

ON (DIS)AGREEMENT IN FRENCH PSEUDO-RELATIVES

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Pseudo-relatives (PRs) corresponding to the bracketed portion of the French sentence in (1) are found in most (some would argue all) of the Romance languages. For ease of exposition, we will refer to the bolded NP in (1) as the “antecedent” of the PR.

- (1) J’ai rencontré [**Carlos** qui revenait du Mexique].
I-have run-into Carlos QUI was-coming-back from-the Mexico
‘I ran into Carlos coming back from Mexico.’

PRs have been known since at least Radford (1975) and Kayne (1975) to display properties that suggest that their structure is significantly different from that of genuine relatives. For example, the antecedent of a PR can undergo accusative cliticization as in (2a), while the head of a genuine relative cannot (2b).

- (2) a. Je l’ai rencontré qui revenait du Mexique.
I him-have run-into QUI was-coming-back from-the Mexico
b. *Je l’ai rencontré dont tu me parlais.
I him-have met of-whom you me were-telling
Intended: ‘I met the one (= him) you were telling me about.’

An important question tied to the syntax of PRs is what silent category occupies the subject position inside the *qui*-clause: PRO (Kayne 1984:95, Cinque 1995:256, Rafel 2000, a.o.), *pro* (Guasti 1988, Casalicchio 2016, a.o.), or something else? Assuming that sentences like (1) instantiate object control into a tensed clause is problematic given that (a) this would be the only instance of finite control in the French language and (b) cross-linguistically, finite control typically involves subjunctive clauses (Albanian, Greek, Romanian) or the future tense (Hebrew) but not the past tense found in (1). Further, while assuming that *pro* is (or can be) the subject of Italian PRs is *prima facie* plausible given that Italian is a null subject language, the same cannot be said of PRs like (1) since French does not allow null subjects in tensed clauses. In this paper, we will argue that the silent subject of French PRs should be analyzed as the silent copy of the internally-merged PR antecedent (i.e. an NP-trace) based on Guasti’s (1988:45) observation that speakers reject PRs the antecedent of which is in the first or second person.

Guasti (1988:45) (see also Kleiber 1988) notes that while tensed PR clauses are universally accepted when the antecedent is third person, speakers find them problematic if the antecedent is in the first or second person. A survey of our own informants reveals, however, that non-third-person examples are not always judged deviant and that their degree of acceptability strongly correlates with the degree of syncretism exhibited by the PR verbal morphology with respect to the unmarked third person form of the verb (which one may view as non-agreeing on the assumption that only first/second person is truly [+person], following Sigurðsson 1996, Boeckx 2000, Zupon 2015, a.o.). To see what this means, consider, as an illustration, the *imparfait* verbal agreement morphology of the verb *arriver* ‘arrive’ in (3).

- (3) Verbal agreement paradigm for arriver in the French imparfait

je (I)		
tu (you.SG)	[aRive]	Pers.: default; Num.: SG/PL
il/elle (he/she)		
ils/elles (they.MASC/they.FEM)		

nous (we)	[aRivjõ]	Pers.: 1; Num.: PL
vous (you.PL)	[aRivje]	Pers.: 2; Num.: PL

As can be seen in (3), the only forms that distinctively encode person and number in this particular paradigm are the inflections for first and second person plural. The other forms are syncretic with the unmarked third person feature and, as can be seen in (4), these are the forms that correlate with possible PR antecedents or, to put it slightly differently, PRs are only widely accepted when their verbal morphology encodes default agreement and rejected by most speakers otherwise.

- (4) a. Elle m'a vu qui [aRive]. c. ?*Elle nous a vus qui [aRivjõ].
 she me-has seen QUI arrived.DFLT-SG/PL she us has seen QUI arrived.1P-PL
 'She saw me arriving.' 'She saw us arriving.'
- b. Elle t'a vu qui [aRive].
 she you.SG-has seen QUI arrived.DFLT-SG/PL
 'She saw you arriving.'
- d. ?*Elle vous a vus qui [aRivje].
 she you.PL has seen QUI arrived.2P-PL
 'She saw you guys arriving.'

For some speakers, however, the restriction on first/second person plural morphology illustrated in (4) can be overridden by substituting the default third person inflection on the PR verb, yielding an agreement "mismatch" between the antecedent and the verbal morphology in the PR. Though non-standard in nature, this feature conflict resolution ameliorated by syncretism option is found even in literary styles, as the example in (5) illustrates.

- (5) %...je vous ai vus qui entraient dans la cathédrale...
 I you.PL have seen QUI were-entering.3P-PL into the cathedral
 'I saw you guys going into the cathedral.' (*Place rouge*, D. Fernandez, 2008)

What the facts in (4) and (5) indicate is that the finite T present in PRs shows evidence of underspecification for person and is thus ϕ -deficient. Assuming that a nominal element with an unvalued case feature gets its case valued by a probe with an unvalued person feature, we arrive at the conclusion that the T-head in a PR cannot value the case feature of its subject, which means that the latter remains active for further computation. In a PR construction then, the main v is endowed with case and agreement (including person) features that percolate onto V. Assuming that V has an EPP feature, V then attracts the subject of the PR to its specifier and values its case feature as accusative in the process. Furthermore, since this movement is an operation involving ϕ -features, the resulting chain will be an A-chain, assuming that (a) the properties of A-movement are the properties of movement resulting from the interaction of a ϕ -probe with its goal (van Urk 2015) and (b) *qui* lexicalizes Fin rather than Force.

This analysis immediately predicts the well-known subject-object asymmetry that characterizes PRs illustrated in (6).

- (6) a. J'ai vu Marie qui [e] engueulait Georges.
 'I saw Marie yelling at Georges.'
- b. *J'ai vu Marie qui/que Georges engueulait [e].
 Lit. 'I saw Marie that Georges was yelling at.'
 Intended meaning: 'I saw Marie being yelled at by Georges.'

A condition always included in the definition of Agree is that a probe α can undergo Agree with a goal β only if β is the closest goal to α . Assuming that Agree is the precursor to (though not necessarily the trigger of) movement and given this condition on Agree, movement to the specifier of the main V cannot affect the object of the *qui*-clause because, for the purpose of Agree, the closest goal of the V-probe is its subject. We thus derive the ungrammaticality of (6b) as an intervention effect based on Agree.