

Determination and modification: interaction and interpretation

Kim (2004) demonstrated the necessity, in English, of differentiating number agreement between a determiner and a noun on the one hand, and that between subjects and finite verbs, on the other. He posits two features (in an HPSG framework): AGR for determiner-noun agreement and INDEX for subject-verb agreement. This obviates the need for number specification to change midstream in a sentence like [*500 dollars*]_{pl} [*is*]_{sg} *enough*.

This paper examines further data that confirms the need to divorce determiner-noun agreement from subject-verb agreement. However, it counterexamples Kim's claim that the AGR value is invariant within each NP, showing that NP-*internal* agreement may be in conflict in specific, semantically-motivated cases.

As shown in (1a), the determiner *a* may precede an indefinite quantified nominal (IQN: *50 volunteers*) only when an adjective is also present (call this the modified IQN construction [MIQN]). Consistent with Kim's account, despite the fact that *a* (normally) appears only with singular nouns, MIQN noun phrases can trigger plural agreement on the verb (1b). What remains unexplained is how normally-singular *a* combines with a plural nominal.

- (1) a. A *(surprising/modest) 50 volunteers showed up yesterday morning.
- b. (A surprising/modest) 50 volunteers were present at the rally.

We posit a non-branching construction (Kay 2005) that changes the MIQNs from plural to singular, *contra* Kim's claims of invariance. In Kim's terms, MIQNs have the AGR value *singular*, despite the head noun having the AGR value *plural*. It further requires the MIQN to be determined by *a*, ruling out **surprising 50 volunteers* as a full NP. We need not posit a separate, plural, sense of *a* (which would somehow have to be constrained to be followed by an adjective). An alternative account in which simple IQNs optionally have *singular* AGR values is ruled out, as it incorrectly predicts **this 50 volunteers* to be grammatical. Finally, [*a modest 50*]_{NP} *came* is accounted for by the familiar N'-deletion possible with all cardinal numbers (*50 came*).

The plural-to-singular shift is motivated by the peculiar semantics of MIQNs. MIQNs always involve transferred modification (Pullum and Huddleston 2002:558): the adjective does not apply directly to the head nominal, but instead to the quantity of entities denoted by the head nominal. For example, in (1a), what is surprising is not the volunteers themselves, but rather the quantity of volunteers who showed up yesterday morning. Crucially, transfer of modification is required for this construction: *?*a tall 50 giraffes*.

Our account sheds light on other data involving not quantified but conjoined nouns:

- (2) The romantic sparring partners emerge as a *(Shakespearean) Tracy and Hepburn. (modified from the *New York Times*)

Conjoined NPs, when construed as a single gestalt, may undergo singularization similar to that seen in (1), but again only with the addition of (here, non-transferred) modification. Morphosyntactic features relevant for agreement are thus shown to be sensitive to semantic construal, mediated by construction-specific modification structures.