

Government and agreement: what's where why?

Balthasar Bickel
University of Zürich

There is across languages no morphosyntactic phenomenon in government that is not also found in principle somewhere among agreement systems, and vice-versa. I show this for the clause level and in particular for various types of referential conditions on government and agreement and for splits based on predicate classes.

Based on this finding I propose a unified framework for capturing both government and agreement structures as well as for tracking their cross-linguistic variation (elaborating on Bickel 2011 [Handbook of Linguistics Typology] and Witzlack-Makarevich 2011 [Ph.D. dissertation, U. Leipzig]). This calls into question the privileged status that is sometimes accorded to a fundamental distinction between government and agreement, and, by extension, between dependent-marking and head-marking as reflecting fundamentally different types of language (with concomitant differences in other properties of grammar).

Although government and agreement structures can be assigned a unified representational format, they seem to be distributed very differently in the world: there are clear and contrasting areal patterns, and patterns in government seem to be subject to different universal trends from agreement systems.

This apparent contradiction can be resolved by the observation that areal diffusion and universal principles do not normally affect complete systems (in the sense of 'languages' or 'language types'), but only specific aspects (individual variables) of systems at a time, e.g. only the distinction between head and dependent marking, between accusative and ergative alignment, between split and non-split alignments, etc. but not several at once.