

# POSTVERBAL SUBJECT AGREEMENT IN SVO LANGUAGES

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## 1. Introduction

There is an interesting asymmetry in agreement relations in a number of languages and to a small extent in Spanish too. The asymmetry in point has been the following: whereas preverbal subjects fully agree with the verb, postverbal subjects exhibit a default subject-verb agreement relation. This is exemplified in (1) below. Furthermore, from a typological point of view there is another seemingly agreement distinction, that is, whereas agreement relations are sensitive to the Subject-verb order in some languages, languages like Mainstream Italian and Spanish seem to be immune to this configuration, as shown by the contrast between the examples in (1) from Fiorentino and those in (2) from Spanish:

- (1) a. *La Maria la è venuta*  
The Mary CL3.SG.F Aux-3SG arrived-F  
b. *Gl'è venuto la Maria*  
CL3.Aux.3Sg arrived the Mary  
c. *\*L'è venuta la Maria*  
CL3.SG.F-Aux.3SG arrived-F the Mary  
'Mary has arrived' (from Brandi & Cordin 1989)
- (2) a. *Los chicos han vuelto*  
The boys have.3PL come back  
'The boys have come back'  
b. *Han/\*ha vuelto los chicos*  
Have.3PL/3SG come back the boys

This paper deals with the complex distributional facts of agreement relations in Spanish and other Romance languages. Specifically, we investigate why default agreement is forced upon the verb in some cases and is not obligatory in some others. We entertain a number of hypotheses put forward in the agreement literature, such as Mensching & Remberger (2003), Rigau (2001) and Sigurdsson (2004), and discuss their analyses with respect to the data they are able to account for or the data they fail to explain. Also, the alleged typological division between languages that trigger default agreement with postverbal subjects and those that do not becomes an overgeneralization since there are always cases in which the paradigm breaks down

and exceptions to the type do occur. From here we conclude that default agreement with postverbal subjects is a syntactic multifactored phenomenon. Moreover, along the lines of Chomsky (2001a, b), we show how full agreement with certain postverbal subjects fares better with the more general operations of Merge, Agree, and Value advocated in this framework than with the traditional standard Spec-Head agreement relation or even with the covert feature movement operation for weak features put forward in Chomsky (1993). This paper contains two main bodies of content. The first part consists of a discussion of the hypotheses already available in the literature. The second part provides an analysis of standard Spanish and offers a solution for some puzzling data in Spanish.

## 2. Evidence in favour of the Spec-Head relation as an instantiation of agreement

Agreement has been characterized in the generative literature as a Spec-Head relation (cf. Chomsky 1991 and much related work). This has been explained under the standard analysis as follows: the preverbal subject occupies the Specifier position of a functional head to which the verb moves at some point of the derivation and agreement is established. Raising to a Spec position correlates with richer inflectional markers on the head than most of alternative relations that involve a H(...)Spec relation. This is crosslinguistically supported by data from Arabic, Bantu languages and a good number of Romance dialects among many others, in which postverbal subjects require a weak agreement relation, as (1) above from Fiorentino illustrates. In (1a) the subject *María* agrees in person, number and gender features with the verb. This type of full agreement relation is impossible when the subject is postverbal as in (1c), and only a 3rd person default agreement is allowed, as shown in (1b).

It is often the case that default agreement triggers the occurrence of an overt expletive in preverbal position in languages like French, as illustrated in (3):

- (3) *Il est arrivé des garçons*  
 EXPL Aux arrived some boys  
 'Some boys have arrived'

In fact, the occurrence of the expletive *il* supports the Spec-head hypothesis since the verb would be forced to agree with the 3rd person singular expletive occupying the specifier position, and default agreement morphology would automatically follow from this relation.

The same analysis could be applied to the Fiorentino example in (1b) if it were not for the fact that Brandin and Cordin (1989) states that Fiorentino, as opposed to French, is a null subject language and the clitic *gli* is actually licensing an expletive *pro*. The facts from Trentino also constitute evidence for the positing of an expletive *pro* (cf. Chomsky 1982) which triggers default agreement on the verb, as in (4):

- (4) a. *PRO E' venú qualche putela*  
 Aux.3SG come some girls  
 'Some girls have come'

- b. PRO \*L'è      *vegnuda*      *qualche putela*  
 Aux.3PL come.3Fem. some girls  
 'Some girls have come'

The 3rd person plural verbal agreement morphology for the auxiliary *l'è* is disallowed with plural postverbal subjects in Trentino, which under the framework discussed in this section is explained as a mismatch between the 3rd person singular expletive *pro* in Spec position and plural agreement features on the auxiliary head.

Conceptual developments put forward in Chomsky (2000, 2001a, b), such as the irrelevance of the Spec-head relation or the non-existence of covert feature movement, give way to a revision of the phenomenon of Spec-head agreement as internal Merge and Agree plus pied-piping. The Spec-head hypothesis also suggests that there should be no agreement without movement to a Spec position. In the next section, the power of the Spec-head hypothesis will be tested by confronting cases of full agreement with postverbal subjects.

### 3. A plausible Spec-Head account of agreement with postverbal subjects

One phenomenon that, to the best of our knowledge, was never given a final satisfactory account was that of full agreement in Head-Spec orders, that is, when the agreeing XP follows the agreeing X. In contrast to the paradigm in (1), a good number of languages such as Mainstream Italian, most dialects of Spanish, and Basque to mention some, obligatorily exhibit full-fledged subject-verb agreement independently of the order of these two elements. This is illustrated in (5):

- (5) *Lo*            *\*hal/han<sub>i</sub>*            *visto los chicos<sub>i</sub>*  
 CL3.ACC HAVE<sub>3SG/3PL</sub> seen the guys.3PL  
 'The guys have seen it'

Several attempts have been made in the literature to analyze predicate-subject orders (see Goodall 2001, Contreras 1991, Olarrea 1995). One possible syntactic derivation is that both the subject and the verb have raised to a functional category to meet the Spec-head relation, and subsequently the verb amalgam is fronted to yield the word order in (5). The motivation for the final movement of the verb is usually related to informational requirements, that is, depending on the topic and focus status of the constituents. The verb complex in (5), for instance, is the topic of the sentence, whereas the subject indirectly becomes the focus by being the most embedded element (cf. Cinque 1993).

This reverse predicate-subject word order with full agreement is also found in Spanish small clauses, as exemplified in (6):

- (6) *He visto cansados a los chicos*  
 Have seen tired to the children  
 'I have seen the children tired'

The word order in (6) is accounted for in Franco (2000) as the result of inner topicalization of the secondary predicate. Again, the head of the secondary predicate concords in phi features with the subject of the small clause, which is in final position. Thus, movement to an intermediate functional position (AGRadj Phrase) to obtain a Spec/head relation for feature checking was assumed in his work.

More complex operations such as remnant movement are required for longer sentences with transitive predicates, as in (7):

- (7) *Ayer visitaron a los heridos los médicos*  
 Yesterday visit.PL to the injured the doctors  
 ‘Yesterday the doctors visited the injured’

One could assume that in (7), after the verb *visitaron* ‘to visit’ and the subject *los médicos* ‘the doctors’ have met the spec-head relation for feature checking in a functional projection outside the VP (most likely TP), the subject moves up to the specifier of a higher XP for interpretational purposes, for instance, to get focused. Subsequently, all the material below the subject is fronted, as an instance of remnant movement, to a position in the left periphery of the sentence (cf. Rizzi 1997). The position targeted by remnant movement in the left periphery is usually the Spec of a Topic phrase. In this way, the spec-head analysis in combination with a subsequent application of different modes of predicate fronting became the classic straight-forward hypothesis, at least to account for the occurrences of full agreement with postverbal subjects illustrated in (6) and (7) above.

However, even though the Spec-head relation does play a role in agreement, it is not sufficient to account for certain cases of full agreement with existential postverbal subjects which will be discussed in the next section.

#### 4. A problem for a Spec-Head configuration account of post-verbal subjects

The distributional facts of postverbal subjects in Spanish provide evidence that show that the subject of a transitive construction is generated in a position outside the VP. It is a well-known fact that Spanish bare nouns must be postverbal (cf. Contreras 1986). This can be reinterpreted as a constraint by which Spanish bare nouns must occur VP internal due to its existential nature (cf. Diesing 1992). On the contrary, definite nouns (DPs) have to be occupy positions outside the VP for them to obtain the presuppositional reading. Interestingly enough, postverbal subjects of transitive constructions cannot be bare nouns, as shown in the paradigm below:

- (8) a. \**Ya compraron los juguetes padres*  
 already bought the toys parents  
 b. *Ya compraron los juguetes los padres*  
 already bought the toys the parents  
 ‘The parents already bought the toys’  
 c. \**Ya compraron padres los juguetes*  
 already bought parents the toys  
 d. *Ya compraron los padres los juguetes.*  
 already bought the parents the toys  
 ‘The parents already bought the toys’

One can assume that in (8a) and (8c) the subject *padres* being a bare noun with an existential interpretation must be within the existential closure of the VP. However, if subjects of transitive verbs are generated in spec of the vp the existential reading enforced by the bare noun is missed in the mapping onto the syntactic structure.

The subject facts in (8a) and (8c) greatly contrast with subjects of unaccusative verbs in (9a) and objects of transitive verbs in (9b):

- (9) a. *Vinieron soldados*  
 Came-3rd.PL soldiers  
 'Soldiers came'  
 b. *Compraron juguetes*  
 Bought-3rd.PL toys  
 'They bought toys'

In view of the asymmetry between (8a) and (8c) on the one hand and (9a) on the other, it is reasonable to claim that the subject of an unaccusative verb is generated in spec of VP.

Actually, the evidence in (9a) stands against the syntactic derivations via remnant movement put forward in section 2 above as a solution to the Verb-subject orders that exhibit full agreement. If we retake once again Diesing's (1992) analysis of existential interpretation by which existential elements do not move out of the VP since the VP node constitutes the existential closure node we would expect, contrary to the facts, that Spanish existential subjects in unaccusative constructions would not be able to enter in a Spec-head relation in a functional projection, and hence, trigger default agreement.

Additional *prima facie* counterexamples to this prediction are found in unaccusative constructions in Mainstream Spanish with postverbal indefinite subjects which still exhibit full agreement, as shown in (10) (cf. Mejías-Bikandi 1995):

- (10) *Llega\*<sub>i</sub> /an<sub>i</sub> unos trenes<sub>i</sub> al anden*  
 Arrive-SC/PL several trains to the platform  
 'Several cars arrive to the platform'

The relevance of (10) is that the only reading available is that in which *unos trenes* only gets the existential interpretation. Along the lines of Mejías-Bikandi's (1995) analysis of postverbal subjects in Spanish, this semantic interpretation can be structurally derived if we assume again that material inside the VP is part of the Nuclear Scope. Thus, in the logical representation, the variable of the indefinite NP in (7) is bound by an abstract existential quantifier. For our purposes, this means that the NP never left the VP in the syntactic derivation and consequently, the hypothetical Spec-head relation requirement at some point of the derivation for full agreement between the verb and the subject was never fulfilled in (10). Still, full agreement is obtained.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In the subject-verb alternative order Mejías-Bikandi (1995) claims that both the existential and generic (or even presuppositional) readings are available, as exemplified in (i):

- (i) *Unos trenes llegan al anden (y otros se quedan)*  
 several cars arrive (and others stay)  
 'Several cars arrive (and other stay)'

For the generic reading in (i) the subject is scoped out of the VP to Spec of TP and the generic reading becomes available. Also the verb moves to T to check its features against the subject in a Spec-Head configuration. The existential reading in (i) is obtained under the same derivation plus the LF chain reconstruction of the NP to its trace inside the VP. In fact, Mejías-Bikandi shows that reconstruction is

To top it off, the positing of a silent expletive in the Spec position of a functional category does not account for (10) either since singular agreement is not obtained at all. To conclude this discussion, agreement between the subject and the verb takes place in (9) and (10) independently of the Spec-Head relation.<sup>2</sup>

In sum, the situation at this point is the following: Spec-head relations are not enough to account for the whole scenario of agreement facts, still, the Spec-head relation account fares best when it comes to explaining a large set of data represented in (1), (2), and (8). In the next sections we are going to discuss alternative proposals from the literature and attempt to provide an analysis that reconciles all these accounts and thus explain both, the well-behaved agreement with preverbal subjects as well as the seemingly problematic facts of verb agreement with certain postverbal subjects, with an emphasis on the Spanish data.

### 5. Quirky subjects, EPP checking, and default agreement

There is a whole wealth of data from a large number of diverse languages in which default agreement with postverbal Nominatives occurs when there is a Dative element (or a locative sometimes) in preverbal position or close to the verb. Ribargorçan Catalan, Aranese Occitan (cf. Rigau 2001) and Old Spanish (cf. Mensching & Remberger 2003) to mention some provide good illustrations of this phenomenon:

- (11) *Mos caleva istes cadires*  
 to-us.Dat was necessary these chairs      Ribargorçan Catalan  
 ‘We need these chairs’      (from Rigau 2001)

blocked and therefore, only the generic reading is obtained when there is a negative adverb intervening, as in (ii) below (example 4 in Mejías-Bikandi 1995):

- (ii) *Un hombre apenas lava platos*  
 A man(generic/\*existential) hardly (ever) washes dishes

<sup>2</sup> A fashionable solution to the word order and the licensing of agreement features in non Spec-Head configuration in the generative literature of the 90s was proposed along the lines of Chomsky’s (1993, 1995) claim on the existence of covert feature movement. Under this view, the checking of agreement features can be done via covert movement of the features which adjoin to the checking head at the LF level (see also Ura 1996). The asymmetry between overt and covert movement was in principle geared on the strength of features. That is, overt movement was triggered by strong features of the attracting head since strong features had to be eliminated at Spell Out, that is, before the derivation went to PF, otherwise the derivation would crash. Weak features on the contrary could be eliminated at LF after Spell Out, therefore, no overt movement takes place and the principle of Procrastinate posited in Chomsky (1993), that is, do not move anything until it is necessary, is observed. The strong versus weak distinction has been reanalyzed later on as non-interpretible versus interpretable features in Chomsky (1995). Agreement features on the head, structural Case, and the EPP feature on Tense are standard non-interpretible features.

Going back to our empirical problem in (10), agreement would have been obtained, in the light of this approach, by covert feature movement of the phi features of the subject to the relevant functional head, that is, T or AGRs. The lexical material of the subject, on the other hand, stays in situ within the VP and the existential interpretation becomes available. Therefore, we must presume that verb-subject agreement features in (7) and (10) are weak or uninterpretable for that matter. This solution works beautifully for the paradigm from Fiorentino in (1). However, since agreement is rich in (10), it is hard to understand how the agreement features in (10) are any “weaker” than those in (2a). Given the data in (2a) and (10) it seems that the categorization strong versus weak features might just be a value assigned as an ad hoc diacritic to indicate movement. Most importantly, there is good evidence from natural languages that rich inflectional morphology and strong features as triggers of movement do not always walk hand in hand.

- (12) *Mos cau aguestes cagires*  
 to-us is necessary these chairs  
 ‘We need these chairs’  
 Arenese Occitan  
 (from Rigau 2001)
- (13) *Les uino muitos males*  
 to-them.Dat came many evils  
 ‘Many evils came upon them’  
 Old Spanish  
 (from Mensching & Remember  
 2003)

None of the examples from (11) to (13) contain a subject expletive or a subject clitic in contrast to the French example in (3) or the examples from Fiorentino and Trentino in (1) and (4). However, it seems that dative clitic has the same effect as the expletive/subject clitic on triggering default agreement on the verb. The interference of the dative for agreement is somehow reminiscent of Dative intervention Effects in Boeckx (2000), but the two phenomena are far apart since Dative intervention in Icelandic affects mostly to certain person combinations of Dative and Nominative pronouns. Hence, it has been analyzed in the literature as a Person Case Constraint related type of phenomena, as in Sigurdsson (2004)

In Franco and Huidobro (2003) we suggest that the dative clitic by being higher than the Nominative DP checks the EPP feature of T. At the same time, this checking operation sends all the agreement features to Spell Out before any further agreement checking with the Nominative DP could take place. However, Spanish and Italian stand out as a strong exception to this hypothesis since full agreement obtains in inversion predicates.

In other words, Agree probes into a VP internal argument in these two languages, as shown in (14):

- (14) a. *A mi me gustan las lentejas*  
 To me cl.dat like the lentils  
 ‘I like lentils’  
 b. *Pro Me encantan las lentejas*  
 to me cl.dat love the lentils  
 ‘I love lentils’

Even if the dative argument in (14) checks the EPP feature, the VP internal nominative object is still able to fully agree with the verb. We will address this issue in subsequent sections in our analysis.

## 6. The Number Feature Hypothesis

Mensching and Remberger (2003), among others, have realized that actually it is the number feature what is lost when the default agreement surfaces: “the essence of the construction is the lack of agreement in Number” (Mensching and Remberger (2003: 12). This observation indeed has been the key to a number of proposals on default agreement based on the nature of the number feature. Thus, Mensching and Remberger (2003) advocate the existence of defective T without the feature number, which can be parametrized across languages. Sigurdsson (2004) claims two different functional phrases for Person feature and Number feature projected in this order,

which would allow him to explain the lack of agreement with nominative objects when there is a quirky dative subject occupying Spec of Number Phrase. Furthermore, Rigau (2001) states that in Ribagorçan Catalan default agreement is obtained because the number feature in T is locative marked in the lexicon and is able to agree with the oblique clitic.

However, most Romance languages that exhibit the preverbal versus postverbal asymmetry with respect to agreement have one property in common, that is, default agreement cannot occur with personal pronouns. This was early mentioned in Brandi and Cordin (1989) with respect to the distribution of default agreement in Fiorentino and Trentino, as in (15) below. This contrast between nominal and pronominal postverbal subjects is replicated by agreement relations in Ribagorçan Catalan (cf. Rigau 2001) or lower registers of colloquial Spanish among many languages.<sup>3</sup>

- (15) a. *tu*      *vieni te*  
           CL2nd come you-ACC  
           ‘You come’  
       b. *e*      *vien*      *loro*  
           CL3rd come.PL they  
           ‘They come’

The problem that the contrast in (15) poses for the Number Feature Hypothesis is that if T is specified somehow with respect to the feature number, thus, allowing default agreement, still, how is it possible that the presence of a pronominal argument overrides this feature number specification on T and turns this feature into a variable valued by this pronominal argument? Moreover, it is not always the case that default agreement only neutralizes number agreement. There are some languages for instance Fiorentino itself which also neutralizes the feature gender. We are not claiming here that the previous analyses presented so far are not able to handle these cases, however, their stipulation will be double when confronting these cases in which gender agreement is also lost. Finally, the optionality of full agreement with postverbal nominal subjects in Colloquial Portuguese and Colloquial Spanish would remain a mystery under the Number Feature Hypothesis.

## 7. The analysis

Chomsky (2001a, b) dispenses with Spec-Head relations, and alternatively attempts to capture all agreement relations under a more general relation, which he calls Agree. Agree is an agreement relation between two elements, the Probe and the Goal, under which the process of feature checking takes place. Agree can also be a

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<sup>3</sup> The asymmetries in the richness of agreement between pronouns and lexical NPs have been attested at large in the Romance linguistics literature (cf. Franco 1993, Suñer 1999). The phenomenon has to do with the nature of pronouns as lexicalized phi-features and not with the fact that NPs are third person, otherwise (15b) would be ungrammatical. One can hypothesize that the subject pronouns in (i) have a whole uninterpretable set of phi features and work as a probe that have to match and agree with a goal T. Again, if we assume that all personal pronouns are non existential referential elements and hence, have to be scoped out of the VP, the full agreement relation is borne out from our previous analysis based on the internal Merge (Spec-Head) of referential postverbal subjects.



long distance agreement relation under c-command. The evidence from rich morphology (agreement) in favour of a Spec-head relation is reanalyzed by Chomsky (2001b) in a new light. That is, morphological richness is a reflex of the satisfaction of the EPP feature by internal Merge. Furthermore, Chomsky (2001b: 11) states that “if there is no SPEC-head relation, then the EPP-feature Occ cannot be satisfied by Merge alone. It follows that internal Merge requires Agree. Therefore, Move = Agree + Pied + piping + Merge” (p. 11)”.

Assuming the mechanisms outlined above, our next goal is to reanalyze the subject-verb agreement paradigms exemplified so far. The strength of agreement with preverbal subjects can be understood as a closer relation since the uninterpretable EPP feature of T (C-T unit in Chomsky’s terms) has to be checked by internal Merge and, relevantly, internal Merge and Agree are considered simultaneous operations (Chomsky 2001b: 13). The probe T will make available a position for Merge (i.e. SPEC) with the nominative subject goal. In other words, the Spec-head configuration is a by product of internal Merge.

As regards agreement with VP internal postverbal subjects neither the paradigms nor the contexts are uniform, as we have seen in the examples above. Let us see first how a postverbal existential subject can fully agree with the verb in Spanish, as in (16):

- (16) *No \*ha/ha<sub>i</sub> venido chicos<sub>i</sub> este mes*  
 No **have3sg/3pl** come boys.3Pl this month  
 ‘There have not arrived boys this month’

In (16) under the operation Agree the phi features of the Probe T search for the Goal that can Match those features and value them for subsequent deletion. In this case, *chicos* constitutes a complete goal which is paired with the probe T by Agree under c-command minimizing Search. It is also understood that Case and agreement features are checked under the same operation and similar conditions. The obvious question that comes next is to see what happens to the EPP feature of T, or to put it differently, what are the reasons why the nominative subject remains in situ in (16). The answer is the same for both issues. Along the lines of Chomsky (2001b: 10), Internal Merge is motivated by scopal and discourse related properties and by the same token, a head H has OCC (EPP) “only if that yields new scopal or discourse related properties” (Chomsky 2001: 10). Usually, preverbal subjects are topics, thus, we can assume that there was not any Topic feature in the numeration in (16) to be satisfied. Alternatively, one could propose that the strength of the inflection on the verb is enough to check the EPP on a head to head relation.

The set of data in (1b) and (3) however exemplifies instances of obligatory default agreement with postverbal subjects in Fiorentino and French, which drastically contrasts with the Spanish sentences. The Fiorentino data does not pose much of a problem if we assume that there is a null expletive in subject position that bears default agreement. In fact, in French, a Romance related language, this hypothetical expletive surfaces overtly, as in (3) repeated here as (17) for convenience:

- (17) *Il est arrivé des garçons*  
 EXPL Aux arrive some boys  
 ‘Some boys have arrived’

In (17), the verb does not agree with the plural NP in sentence final position, but with the third person singular expletive *il*. In this regard, Fiorentino is not very different from French. The rich agreement paradigm in this Italian dialect allows the expletive to be a null *pro* according to Brandi and Cordin or the expletive surfaces as a default clitic, i.e., *gli* according to Mensching and Remberger (2003). The derivation would be as follows: (i) the expletive in accordance to Chomsky (2001a: 12) has the uninterpretable feature [person]. Under local Match, the expletive agrees with T and deletes the EPP feature of T and its own [person] feature. Furthermore, it might well be the case that when T and the expletive paired, all the agreement features went directly to Spell Out rendering those features invisible for the next probe-goal relation between the T and the postverbal NP goal to satisfy the checking of Case features by a nominative element. Now considering that the same constructions as in the Fiorentino construction in (1b) and the French construction in (17) would exhibit plural agreement in Spanish, we conclude that the occurrence of an overt or covert expletive account is not a possibility in Spanish. Actually, this property of Spanish rather than being ad hoc stipulation is borne out from the pro-drop parameter.

The second context in which default agreement takes place is that of (11) to (13), in which a dative clitic precedes the verb and the subject follows the verb. Our account of default agreement for these facts ultimately goes along the lines of that of default agreement with expletives in Spec of TP. That is, the Dative Argument projects higher than the Nominative one and this Dative DP undergoes a hybrid clitic movement, first as an XP move to Spec of TP and then cliticization onto the verbal amalgam in T. Similarly, when the dative clitic merges with TP, the EPP feature of T is checked and sent along with the agreement features of T to Spell-Out.

How does the syntax of Spanish (see also Central Catalan, Standard Italian) manage to obtain full agreement with the postverbal nominative argument in (14)? We claim that the answer to this puzzle lies in the status of clitics across languages. If we adopt Franco (1993) proposal for Spanish object clitics in which clitics are functional heads that project an agreement phrase AGRoP below TP, the conclusion is that the Spanish dative clitic will never be part of an internal merging operation of movement to Spec of TP in which all agreement features of T are discharged. On the other hand, the Spanish verb picks up the agreement dative clitic head on its way to T forming a complex inflected verbal amalgam under T. Since the dative clitic is an agreement head probe there has to be a goal to match its features with. This goal can be instantiated by internal merging in the form of a dative DP or in the form of a *pro* in Spec of TP. In either case the clitic *me* checks both, its own agreement features as well as the EPP of T by being in a head to head relation with T. At this point, the agreement features of the Goal in Spec of TP are checked off. Thus, the agreement features of T remain initially unchecked until the operation Agree subsequently comes into play under c-command and probes for the Phi-features of the postverbal nominative argument.

## 8. Two apparent problems posed by Spanish.

In the previous section, we have claimed that there are no covert expletives available in constructions with postverbal subjects in Spanish and consequently there is

no default agreement. However, There are two structures in Spanish and most languages in which the occurrence of an expletive is standardly assumed, that is, existential and weather verb constructions:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| (18) <i>Hay cinco hombres</i><br>there are five men<br>'There are five men' | (19) <i>Llueve</i><br>rain<br>'It rains' |
|---|--|

We would like to show that both constructions are quite different and at the same time they are similar under the hypothesis that none of them involve an expletive subject. In the existential construction in (18) there is no expletive *pro*, but an etymologically locative clitic *y* (cf. Old Spanish *hi/hy*, the 'h' is not pronounced), which merges with T and later on is cliticized onto the third person of the verb *haber*, i.e., *ha*. In the derivation, the clitic, before it attached to the verbal head entering in a head to head relation, would have merged with T in which the EPP would be satisfied and the phi features neutralized. It would be hard to show that there is any locative clitic in present day Spanish, however, locative clitics and locative pronouns are responsible for lack of agreement in other Romance languages and the locative account outlined above explains reasonably well what might have happened in the history of Spanish, even though nowadays *hay* could be considered a relic-form.

In any event, our prediction is that some cases of full agreement should surface in the prototypical expletive constructions. Thus, if there is no element that internally merges with T the operation Agree will apply and the agreement features of T will be matched with a c-commanded Goal, which is indeed the case that spoken Spanish exhibits with other tenses in the existential construction:

- (20) *Han habido varios fallos*  
have.pl had some mistakes  
'There have been some mistakes'
- (21) *Habrían unas trescientas personas*  
would have about three hundred people  
'There could be about three hundred people'
- (22) \**Hayan hombres de todos sitios*  
there were men from every where

For the construction with weather verbs such as that in (19) with *llueve*, the verbal inflection is strong enough either to check the EPP or to license a *pro* with the features 3rd person singular for the same purpose. Again, full agreement occurs in the spoken language, as shown in (23):

- (23) *Llovieron chuzos de punta*  
rain.pl pieces of ice pointing down  
'It rained cats and dogs'

Finally, there is another construction in Spanish that occasionally exhibits default agreement. The construction in question is a mixture of those we have seen above, that is, it is an inversion predicate and the verbs are of an existential nature, also called deontic existentials in Rigau (2001). This is illustrated in (24):

- (24) *Me falta(n) las cartas de recomendación.*  
 CL.1st-DAT. lack-**sg.** the letters of recommendation  
 ‘I’m missing the recommendation letters’  
 ‘I still have to do the letters of recommendation’

In this paper we contend that the sentence in (24) is not a counterexample to full agreement in inversion predicates in Spanish (cf. example 14). One property that sets example (24) apart from those sentences with default agreement from other Romance languages discussed above is that agreement is optional.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the sentence has an ambiguous interpretation as captured by the English glosses. The first interpretation is uniquely existential whereas the second interpretation is deontic existential. Under the second interpretation, (24) can be paraphrased as:

- (25) *Me falta hacer las cartas de recomendación*  
 To me.cl.dat lack do the letters of recommendation  
 ‘I still have to do the letters of recommendation’

Under the second reading (deontic), example (24) is derived from (25) after deletion of an infinitival verb has applied. Now the picture is more clear. Full agreement occurs when the verb agrees with the DP Nominative. On the contrary, 3rd person singular agreement occurs when the verb agrees with a non finite clause.

Therefore, there is no lack of agreement or optionality of agreement for that matter in Spanish inversion predicates. Default agreement is only an illusion as far as the construction in (24) is concerned. Each different occurrence of agreement correlates with one specific structure and one particular meaning. As a piece of evidence only those inversion predicates that can take nonfinite clauses can show lack of agreement with the Nominative DP:

- (26) a. \**Me sobra (hacer) los papeles*  
 me.cl.dat have enough (do) the papers  
 b. *Me toca (hacer) los peores papeles*  
 me.cl.dat touch (do) the worst roles  
 ‘It is (always) my turn to play the worst roles’

Moreover, if we align full agreement with the first existential deontic interpretation and 3rd person agreement with the second deontic only interpretation we could safely state that agreement works as a disambiguator in this type of inversion predicates shown in (24). Further evidence that full agreement is related to core existential interpretations can be seen in (27):

- (27) *Me falta\*/an llaves*  
 To me.cl.dat miss.sg/pl keys  
 ‘I’m missing the keys’

<sup>4</sup> Notice that the pronominal vs nominal contrast in terms of agreement also holds in Spanish inversion predicates, as shown by the contrast between (24) above and (i) below:

- (i) a. *Me faltan/\*a<sub>i</sub> ellos<sub>i</sub>*                      b. *Me faltas/\*a<sub>i</sub> tu<sub>i</sub>*  
 CL.1st-DAT lack-3 pl/sg they                      CL.1st-DAT lack-2sg/3sg you  
 ‘I’m missing them’                                      ‘I’m missing you’

The sentence in (27), given that bare nouns can only have existential readings in Spanish due to its position within the VP (cf. section 3), can only mean that ‘some keys are missing or lost’, and crucially, full agreement is required, thus, confirming our hypothesis, under which the existential interpretation in Spanish inversion predicates correlates with full agreement.<sup>5</sup>

## 9. Conclusion

The strength of agreement reflects the history of the syntactic derivation as well as the specific position of elements. Two constructions of the type V NP may have an identical word order at first sight, however, the positions those elements occupy and the derivation in the syntax could have been completely different in each utterance. In most cases, agreement is geared on the operation of internal merging provided there is no interference by an intervening element. In the remaining cases, it is the operation Agree under c-command that grants the matching of uninterpretable features that were left unchecked. Incidentally, default agreement with postverbal subjects seems to be a phenomenon typical of SVO languages. In contrast, languages with a canonical VSO order mostly hold full agreement relations between the verb and the subject that follows.

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<sup>5</sup> Still, the facts in (27) raise the question of why the deontic interpretation is not obtained. To put it differently, one wonders why (27) cannot be derived from (i) below under deletion of the non-finite verb:

- (i) *?Me falta hacer llaves*  
       to me.clo.dat do keys

One possibility that comes to mind is that the bare noun *llaves* incorporates onto the verb *hacer*. Once the incorporation of *llaves* has taken place it would be impossible to delete of one part of the V + N unit.

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