

Past participle agreement in Abruzzese: split auxiliary selection and the null-subject parameter

1. Past participle (pp) agreement in Romance languages is usually thought to be governed by the mechanisms proposed by Kayne (1989) and Belletti (2002). According to Belletti, pp agreement always takes place with internal arguments. Here, we present counterevidence to this generalization, and propose a novel analysis of pp agreement, as well as person-driven auxiliary selection, using previously unknown data from a southern Italian dialect spoken in Abruzzo.

2. In Eastern Abruzzese (EA), an undocumented southern Italian dialect, pp agreement may take place either with the subject (1) or with the object (2) of transitive verbs. The pp always agrees with a plural DP, be it the subject or the object.

(1) Giuwanne e Mmarije a pittite nu mure
John and Mary have-3rd sg/pl painted-pp pl a-sg masc wall-sg masc
'John and Mary have painted a wall'

(2) Giuwanne a pittite ddu mure
John has-3rd sg/pl painted-pp pl two walls
'John has painted two walls'

3. EA has a "split" system of auxiliary selection (Manzini & Savoia (2005)). Many dialects in Central and Southern Italy show this type of auxiliary selection. In these varieties, the argument structure of the verb is not the conditioning factor, but rather the person-number specification of the subject. There is much variation, but EA represents probably the most common pattern, that where "be" appears with a 1st- or 2nd-person subject, and "have" with a 3rd-person subject is ((Cocchi (1995, Chapter 4), Kayne (2003, Chapter 7), Ledgeway (2000, Chapter 6), Loporcaro (1998), Tuttle (1986)). If the auxiliary is merged in v , this indicates that v is sensitive to the ϕ -features of the subject; it is in this sense that such systems are ergative (see Müller (2004)).

4. We provide an analysis of EA auxiliary selection and participle agreement following Chomsky's (2001, 2004, 2005) recent proposals centring on the Agree relation, a head-head feature-checking relation subject to locality conditions. Our main proposal is that EA has two v Ps, one of which licenses the (nominative) subject and the other the (accusative) object. We further assume that singular agreement represents the underspecified value of the Number feature, and as such can be overridden by the plural value. We show how these assumptions give rise to an effect of past-participle with both plural subjects and plural objects.

5. An important consequence of our analysis is that Nominative case is assigned within v P, and not by T as is standardly assumed. Thus the role of T is somewhat reduced. We suggest that T does not license the subject in EA, but only the inflected verb. T thus can only trigger verb-movement, not subject raising. We conclude that varieties with the kind of auxiliary-selection and participle-agreement system described here must be null-subject languages of the Greek type (see Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou (1998)). Support for this claim comes from the impossibility of inserting a subject immediately after a low complementizer in EA.

6. The correlation with the null-subject parameter explains a significant cross-linguistic generalisation. Although both argument-structure-driven auxiliary selection and the generalised use of "have" as perfect auxiliary are found in Germanic (German vs. English), the Central-Southern Italian person-driven system is not found. Our analysis entails that a person-driven system can only be found in a (Greek-style) null-subject language. Since no Germanic language is a Greek-style null-subject language, we understand the typological generalisation as a non-trivial case of parameter interaction.