Obviative agreement, word order, and the ϕ/δ divide
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Intro Recent work (e.g. Van Urk, 2015; Baier, 2016; Miyagawa, 2017) has examined agreement with heads that probe for both ϕ-features (person, number, gender) and δ-features (i.e. discourse or A-features). I argue that agreement with the number probe (#) in Ojibwe is an instance of mixed ϕ/δ agreement based on the patterns of agreement and movement triggered by obviation. In stretches of discourse with multiple third persons, the argument which is the focus of the narrative (i.e. the topic or point-of-view center) is proximate (morphologically unmarked), while all others are marked obviative. I argue that the feature [OBV], which encodes this distinction, occurs as both a ϕ-feature and δ-feature, further blurring the line between these categories.

Data Ojibwe has three agreement slots (see Oxford, 2018) all evident in (1) and (2): Voice, Infl, and C (analyzed here as #). Voice agrees with the object in person, and shows a morphological DIRECT/INVERSE alternation (-aa vs. -igo). Infl omnivorously agrees with the “most prominent” argument in person and number (surfacing as o-; agreement with proximate). C/# agrees with third persons in number, animacy, and obviation. I focus here on obviative agreement with C/#. The first key fact is that C/# is omnivorous for obviative: it agrees with obviative over proximate, surfacing as -n, regardless of whether the obviative argument is the subject (2a) or object (1a). The second key fact is that obviation conditions word order such that obviative tends to precede proximate: with direct alignments, VOS is preferred (1a), but VSO is also possible (1b); with inverse alignments, only VSO is licensed (2a)—VOS is ungrammatical (2b). These facts contrast with typical person hierarchy effects, where the more “prominent” argument—in this case the proximate—is privileged in agreement and word order (see e.g. Oxford, 2018; Zubizarreta and Pancheva, 2017).

Analysis I assume that [ϕ:OBV] originates on #, while [δ:OBV] originates on C. The δ-features on C are inherited by # (cf. Lochbihler and Mathieu, 2016), resulting in a mixed probe. I further assume the verb raises to C, deriving verb-initiality (Hammerly, 2019). The derivation of direct VOS is in (3). First, I note that the proximate subject has moved to Spec,IP as the result of agreement with Infl (Oxford, 2018). When the ϕ-probe on # is merged, it cannot agree directly with the obviative DP, as it is within the VoiceP phase—so # agrees with VoiceP, which has inherited [ϕ:+OBV] from a prior agreement with the object (Oxford).
This agreement “unlocks” the VoiceP phase (Rackowski and Richards 2005). When C is merged, its δ-feature is inherited by #. The δ-feature can now agree directly with the object, triggering movement to Spec,#P and deriving VOS. Direct VSO (not shown) is captured by the optionality of δ-features on DPs (Van Urk 2015)—in the absence of this feature, the object remains in situ.

The derivation of inverse, which shows rigid VSO, is shown in (4). The tree begins at a point where the proximate object has already agreed with both Voice and Infl, and has moved successive cyclically up to Spec,IP (Oxford 2018). The key difference between the direct and inverse alignments is that the obviative subject is immediately accessible when the φ-probe on # is merged, as it is sitting at the edge of the VoiceP phase. Therefore # agrees with the obviative subject directly, and moves it to its specifier. This occurs regardless of whether or not the obviative argument is specified for a δ-feature, deriving the obligatory nature of VSO in inverse alignments.

**Impact** The analysis connects two facts: the unexpected word order of Ojibwe and omnivorous agreement with obviation on C/#. I highlight three consequences. First, it resolves a conflict with Oxford’s (2018) analysis of agreement on Voice and Infl, which makes the prediction that proximate arguments (which are always promoted to Spec,IP as the result of agreement with Infl) should precede obviative ones. The present analysis maintains object agreement with Voice and omnivorous proximate agreement on Infl by attributing the preference for obviative to precede proximate to agreement with C/#!.

Second, it predicts that languages that lack such omnivorous agreement with obviative on C/# should show opposite word order patterns. A preliminary survey of Blackfoot (Bliss 2013) and Menominee (Bloomfield 1962) supports this prediction. Both of these languages show C/# agreement with proximate arguments, and show a corresponding difference in word order such that proximate precedes obviative.

Finally, the analysis provides insight into the nature of obviation as a morphosyntactic feature, and more generally to the divide between φ- and δ-features. Obviation is a φ-feature in that it further carves the space of possible distinctions within the third persons. Like number, obviation is involved in the process of individuation (which also supports its position on the # probe). However, it is a δ-feature in that it is involved in discourse differentiation by encoding relative prominence (Mikkelsen 2015; Bossi and Diercks 2019). Obviation provides a unique case where a single category of feature inhabits both spaces. This suggests that the two classes of features may be further unified representationally, raising questions about the place of obviation and the φ/δ divide in current feature structures (e.g. feature geometries).

**REFERENCES**