

Is past participle agreement in French also a normative artefact?

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- “Accordo del PP in francese
Sia *b* una proposizione, *a* un nominale di *b* e *p* un participio passato di una forma verbale perifrastica di *b*. *p* si accorda in genere e numero con *a* se e solo se:
 - (i) la proposizione è finalmente intransitiva [= internal argument is not in its post-verbal base position].
 - (ii) *a* è legittimato al controllo dell’accordo.
Un nominale è legittimato al controllo dell’accordo sse:
 - a. non è *chômeur* [= *a* is in an argument position]
 - b. è il 2 inizializzato da *p* [= is the internal argument of *p*].“
 (cf. Loporcaro 1998 :53)

- According to Loporcaro 1998, two parameters determine past participle agreement in Romance :
Auxiliary selection (*être* with unaccusatives, passives, reflexive constructions; *avoir* with unergative verbs and active-transitive constructions), and,
In the case of active-transitive constructions, *linear order* between past participle and internal argument. Moreover, when there is agreement with the subject, *être* is chosen in French (cf. Stark/Riedel 2013: 119).

- (1) *Pierre donne la pomme à Jean.*
Pierre gives the apple to John
- (2a) *La pomme a été donné-e à Jean.*
The apple has been given to John
- (2b) *Pierre a donné la pomme à Jean.*
Pierre has given the apple to John
- (3) *Marie est arrivé-e.*
Marie is arrived-F
- (4a) *Pierre l’a donné-e à Jean.*
Pierre it-has given-F to John
- (4b) *la pomme que Pierre a donné-e à Jean.*
The apple that Pierre has given-F to John

2. Formalization – two different rules ?

- Function‘ of past participle agreement in Romance / French?
Idea (cf. Stark 2013):
,signal‘: the subject of the sentence is a theme (patient), not a higher thematic role (e.g. agent) (= there is no DP externally merged in SpecvP) - idea of

‘detransitivization’ on a semantic level (cf. Kayne 1989: internal argument in Spec Agr_oP = ‘object conjugation’; Loporcaro’s 1998 first condition).

- Problem: that holds only for past participle agreement with *être*. Subjects in past participle agreement constructions with *avoir* are agents, and still, we have agreement (not with the subject, but with the *preceding, never the following*, internal argument).
- Question: Why should agreement be based on linear (‘surface’) order in one case (*avoir*) with certain types of internal arguments (interrogative and relative pronouns, clitics), and not the other (*être*), when the trigger for agreement is the same (= the internal argument)?
- One solution:
Past participle agreement is always triggered by the internal argument moving through SpecvP (originally SpecAgr_oP) at one point in the derivation, i.e. by a Spec-Head configuration (Kayne 1989), like subject-verb agreement.

DP . . . [Agr_{OP} (DP) Agr_O [v_P V (DP)]] . . .

(Kayne 1989, in the representation of D’Alessandro/Roberts 2008: 478)

- Shortcomings of that proposal:
 - 1) How can this movement be motivated in recent minimalist terms (and in a cross-linguistically convincing perspective; for a general theoretical critique see Georgi 2014: 239-244) ? Note that past participle agreement in French requires movement (= internal Merge) to a *certain* position (SpecvP or SpecAgr_oP; cf. Georgi (2014: 242) and is realized only in the initial sentence of embedded structures with long *wh*-extraction).¹
 - 2) Why *shouldn’t* past participle agreement (with *avoir*) function *exactly* in the same way as subject-verb-agreement (cf. Kayne 1989: 85), e.g. as a case of AGREE (cf. Chomsky 2001)?
 - 3) If modeled as a probing relation between v^o and a DP in its probing domain, past participle agreement with *avoir* needs, as opposed to past participle agreement with *être*, additional or different conditions, i.e. independently motivated preposing of the object DP (because of *wh*-movement or its clitic status, Kayne 1989, Belletti 2001) and the avoidance of AGREE with postverbal lexical DPs remaining *in situ* (cf. D’Alessandro/Roberts 2008:479f.).
- Ad 2) Why *shouldn’t* past participle agreement (with *avoir*) function *exactly* in the same way as subject-verb-agreement (cf. Kayne 1989: 85), e.g. as a case of AGREE (cf. Chomsky 2001)?

- (5) a. *Il a (*ont) été acheté(*es) trois chemises.*
It has (*have) been bought (*-F-PL) three shirts.
- b. *Trois chemises (*a) ont été acheté*(es).*
Three shirts (*has) have been bought*(-F-PL)
- (6) a. *Pierre a acheté(*es) trois chemises.*
Pierre has bought(*-F-PL) three shirts.
- b. *Pierre les a acheté*(es).*
Pierre them-has bought*(-F-PL)

- But see ‘Unaccusative inversion’ or ‘ordinary inversion’ (Fender 2002, Lahousse 2011): subject in SpecvP - AGREE without movement (with *être*):

¹ (i) *La lettre qu’il a dit(*e) que Pierre lui a envoyé*(e)* (Chomsky 1995: 325).

- (7) a. *Une épreuve sera présentée à chaque candidat.*
A test will-be presented-F to each candidate.
b. *A chaque candidat sera présentée une épreuve.*
To each candidate will-be presented-F a test.
- (8) a. *Je voudrais que soient inscrits tous les enfants de Marie.*
I would like that would-be inscribed-PL all the children of Marie.
b. **Je voudrais que soient tous inscrits les enfants de Marie*
*I would like that would-be all inscribed-PL the children of Marie.

3. A solution? D'Alessandro/Roberts 2008 on Standard Italian

- Recall 3):
If modeled as a probing relation between v° and a DP in its probing domain, past participle agreement with *avoir* needs, as opposed to past participle agreement with *être*, additional or different conditions, i.e. independently motivated preposing of the object DP (because of *wh*-movement or its clitic status) and the avoidance of AGREE with postverbal lexical DPs remaining *in situ* (cf. D'Alessandro/Roberts 2008:479f.):

- (10) *Sono arrivate le ragazze.*
Are arrived-F.PL the girls.
(11) *Ho mangiato/*a la mela.*
Have eaten/*-F the apple.
(12) *L'ho mangiata.*
It-have eaten-F.

- Idea:
AGREE between v° and the DP in SpecVP *always* takes place, but for the “Phase Impenetrability Condition” (Chomsky 2001, 2005), it is only spelled out at LF when the head containing the probe and its goal are complements of the same phase head.
‘Transitive v° ’ heads a non-defective phase, i.e. an active phase head, and the probe and its goal are not both contained in the complement of this phase head, hence no overt agreement (cf. example (11)), because of:
“(13) [(11) in the original, ES] Given an Agree relation A between probe P and goal G, morphophonological agreement between P and G is realized iff P and G are contained in the complement of the minimal phase head H.” (D'Alessandro/Roberts 2008: 482)
Additionally: the active participle moves to v_{PRT}° (or rather to v_{AUX} , Cinque 1999: 102). Evidence: Adverb placement in transitive/active sentences.

- (13) a. *Hanno accolto bene il suo spettacolo.*
b. **Hanno bene accolto il suo spettacolo.*
Have (*well) received well the his play.
(14) a. *Questo genere di spettacoli è sempre stato bene accolto.*
b. **Questo genere di spettacoli è sempre stato accolto bene.*
This kind of plays is always been well received (well).
(D'Alessandro/Roberts (2008: 482, quoting Cinque 1999:102)

‘Passive/unaccusative/reflexive’ v° heads a defective phase, i.e. not an active phase head (also no case-assignment), and thus, the probe and its goal are in the complement of the next higher active phase head, i.e. C° , hence overt agreement at LF.

Here (cf. example (10)), the past participles remains in V° (not clear in D’Alessandro/Roberts 2008, 484; would be odd, because the probe is on v_{PRT}° ?) or there might be movement to v_{PRT}° or even v_{AUX}° , but that is not relevant, v_{PRT}° in this case heads a defective phase.

For past participle agreement with clitics (cf. example (12)): the clitic moves to the higher v° head and incorporates there (D’Alessandro/Roberts 2008: 485), v_{PRT}° heads a non-defective phase. At the moment of spell-out, goal and probe are both in the complement of C° , and past participle agreement is overtly realised.

4. More data from French (standard and non-standard)

4.1 Two problems with D’Alessandro/Roberts 2008

1. Past participle agreement with *wh*-elements in transitive clauses?²
2. Different behaviour of the past participle: does not move (to v_{AUX}° ?) in French (cf. Cinque 1999: 46, 146f.; see also D’Alessandro/Roberts 2010 on Eastern Abbruzzese), thus, agreement is always - or never - predicted:

- (13) a. *Hanno accolto bene il suo spettacolo.*
 b. **Hanno bene accolto il suo spettacolo.*
- (14) a. *Questo genere di spettacoli è sempre stato bene accolto.*
 b. **Questo genere di spettacoli è sempre stato accolto bene.*
- (15) a. *Ils ont bien accueilli son spectacle.*
 b. **Ils ont accueilli bien son spectacle.*
 Have well received (*well) the his play.
- (16) a. *Ce genre de spectacle a toujours été bien accueilli.*
 b. **Ce genre de spectacle a toujours été accueilli bien*
 This kind of plays is always been well received (well).

4.2 Corpus data

- a. www.sms4science.ch (500’000 tokens, about 4’600 text messages in non-dialectal French): all past participles, manual analysis. (cf. Stark et al. 2014)
- b. [OFRON](#): more than 28 hours of recordings, 119 speakers from the whole *Suisse romande* (ca 232.536 words). (cf. Avanzi et al. 2012-2014)
- c. *C-ORAL-ROM*: 772 different recordings in four Romance languages (sp., fr., ital., port.), 121:43:07 hours, 1,427 different speakers (cf. Cresti / Moneglia 2005: 1); French part: 305 speakers, recordings mainly from 1999-2002.
 Only ‘hearable’ agreements (= phonetically realized: <écrit-e> [ekrit] vs. <vu-e> [vy]).

4.2.1 Corpus data - overall results

² There should always be overt agreement (not the case in standard Italian, nor always in French):

(i) *Je me demande combien de pommes ils ont produit(*es) cette année.* (cf. Deprez 1998)).

| | Chiffres absolus | Pourcentage |
|------------|------------------|-------------|
| Non marqué | 72 | 10,1 |
| Marqué | 638 | 89,9 |
| Total | 710 | 100,0 |

Table 1 : Past participle agreement in *sms4science.ch*

| | Chiffres absolus | Pourcentage |
|------------|------------------|-------------|
| Non marqué | 14 | 14.43 |
| Marqué | 83 | 85.57 |
| Total | 97 | 100 |

Table 2: Past participle agreement in *OFROM* (only ‘consonantical’ agreement)

| | Chiffres absolus | Pourcentage |
|------------|------------------|-------------|
| Non marqué | 16 | 14.55 |
| Marqué | 94 | 85.45 |
| Total | 110 | 100 |

Table 3: Past participle agreement in *C-ORAL-ROM* (only ‘consonantical’ agreement)

- (17) *Ben oui c'était le gag, nous_{M,PL} sommes allés_{M-PL} [we are gone-PL] y manger avec Ronny et nous n'avons pas pu résister à prendre les ravioli Carly quand nous les_{M,PL} avons vu_{M,SG} [we them-have seen] sur la carte.*

4.2.2 Role of the auxiliary / construction – statistical significance!

| | Non marqué | Marqué | Total |
|----------------------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| <i>Avoir</i> | 25 23.4% | 82 76.6% | 107 100% |
| <i>Etre</i> | 32 7.8% | 377 92.2% | 409 100% |
| <i>être</i> ellipses/épithète | 15 7.7% | 179 92.3% | 194 100% |
| Total | 72 10.1% | 638 89.9% | 710 100% |

Table 4: Past participle agreement in *sms4science.ch* according to the construction

| | Non marqué | Marqué | Total |
|------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| <i>Avoir</i> | 7 46.67% | 8 53.33% | 15 100% |
| <i>Etre</i> | 7 11.29% | 55 88.7% | 62 100% |
| <i>être</i> ellipses / épithète | 0 0% | 20 100% | 20 100% |
| Total | 14 14.58% | 82 85.42% | 97 100% |

Table 5: Past participle agreement in *OFROM* according to the construction

- (18) *en en pédagogie on n'a rien fait maintenant c'est des choses qui qui seraient | _ | **qui seraient plus permis** | _ | euh plus permises* [things which would-be not any longer allowed – F-PL]
- (19) *j'avais des bottes rouges aussi [...] je sais même pas où je les ai mis* [where I them-have put]

| | Non marqué | Marqué | Total |
|------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| <i>Avoir</i> | 9 45.0% | 11 55.0% | 20 100% |
| <i>Etre</i> | 7 10.6% | 59 89.39% | 66 100% |
| <i>être</i> ellipses / épithète | 0 0% | 24 100% | 24 100% |
| Total | 16 14.55% | 94 85.45% | 110 100% |

Table 6: Past participle agreement in *C-ORAL-ROM* according to the construction

4.2.3 Agreement with clitics and relative pronouns (as predicted by Kayne 1989)?

| | Non marqué | Marqué | Total |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| Objet cliticisé | 19 22,1% | 67 77,9% | 86 100,0% |
| Pronom relatif (<i>qu-</i>) | 6 30,0% | 14 70,0% | 20 100,0% |
| Élément interrogatif (<i>qu-</i>) | 0 0,0% | 1 100,0% | 1 100,0% |
| Total | 25 23,4% | 82 76,6% | 107 100,0% |

Table 7: Past participle agreement in *sms4science.ch* according to the controller

| | Non marqué | Marqué | Total |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|------------|
| Objet cliti(ci)sé | 7 53.85% | 6 46.15% | 13 100% |
| Pronom relatif (<i>qu-</i>) | 0 0% | 2 100.0% | 2 100% |
| Élément interrogatif (<i>qu-</i>) | 0 0% | 0 0% | 0 100% |
| Total | 7 45.67% | 8 53.33% | 15 100% |

Table 8: Past participle agreement in *OFROM* according to the controller

| | Non marqué | Marqué | Total |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|------------|
| Objet cliti(ci)sé | 5 45.45% | 6 54.54% | 11 100% |
| Pronom relatif (<i>qu-</i>) | 4 44.44% | 5 55.55% | 9 100% |
| Élément interrogatif (<i>qu-</i>) | 0 0% | 0 0% | 0 100% |
| Total | 9 45.0% | 11 55.0% | 20 100% |

Table 9: Past participle agreement in *C-ORAL-ROM* according to the controller

5. Discussion: past participle agreement with *avoir* as ‘grammatical virus’

- Idea (MacKenzie 2013):
„[...] the rule is in fact a grammatical virus; that is, an epiphenomenon of language pedagogy rather than a genuine component of the French grammar.“ (MacKenzie 2013: 19)
- « La règle d’accord du participe passé conjuguée avec *avoir* est passablement artificielle. La langue parlée la respecte mal » (Grevisse-Goose 1985 : 1369).
- Background: „Virus Theory“ (Sobin 1997, Lasnik/Sobin 2000):
‘pseudo-rules’ of grammar of standardized languages learnt at school or in contact with prestigious speakers with five characteristics (cf. MacKenzie 2013: 22, based on Sobin 1997):
 - lexical specificity
 - directionality (i.e. sensitivity to a particular linear order):

only with *avoir* is linear order a prerequisite of past participle agreement (see examples (6) and (7) from section 2):

- (6) a. *Pierre a acheté(*es) trois chemises.*
b. *Pierre les a acheté*(es).*
- (7) a. *Une épreuve sera présentée à chaque candidat.*
b. *A chaque candidat sera présentée une épreuve.*

iii) under-extension :

- (20) *ces arbres, je les ai vue(*s) abattre*
these trees, I them-have seen cut
- (21) *les airs que j’ai entendu(*s) jouer*
les melodies that I have heard play

- (22) *les orchestres que j'ai entendu*(s) jouer* (cf. MacKenzie 2013:27)
the orchestras that I have heard*(-PL) play

Why shouldn't there be agreement in restructuring contexts with the preceding internal argument of the past participle whenever this is the theme/patient of the infinitive ((20), (21) against (22); see Radford/Vincent 1997, 155-157, for the lack of a syntactic explanation of the similar behaviour of *faire* and *laisser*)?

iv) over-extension:

- (23) *Elle s'est fait(*e) confectionner une nouvelle robe.*

she herself-is made(*-F) make a new dress

v) late internalization :

Pirvulescu / Belzil (2008) for young French Canadian children exhibiting few cases of past participle agreement with *avoir*, Brissaud/Cogis (2008) reporting striking difficulties in marking the - basically graphic - past participle agreement with *avoir* of French high school children.

| | Pourcentage accord marqué | Pourcentage accord non-marqué |
|-----------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Sans indication | 86,50 | 13,50 |
| Pas de maturité | 77,00 | 23,00 |
| Maturité | 91,09 | 8,91 |
| Total | 89,39 | 10,61 |

Table 10: Past participle agreement in *sms4science.ch* according to education of participants

6. Summary and outlook

- Past participle agreement in French is not derivable by one rule / one explanation in minimalist terms (because of agreement also with internal arguments *in situ*, but only in the case of *être*, against Kayne 1989, because of agreement with preceding *wh*-elements, because of different movement properties of past participles in French, against D'Alessandro/Roberts 2008, because of unexpected behavior of the fixed order of movement and agreement in only the initial clause in structures with long *wh*-extraction, Georgi 2014, 239-244).
- Production data show statistically significant differences in error rates of past participle agreement with *avoir* vs. *être*, in both written and spoken spontaneous speech production.
- At least four out of five criteria of the 'virus theory diagnostics' (Slobin 1997, Lasnik/Slobin 2000, MacKenzie 2013) are met for past participle agreement with *avoir*: conclusion: *artificial rule*.
- More psycholinguistic experiments and acquisition data are needed to corroborate this hypothesis.

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