

A Linear Approach to Mass Agreement in Central Asturian

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Statement of the Problem: In Central Asturian (CA), adjectives may agree with nouns in mass, referred to as “mass neuter” or “mass agreement” in the literature. The mass morpheme *-o* appears on post-nominal attributive adjectives (1) but is unattested in pre-nominal adjectives (2). Otherwise attributive adjectives, regardless of their position, agree in gender with the noun that they modify.

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|-----|----|---|--------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| (1) | a. | el
the.masc | quesu
cheese.masc | { fresc-o
fresh-mass | / *fresc-u
/ fresh-masc | |
| | | ‘the fresh cheese’ | | | | |
| | b. | la
the.fem | sidra
cider.fem | { fresc-o
fresh-mass | / *fresc-a
/ fresh-fem | |
| | | ‘the fresh cider’ | | | | |
| (2) | a. | el
the.masc | { *fresc-o
fresh-mass | / fresc-u
/ fresh-masc | quesu
cheese.masc | |
| | | ‘the fresh cheese’ | | | | |
| | b. | la
the.fem | { *fresc-o
fresh-mass | / fresc-a
/ fresh-fem | sidra
cider.fem | |
| | | ‘the fresh cider’ [adapted from Faber 2015: 13] | | | | |

Previous literature (cf. d’Andrés 1993; Arias Cabal 1998; Bonet et al. 2012; a.o.) has addressed this phenomenon, but has failed to propose a theory that unifies attributive adjective agreement with the mass interpretation of nouns and their gender. I therefore take a novel approach by analyzing mass agreement in CA through a DM and Minimalism lens *à la* Kramer (2015). I argue that the agreement restrictions in (1)-(2) are linear and that there is no evidence that semantic differences related to adjective position is responsible for such restrictions (cf. Demonte 1999). My aim is to account for this linear order restriction in CA by using layered *nPs*. I argue that this will simultaneously address the gender and mass features of nouns and also shed light on adjective-noun mass agreement in CA.

Background Assumptions: Applying Kramer (2015), nouns in CA are lexically decomposed and their roots are licensed by recursive *nPs*. The lower *nP* is the locus of gender. The higher *nP* is the locus of a [\pm MASS] feature. Theme vowels are in competition for insertion. Applying and formalizing Baker (2008), adjectives are left-adjoined. Pre-nominal adjectives are adjoined higher, while post-nominal adjectives are adjoined lower. Furthermore, *aP* agreement is checked via an upward probe that agrees with the *c*-commanding head directly above *aP-n* or *D*.

Proposal: Vocabulary Items for adjectives (3) are inserted onto the root if all features, or a subset of features, are also present on the target of the adjective’s upward probe; *n* or *D*. With either of these two heads being the target, a feminine adjective agrees with a [+FEM] feature (4a). When underspecified the adjective is masculine (4b). Finally, (4c) shows mass agreement under [+MASS].

- | | | | | | | | | |
|-----|----|--------------|----------------------|-----|----|--------------------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| (3) | a. | [a], [+FEM] | \leftrightarrow -a | (4) | a. | [a [+FEM]][$\sqrt{\text{FRESC}}$] | = | ‘fresca’ (<i>fresh</i>) |
| | b. | [a] | \leftrightarrow -u | | b. | [a [$\sqrt{\text{FRESC}}$]] | = | ‘frescu’ (<i>fresh</i>) |
| | c. | [a], [+MASS] | \leftrightarrow -o | | c. | [a [+MASS]][$\sqrt{\text{FRESC}}$] | = | ‘fresco’ (<i>fresh</i>) |

The agreement patterns in (1b) & (2b), shown structurally in (5) & (6), demonstrate post-nominal mass agreement and pre-nominal gender agreement, respectively.

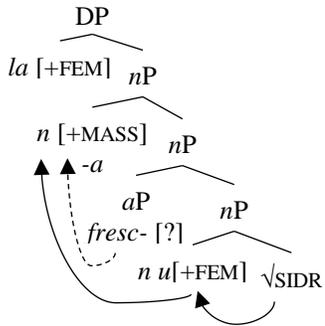
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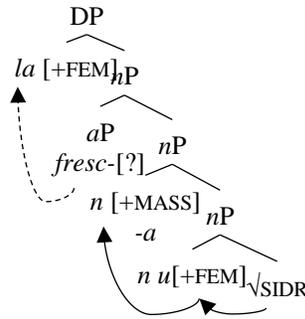
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The nominal root moves to *n* [+MASS], deriving a mass noun and subsequently spelling out the theme vowel. As adjectives are left-adjoined, the post-nominal adjective in (5) is adjoined to the *nP* containing gender (lower position) and the pre-nominal adjective in (6) is adjoined to *nP* containing mass (higher position). The adjective then probes upward and agrees with the first c-commanding head that it encounters. Thus, I argue that the post-nominal mass adjective in (5) looks up to find the mass feature on the c-commanding head above it, *n*. In the case of pre-nominal agreement (6), the c-commanding head is D, where the adjective looks up to find a gender feature.

(5) *la sidra fresco*



(6) *la fresca sidra*



Implications/Predictions: Under my proposed system, the linear order in CA is accounted for by nominal root movement to a *nP* with mass and left-adjunction of the adjective, with the pre-nominal adjective adjoined higher than the post-nominal one. The added advantage to this approach is that I uniformly treat adjectives as left-adjoining and upward-agreeing probes that agree with *n* or D. It follows that pre-nominal gender agreement in adjectives is licensed by the highest-projected adjective probing up to find D, the head that c-commands it, while post-nominal mass agreement in adjectives involves the c-commanding mass *n* directly above the lower-projected adjective. Gender agreement holds in count noun modification as in this case the mass *n* is [-MASS] and not [+MASS]. Further evidence motivating the possibility of a split-agreement system comes from Russian (7), in which the lower adjective can show one agreement pattern while the higher adjective can show another.

- (7) očen' xoroš-aja glavn-yj vrač
 very good-F head-M doctor
 'a very good head doctor' [Pesetsky 2013: 37]

Selected References: **d'Andrés, R.** (1993). Emplengu del neutru n'asturianu. *LIA*, 49, 49-85.; **Arias Cabal, Á.** (1998). Diacronía del incontable o 'neutro de materia' en asturiano. In *Acti del XXI CILFR* (V. 1, pp. 35-49). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.; **Baker, M.** (2008). *The syntax of agreement and concord*. Cambridge: CUP.; **Bonet, E. et al.** (2012). Asimetrías de concordancia en el SD: El rasgo de masa en asturiano. In A. Fábregas et al. (Eds.), *Los límites de la morfología. Estudios ofrecidos a Soledad Varela Ortega* (pp. 91-104). Madrid: EUAM.; **Demonte, V.** (1999). El adjetivo: Clases y usos. La posición del adjetivo en el sintagma nominal. In I. Bosque et al. (Dirs.), *Gramática descriptiva de la lengua española, vol 1* (pp. 129-216). Madrid: Espasa; **Faber, A.** (2015). La influencia de la *concordancia continua* del asturianu nel castellanu faláu n'Asturies. *RFA*, 15, 9-31.; **Kramer, R.** (2015). *The Morphosyntax of Gender*. Oxford: OUP. **Pesetsky, D.** (2013). *Russian case morphology and the syntactic categories*. Cambridge: MIT Press.