

Variation in adjectival agreement

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So-called *pancake sentences* are a well-known phenomenon in the Scandinavian languages (e.g. Enger, 2004; Faarlund, 1977; Haugen and Enger, 2014, 2019; Josefsson, 2006, 2009, 2014a,b; Källström, 1993; Malmgren, 1984; Telemann et al., 1999; Wellander, 1949, 1955; Widmark, 1966; Åkerblom, 2020). In these constructions, the predicative adjective takes a *t*-morpheme, which looks like neuter agreement, irrespective of what gender and number the subject noun has.

- (1) a. Pannkak-or är go-tt. [Swedish]
pancake-PL are nice-N.SG
b. Vodka er sun-t [Norwegian]
vodka.M is healthy-N.SG

Although the morphological form of the predicative adjective violates the normal agreement patterns in the languages, the form is felt to be the correct one, and in the literature the phenomenon is generally treated as some form of agreement rather than a case of disagreement (for discussion, see Haugen and Enger, 2019, 535). On the analysis in Haugen and Enger (2014, 2019), for instance, this is a type of semantic agreement, and on the account in Josefsson (2014a), it is a case of syntactic agreement with a classifier head. Corresponding cases with canonical agreement, as in (2b), are generally marked as ungrammatical (Haugen and Enger, 2019, 172–173):

- (2) a. Vodka-en er god. [Norwegian]
vodka-DEF.M is good.C.SG
b. *Vodka er sunn. [Norwegian]
vodka.M is good.C.SG

At the same time, corpus findings show that both canonical agreement and neuter agreement are used, although neuter agreement is more common (Åkerblom, 2020). It is this apparent variation in agreement and specifically the status of cases like (2b) that we explore in this study. In an acceptability study, we investigated speakers' judgements of sentences like (1b) and (2b) in Swedish. We also looked at how the presence of a premodifying adjective in the subject, as in (3), affected the judgements. The acceptability of canonical agreement has been said to improve when the subject is premodified. Explanations as to why this is the case differ (see for instance Haugen and Enger, 2019; Åkerblom, 2020).

- (3) Rysk vodka är god. [Swedish]
Russian.C is good.C.SG

Finally, we also investigated whether the presence of a modal auxiliary affected the judgements. With a modal verb included in the verb-phrase, not only is the semantics of the sentences altered slightly but the distance between the subject and the predicative verb also increases. This could have an effect on the perceived well/ill-formedness of the agreement pattern (Bock and Miller, 1991).

In the study, thirty-three native speakers of Swedish rated 320 sentences each on a 7-point Likert scale in a computer lab in exchange for a cinema voucher. The sentences were taken from 160 experimental items of eight sentences each differing in agreement (common gender, CMN, or neuter gender, NEUT), in whether the subject included a modifier (MODIF.),

and in whether a modal auxiliary was present (MODAL), as in (4). The sentences were distributed across 4 lists (two sentences from each item appeared on each list) fully rotated in a Latin square design.

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|-----|----|---|---------------------|
| (4) | a. | Senap är stark.
mustard.CMN is strong.CMN | [CMN] |
| | b. | Senap är stark-t.
mustard.CMN is strong-NEUT | [NEUT] |
| | c. | Senap ska vara stark.
mustard.CMN should be strong.CMN | [CMN+MODAL] |
| | d. | Senap ska vara stark-t.
mustard.CMN should be strong-NEUT | [NEUT+MODAL] |
| | e. | Skånsk senap är stark.
Scanian mustard.CMN is strong.CMN | [CMN+MODIF.] |
| | f. | Skånsk senap är stark-t.
Scanian mustard.CMN is strong-NEUT | [NEUT+MODIF.] |
| | g. | Skånsk senap ska vara stark.
Scanian mustard.CMN should be strong-NEUT | [CMN+MODIF.+MODAL] |
| | h. | Skånsk senap ska vara stark-t.
Scanian mustard.CMN should be strong-NEUT | [NEUT+MODIF.+MODAL] |

The results from the study confirm the picture that neuter gender is the default option but also make it clear that there is a lot of variation in the agreement preferences in these constructions. Notably, the sentences with common gender received fairly high ratings and could thus hardly be described as ungrammatical in contrast to what is common in the literature. As expected, the ratings with common gender improved when the subject included a modifier and, interestingly, were even higher than those for neuter gender when there was also a modal verb present in the sentence. In the presentation, we will discuss variation between participants' agreement preferences and look at the implications of these findings for the analysis the phenomenon.

References

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