Cyclicity in Agree: Maximal projections as probes

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Cyclic Agree (Rezac 2003; Bejar & Rezac 2009) has been proposed to account for why a probe can agree with DPs in both its complement and specifier in agreement displacement. This has been operationalized by assuming that when an unsatisfied probe reprojects, its search space (i.e. its c-command domain) is cyclically expanded to include the specifier. The result is that Spec-Head agreement is still Agree under c-command – the specifier is in the c-command domain of the intermediate level projection. In Bare Phrase Structure (BPS; Chomsky 1995), there is no distinction between head, bar, and phrase levels. Therefore, a prediction of this type of account is that if a probe remains unsatisfied when it reprojects to form a maximal projection, that maximal projection should be able to probe its c-command domain through the same kind of cyclic expansion that makes Spec-Head agreement possible. This prediction is untestable in canonical configurations where Cyclic Agree is invoked, since the c-command domain of the maximal projection of probes like v, T, and complement C only contains the head that selects the maximal projection.

In this talk, which draws on data from original fieldwork, I argue on the basis of a pattern of an agreeing adjunct C in Amahuaca (Panoan; Peru) that this prediction of cyclic expansion is borne out. Adjunct C agrees with DPs in its own complement but also with matrix DPs. This is possible because the maximal projection of this high adjunct C can probe its c-command domain – the matrix TP. This account based on cyclic expansion provides a straightforward way to capture this apparently non-local pattern of agreement without loosening the conditions on locality in Agree.

The Amahuaca data therefore provide support for a Cyclic Agree model and suggest that probe reprojection is fully generalizable and need not be limited to (what in non-BPS terms are) intermediate level projections. The strongest conclusion of such an account is that Agree always requires that the probe c-command the goal, with Spec-Head agreement and the type of apparent long-distance agreement seen in Amahuaca simply indicating cyclic expansion of the probe's domain.