

Long-distance gender agreement in mixed Italian/English and Italian/German ergative clauses

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Under the feature-checking approach to CS (MacSwan 1999 and subsequent work), the grammatical status of mixed DPs has become a puzzle. Theoretically, in language pairs involving one genderless language, such as English and Italian, switching between D and N should not be available, contrary to facts. Crucially, the analogical gender (i.e. the gender of the equivalent noun) in mixed DPs - such as *la(fem) chair* - calls into question the architecture of the Lexicon (cf. Halle and Marantz 1993) and consequently the whole process of borrowing. In fact, analogical gender may be analysed: a) as true concord (Liceras et al. 2008 a.o.), or b) as the output of a lexical rule assigning the analogical gender to the English noun (the “temporary” borrowing account; see Poplack et al. 1982).

Starting with the Null Hypothesis on Code-Switching (Chan 2003), in this pilot work we will try to provide an adequate solution to the puzzle by testing the ability of nominal gender to be “infinitely reusable as an ‘active goal’” by the operation Agree (Carstens 2010) in code-switching (CS) contexts.

Data are obtained through an Acceptability Judgment Task (AJT) administered to some adult Italian/English (10) and Italian/German (9) balanced bilinguals (2L1), as well as to some speakers who are highly fluent in both languages, but with a preference for one of them, in order to see if different responses are given by the different groups.

Firstly, we will focus our attention on participial gender agreement in mixed Italian/English sentences containing an Italian compound ergative-type verb (i.e. unaccusative, passive or reflexive), where the past participle must agree in gender with the DP-syntactic subject. The subject, i.e. the “active goal” for the operation Agree, may either be a monolingual English DP, as in (1), or a mixed DP, as in (2):

- (1) The chair è stata/stato riparata/riparato
- (2) a Il chair è stata/stato riparata/riparato
- b La chair è stata/stato riparata/riparato
- c The sedia è stata/stato riparata/riparato
 “the chair has been(f/m) repaired(f/m)”

In particular, we will address the following Research questions:

1. What gender does the past participle take in a case like (1), where the subject is an English genderless DP? In particular, does it take the default gender (masculine in Italian), or the analogical gender, i.e. the gender of the equivalent noun (feminine in this case)?
2. What gender does it take instead in cases like (2), where the subject is a mixed DP? A corollary to this question regards the gender that can be assigned to the Italian D which accompanies the English N: is it either the default masculine form, as in (2a), or the feminine analogical gender, as in (2b)?
3. Is the gender of the Italian N in (2c) still active and able to enter an agreement relation?

Secondly, we will compare our results with those obtained in previous work on the acceptability of participial agreement in mixed Italian/German ergative-type clauses. Indeed, unlike English, German and Italian are two gendered languages which overtly spell-out

gender agreement relations; hence we expect different results. Crucially, we will consider only nouns which have a different gender in the two languages.

The provisional results suggest that analogical gender cannot simply be analysed in terms of a temporary borrowing. The Italian/German bilingual speakers seem, in fact, to be able to assign the analogical gender even to a monolingual DP. Indeed they sometimes accept cases where the past participle does not agree with the gender of the subject, but rather with the gender of the equivalent noun, as in (3):

- (3) das Fahrrad è stata rubata in via Saffi
 the(N) bike(N) is been(F) stolen(F) in street Saffi
 ‘the bike has been stolen in Saffi street’

Two more Research questions are then addressed:

1. Will the analogical gender be accepted in a higher/lower number of cases in Italian/English mixed sentences with respect to Italian/German ones?
2. Will the default agreement be accepted in a higher/lower number of cases instead?

Since the type of construction may affect acceptability, we will also compare participial agreement in mixed Italian/English ergative clauses with a different case of participial agreement, namely when the participle agrees with an object clitic in transitive clauses.

From a theoretical point of view, the results that we obtain may also shed some light on the phase status of little *v*, and in particular whether this category is assumed to count as a phase only in transitive clauses, or also in ergative-type ones.

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