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## Subject agreement variation: Support for the configurational approach

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### Abstract

In this paper we argue that variation in subject-verb agreement in Belfast English and Appalachian English bears on a number of issues that are relevant to current syntactic theory, including clause structure and subject positions, case, the syntax of negative polarity items and negative concord and the structure of the DP. We show that while the nature of the subject plays a role in determining subject-verb agreement in the two varieties (in different ways), subject position is the overt structural manifestation of the differing properties of the subject, independent of which properties are relevant in the variety in question. Our proposal on subject positions, which goes beyond what Henry (1995) proposed for Belfast English, is able to capture clusters of properties not discussed by Henry, and thus more fully accounts for the range of micro-parametric variation we find. This paper thus provides support for a configurational approach to subject-verb agreement.

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### 1. Domain of investigation and contributions of our study

Variation in subject-verb agreement across varieties of English is a rapidly expanding domain of syntactic inquiry. A major catalyst to generative interest in the matter was Henry's (1995) influential work on 'singular concord' in Belfast English, a phenomenon which allows plural full DP subjects and some plural pronominal subjects to appear with apparently singular verbal *-s*. Henry distinguished between Belfast English case-vague pronouns and unambiguously nominative pronouns, only the latter of which require an apparently plural verb (see also Milroy, 1981).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In contrast with these variations on the theme of the "Northern Subject Rule," recent work by David Britain, Laura Rupp, and colleagues addresses the "Southern Subject Rule" (attested in varieties in East Anglia, Cambridgeshire, and Essex), where verbal *-s* appears more with pronouns than with full DPs (see <http://privatewww.essex.ac.uk/~dbritain/research.html>). We do not discuss the Southern Subject Rule in this paper.

American sociolinguistic work has described subject-verb agreement patterns in varieties like Appalachian English and Ocracoke English, which share only some features with Belfast English.<sup>2</sup> For example, unlike Belfast English, these American varieties admit apparent ‘singular concord’ with all subjects in the past tense (both plural full DPs and plural pronominal subjects), so that *was* occurs throughout the entire paradigm. This contrasts with the present tense, where Appalachian English closely resembles Belfast English. As we will see in this paper, however, there are some interesting points of variation in the present tense between the two dialects. There are a number of different hypotheses that could logically be responsible for the variation in agreement we find within and between the two dialects, which we could summarize as follows:

- (a) the nature/structure of the subject
- (b) the position of the subject
- (c) the properties of the agreement head
- (d) some combination of the above

As we investigate the variation found in Belfast English and Appalachian English, we will see that it bears on a number of issues that are relevant to current syntactic theory, including clause structure and subject positions, case, the syntax of negative polarity items and negative concord, the structure of the DP, and micro-parametric correlations. These issues will be addressed as we focus on (a) and (b) above, which are two different but compatible approaches to account for subject-verb agreement across varieties of English. We show that while the nature of the subject plays a role in determining subject-verb agreement in the two varieties (in different ways), subject position is the overt structural manifestation of the differing properties of the subject, independent of which properties are relevant in the variety in question. Our proposal on subject positions, which goes beyond what Henry (1995) proposed for Belfast English, is able to capture clusters of properties not discussed by Henry, and thus more fully accounts for the range of micro-parametric variation we find.

Our investigation focuses on the phenomena of Belfast English and Appalachian English, which suggest that apparently unrelated syntactic phenomena in fact correlate, and which we argue can most readily be accounted for by a hypothesis which takes variation in agreement phenomena to be manifested configurationally. Recently, however, work by Smith (2000), Adger and Smith (2005), Adger (2006), and Adger and Smith (this volume) has shown that in another variety, Buckie English, agreement patterns differ in various ways from those of Belfast English, and as Adger and Smith (this volume) show, Buckie English does not seem to exhibit any other syntactic phenomena correlating with singular concord (the way that Belfast English and Appalachian English do, as we will see in this paper). Adger and Smith thus argue that the facts of Buckie English motivate an entirely different analysis—one which does not rely on different subject positions, but rather on different T heads available in the lexicon, with different feature content (approach (c) above). In this paper we wish to show that, although it is entirely possible that the variability found in Buckie English does not call for a configurational approach to subject-verb agreement in this variety, the facts and correlations found with Belfast English and Appalachian English suggest that at least some grammars express variation in agreement configurationally.

The paper is organized as follows. In section 2 we give an overview of the singular concord, as it manifests itself in Belfast English and Appalachian English. As we will see, the properties of the subject which allow for singular concord differ in the two varieties; while Nominativity seems to be relevant for singular concord in Belfast English, novel data from Appalachian English will show that morphological complexity is relevant in this variety. In section 3 we explore the proposal that singular concord depends on which position the subject occupies in the clause. We review evidence from Henry (1995), as well as novel evidence from Appalachian English, which supports the view that singular concord is a syntactic phenomenon, whereby a subject agrees, or fails to agree, depending on its structural position. To account for correlations of apparently unrelated phenomena, and the variation found between Belfast English and Appalachian English, we propose that the clause contains three

<sup>2</sup> Appalachian English is a group of varieties spoken in areas of the eastern United States, an area that roughly coincides with the central and southern part of the Appalachian Mountain range (Algeo, 2003). Notable studies include Hackenberg (1972), Wolfram and Christian (1976), and Montgomery and Hall (2004). Ocracoke English is spoken in Ocracoke, North Carolina; see, for example, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1997). See also Montgomery’s work (e.g. 1989, 1995, 1997) on historical connections between UK and US varieties.

The Appalachian English phenomena we discuss in this paper are gleaned both from the literature and from our own ongoing fieldwork in Eastern Tennessee and Southwestern Virginia.

positions for the subject (in contrast with Henry's Two Subject Position hypothesis). In this section we bring to bear on our proposal data on NPIs, Negative Concord, Negative Inversion, and interrogatives, and discuss how the hypothesis captures correlations, both within and across varieties. In section 4 we review the non-configurational approach to variation in subject-verb agreement in Buckie English, proposed in Adger and Smith (this volume), which makes reference only to the feature content of particular functional heads. Our view is that, while this non-configurational approach is applicable to the Buckie facts, it cannot capture the kinds of correlations discussed in section 3, and does not have the same predictive power as the configurational approach. In section 5 we conclude.

## 2. Singular concord

In this section we discuss similarities and differences between Belfast English and Appalachian English regarding so-called singular concord.

Singular concord is a label that refers to the co-occurrence of a plural subject with a verb carrying the *-s* suffix (see, e.g., Milroy, 1981). Discussions in the literature (such as Henry, 1995 and work by David Adger and Jennifer Smith; see section 4) work with two interrelated assumptions: (i) that verbal *-s* is the morpho-syntactic instantiation of 3rd person singular and also serves as a 'default' form, and (ii) that singular concord represents a lack of agreement between the (plural) subject and the verb. The discussion in this paper follows these assumptions.<sup>3</sup> We begin by describing singular concord in Belfast English and in Appalachian English.

### 2.1. A descriptive characterization

In Belfast English (BeE) singular concord is possible with full DPs (Milroy, 1981; Henry, 1995), as shown in (1a–c). Note that, alongside this pattern, BeE also allows the "standard" pattern, as shown in (1d–f)<sup>4</sup>:

- |     |                                     |                               |
|-----|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| (1) | a. The children <b>is</b> happy.    | d. The children are happy.    |
|     | b. The girls <b>likes</b> pizza.    | e. The girls like pizza.      |
|     | c. The children <b>has</b> arrived. | f. The children have arrived. |

In contrast with full DPs, singular concord is impossible with plural pronouns that are specified for Nominative case; this can be seen in (2a–f)<sup>5</sup>:

- |     |                               |                      |
|-----|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| (2) | a. *They <b>is</b> happy.     | g. They are happy.   |
|     | b. *We <b>is</b> happy.       | h. We are happy.     |
|     | c. *Youse <b>is</b> happy.    | i. Youse are happy.  |
|     | d. *They <b>likes</b> pizza.  | j. They like pizza.  |
|     | e. *We <b>likes</b> pizza.    | k. We like pizza.    |
|     | f. *Youse <b>likes</b> pizza. | l. Youse like pizza. |

So, while the subject *the children* can co-occur with a verb carrying the *-s* suffix in BeE (1a), the pronominal subjects *they*, *we*, and *youse* cannot (see e.g. (2a)).

<sup>3</sup> While the literature on singular concord has tended to focus on *number* agreement, we do not wish to deny the possibility of entirely different kinds of hypotheses to explain this phenomenon. In this regard, see recent work by Bernstein and Zanuttini (2008a,b), who propose approaching the facts from the perspective of *person* instead (so that in some singular concord varieties, verbal *-s* would be a marker of 3rd person (singular or plural), or, of lack of person).

<sup>4</sup> The examples in (1–5) are adapted from Henry (1995).

<sup>5</sup> The second person pronouns in BeE are *you*, *youse* (2nd plural), and *yousuns* (2nd plural). As we shall see immediately below, *yousuns* is analyzed as a case-vague pronoun (Henry, 1995:38). Here we follow Henry's claim that *youse* is case-marked, in contrast with *yousuns* (see Henry, 1995:38 for arguments). As for the form *you*, it is not clear to us whether or not it can be used with plural reference in BeE. The following statement from Henry (1995:18) suggests that the form *you* has only singular reference: "...*youse* [...] is the second person plural pronoun in Belfast English. ..." We will thus not include *you* in our discussion of BeE.

Note, however, that BeLE plural pronouns that are case-vague (i.e., those pronouns which can appear in both nominative and accusative positions) behave like full DPs; this can be seen in (3a,b), (4a,b), and (5a,b):

- (3) a. Themuns **is** happy. c. Themuns are happy.  
b. Themuns **likes** pizza. d. Themuns like pizza.
- (4) a. Usuns **is** happy. c. Usuns are happy.  
b. Usuns **likes** pizza. d. Usuns like pizza.
- (5) a. Yousuns **is** happy. c. Yousuns are happy.  
b. Yousuns **likes** pizza. d. Yousuns like pizza.

Appalachian English (AppE) patterns like BeLE in many ways (see, e.g., Hackenberg, 1972; Wolfram and Christian, 1976; Hazen, 1996; Montgomery, 1997). For example, it allows singular concord with full DPs, as in (6a,b)<sup>6</sup>:

- (6) a. Those boys **is** plumb foolish. c. Those boys are plumb foolish.  
b. The potatoes **looks** awful. d. The potatoes look awful.

Furthermore, AppE Nominative plural pronouns seem to behave like those of BeLE; as the examples in (7) show, they cannot appear with verbal *-s* (although see discussion below)<sup>7</sup>:

- (7) a. \*They **is** old friends. e. They are old friends.  
b. \*We **is** old friends. f. We are old friends.  
c. \*They **plows** their corn in June. g. They plow their corn in June.  
d. \*We **plows** our corn in June. h. We plow our corn in June.

In light of these data, what are the grammatical factors relevant for singular concord? In the next subsection, we will examine the relevant properties of the plural subjects which allow singular concord.

## 2.2. What are the relevant properties of the subject?

The behavior of unambiguously Nominative and case-vague plural pronouns at first glance suggests two hypotheses. First, let us consider what we will call the **Nominativity Hypothesis**<sup>8</sup>:

**Nominativity Hypothesis.** If the subject is unambiguously nominative, it does not allow singular concord.

Under this hypothesis, proposed by Henry (1995:24) for BeLE, if singular concord is lack of subject-verb agreement, then we conclude that nominative-marked subjects require full subject-verb agreement, while all other subjects do not.

Besides case, we can also compare the internal composition of the different pronoun types. BeLE case-vague plural pronouns are morphologically complex: the forms *themuns*, *usuns*, and *yousuns* consist of a simplex pronoun plus the form *-uns*. This observation leads us to the question of whether morphological complexity might be relevant to singular concord. Consider the **DP Complexity Hypothesis**:

**DP Complexity Hypothesis.** If the plural pronoun in subject position is simplex, it does not allow singular concord; complex pronouns and plural full DPs do allow singular concord.

<sup>6</sup> The examples in (6–7) come from our field data.

<sup>7</sup> In this paper we leave out discussion of the Appalachian forms *you*, *y'all*, and *you'uns*. M&H (2004:xxxviii) list *you* as one of the possible 2nd plural forms in Smoky Mountain English (both nominative and objective); W&C (1976:120) suggest that *y'all* is the preferred 2nd person plural form in the variety they examine, though they do not seem to exclude *you* as a possible plural form. See footnote 14 for the relevance of the form *you* to the current discussion.

<sup>8</sup> This is reminiscent of Cardinaletti's (1997) *Nominative Agreement Hypothesis*, also taken up in Tortora (2006), who appeals to the hypothesis in the analysis of Appalachian *they*-existentials.

Under this hypothesis, if singular concord is lack of subject-verb agreement, then we conclude that morphologically simple pronouns require subject-verb agreement, while morphologically complex pronouns and plural full DPs do not.<sup>9</sup>

Confronted with these two hypotheses, we must ask what kind of data allows us to distinguish between them. In this regard, let us consider the data in (9) from Henry (1995:23–24). As Henry notes, these data suggest that in BeE, *nominativity* is the relevant factor. In particular, as can be seen in (9a), the complex plural DP *us students* allows for singular concord alongside an agreeing verb form; in contrast, singular concord is not possible with the complex plural DP *we students* (9b), which contains the nominative pronoun *we*<sup>10</sup>:

- (9) a. Us students **is** going.      c. Us students are going.  
b. \*We students **is** going.      d. We students are going.

Thus, the Nominativity Hypothesis best accounts for the data of BeE.<sup>11</sup> As we will immediately see, however, this hypothesis cannot account for the AppE facts.

In order to contrast the AppE facts with those of BeE, let us first note that, as far as we can tell, AppE seems to be unique among English varieties in that it has a pronoun, *we'uns*, which is both unambiguously nominative and complex.<sup>12</sup> This pronoun can be seen in the example in (10):

- (10) *We'uns* used to drink moonshine all the time.

Now, note that the two hypotheses that we are considering make different predictions with respect to the pronoun *we'uns*. The Nominativity Hypothesis predicts the examples in (11) to be ungrammatical, because *we'uns* contains an explicit nominative (recall from (7b,d) that the simple nominative pronoun *we* does not allow singular concord; note too that there is no attested use of *we'uns* in object position). The DP Complexity Hypothesis, on the other hand, predicts the examples in (11) to be grammatical, because *we'uns* is complex.

- (11) a. We'uns **is** planning a picnic.  
b. We'uns **is** mighty good to our friends.

<sup>9</sup> We do not go into a detailed analysis here of how the “complexity” of a DP would allow for singular concord, but note that Adger and Smith (this volume) make a similar empirical observation regarding pronouns in Buckie English. Specifically, they observe that “pronouns that have nominal complements” in Buckie (*you ones*, *you bairns*) allow singular concord in the present tense (i), while pronouns that do not have a nominal complement do not (ii):

- (i) a. You ones **is** old ken'.  
b. You ones **kens** him.  
c. You bairns **is** for it.  
(ii) a. \*You **is** here.  
b. \*You **kens** him.

They propose that such (what we call complex) DPs have a +N feature that checks an N feature in T, yielding the -s verb form. For more on Adger and Smith's analysis of Buckie English, see section 4.

<sup>10</sup> Here we are assuming that the plural DP *we students* is unambiguously nominative, while the plural DP *us students* is not.

<sup>11</sup> Henry also uses the following data to support the idea that nominativity is the relevant factor in agreement:

- (i) a. Him and me **is** going.      c. Him and me **are** going.  
b. \*He and I **is** going.      d. He and I **are** going.

In (ia), coordination of two non-nominative pronouns can yield singular concord; however, (ib) shows that coordination of two nominative pronouns renders singular concord impossible. Thus, according to Henry, a nominative subject, be it simplex or complex, requires a plural verb form (id). We leave open the question of whether these coordination data form the basis of a valid argument in favor of the nominativity hypothesis, since in general the nature of the nominative and non-nominative constituents inside a coordinate structure is not obvious.

Note that Henry addresses the potential objection that (9b) and (ib) above may be unacceptable because of a mix of ‘standard’ (*We students* and *He and I*, respectively) and non-standard (singular concord) forms. Henry's response is that this cannot be the reason for the unacceptability of these structures, since speakers have no problem mixing subjects like *We students* and *He and I* with non-standard past verb forms such as *seen* and *done* (instead of *saw* and *did*: *He and I seen them/We students done the work*; Henry, 1995:24).

<sup>12</sup> Montgomery and Hall (2004:641) report this pronoun as rare; this claim is corroborated by the fact that it is not reported at all in Wolfram and Christian (1976), and by our own experience. The examples in (10–12) come from our field data, and were judged to be acceptable by an informant from Mountain City, TN.

Our fieldwork has shown that the predictions of the DP Complexity Hypothesis are borne out in AppE; that is, the sentences in (11) are grammatical for one of our informants. Note that the sentences in (11) are not accepted by all of our informants, but this does not seem to be because of the particular choice of verb inflection; rather, it is due to the fact that the form *we'uns* has a very low currency in present-day AppE (see footnote 12).<sup>13</sup>

So, in contrast with BeE, it is the DP Complexity Hypothesis that best accounts for the AppE data.<sup>14</sup> A question which naturally arises is why different factors are relevant in these two varieties. We reserve our comment on this question for section 3.2, when we introduce an extension of the configurational hypothesis (a hypothesis to which we turn momentarily).

### 2.3. Summary of singular concord in BeE and AppE

To conclude, nominative case is the relevant property for agreement in BeE. Our novel data from AppE show that in this variety, in contrast, the relevant property for agreement is morphological complexity. Now that we have seen that the nature of the subject correlates with singular concord (or lack thereof), we would like to discuss whether (and how) these properties of the subject map onto the syntactic representation of subject-verb agreement. That is, what is the syntactic characterization of subject-verb agreement in these varieties such that certain plural subjects trigger agreement on the finite verb, while others (plural full DPs and complex/case-vague plural pronouns) may fail to do so? Before we address these issues (in section 3), we briefly address the relevance of some of the AppE data just reviewed to questions of acquisition and language change.

As we saw above, AppE is unique in having *we'uns*, a pronoun that is both unambiguously nominative and morphologically complex. A learner who hears this pronoun with singular concord can conclude that, in this variety, morphological complexity (and not case) determines whether a subject agrees. However, if a pronoun of the type *we'uns* is missing from the stimulus, the learner might come to form either the Nominativity Hypothesis or the DP Complexity Hypothesis with equivalent probability, since nothing else in the stimulus points to one hypothesis over the other. It is also worth considering how this absence of definitive data might yield certain trajectories of language change but not others. So, a speaker who has arbitrarily formed either the DP Complexity Hypothesis or the Nominativity Hypothesis will appeal to this hypothesis when confronted with a new complex pronoun, which will in part determine how agreement with this new pronoun will work.

## 3. The syntax of subject-verb agreement: multiple positions for the subject

In this section we shift our focus from the internal properties of the subject to its distribution; in particular, we explore the possibility that singular concord depends on which position the subject occupies in the structure of the clause. Under this view, the clause contains more than one position for the subject, and, depending on which position a plural subject occupies, singular concord is or is not possible. This hypothesis is not incompatible with the approach that focuses on the internal composition of the subject; in fact, as we will see, the “Multiple Subject Positions” hypothesis can subsume the former two hypotheses; that is, the internal composition of the subject arguably determines what position in the tree it may/must occupy.

<sup>13</sup> Bernstein's (2006) data on coordination may further confirm that DP complexity is relevant for AppE (assuming that such coordination structures can form the basis of a valid argument in favor of the nominativity hypothesis; see footnote 11). As the examples in (ia,b) show, singular concord is possible with coordination of either two accusative pronouns or two nominative pronouns (unlike BeE, footnote 11):

- (i) a. It's true that me and him gets in a fight some time.
- b. It's true that he and I gets in a fight some time

The BeE data in (9) raise the question of what the agreement facts are in AppE with NPs like *we students*. It has thus far been difficult to verify their agreement properties, due to the fact that such NPs are generally dispreferred to NPs like *us students*.

<sup>14</sup> If DP Complexity is the relevant factor for (non-)agreement in AppE, then we predict that for those speakers who have *you* as a plural form, this form should not allow singular concord (regardless of whether this form is explicitly nominative or not). This prediction is borne out: none of our AppE informants allow singular concord with the form *you<sub>p</sub>*.

### 3.1. Two positions for the subject

#### 3.1.1. Some background for the Two Subject Positions Hypothesis

Let us begin by observing that in many languages, differences in agreement with the finite verb sometimes correlate quite transparently with differences in placement of the subject noun phrase. Thus, as is well known, in Standard English a plural subject occupying the structural subject position in a declarative clause must agree with the finite verb (see (12a,b)); but when the plural subject of a declarative clause appears in postverbal position in *there*-sentences, the verb can readily bear singular phi-feature inflection (as in (13a',b')). Sobin (1997) in fact takes (13a',b') to instantiate the grammatical norm, treating the plural version in (13a,b) as a 'virus' (but see Schütze, 1999).

- (12) a. Lots of people are in the room.  
a' \*Lots of people is in the room.  
b. Only two apples seem to be left.  
b' \*Only two apples seems to be left.
- (13) a. There are lots of people in the room.  
a' There's lots of people in the room.  
b. There seem to be only two apples left.  
b' There seems to be only two apples left.

It is important to bear in mind that for some speakers, singular verb agreement in *there*-sentences is not confined to contracted 's; this can be seen by the example in (13b'). Let us thus take (13a',b') to instantiate genuine singular concord. Interestingly, such singular concord, in Standard English, is possible only if the subject is visibly not in the structural subject position (which in (13) is occupied by the expletive *there*). This suggests that not being in the structural subject position and not triggering plural verb agreement are correlated.<sup>15</sup>

Plural verb agreement with a *committee*-type noun phrase (a 'plurilingual' in the sense of den Dikken, 2001) is actually impossible in *there*-sentences: thus, while (14a/a') are fine (in the relevant – mostly British – varieties), with either singular or plural verb agreement, only (14b) (with singular verb inflection) is grammatical.

- (14) a. A committee is holding a meeting in this room.  
a' A committee are holding a meeting in this room.  
b. There is a committee holding a meeting in this room.  
b' \*There are a committee holding a meeting in this room.

This is once again related to the structural height of the subject. den Dikken (2001) argues that 'plurilinguals' are noun phrases headed by a (null) plural pronoun, a null instance of *they*. Nominative pronominally headed noun phrases cannot serve as the associate of *there*—something that is directly related to another general fact about (weak) pronominally headed noun phrases: the fact that they have to be structurally higher than non-pronominal noun phrases. This, in turn, translates into obligatory subject-verb agreement between (weak) pronominally headed subjects and the finite verb.

This requirement of full agreement between (weak) pronominally headed subjects and the finite verb is seen not just in English. As Rouveret (1991) points out, in Welsh VSO clauses (in which the postverbal subject is not in what corresponds to the preverbal structural subject position in languages like English), the finite verb must agree in number with pronominal subjects, while it does not show number agreement with full-nominal subjects

<sup>15</sup> The fact that there are differing views regarding whether apparent lack of agreement in *there*-sentences is confined to 's (or whether it is permitted also with the full form *is*, or *was*, or *seems*) likely reflects the fact that different speakers allow different possibilities. Chomsky (1995:384, n. 42) and Tortora (2006:292, n. 17) argue that *there*-sentences with plural post-verbal subjects only allow the 's form, suggesting that 's does not obviously encode singular agreement; see also Schütze, 1999, who notes that some speakers only allow 's in these constructions, and Rupp, 2005, who does not explicitly state it, but whose data robustly excludes examples that do not have contracted 's. See also Quirk et al. (1985:1406n).

(something which is also noted in Adger and Smith, this volume, to show that UG “makes available a pronoun/NP split”):

- (15) a. Darllen-{asant/\*odd} hwy y llyfr.  
read-PST-3PL/\*3SG they the book  
‘They read the book.’  
b. Darllen-{odd/\*asant} y plant y llyfr.  
read-PST-3SG/\*3PL the children the book  
‘The children read the book.’

Following Koopman and Sportiche (1991) and others, Rouveret (1991) assumes that at no point in the derivation of Welsh VSO clauses is the subject in the high structural subject position that English preverbal subjects occupy. For concreteness, let us call the high structural subject position of English ‘SpecAgrsP’, and the lower position occupied by subjects in Welsh VSO clauses ‘SpecTP’. On the assumption that for full-nominal subjects the establishment of a Spec-Head agreement relationship with Agrs is a prerequisite for subject-verb agreement, the absence of subject-verb agreement in (15b) follows as a matter of course. To account for the fact that pronominal subjects do (in fact, must) agree with the finite verb (as in (15a)), Rouveret argues that, even though pronominal subjects clearly do not surface in a specifier position above Agrs (the head to which the finite verb raises in overt syntax), they do nonetheless raise higher up the tree than full-nominal subjects do: in particular, Rouveret argues at length that pronominal subjects raise not to SpecAgrsP but to an Agrs-adjoined position, and that they do so obligatorily. By so raising, the pronominal subject ends up in the checking domain of Agrs and therefore must agree with the finite verb.<sup>16</sup>

As Henry (1995:22) observes (following Mohammad 1989), Arabic also provides evidence that plural verb agreement can only be triggered from a particular structural position. As the datum in (16) shows, VSO word order in Arabic (similarly to Welsh) yields lack of plural agreement between a plural DP subject and the verb:

- (16) Jaa?a l-?awlaad-u.  
came.3SGMASC the-boys-NOM

However, as can be seen in (17), when the subject precedes the verb, agreement is triggered:

- (17) L-?awlaad-u jaa?uu.  
the-boys-NOM came.3PLMASC

Entirely independently of the facts of agreement in English dialects, therefore, it can be argued (a) that there are (at least) two structural positions for subjects, with the higher one correlating with agreement and the lower one not,<sup>17</sup> and (b) that certain types of pronominal subjects must engage in a close structural relationship (either Spec-Head agreement or, in the case of Welsh, head-adjunction) with the high inflectional head responsible for the checking of the phi-features of the subject and the finite verb.

### 3.1.2. *The Two Subject Positions Hypothesis and Belfast English subject-verb agreement*

With these conclusions in place, let us now return to the syntax of subject-verb agreement in English dialects, for which (a) and (b) have been exploited particularly forcefully in Henry’s (1995) approach to the BeIE facts, which we will review in some detail here. Henry proposes what we label the **Two Subject Positions Hypothesis**:

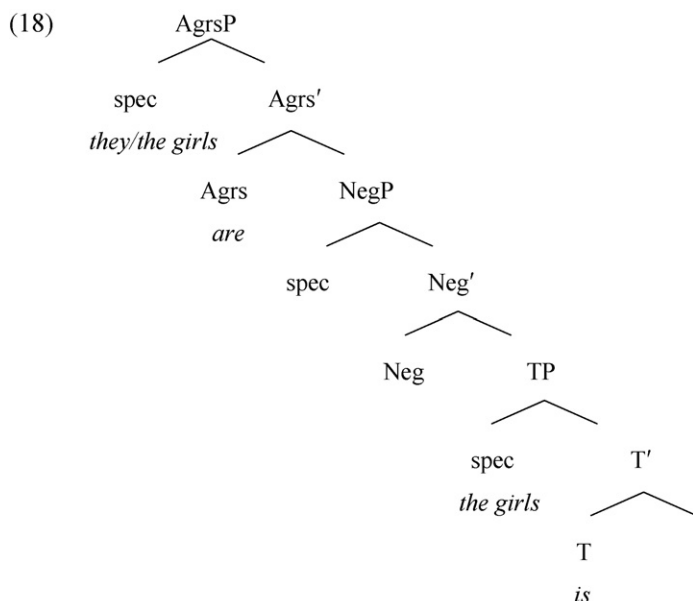
**Two Subject Positions Hypothesis.** Plural DPs that obligatorily trigger subject-verb agreement are in a higher (agreeing) subject position; those that do not are in a lower (non-agreeing) subject position.

<sup>16</sup> den Dikken (1999) argues that Rouveret’s analysis of the Welsh difference between full-nominal and pronominal subjects is strikingly borne out by the facts of number agreement in Hungarian possessed noun phrases, where Rouveret’s head-movement approach to pronominal agreement is directly morphologically vindicated. Relevant in connection with the special agreement behavior of pronouns as well is Sichel (2000), whose work is concerned with pronominal syntax in Hebrew.

<sup>17</sup> Or at least, less strictly; see Franck et al. (2006) for important discussion of the idea that two functionally distinct components are involved in agreement, Agree and Spec-Head agreement, and that agreement is ‘more vulnerable with respect to interference when realized only via AGREE as compared to when it is checked twice by both components’; p. 210.



This hypothesis is sketched in the tree in (18):



Under this hypothesis, when agreement is obligatory, as with the pronoun *they*, the subject must occupy a high (Spec,Agrs) position. A non-agreeing subject occupies the low, non-agreeing position (namely, Spec,TP).<sup>18</sup> With this configuration, if nominative case is relevant for agreement (as in BelE), a subject that is nominative will move to the higher (Agrs) position, while a subject that is not may remain in the lower (TP) position. And if DP complexity is relevant for agreement (as in AppE), a subject that is simplex will move to the higher (Agrs) position, while a subject that is complex may remain in the lower (TP) position.

A question that arises here is whether there are any data that could provide evidence for the idea that the position of the subject determines whether or not a verb agrees. In this regard, we will examine some data on Negative Polarity Items and Negative Quantifiers which may serve as evidence for a correlation between agreement and subject position.<sup>19</sup>

As Duffield (1993) and Henry (1995) note, BelE allows Negative Polarity Items (NPIs) in matrix subject position; this is illustrated in (19a). Interestingly, as is illustrated in (19b,c), a plural NPI in matrix subject position requires singular concord (examples from Henry, 1995:29):

- (19) a. Any country couldn't stand it. (= No country could stand it)  
 b. Any animals isn't coming. (= No animals are coming)  
 c. \*Any animals aren't coming.

<sup>18</sup> Note that NegP dominates the TP projection; this will become relevant momentarily.

<sup>19</sup> As discussed extensively in Adger and Smith (this volume), Henry (1995) also uses adverb placement as a probe for the different subject positions (agreeing and non-agreeing). Although the description of the adverb placement facts in BelE is thorough, we will not employ the analysis, as it is problematic. One issue is that, given the time that the book was published, adverb placement was assumed to be variable (without semantic effects), and so the analysis was not able to take into account more recent work (e.g., Cinque, 1999), which argues that adverbs occupy fixed positions in the clause (i.e., specifier positions of designated functional categories). Under this more recent view of adverb placement, it is not immediately clear how Henry's BelE adverb facts can be recast. Another issue is that Henry's analysis of sentences such as (i) and (ii) implicitly takes these to be semantically equivalent (which does not seem correct):

- (i) The girls really are happy.  
 (ii) The girls are really happy.

Finally, Henry's approach incorrectly predicts the following to be grammatical (we thank A. Henry (personal communication) for providing her judgment of (iii)):

- (iii) \*Really the kids is happy.

See Adger and Smith (this volume) for a more thorough discussion of the questions raised by Henry's analysis of the adverb placement facts in BelE.

In order to explain the possibility of an NPI in matrix subject position, Henry proposes that such subjects must be below the scope of negation.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, given that singular concord is required in sentences with NPI matrix subjects, she concludes that this low subject position (Spec,TP) fails to provide an appropriate configuration for subject-verb agreement. Thus, the behavior of matrix subject NPIs in BeE provides a clue into the syntax of agreement.

### 3.1.3. *The Two Subject Positions Hypothesis and Appalachian English*

Unfortunately, the absence of matrix subject NPIs in AppE (see (20)) makes it impossible to draw the parallels with BeE that would establish two subject positions on the basis of the distribution of NPIs.

(20) \*Anybody ain't/isn't/aren't coming.

However, even though AppE does not allow matrix subject NPIs, a similar point can be made with another set of data. Consider the fact that AppE, like some varieties of African American English (e.g., Green, 2007; Sells et al., 1996), allows negative quantifiers in the subject position of sentences with a negative auxiliary, yielding a single-negation reading (i.e., negative concord), something Green (2007) labels 'non-inverted negative concord'. This is illustrated in example (21) (Wolfram and Fasold, 1974; Wolfram and Christian, 1976):

(21) Nobody wouldn't go. (= Nobody would go.)

Suppose we were to adopt a view of negative concord which requires that all the elements that contribute to the single negative reading are c-commanded by the head of a NegP projection (in the IP domain of the clause; though see the discussion in 3.2.2 below). Then the fact that the negative quantifier in (21) occurs in subject position and yields a negative concord reading (in co-occurrence with the negative auxiliary *wouldn't*) could be taken as evidence that the negative quantifier is in a low position, below NegP (like the subject NPI in BeE).<sup>21</sup>

In addition to the construction in (21), AppE (like AAE) allows Negative Inversion, as in (22) (Wolfram and Christian, 1976:113):

(22) Didn't nobody get hurt or nothin'.

Let us assume that the negative quantifier is in the same low position as it is in the construction in (21) (namely, Spec,TP).<sup>22</sup> If this is the case, we predict that, in Negative Inversion contexts, only singular concord should be possible. Our fieldwork has not yet robustly shown whether or not this prediction is borne out. So far we have one speaker who requires singular concord in Negative Inversion constructions, as can be seen in (23)<sup>23</sup>:

- (23) a. A guy was painting a barn that **hasn't** no farmers used in years  
b. \*A guy was painting a barn that **haven't** no farmers used in years.

<sup>20</sup> Here it is the abstract negation (in NegP) that takes scope over the NPI (see (18)), not the negative marker *n't*, which is clearly to the right of the NPI (and as such does not take scope over it).

<sup>21</sup> Of course, this explanation for the licitness of a negative quantifier in matrix subject position raises the question as to why an NPI would not be possible in this configuration in AppE. In this regard, see the discussion at the end of section 3.2.2.

<sup>22</sup> Thus, the only difference between (21) and (22) would be that the auxiliary verb has moved to a higher functional head in the Negative Inversion case.

There is some reason to believe that this inverted word order is not the result of T-to-C movement, at least for some speakers of AAE. As can be seen by the example in (i) (taken from McCloskey, 1997, citing Labov et al., 1968), it is possible to embed a Negative Inversion sentence in a relative clause, a clause type that is known to preclude T-to-C movement:

(i) I know a way that can't nobody start a fight.

We have found the same possibility in AppE (from our field data):

(ii) A guy was painting a barn that won't no farmers use.

Since there is no T-to-C movement in relative clauses with an overt complementizer, the auxiliary in (i)-(ii) must not have moved to C, suggesting that the subject, which appears to the right of the auxiliary, must be in a low structural position (see McCloskey, 1997). However, see Green (2007) and Green et al. (this volume) for a discussion of Negative Inversion in AAE, and arguments that it does involve T-to-C movement.

<sup>23</sup> This speaker is from Mountain City, TN.

The ungrammaticality of (23b) serves as an initial indication that the low position of *no farmers* fails to provide an agreement configuration.

#### 3.1.4. Interim summary

In summary, these data from BeE and AppE support the idea that a low subject position correlates with lack of agreement. If we combine this tentative conclusion with the observations concerning the internal configuration of the subjects that allow singular concord, we derive the following scenario. In BeE, the non-nominative DPs (i.e., full DPs and case-vague pronouns) can occupy this low position, while case-marked pronouns cannot; in AppE, it is the complex DPs that can occupy this low position (i.e., full DPs and complex pronouns—even those with nominative pronouns inside of them, like *we'uns*), while simplex pronouns are banned from it.

Having reviewed data from BeE and AppE which are captured by the Two Subject Positions Hypothesis, we turn to another novel data point distinguishing AppE from BeE which shows that: (i) a Multiple Subject Positions Hypothesis may be able to account for another point of variation, and (ii) this kind of hypothesis allows us to capture correlations among phenomena. In this discussion, we will build on recent proposals in the literature, and explore the hypothesis that the clause contains three subject positions.

#### 3.2. Three positions for the subject

In this section we will follow the line of reasoning outlined above with the Two Subject Positions Hypothesis and introduce a contrast between BeE and AppE that cannot be captured by that hypothesis in its current formulation. This will lead us to explore a modification to the proposal to account for the new data.

##### 3.2.1. Motivations for a Three Subject Positions Analysis

Henry (1995) has noted that although singular concord is possible with plural DPs in declaratives in BeE, it is not possible in interrogatives. Consider (24):

- (24) a. \*Is the eggs cracked?  
b. \*Has the children arrived?

Henry's explanation (pp. 42–43) for the absence of singular concord in interrogatives is that agreement is triggered when T moves through Agrs on its way to C. However, assuming (as Henry does) that subject-verb agreement obtains as a result of a Spec-Head configuration, T-to-C movement through Agrs should not by itself trigger plural agreement; rather, the subject should also occupy Spec,AgrsP. If this is correct, then T-to-C movement in BeE entails subject raising. We can capture this entailment by stipulating that when T raises to Agrs, it activates the EPP feature of Agrs, which then forces the subject to raise to Spec,AgrsP (to check this EPP feature).

Now let us turn to the AppE interrogative facts. As the example in (25) shows, AppE does allow singular concord in inversion contexts, in contrast with BeE (example from Bernstein, 2006)<sup>24</sup>:

- (25) Is them cars fast?

If movement of the verb to C triggers agreement, as Henry claims, why does AppE allow non-agreement in interrogatives, unlike BeE? Here we consider two possible answers. The first answer relates to the idea we just mentioned, that T-to-C movement forces subject raising to Spec,AgrsP in BeE. Suppose that this activation of an EPP feature in Agrs (as a result of T movement to C) is what is responsible for the subject's movement to Spec,AgrsP, and thus obligatory agreement in interrogatives in BeE. Then, to explain the difference between BeE and AppE, we can

<sup>24</sup> Montgomery's (1989, 1995, 1997) arguments for an Ulster Scots origin of AppE offer a possible source of singular concord in AppE interrogatives (see (25)), since Ulster Scots also allows this configuration (Montgomery, 2006):

- (i) Is the wains (= children) awa?  
(ii) Is them boys daft?

As Adger and Smith (this volume) show, Buckie English also allows singular concord in interrogatives, something we discuss in section 4 below.

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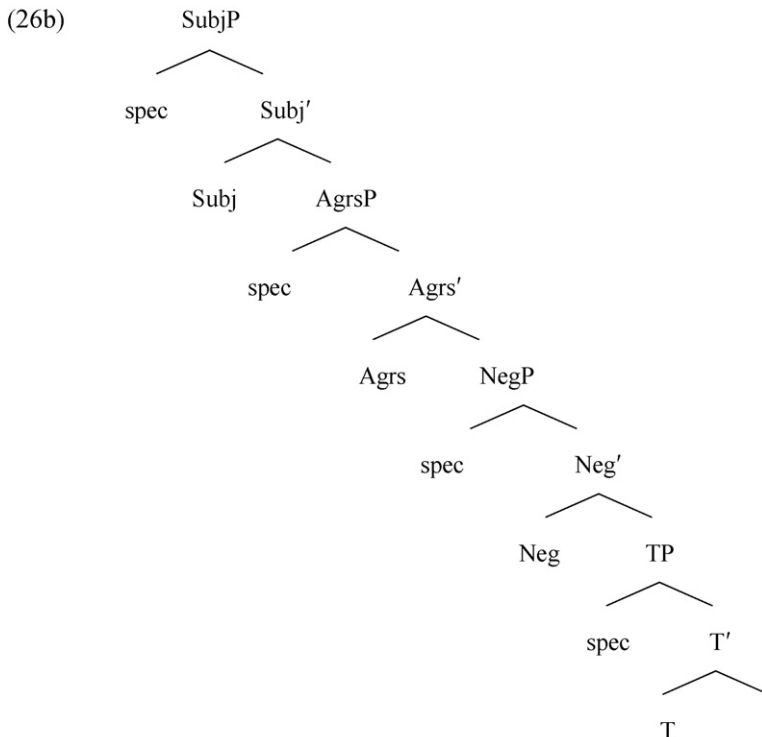
further stipulate that T-to-C movement in AppE skips Agrs, so that the EPP feature on Agrs is never activated, thus precluding movement of the subject to Spec,Agrs.<sup>25</sup>

Another possible analysis for the difference between BeLE and AppE interrogatives, which we would like to explore here, resides not in the nature of the Agrs heads in the two varieties, but rather in the details of the Subject Positions Hypothesis. Let us expand on the Two Subject Positions Hypothesis, and consider the following:

**Multiple Subject Positions Hypothesis.** UG provides three different subject positions: a high SubjectP position, an AgrsP position, and a TP position. Only DPs in the AgrsP position trigger agreement on the verb.

This proposal is not entirely novel, as these different positions have been independently argued for in work by, e.g., *Cardinaletti (2004)*, and *Rizzi (2006)*, among others (for Rizzi, the highest position would be an EPP, or “Criterial” position). We illustrate the proposal in (26), where the SubjectP position is the highest, and the TP position is the lowest, with both of these positions involving no agreement<sup>26</sup>:

- (26a) Three Different Subject Positions:
1. SubjectP position (no verbal agreement)
  2. AgrsP subject position (verbal agreement)
  3. TP subject position (no verbal agreement)



Once we take the clause to contain (at least) these three subject positions, we can propose that languages differ with respect to which of these positions are active. In particular, we propose two available positions for the subject in AppE,

<sup>25</sup> V2 constructions in Mainland Scandinavian languages might provide some evidence for such “Agrs-skipping” (see *Holmberg and Platzack, 1991:101*).

If one were to reject an “Agrs-skipping” approach, one could stipulate instead that the AppE verb does move through Agrs in T-to-C movement, but that activation of the EPP feature on the Agrs head does not entail subject raising; in this case, the verb does the job of checking the EPP feature itself (cf. *Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou’s, 1998* arguments that some languages exhibit this option). Still another possibility is to stipulate that in AppE, the Agrs head does not have an EPP feature to begin with, so that movement of the verb through Agrs would not trigger raising of the subject.

<sup>26</sup> Here we follow *Rizzi (2006)* in proposing that the highest position is a non-agreeing position; see Rizzi for arguments.

and two for the subject in BeE (the latter, following Henry). However, the two varieties differ in the sets of positions available: AppE has positions 1 and 2 available, and BeE has positions 2 and 3 available:

- (27a) AppE:
1. SubjP subject position (high) (no verbal agreement)
  2. AgrsP subject position (low) (verbal agreement)
- (27b) BeE:
2. AgrsP subject position (high) (verbal agreement)
  3. TP subject position (low) (no verbal agreement)

What this means, then, is that in AppE, the non-agreeing position would be the higher of the two; in BeE, in contrast, the non-agreeing position would be the lower of the two.<sup>27</sup>

### 3.2.2. Capturing micro-parametric correlations

With this expansion of the subject positions hypothesis in place, we can now pursue an analysis for the difference in behavior between AppE and BeE interrogatives. In AppE (where singular concord is possible in interrogatives), the subject and verb are either in the SubjP (higher) projection or the Agrs (lower) projection. In the former case, there would be no subject-verb agreement in interrogatives because the non-agreeing verb would raise directly to C without moving through Agrs, which is below the SubjP projection.<sup>28</sup> In BeE however, agreement is always triggered in interrogatives (singular concord being impossible). How would this work, given that the two subject positions proposed for this variety are different? If the plural subject and verb are in the (higher) agreeing Agrs projection, the verb will already have (plural) agreement morphology. But even if the subject and verb are in the (lower) non-agreeing TP projection, T-to-C movement would involve verb raising through Agrs (Agrs being higher than TP), again triggering agreement (*à la* Henry).

In sum, the Multiple Subject Positions Hypothesis can provide an account for the difference between BeE and AppE interrogatives. What is most interesting to us, though, is the fact that this new proposal allows us to shed light on correlations in micro-parametric variation. Specifically, it allows us to capture the difference between BeE and AppE in terms of Negative Polarity Items (NPIs).

Recall that BeE allows NPIs as matrix subjects as long as there is singular concord (i.e., the subject NPI in Spec,TP is below the scope of negation). This was illustrated in example (19), repeated here as (28):

- (28) a. Any animals isn't coming. (= No animals are coming)  
b. \*Any animals aren't coming.

We further noted that AppE differs from BeE in that NPIs are not licit in matrix subject position, regardless of the agreement morphology on the verb (see (20)) but that AppE does show an agreement effect entirely similar to the one seen in BeE (28) in a closely related domain: Negative Inversion with Negative Concord (recall (23), repeated here).

- (20) \*Any animals isn't/aren't/ain't coming.
- (23) a. A guy was painting a barn that **hasn't** no farmers used in years  
b. \*A guy was painting a barn that **haven't** no farmers used in years.

How can we explain the difference between BeE and AppE with respect to the licensing of NPI subjects while still accounting for the Negative Concord facts in (23) and the parallel between (28) and (23) in the domain of agreement?

<sup>27</sup> Under this view, one must assume that the subject does not pass through Spec,Agrs in the course of raising to Spec,SubjP in singular concord sentences in AppE. Also, a question arises as to where the verb is in such configurations. One possibility is that although the non-agreeing subject is in Spec,SubjP, the verb remains in T. Another possibility is that the verb moves to the Subj head (so that a Spec-Head relationship can obtain). If the latter is the case, again, we must assume that the verb skips Agrs, to ensure lack of agreement. As we noted in footnote 25, there might be some evidence for such Agrs-skipping in V2 constructions in the Mainland Scandinavian languages.

<sup>28</sup> Verbal agreement is also possible in AppE interrogatives, as was the case with declaratives. Under the current proposal, the presence of *are* in interrogatives would be the result of movement of the verb from the Agrs position (Position 2 in (27a)).

We would like to argue that the conclusion that the AppE subject is either in SubjP or in AgrsP, hence always higher than NegP, is not incompatible with the discussion in section 3.1.3 about non-inverted negative concord and negative inversion (both forms of negative concord). In fact, a comprehensive account of the BeIE and AppE facts naturally falls into place once we discard the NegP c-command requirement on Negative Concord in AppE, in favor of an alternative requirement. In particular, let us hypothesize for AppE Negative Concord (following Haegeman and Zanuttini, 1991) that it involves movement of the negative constituent to SpecNegP, an A-bar position. Let us further assume (as is standard) that such movement can only feed subsequent movement of the negative constituent into a higher subject position if that higher subject position is itself an A-bar position. Assuming so, we derive the result that onward movement of a negative subject beyond SpecNegP can only target SpecSubjP, which we will take (following Rizzi, 2006) to be a position that can host a variety of constituent types (including fronted locatives and other non-argumental material), and hence is classified as an A-bar position (in contrast with SpecAgrsP, which is an A-position). Since, as we pointed out previously, a subject raised to SpecSubjP does not establish a Spec-Head agreement relationship with the Agrs-head, and hence will show singular concord with the finite verb, the facts in (23) are thus correctly derived by the analysis, even with both subject positions of AppE higher in the tree than NegP. At the same time, the ungrammaticality of (20) in AppE continues to fall out from the assumption that NPIs depend for their licensing on a c-commanding negative operator in NegP: both agreeing and non-agreeing subjects in AppE are above NegP, hence ineligible as NPIs.

Note that the licensing of negative constituents thus involves conditions that differ in crucial respects from the licensing of negative polarity items (which are not themselves negative, but do depend on a negative licenser): whereas the latter must be c-commanded (at S-structure) by the negative operator in NegP, the former do not have to be. With the facts viewed in this way, it thus turns out that both the licensing of NPI subjects in BeIE and the licensing of negative inversion with subjects in AppE require singular concord, but the way in which this singular-concord requirement is derived is different in the two cases: for the BeIE NPI facts, singular concord follows from the fact that the NPI-subject must be c-commanded by Neg and hence cannot raise to SpecAgrsP; for the AppE negative inversion facts, singular concord is a consequence of the fact that the negative subject must move to SpecNegP ('negative concord' à la Haegeman and Zanuttini, 1991), an A-bar position, and hence cannot raise to SpecAgrsP (an A-position) later in the derivation, but rather, can only move up to SpecSubjP (a non-agreeing A-bar position).

Independent of the issue of agreement, the idea that licensing of negative constituents differs from the licensing of negative polarity items in this way, together with the three subject positions hypothesis, also gives us an explanation for something we otherwise would have no explanation for, namely, the fact that BeIE allows NPIs in matrix subject position at all, while AppE does not—and conversely, the fact that AppE allows so-called non-inverted negative concord at all, while BeIE does not. Thus, the Multiple Subject Positions Hypothesis allows us to capture three apparently independent facts about each variety, which we repeat here for clarity:

BeIE:

- (29) Anybody couldn't stand it. (= Nobody could stand it)
- (30) \*Nobody couldn't stand it.
- (31) \*Is the eggs cracked?

AppE:

- (32) \*Anybody couldn't stand it.
- (33) Nobody couldn't stand it. (= Nobody could stand it)
- (34) Is the eggs cracked?

### 3.2.3. Summary of the Multiple Subject Positions Hypothesis

To conclude this section: we have seen how a subject can be mapped into a certain configuration that may or may not trigger agreement, and we have proposed a particular (expanded) version of the Multiple Subject Positions Hypothesis, whereby BeIE and AppE differ with respect to which two subject positions are available. The idea that AppE and BeIE exploit two different sets of positions allows for an explanation of the difference in behavior between the two varieties with respect to agreement in interrogatives, the availability (or lack thereof) of matrix subject NPIs, and the availability (or lack thereof) of non-inverted negative concord. In this regard, a Multiple Subject Positions Hypothesis has the advantage of being able to connect three apparently unrelated points of variation under one (more

abstract) parametric difference. We might also consider the fact that, although we have yet to understand why subject-verb agreement in AppE is apparently sensitive to DP Complexity, while in BeE it is apparently sensitive to Nominativity, the Multiple Subject Positions Hypothesis (in contrast with the Two Subject Positions Hypothesis) may make predictions that can be tested in this regard by considering the various subject positions in other languages. That is, if the SubjP position explicitly bans non-complex subjects, while the TP position bans explicitly nominative subjects, then we expect other languages employing the SpecSubjP and SpecTP positions for their subjects to exhibit the same restrictions. If this is indeed the case, that will be an indication that the hypothesis linking the complexity and nominativity of the subject to its placement in the tree is on the right track.

#### 4. Buckie English and the non-configurational approach

In section 2 we argued that nature of the subject plays a role in agreement, such that in some varieties, like BeE, case-vagueness is the property that allows singular concord, while in other varieties, such as AppE, the complexity of the DP is the defining property allowing singular concord. In section 3, we argued that these differences (nominativity vs. case-vagueness (BeE), or DP simplicity vs. DP complexity (AppE)) manifest themselves in different structural positions, and that these different structural positions have consequences for other apparently unrelated syntactic phenomena. However, while these may be considerations for BeE and AppE, work by David Adger and Jennifer Smith on Buckie English (Smith, 2000; Adger and Smith, 2005, *this volume*; Adger, 2006) shows that in this latter variety, variability in agreement does not correlate with any other syntactic phenomena. Their Buckie data thus motivate, in their view, a syntactic analysis of agreement variability within a single variety which does not rely on differences in the structural position of the subject, but rather on the different featural make-up of the various T heads available in the speakers' lexicon. Here we briefly discuss their data and approach, and suggest that while it may be appropriate for the variety in question, it is not obviously extendable to the cases of BeE and AppE.

##### 4.1. Variation in feature content

Smith (2000), Adger and Smith (2005), Adger (2006), and Adger and Smith (*this volume*) discuss an interesting pattern of variation found in Buckie English (BuckE) which differs from the patterns found in BeE and AppE. In the past tense of this variety, both the forms *was* and *were* are possible with the pronouns *we* and *you*; however, only *were* is possible with the pronoun *they*; examples from Adger and Smith (2005:156)<sup>29</sup>:

- (35) a. There was one night **we were** lyin' at anchor'  
b. We played on 'at beach 'til **we was** tired, sailin' boaties...  
c. He says 'I thoct **you were** a diver or somethin'.  
d. 'Aye, I thoct **you was** a scuba diver.  
e. **They were** still like partying hard.

As Adger and Smith show, plural full DPs differ from the plural pronoun *they* in allowing singular concord in the past tense.

- (36) a. Buckie boats **were** a' bonny graint.  
'Buckie boats were all nicely grained.'  
b. The mothers **was** roaring at ye comin' in.  
'The mothers were shouting at you to come in.'

<sup>29</sup> Our discussion of BeE and AppE subject-verb agreement did not touch on *was/were* variation, which we have deliberately set aside. The two varieties differ substantially from one another (and from BuckE) with respect to past tense forms of *be*. Very briefly: according to Henry (1995), BeE speakers divide into two types (those that allow, in the past tense, variation of the type found in the present tense, and those whose past tense system is like that of Standard English). AppE, on the other hand, allows (alongside the pattern found in Standard English) levelling of *was* across the paradigm, both for full DPs as well as for pronouns (making it similar in the past tense to African American English). We leave open the question of whether *was* in this case is the agreeing form for all subject types, or whether this 'levelling' is an indication of no agreement across the board in the past tense (of course this question also holds for the Standard English pattern of levelling in the past tense with lexical verbs).

They also note that the present tense differs from the past in that neither the singular form *is* nor verbal *-s* are possible with any of the plural pronouns *we*, *you*, and *they* (i.e., singular concord is not possible in the present tense with plural pronouns, just like in BeE; however, see footnote 9 above). As with the past tense, though, full DPs do allow singular concord in the present tense (examples taken from Adger and Smith, *this volume*):

- (37) a. Nearly all the houses **is** bought with the English.  
b. Now, when fish **gets** scarce, the wages get scarce.

Thus, strictly in terms of agreement, BuckE looks more like BeE and AppE in the present tense than it does in the past tense (see footnote 29 for how BeE and AppE themselves differ from one another in the past tense).

Adger (2006) and Adger and Smith (*this volume*) propose an approach to this kind of intra-speaker variation that amounts to a choice amongst various T heads available in the speaker's lexicon.<sup>30</sup> These functional heads have the same interpretable features, but differ in their uninterpretable features and thus spell out as different morphological forms. The spell-out of the forms depends also in part on whether the subject itself has a determiner layer and an N feature (full DPs have these, simple pronouns do not), and on whether the D head is specified for singular. In their proposal, then, the different forms (*was*, *were*, *is*, *are*, *gets*, *get*, etc.) do not arise as the result of different syntactic positions for the subject; rather, they are simply the result of the speaker's choosing one of the available functional heads (in combination with the properties of the subject, i.e., whether it has a D head, what the nature of that D head is, and whether it has an N feature).<sup>31</sup>

#### 4.2. Accounting for correlations with the Feature-Content Hypothesis

Part of what motivates Adger and Smith's non-configurational approach is that BuckE does not seem to have any of the other syntactic properties that BeE has which Henry argues follow from the Two Subject Positions Hypothesis. Specifically, they note that BuckE does not have the adverb placement facts of BeE (see footnote 19 above), and they do not make any mention of the behavior of matrix subject NPIs (see section 3), suggesting that BuckE does not allow NPIs in matrix subject position.<sup>32</sup> Given the total lack of correlations between singular concord and any other syntactic phenomena in BuckE, there seems to be no motivation for advocating a configurational approach to variation in agreement in this variety. As noted in footnote 9 above, Adger and Smith do observe that BuckE "pronouns that have nominal complements" do allow singular concord in the present tense, as can be seen in (38), while pronouns that do not have a nominal complement do not (39):

- (38) a. You ones is old ken'.  
b. You ones kens him.  
c. You bairns is for it.

- (39) a. \*You is here.  
b. \*You kens him.

This is like the facts we discussed for AppE in section 2, and shows that "DP complexity" plays a role in singular concord in BuckE as well. But again, Adger and Smith argue that this difference in agreement results not from the subject occupying a distinct syntactic position, but rather from the very nature of the complex DP itself, namely, the presence of an N head which yields an N feature, resulting in a checking configuration that yields a verbal *-s* form.

<sup>30</sup> We refer the reader to Adger (2006) and Adger and Smith (*this volume*) for an in depth discussion of the proposal, whereby speakers use an algorithm (proposed in Adger, 2006), in combination with the pronominal inventory in the language (and a set of UG-endowed features, such as singular, participant, author, past, present), to generate the various T heads.

<sup>31</sup> Note that this kind of hypothesis gives content to the notion of "different grammars." Although see Adger (2006), who states that this kind of "multiple-T-heads-in-the-lexicon" hypothesis is not a "multiple grammars" hypothesis. It seems to us, though, that given a minimalist theory of syntax, where all parametric variation is a matter of the feature composition of functional heads, it follows that once a lexicon has two differently specified functional heads, one automatically gets two grammars existing side by side. We intend to be neutral here with respect to the question of whether the grammars are "competing" or not (Kroch, 1994).

<sup>32</sup> That BuckE does not allow matrix subject NPIs is confirmed by J. Smith and D. Adger, personal communication (whom we thank).



Although there may be no obvious reasons to pursue a configurational approach to agreement phenomena in BuckE, we would like to maintain that the purely featural approach to agreement variation cannot be maintained to explain variation within BeE and AppE, as well as across these two varieties. Because the featural approach is designed to account for a dialect whose agreement variability does not show sensitivity to syntactic environment — for example, whether the clause is declarative or interrogative, or whether the matrix subject is an NPI or a negative quantifier engaging in negative concord with a negated auxiliary — it does not seem equipped to make any predictions about or explain micro-parametric correlations for varieties that exhibit them. As we noted in section 3, the Multiple Subject Positions Hypothesis, by contrast, has the advantage of capturing these correlations in micro-parametric variation, so that the three apparently unrelated points of variation (see (29)–(34) in section 3.2.2) can be derived from one (more abstract) parametric difference. It is not obvious to us how to link these correlations under the Feature-Content Hypotheses. That is, how would the choice of the functional head yield a variety that allows matrix subject NPIs and at the same time forces agreement in interrogatives? As we saw, while the forms *is* and *are* are both possible in declaratives in BeE, only the latter is available in interrogatives. If we were to apply the Feature-Content Hypotheses (in particular, the D-number Hypothesis) to the BeE facts, we would have to say that, of the two D heads normally available in declaratives, only one can occur in interrogatives. Then the question arises as to what mechanism would make one D-head unavailable in such contexts. We would have to find a way to make the singular D head incompatible with some property of interrogatives. One can imagine proposing an additional uninterpretable feature on the relevant D head which (when being checked against the T head that otherwise yields the singular form *is*) would yield an array of checked features that for some reason cannot raise to C<sup>0</sup>, thus making the derivation crash. While we do not attempt to devise a precise proposal here, we do wish to point out that in the absence of independent evidence for a feature that could have this effect, we run the risk of developing a theory that is unconstrained, and which is thus unfalsifiable.<sup>33</sup>

However, a word is in order here regarding the claim that singular concord in interrogatives correlates with the availability of non-inverted negative concord and negative inversion. In particular, this claim might seem complicated by the fact that while BuckE allows neither non-inverted negative concord nor negative inversion (D. Adger, personal communication), Adger and Smith do report that this variety, like Appalachian English, allows singular concord in interrogatives (example from Adger and Smith, *this volume*):

(40) Is your lights gan on and off?

It may at first glance seem that this fact compromises the claim (see section 3.2.2) that the ability to have singular concord in interrogatives correlates with the ability to have non-inverted negative concord, such as that seen in (33), repeated here as (41):

(41) Nobody couldn't stand it. (= Nobody could stand it)

However, it is worth briefly discussing how correlations actually may or may not play out in more than one language. Specifically, it is possible that while two (apparently unrelated) phenomena do indeed correlate in a given language (or set of related languages), there may be independent reasons for why these correlations do not play out in every language. In this regard, consider for example the fact that *do*-support in interrogatives correlates with the inability of lexical verbs to appear to the left of adverbs like *always* in English:

(42) a. Mary always smokes.  
b. \*Mary smokes always.

(43) a. Does Mary smoke?  
b. \*Smokes Mary?

We relate these two apparently unrelated phenomena through a theory of verb movement and feature strength which holds that lexical Vs do not move to T (and thus cannot move to C in interrogatives, resulting in the insertion of *do* in

<sup>33</sup> Another point to consider is how the Feature-Content Hypotheses would account for the requirement that the singular form be used with matrix subject NPIs in BeE, or the requirement that the singular form be used in Negative Inversion contexts in AppE (recall (23)).

English). Now, although these two phenomena are correlated in English, Benincà and Poletto (2004) have shown that they do not always correlate in every language that has *do*-support: while Monnese, a Northern Italian dialect, does allow lexical V movement to T (witnessed by the fact that the lexical V appears to the left of adverbs like *always*; see (44)), just like English, it exhibits *do*-support in matrix interrogatives (as can be seen in (45)):

(44) I tfakola semper.  
he speaks always  
'He always speaks.'

(45) fa-l majà?  
does-he eat?  
'Does he eat?'

The question here is whether we should take the facts of Monnese to now indicate that *do*-support and appearance of the lexical V to the right of adverbs like *always* in English are not in fact connected, and the answer is no. Rather, what we conclude is that *do*-support is a strategy used by the two languages for entirely different reasons.

On analogy with this, we note that although both BuckE and AppE allow singular concord in interrogatives, they may do so for entirely different reasons. If so, then we do not expect to find singular concord to correlate with non-inverted negative concord in BuckE, the way that it does in AppE. In fact, given Adger and Smith's observations that variability in agreement in BuckE does not correlate with any other syntactic phenomena, we are led to believe that the kind of hypothesis at play in BeE/AppE (multiple subject positions) are not at play in BuckE (though the reverse might be possible, i.e., the Feature-Content Hypothesis may be at play in BeE/AppE, and for independent reasons, differences in feature content manifest themselves as differences in subject positions). We wish to suggest with this observation that it may be the case that no one hypothesis is the correct one to account for the range of variation found in subject-verb agreement in all English varieties, but rather, different speakers form different kinds of hypotheses to account for the phenomena found in their particular variety. In fact, as we discussed towards the end of section 2.2, it is possible that even speakers within the same speech community may form different hypotheses (e.g., DP Complexity or Nominativity), depending on the stimuli that the speaker was presented with during the acquisition process.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper we have examined the restrictions on the co-occurrence of subjects with agreeing and non-agreeing verbal forms in Belfast English and Appalachian English. For both of these varieties, the nature of the subject determines (in part) whether subject-verb agreement is obligatory or not, although what the relevant properties of the subject are differs between these two varieties. These varieties are thus like Buckie English, whose agreement variation also depends on the nature of subject (e.g., whether it is a 1st/2nd vs. 3rd person, for the past tense; whether the pronoun has a nominal complement). In fact, aspects of Adger and Smith's (this volume) feature proposals for Buckie English may indeed provide us with a more precise description of what we have vaguely labelled "DP Complexity" in our description of the facts of Appalachian English in section 2, such that it is the presence of an N feature within the DP, and/or the featural make-up of the D-layer itself, which allows the complex DPs to engage in singular concord (while simplex subjects in Appalachian do not have the relevant N feature, and/or a D-head marked for singular).

However, as we have seen, at least for Appalachian and Belfast English, it is not enough to appeal to the nature of the subject. The fact that variation in agreement in these varieties also interacts with a number of apparently unrelated syntactic phenomena suggests that the different properties of the subject map onto different syntactic positions, such that variation in subject-verb agreement is also configurationally represented (something which is independently supported and argued for in languages like Standard English, Welsh, Arabic, and Hebrew, as we saw in section 3.1.1). We have thus provided an account of the variation within AppE, and between AppE and BeE, which appeals to three different structural positions for three different kinds of subjects. We hope to have shown that this approach allows us to capture micro-parametric correlations that would not readily be captured under a purely featural approach.

Adger & Smith argue that a configurational approach to agreement variability in Buckie English is neither necessary, nor is it supported by any data in that variety. While it is entirely imaginable that one might argue that the configurational approach is also able to capture the Buckie English facts, we agree that if there is absolutely no syntactic evidence for different subject positions in a given variety, it is difficult to imagine why the learner would conclude that the different types of subjects map onto different positions. We believe that it is perfectly plausible to say, depending on the evidence within the variety, a learner may either conclude that variation in subject-verb agreement is represented configurationally (as in Appalachian and Belfast English, where independent syntactic phenomena come into play), or that it is represented purely featurally, as in Buckie English.

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