

Constituent negation in Kildin Saami: a case for concord in verbal domain¹

Vsevolod Potseluev
National Research University Higher School of Economics,
Moscow
potseluev.va@yandex.com

The data were gathered by elicitation (translation and judgement tasks) in the village of Lovozero (Murmansk Oblast, Russia) in 2022-2024. Sentential negation in Kildin Saami (further – Saami) is expressed by an auxiliary verb similarly to other Uralic languages. The negation bears person and number features of the subject, whereas the lexical verb is marked just by tense (1)-(2).

(1) munn emm pued.
1SG.NOM NEG.1SG come.NPST.CNG
'I don't come.' [Rießler 2022: 235]

(2) munn puad-a.
1SG.NOM come-NPST.[1SG]
'I come.' [Rießler 2022: 235]

The constituent negation is expressed by the means of the same auxiliary verb, expressing φ -features of the subject (3).

(3) emm/*egg/*ejj munn a tonn joadj-ex lujavr-a
NEG.1SG/2SG/3SG 1SG but 2SG go-PST.2SG L.-DAT
'It is not me but you who went to Lovozero.'

At the first glance this is an instance of agreement similar to clausal agreement of a predicate with its subject. Under the most prominent theories of agreement the controller of agreement has to c-command its goal (among others [Preminger 2014]). In the cases, where the negated constituent is the subject, the agreement is obligatory, since in any imaginable syntactic configuration the negation c-commands the subject. This is expected from Agree. However, negated constituents in lower positions like direct object can agree too (4).

(4) tonn vvo̯lt-ek egg mun pas'tem'
2SG take-PST.2SG NEG.2SG 1SG.GEN spoon.ACC.SG
'You took not mine spoon'

Moreover, agreeing negation may be placed fairly deep in the nominal structure, as adjectives can be negated with the same marker (5). These facts would pose a problem for any pure Agree-based analysis of the observed phenomenon.

(5) tonn vualt-ek mun ejj/ egg vuem' a odd pas'tem'

¹ This work is an output of a research project implemented as part of the Basic Research Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE University)

2SG take-PST.2SG 1SG.GEN NEG.3SG/NEG.2SG old but new spoon.ACC
 ‘You took my not old but new spoon’

I argue that the phenomenon we are observing here is not actually (just) agreement but an instance of concord similar in mechanism to case spreading (6) proposed in [Norris 2014] with the sole difference being that in the examples above ϕ -features are spread instead of case.

(6) Case Concord [Norris 2014: 149]:

- a. Let X and Y be two nodes in a single extended projection, Y immediately dominating X.
- b. If Y has a valued case feature [CASE: alpha] (but X does not), then copy Y’s case feature to X.

After T^0 agrees with the subject, TP as a whole is valued for both person and number. Then the process of feature spreading begins: every constituent dominated by TP is assigned for these features in a cyclic fashion. Concord does not apply higher than TP as can be deduced from the fact that complementizer negation cannot express ϕ -features (7).

(7) ejj/*emm vajme a kues’s’koopč-a <...>
 NEG.3SG/1SG if but when clean-NPST.1SG
 ‘Not if but when I clean <...>’

Also, concord cannot be applied lower than TP either as can be seen from sentences with constituent negation inside non-finite clauses (8)-(9). There are two possible reasons why agreeing negation is dispreferred in these clauses: either agreement is sensitive to case and the only possible goal is a nominative NP, or the dependent clause lacks TP, which prevents concord inside the clause. It is clear that both explanations would support the idea that ϕ -feature spreading starts at TP and it cannot start as long as T^0 does not agree with the subject: in the first case it cannot agree because of case-discrimination, whereas in the second case there is no T^0 to begin with.

(8) munn šobš-a kirm’ez-et’ ejj/*jev peert-es
 1SG love-NPST.1SG painting-ACC.PL NEG.3SG/3PL house-LOC
 kir’jx-a a viken’
 write-PTCP.PST but outdoors
 ‘I like the paintings painted not in a house but outdoors’

(9) munn jurd-a vues’s’t’-e tenn vuer-es’t’ ejj/*emm
 1SG think-NPST.1SG buy-INF this time-LOC NEG.3SG/1SG
 muur’j-et’ a muur’r’j šaap’k’
 berry-ACC.PL but berry.ADJ pie
 ‘I think to buy this time not berries but a berry pie’

In my talk, I will focus on possible alternative analyses involving operation Agree, arguing that all of them fail to capture the contrasts observed in Kildin Saami.

References

Norris 2014 — Norris, Mark. *A theory of nominal concord*. Diss. UC Santa Cruz, 2014.

Preminger 2014 — Preminger, Omer. *Agreement and its failures*. Vol. 68. MIT press, 2014.

Rießler 2022 — Rießler, Michael. "Kildin Saami." *The Oxford guide to the Uralic languages* (2022): 219-239.