

Agreement with the Accusative in Spanish Existential Constructions

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The problem(s)

Spanish is split in two dialects with respect to agreement in Existential Constructions with *haber*. In Spanish Dialect I (SI) the verb has default agreement (3er person, singular) (1), but in Spanish Dialect (SII), the verb agrees with the internal nominal (2). Given that the nominal [dos hombres] is the Accusative Object, as shown by the cliticization in (3), this is a direct challenge for theories that link together Agreement and Case. In SII, the nominal seems to be in agreement with T, but T cannot be its case-licensor because T does not value ACC. So, Chomsky's 2000 account for English Existential constructions cannot be extended to Spanish.

Additionally, there is a ban on nominals that are marked with [person] in *haber*-sentences in Spanish (both dialects), assuming that only [1p], [2p] and some [3p] nominals (for instance proper nouns and non clitic pronouns) are marked by persons. (4). These sentences, contrary to their English counterpart, cannot have a presentational (or "list") reading (they are just ungrammatical). However, in SII, *haber* can be inflected in [1p] or [2p], even if the internal nominal is [3p], as shown by (5); furthermore, in these cases, it is not possible to put an explicit subject (that is, these sentences are still impersonal) (6). Notice further that if we postulate a *pro* with a [person] value ([1p] or [2p]) as responsible for the valuation of T, this will predict that it could be replaced by a lexical pronoun (as any other instance of *pro* in Spanish), which is contrary to the facts, and in addition it will violate the ban on [person]-marked nominals in Spanish Existential constructions. It seems then, that we don't have any internal constituent to value the [person] feature of T in (5).

Proposal

I propose that we can solve all these problems at the same time by postulating: (A) a small *v* with only [number] and no [person], for Existential constructions in both dialects, and (B), for SII, a T with an interpretable [person] feature, in addition to its uninterpretable [number]. (A) is compatible with other studies that have proposed that there are several types of small *v*, with different properties (as in Boeckx 2003). If small *v* has only [number], the ban on nominals with [person] is explained, given Chomsky's suggestion that only complete probes can value the [case] feature of the goal. Nominals with [person] won't be able to value their [case] feature. If the nominal does not have [person], the probe *v* will be complete with respect to its goal, then it will be able to value the [case] feature. In SII, given that T has only one uninterpretable feature, namely [number], it can probe *v*, producing the effect of object-agreement, as in the schema (7)—this is possible because the ϕ -features of *v* are still there, since the deletion procedure applies only in the point of Spell-Out and this small *v* is not a phase (it does not have an external argument). (B) rightly predicts that in SII *haber*-sentences, the verb can be inflected in all persons, even if no nominal has the proper value. In addition, in SI, where both ϕ -features in T are uninterpretable, small *v* is incomplete with respect to T, thus unable to value its features, and then T must use some mechanism of default agreement.

Theoretical implications

This analysis supports the relation between Case and Agreement, and the operation Agree (Chomsky 2000), and, given that it shows evidence that the case of the internal nominal in existential constructions is valued in a lower position (not by T), it provides a way to encode the insight of the Partitive Case Hypothesis (Belletti 1988, Lasnik 1992) in the Agree system (although with different technical details).

- (1) Hubo dos hombres en la fiesta *SI*
 was two men in the party
 There were two men in the party
- (2) Hubieron dos hombres en la fiesta *SII*
 were two men in the party
 There were two men in the party
- (3) a. Hay un hombre en la habitación
 Is a man in the room
 There is a man in the room
- b. Lo hay
 CL-ACC is
- (4) a. Lo/La había en la habitación
 CL-MAS/CL-FEM was in the room
- b. *Me/*Te/*Nos había en la habitación
 Me/Te/Us was in the room
 There was me/you/us in the room
- c. *Hay Juan
 Is John
 There is John
- (5) Hemos dos estudiantes en la clase *SII*
 Habéis
 Were-1P-PLU two students in the class
 Were-2P-PLU
- (6) a. *Nosotros hemos los estudiantes en la clase *SII*
 We were-1P-PLU two students in the class
- b. *Hemos nosotros los estudiantes en la clase *SII*
 Were-1P-PLU we two students in the class
- (7) *SII*
 T v nominal
 [*i*person]
 [*u*number:] → [*u*number] → [*i*number]

References

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