What happened to government? It’s alive and kicking, and called ‘Agree’

Workshop ‘What happened to government? On the occasion of the retirement of Hans Bennis’
University of Amsterdam • 18 March 2017

Marcel den Dikken

Department of English Linguistics • SEAS • Eötvös Loránd University
Research Institute for Linguistics • Hungarian Academy of Sciences

The structural relationship of government was mobilised in the 1980s in two very different ways: (a) in head–dependent relations (‘head government’), for which the title ‘government’ was familiar from traditional grammar, and (b) in antecedent–trace relations (‘antecedent government’). The unification of (a) and (b) under a single title facilitated a generalisation about the licensing of traces (the ECP: ‘a trace must be properly governed’). But already in Barriers, the disjunctive ECP of LGB was largely unnecessary (the combination of profusely performed intermediate adjunction and the notion of ‘extended chains’ making even object traces antecedent-governed), and artificial reference to antecedent–trace relations as ‘government’ relations became redundant. Early work in the minimalist programme sought to undermine the head-government relation, with the Spec–Head relation taking over wherever necessary. But in more recent minimalist work, the pendulum has swung back decisively to Barriers-style syntactic derivations for movement dependencies, with a concomitant reintroduction of ‘government’ (i.e., c-command within a local domain), under the title ‘Agree’. In this paper, I concentrate on the central role that Agree plays in the licensing of specifiers. I propose (1) as the definition of Agree, and use it to integrate the Case Filter, the EPP and the ECP with the aid of the principle in (2).

\[(1) \quad \text{Agree}\]
\[a. \quad \text{RELATOR heads can establish two types of agreement relations at the same time}\]
\[\quad (i) \quad \text{Upward Agree} \text{ (a.k.a. Spec–Head agreement) with their specifier}\]
\[\quad (ii) \quad \text{Downward Agree} \text{ with their complement}\]
\[b. \quad \text{non-RELATOR heads can only establish a Downward Agree relation with their complement}\]

\[(2) \quad \text{Specifier Licensing Principle (SLiP)}\]
\[\text{a specifier is licensed in an Agree relation with a probe}\]