

Non-agreement in Western Armenian*

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1. Introduction

This paper is concerned with the agreement behavior of [Num N_{sg}] elements in Western Armenian (WA) (e.g., ‘three dog_{sg}’). Such elements allow both singular and plural agreement on the verb. We call the singular agreement possibility ‘non-agreement’ and the plural agreement possibility ‘full agreement’. We argue that each agreement possibility is correlated with the syntactic position of the [Num N_{sg}] element: when this element is inside the VP then, we have non-agreement; conversely, when this element is in [Spec, TP] we have full agreement.

We take this pattern to be evidence for a bipartite version of the Agree mechanism, whereby Agree is broken down into a purely syntactic Agree and a PF Agree. The syntactic Agree can only look upwards (although bounded by maximal projections) and is sensitive to interpretable features. This version of Agree, together with the assumption that [Num N_{sg}] elements in WA come with both an iPL and a uSG feature (with the iPL feature being structurally higher than the uSG feature) derives the pattern: the syntactic part of Agree ensures that a probe on T can only find the [Num N_{sg}] nominal just in case it is in [Spec, TP] (since it can only look upwards), and when it does find it, it first accesses the iPL feature, leading to plural agreement. Conversely, when the relevant nominal is inside the VP, the probe on T cannot find it (since it cannot look downwards). In this case, the PF part of Agree will determine the agreement based solely on the uFs (since iFs delete at PF); given that [Num N_{sg}] come with a uSG feature, the agreement in this case is singular.

The rest of this paper is organised as follows: Section 2 reviews the basic data behind the phenomenon. Section 3 argues on the basis of scopal and adverbial data that fully agreeing [Num N_{sg}] elements are in [Spec, TP], while the corresponding non-agreeing

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nominals are inside the VP. Section 4 presents the analysis. Section 5 shows how data from Pseudo-Incorporation in WA offer support for our analysis. Section 6 concludes.

2. The Phenomenon

2.1 Some general facts about WA nominals

Western Armenian (WA) subjects typically agree for person and number with the verb, (1), (Bale and Khanjian 2014:2):

- | | | | |
|-----|---|-----|--|
| (1) | Dəgha vaze-ts
boy.SG ran-PST.3SG
'(One or more) boys ran' | (2) | Dəgha-ner vaze-ts-in
boy-PL ran-PST-3PL
'(Two or more) boys ran' |
|-----|---|-----|--|

WA allows a noun to appear either in the singular or in the plural in a numeral + noun construction, (Sigler 1997:167):

- | | | | |
|-----|--|-----|--|
| (3) | kəsan usanor
twenty student.SG
'twenty students' | (4) | kəsan usanor-ner
twenty student-PL
'twenty students' |
|-----|--|-----|--|

We will refer to the numeral-noun construction in (3) as a 'covert plural' (following Sigler 1997).

These covert plural subjects allow singular agreement with the verb, (Sigler 1997:166-167):

- | | | | |
|-----|---|-----|---|
| (5) | jad derev ing-av
many leaf.SG fall.PST-3SG
'Many leaves fell' | (6) | hink zinvor əsbann-ve-tj-av
five soldier.SG kill-PASS-PST-3SG
'Five soldiers were killed' |
|-----|---|-----|---|

Following Sigler (1997), we will call this 'non-agreement', because something that is semantically plural allows singular agreement on the verb.

2.2 The pattern

As we saw in (5) and (6), passives and unaccusatives allow non-agreement. According to Sigler (1997), non-agreeing covert plurals are not possible with transitive and unergative verbs, (7-8):

- | | |
|-----|---|
| (7) | hink zinvor ayn kyuB-ə kantetj-in/*-∅
five soldier-(PL) that village-DET destroyed-3PL/*-3SG
'Five soldiers destroyed that village' |
| (8) | yerek jun hatfe-j-in/*-∅
three dog bark-PST-3PL/*-3SG
'Three dogs barked' |

- (14) $\neg\exists x[3\text{-student}(x) \wedge \text{fall} - \text{hole}(x)]$ (It's not the case that there are three students who fell in a hole)

Now consider Scenario 1 in (15):

- (15) **Scenario 1:** There's a class with 3 students and they fell. We are trying to determine what happened. 2 students fell in a hole. 1 student fell off a hill.

In this scenario, it is true there do not exist three students who fell in a hole, and it is false that there are three students who did not fall in a hole (only 1 student fell off a hill), that is (14) is true and (13) is false. **(12) is judged true in this scenario.** This tells us that non-agreeing covert plurals can have low scope with respect to negation.

To see whether or not non-agreeing covert plurals can have high scope with respect to negation, we construct a scenario where (13) is true, but (14) is false. This is what Scenario 2 does:

- (16) **Scenario 2:** There's a class with 6 students and they fell. We are trying to determine what happened. 3 students fell in a hole. 3 students fell off a hill.

Example (12) is judged false in this scenario. We thus conclude that covert plurals can have only low scope with respect to negation. Taking negation to mark the left edge of the VP, we can conclude that **non-agreeing covert plurals are VP-internal.**

On the other hand, plural agreement on the verb shows the opposite pattern:

- (17) jerek aʃagerd pos-i-n metʃ tʃ-inga-n
 three student hole-GEN-DEF in NEG-fell-PST.3PL
 'Three students did not fall in a hole' (* $\neg > \exists$, $\exists > \neg$).

The sentence in (17) can only mean that there are three students who did not fall in a hole. It is judged false in Scenario 1, and true in Scenario 2. Following the same reasoning as above, we conclude that **agreeing covert plurals are outside the VP.** We will take them to occupy the [Spec, TP] position.

3.2 Adverbs

Data from adverb placement bolster the results from scope. Consider the following sentence:

- (18) jereg gajan-i-n mech arakoren jergu aʃagerd
 yesterday train.station-DAT-DEF in quickly two student
 jega-v/-n
 arrive-PST.3SG/-PST.3PL
 'Yesterday in the train station, two students arrived quickly (after)'

Example (18) shows that in WA ‘quickly’ can be both VP- and TP- adjoined: VP-adjoined ‘quickly’ has an interpretation in which what happens quickly is the arrival event itself. In its TP-adjoined interpretation, it means something along the lines of ‘quickly after something else happened’.

Our scope results indicate that non-agreeing covert plurals are VP-internal, while agreeing covert-plurals are in [Spec, TP]. Consider (18): If the non-agreeing covert plural is indeed within the VP, then ‘quickly’ should be free to attach either on the VP or on the TP, and both interpretations should be available. But, when the verb shows full agreement, then the covert plural is in [Spec, TP]. Given that in (18), the adverb is to the left of the covert plural, this means that the adverb can only attach to the TP (as attaching to the VP would require it to be lower than the covert plural). Hence, with full agreement we predict that only the TP-adjoined interpretation should be available. This prediction is borne out:

- (19) jereg gajan-i-n mech arakoren jergu ašagerd jega-v
yesterday train.station-DAT-DEF in quickly two student arrive-PST.3SG
✓‘Yesterday in the train station, two students arrived quickly’
✓‘Yesterday in the train station, two students arrived quickly (after)’

- (20) jereg gajan-i-n mech arakoren jergu ašagerd jega-n
yesterday train.station-DAT-DEF in quickly two student arrive-PST.3PL
✗‘Yesterday in the train station, two students arrived quickly’
✓‘Yesterday in the train station, two students arrived quickly (after)’

In (19) where the agreement is singular both interpretations of the adverb are possible, in contrast to (20), where only the TP-modifying interpretation is allowed. We thus have converging evidence from scope behavior and adverbs that:

- Non-agreeing elements are always low, inside the VP.
- Agreeing elements are always high, in [Spec, TP].

4. Analysis

4.1 Covert plurals

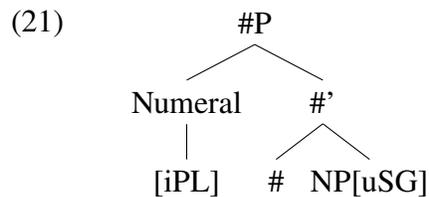
To model our data we need to make the Agree operation sensitive to interpretable features (iFs) as well as to uninterpretable features (uFs), as covert plurals are able to trigger plural agreement even though they are formally singular. Thus, we adopt Smith (2017)’s account of the structure of ϕ -features whereby both uFs and iFs can be specified on a nominal (see also Wechsler and Zlatić 2003). Thus, we take WA covert plurals to be specified as uSG, iPL.

Then, we need a version of Agree that is sensitive to both iFs and uFs. We adopt a model of bipartite Agree (Smith 2017, Arregi and Nevins 2012), where Agree is split into a (narrow) syntactic part (Agree-Link), and a PF part (Agree-Copy). iFs are present in the

narrow syntax but they delete when the structure is sent to PF. Hence, the purely syntactic part of Agree can be sensitive to iFs, but the PF part of Agree cannot.

Assuming that verbal agreement is agreement with a probe on T, we then need a way of constraining the Agree mechanism so that the sensitivity to the iPL feature of a covert plural will obligatorily lead to full agreement in the case where the covert plural is in [Spec, TP]. This can be derived from the following assumptions:

1. The purely syntactic part of Agree (Agree-Link) can only look upwards (but bounded by maximal projections (contra Bjorkman and Zeijlstra 2019), i.e., restricted to Spec-Head configurations).
2. The PF part of Agree (Agree-Copy) can look either upwards or downwards.
3. The structure of covert plurals (see (21)).



The idea is to structure the iPL and uSG parts of the covert plural (for an idea along similar lines, see Scontras 2013; see also Landau 2016, and Pesetsky 2013 for similar ‘structural height’ approaches to agreement phenomena). The uSG feature is on the morphologically singular NP. The singular NP is taken as the argument of #, which hosts the numeral in its specifier. As the iPL features are associated with the numeral (which seems intuitively correct), the iPL feature ends up structurally higher than the uSG feature. We do not assume a D layer as covert plurals do not appear to be full DPs; they have no definite marker and based on our data, they do not reconstruct (see scope data in section 4.1).

Evidence for the structure in (21) comes from the fact that a classifier can optionally appear between the numeral and the NP (Sigler 1997, Khanjian 2013).

(22) jergu had afagerd
two CLF student

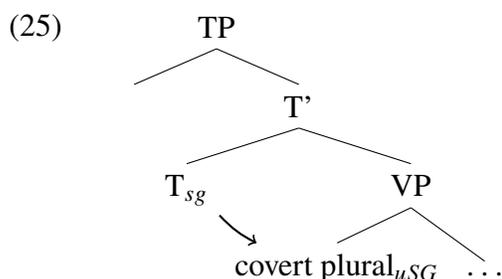
The structure with the overt classifier in (22) shares with covert plurals certain important characteristics: ‘Num N’ constructions with overt classifiers can trigger either singular or plural agreement on the verb, which also correlates with their position: a non-agreeing [Num had N] element takes low scope with respect to negation, whereas an agreeing [Num had N] element takes high scope:

(23) jerek had afagerd pos-i-n metʃ tʃ-inga-v
three CLF student hole-GEN-DEF in NEG-fell-PST.3SG
‘Three students did not fall in a hole’ ($\neg > \exists$, $*\exists > \neg$)

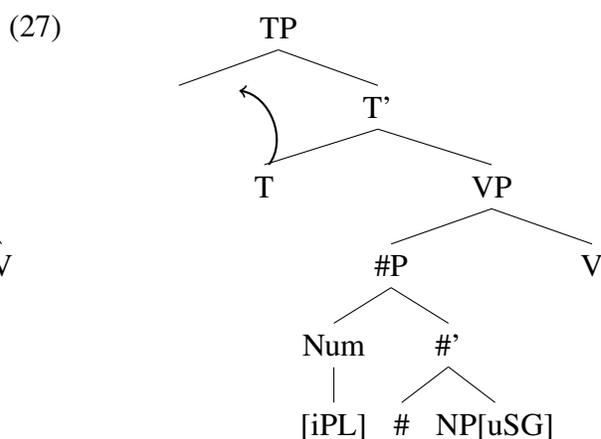
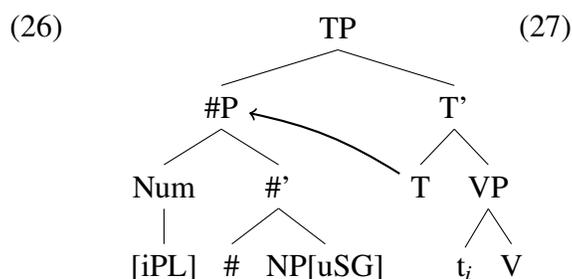
- (24) jerek had aɟagerd pos-i-n metʃ tʃ-inga-n
 three CLF student hole-GEN-DEF in NEG-fell-PST.3PL
 ‘Three students did not fall in a hole’ (*¬ > ∃, ∃ > ¬).

Given these similarities, the idea that covert plurals and ‘Num CLF N’ constructions essentially share the same structure, with the # head as the locus of the optional realisation of the classifier, is quite attractive, so we proceed to adopt it for the rest of this paper.

Consider now what happens when the covert plural is left inside the VP. T will look in its specifier during Agree-Link. It will not find anything there, (27). The structure will be sent to PF where Agree-Copy will be able to look downwards. The iPL feature will have been deleted. Therefore, Agree-Copy will only find and copy the uSG feature from the covert plural, resulting in singular agreement, (25).



Conversely, when the covert plural is in [Spec, TP], T will look into its specifier and the first thing it will find will be #P, which hosts the iPL feature of its head. Economy considerations suggest that once T finds something that it can use for Agreement purposes, it does not search further down the structure of the element in its specifier. Therefore, once it finds the iPL feature, it stops probing and thus never finds the more deeply embedded uSG feature on the NP.



This analysis captures the fact that plural agreement on the verb is correlated with high scope for the covert plural, whereas singular with low scope.

4.2 Full plurals

Our analysis makes certain immediate predictions. Since full plurals are morphologically marked overtly (*ʃun* vs *ʃun-er*), they must carry a uPL feature (in addition to an iPL feature). This means that an overt plural should always trigger full agreement on the verb. The reason is that at PF Agree can look either upwards or downwards, so regardless of the position of a full plural relative to the probe on T, the uPL feature will always be found at PF. This prediction is borne out:

- (28) *jerek aʃagerd-ner inga-n/*-v*
 three student-PL fall-PST.3PL/*-PST.3SG
 ‘Three students fell’

One might wonder if reference to the PF part of Agree need be made in deriving plural agreement on the verb in (28). In principle, (28) could be explained by saying that ‘three students’ is in [Spec, TP], so this example represents a case where T agrees with the element in its specifier. However, the following example in (29) shows that this is not correct. (29) shows that a morphologically plural ‘Num N_{pl} ’ allows both VP- and TP-adjoined interpretations of adverbs like ‘quickly’:

- (29) *jereg gajan-i-n mech arakoren jergu aʃagerd-ner jega-n*
 yesterday train.station-DAT-DEF in quickly two student-PL arrive-PST-3PL
 ✓‘Yesterday in the train station, two students arrived quickly’
 ✓‘Yesterday in the train station, two students arrived quickly after’

Therefore, here ‘students’ can be VP-internal. T looks upwards in the syntax and finds nothing in its specifier. But plural agreement still surfaces on the verb. Therefore, the verbal agreement in (29) must come from the PF part of Agree, and for that to be possible we need the PF part of Agree to be able to look downwards into the VP where the plural subject is. This is exactly what the model we adopted above gives us.

5. Pseudo-Incorporation: Accounting for transitives and unergatives

We have proposed an analysis of non-agreement in WA where the phenomenon is inextricably tied to the height of the subject that triggers agreement. VP-internal covert plurals trigger non-agreement, whereas covert plurals in [Spec, TP] trigger full agreement. This way of viewing the pattern differs from Sigler’s original formulation. Recall that Sigler suggested that non-agreement is only possible with passives and unaccusatives, while transitives and unergatives always trigger full agreement, (see Section 2, (7-8)).

Prima facie, our analysis derives no split between passives/unaccusatives vs transitives/unergatives. However, we argue that this split is not real: transitives and unergatives can exhibit non-agreement when their agent argument remains low; specifically, they allow non-agreement when the agent undergoes Pseudo-Incorporation (PI).

5.1 Bare singulars PI

First, we show that bare singulars in WA undergo PI (see Sağ 2019, Sağ (Forthcoming), for the same claim, although based on different data).

PI is a phenomenon present across a variety of languages (see Massam 2001 for Niuean, Farkas and de Swart 2003 for Hungarian, Öztürk 2009 for Turkish, Espinal and McNally 2011 for Spanish and Catalan, a.o.). Primarily it consists in bare nominals that descriptively appear to be very closely associated with the verb and have a weakened referential and syntactic status: they take obligatory low scope, are number-neutral, are often unable to bear case, cannot introduce a discourse referent and cannot act as syntactic binders. At the same time, they accept adjectival modification which suggests that they are full NPs. (see Massam 2001, Öztürk 2009 a.o. for details on these properties).

With the above in mind, consider WA bare singulars. First, as Bale and Khanjian (2014):2 note, bare singulars are number neutral and take low scope, (30). Thus, they fulfill two classic diagnostics for PI.

- (30) Dəgha tʃi vaze-ts
 boy.SG NEG ran-PST.3SG
 ‘(One or more) boys did not ran’ ($\neg > \exists$, $*\exists > \neg$)

A way in which bare singulars deviate from full argumental DPs is in their inability to bear Dative case. Animate objects in WA are marked Dative (Differential Object Marking (DOM), Khanjian 2013), contrast (31) with (32):

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>(31) John-\emptyset manug-i-n
 John-DEF child-DAT-DEF
 tasdiarege-ts
 educate-PST.3SG
 ‘John educated the (unique) child’</p> | <p>(32) ??John-\emptyset manug-\emptyset
 John-DEF child-DEF
 tasdiarege-ts
 educate-PST.3SG
 ‘John educated the child’</p> |
|---|---|

However, the pattern with bare singulars is the exact opposite, (33-34):

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>(33) ?*John-\emptyset manug-i
 John-DEF child-DAT
 tasdiarege-ts
 educate-PST.3SG
 ‘John loves a child’</p> | <p>(34) John-\emptyset manug tasdiarege-ts
 John-DEF child educate-PST.3SG
 ‘John educated one or more children’</p> |
|---|---|

This contrast can be understood if we take bare singulars to Pseudo-Incorporate.

Additionally, bare singulars cannot act as syntactic binders (see also Öztürk 2009 on Turkish here):

- (35) *Jes nəgar_i təri ir_i ʃərtʃanag-i-n metʃ- \emptyset
 John-DEF picture put.PST.1SG his frame-GEN-DEF inside-DEF
 Intended reading: ‘John put a picture_i in its_i frame.’

Full DPs on the other hand can bind:

- (36) Jes nəgar-ə_i təri ir_i ʃərtʃanag-i-n metʃ-ə
 I picture-DEF put.PST.1SG his frame-GEN-DEF inside-DEF
 ‘I put the picture_i in its_i frame’

Finally, bare singulars allow adjectival modification:

- (37) jereg, john-ə fantasi kirk gart-a-ts kordz-e-n vertʃ
 yesterday, john-def fantasy book read-th-past work-abl-def after
 ‘Yesterday, John read fantasy book(s) after work’

This tells us that bare singulars are at least NPs. So, bare singulars in WA lack many of the properties that syntactically present full arguments have, while being phrasal in nature. This leads us to the conclusion that they undergo PI.

5.2 Covert plurals PI

Covert plurals show the hallmarks of PI as well. First, recall that covert plurals show low scope (Section 3.1). Thus, they pass the first test. Number neutrality is not a viable test in the case of covert plurals, as they contain a numeral which specifies the number of elements with a certain inexorable exactness. Nonetheless, covert plurals in object position pass the Dative marking test: In object position, they cannot bear Dative case:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>(38) John-ə harujr had zinvor
 John-DEF 100 CLF soldier
 mert-uts
 killed.PST.3SG
 ‘John killed 100 soldiers’</p> | <p>(39) *John-ə harujr had zinvor-i
 John-DEF 100 CLF soldier-DAT
 mert-uts
 killed.PST.3SG
 ‘John killed 100 soldiers’</p> |
|--|---|

Moreover, covert plurals cannot act as syntactic binders:

- (40) *[Jerek aʃagerd]_i mertsə-v-ets-av irents_i dun-i-n metʃ-ə
 three student kill-PASS-PST-3SG their house-GEN-DEF inside-DEF
 Intended reading: ‘[Three students]_i were killed inside their_i houses.’

On the other hand, agreeing covert plurals can bind:

- (41) [Jerek aʃagerd]_i mertsə-v-ets-an irents_i dun-i-n metʃ-ə
 three student kill-PASS-PST-3PL their house-GEN-DEF inside-DEF
 Intended reading: ‘[Three students]_i were killed inside their_i houses.’

Finally, covert plurals also allow adjectival modification. We have already argued that covert plurals are fully phrasal elements (#Ps). The adjectival modification facts though strengthen the point and also establish that the N_{sg} part of a covert plural is indeed an NP:

- (42) hink jevpagan zinvor merts-ve-ts-av
5 european soldier kill-PASS-AOR-PST.3SG
'Five European soldiers were killed'

Given the striking parallel patterning between bare singulars and covert plurals in terms of the PI diagnostics, we conclude that covert plurals undergo PI. A hallmark of analyses of PI is that PI-ed elements are **low** (Massam 2001). This ties in elegantly with our analysis of non-agreeing covert plurals as being elements that are left low. Now, we have a reason why they are low: they have undergone PI.

5.3 Agent PI

Interestingly, WA allows PI-ed elements to serve as the agent argument. Consider (43):

- (43) mariam-i-n meyu xajte-ts
mariam-DAT-DEF bee sting-PST.3SG
'Mariam got bee-stung'

- (44) Ali-yi ari soku
Ali-acc bee stung
'Ali got bee stung'

This parallels examples from Turkish that have been claimed to involve agent pseudo-incorporation (Öztürk 2005, Öztürk 2009). We argue that just like Turkish, WA allows agent PI. 'bee' in (43) is number neutral. Moreover, it takes low scope with respect to operators like negation:

- (45) mariam-i-n meyu tʃə-xajte-ts
mariam-DAT-DEF bee NEG-sting-PST.3SG
'Mariam did not get bee-stung' ($\neg > \exists$, $*\exists > \neg$)

Furthermore, these agents cannot act as syntactic binders:

- (46) *Marjam-i-n bəziʃg; naje-ts-av ir; dun-i-n metʃ-ə
Marjam-DAT-DEF doctor see-PST-3SG his house-GEN-DEF inside-DEF
Intended: 'A doctor_i saw Marjam in his_i house'

But they do accept adjectival modification:

- (47) marjam-i-n jevpagan meyu xajt-e-ts
Mariam-DAT-DEF european bee sting-th-aor3sgPast
'Mariam got stung by European bees'

Crucially, covert plurals can also occupy this agent position:

- (48) mariam-i-n jerek meyu xajte-ts
 mariam-DAT-DEF 3 bee sting-PST.3SG
 ‘Mariam got three-bee-stung’

Again their behavior is that of PI-ed elements. They have low scope, (49), and cannot act as syntactic binders, (50):

- (49) mariam-i-n jerek meyu tʃə-xajte-ts
 mariam-DAT-DEF 3 bee NEG-sting-PST.3SG
 ‘Mariam did not get three-bee-stung’ ($\neg > \exists$, $*\exists > \neg$)

- (50) *Marjam-i-n [jerek bəʒiʃg]_i naje-ts-av irents_i dun-er-u-n
 Marjam-DAT-DEF three doctor see-PST-3SG their house-PL-GEN-DEF
 metʃ-ə
 inside-DEF
 Intended: ‘[Three doctors]_i saw Marjam in their_i houses’

Finally, covert plurals in agent position accept adjectival modification, (51):

- (51) marjam-i-n hink jevropagan meyu xajte-ts
 mariam-DAT-DEF 5 European bee sting-PST.3SG
 ‘Mariam got bee stung by five European bees’

Based on this patterning, we argue that WA allows agent PI, which extends to covert plurals. Given that PI-ed elements are analysed as remaining low (Massam 2001), we predict that they should show non-agreement: indeed, the verb in (48) bears singular agreement. Note also, that PI-ed agents, either bare singulars or covert plurals, appear especially low, to the right of the Dative marked object, ‘Mariam’. This accords well with the idea that PI-ed elements remain low. Notice that once we raise them to [Spec, TP], then they trigger plural agreement and start behaving more like full arguments (e.g., they can bind (52)):

- (52) ✓[jerek (had) bəʒiʃg]_i Marjam-i-n naje-ts-an irents_i dun-er-u-n
 three CLF doctor Marjam-DAT-DEF see-PST-3PL their house-PL-GEN-DEF
 metʃ-ə
 inside-DEF
 ‘[Three doctors]_i saw Marjam in their_i houses’

Therefore, we conclude that non-agreement is possible with transitives and unergatives after all when the agent remains low, inside the VP (i.e., when it undergoes PI). Because agent PI is associated with a marked interpretation, it is rarer for the agent to remain low. It usually raises out of the VP, giving the impression that transitives and unergatives do not allow non-agreement. However, once the PI facts are taken into account, the full pattern emerges:

- (53) *Agreement Pattern:* Covert plurals exhibit singular agreement when they are VP-internal.

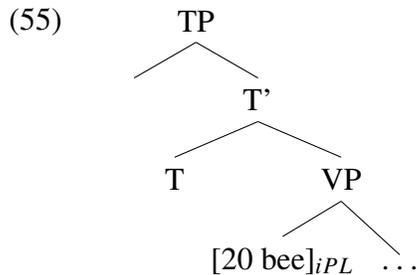
The pattern in (53) is exactly what our agreement analysis derives.

5.4 Downwards Agree

As a final comment, notice that the agent PI pattern makes the agreement pattern appear particularly recalcitrant from the perspective of theories that take Agree in the narrow syntax to be able to look only downwards:

- (54) mariam-i-n kəsan meɣu xajte-ts
mariam-DAT-DEF twenty bee sting-PST.3SG
'Twenty bees stung Mariam'

The probe on T will look downwards and will always find the iPL feature on '20 bee' (the agent):



Even if we say that the VP is a phase and hence Agree cannot look into it, the agent is at the edge and hence should be accessible. We take this as further evidence that the correct approach to the WA data requires Agree to look upwards in the narrow syntax.

6. Conclusion

In this paper we have argued that the agreement behavior of covert plurals in WA is conditioned by the height of the covert plural: covert plurals inside the VP trigger non-agreement, whereas covert plurals in [Spec, TP] trigger full agreement. To capture the pattern need to employ a bipartite version of Agree: the narrow syntactic part of this version of Agree is sensitive to iFs and is defined only on Spec-Head configurations (i.e. it can only look upwards, but is bounded by maximal projections). This, together with the assumption that the covert plurals in WA come with both a uSG and an iPL feature, with the iPL feature being structurally higher than the uSG feature, derives the agreement patterns.

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