What Kinds of Agreement are Possible?
Examining Lubukusu Complementizer Agreement
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Much recent research has called into question the nature of the Agree relation, whether probing is upward, downward, or both (Baker 2003, 2008; Carstens 2005, 2012; Collins 2004; Zeijlstra 2012; Wurmbrand 2011; Preminger 2012). This talk gives an in-depth empirical analysis of a particularly interesting agreement relation in Lubukusu, bringing these data to bear on the broader question of agreement in natural language.

Lubukusu (Bantu, Kenya) displays a typologically rare form of complementizer agreement where a complementizer agrees in gender, number, and person features with the main-clause subject. As can be seen in (1), the embedding complementizer in Lubukusu agrees with the subject of the matrix clause (cardinal numbers in examples represent NOUN CLASS, not PERSON):

(1) Alfredi a-a-bolela baba-andu a-li ba-kha-bile
    1Alfred 1S-PST-tell 2-person 1-that 2S-FUT-conquer
    ‘Alfred told the people that they will win.’

Complementizer agreement is rare cross-linguistically, and most attested cases consist of agreement with an embedded subject (e.g. in West Germanic languages), as opposed to the agreement with the main-clause subject that appears in Lubukusu. As (2) shows agreement can only be with the surface subject of the clause, not restricted to the source of the reported information (as might be expected in a logophoric system).

(2) Sammy ka-ulile khukhwama khw-ise a-li (*ndi) balimi bafuna kamaindi
    1Sammy 1S-heard from from-me 1-COMP (*1sg) farmers harvested maize
    ‘Sammy heard from me that the farmers harvested the maize.’

A wide variety of syntactic diagnostics are employed to demonstrate that the complementizer agrees with the subject of the most local clause (including causatives, passivization, multiple embeddings, NP intervention effects, complex NPs, and split-antecedence relations). In this sense this agreement relation is local (clause-bound), but not too local, as the complementizer agrees with the superordinate subject regardless of intervening DPs. As shown in (3), the complementizer can only agree with the second person subject and not the class 1 indirect object:

(3) ewe w-a-bol-el-a Nelsoni o-li (*ali) ba-keni ba-rekukha
    you 2sgs-PST-say-AP-FV 1Nelson 2sg-that 2-guests 2s-left
    ‘You told Nelson that the guests left.’

In the end, I present results following Diercks (2011) that the agreeing complementizer is essentially anaphoric agreement, that is, agreement mediated by a null anaphor that is merged locally with the agreeing complementizer.

I conclude by discussing current work by both myself and some colleagues, as well as independent but parallel work by Vicki Carstens, both of which are attempting to reanalyze the facts of Lubukusu complementizer in a way that integrates this agreement pattern more fully into the probe-goal system of Chomsky (2001) and its descendants.