S-V and V-S agreement on evidence from Italo-Romance

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It has long been known that if, in a given language, the verb agrees with a following argument with a certain syntactic function, it will also agree with a preceding argument with the same syntactic function (Moravcsik 1978, Corbett 1979, Lehmann 1982, see Greenberg's universal 33). This is observed in Italo-Romance, a family of Romance languages that include Italian. While person and number agreement of the verb with a preceding argument in subject position is generally obligatory in this language family, a great deal of variation is observed in verb-subject agreement. This variation has received much attention in the syntactic literature (see Brandi/Cordin 1981, 1989 and Samek-Lodovici 2002 for two different approaches). Although it has been noted that V-S agreement varies in accordance with verb class (Parry 1997, 2000, 2013, Savoia 1997, Benincà 2001, Manzini/Savoia 2005, etc.), the extent of this variation, and its rationale, are poorly understood. Table 1 shows three principal patterns of verb agreement that are found in Italo-Romance.

Table 1. Patterns of (person and) number agreement on the Italo-Romance verb

	S-V agreement	V-S agreement with…
(i) *Italian, Sicilian*	+	A, U, non-argumental NP
(iia) *Cairese (C. Montenotte)*	+	A, U
(iib) *Milanese*	+	A, +/- U
(iii) *Grosino (Grosio)*	+	A

(A = actor; U = undergoer)

The controller of person and number agreement on the verb can be a clause-internal argument or the clause-external antecedent of a clause-internal anaphora. In the former case agreement is grammatical, in the latter it is anaphoric (Givón, 1976, Lehmann 1982, Bresnan/Mchombo 1987). In Table 1 we have shown patterns of grammatical agreement. The selection of the controller is normally captured in terms of macrorolehood (Van Valin/LaPolla 1997: 326), with actor being the default controller and undergoer the marked one. As mentioned, V-S agreement differs across dialects. In pattern (i) the verb can agree with a post-verbal actor or undergoer, or, failing this, with a clause-internal non-argumental noun phrase endowed with person and/or number features. This happens in existential constructions, where the post-copular noun phrase is not an argument (Francez 2007, Cruschina 2012, Bentley et al. 2015).

(1) Ci   sunnu picciriddri   malati. (Sicilian)
     PF   be.3PL children   sick
     'There are sick children.'

Contrastingly, in patterns (iia) and (iib), the existential copula agrees anaphorically with an implicit spatio-temporal antecedent (Francez's 2007 implicit argument), the anaphora being an etymologically locative clitic (see i in 2). Pattern (iib) optionally allows the same kind of anaphoric agreement in VS constructions other than existentials (cf. 3). This type of agreement is subject to verb-class restrictions. These restrictions are reminiscent of the unaccusative-vs.-unergative divide. In the light of first-hand evidence, we propose that the predicate must be stage level, and hence include a contingent or temporally-bounded state, to be predicated of a slice of space and time.

(2) As poruma nenta divurzié perché u i è i fiöi (Cairo Montenotte)
     REFL can.1PL NEG   divorce because ESCL LSCL be.3SG the children
     'We cannot divorce because there are the children.'

(3) a. Gh' è   mort tanti sudà. (Milan S. Ambrogio, Lombardy)
        LSCL be.3SG died many soldiers
     b. In   mort tanti sudà.
        be.3PL   died   many soldiers
        'There died many soldiers.'

The fact that patterns (iia) and (iib) are only found in northern dialects is not trivial. On the contrary, it is due to the presence, in these dialects, of clause-internal anaphoras that are non-personal pre-verbal clitics (Poletto 1993, 2000, Tortora 1997, 2014). Optional anaphoric agreement in V-S constructions other than existentials, in pattern (iib), is the manifestation of a synchronic conflict between anaphoric agreement and grammatical agreement with the marked macrorole. Lastly, pattern (iii) solely allows grammatical V-S agreement with an actor. In fact, V-S agreement is only obligatory if S is a transitive actor (AT) and a topical undergoer is resumed clause-internally by an object pronoun.

(4) Quel cinema, i   l' a   vedu tantisima gent.   (Grosino)
     that film   SCL.3PL OCL have.3PL seen   very.many people
     'That film, many people have seen it.'

The variation observed thus indicates that, while S-V agreement is fully grammaticalised, V-S agreement abides by constraints that are best captured at the semantic-syntax interface.

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