

“Pluringulars”, pronouns and quirky agreement

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Abstract

Unlike full noun phrases, weak and null pronouns typically cannot procrastinate: they cannot move at LF. Taking this as its starting point, this paper addresses the behaviour of English weak and null pronouns in three agreement domains: agreement attraction, agreement with committee-type noun phrases (here dubbed “pluringulars” when they trigger plural finite verb agreement), and agreement in there sentences. Agreement attraction is analysed in terms of LF-movement, which, in the light of the fact that they cannot LF-move, immediately accounts for the fact that weak pronouns cannot trigger attraction. “Pluringulars” are argued to be complex noun phrases headed by a null plural pronoun, which explains their failure to trigger attraction and a number of other properties of “pluringulars” which otherwise stand out as quirks, including the fact that they cannot be the associate of there in plural-agreeing there sentences. Agreement attraction also fails in there sentences, which is shown to supply an argument against expletive replacement.

1. From Africa to Massachusetts

Pronouns often behave differently from full noun phrases – and typically, when differences between pronouns and full noun phrases present themselves, the pronoun raises to its feature-checking position(s) overtly while the full noun phrase procrastinates. This may be manifest in word order (e.g. in the English verb–particle construction: *John looked up the information/*it, John looked the information/it up*); it also comes to the fore in the domain of agreement phenomena. Thus, in Kilega (Bantu; Kinyalolo 1991), *wh*-phrases agree in ϕ -features with the finite verb, overruling the privileged relation between the subject and the finite verb, *except* when the subject is a (null) pronoun, in which case *wh*-agreement and subject agreement co-occur. This is illustrated in (1)–(2).

- (1) Kilega
- a. *Bikí bi-á-kás-íl-é bábo bíkulu mwámi?*
 8what 8RM-ASP-give-ASP-FV 2that 2woman 1chief
 ‘What did those women give the chief?’
- b. **Bikí bi-b-á-kás-íl-é bábo bíkulu mwámi?*
 8what 8RM-2SA-ASP-give-ASP-FV 2that 2woman 1chief
- (2) *Bikí bi-b-á-kás-íl-é pro mwámi?*
 8what 8RM-2SA-ASP-give-ASP-FV 1chief
 ‘What did they give the chief?’

Similarly, in dialects of American English spoken in the Northeast of the United States (especially but by no means exclusively in Massachusetts; see Kimball and Aissen 1971; Kayne 1989, 1995), ϕ -feature agreement on the finite verb can be triggered by the *wh*-phrase (cf. (3b)), overruling subject–verb agreement. But as in Bantu, (weak) pronouns must trigger agreement on the finite verb, as seen in (4).

- (3) a. *the people who Clark thinks are in the garden*
 b. %*the people **who** Clark **think** are in the garden*
- (4) a. *the people who he thinks are in the garden*
 b. **the people **who** he **think** are in the garden*

Let us hypothesise that lack of subject-verb agreement in (1) and (3b) is the result of lack of overt-syntactic movement of the subject into the checking domain of the functional head (let us call it AgrS) responsible for the checking of the phi-features of the subject and the finite verb. This may mean either of two things: either (i) the ϕ -features of AgrS in Bantu and the relevant dialects of English are weak, being checked against the *wh*-phrase at LF, after raising of AgrS to C (cf. Kayne 1989), or (ii) those features are strong but get checked against a constituent other than the subject: more specifically, the object raising through SpecAgrSP on its way to SpecCP (cf. Kayne 1995). The choice between these two options is immaterial for our purposes here. What is important is that, regardless of the strength of the ϕ -features in AgrS, null (2) and weak (4) pronouns must check AgrS’s ϕ -features against their own in *overt* syntax:

- (5) A weak pronominal subject *must* raise into the checking domain of AgrS in overt syntax.

Arguably (though see Sichel 2000: Chapter 2 for arguments for a different view), this is a consequence of an intrinsic property of weak and null pronouns – the fact that they are invisible to Attract at LF forces them to perform all their

movement in overt syntax (cf. Chomsky 1993 on English auxiliaries; in concert with this, Željko Bošković, personal communication, tells me that in Serbo-Croatian *weak* auxiliaries raise higher than *strong* ones, confirming the general picture).¹

- (6) a. Weak/null pronouns are invisible to Attract at LF.
 b. The unchecked [–interpretable] formal features of the null/weak pronoun ensure that not raising the pronoun at all will lead to a violation of Full Interpretation.

In this regard, weak and null pronouns are like *expletives* (cf. Roberts and Shlonsky 1996), which likewise must raise in overt syntax (cf. (7), from Bošković 1997).

- (7) a. **I alleged John to have stolen the documents.*
 b. *I alleged him to have stolen the documents.*
 c. *I alleged there to be stolen documents in the drawer.*

Let us take the data just reviewed to establish that (null and weak) pronouns are different from full noun phrases (and strong pronouns, which behave like the latter) in that they cannot undergo movement at LF. In what follows, I will take this finding as my starting point for an investigation of the behaviour of English (null and weak) pronouns in the domain of agreement phenomena more generally. This investigation will lead me into the realms of (i) agreement attraction phenomena (*the identity of the participants is¹are to be kept a secret*),² (ii) collective noun phrases which trigger plural agreement on the finite verb (which I will refer to as “pluringulars”, hybrids of singular and plural noun phrases; *the committee is/⁰are holding a meeting in the room*) and (iii) *there*-expletive constructions (*there are/^slots of people in the room*). Agreement attraction will be analysed in terms of LF-movement of the embedded noun phrase, which, in combination with (6a), will immediately account for the fact that pronouns cannot trigger agreement attraction (**the identity of them are to be kept a secret*). “Pluringulars” will be shown to be complex noun phrases headed by a null plural pronoun, which, in combination with (6a) and the LF-movement analysis of agreement attraction, will ensure that these cannot trigger attraction either (**the identity of the committee are to be kept a*

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1. This entails that (null or overt) *resumptive* pronouns cannot LF-move towards their A'-binders. Note that Cinque (1990) in fact argues explicitly (with reference to the impossibility of “stacking” island violations) that what moves at LF in constructions featuring an A'-bound *pro* is not *pro* itself but the minimal clause containing it, which *pro* must pied-pipe. By saying that (weak/null) pronouns are invisible to Attract at LF, we do not necessarily imply that they are entirely invisible to the LF computation: pronouns can be bound or serve as E-type pronouns, for instance. With binding and interpretation as E-type pronouns not involving Attract, (6) does not affect this.
2. Examples of agreement attraction will systematically be adorned with a superscript “!” in this paper, to mark their non-standard/marked status; boldface marks ‘quirky’ agreement relations throughout.

secret). And the pronominally headed approach to “plurilinguals” will also be seen to straightforwardly guarantee that these are ineligible to serve as the associate of *there* in a plural-agreeing *there* sentence (**there are a committee holding a meeting in the room*): pronouns in general are ineligible as associates of *there*. The behaviour of *there* sentences with respect to agreement, as shown in (iii) above (which has recently attracted quite a bit of attention; see Sobin 1997 and Schütze 1999), will be clarified along the way – including the fact that agreement attraction fails in *there* sentences, which our analysis of attraction allows us to construe as an argument against “expletive replacement”.

2. Agreement attraction and pronouns

By “agreement attraction” (as Jespersen 1913/1961 dubs it), I refer to the phenomenon illustrated in (8b), whereby a subconstituent of a complex noun phrase in subject position (rather than the subject noun phrase as a whole) triggers agreement on the finite verb.

- (8) a. *The identity of the participants is to remain a secret.*
 b. *[!]The identity of **the participants** are to remain a secret.*

Agreement attraction is one of the most frequent “errors” in both spoken and written English, even in edited texts. Its existence is widely acknowledged in descriptive grammars (cf. Jespersen 1913/1961, Visser 1963, Quirk *et al.* 1985 etc.), frowned upon as a serious error in prescriptive grammars, and discussed in detail in the human sentence processing literature (cf., e.g., Bock and Miller 1991, Eberhard 1997 and the references cited there). The *communis opinio* on agreement attraction is eloquently represented by Quirk *et al.* (1985: 764), who write that “[a]lthough these sentences might well be uttered in casual speech, or inadvertently written down, most people would probably regard them as ungrammatical, because they flatly contradict grammatical concord”.³

In recent work, however, Kayne (1998a,b) has pointed out three important properties of constructions of the type in (8b) which lead one to suspect that the gram-

3. The focus of this paper is English, but agreement attraction is by no means limited to English – cf. Vigliocco *et al.* (1996) and references cited therein for attraction phenomena in Dutch, French, Italian and Spanish. An attested example from Dutch (actually featuring the rare type of attraction towards the singular, and triggered by an appositive noun phrase) is given in (i), below.

(i) *[!]De geringe uitstralings-effecten van Schiphol en Rijnmond, in het rapport de belangrijkste conclusie, is bijvoorbeeld niet in de tekst van de EZ-rapportage terug te vinden.*
 ‘the limited appeal-effects of Schiphol (Amsterdam International Airport) and Rijnmond (Rotterdam Harbour), in the report the most important conclusion, is, for instance, not retraceable in the text of the Trade and Industry Department’s report’
(Het Financieele Dagblad [Dutch Financial Times], 30 June 1999)

mar *should* in fact take at least part of the responsibility for agreement attraction effects. He shows, first of all, that attraction is not just a linear adjacency effect since it can be triggered by prenominal genitives as well (cf. (9)).⁴ Secondly, regardless of its position in the complex noun phrase, a pronoun cannot trigger attraction (cf. (10)).⁵ And thirdly, Kayne (1998b) draws attention to the fact that attraction is scope-sensitive, as is illustrated in (11).⁶

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4. The sentences in (9) are made-up examples due to Kayne (1998a); the phenomenon, illustrated also by the attested examples from Reid (1991) given in (i)–(ii), is weaker than the attraction effect in (8). (ii) is particularly interesting, presenting as it does a minimal pair of attraction and regular agreement – the choice between the two being influenced, as Reid (1991: 222) points out, by the fact that the author’s bibliography “lists two books by Hoy and Lortie, and only one by Sack and Harrington”.

- (i) ¹*The ADT [security systems firm] 98 years’ experience have taught us that no one alarm device will foil a determined burglar.* (Reid 1991: 193)
- (ii) ¹*Although Hoy and Lortie’s work indicate that student teaching is a period of socialization, Sack and Harrington’s (1982) work indicates that ...* (Reid 1991: 222)

That linear adjacency between the “agreement attractor” and the finite verb is not essential for attraction to occur is further confirmed (a) by Vigliocco and Nicol’s (1998) observation that attraction also occurs in inversion constructions like (iii) (essentially to the same degree as in their non-inverted counterparts), and (b) by the attraction case in (iv), which has a singular noun phrase (headed by *month*) and a *from*-PP containing another singular noun phrase (*the Red Seal vault*) intervening between the trigger and the finite verb.

- (iii) *Is¹ are the helicopter for the flights safe?*
- (iv) ¹*The firm’s promise of 12 CDs a month from the Red Seal vault are causing a lot of mouths to water.* (Reid 1991: 203)

5. Many speakers dislike (10a) (with distressed *them*) even with ‘regular’ agreement (plural *identities* or singular *is*); but those that do like those variants still reject (10a) as it stands. That differences like the one between (8)/(9) and (10) are not a reflex of morphological case is shown by the examples in (ii).

- (i) a. *How/when/where are the N_{PLUR}?*
 b. *How/when/where’s the N_{PLUR}?*
- (ii) a. *How/when/where are they?*
 b. **How/when/where’s they?*
 b.¹ **How/when/where’s them?*

Schütze (1999), who presents these examples, takes the contrast between (ib) and (iib) to suggest that quirky agreement in the presence of an explicitly *nominative*-marked subject is impossible. In a footnote, however, Schütze (1999:fn. 21) points out that morphological case marking is not in fact the key to the behaviour of pronouns: even the (default) non-nominative form *them* is impossible in the context at hand, as (iib’) shows. What is at stake, then, is a property of *pronouns* as opposed to full noun phrases, rather than a property of *nominative-marked vs unmarked subjects*.

6. Examples of the type in (11b) are not brilliant; by far the preferred way of conveying the wide-scope reading for *all the doors* is to use plural *keys* rather than singular *key* (as in *the keys to all the*

- (9) a. *The participants' identity is to remain a secret.*
 b. *!The participants' identity are to remain a secret.*
- (10) a. **The identity of them are to remain a secret.*
 b. **Their identity are to remain a secret.*
- (11) a. *The key to all the doors is missing.*
 b. *!The key to all the doors are missing.* [wide scope \forall only: many keys]

The fact that (11b), to the extent that it is acceptable, allows only a wide-scope interpretation for *all the doors* suggests an account of agreement attraction phenomena in terms of LF movement – Quantifier Raising (QR) in particular.⁷ Such an approach is enhanced by the fact (to which Anastasia Giannakidou, p.c., has drawn my attention) that quantifiers which cannot take inverse (wide) scope, hence are restricted to narrow-scope readings, fail to trigger attraction: **the key to few doors are missing* is bad. I adopt a perspective on QR according to which QR takes the formal features of a quantified expression to some operator position – minimally to the local D, from which successive-cyclic movement to higher operator positions is possible. Adjunction of the formal features of *all the doors* to the D-head of the complex subject noun phrase in (11b), to gain scope over *key*, results in a configuration in which the formal features of the QP (including its ϕ -features) come to c-command the formal features of the entire subject (cf. (11b')). Let us assume that as a result, these features can (but do not have to; (11a) is grammatical on a wide-scope reading for *all the doors*, too) take the lead in the determination of finite verb agreement. The wide-scope-only reading for *all the doors* in (11b) then follows: the features of the QP gain access to those of Infl as a result of LF movement, which in turn results in wide scope for the QP.⁸ The account will carry

doors are missing, which obviously cannot show us any attraction effect). But (11b), when used, allows only the wide-scope reading for the universal quantifier; that reading is *available* for (11a) as well, but it is *obligatory* for (11b). “Distributivity effects” of this sort are the subject of debate in the sentence processing literature. In their original study of “distributivity effects” in English, Bock and Miller (1991) found “virtually no differences in the distributions of errors for single-versus multiple-token preambles” (p. 61) – i.e., the difference between *the key to the cabinets* (single-token: one key that fits to all the cabinets) and *the label on the bottles* (multiple-token: one label for each of the bottles) was found not to be significant in English. In her study of the effects of explicit number marking on attraction, Eberhard (1997) also failed to find an effect induced by the QP in examples of the same type as (11), with a *quantificational* second noun phrase; but she did not take the scope of the QP (the “distributivity effect”) into account, so her findings do not directly affect the text claim based on Kayne (1998a,b). Vigliocco *et al* (1996) show, on the basis of evidence from Dutch and French, that “distributivity effects” are real there – i.e., attraction is significantly more common in these languages in the case of so-called “multiple-token” cases like *the label on the bottles* (one label for each of the bottles).

7. Kayne (1998a,b) has taken a different perspective, according to which in (8b) *the identity of the participants* is not a DP constituent (while in (8a) it is). His analysis entails a variety of departures from more traditional syntactic analysis; discussing it in detail here is well beyond the scope of the present paper. See the original work for details. The scope of Kayne’s proposal seems to me narrower than that of mine.

over to (8b), on the assumption that non-quantificational noun phrases can promote their formal features to a higher D-head as well (cf. Heim and Kratzer 1998 and references cited there on generalised QR).

- (11) b.' [IP [DP [D <FF_{NP2}> [D *the*+FF_{NP1}>]] [NP1 *key*_{NI} [to [NP2 *all the doors*_{N2}]]]] [Y *are missing*]]

This much said, the ungrammaticality of agreement attraction in (10) is entirely straightforward. The LF-movement approach to agreement attraction, motivated independently by the scope facts in (11), will immediately account for it, in the light of our earlier conclusion that pronouns cannot undergo LF movement (cf. (6a)).⁹ By contrast, a conceivable alternative approach to attraction phenomena

8. Eberhard (1997) reports the results of two interesting sentence processing experiments which confirm the text discussion. First, she found that “[f]ewer [attraction] errors occurred when the subject noun phrases were marked as singular by a quantifier” (cf. *every/each/one key to the cabinets*). This fits in with the text proposal: QR applied to the formal features of the quantificational NP1 will make them “win” when it comes to agreement. Secondly, she also found that “singular attraction errors are significantly more likely to occur when the local noun phrase [NP2] is marked as singular by a quantifier [*every, each, one*] than when it remains unmarked by the determiner *the*” (cf. *the keys to every/each/one cabinet*). In general, though, agreement attraction is remarkably lopsided, in the sense that attraction towards the plural is common but attraction towards the singular is much less so (though by no means non-existent; (i), below, is an attested example from English, taken from Reid 1991: 203). Of all the attraction cases, well over 80% is of the former type – a figure emerging both from corpus-based studies and from psycholinguistic experiments (cf. Bock and Miller 1991; Eberhard 1997). It is interesting to note that in examples of the type in (3b) a similar (though stronger) effect is observed (see Kimball and Aissen 1971; Kayne 1989, 1995): %*the people who Clark think are in the garden* but never **the person who the Clarks thinks is in the garden*. The singular/plural dichotomy is presumably rooted in the fact that plural agreement is morphologically unmarked in English (cf. Kayne 1989; also cf. Quirk *et al.* 1985: 756, note [a] for the same point).

(i) ¹*New requirements of belief in biblical inerrancy appears to have been arbitrarily imposed.*

9. Minimally different from (10a) is (ia), featuring *all of them*. Here attraction is acceptable. This indicates that *all* is the head of *all of them*, triggering plural agreement (just like it does in (ib)) after QR has applied (cf. the text proposal for agreement attraction).

(i) a. ¹*The identity of all of them are to remain a secret.*
 b. *All (of them) are present.*

It is worth noting that the attraction contrast between (10a) and (ia) tells us that *them* is not (or, in any event, does not have to be) the head of *all of them*, with *all of* functioning as some kind of complex quantifier. Such an approach to *all of them* is not only X-bar-theoretically problematic (what is the structure of *all of*?), it also fails to make attraction available for examples such as (ia). Like (ib) are (ii)–(iii) (attested examples taken from Reid 1991: 287). I will not take these to instantiate agreement attraction; instead, *each/every*-phrases can arguably be taken to trigger plural verb agreement because of their semantic plurality (“plurality of reference”, in Reid’s 1991: 287 words), regardless of whatever else is included in the noun phrase. See Eberhard (1997: 162) and references there for discussion (which tells us that the question of whether “referential

predicated on Chung’s (1998) definition of “Associate Relation”, a key player in her approach to agreement, would fail to make the desired distinction between (9b) and (10b). Chung makes the specifier of the specifier of a head H an “associate” of H, and thus entitles it to enter into a Feature Compatibility (i.e., agreement) relationship with H. Agreement attraction to pronominal “Saxon” genitives is then expected to be possible throughout – an expectation that, as we have seen, is only partially fulfilled by the empirical data: (9b) with *the participants’* is attested, but (10b) with *their* is not.

In sum, then, the QR based approach to the attraction phenomena canvassed in this section (cued by the scope facts in (11)) lends support to our earlier conclusions about weak pronouns.

3. Agreement attraction and null pronouns in English

The distribution of agreement attraction in English also confirms that null pronouns pattern with weak pronouns in being invisible to LF-movement operations. This may strike the reader as a surprise – after all, English is not usually taken to be a *pro*-drop language. Nonetheless, I will argue that there are two contexts in English (one from all varieties of the language, and another prominent primarily in British English) which involve noun phrases headed by a *null pronoun*: “nominalised adjectives” (as in *the poor*) and “plurilinguals”, my label for plural-agreeing collective noun phrases. Let us start with the former.

plurality” has a robust influence on verb agreement is far from settled in the processing literature); and see Chung (1998: 113) on *each/every* type quantifiers triggering plural verb agreement in Chamorro (which she takes to argue against Quantifier Raising as an LF operation leaving a trace). I will tentatively take examples involving (*n*)*either*, as in (iv) and (v) (attested examples taken from Jespersen 1961: Vol. II, p. 172), to work roughly the same way as (ii) and (iii), with (*n*)*either* triggering agreement: as Jespersen puts it, these “generally take the verb in the sg, but sometimes in the pl because of the fundamental plurality of the conception: *neither are alive = both are dead*”.

- (ii) *Unless every one of you want to be sent down to the principal’s office, ...*
- (iii) *Well, that’s where each of us come in.*
- (iv) *Either of them are enough to drive any man to distraction.*
- (v) *Neither of these are the causes of it.*

3.1. “Nominalised adjectives”

The noun phrase *the poor* in (12a) can be analysed (simple-mindedly) as in (12b) or (more abstractly) as in (12b') (cf., e.g., Kester 1996 for references and discussion).¹⁰

- (12) a. *The poor are suffering the most.*
 b. [DP *the* [_{A/NP} [_A *poor*]]]
 b.' [DP *the* [_{AP} *poor* [_{NP} *pro*_[+PLUR]]]]

An important observation which allows us to decide between these two options is that, despite the formal plurality of *the poor*, it cannot trigger agreement attraction, as shown by the ungrammaticality of (13b).¹¹

- (13) a. *The identity of the poor is to remain a secret.*
 b. **The identity of **the poor are** to remain a secret.*

The ungrammaticality of (13b) can be related to that of (10) if we assume an analysis of *the poor* in terms of a *pronominally headed* structure, as in (12b'). Such a structure has two additional advantages. First, the specification of *pro* as [+PLURAL] accommodates the formal plurality of *the poor*. And secondly, on the assumption that *pro* in English is necessarily [+HUMAN], the fact that *the poor* is restricted to take [+HUMAN] referents follows as well.

If these pros of the *pro*-based approach to *the poor* establish the analysis in (12b') independently, then *the poor*'s failure to trigger agreement attraction, analysed in terms of the LF-movement approach motivated in section 2, confirms that null pronouns are like weak pronouns in their LF invisibility.

10. As an anonymous reviewer reminds me, Lobeck (1995) argues for an analysis of *pro* as an NP on the basis of ellipsis constructions; her result fits in with the representation in (12b'). I doubt it, however, that (12b') should be assimilated to the structure of elliptical noun phrases in general – cf. **the red pencil and the white*. While I believe that *the poor* is headed by *pro*, I do not wish to commit myself to a *pro*-headed approach to NP ellipsis constructions. (Notice, by the way, that the specification “[+PLURAL]” for *pro* in (12b') should not be taken to be an exhaustive feature specification: *pro* is also [+HUMAN] and [3rd PERSON], and presumably [+GENERIC] as well; cf. below.)

11. Thanks to Richard Larson for drawing my attention to *the poor* in the context under discussion, and providing the initial judgement on (13b). Speakers largely agree that (13b) is deviant. Richard Kayne (personal communication) tells me, however, that for him it seems acceptable; he adds that he accepts *there are the poor* in list contexts (cf. the end of section 4, below). Jonathan Bobaljik (p.c.) points out, in addition, that *there are poor in every country* is good, in contrast to what we find with “plurilinguals” (cf. section 4). And Joseph Aoun (p.c.) notes the grammaticality of *these/those poor*, which contrasts with the ill-formedness of (21b). Taken together, these observations suggest that *the poor* does not involve a pronominally headed structure à la (12b') for all speakers, in all of its incarnations; (12b) may be available alongside it, under certain conditions which remain to be properly understood. Note in closing that the deviance of (13b) (in the majority dialect) cannot be the consequence of the fact that *the poor* is not morphologically marked for plurality: plurals which are morphologically identical to their corresponding singulars, like *the deer*, do manage to trigger agreement attraction (Peter Svenonius, p.c.).

3.2. “Plurilinguals”

Further confirmation comes from the behaviour of collective noun phrases. British English allows collective noun phrases headed by a formally singular noun to trigger plural agreement with the finite verb, as in (14b) (see Quirk *et al.* 1985: 316, 771; Hoeksema 1983; Morgan 1984; Reid 1991; Elbourne 1999, and a variety of references cited in these works).

- (14) a. *The committee has decided.*
 b. %*The committee **have** decided.* [“plurilingual”]

In American English this is more restricted but not impossible, subject to a fair amount of idiolectal variation. For example, Richard Nixon has been quoted as saying to H.R. Haldeman: “In this period of our history, the educated class *are* decadent” (cf. *The International Herald Tribune* 3/3/99). That Nixon was a “plurilingualist” is revealed also by the following statement he made in a press conference: “But when a people *are* pounded night after night with that kind of frantic, hysterical reporting, it naturally shakes *their* confidence” (cf. Reid 1991: 105) – here *a people* is construed “plurilingually”, something which appears to be widely possible in American English (Richard Kayne, Harriet Taber, p.c.).

Quirk *et al.* (1985: 759n.), when pointing out that “*couple* in the sense of two persons normally has a plural verb even in AmE”, add that “[w]hen it denotes a unit, the singular verb is used”, giving *each couple was asked to complete a form* as an example. These examples highlight the general distinction between singular- and plural-agreeing *committee*-type noun phrases: collectivity vs individuality. Reid’s (1991: 272) pair in (15) confirms this for *couple*;¹² another illustrative pair is given in (16), involving *crew*, culled from one and the same text (by Harry Waters, in *Newsweek*; cf. Reid 1991: 273). A more complicated case is the example in (17), involving *group* (from a paper by Robert Davis in *Journal of Mathematical Behavior*; cf. Reid 1991: 230, 256–257 for interesting discussion).

- (15) a. *And this fall the couple expects its first child.*
 b. *A Florida court ruled against a Pennsylvania couple who contend May’s 10-year-old daughter is actually their child.*

12. These examples in addition illustrate the pronominalisation difference between singular- and plural-agreeing *committee*-type noun phrases (see Quirk *et al.* 1985: 316, 759n., 769n., 771 for more detailed illustration). The use of *their* in (15b) fits in with the analysis in (19), *pro* being [+PLURAL, +HUMAN]; so does the tendency to use *who* rather than *which* in relative clauses construed with “plurilinguals” (cf. *The committee {which/*who} has decided is here* vs. *The committee {who/?which} have decided are here*). But since the pronominalisation and relativisation facts for “plurilinguals” (and more generally) are substantially more subtle than any simple approach can handle, I leave a detailed account of them for a future occasion.

- (16) a. *Each week “Pirate TV”’s scruffy crew, supposedly transmitting from a barge off Manhattan, take aim at the deadliest forms of airwave pollution.*
 b. *The crew of the Calypso invades dry land to liberate the fish in pet stores.*
- (17) *One group of faculty members teaches a great deal, and is paid very little; the other group teach very little, but are paid considerably more.*

What is important for our purposes is that, despite their outward plurality, “pluringulars” cannot trigger agreement attraction – as Janet Fodor (personal communication) points out, (18b) is ungrammatical.

- (18) a. *The diverse background/education level of the committee is to remain a secret.*
 b. **The diverse background/education level of the committee **are** to remain a secret.*

The ungrammaticality of (18b) can be related to that of (10) and (13b) if we assume an analysis of “pluringulars” in terms of a *pronominally headed* structure, as in (19) (to be returned to in more detail in section 6, where it will be identified as an apposition structure):¹³

- (19) [DP1 *pro*_{[+PLUR]] [DP2 *the committee*_[-PLUR]]]}

Just as in the case of *the poor*, a *pro*-based analysis of “pluringulars” along these lines has a number of additional virtues. Thus, consider the examples in (20). Both of these sentences are grammatical, but there is a difference between the two. (20a) is ambiguous between a reading in which *theirs* is the predicate of the *committee*-headed phrase (roughly paraphrasable as “they have the best/most argumentative committee” or “the best/most argumentative committee belongs to them”) and one in which it is the (inverted) predicate of *theirs* (“theirs (i.e., their committee) is the

13. The *pro*-head of the structure in (19) is definite, as is usual for *pro*. The definiteness of *pro* (and hence of the complex DP in (19)) will play a key role in the discussion in section 4; but it also leads one to ask the question (raised by Paul Elbourne and Barbara Partee, personal communication) of how, in the structure in (19), the definite pronoun could ever team up with an indefinite *committee*-type noun phrase (as in *Any committee worth their salt are going to look into that*; Elbourne, p.c.). In section 6, (19) is identified as an apposition structure. Notice that definite noun phrases can host indefinite appositions: *these people, a very interesting bunch, ...* On the approach to “pluringulars” taken here, indefinite “pluringulars” will involve just this: a definite description hosting an indefinite apposition. While this raises questions that I do not fully understand at this time, I emphasise that the pronominally headed approach to “pluringulars” is supported not just by the agreement facts canvassed above, but by three independent pieces of evidence as well – see the remainder of section 3 as well as section 4 for discussion.

best/most argumentative one”). (20b), on the other hand, is unambiguous: it lacks the second of the two readings circumscribed for (20a).¹⁴

- (20) a. *The best/most argumentative committee is theirs.*
committee = ✓subject / ✓predicate
 b. *The best/most argumentative committee are theirs.*
*committee = ✓subject / *predicate*

The fact that a predicate reading for the *committee*-phrase is unavailable in (20b) means that *committee*-type noun phrases, qua “plurilinguals” (i.e., morphologically singular but plural-agreeing noun phrases), are barred from predicate positions. On an analysis of “plurilinguals” as pronominally headed noun phrases, this restriction on their distribution follows straightforwardly: it simply reduces to the general fact that plural pronouns (unlike singular *it*: cf. *you are it* (in the game of tag), *Coke is it*; Moro 1997) cannot be predicates, a fact which is presumably rooted in their semantic type.

The pronominally headed analysis of “plurilinguals” receives further support from the Janus-faced nature of these noun phrases – plural on the outside but rigidly singular when it comes to the distribution of demonstratives inside DP:

- (21) a. *This committee has/have decided.*
 b. **These committee have decided.*

(21b) must feature a pronominally headed *committee*-type noun phrase since we find plural verb agreement in this example; but the pronoun itself cannot be combined with the demonstrative *these* (cf. **these they*, **they these*), and plural *these* cannot be the demonstrative of the common-noun phrase headed by *committee* either, since *committee* is morphologically singular. There is no way, therefore, for plural *these* to occur anywhere inside the maximal projection of a “plurilingual”:

14. I deliberately use *theirs* to avoid interference from agreement with an explicitly plural-marked postcopular noun phrase (which, despite claims to the contrary (cf. Moro 1997), is not impossible in English: cf. (i), recorded by Francis 1986: 315).

- (i) a. *The weather to watch **are** those rains.*
 b. *The cause of layoffs such as these **are** not the taxes.*

Potentially problematic is (iib) (provided by Paul Elbourne, personal communication). If this is indeed a Predicate Inversion construction (and it certainly passes the *to be* test (cf. Moro 1997; Den Dikken 1998): *I consider the most argumentative committee *(to be) the Admissions Panel*), it contradicts the text claim. I suspect, however, that (iib) succeeds only as an equative construction (which likewise seems to force *to be* in the relevant contexts). The structure and derivation of equatives is up in the air; I will not address it here, leaving the precise status of (iib) as a question for further research.

- (ii) a. *The most argumentative committee is the Admissions Panel.*
 b. *The most argumentative committee **are** the Admissions Panel.*

(22a,b) both fail. The ungrammaticality of (21b) is thus accounted for, on the pronominally headed analysis of “plurilinguals” in (19).

- (22) a. *_[DP these committee]
 b. *_{[DP1 {these pro_{PLUR}}} [DP2 committee]]}

All of these observations help support the pronominally headed structure of “plurilinguals” given in (19), which is parallel in relevant respects to that in (12b’), the *pro*-headed structure of *the poor*. The *pro*-headed structure in (19) provides a unified account of all of the data in (20)–(21), and it explains the ban on agreement attraction triggered by “plurilinguals” (cf. (18b)), confirming the LF invisibility of null pronouns which the discussion in section 1 had already pointed us towards.

There is one further fact about “plurilinguals” which the pronominally headed structure in (19) allows us to capture – the observation, due to Elbourne (1999), that they cannot occur as the associate of *there* in existential sentences. This observation leads us into the realm of *there* sentences, to which the next two sections of this paper will be devoted. In the conclusion (section 6), I will subsequently return to the question of what the internal structure of (19) might look like, presenting considerations that point towards an apposition approach.

4. Agreement and *there* sentences

Agreement in *there* existentials is more flexible than a simple-minded “expletive replacement” (Chomsky 1986, 1995) analysis can explain – alongside (23a), with its expected plural agreement, we also find (23b).¹⁵

- (23) a. *There are lots of people in the room.*
 b. *There’s lots of people in the room.*

Yet, while agreement is flexible in (23), at the same time agreement in *there* existentials is entirely inflexible in sentences in which the associate of *there* is a collective (*committee*-type) noun phrase – (24b) is ungrammatical even in dialects

15. Singular agreement in (23b) is to be kept distinct from the phenomenon of “first conjunct agreement” (cf. Munn 1993; Morgan 1984; Green 1984). It is often claimed that “[i]n certain constructions (the *there*-insertion construction, for example) the verb agrees not with the coordinate structure that is the logical structure, but with the conjunct closest to the verb” (Morgan 1984: 74) – *There was/*were a man and two women in the room, There were/*was two women and a man in the room*. Green (1984: 30) points, however, that of her nineteen informants “no two of them accepted exactly the same set of sentences” in contexts of this sort, with many speakers vacillating “from moment to moment or day to day about whether certain examples were acceptable or not”. I will not discuss “first conjunct agreement” constructions here.

which otherwise allow *committee*-type collectives to trigger plural agreement with the finite verb, as Elbourne (1999) has pointed out.¹⁶

- (24) a. *There's/is a committee (holding a meeting) in the room.*
 b. **There are a committee (holding a meeting) in the room.*

The question to answer is how a comprehensive analysis of *there* sentences can account for these facts.

To get (23b) out of the way, Chomsky (1995: 384, n. 42) suggests that what we are dealing with here is a “frozen” form *there's*. In support of the frozenness of *there's*, Chomsky presents the impossibility of subject-auxiliary inversion and negation in (23b). But this does not seem factually accurate. Reid (1991: 285) reports an attested case of negated (23b) (*There isn't any more clean areas*; Major Donald Amin, interview in *All Things Considered*, NPR), and Schütze (1999: 475) – apart from refuting a “grammatical virus” approach to plural (23a) à la Sobin (1997), which I will not consider here – mentions some striking examples featuring *'s* to the left of *there* in inversion constructions with a plural *there*-associate (cf. *How many calories 's there in a Tic Tac?* – recall here that Vigliocco and Nicol 1998 make a similar point with reference to agreement attraction; see fn. 4, ex. (iii), above). Schütze also notes that quirky singular agreement in *there*-sentences with a plural associate is possible with non-contracted past-tense *was* as well: *There was fifty people at the party last night*. And finally, Quirk *et al.* (1985: 1406n.) point

16. Maurice Williams (personal communication) points out to me that, with *a committee* in sentence-final position (which is felicitous only if the noun phrase is made sufficiently heavy), plural agreement *is* possible, as in (i).

- (i) *There are in the room [a committee that ...].*

This indicates that *there* sentences with sentence-final associates of *there* are a different kettle of fish, not to be analysed in the same terms (or even derived from the same structure) as garden-variety *there* sentences (see also Chomsky 1999 for remarks about *there* sentences with “extraposed” associates; Chomsky’s account in terms of a PF kind of extraposition presumably will not manage to rule in “plurilinguals” here). Possibly, *there* existentials with sentence-final associates should be assimilated to stylistic/locative inversion constructions – see also the second part of fn. 21, below.

There sentences allow us to show that not all plural-agreeing morphologically singular noun phrases are “plurilinguals”, in the sense of having the structure in (19). Thus, *police* (which is fine with plural agreement in both British and American English) occurs in plural-agreeing *there* sentences, apparently contradicting Elbourne’s claim (cf. (ii), an attested case). So *police* is not a (19)-type “plurilingual”. This is further confirmed by the fact that *police* (also *staff*, *faculty*) readily occurs with quantifiers like *some* and *several*, something which is impossible in the case of “plurilinguals” (cf. *Several police/*committee are ...*). How best to analyse *police* and the like is an issue orthogonal to my purposes; I cannot address it here.

- (ii) *There are certain police I shouldn't trust because as much as you think that police are nice they have some of them that's bad.* (CityState, *Village Voice*, 23 November 1999)

out that, in the same register that allows (23b), it is also possible to say things like *There seems/appears/happens to be only two apples left* (cf. also Schütze 1999: 479, ex. (41a)), where we are not dealing with a contracted copula but with an inflected raising verb instead. We can safely conclude, therefore, that (23b) is not an insignificant “frozen” quirk which can simply be set aside as “not relevant here” (Chomsky 1995: 384, n. 42). Singular agreement in *there* sentences with plural associates represents a real option of the grammar.¹⁷

To make it follow, what we need is an analysis of *there* sentences in which in sentences of the type in (23) *there* has “a choice of associate” – a plural one alongside a singular one. Finding a potential plural associate is not difficult; the question is what *there*’s singular associate in (23b) might be. A small clause analysis of locatives, which treats *in the room* in (23) as the predicate of a small clause whose subject is *lots of people*, provides the answer: the structure underlying (23) is as in (25) (cf. Belvin and Den Dikken 1997 for more detailed discussion).

(25) *there* ... [SC [NP *lots of people*] [PP *in the room*]]

With (25) in place, the oscillation between plural and singular finite verb agreement in (23) can be seen to be a reflex of the fact that *there* in (25) can pick either of two constituents as its associate: either the NP headed by *people* in the subject position of the SC (in which case we obtain plural agreement), or the entire SC (which yields singular agreement).¹⁸

17. Indeed, as Boeckx (1998: 19) points out (crediting the observation to Howard Lasnik), there is at least one context in which singular agreement in *there* sentences with plural associates is not just an option but in fact the only possibility: in (ib) the presence of the dative PP *to Mary* makes plural agreement unacceptable. I add, however, that this observation does not meet with general agreement among speakers; and moreover, as Boeckx (1998: 30, n. 29) notes himself (crediting this particular observation to Mona Anderson), the facts in (ib) are reversed when the dative PP contains a *pronominal* experiencer (cf. (ic)). While I believe that (ib) can be made to follow from the analysis of *there* sentences presented in the main text, I am not at this time prepared to develop a detailed account which will ultimately manage to differentiate between (ib) and (ic).

- (i) a. *There {seem/³seems} to be lots of people in the room.*
 b. *There {*seem/seems} to **Mary** to be lots of people in the room.*
 c. *There {seem/*seems} to **her** to be lots of people in the room.*

18. Treating (23b) as a case of singular agreement with a small clause can be viewed as a way of reducing Schütze’s (1999) *default* agreement (which he claims is at stake in (23b)) to well-behaved “real” agreement. I stress that *there*’s inability to take *that*-clause associates is a consequence of the *definiteness* of *that*-clauses, and does not warrant the extrapolation that *there* cannot take *any* (small) clausal associates. Notice that, even when SC is picked as the associate of *there*, the subject of the small clause must be indefinite: *There’s (*the) people in the room*. Apparently, the definiteness of the subject of the small clause contributes to the definiteness of the containing small clause as a whole. This recalls the behaviour of possessors in possessive noun phrases with respect to definiteness – cf. *There’s {a/*the} famous linguist’s father in the room*. The account of the “percolation” of definiteness in the two cases should presumably run along parallel lines; I will not venture a proposal here.

With *a committee* substituting for *lots of people* in (25), singular agreement will result if *committee* is a simple singular (regardless of whether the associate of *there* is SC or NP), or if *committee* is a “pluringular” and the associate of *there* is SC. Deriving (24a) is hence unproblematic on the present approach. And so is ruling out (24b). The reason why “pluringular” *committee* itself cannot be the associate of *there* is that “pluringular” *committee* has the pronominally headed structure in (19). This immediately disqualifies it as a potential associate of *there*, for the same reason that pronouns in general cannot be the associate of *there* (except in, e.g., “list readings” like *Well, there’s me/you/him/her/us/them*; but these cases are irrelevant in the present context since here the pronoun never triggers plural agreement with the finite verb to begin with) – an instantiation of the definiteness restriction on *there* existentials.¹⁹

So once again we see that a pronominally headed analysis of “pluringulars” makes the right empirical predictions without further ado. The ease with which the present proposal links up (24) to the observations about “pluringulars” made in section 3 makes it strongly superior to Elbourne’s (1999) analysis of (24), which is based on two core hypotheses: (i) “pluringulars” possess a “mereological plural” feature, and (ii) this feature cannot raise in covert feature movement.²⁰ Elbourne’s approach and mine are not dissimilar – in both, an important role is played by failure of LF movement. But while on Elbourne’s assumptions this is a property peculiar to one particular feature (the “mereological plural” feature), mine make it a general property of weak and null pronouns, which vastly extends the empirical scope of the proposal. Whereas the present analysis generalises over (24) and all of the peculiarities of weak and null pronouns reviewed in the foregoing, Elbourne’s

19. Elbourne (1999) notes that (i) is grammatical with *was*, with successful binding of *each other* suggesting that *team* is a “pluringular” here despite the fact that there is singular agreement on the finite verb. The present analysis of “pluringulars” raises the question of how (ia) could possibly be grammatical: after all, I categorically disallow a “pluringular” as the associate of *there*. I believe that this is the right result in general: (ii) is ungrammatical. The reason why (ia) succeeds is that it makes an analysis available in which *drinking each other under the table* is an adjunct with a PRO subject; as is well known, the featural connection between PRO and its controller can be relatively loose – cf., e.g., the phenomenon of “partial control”, as in *The committee was glad that the chair had agreed PRO to gather before the elections* (from Landau 2000), where PRO is plural but its controller (*the chair*) is singular; note, though, that “partial control” contexts do not support plural anaphors (cf. *John told Mary that he preferred to meet (*each other) at 6 p.m.*), so a full assimilation of Elbourne’s (ia) to “partial control” does not seem feasible.

(i) *Was/*Were there a team drinking each other under the table?*

(ii) **Was there a team in each other’s seats/outfits/...?*

20. As for hypothesis (i), see Reid (1991: 237) for a critique of a more general proposal, credited to Weinreich (1980) and similar in spirit to Elbourne’s approach to plural-agreeing collectives, which treats quirky agreement facts in terms of a “covert subject-number feature ... whose scope encompasses the subject phrase as a whole” – “It is simply a way of preserving the shibboleth of subject-verb agreement by a formal trick.”

account holds no promise in this department: it seems unlikely that it could make sense of the facts in (20), and (21) does not look entirely straightforward from the “mereological plural” perspective either. Moreover, Elbourne’s approach to (24) (which says that (24b) is bad since LF movement of the features of *there*’s associate fails to carry along the LF-inert “mereological plural” feature) is heavily dependent on Chomsky’s (1986, 1995) “expletive replacement” approach to *there* sentences – an analysis which I believe the data discussed in the next section show is empirically inadequate.

5. Agreement attraction and *there* sentences

Reid (1991: 228) quotes a number of sentences from Sperber and Wilson’s book *Relevance* involving the noun phrase *a set of assumptions* and the agreement form of the verb that it triggers. Consider the minimal pair in (26) (slightly but innocuously adapted from the original):

- (26) a. *A set of assumptions is placed in the memory of the deductive device.*
 b. %/! *A set of assumptions **are** placed in the memory of the deductive device.*

For British English speakers, (26b) is ambiguous as far as its analysis is concerned. It can be an instance of “pluringular” agreement (analogous to (14b)), or it can involve agreement attraction (à la (8b)). For speakers for whom *set* is not construable as a “pluringular”, (26b) can only involve agreement attraction.

Interestingly, however, no matter how *a set of assumptions* in (26b) is treated, it does not seem good in *there* sentences:²¹

- (27) a. *There is a set of assumptions placed in the memory of the deductive device.*
 b. **There **are** a set of assumptions placed in the memory of the deductive device.*

21. To be set aside here are those speakers for whom *a set of...* behaves like *a number of...*, which is systematically exempt from the restrictions on attraction discussed in this paper. This suggests that *a number of...* triggers plural agreement not as a result of attraction but in some other way – one possibility being that *a number of* has been reanalysed as a complex quantifier. I reiterate the X-bar-theoretic problems that such an analysis would incur (cf. fn. 9), but leave open all questions about the proper analysis of *a number of...*

Notice that in stylistic/locative inversion constructions, attraction is occasionally attested, as in (i) (from a television documentary; cf. Reid 1991: 285). From the perspective on (27) laid out below, this is surprising (cf. Den Dikken and Næss’s 1993 analysis of locative inversion along the lines of (28)); cf. n. 16.

(i) *Nine hundred feet below the surface **are** a unique combination of **metals**.*

In section 4 I discussed the roots of the ungrammaticality of (27b) on its “plurilingual” construal. Apparently, however, (27b) also fails as a case of agreement attraction. The question is why attraction should fail in *there* sentences – a question that cannot simply be set aside saying that the finite verb and the plural “attractor” are not adjacent: after all, linear adjacency is not in general a *conditio sine qua non* as far as agreement attraction is concerned (cf. (9b) and fn. 4, above).

If attraction involves raising of the features of the subject-contained noun phrase to the outer D-head at LF (as I argued in section 2) and agreement in *there* sentences is established via “expletive replacement” type movement at LF, there should be no reason for attraction to fail in *there* sentences of the type in (27b). After all, with the features of *assumptions* adjoining to the D-head of the containing noun phrase, LF movement of the features of the latter would carry the (garden-variety, i.e. non-“mereological”) [+PLURAL] feature of the embedded noun along into the checking domain of finite Infl. Plural agreement should then be straightforward; but it is actually ungrammatical (*modulo* the remarks made in note 21).

An alternative analysis of agreement in *there* sentences along the lines of Hoekstra and Mulder (1990) and Den Dikken and Næss (1993), which takes *there* to be a small clause predicate (cf. Moro 1997), fares better in this respect. Agreement between the finite verb and the associate of *there* is established on this approach via the chain of identical indexations linking (i) *there*, (ii) *there*’s trace, and (iii) the trace’s subject (via general predicate-subject coindexation). This is illustrated in (28). Since the subject of *there* is fixed once and for all (“at D-structure”), LF feature movement does not affect “long distance” agreement in *there* sentences. Hence, since the head of *a set of assumptions* is singular, and since it is this noun whose projection is the subject of *there* and is coindexed with *there* as a result, the finite verb in (27) cannot be attracted to plural agreement. While *a set of assumptions* in (26b), occupying the subject position, can have the [+PLURAL] feature of *assumptions* “peek out” of the complex subject-DP and check agreement on the finite verb, no such “peeking out” is possible in (27b), where *a set of assumptions* is never itself in the SpecAgrSP position. Its “proxy” (*there*) checks agreement, via the chain of identical indexations that relates it to its subject – the entire noun phrase *a set of assumptions*. *There* is predicated of this noun phrase, not of its subconstituent *assumptions*; and since predication relations are unalterable in the course of the derivation, *there* will *never* end up coindexed with *assumptions*, not even after the formal features of the latter raise at LF. Agreement with *assumptions* (i.e., agreement attraction) is thereby blocked in (27b), as desired.

(28) [AgrSP *there*_i [AgrS_i (...)] [SC [a set [of [assumptions]]]_i t_i]]

6. Concluding remarks

This paper has addressed a variety of “quirky” agreement phenomena in English, all with an eye towards establishing the central hypothesis that weak and null pro-

nouns are LF “inert”, hence cannot undergo LF movement. I analysed agreement attraction (as in (8b)) in terms of LF movement (of the Quantifier Raising type), correctly ensuring that overt weak pronouns cannot trigger it (cf. (10)), and taking the failure of attraction with *the poor* (13b) and “plurilinguals” (14b) to be evidence for pronominally headed structures of these constructions (as in (12b') and (19)). Along the way, I presented some additional empirical arguments in favour of a pronominally headed approach to *the poor* and to “plurilinguals”. In the second part of the paper, which focused on existential *there* sentences, Elbourne’s (1999) observation that “plurilinguals” do not occur as the associate of *there* in *there* existentials was shown to vindicate the *pro*-based analysis of *committee*-type noun phrases, and the fact that attraction also fails in *there* sentences was brought up as evidence against an “expletive replacement” type LF-movement analysis of *there* existentials. All in all, the evidence clearly suggests that weak and null pronouns are LF invisible, and that English has null pronouns in at least two types of complex noun phrases.²²

Three questions remain. The first is of a comparative-linguistic nature – why is it that plural-agreeing *committee*-type noun phrases are possible in British English, but rare (if not non-existent) elsewhere? The second question concerns the internal structure of (19), and asks what the relationship between the pronoun and the *committee*-DP is. And the third is about the licensing of the null pronominal head of (12b') and (19).

I have no particular insights to offer with regard to the first question – nor do I think that any other extant approach (such as Elbourne’s 1999) does any better on this score. As for the internal structure of (19), accounts which would have the null pronoun sit in the D-head of a simplex DP (cf. Postal’s 1966 approach to *us linguists*) would face the difficult question of how the pronoun can be compatible with a lexical definite determiner or (as in (21a) with plural agreement) a demonstrative.²³ With such accounts discarded, two options remain: (19) instantiates either (i) an apposition type structure or (ii) a clitic doubling configuration.

From theoretical discussions of clitic doubling (cf., e.g., Sportiche 1997, and references cited there), we are familiar with the idea that the doubling clitic can be null. But English is not usually thought to have clitics, let alone clitic doubling. Moreover, the clitic doubling approach to (19) would raise the question of how the full noun phrase and the doubling clitic could differ in ϕ -features (number, to be specific: the null pronoun is plural but the *committee*-DP itself is singular). In clitic doubling languages, clitics and their doubles as a rule agree quite strictly with respect to their ϕ -features.

22. If Campbell (1998) is right, even garden-variety common-noun phrases feature a (singular) *pro*, in their specifier.

23. Notice also that *us linguists* can trigger attraction, unlike “plurilinguals”: *!The identity of us linguists are to remain a secret* (Richard Kayne, personal communication).

The alternative apposition approach fares better in this respect: alongside (29a) we find appositive (29b), featuring a plural head and a singular appositive noun phrase, much as in (19).²⁴

- (29) a. *The agreement facts are the biggest pain in the neck.* b. *The agreement facts, the biggest pain in the neck, have eluded many linguists for centuries.*

I therefore tentatively adopt the apposition approach to (19). This approach in and of itself does not help us out when it comes to the licensing of the null head of this structure, which raises difficult questions. We know that this pronoun is plural; and from (30a,b) we can conclude that its default person specification is third person (cf. Kayne 1999; Kayne and Pollock 1999: *pro* tends to be third person).²⁵

- (30) a. *The committee consider themselves very clever.*
 b. **The committee consider ourselves very clever.*
 b.′ *Our committee consider ourselves very clever.*

Though there is nothing wrong with *we the committee* (in fact, if anything, it is much better than *they the committee*, the “overt counterpart” of (19)) and the like, (30b) fails miserably. But as Janet Fodor points out, in the presence of a first person plural possessor, (30b) becomes grammatical, as (30b′) shows. We know that *our* cannot normally antecede an anaphor outside the possessed noun phrase: **Our parents consider ourselves very clever* is ungrammatical. So the antecedent of *ourselves* in (30b′) must be the null pronoun heading the structure of the “plurilingual” – the *pro* of (19). This is further confirmed by the fact that (30b′) with singular verb agreement is impossible (cf. **Our committee considers ourselves very clever*): in

24. It is interesting to add a further observation about appositive noun phrases in this context. Notice that (29b) features plural finite verb agreement, with the head noun phrase. That the singular appositive DP cannot trigger attraction may not come as a big surprise in the light of the fact that attraction to singular is exceedingly rare to begin with; but as Quirk *et al.* (1985: 1304n.) point out, no attraction is possible in either direction in the case of appositive noun phrases; cf. (i) (but note the attested example from Dutch quoted in fn. 3, above). This shows that, even if Elbourne (1999) were to be right that plural-agreeing collectives possess a “mereological plural” feature (which I doubt very strongly: with the approach based on (19) in place there is no need for such a feature at all), this feature would be unable to trigger plural agreement on the finite verb if we adopt an apposition approach to “plurilinguals” à la (19).

- (i) a. *Land, brains, wealth, technology – in other words everything we need – {are/*is} plentiful in our country.*
 b. *Everything we need – land, brains, wealth, technology – {is/*are} plentiful in our country.*

25. For (30a), cf. Quirk *et al.*'s (1985: 769n.) example in (i):

- (i) *The navy congratulated themselves on, if not a victory, at least an avoidance of defeat.*

the structure of singular-agreeing *committee*-type noun phrases there is no null pronoun which can locally bind the anaphor.

The grammaticality of (30b') thus shows that as far as person marking is concerned, the null head of “pluringulars” is not strictly restricted to third person: other persons are possible, if *content-licensed* by a local noun phrase with the same person feature as the null head. When third person, the null head of (19) does not need a content licenser; it is licensed by default. In this respect it bears a close resemblance to *pro* (cf. Rizzi 1986; Kayne 1999; Kayne and Pollock 1999). The data in (30) hence lend further support to the analysis of “pluringulars” as *pro*-headed noun phrases, which I believe is robustly supported. But there is work left to be done – in particular, future research should address the question of why it is that the “overt counterpart” of (19) (*?they the committee*) is so much poorer than *we the committee*, what the crucial property of (mostly) British English is that allows it to license *pro* in the configuration in (19), and why it is that other languages seem to lack this property.

Acknowledgements

Versions of this paper were presented at the SUNY Stony Brook Linguistics Colloquium (October 1999), at the Eastern States Conference on Linguistics (ESCOL) held at the University of Connecticut at Storrs (November 1999), at the Comparative Germanic Syntax Workshop held at the University of Groningen (May 2000), at the LEHIA Summer Courses at San Sebastian (July 2000), and in my Advanced Syntax seminar at the CUNY Graduate Center (Fall 1999). The original incentive to this work was Dianne Bradley and Janet Dean Fodor’s invitation to present a “Syntax Tutorial” on the syntax of features at the 12th Annual CUNY Conference on Human Sentence Processing, organised at the CUNY Graduate Center (March 1999) – see Den Dikken (2000), which contains a precursor of some of the material discussed herein. I thank the audiences present on those occasions, as well as Paul Elbourne, Janet Dean Fodor, Arild Hestvik, Richard Kayne and Chris Wilder for detailed comments and suggestions. A special thank-you is due to Dianne Bradley for supplying me with a number of key sentence processing papers on agreement attraction, and to Ricardo Otheguy for making me aware of Reid (1991) and for providing me with a copy of this book. The usual disclaimers apply.

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