Icelandic Quirky Agreement Restrictions

In this paper I argue for a Minimalist analysis of Icelandic Quirky agreement restrictions. I propose that in order to account for the Icelandic data, T is $\varphi$-defective, lacking [Person] in Quirky subject constructions. This proposal builds on work by Sigurðsson (1996) and Boeckx (2000), among others, and updates it for a more recent Minimalist framework based in Chomsky 2001. In addition to my main proposal I consider a split-$\varphi$ probe, as well as a $\varphi$-stacking approach to the data reminiscent of Richards 2013, along with some alternatives. My analysis provides new insight on how case and agreement can interact with other components in a Minimalist framework.

In addition to a NOM-ACC paradigm, Icelandic has non-NOM (Quirky) subjects and NOM objects (Thráinsson 2007). The finite verb agrees with the NOM object when a Quirky subject is present (1). This is opposite to the NOM-ACC pattern, where the finite verb always agrees with the subject (2). In addition, these Quirky constructions block 1st/2nd person NOM objects (3). Again, this is contrary to the NOM-ACC pattern, where 1st/2nd person objects are allowed (4).

I look at two questions regarding this data in the paper. First, why does the finite verb agree with the NOM object and not with the Quirky subject in Quirky constructions? Second, why are 1st/2nd person NOM objects completely blocked in Quirky constructions?

My first proposal involves defective T. In these constructions, the Quirky subject is inactive, so the verb establishes agreement with the NOM object. For the 1st/2nd person restriction on NOM objects, I propose that T is $\varphi$-defective, lacking a [Person] feature. Following Sigurðsson (1996) and Boeckx (2000), I consider only 1st/2nd person as [+Person]. In my system, if the NOM object and T are not relatively $\varphi$-complete to each other, the derivation will crash. Thus, if T lacks [Person] and the NOM object has [Person], the derivation crashes.

Another proposal I consider involves partial agreement. This analysis uses a split $\varphi$-checking system, where [Person] and [Number] probe separately. I adopt Sigurðsson’s (1996) Boeckx’s (2000) claim that the Quirky subject checks [Person]. In this system, T probes for [Person] and [Number] separately. First, T finds the Quirky subject as its goal, checking [Person]. Next, T probes again and finds the NOM object, checking [Number]. Additional support for a split-$\varphi$ analysis comes from Sumerian (Jagersma 2010) and Yucatec (Pynes p.c.). However, this analysis doesn’t fully explain why 1st/2nd person NOM objects are blocked without making non-Minimalist stipulations about the interpretability of $\varphi$-features on DPs (à la Boeckx (2000)).

My main analysis improves over Sigurðsson’s and Boeckx’s (2000) by abandoning certain undesirable theoretical bases. Their analyses both involve AGR heads, which can be questioned for independent reasons. Boeckx’s analysis also uses a notion he calls Point-of-View (PoV). PoV is a mechanism that essentially forces DPs to check [Person]. Since DPs are interpretable for [Person], this seems stipulative and forced. My analysis does away with this by turning to relative $\varphi$-completeness. Boeckx also uses a framework based in Distributed Morphology, which I ignore.

Along with my defective T analysis, I consider a $\varphi$-stacking approach. In this system, a Quirky subject triggers full agreement, but is overridden by agreement from the NOM object. This approach is based on Richards’s (2013) case-stacking. While this may be tempting based on the relationship between case and $\varphi$-features, I reject this approach in favor of my first proposal. I also consider alternative accounts by López (2008) and Sigurðsson & Holmberg (2008).

My proposal for Icelandic Quirky agreement restrictions allows us to explain the data while minimizing theoretically unnecessary assumptions and components. Finding an answer to the Icelandic data provides new insight on case and agreement patterns more generally, and can shed light on how these components work in other constructions.
Data

(1) Henni leiddust strákarnir.
her.DAT.3SG bored(3PL) the boysNOM.3PL
‘She found the boys boring.’

(2) Við lásum bókina.
we.NOM.1PL read.1PL the book.ACC.3SG
‘We read the book.’

(3) * Henni leidd-umst/-ust/-ist við.
her.DAT.3SG bored.1PL/3PL/DFT we.NOM.1PL
‘She found us boring.’

(4) Ég sá þíg.
I.NOM.1SG saw.1SG you.ACC.2SG
‘I saw you.’

References
RICHARDS, NORVIN. 2013. Lardil “case stacking” and the timing of case assignment. Syntax 60:1, 42-76.
SIGURDSSON, HALLDÓR ÁRMANN; and ANDERS HOLMBERG. 2008. Icelandic dative intervention: Person and number are separate probes. In D’Alessandro, Fischer, and Hrafnbjargarson.