Structural Conditions on Agreement

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In this paper I show that there are two agreement patterns in Arabic; person agreement and number agreement, which are not necessarily instantiated by the same affix under the same structural conditions. Then, I discuss the structural conditions on agreement and propose, by contrasting Moroccan Arabic and Standard Arabic, that agreement can obtain whenever the verb is in a local relation with the subject (Spec-head relation or canonical government relation). As to why the Spec-head relation seems to be most predominant it will be argued that it can be derived from independent properties of individual languages (presence vs absence of expletive) combined with general principles such as the binding principles and the thematic criterion.

1. Subject Verb Agreement in Standard Arabic

We start with Standard Arabic. Consider the following sentences:

(1) a. daxal-a   T-Tullaab-u
        enter-3SM the-students-Nom
        'The students entered'

     b. daxal-at   T-Taalibaat-u
        entered-3SF the-students-Nom (F)
        'The students entered'

(2) a. kaan-a T-Tulaab-u   ya-drus-uun
        was-3SM the-students-Nom Imp.3M-study-PM.Nom
        'The students were studying'

     b. kaan-at T-Taalibaat-u   ta-drus-na
        was-3SF the-students.F-Nom Imp.3F-study-PF
        'The students were studying'

When the verb precedes the subject, agreement is in Gender and Person only as shown in (1). When the subject precedes the main verb as in (2) agreement is in Person and Number in addition to Gender. Also, in (2) the subject agrees with the auxiliary that precedes it in person and gender only.

The main question is how to account for the subject

17

18

BENMAMOUN

verb agreement features alternation. If we confine our attention to (1) we may account for the facts by positing two agreement affixes. One affix that contains gender and person and is realized under the VS order as in (1). Another agreement affix contains number, person and gender and is realized under SV as in (2).

Another way to implement the same basic idea would be to posit one abstract agreement affix and allow it to be either partially specified (gender and person) or fully specified (number, gender and person) depending on the structural relation that obtains between the verb and the subject. According to this account the phi features are encoded on one affix with the full or partial specification contingent on the subject verb order.

(3) a. V S O ---> V+AGR (P.G)
     b. S V O   ---> V+AGR (N.P.G)

However, this account cannot carry over to (2) where the imperfective form of the verb carries two agreement affixes. The prefix carries person and gender and the suffix carries number and gender. Moreover, the suffix shows up only when the subject precedes the verb (2b). Thus, (2b) clearly shows that we are not dealing with one agreement affix but rather with two affixes that happen to overlap in the feature gender. In other words, Number and Person agreement do not necessarily belong to the same morpheme.

(4)   Agr   Agr
          N   G   P   G

The facts from the imperfective form of the verb strongly support the proposal that there are two independent agreement patterns in Arabic encoded by different features on different affixes; one in number and gender and shows up under the SV order only and another in person and gender and shows up under both VS and SV orders.[1,2]

To sum up, in SA there are two forms of agreement depending on the surface location of the subject. For the rest of the paper I will restrict the discussion to the imperfective because it is clearer with this form that there are two agreement patterns since they are represented by different affixes. I will refer to the two patterns of agreement by the features that single them out: Person Agreement or P-agreement and Number Agreement or N-agreement.

2

Notice that P-agreement is realized regardless of word order and N-agreement is realized under the SV order only. This raises the issue of the structural conditions under which each type of agreement is realized.

2.Structural Conditions on Agreement

2.1.Structure of the Sentence in Standard Arabic

Before dealing with the conditions on agreement, it is relevant at this point to outline the structure of the sentence we are going to assume. We will be adopting the structure in (5). TP, which refers to Tense, dominates VP and the subject is generated in Spec VP.

(5) $[_{TP}$ Spec $[_{T'}$ T $[_{VP}$ Spec V'...]]]

The verb moves to T to support the Tense inflection. I will assume with Mohammed (1988) and Fassi Fehri (1989) that the VSO order is derived by V-movement to T while the subject remains in the Spec of VP according to the internal subject hypothesis, Koopman & Sportiche (1988,90), Kuroda (1985) and Fukui & Speas (1986). This provides a natural analysis for (1a,b) and (2a,b). The auxiliary is in T and the verb stays in situ or may move to an intermediate projection whose specification need not concern us here. Notice that if this analysis is on the right track, it provides strong evidence for the VP subject hypothesis and for deriving the VSO order by verb raising to T.

Turning to the structural conditions on agreement, suppose that it takes place exclusively under a Spec-head relation (Chomksy 1986, Mahajan 1989). The requirement is that the agreeing head and the category it agrees with should be in a relation as in (6):

(6) $[_{XP}$ YP $[_{X'}$ X....

Where YP is in the Spec position of the projection headed by X. If the representation in (6) is the only one under which agreement can take place we predict that in Arabic, agreement between the subject and the verb can only show up under the SV order since it is only under this order that the subject is in Spec-head relation with the verb.

This provides the right account for N-agreement between the subject and the lexical verb in. The subject is in a Spec-head configuration with the agreeing head. On the other hand, in (1) the verb in T is not in a Spec-

20
BENMAMOUN

head configuration with the subject in Spec VP and
therefore N-agreement does not take place. Similarly, in
(2a,b) the auxiliary is not in Spec-head relation with
the subject and as predicted N-agreement is absent.

However, this fails to predict P-agreement which
shows up under both the SV and the VS orders. In (1) the
lexical verb agrees with the postverbal subject in person
and gender and in (2) the auxiliary verb <u>kaan</u> also agrees
with the subject in person and gender.

The availability of P-agreement under the VS order
suggests that Spec-head relation may not be the only
structural condition on agreement. P-agreement seems to
obtain both when the subject is in Spec-head relation
with verb and when the latter canonically governs the
subject:[3]

(7)   XP
                      ZP   X
                         X   YP
                           ZP
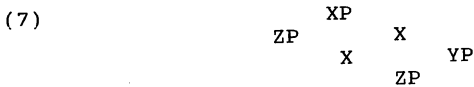
If the subject stays in Spec VP and the verb moves
to T, P-agreement obtains under government (1). On other
hand, if the verb does not move, it agrees with its
subject in Spec VP under Spec-head relation. Given the
representation in (5) this means that P-agreement is
possible regardless of the surface order of the subject
and the verb.

Thus the relevant effects can be captured by the
descriptive generalizations in (8):

(8) a. N-agreement obtains under Spec-head government.

     b. P-agreement obtains either under head government
        or Spec-head agreement.

2.2.Moroccan Arabic

In Moroccan Arabic, as in Standard Arabic, P-
agreement is realized under both the SVO and the VSO
orders:

(9) a. faaq-uu   le-wlaad
         woke-Past.3P   the-boys
         'The boys woke up'
     b. kaan-uu   le-wlaad ta-y-la9b-uu
         were.Past.3P   the-boys Prog-3-play-P
         'The boys are playing'

However, unlike in Standard Arabic, N-agreement also obtains under both orders. In (9a) and (9b) there is N-agreement and P-agreement between the subject and the verb regardless of word order. (9b) contrasts sharply with (1a,b) and (2a,b) in Standard Arabic where N-agreement is absent under the VSO order. The equivalent of (1a, b) in Moroccan Arabic is ungrammatical as illustrated in (10):

(10)   a.* faaq   le-wlaad
            woke.Past.3SM the-boys
            'The boys woke up'

N-agreement in Moroccan Arabic can be accounted for by generalizing the government condition on P-agreement to N-agreement. That is N-agreement can take place either under head government or Spec-head relation. Hence, N-agreement patterns with P-agreement. This can be captured by the generalizations in (11)

(11)   a. P-agreement takes place under government or Spec-head relations.

       b. N-agreement takes place under government or Spec-head relations.

Since both P-agreement and N-agreement obain under identical structural conditions, we can simplify this generalization further:

(12)   Agreement takes place under Spec-head or government relations.

Thus, descriptively, the difference between Standard Arabic and Moroccan Arabic is that in the former N-agreement is restricted to the Spec-head configuration while in the latter this restriction is removed. The obvious question is why does this difference exist between the two languages?

3.Agreement, Expletive pro and Conditions on Null Subjects

We refered to the formulations of the structural conditions on agreement in Standard Arabic and Moroccan Arabic as descriptive generalizations. We can either elevate those generalization to the status of primitive conditions on agreement or we can try to derive them as epiphonema that result from the interaction of independent principles of the grammar.

Recall that N-agreement in Standard Arabic takes

22
BENMAMOUN

place under a Spec-head relation while in Moroccan Arabic
it can take place under head government in addition to
the Spec-head relation. In this section, I will attempt
to provide an explanation for this difference and see if
it can be derived from independent properties of the
two languages. The main goal is to let agreement take
place whenever the subject and the verb are in a
government or Spec-head relation with independent
principles of the grammar filtering out any undesirable
results.

Consider the structure of the sentence that we have
been assuming:

(5) $[_{TP}$ Spec $[_{T'}$ T $[_{VP}$ Spec V'...]]]

We assumed that the VSO order is derived by verb
movement to T while the thematic subject remains in Spec
VP. The Spec of TP is non-thematic as supported by the
fact that it can host the Spec of VP at SS in SVO
languages. The question, then, is what can occur in that
position apart from the thematic subject? In English, it
is clear that an expletive subject can fill that
position:

(13) a. John seems to be angry
     b. It seems that John is happy.

Now can the parallel of (13b) exist in VSO
languages but in a single clause? Thereotically, the
answer is positive if we can prevent binding of Spec-VP
by Spec TP. So, suppose that an expletive subject can
occur in Spec TP when the subject is in Spec VP.

As far as binding is concerned, we assume with
Chomsky (1986, 143) that binding entails referential
dependency which is absent in the case of the chain
containing the expletive and the potsverbal NP. Hence, in
(14) the expletive is not referential and cannot enter
into binding relations with the lexical referential NP.

(14) There was a student in the garden

In Arabic, the subject can occur in the preverbal
position:

(15) ?al-?awlaad-u xaraj-uu
     the-boys-Nom go-Past.3MP
     'The boys left'

It is clear that the preverbal NP is in Spec TP.

This is shown by the fact that it occurs after the complementizer "?anna" and is assigned Case by it. Since Case is assigned under government (or Spec-head) and since C governs into the Spec of TP, it follows that the preverbal NP is in Spec TP:

(16)   qaala Omar ?anna T-Taalib-a xaraja
         said Omar that the-student-Acc left
         'Omar said that the student left'

        Moreover, the Spec of TP can also be filled by an expletive. Mohammad (1987) presents evidence for an expletive subject in the Spec of IP (our TP) in Arabic. He further argues that the expletive subject enters into agreement relation with the verb. For example, in the following sentence where the verb "badaa" (seem) takes a clausal complement (CP), the agreement on the verb is third person singular (Mohammad 1987, 5 (7)):

(17)   yabduu ?anna L-?awlaad-a saafaruu
       seems 3SM that the-boys-Acc departed 3PM
       'It seems that the boys departed'

        By positing an expletive subject in the Spec TP, the agreement on the matrix verb is derived. Notice that the verb cannot agree with the lower NP in Spec TP since CP intervenes.

        The strongest piece of evidence for positing a null expletive in the Spec of TP in Standard Arabic, comes from the behavior of the complementizer ?anna (that). We saw above that this complementizer assigns accusative Case to the NP it governs. There is also independent evidence that pro is lexicalized if governed and Case-marked by a non-nominative Case assigner such ?anna (see Benmamoun 1991 for details):[4] (Mohammad 1987, 9 (18a,b) irrelevant glosses ommitted)

(18) a.?idda9aa ar-rajul-u ?anna-hu yabduu ?anna al-
         awlaad-a
         claimed   the-man-Nom that-it seems   that   the-man
         saafaruu
         departed

         'The man claimed that it seems that the boys departed'

24
BENMAMOUN

b. * ?idda9aa ar-rajul-u ?anna-pro yabduu ?anna al-
awlaad-a
claimed   the-man-Nom   that-pro   seems   that
the-children
saafaruu
departed

For the present purposes, the main consequence of
Mohammad's analysis and proposal is that the preverbal NP
in the Spec of TP is occupied by an expletive which
enters into an agreement relation with the verb.

This is also the case in Classical Arabic as shown
by the following example from Abbas Hassan (1975,
vol I, 254):

(19) Hasib-tu-hu   qaam-a   ?axuu-ka
     think-Past.1S-it stand-Past.3MS brother-your
     'I thought your brother stood up'

Abbas Hassan (op.cit 253) points out that what we
have been refering to as the expletive pronominal cannot
agree with the postverbal subject in number.[5]

Now let's consider the scenario where the verb
agrees fully with the postverbal subject:

(20)* 9aad-uu   T-Tullab-u
      return-Past.3MP the-students-Nom

The verb contains all the agreement features of
number, person and gender. In the present context, this
means that the verb has entered into P-agreement and N-
agreement with the verb. Full agreement is also found in
the context of pro-drop:

(21) 9aad-uu
     return-Past.3MP
     'They returned'

There are two possible representation for (21).
Under one representation, the null subject is in Spec VP:

(22) [$_{TP}$ NP [$_{T'}$ 9aad-uu [$_{VP}$ pro V'...]]]

Another representation is with the null subject in
Spec TP:

(23) [$_{TP}$ pro [$_{T'}$ 9aad-uu [$_{VP}$ t V'...]]]

Given the theory that thematic null subjects

require both identification by agreement and licensing by Case, both representations are consistent with that theory.[6] In (22) the null subject is governed by the verb in T. Moreover, it is identified by the agreement on the verb and licensed by Case carried by the verb. Similarly, in (23) the null subject is in Spec-head relation with the verb where it can be identified and licensed.

To decide among the two competing representations we need to consider sentences with auxiliary verbs where Case is assigned by the auxiliary. Assuming that the auxiliary is located in T at SS, we expect two orders: AUX SVO or SAUXVO. This is the case with lexical subjects:

(24) a. kaan-a   ?al-?awlaad-u   ya-l9ab-uun
         be-3MS   the-children-Nom Imp.3M-play-MP
         'The children were playing'

     b. ?al-?awlaad-u   kaan-uu   ya-l9ab-uun
        the-children-Nom be-3MP Imp.3M-play-MP
        'The children were playing'

Notice in (24a) the auxiliary agrees with subject in number (and gender) only while the lexical verb fully agrees. Crucially, with null subjects both the auxiliary and the lexical verb fully agree:

(25) a. kaan-uu   ya-l9ab-uun
        Imp.3M-play-MP
        'The children were playing'

     b. *kaan-a   ya-l9ab-uun
        be-3MS   Imp.3M-play-MP

(25a) and (25b) have the representations in (26) and (27) respectively. In (26) the null subject is in Spec TP while in (30) it is in Spec VP:

(26) [$_{TP}$ NP [$_{T'}$ kaan-uu [$_{VP}$ pro   V'...]]]

(27) [$_{TP}$ pro [$_{T'}$ kaan-a [$_{VP}$ t   V'...]]]

(26) contrasts sharply with (27) where the auxiliary does not N-agree with the subject which suggests that the null subject is in Spec IP. Movement of the null subject to Spec IP could not be for identification since the lexical verb carries all the relevant features needed to identify the null subject. However, while both the auxiliary verb and the lexical

26

BENMAMOUN

verb carry agreement, only the auxiliary can assign Case. Thus, movement to Spec IP may be to satisfy the licensing requirement.

However, notice that if licensing is the reason for movement of the null subject to Spec IP it implies that it is not Case assignment alone that is involved in licensing but rather the additional requirement that the null subject be in the Spec of a Case-assigner. This so because Nominative Case can be assigned in Spec VP as shown by the fact that the lexical subject can stay there and get Nominative Case under government. So, if this analysis is correct, licensing entails being in a Spec-head relation with a Case-assigner.

Returning to (25a) and (25b) the expletive pro is in Spec TP where the verb, with all the agreement features, is located. As a result of this Spec-head relation the expletive is interpreted as a thematic pronominal on a par with pro in (21). This implies that the pro in Spec TP is referential which results in two violations. First, a violation of principle C since pro in Spec TP is no longer interpreted as an expletive and therefore can enter into referential dependency with the postverbal subject. This violates principle C since the lexical NP in Spec VP is A-bound by pro in Spec TP. Second, a violation of the thematic criterion since there are two arguments, pro in Spec TP and the postverbal NP, and there is only one external thematic role available.

Notice that it is not problematic that the expletive pro in the VSO is in a Spec-head relation with the verb in T though the latter agrees with the postverbal subject in Person.

(28) 9aad-a   T-Tullab-u
     return-Past.3MS the-students-Nom

(29) [$_{TP}$ pro [$_{T'}$ T+Agr [$_{VP}$ Spec V'...]]]

Person agreement is a necessary but not sufficient condition to identify a pronominal as thematic, hence referential. In order to identify pro as thematic all the agreement features have to be present. Thus, expletive pro cannot enter into a binding relation nor can it qualify as an argument for the purpose of the thematic criterion since it lacks all the relevant agreement features. That is, pro in Spec TP in (28) is not referential and consequently cannot bind the lexical NP in Spec VP nor does it need a thematic role.

If this analysis of the absence of N-agreement (and therefore full agreement) in Standard Arabic can be sustained, its presence in Moroccan Arabic under both the SVO and the VSO orders, strongly suggests that there is no expletive pro in the Spec of TP.

It is not possible to duplicate the Standard Arabic evidence in Moroccan Arabic in order to establish whether Spec TP in the VSO order contains an expeltive pro. The complementizer "belli" clearly does not assign Case to the Spec of the projection it governs. Recall that in Standard Arabic, the complementizer "?anna" assigns Case to the Spec of TP. This is shown by the overt accusative marker on the lexical NP (30) or by the clitic on the complementizer when Spec TP is pro (31a,b):

(30) ?aDunnu ?anna T-Tullab-a   9aad-uu
     I think that the-students-Acc return-Past.3MP
     'I think that the students are back'

(31) a. ?aDunnu   ?anna-hum 9aad-uu
        I think   that-them return-Past.3MP
        'I think that they are back'

     b.*?aDunnu   ?anna-0   9aad-uu
        I think   that-0   return-Past.3MP

The above examples contrast sharply with their equivalents in Moroccan Arabic. This is especially so if we contrast (30) and (31) on the one hand, with (32) and (33) on the other. While the accusative clitic is obligatory after the complementizer in Standard Arabic as shown by the grammaticality of (31a) and the ungrammaticality of (31b), the opposite obtains in Moroccan Arabic as evidenced by the grammaticality of (31b) and the ungrammaticality of (31a).

(32)   tanDann belli le-wlaad   xarj-uu
        I think that the-children exit-Past.3MP
        'I think that the children went out'

(33) a. *tanDann belli-hum   xarj-uu
        I think that-them   exit-Past.3MP

     b. tanDann belli   xarj-uu
        I think that   exit-Past.3MP
        'I think that they went out'

Since "belli" does not assign Case to the NP in the Spec of TP, this suggests that the lexical NP in (32) has Nominative Case. However, given the fact that pro is not

28

BENMAMOUN

lexicalized under Nominative Case assignment, the above
examples do not show that there is no expletive pro in
the Spec of TP under the SVO order. But they do not show
that there is an expletive pro either.

Fortunately, there are two contexts where we can
find evidence to support the hypothesis that there is no
expletive pro in Spec TP coocuring with a thematic
postverbal pro in Spec VP. These are the contexts of the
negative modal 9ammar (never) and the verb Dann (think).
Both 9ammar and Dann can take a tensed complement.

The modal 9ammar assigns genitive or accusative
Case to the Spec of TP as shown by the objective or
genitive clitic it carries:

(34) a. 9ammar-ni   ma msi-it
         never-me (acc) not left-Past.1S
         'I never left'

     b. 9ammar-i   ma msi-it
         never-me (gen) not left-Past.1S
         'I never left'

The presence of the clitic indicates that 9ammar
assigns Case to the NP in the Spec of TP. It also
indicates that the null thematic pronominal is in Spec
TP, a position governed by a non-nominative Case assigner
which results in the lexicalization of pro.

Thus, it follows that the lexical NP in the Spec of
TP in (35) is assigned Case by 9ammar:

(35)   9ammar le-wlaad   ma za-aw   l-9and-ii
         never   the-children not came-Past.3P to-at-me
    •   'The children never visisted with me'

The lexical NP can also marginally remain in the
Spec of VP:

(36) (??) 9ammar ma za-aw   le-wlaad   l-9and-ii
           never   not came-Past.3S the children to-at-me
           'The children never visited with me'

Now if, in the VSO order, Spec TP is occupied by
the expletive null subject we should expect it to be
lexicalized due to government and Case assignment by
9ammar. This prediction is not born out as the
ungrammaticality of (37) indicates:

(37) * 9ammr-u   ma za-aw   le-wlaad   l-9and-ii
         never-it not came-Past.3S the children to-at-me

    Similar facts   obtain in the context of the verb
Dann (think):

(38) a.   ta-n-Dann   le-wlaad   za-aw
           Prog-1-think the-children came-Past.3P
           'I think the children came'

     b.   ta-n-Dann-hum   za-aw
           Prog-1-think-them came-Past.3P
           'I think they came'

     c.   ta-n-Dann za-aw   le-wlaad
           Prog-1-think came-Past.3P the-children
           'I think the children came'

     d.*   ta-n-Dann-u   za-aw   le-wlaad
           Prog-1-think-it came-Past.3P the-children

    (38d) is ungrammatical with the expletive occupying
Spec TP.

    The ungrammaticality of (38d) and (37) clearly
shows that there is no expletive pro in the Spec of TP
cooccuring with the thematic Spec of VP.[7] Hence
agreement with Spec VP under government does not violate
principle C (or B) nor the thematic criterion since there
is no pronominal in Spec TP that would be interpreted as
thematic by the agreement on the verb.[8]

    If this analysis of the contrast between Moroccan
Arabic and Standard Arabic is correct, then we have an
explanation for why Spec-head agreement is so pervasive.
In languages where Spec-TP can be filled by an expletive,
full agreement with the postverbal NP is disallowed due
to independent principles of the grammar.[9]

    To conclude, it seems that the different structural
environment where subject verb agreement takes do not
need to be stipulated. Rather, as long as there is a
structural relation between two agreeing elements
(government or Spec-head), agreement can freely take
place. Any unwanted results would be filtered by
independent principles of the grammar.[10] Hence, the
structural environment where agreement may take place in
a particular language cannot be elevated to the status of
a parameter. It is rather an epiphenomenon that results
from the combination of the constraints on the
identification of null subjects and on referential

30

BENMAMOUN

dependency in addition to the thematic criterion.

Footnotes

* I would like to thank Joseph Aoun and Maria-Luisa Zubizarreta for helpfull discussions. For a much more detailed analysis of the various issues involving subject verb agreement see Benmamoun (in progress).

1. The suffix cannot be considered a resumptive pronoun, (simply a pronominal) that is related to a topicalized or left-dislocated NP. The main reason against that is that the suffix lacks the main pronominal feature which is Person. Moreover, in (2) there is no representation in which the NP subject is left-dislocated or topicalized. Also, the suffix does not constitute together with the prefix a discontinuous morpheme. If we assume that it is a discontinuous morpheme, we still have to explain why the second part of this morpheme does not show up under VS.

2. Shlonsky (1989) also argues for separating agreement features. He proposes that the features, Person, Number and Gender each heads an independent projection.

3. For the present purposes we assume canonical government in the sense of Kayne 1984 and defined in terms of Reinhart's (1976, 32) formulation of the c-command condition:
Node A c-commands node B if neither A or B dominates the other and the first branching node dominating A dominates B.

4. In Benmamoun (1991) it is argued that pro is lexicalized when governed by a non-Nominative Case assigner:

Lexicalization Condition
*pro if non-Nominative
[+Case]

This condition accounts for the lexicalization of pro in the context of V, P, N and C.

5. Abbas Hassan points out that the preverbal pronoun may, but need not, agree with the postverbal subject in gender. Crucially, it cannot agree with the postverbal subject in number.

6. See Jaeggli (1982), Rizzi (1986) and Jaeggli & Safir (1989) among others.

7. Verbs like <u>Dhar</u> (seem) to carry expletive agreement:

(i)   ta-y-Dhar-l-ii   belli Omar msa
      Prog-Imp.3M-seem-to-me that Omar left
      'It seems to me that Omar left'

However, this shows that the matrix verb "Dhar" needs a subject. Thus, the ban on the expletive is only in sentences with a thematic subject. In other contexts the null expletive is allowed since no violation of the thematic criterion or principle insue. This is supported by the fact that it can be lexicalized when governed by a non-Nominative Case-assigner:

(ii)   9ammr-u ma-xTar b-baal-i belli Omar kaan hna
       never-it Neg-occured to-mind-my that Omar was here
       'It never occured to me that Omar was here'

8. We differ from Shlonsky (1990) that expletives need to be identified by agreement on the verb or by the postverbal subject. Under our analysis that identification would result in a principle C or B violation. Moreover, as he points out, his restriction on expletives has to be relaxed in some contexts such as Spec of weather verb and extraposition among others.

9. This is basically parallel to the proposal that in VSO and VOS orders Spec TP may not be projected altogether (Borer 1986, Travis 1984, Adams 1987 and references cited there).

10. The remaining problem is how to explain the presence of the expletive in one language and its absence in another. This cannot be derived from the presence vs absence of agreement to avoid circularity. One possibility is Case if it can be shown that Spec IP in languages with the expletive, Case can only be assigned to Spec IP and therefore the expletive is needed to discharge Case and transfer it to the postverbal NP. In languages without expletives, Nominative can be assigned directly to Spec VP.

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32

BENMAMOUN

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