Parameters of Agreement, Non-Parameters of Case

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In Baker (In press: chapter 5), I argue that the following two parameters account for most of the variation in the syntax of agreement that is found in languages of the world.

(1) The Direction of Agreement Parameter:
F agrees with DP/NP only if DP/NP asymmetrically c-commands F.

(2) The Case Dependence of Agreement Parameter:
F agrees with DP/NP only if F values the Case feature of DP/NP or vice versa.

For example, most Bantu languages are set positively for (1) and negatively for (2), whereas most Indo-European languages have the opposite settings. In this talk, I consider how these parameters apply to two Turkic languages, Sakha and Turkish, and then discuss the implications for the assignment of case in these languages.

First I argue that these two Turkish languages share a “yes” setting for parameter (2), but differ in the setting of parameter (1). Parameter (1) is set positively in Turkish, but negatively in Sakha. Crucially, the two agreement-bearing heads in these languages, T and D, behave consistently within each language, even though they behave differently across the two languages. I claim that this confirms my (In press) view that (1) and (2) are best seen as syntactic parameters, which govern languages as wholes, and should not be reduced to the feature specifications of individual functional heads.

Next I consider the implications of these results about agreement for the assignment of case in these languages. The parameter in (2) implies that nominative case in Turkic is assigned by T and genitive case by D, in the standard way. But what about accusative case and dative case, which are never agreed with in these languages? I present converging evidence from Sakha that accusative case is assigned not by a functional head (e.g. v), but by a clause level algorithm, such as (3) (cf. Marantz 1991).

(3) Assign ACC to NP X if there is another NP Y such that Y and X are in the same phase and Y c-commands X.

It then follows from (3) plus (2) that there could not be object agreement in Sakha. I conclude that agreement is treated in a uniform (parametrized) way in natural languages, but case assignment surprisingly is not.