

Reaching agreement as a core syntactic process

Commentary of Bock & Middleton *Reaching Agreement*

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Abstract In their paper *Reaching Agreement*, Bock and Middleton (2011) review a vast array of psycholinguistic experiments on semantic influences in agreement which they argue provide critical empirical evidence to the longstanding debate about the role of meaning in syntax. The authors propose to unify these findings within the Marking and Morphing model, the reference framework for many psycholinguistic studies of agreement production. In this commentary, I discuss four concerns about the approach advocated by Bock and Middleton: (1) the pervasive confusion with respect to the definition of agreement, and its conceptual consequences on the debate about the role of meaning in syntax, (2) the infelicitous comparison between pronouns and verbs providing the empirical foundations of Marking and Morphing, (3) the existence of a set of experimental findings invalidating the assumption of the model with respect to the relation between feature transmission and morphology, (4) the lack of assumptions of Marking and Morphing with respect to the process of feature transmission, hence its inability to account for the structural effects on attraction. In response to these concerns, I present an alternative model, Selection and Copy, and sketch a line of research that explores the workings of the Copy component. I then address the criticisms raised by Bock and Middleton against this research and question the explanatory force of Marking and Morphing as a model of agreement defined as a core syntactic process.

Keywords Language production · Agreement · Number · Marking and Morphing · Selection and Copy · Production syntax

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