

Optional agreement in Santiago Tz'utujil (Mayan) is syntactic

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Contribution: A number of Mayan languages display *optional verbal agreement* (Henderson 2008, England 2011). Focusing on novel data from Santiago Tz'utujil (ST), we demonstrate that this optionality is not reducible to phonological or morphological factors. Rather, the source of optionality is in syntax. Regarding optional agreement, there is a syntactic distinction between external arguments (EA) and internal arguments (IA). Only IAs show optional agreement; EAs in contrast must be indexed for person/number on the verb. We provide an analysis in which surface optionality is a result of two possible syntactic derivations.

Data: The dichotomy in the optionality/obligatoriness of agreement is explained in terms of the base-position of the argument involved.

Transitive objects (1), unaccusative subjects, passive subjects, and subjects of existential constructions are commonly thought to be base-generated in Compl-position; they are IAs and agreement is optional:

- (1) optional agreement with transitive object in ST

Ajoj x-e-∅-qa-loq' i-k'e' ab'aj.
1PL PRF-A3PL-∅-E1PL-buy PL-two stone
'We bought two stones.'

In contrast, transitive subjects, antipassive subjects, positional subjects (2), possessors, and sole arguments of non-verbal predicates are base-generated in Spec-position; they are EAs and agreement is obligatory.

- (2) obligatory agreement with positional subject in ST

Penliew e-/∅-tzb'ola i-k'e' etzb'al.*
PREP.ground A3PL-/*∅-sit PL-two doll
'There are two dolls sitting on the ground.'

Analysis: We argue that the patterns of (non-)optionality reflect an underlying contrast between specifiers and complements. Complements can be deficient and thus, rendered "invisible" to the agreement probe. Specifiers cannot be deficient and agreement always obtains. This deficiency can be realized as either (i) *structural reduction*; the argument may lack a particular functional head; or (ii) *featural reduction*; the argument may lack the feature sought by the agreement probe.