

Past Participle-Object Agreement and Topicalization: A Parallel Between Friulian and Old Italian

In the rise and fall of the active-inactive alignment across Romance (La Fauci 1988; Ledgeway 2012), participle-object agreement developed from an alignment-driven pattern, differentiating O and S_o from A and S_A, into a partially discourse-driven pattern (Bentley 2006), where, alongside S_o, only a subclass of topical objects trigger agreement, specifically, those in CLLD. The paper draws a parallel between Friulian and Old Italian, identifying a stage in which the past participle agrees with topical *in-situ* postverbal direct objects (De Cia, Ciconte, Bentley forthc.).

As shown in (1) and (2) below, in Friulian and in Old Italian respectively, past participle agreement in gender and number takes place with the postverbal direct object in the absence of apparent right or left dislocation:

(1) *Mario al a mangjad-e le polente*
Mario 3SG.M.SCL has.3SG eat.PTCP-F.SG the polenta.F.SG
“Mario ate the polenta”

(2) *La Benvegnuda avea subito fatt-a la suppa,*
the Benvegnuda had.3SG immediately made.PTCP-FSG the soup.FSG
“Benvegnuda had prepared the soup right away” (*Trecentonovelle*, 98, 29-36, p. 219)

Friulian shows that object-past participle agreement, however, does not consistently take place. Its occurrence is conditioned by the discourse-pragmatic status of the postverbal direct object: if the direct object is in *narrow focus* (in the sense of Lambrecht 1994) there is no object-past participle agreement (the focal portion of the sentence is in capitals):

(3) CONTEXT: What did you get?
a. *O ai cjapât DOS MULTIS*
1SG.SCL have.1SG get.PTCP two fine.F.PL
“I have got two fines”
b. **O ai cjapad-is DOS MULTIS*
1SG.SCL have.1SG get.PTCP-F.PL two fine.F.PL

In a similar fashion, Old Italian does not consistently exhibit object-past participle agreement, as shown in (4), which, crucially, is drawn from the same Old Italian text as (2):

(4) *Ebbe veduto una passera calcare ben cento volte un'altra,*
had.3SG seen.PTCP a sparrow.FSG press.on.INF well hundred times another
“She saw a sparrow jumping on another sparrow hundreds of times”
(*Trecentonovelle*, 226, 32/1-9, p. 586)

Comparative analysis of Friulian and Old Italian reveals that if the postverbal object has topical status as *given* (G-topic) or *aboutness/shift* (A-topic) information (Erteschik-Shir 1999; Bianchi & Frascarelli 2010), past participle-object agreement obligatorily takes place. The central claim of the paper is hence that the mechanism of past participle agreement with a postverbal object in Friulian and in Old Italian is the same: past participle agreement with *in situ* objects is not in free variation with absence of agreement, but constrained by the discourse-pragmatic status of the object: agreement must take place if the postverbal object bears a *Given* or *aboutness/shift* topical interpretation. This can be appreciated in the Friulian example in (5) and the Old Italian example in (6b), where the postverbal object, by virtue of being *given* information in discourse, agrees in number and gender with the past participle:

(5) *Ce u-tu c-o vegni a Cortine?*
what want.2SG-2SG.SCL that-1SG.SCL come.1SG to Cortina
O ai già viodud-e Cortine!
1SG.SCL have.1SG. already seen.PTCP-FSG Cortina.FSG

“Why do you want me to come to Cortina? I’ve already seen Cortina!”

(6) a. *Al quale disse Nerone: O uomo, servo del grande re, il quale se’ mio pregione, perché mi sottrai tu i cavalieri miei e ragunili a te? Al quale disse Paulo:*

b. *Non solamente de la tua corte ho raccolto-i cavalieri,*
Not only from the your court have.1SG taken.PTCP-MPL knight.MPL

“Nero said to him: – Man, servant of your great king, but prisoner of mine, why do you steal my **knights** and turn them to your cause? – Paul replied to him: – Not only have I taken knights from your court” (*Leggenda*, II, 85, 16-21, p. 739)

In Modern Italian, object-past participle agreement is analysed as the result of clitic-movement (Kayne 1989; Belletti 2001): the clitic moves as a phrase and passes through the specifier position of the functional head hosting the past participle, triggering agreement (see D’Alessandro and Roberts 2008 for an Agree analysis). Such analysis is however unsuitable for the pattern of past participle-object agreement in Friulian and Old Italian in (5) and (6b), where the participle agrees with postverbal direct objects which are not resumed by an agreeing object clitic (Benincà & Vanelli 1984; Haiman & Benincà 1992; Egerland 1996; Paoli 1997, 2006).

In light of the more recent literature on the relation between information structure and verb-object agreement in Bantu and Italo-Romance (Bax & Diercks 2012; Mursell 2018; D’Alessandro 2017, 2019), this paper proposes that the pattern of past participle-object agreement in Old Italian and Friulian can be explained by postulating the presence of an extra set of phi-features ($\mu\phi$) on v° . These phi-features can only be valued by an internal argument DP that enters the derivation carrying a [Topic] discourse feature as well as a set of interpretable phi-features ($i\phi$), namely [Number] and [Gender]. The correct discourse-pragmatic interpretation of the topical *in-situ* object is then ensured through *Long-Distance Agree* (Polinsky and Potsdam 2001, Frascarelli 2007). If a goal with the [Topic] interpretation is not available, the default masculine singular ending surfaces on the past participle, as the Agree operation (Chomsky 2001) fails (e.g. with focal objects).

In terms of the change documented in Bentley (2006:194-210), the discourse-driven strategy recorded in this study constitutes an intermediate stage of a change whereby the participle increasingly agrees with subjects and decreasingly with objects, or undergoers, as a result of a transition from one alignment principle (active-inactive) to another such principle (nominative-accusative). This stage precedes the one testified by Modern Italian. Given that across Romance participle agreement with the object has retrenched over time (Loporcaro 1998, 2016), the stage in participle agreement uncovered in this paper could in principle be found in other Romance languages.

Selected References

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