

An agreement alternation in inversion in North-Eastern Italian varieties

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1. Variation of morphological agreement in inversion

Since Government and Binding, **subject-verb agreement** has been analyzed as the morphological reflex of a **Spec-Head configuration**.

Guasti & Rizzi (2002):

Feature checking by **overt movement** is necessarily morphologically expressed.

→ SV: full agreement

Feature checking by **covert movement**: language-specific morphological rules apply.

→ VS: either full or defective agreement

Furthermore, they state that morphological realization of agreement in inversion „*may vary across closely related systems and fluctuate within the same system.*” (Guasti & Rizzi 2002:189)

? How can we formally handle *fluctuation*?

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? How can we formally handle *fluctuation*?

- I will present new data from **North-Eastern Italian dialects** that display an **optionality** of morphological agreement in inversion and I will show how we can systematically account for the data within a Minimalist framework.

1.1 Some preliminaries: Agreement patterns in subject inversion

Cross-linguistically, we observe **two agreement patterns** with postverbal subjects:

❖ **Full agreement**, as in English (1a.) Standard Italian (1b.):

- | | | | |
|-----|----|--|------------------|
| (1) | a. | There have arrived two girls. | English |
| | b. | Sono arrivate due ragazze.
Are arrived.F.PL two girls
„Two girls arrived.“ | Standard Italian |

❖ **Defective agreement**, as in French (2a.), some Italian dialects (2b.) and Arabic.

- | | | | |
|-----|----|--|---|
| (2) | a. | Il est arrivé deux filles.
Expl is arrived.M.SG two girls
„Two girls arrived.“ | French |
| | b. | ε mɔrt lə galinə.
Is died.M.SG the chickens
„The chickens died.“ | Piobbico, Marche
(Manzini & Savoia 2005: 48) |

1.2 Alternation of morphological agreement in North-Eastern Italian dialects

While preverbal subjects obligatory trigger full morphological agreement, we observe an **apparent optionality** in the dialects of Venice and Gazzolo d'Arcole (near Verona):

(3) Venetian:

- a. Xe morto na fia.
 Is died.**M** a girl
- b. Xe morta na fia.
 Is died.**F** a girl
 “A girl died.”

(4) Gazzolo:

- a. Xe morto na toseta.
 Is died.**M** a girl
- b. Xe morta na toseta.
 Is died.**F** a girl
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(4) Gazzolo:

- | | |
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| a. Xe morto | na toseta. |
| Is died. M | a girl |
| b. Xe morta | na toseta. |
| Is died. F | a girl |
| “A girl died.” | |

I will show that the verbal agreement alternation in the two North-Eastern Italian dialects...

- i. is a morphological reflex of the thematic/categorical distinction (Kuroda 1972),
- ii. it is determined by the pragmatic nature of the postverbal DP and
- iii. depends on the selection of two different kinds of null elements and their respective merge position.

↩ Roadmap

1. Introduction
2. Previous accounts: (In)definiteness Effects
3. The distribution: some interpretational facts
4. Discussion
 - 4.1 Pragmatic analysis
 - 4.2 Syntactic analysis
5. Summary and open questions

2. Previous accounts: (In)definiteness effects

Manzini & Savoia (2005, 2006: 72) report Italian dialects that display agreement alternations.

They claim that **full agreement correlates with definiteness and/or specificity**, while defective agreement correlates with indefinite and non-specific DPs:

(5) Barcis (Friuli):

a. i 'son vi'nuts **no 'fi:s**
 SCI are come.PL my sons
 „My sons came.“

b. a'l e vi'nu **dei kann'ais**
 SCI is come.SG of.the children
 „Children came.“

(6) Montereale (Friuli):

a. i 'veŋ i **ŋo fi'oi**
 SCI come.PL the our children
 „Our children come.“

b. a 'veŋ **ka'nais**
 SCI come.SG children
 „Children come.“

2.1 (In)definiteness effects in Gazzolo and Venetian?

Definiteness and specificity does indeed explain a big part, **but not all the data**.

The agreement alternation in Venetian and Gazzolo also appear with a **superlative** which is analysed as definite and specific:

(7) a. Gazzolo:

Xè morto / La xè morta **la pì famosa** **delle linguiste ‘taliane.**
 Is died.M / SCI is died.F the.F most famous.F of-the linguists.F italian.F
 “The most famous Italian linguist died.”

b. Venetian:

Xè morto / La xè morta **la pì famosa** **dele linguiste ‘taliane.**
 Is died.M / SCI is died.F the.F most famous.F of-the linguists.F italian.F
 “The most famous Italian linguist died.”

In the following, I will take a closer look at the **distribution** of the agreement alternation in inversion of the dialects of Gazzolo and Venice.

3. The distribution: some interpretational facts

Full agreement correlates with a discourse-given DP:

(8) This morning there was an accident on the highway. There were two persons in the car: **a girl** and her mother. The ambulance arrived but ...

- | | | | | |
|------------------|------------|----------|--------------|------------|
| a. #xe morto | la toseta. | b. *(La) | xe morta | la toseta. |
| is dead.SG.M | the girl | SCI | is dead.SG.F | the girl |
| "The girl died." | | | | |

Defective agreement is preferred when the DP is new, not discourse-given:

(9) This morning there was an accident on the highway. The ambulance arrived but ...

- | | | | | |
|------------------|------------|------------|--------------|------------|
| a. xe morto | la toseta. | b. # *(La) | xe morta | la toseta. |
| is dead.SG.M | the girl | SCI | is dead.SG.F | the girl |
| "The girl died." | | | | |

3. The distribution: some interpretational facts

New, not given DP correlates with defective agreement.

Here this is exemplified with the **Veneto plural inflected forms** *qualcheduni* ('somebody', see 10a.) and *nisuni* ('nobody', see 10b.) which cannot be interpreted as given:

- (10) a. Xe morto / *morti *qualcheduni*.
 is dead.SG.M dead.PL.M somebody.PL
 "Somebody died."
- b. No xè morto / *morti *nisuni*.
 Not is dead.SG.M dead.PL.M nobody.PL
 „Nobody died.”

3. The distribution: some interpretational facts

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- (10) a. Xe morto / *morti *qualcheduni.*
 is dead.SG.M dead.PL.M somebody.PL
 "Somebody died."
- b. No xè morto / *morti *nisuni.*
 Not is dead.SG.M dead.PL.M nobody.PL
 „Nobody died."

To summarize, we observe the following correlations:

full agreement	↔	given DPs
defective agreement	↔	discourse-new DPs

4. Discussion

4.1 Pragmatic analysis

Thetic/categorical distinction (Kuroda 1972, Sasse 1987, Ladusaw 1994)

❖ **Thetic sentences:**

statements in which the subject is interpreted internal to predicative nucleus

- (11) a. It is raining.
b. (Once upon a time), there was a princess.

❖ **Categorical sentences:**

bipartite; subject is interpreted external to predicative nucleus

- (12) a. Jane is tall.
b. The princess was a skilled paraglider.

Based on the **distribution and interpretation** of the sentences in Gazzolo and Venetian, I analyze

defective agreement sentences	↔	thetic sentences
full agreement sentences	↔	categorical sentences

4.2 Syntactic analysis

We see this kind of agreement alternation **scattered throughout Northern Italian dialects**.

And interestingly, in those dialects that have **overt subject clitics** we see a correlation between the **full agreement pattern with the inflected subject clitic** and the **defective agreement pattern with an invariant form of the subject clitic**:

(5) Barcis (Friuli, Manzini & Savoia 2006: 72):

a. *Full agreement*

i 'son vi'ɲuts no 'fi:s
SCI are come.PL my sons
„My sons came.“

b. *Defective agreement*

a'l e vi'ɲu dei kann'ais
SCI is come.SG of.the children
„Children came.“

(13) Casaccia (Grisons, Switzerland; M&S 2006: 56, 74):

a. *Full agreement*

i 'venan i ba'gai
SCI come.PL the children

b. *Defective agreement*

al 'venɿ i ba'gai
Expl come.SG the children

4.2 Syntactic analysis

4.2.1 The hypothesis

Already Chomsky (1995), Cardinaletti (1997) observe that the nature of the expletive plays a crucial role for the agreement pattern in a given language.

Gazzolo and Venetian represent a hybrid system disposing over two kinds of null elements that differ in their featural make-up and in their merge position triggering either the full or the defective agreement pattern.

Thetic sentences: null expletive

- Merged in the **non-thematic specifier of unaccusative v**.
- Unaccusative v does not assign theta roles, contrary to unergative and transitive v (along the lines of Richards & Biberauer 2005, Deal 2009).

Categorical sentences: null *pro*

- Null *pro* needs a theta role and must therefore be merged within a bigger constituent: αP
 - Big-DP (Sabel 2000, Torrego 1995, Uriagereka 1995, Belletti 1999)?
 - Small clause (Sato 2008, Hale & Keyser 2000)?
- V selects αP and assigns a theta role to it.

4.2.2 Thetic sentences: selection of expletive

The derivation

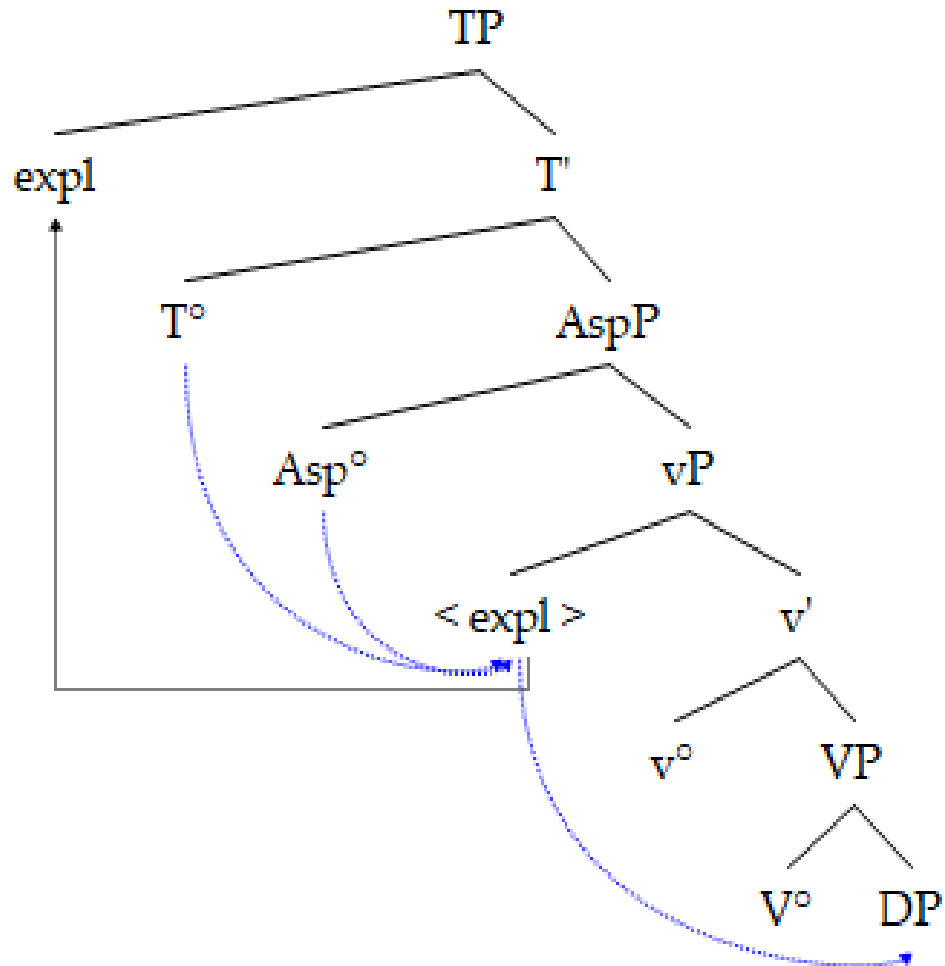
- (15) **Expletive** [$u\phi$: 3.SG.M], [Case: _]; merged in non-thematic Spec,vP
(Richards & Biberauer 2005, Deal 2009)

Step Σ :

Expletive is merged in the specifier of unaccusative v.

Expletive probes DP for case features.

Feature sharing of unvalued case feature with DP (Pesetsky & Torrego 2007).



4.2.2 Thetic sentences: selection of expletive

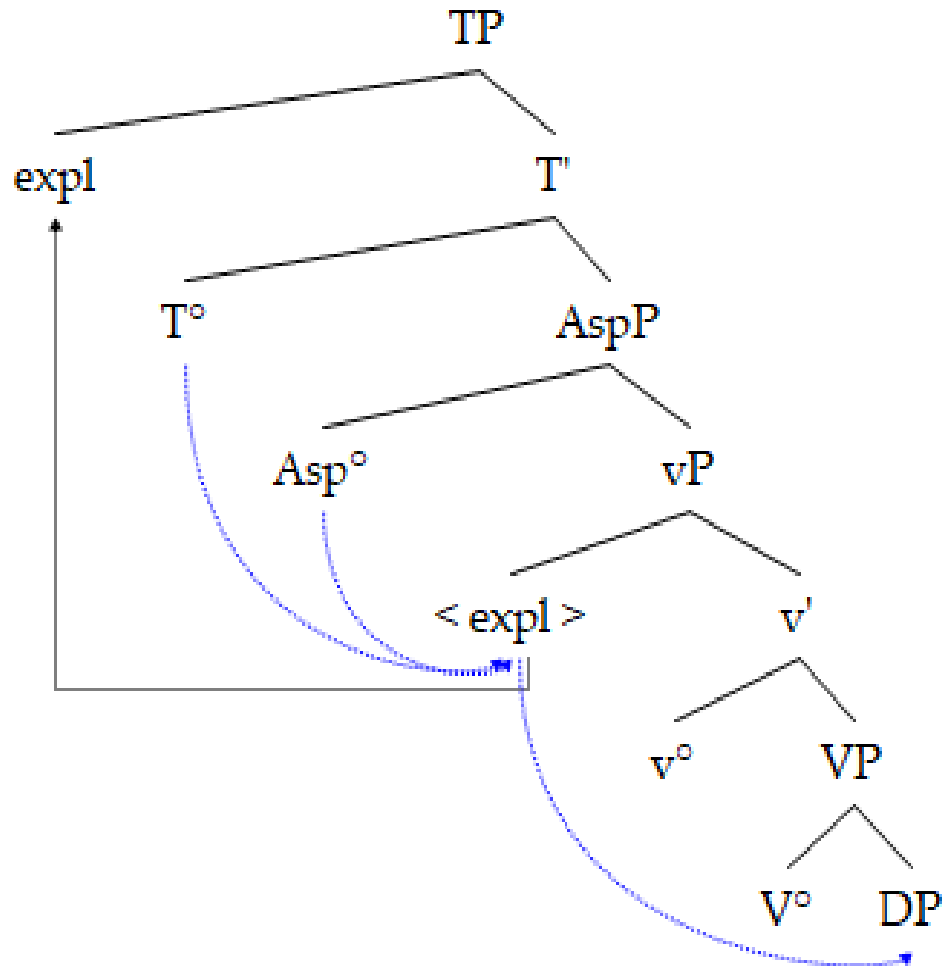
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(15) **Expletive** [$u\phi$: 3.SG.M], [Case: _]; merged in non-thematic Spec,vP
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Step Σ_{+1} :

AspP is merged.

Asp $^{\circ}$ probes for ϕ -features and agrees with the expletive.



4.2.2 Thetic sentences: selection of expletive

The derivation

- (15) **Expletive** [$u\phi$: 3.SG.M], [Case: _]; merged in non-thematic Spec,vP
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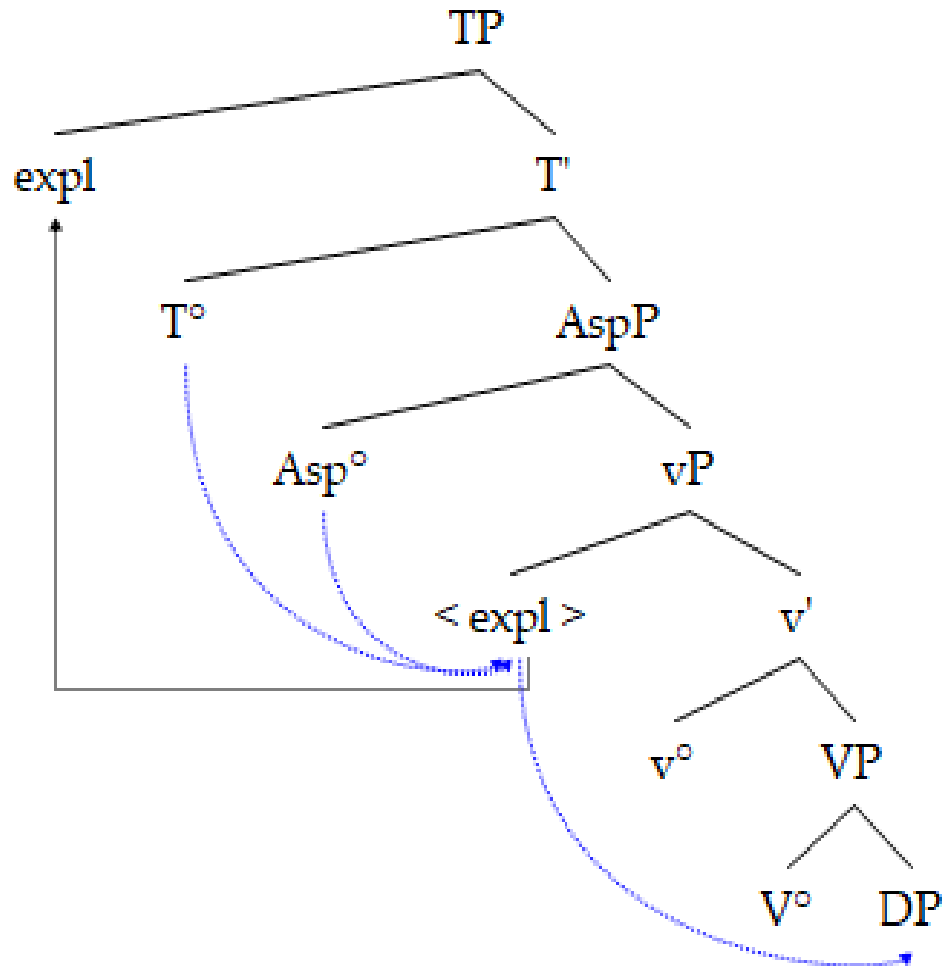
Step Σ_{+2} :

T° probes for ϕ -features.

Expletive is closest, active, c-commanded element.

Feature checking: ϕ and nominative.

Nominative value is shared with associate DP.



4.2.2 Thetic sentences: selection of expletive

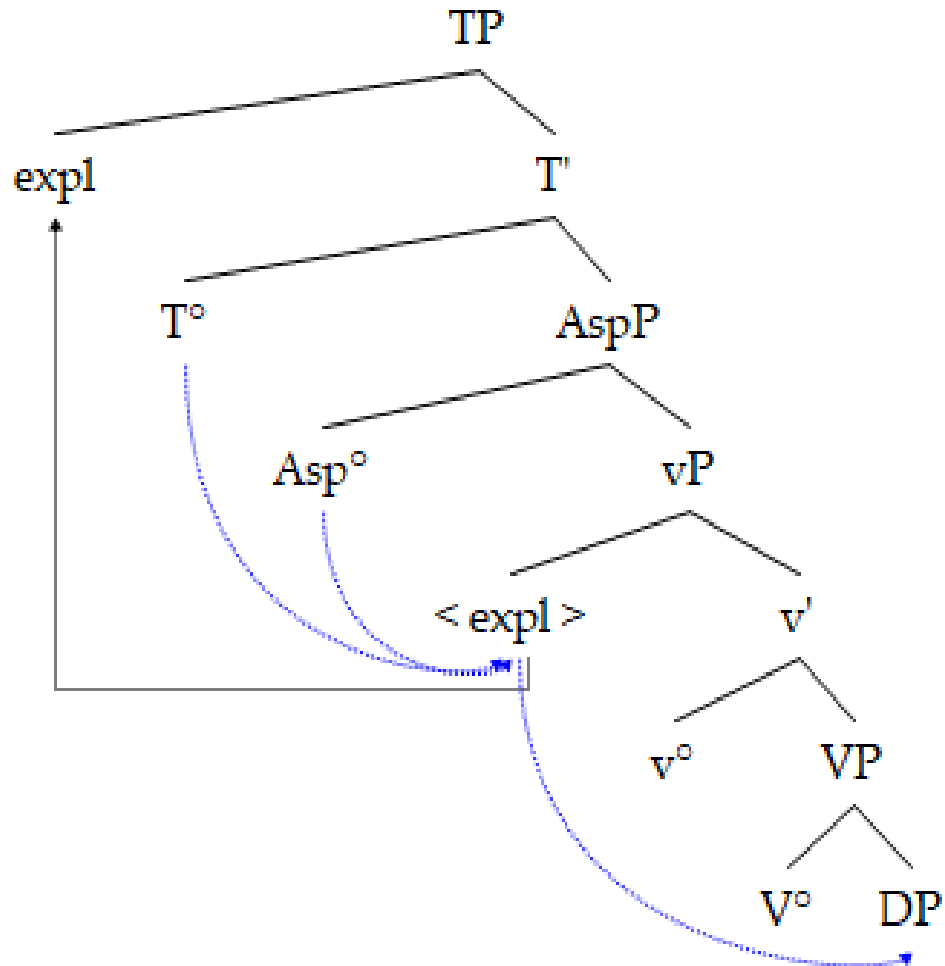
The derivation

- (15) **Expletive** [$u\phi$: 3.SG.M], [Case: _]; merged in non-thematic Spec,vP
(Richards & Biberauer 2005, Deal 2009)

Step Σ_{+3} :

EPP raises closest DP: expletive.

DP remains in situ.



4.2.1 Categorical sentences: selection of pro_{α}

The derivation

(16) **pro** [$u\phi$: _], [Case: _], [uGiven]; merged within α P (Abe 2009, Sato 2008)

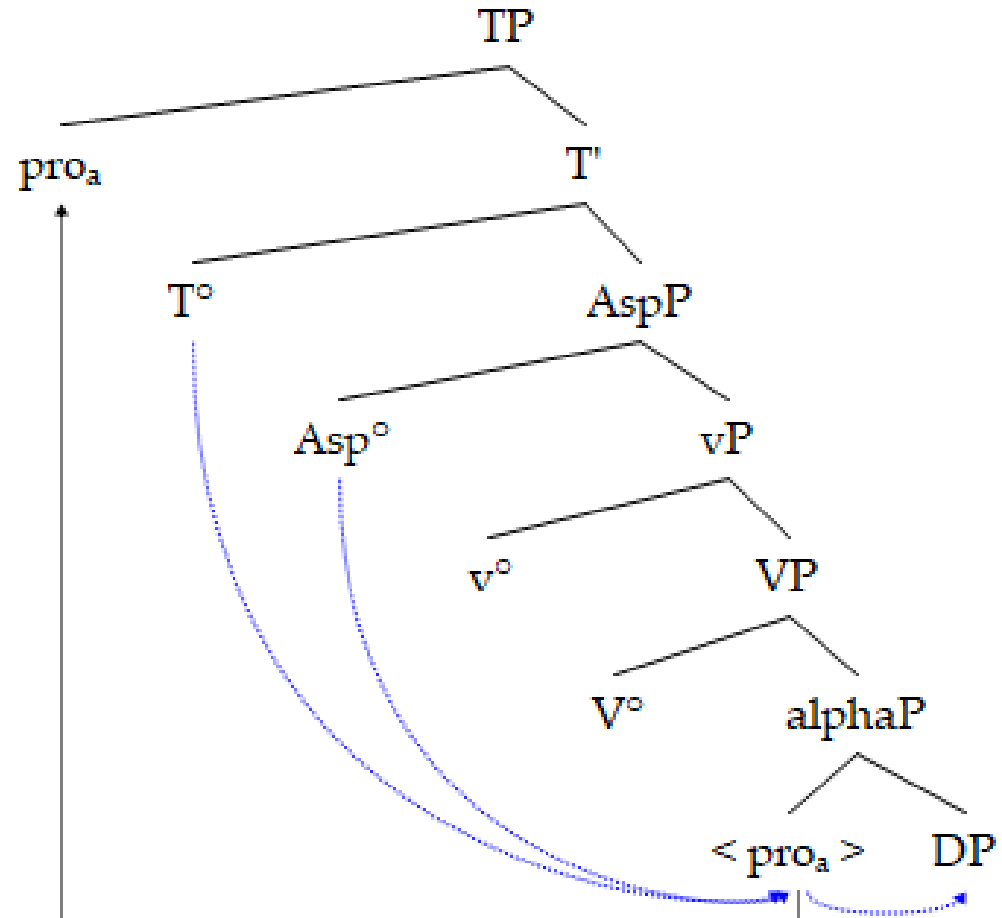
Step Σ :

V° selects α P containing pro_{α} and the DP.

pro_{α} probes DP for ϕ -, case features as well as the *Givenness* feature.

Feature checking of ϕ and *Givenness* feature.

Feature sharing of unvalued case feature with DP.



4.2.1 Categorical sentences: selection of pro_{α}

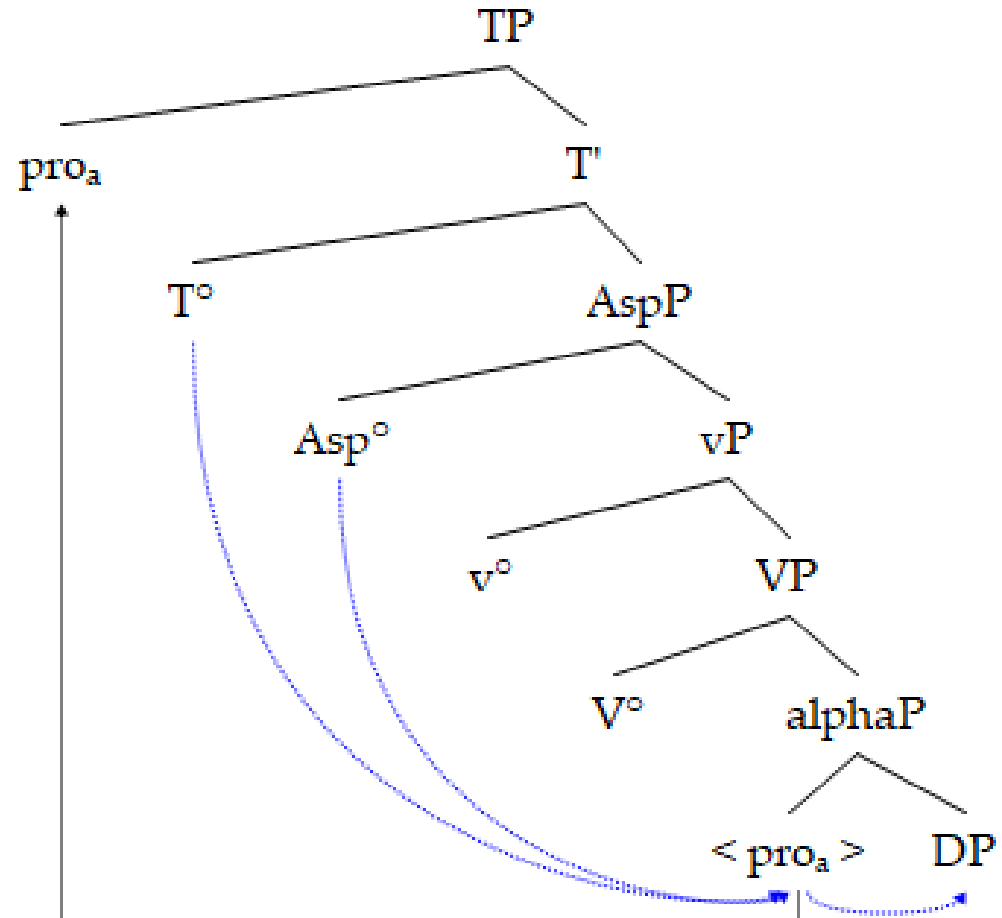
The derivation

(16) **pro** [$u\phi$: _], [Case: _], [u Given]; merged within α P (Abe 2009, Sato 2008)

Step Σ_{+1} :

AspP is merged.

Asp $^{\circ}$ probes for ϕ -features and agrees with pro_{α} .



4.2.1 Categorical sentences: selection of pro_{α}

The derivation

(16) pro [$u\varphi$: _], [$Case$: _], [$uGiven$]; merged within αP (Abe 2009, Sato 2008)

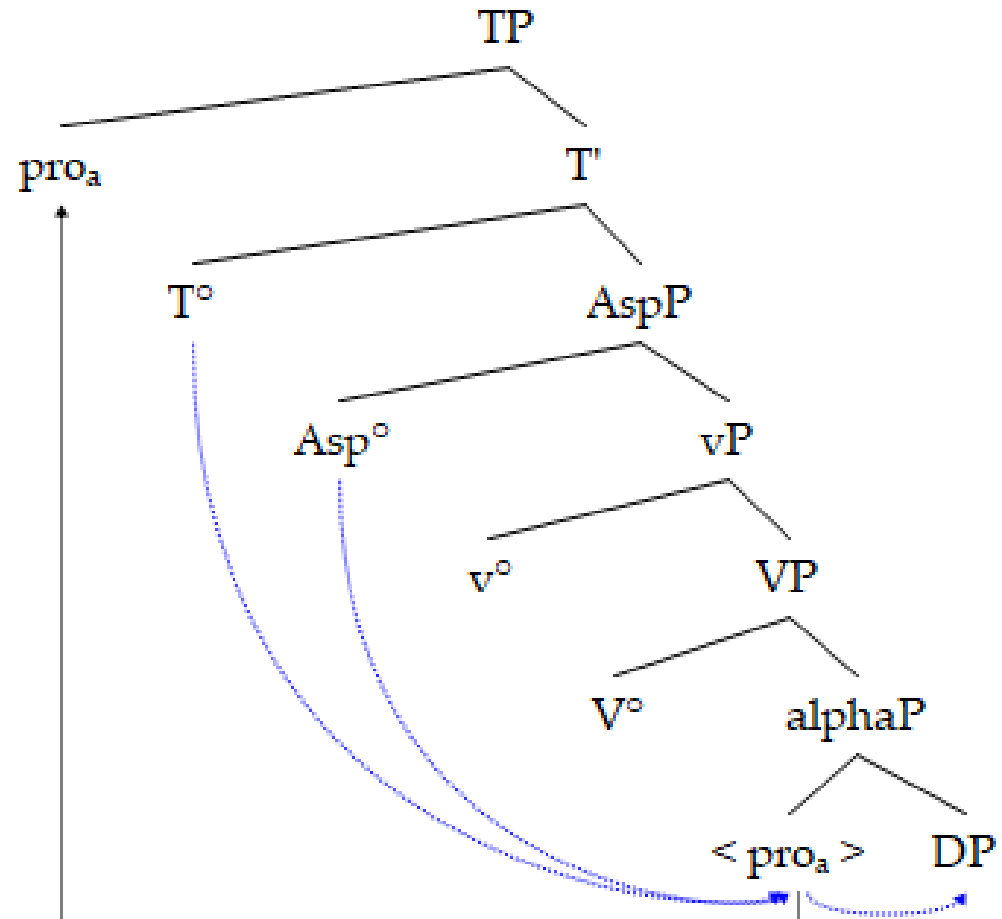
Step Σ_{+2} :

T merges and probes for φ -features.

pro_{α} is closest, active, c-commanded element.

Feature checking: φ and nominative.

Nominative value is shared with associate DP.



4.2.1 Categorical sentences: selection of pro_{α}

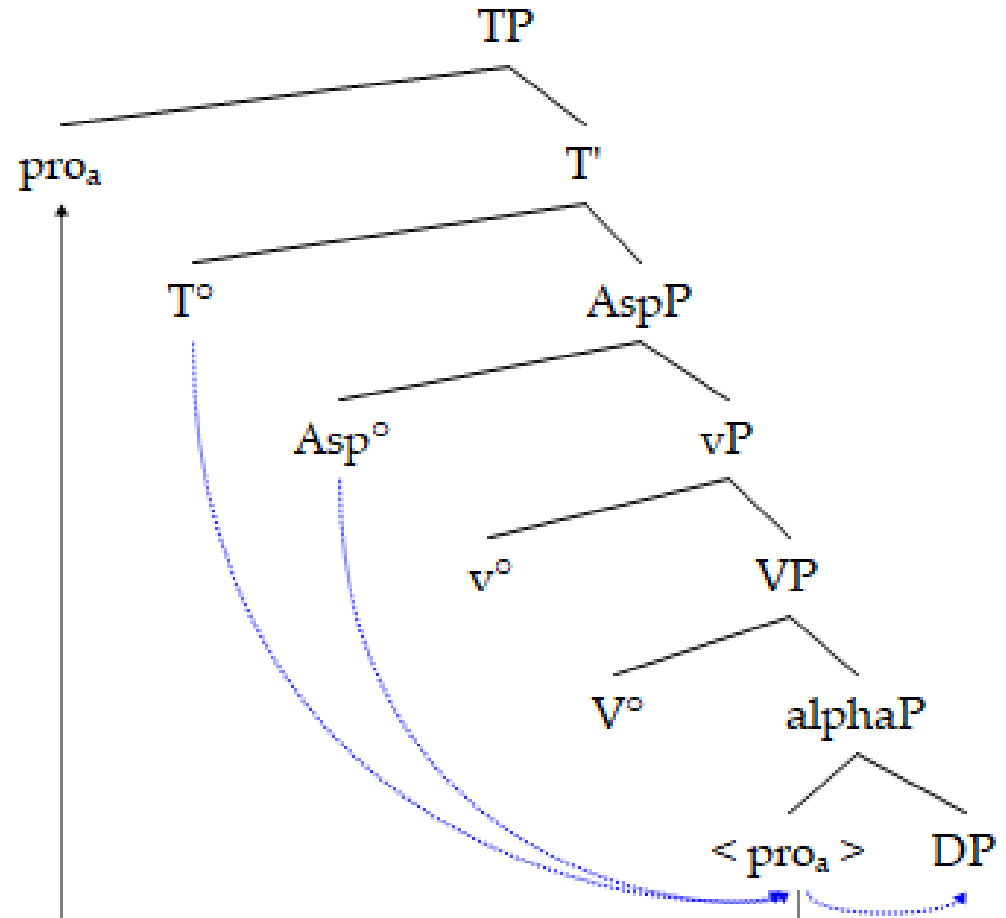
The derivation

(16) pro [$u\phi$: _], [Case: _], [u Given]; merged within αP (Abe 2009, Sato 2008)

Step Σ_{+3} :

EPP raises closest DP: pro_{α} .

DP remains in situ.



4.2.3 Semantically triggered DP movement à la Diesing (1992)?

2) Lack of indirect empirical evidence:

- There is no conceivable difference regarding the extraction fromthetic and categorical DPs, as predicted by Bianchi & Chesi (2014), see (20).

(20) a. **Di chi** xe che el ga dito che xe **nato** **la fia?**
From who is that SCL has said that is born.M.SG the girl

thetic

b. **Di chi** xe che el ga dito che xe **nata** **la fia?**
From who is that SCL has said that is born.F.SG the girl
„Whose daughter did he/she say was born?“

categorical

3) Theoretical considerations:

- i. Why can't T probe the lower DP?
→ controversial phasehood of unaccusative v
- ii. Crosslinguistic same interpretation ofthetic sentences but different agreement patterns
→ undesirable parametrization of unaccusative phase
- iii. If T cannot probethetic DP, no nominative can be assigned to postverbal DP.
→ unvalued case feature leads to derivational crash

4.2.3 Cross-linguistic differences

Cross-linguistic differences depend on ...

- i. the availability of a *pro* as assumed for Null Subject Languages,
- ii. the featural make-up of expletives involved in the derivation and
- iii. the ability of verbs to assign partitive case.
 - Diagnostics for partitive case: strong Definiteness Effect (as in English and French)

Featural make-up of the expletives:

Standard Italian: expletive *pro* [+D, u ϕ : __ , Case: __]

French: expletive *il* [+D, u ϕ : 3.SG.M, ~~case~~] and partitive case

English: expletive *there* [+D, u ϕ : __ , ~~case~~] and partitive case

→ **Venetian and Gazzolo: hybrid system**, having a null expletive (French type) and a null pronominal (Standard Italian type) but without the possibility to assign partitive case.

5. Summary

I have shown that the agreement alternation in Venetian and Gazzolo is a **reflex of the thematic/categorical distinction**, i.e. depending on the pragmatic nature of the DP.

I have proposed an analysis within the Minimalist framework that attributes the agreement alternation to **two different kinds of null elements**, which differ in their **featural make-up** as well as in their **merge position**.

Furthermore, I have shown that - at least for the time being - there is **no reason to assume different positions for the DP** in thematic and categorical sentences in Gazzolo and Venetian.

Cross-linguistically, different agreement patterns with postverbal subjects are due to

- i. the availability of a *pro* as assumed for Null Subject Languages,
- ii. the featural make-up of the language-specific expletive and
- iii. the availability of partitive case as VP-internal licenser.

5.1 Open questions

1) What is the exact syntactic nature of α P?

- Big-DP? And if so, which kind of big-DP: doubling phrase in Spec,DP or complement to D (Uriagereka 1995, Belletti 1999, Cechetto)
- Small Clause (Sato 2008, Hale & Keyser 2000)
- or ... ?

2) Are there restrictions of the agreement alternation in predicate type:

- unaccusative/unergative cut?
- stage-level vs. individual-level predicates (Bianchi & Chesi 2014)?

3) Is discourse-givenness the decisive pragmatic correlate of full agreement or can we identify a more fine-grained pragmatic property of the DP?

Thank you!



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