

Past Participle Agreement in French

Object-Agreement? Adjective Agreement

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1. Introduction

Past participle agreement in French figures among the topics regularly discussed in syntactic theory. After Kayne's seminal work (1985, 1989), in which he showed that participial small clauses have a separate AGR projection, syntactic theory has been enriched with other AGR-types, among which AGR-S, AGR-O, AGR-IO, and AGR-A. Depending on some details that are basically irrelevant for this paper, these elements may function as full heads in the sense of X-bar theory, or as features of an (inflectional) X-bar head. During these developments, Kayne's original AGR head for participial morphology has been recategorized as AGR-O (in Obenauer 1992, see also Déprez 1998), and as AGR-PART (Friedemann and Siloni 1993), while AGR-A has also been suggested (Chomsky 1993). In this paper we are concerned with the question: which features are actually visible?

The minimalist program (Chomsky 1995) has enlarged the interest in morphology in the sense that morphology is considered to be the cause of cross-linguistic differences with respect to the dichotomy overt vs. covert movement. As has been clear since the eighties, French participle agreement presents one of the clearest examples of the link between visible morphology and overt movement, as the generalization eventually is rather simple: when some overt movement has passed through the AGR projection, the participle agrees; when this movement is absent, the participle does not agree.

In section 2 we will repeat the most important basic facts concerning participle agreement in French. In section 3 we will consider object agreement (AGR-O). In section 4 we will consider adjective agreement (AGR-A) and compare it to participle and object agreement. In section 5 we will elaborate our proposal by showing how our analysis works and by considering the case in which AGR-O does

have influence. In this section we will also present evidence that the minimalist checking procedures have far-reaching consequences and explain a set of examples for which Kayne (1989) needed a chain-condition. Section 6 will be the conclusion.

2. Basic facts

In (1) we give the facts that illustrate the generalization that the past participle in French agrees if and only if there has been some overt movement.

	Spell-out point	Past Participle Agreement
(1) a.	Elle les _i a vus t _i she them has seen+PLUR 'She has seen them.'	yes
b.	Il a vu Marie et Paul he has seen Mary and Paul 'He has seen Mary and Paul.'	no
c.	Ils _i sont arrivés t _i they are arrived+PLUR 'They have arrived.'	yes
d.	Il est arrivé trois garçons there is arrived three boys 'There have arrived three boys.'	no
e.	Elles _i ont été vues t _i they have been seen+PLUR+FEM 'They have been seen'	yes
f.	Il a été lu trois livres there has been read three books 'There have been read three books.'	no
g.	Ils se _i sont regardés t _i they each-other been looked-at+PLUR 'They have looked at each other.'	yes

Agreement is made morphologically visible by *-e* (feminine) and *-s* (plural). (1a) and (1g) have clitic-movement (of a pronoun and a reflexive pronoun, respectively), while (1b) illustrates its absence. (1c) and (1e) have NP-movement, while (1d) and (1f) illustrate its absence. Past participle agreement is not sensitive to the independent differences between clitic and NP movement; it simply is sensitive to overt-ness of movement.¹

In (2) we give the examples that show that the notion of structural direct object is important for the rule of participle agreement.

	Spell-out point	Past Participle Agreement
(2) a.	Je leur _i ai donné les livres t _i I them have given the books 'I have given them the books.'	no
b.	Ils se _i sont donné des livres t _i they REFL are given books 'They have given books to each other.'	no
c.	Je les _i ai vus t _i partir I them have seen+PLUR leave 'I have seen them leave.'	yes

If a dative clitic has been moved, as in (2a), the participle does not agree; it is crucial that the indirect object be excluded from the rule governing participle agreement. (2b) shows the same restriction in another way; (2b) shows in addition that auxiliary choice is irrelevant. The irrelevance of auxiliary choice is important in the sense that participle agreement cannot be linked to Burzio's generalization in a direct way — an observation that can also be made by contrasting (1a) to (1c) and (1e). (2c) shows that participle agreement is not sensitive to the clausal node dominating the trace. Hence, past participle agreement is based on direct objects only, in a structural definition that cannot be related to the theta-grid, as stated in (3).

(3) The past participle agrees iff the structural object position has a trace.

When one considers the Case of the antecedent of the trace, it is to be remarked that the antecedent may bear either NOM (in (1c) and (1e)) or ACC (in (1a) and (2c)). When one considers the features that are actually checked, one may remark that the agreement takes place in terms of gender and number, but not in person. As has been argued before (Kayne 1985), these two properties of participle agreement render it impossible to make use of AGR-S, because AGR-S involves person features and is related to NOM only. At present, the rule given in (3) makes AGR-O a good candidate. Since Obenauer (1992), the proposal that participle agreement is the morphologically visible reflex of AGR-O has become more or less the standard analysis. In what follows we will argue that participle agreement is to be analyzed as a reflex of AGR-A.

3. Against object agreement

A major drawback of the AGR-O proposal is that AGR-O is not morphologically reflected in French in general, as shown in (4).

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| (4) | Spell-out point | Object Agreement |
| a. | Je vois Marie.
I see Mary
'I see Mary.' | no |
| b. | *Je la _i vois t _i
I her see+FEM
'I see her.' | no |

French verbs never agree with their objects; this is expected when movement is absent (as in (4a)), but it is not expected when movement has been overt, because overtness should be reflected by morphologically visible agreement. (4b) shows that object agreement is impossible even if the structural direct object is a trace.

An other disadvantage of the AGR-O proposal is based on the observations that we made above concerning the Case of the antecedent. With participle agreement, the antecedent of the trace may bear either NOM or ACC Case. Within the minimalist program, AGR-O is exclusively related to ACC, and definitely excludes NOM. The empirical problem is formed by (1c) and (1e), as in these cases AGR-O is absent. This problem is related to the irrelevance of Burzio's generalization we also noted above. Essentially, the Case property of AGR-O does not fit participle agreement.

The third problem that we wish to note is more subtle. If the minimalist program correctly links AGR-S to NOM and features for person, number and gender, we expect a similar link between AGR-O and ACC and features for person, number and gender. As the features that are relevant for participle agreement do not include person features, we would expect that it cannot be analyzed as AGR-O. Nevertheless, this argument cannot hold directly, since the concrete AGR-O proposals build in a restriction to participles anyway, in view of the data in (4). Other proposals link AGR-O to clitics and these do have person distinctions; such ideas confirm our view that AGR-S and AGR-O are both related to one particular Case feature and a set of nominal features including person features.

4. In favor of adjective agreement

From a morphological point of view, it is clear that the features checked in participle agreement are the features normally checked in constructions with plain adjectives. Adjectives check features for number and gender, and not person. Hence, an analysis in which participle agreement is linked to adjective agreement would immediately account for this; such an analysis would not be subject to the criticism directed against the AGR-O proposal shortly above. Therefore we discuss adjective agreement in this section.

Adjectives in French normally agree in sentential (copular) constructions. Some examples are given in (5).

	Spell-out point	Adjective Agreement
(5) a.	Elle _i est t _i heureuse she is happy+FEM 'She is happy.'	yes
b.	Je la _i considère t _i heureuse I her consider happy+FEM 'I consider her happy.'	yes
c.	Je considère cette fille heureuse I consider that girl happy+FEM 'I consider that girl happy.'	yes
d.	Elles sont parties PRO heureuses they are left happy+FEM+PLUR 'They have left happy.'	yes

At first sight, everything seems to conspire against linking adjective agreement to participle agreement. Although adjective agreement solves the morphological problem of the actually checked features, it does not show any overt / covert dichotomy and it never seems to relate to direct objects while participles do. Still, there are fully independent reasons for this situation. Adjectives lack AGR-O in an universal way; the rare accusative-marked objects of Adjectives that one finds are explained by inherent Case. In a similar way, Adjectives have always been considered to be 'predicates' in the sense that they intrinsically depend on the presence of some NP. Under the assumption that the 'subject' of the predicate is in either the Specifier position of a Small Clause or in the Specifier position of a separate AGRAP, adjective agreement can be formalized as in (6).

- (6) The adjective agrees with the NP in its Specifier position.

The NP itself may be a full NP — (5c), the trace of a full NP — (5a), a PRO — (5d), or the trace of a clitic — (5b).

Like participle agreement, adjective agreement is disconnected from Case properties, the NP in situ or the antecedent of the trace may be either NOM or ACC. That is, both participle agreement and adjective agreement are independent of the Case feature of the NP with which the agreement relationship holds. This entails that the second objection to the AGR-O proposal that we formulated above (the Case of the antecedent) does not hold if participle agreement is generalized with adjective agreement.

The rule in (6) can be changed without negative effects into the rule in (7). Under the assumption that Adjectives are ‘predicates’ and that this property triggers filling of its Specifier position, (7) is equal to (6).

- (7) At Spell-out, an adjectival head agrees with its Specifier, if and only if this Specifier has phi-features.

The major difference between (6) and (7) is that (6) does not relate to any level of representation, while (7) does. As stated, in the minimalist approach (7) holds at Spell-out; it may not hold before or after. Consequently, (7) makes a prediction about adjectives: in cases in which this Specifier position is not made use of in overt syntax for independent reasons, the adjective does not agree. A case in point might be an impersonal construction with an adjective. For English it has been shown that the use of adjectives in an impersonal construction is sensitive to the difference between stage- and individual-level predicates. Among the stage-level predicates there are some examples in the literature (Kayne 1979, Hériau 1976), and some are accepted with *ne ... que* (litt. ‘not ... that’ = ‘only’), which is a focalizer. Those without agreement given in (8) have particular properties in terms of information structure.²

- (8) a. Il nous reste encore disponible trois chambres.
 there us leave still available three rooms
 ‘There are still three rooms available to us.’
 b. Il n’ a été content que ces trois filles-là.
 there not has been satisfied that those three girls over there
 ‘Only those three girls over there were satisfied.’

The informational properties that can be noted in these constructions with adjectives are possibly but not necessarily linked to the effects that Obenauer (1992) and Déprez (1998) discussed for participle agreement (see below). So, the prediction made by (7) is borne out.³

Two of the objections against analyzing participle agreement as AGR-O therefore do not hold if participle agreement is an instantiation of AGR-A. And, in fact, the first (the fact that AGR-O should not be morphologically present with ‘ordinary’ verbs) also is immediately accounted for. If participle agreement is analyzed as AGR-A, the AGR-O analysis no longer needs to build in a restriction to participles for French.

The result with respect to the different AGR-nodes is the following:

- (9) a. AGR-A is morphologically visible iff its Spec position has phi-features at Spell-out.
- b. AGR-S is always overt (morphologically visible).
- c. AGR-O is always covert (morphologically invisible).

5. Illustration and elaboration

We just showed that the criticisms raised against AGR-O can be answered by analyzing participle agreement as AGR-A. In this section, we will give three illustrations, and discuss a number of important theoretical properties.

First, consider the details of the cases given in (1c) and (1d) — *Ils sont arrivés* and *Il est arrivé trois garçons* — which are given in (10a) and (10b), respectively. Due to Burzio’s generalization, (1e) and (1f) have the same structures.

- (10) a. $[_{TP} \text{ Ils}_i \text{ T/AGRS } [_{VP} \text{ sont } [_{PARTP} t_i \text{ PART/AGRA } [_{VP} \text{ arrivés } t_i]]]]$
- b. $[_{TP} \text{ Il T/AGRS } [_{VP} \text{ est } [_{PARTP} e \text{ PART/AGRA } [_{VP} \text{ arrivé trois garçons}]]]]]$

According to (9a), the participle agrees only if the specifier has phi-features. In case of movement, the Specifier is used as an intermediate landing site, such that agreement is present. In the impersonal construction movement is absent and an expletive is inserted in [Spec,TP]. In this case [Spec,PARTP] remains empty, such that agreement is absent.

Next consider the details of the examples in (1a) and (1b) — *Elle les a vus* and *Il a vu Marie et Paul* — which are given in (11a) and (11b), respectively.

- (11) a. $[_{TP} \text{ Elle T/AGRS } [_{AGROP} \text{ les}_i \text{ AGRO } [_{VP} \text{ a } [_{PARTP} t_i \text{ PART/AGRA } [_{VP} \text{ vus } t_i]]]]]]$
- b. $[_{TP} \text{ Il T/AGRS } [_{AGROP} \text{ AGRO } [_{VP} \text{ a } [_{PARTP} e \text{ PART/AGRA } [_{VP} \text{ vu Marie et Paul }]]]]]]$

According to rule (9a), agreement is morphologically visible if the Specifier has phi-features. In the case of clitic-movement, it has, in its absence it has not. Two things can be noted with respect to these representations. First, it is based on a theory of cliticization in which the Case-features of the clitic are checked in an A-configuration while the actual cliticization is to be performed later. Second, the structure shows that our analysis does not discredit AGR-O itself. We assume the existence of AGR-O in the theory, and in fact make use of it. The link with AGR-O that has been proposed, is indeed a link with AGR-O; only, it is not a link with the main verb, but with the auxiliary. This eventually explains why an AGR-O effect is present in participle agreement.

Our analysis is based on Case-checking. As object NPs do not check their Case-features in overt syntax, (12a) is allowed, while the ungrammaticality in (12b) is explained by the minimalist assumption that overt movement must be triggered.

- (12) a. Jean a lu les livres Jean a [**e** AGRA [lu les livres]]
 ‘John has read the books.’
 b. *Jean a les livres lus Jean a [les livres_i AGRA [lus t_i]]
 ‘John has the books read.’

For Case-theory Kayne (1989) added a specific chain-condition, given in (13).

- (13) “If a Case-marked chain is headed by an A-position, then that A-position must be assigned Case.”

That is, one of the major theoretical problems for rule (3) was how to build in a generalization across NP-movement (A-movement) to subject position and clitic-movement (A-bar-movement for Kayne), while excluding NP-movement of objects. In (12a) the object is already Case-marked, so moving it in the way indicated in (12b) would give rise to an ill-formed chain. Under the current analysis this special chain-condition can be dropped entirely. Clitics must move for independent reasons, while NPs do not. Hence, overt NP-movement is not triggered in our analysis. This is one of the major differences of approach caused by the minimalist program. It is advantageous in the sense that a seemingly ad hoc statement can be fully derived — by Procrastinate. The ungrammaticality in (12b) arises because one has overtly moved an NP for which there was no reason for overt movement in the first place.

In the analyses of Kayne and Obenauer, AGRP can be the (intermediate) adjunction site for WH-movement, as illustrated in (14).

- (14) a. Les maisons que_i tu as achetées t_i
 the houses that you have bought+FEM+PLUR
 ‘The houses that you have bought.’
 b. [que_i [tu as [_{AGRP} t_i [_{AGRP} AGR [achetées t_i]]]]]

The chain-condition in (13) also explained this case; we note that it leads to a situation in which one can either move via the Specifier position or Adjoin to the maximal projection. Our analysis is based on movement via the Specifier position only, and is thus advantageous also in this respect. However, for our analysis it entails that WH-movement has made use of an A-position in the course of the derivation of (14). Now consider (15).

- (15) a. La lettre que_i il a dit(*e) t_i que Paul lui a envoyée t_i
 the letter that he has said (*FEM) that Paul him has sent+FEM
 ‘The letter that he said that Paul had sent him.’
 b. que_i il [e AGRO [a dit [t_i que Paul [t_i AGRO [lui a envoyée t_i]]]]]

(15) can be explained by assuming that the Case-feature of the relative pronoun is checked with the lower AGR-O, but not with the higher (cf. Chomsky 1995). For a minimalist theory this is not a problem, and in fact the situation we expect. If an element has one particular Case-feature that has to be checked, checking it suffices; there is no need to check it twice. In a theory in which the adjunction to the lower AGRP is allowed, there does not seem to be any reason for blocking it in the higher AGRP. (15) thus shows, on the one hand, that the adjunction approach for (14) does not give the correct empirical results, and, on the other hand, that Case-checking takes place before additional A-bar-movement.

Our analysis thus makes predictions as to what happens in case of A-bar movement in impersonal constructions. Contrary to the predictions of the rule given in (3), participle agreement is absent if there has been A-bar-movement, as illustrated in (16).

- (16) Combien de linguistes_i est -il venu(*s) t_i
 how many linguists is there come(*PLUR)
 ‘How many linguists have come?’

According to the rule in (3), there is a structural object that has been moved, and there should be agreement, contrary to fact. Until now, we have considered overt NP-movement (to subject position), and overt A-bar-movement (clitic-movement and WH-movement); for the cases of A-bar movement we showed that passage through the Specifier positions of the (lower) AGR-phrases is necessary, and can thus be viewed upon as checking of A-features before checking of A-bar features.

We analyze (16) as the checking of A-bar features in overt syntax, while delaying the checking of A-features to covert syntax. As is well-known, in all impersonal constructions, the ‘associate’ has to move to the ‘expletive’ in order to replace it at LF, which explains the absence of participle agreement in (17).

- (17) Il est [**e** venu(*s) trois linguistes]
 there is come(*PLUR) three linguists
 ‘There have come three linguists.’

It is crucial that expletive replacement be done in covert syntax for any language.⁴ For French it is crucial that expletive replacement does not check AGR-S: the finite verb agrees with the expletive and not with the associate. (16) also is an impersonal construction, so we predict that the checking of A-features must be delayed to covert syntax, while the A-bar-features of the NP are checked in overt syntax. This eventually accounts for the absence of participle agreement in (16): the Specifier-positions are empty at Spell-out point, while Case-checking is performed at LF. The details of the representation are given in (18).⁴

- (18) [_{CP} combien de linguistes_i [_C C [_{TP} Expletive T/AGRS [_{VP} être [_{PARTP} **e** PART/AGRA [_{VP} venu t_i < FF: WH ✓, FF: Case>]]]]]]

This construction is subject to the standard interpretation of impersonal constructions: in this case *combien de linguistes* is indefinite. As Obenauer (1992) has shown, interpretational effects also play a role for participle agreement with regular direct objects (cf. also Déprez 1998). The relevant facts are given in (19).

- (19) a. Combien de fautes a-t-elle faites?
 how many mistakes has she made+FEM+PLUR
 ‘How many (amongst a known set) mistakes has she made?’
 b. Combien de fautes a-t-elle fait?
 how many mistakes has she made
 ‘How many mistakes has she made?’

Under our analysis these facts are accounted for in the way indicated for (16) in (18). It is possible to move the WH-element in two ways: via the Specifier positions, with checking of Case-features, and more directly, ignoring the Specifier positions and without checking of Case-features. In the former case the interpretation of the NP is specific, while in the latter it is non-specific according to Déprez’ analysis. In structural terms, our analysis makes use of (20).

- (20) a. [_{CP} Combien de fautes_i [_{TP} elle T/AGRS [_{AGROP} t_i AGRO [_{VP} a
[_{PARTP} t_i PART/AGRA[_{VP} faites t_i <FF: WH a, FF: Case a>]]]]]]]
 b. [_{CP} Combien de fautes_i [_{TP} elle T/AGRS [_{AGROP} e AGRO [_{VP} a
[_{PARTP} e PART/AGRA[_{VP} fait t_i <FF: WH a, FF: Case >]]]]]]]

On the technical level we must ensure that passage through [Spec,PARTP] is necessary in order to reach [Spec,AGROP]. We explain failure to do so as an instance of violation of Relativized Minimality applied to A-positions; [Spec,PARTP] is an intervening landing site for A-movement.

6. Conclusion

In this paper we have shown that past participle agreement is best analyzed as the morphological reflex of AGR-A. This does not mean that AGR-O itself is to be rejected, but only that participle agreement is not the morphologically visible reflex of it; in fact, the details of AGR-O are important for the explanation of the patterns of past participle agreement that involve past participles with *avoir* ('have').

One of the objections that may be raised against this analysis is that the constructions discussed in this paper are generally considered to be 'verbal' in nature, rather than 'adjectival'. The general approach to be further developed in future research is that 'verbal' should not be equated with 'event', nor 'adjectival' with 'property'. That is, next to gerundive nominalizations and present participles there are other constructions in which the syntactic category does not directly correspond to the semantic value, for example the 'Event-nominalizations' discussed by Grimshaw (1990). An initial formalization of our ideas can also be found in Drijkoningen (1997).

Notes

1. With respect to the word order that can be derived by the rule of Stylistic Inversion (e.g. *A quel endroit sont arrivées les filles?* 'At which place have arrived the girls?'), it is useful to add that both the older standard analysis (rightward NP movement of the subject) and the more recent analysis (leftward 'remnant' movement of the constituent following the subject) imply that this construction does not intervene in the discussion of the properties of participle agreement.
2. The exact relation to information structure is subject to further research.

3. In general the data are not clear-cut. One might compare English *We have three rooms available* with *We have available three rooms*, or Dutch *Wij hebben drie kamers beschikbaar* with *Wij hebben beschikbaar drie kamers*. It is the Dutch or English construction with a post-adjectival NP that is related to the examples of absence of adjective agreement. Note that rejection of (8) by some speakers would not directly undermine our argumentation.
4. One might object to Expletive Replacement on more general grounds. If so, this does not directly affect our argumentation; adaptation to such a theory reduces to adjusting the technique(s). In fact, absence of Expletive Replacement would predict absence of NP-movement altogether; hence, such a theory would also have to explain absence of participle agreement by absence of NP-movement.

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