Agreement alternations and Defective Probes in Dutch

Introduction – Standard Dutch and many Dutch dialects have position-dependent agreement (PDA) for 2P.SG. This paper argues for a novel syntactic analysis of PDA, introducing the concept of Defective Probes. I show that the account based on Defective Probes provides a simple and empirically adequate solution to PDA, forcing the conclusion that T and C are independent Probes (Haegeman & Van Koppen 2012, contra Chomsky 2008).

Data – The core phenomenon that this paper accounts for is illustrated in (1 & 2): 2P.SG agreement varies with word order (SV-VS). In SV, the verbal inflection is homophonous with 3P.SG; in VS, the inflection is homophonous with 1P.SG. Looking at 578 dialects (MAND corpus), we find this type of PDA only in varieties where 2P.SG inflection is non-unique (n = 239); varieties with unique 2P.SG inflection never exhibit PDA (n = 130).

(1) Jij loop-t cf. hij loop-t you walk-t he walk-t (2) Loop jij cf. ik loop walk-ø you I walk-ø

Prerequisites – I assume the (standard) inventory of binary features (e.g. Noyer 1992) in (3), and that they are organized in a geometry (4) (Harley & Ritter 2002; Preminger 2014) where each feature has a default value (underlined in (3)). Unvalued variants of these features are present on Probes (T and C; Carstens 2003, Van Koppen 2005) and valued variants are present on Goals (subjects). I assume with standard DM (Halle & Marantz 1993) that affixes are inserted at Morphology obeying the elsewhere principle.

(3) (4)

+ Participant	+ Author - Author	- Group 1p.sg 2p.sg	+ Group 1p.pl 2p.pl	Participant] [Group]
- Participant		3p.sg	3P.PL	[Author]

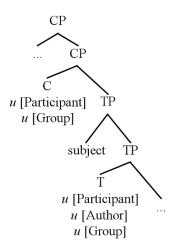
I propose that Probes can be Defective (5) and the morphological recovery principle in (6).

- (5) **Defective Probe**: A Probe is Defective when it lacks a u[feature] that is relevant (i.e. being referred to) in the affix inventory. Defectivity is restricted by the person geometry.
- (6) **Principle of default morphological interpretation**: In the absence of a relevant feature, interpret the default value of that feature at Morphology.

Analysis – I follow Zwart's (1997) analysis of Dutch main clauses: the verb is in T in SV word order (normal declaratives), but in C in VS word order (inversion: questions, topicalizations, imperatives); the subject is always in SpecTP. I argue that in varieties with PDA, C, but not T, is a Defective Probe, and that it lacks *u*[Author] (7). (7)

Given the data in (1 & 2), we have the following affix inventory (incl. the plural affix for completeness).

When C agrees with a 2P.SG subject ([+ Participant], [- Author], [- Group]), its feature will be valued as [+ Participant] and [- Group]. Given the affix inventory, [± Author] is relevant in the paradigm: by the Principle of Default Morphological Interpretation, [+ Author] will be interpreted at Morphology. As a result, Morphology sees [+ Participant], [+ Author], [- Group] and the 1P.SG affix will be inserted, correctly accounting for PDA with 2P.SG. 3P agreement is unaffected because regardless of the specification at



Morphology, there is no affix that corresponds to the specification, so the elsewhere affix will be inserted.

This proposal predicts that in varieties with a Defective Probe as in (7), also other types of C agreement will be homophonous for 1P and 2P, but T agreement not necessarily. This prediction is born out: we find PDA also for 2P.PL as well as 1P/2P homophonous complementizer agreement, providing further support for the proposal.

Even more Defective Probes – In addition to PDA with 2P.SG, several varieties of Dutch have an even more impoverished verbal paradigm and PDA with 2P.SG, 1P.PL and 2P.PL; in VS, the inflection is homophonous to 1P.SG. A full paradigm is given in (8).

(8)				(9) _{CP}
	SV	VS		
1P.SG	Ø	Ø		ČP
2P.SG	-t	Ø		
3P.SG	-t	-t		
1P.PL	-t	Ø		u [Participant]
2P.PL	-t	Ø		subject TP
3P.PL	-t	-t		
Affix ir	ventory:			Ť
[+ Participant] [+ Author] [- Group] ⇔		ø	u [Participant]	
Elsewhere ⇔		· -t	u [Author] u [Group]	

The current proposal provides a straightforward analysis: C is an even more Defective Probe and only bears u[Participant] (9). When there is agreement in C, the defaults for [Author] and [Group] will be interpreted at Morphology: [+ Author] and [- Group]. When C agrees with a [+ Participant] (1P.SG, 2P.SG, 1P.PL or 2P.PL), this will result in a 1P.SG interpretation at Morphology. Hence, the \emptyset affix is inserted, leading to PDA for 2P.SG, 1P.PL, and 2P.PL.

Implications – I argue for a syntactic account of PDA based on Defective Probes. Defective Probes are attractive from a learnability perspective, as it makes concrete the idea that the child only posits features that it has morphological evidence for. Since Defectivity of Probes is restricted by the person geometry, the current proposal makes strong empirical predictions, in contrast to alternative, morphophonology-based accounts. For instance, 3P should never exhibit PDA, since even in the absence of [Participant], the defining feature of 3P, [-Participant], will be interpreted at Morphology, as it is the default value. This prediction is correct: PDA with 3P is completely absent in the Dutch language area (Don, Fenger & Koeneman 2013). In addition, the current observation that PDA is only attested when the 2P.SG affix is syncretic refutes Ackema & Neeleman's (2003) morphophonological account, that requires PDA to make reference to a unique specification of the 2P.SG affix: in all and exactly those dialects that have a morphologically unique 2P.SG affix, PDA does not occur; whereas in exactly those dialects where the 2P.SG affix is not unique, PDA does occur.

Conclusion – I argue that position-dependent agreement in Dutch is syntactic and the result of Defective Probes. The consequence is that T cannot inherit its features from C, but that they are dissociated (Haegeman & Van Koppen 2012): both T and C can bear unvalued phifeatures and enter into Agree independently.

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