Identity Crisis

Introduction: In assumed identity contexts like in (1), the number feature on the predicate of a binominal small clause is argued to be intrinsically valued (Béjar et al. 2019). Depending on the features of the two nominals involved, (assumed) identity statements in Telugu (Dravidian) are unacceptable in some combinations, but acceptable in others (2) – specifically, plural subjects with singular predicates are always ineffable in binominal copular constructions. In this paper, I provide an explanation for this ineffability by distributing the burden: articulated probes in the syntax agree with multiple deficient goals, which sometimes leads to conflicting requirements on vocabulary insertion.

(1) The banana is the [eyebrow/eyebrows]

Context: Fruit plate arranged like a face

(2) Context: Actors discussing their roles in a play

a. nenu picci-vaaLLa-nu
   1SG mad-3PL-1SG
   ‘I am the mad people’ 1SG > 1PL

b. * memu picci-vaaDi-(mi)
   1PL mad-3MS-(1PL)
   ‘We are the mad person’ 1PL > 1SG

Telugu Copular Clauses: Telugu copular clauses with predicate adjectives need a nominal to host the adjective (3). This nominal covaries with the subject in number and gender, and is phonologically identical to a 3rd person pronoun (4). In addition to this covarying host, an agreement marker is found adjacent to it, which covaries with the subject in person and number (2a,6). This agreement marker is not the usual verbal agreement; the latter shows up in non simple present tenses (5).

(3) vaaDu picci-vaaDu
   3MS mad-3MS
   ‘He is mad/a mad man’

(5) nenu picci-vaaDi-ni avu-taa-nu
   1S mad-3MS-1S be-fut-1S
   ‘I will become mad/a mad man’

(4) Form of the pronominal host:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[#:sg]</th>
<th>[#:pl]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[Γ:m]</td>
<td>-vaaDu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Γ:f]</td>
<td>-aame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Γ:n]</td>
<td>-di</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(6) Copular agreement paradigm:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[#:sg]</th>
<th>[#:pl]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[π:1]</td>
<td>-ni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[π:2]</td>
<td>-vu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[π:3]</td>
<td>ø</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Problem: Of the six possible person-number combinations of nominals in assumed identity contexts, only two are acceptable in all cases (7). The 3SG > PL combination is acceptable when the subject is in its honorific form, which is phonologically identical to 3PL (8). When the subject is a plural with a singular predicate, ineffability arises in binominal copular clauses.

(7) a. SUB > PRED {*/✓}/REPAIR
   1SG > PL ✓
   2SG > PL ✓
   3SG > PL ✓ / ✓ 3SG.HON

b. SUB > PRED {*/✓}
   1PL > SG *
   2PL > SG *
   3PL > SG *

(8) vaaLLu picci-vaaLLu
   3MS.HON mad-3PL
   ‘He is the mad people’

Analysis: The repair for the 3SG case in (8) suggests a rescue-by-syncretism analysis, where a featural mismatch is rescued when the mismatched features have identical exponents (Pullum & Zwicky 1986 et seq.) However, this cannot be a phonological rescue since all 3rd person agreement markers are null (6). I suggest that these cases are rescued due to the featural makeup of the honorific pronoun. Concretely, honorific pronouns have uninterpretable PL and interpretable SG features, the former participating in agreement and in PF operations, and the latter, LF.
I assume that the agreement morphology is hosted by a head \( F \), with probes relativized to \([\pi: \text{part}]\), a feature common to first and second person pronouns, and to \([#: \text{sg}]\). Crucially for this analysis, the number node of the feature geometry needs to have two independent daughters, \([#: \text{sg}]\) and \([#: \text{pl}]\). I assume, as is common in the literature, that \( \pi \) probes before \( # \) (Coon \& Keine 2019 a.o.). Once \( \pi \) is satisfied by the goal, \( # \) probes. In both probing cycles, all the features of the goal are copied; trivially if both probes agree with the same goal (cf. Deal 2015).

The structure of the copular clause, abstracting away from higher functional projections is given in (9).

Evidence for the small clause structure comes from number and gender concord between the two DPs in regular identity contexts. In these cases, the number and gender features on the nominal host of the adjective can be shown to be derivationally valued (Bobaljik \& Zocca 2011). Such concord behaviour cannot be mediated by a functional head, at least on the assumption that there is no covert \( \varphi \)-agreement (Preminger 2019).

\( \text{sg} \succ \text{pl} \): When the subject of the copular construction is a first or second singular pronoun, the probe on \( F \) agrees with the subject in its specifier. In the \( 3\text{sg} \succ \text{pl} \) case (10), the person probe copies the features of the subject, but continues probing further to \( \text{DP}_2 \), which by assumption, does not have any person features, but its number features are copied. Now the probe has two feature sets, one with \([#: \text{sg}]\), and the other with \([#: \text{pl}]\) (11). These conflicting values for number result in ineffability since there is no vocabulary item that can be inserted at \( F \) (12).

\( \text{pl} \succ \text{sg} \): With plural subjects and singular predicates, the probe on \( F \) is never satisfied just by the subject, and probes the predicate. In all these cases, the situation in (12), modulo person, arises, resulting in ineffability. Notice that if \([#: \text{sg}]\) weren’t an independent daughter of the \([\text{num}]\) node and was just the lack of \([\text{pl}]\), the cases with \( 1\text{pl} \) and \( 2\text{pl} \) subjects would have been predicted to be acceptable, since the probe would have found a suitable goal, contrary to fact.

**Conclusion:** In this paper, I have argued that the apparent (inverse) number hierarchy effects in Telugu copular constructions are a result of articulated probes in the syntax agreeing potentially with multiple goals, resulting in conflicting requirements on vocabulary insertion, and hence ineffability. Crucially for this analysis, the \([\text{num}]\) node of the feature geometry needs two independent daughter nodes, \([\text{sg}]\) and \([\text{pl}]\). This paper adds to the literature explaining hierarchy effects in natural language in general and copular clauses in particular, crucially making use of gluttonous probes (Coon \& Keine 2019), as well as coarse feature copying (Deal 2015).