

## Case as a feature-gluttony repair in Italian assumed-/mistaken-identity copular clauses

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In this talk, I focus on the interaction of agreement and case in assumed-identity and mistaken-identity copular clauses in Italian. Cross-linguistically, copular agreement in such clauses follows three main patterns: i) fixed agreement with the surface-highest DP; ii) agreement with the most  $\phi$ -featurally marked DP (Béjar & Kahnemuyipour 2017); iii) agreement jointly conditioned by height and  $\phi$ -markedness, ruling out combinations where the lower DP is more  $\phi$ -featurally marked than the higher—a pattern typically explained in terms of *feature gluttony* (Coon & Keine 2021). I present new data from Italian that I argue illustrate a fourth strategy: the use of special case-marking on the lower DP to make it inaccessible to agreement in exactly those configurations where a feature-gluttony problem would otherwise ensue.

**Background** In English, specificational and assumed-/mistaken-identity copular clauses pattern alike: the surface-higher nominal takes nominative case, the surface-lower takes (possibly default) accusative case (*The problem is me; He thought she was me*), and the copula agrees with the nominative argument—which, as Heycock (2012) observed, is consistent with the fact that English finite verb agreement is quite generally controlled only by nominative DPs. German differs from this in several respects. For one, in both clause types both nominals bear nominative. Furthermore, in specificational clauses, the copula agrees with the surface-lower nominal (1), but in assumed-/mistaken-identity clauses, Keine *et al.* (2019) identify a  $\phi$ -feature hierarchy effect: when the surface-lower nominal is more  $\phi$ -featurally marked than the surface-higher one (e.g. when trying to express ‘he is me’), the sentence is ungrammatical regardless of agreement target or case assignment (2). Strikingly, the same pattern is shown to hold of Hindi-Urdu by Bhatia & Bhatt (2023).

- (1) *Der Täter bin ich*  
the.NOM culprit be.1SG 1SG.NOM  
‘The culprit is me.’ (German, specificational)
- (2) *er {\*ist ich}/ {\*ist mich}/ {\*bin ich}*  
3SG.M.NOM be.3SG 1SG.NOM/ be.3SG 1SG.ACC/ be.1SG 1SG.NOM  
Intended ‘He is me.’ (German, assumed-identity)

Coon & Keine (2021), followed by Bhatia & Bhatt (2023), attribute this effect to *feature gluttony*: if an articulated probe (e.g.  $[[u\text{PERS} - u\text{PART}]_{\pi} \triangleright [u\text{NUM} - u\text{PL}]_{\#}]$ ) interacts first with a goal with fewer  $\phi$ -features, and later with a goal with more, then such a probe agrees with both goals, ending up with a  $\phi$ -feature bundle that (barring syncretism, ellipsis, or other repairs) will eventually be impossible to expone.

**The empirical picture in Italian** Longobardi (1983) and Moro (1997) document that Italian specificational clauses instantiate the same pattern we saw in their German and Hindi-Urdu counterparts: the surface-lower nominal is nominative and controls agreement (3). By contrast, Italian assumed-/mistaken-identity copular clauses appear to pattern with English ones: the surface-lower nominal takes accusative and the copula agrees with the surface-higher nominal (4). Italian thus presents a mixed picture: German/Hindi-like in specificational clauses, English-like in assumed-/mistaken-identity clauses.

- (3) *Il colpevole sono io*  
the culprit be.1SG 1SG.NOM  
‘The culprit is me.’ (Italian, specificational)
- (4) *Lui {è me}/ {\*è io}/ {\*sono io}*  
3SG {be.3SG 1SG.ACC} {\*be.3SG 1SG.NOM} {be.1SG 1SG.NOM}  
‘He is me (i.e. plays the role of being me).’ (Italian, assumed-identity)

But the Italian empirical picture is in fact even more complex than that, due to a class of exceptions to the pattern in (4) which have not, to my knowledge, previously been reported: even in assumed-/mistaken-identity clauses, if both nominals are tokens of the same pronoun (e.g. in a role-assignment context when someone plays themselves, or in a negated identity statement under a propositional attitude), the surface-lower nominal is nominative rather than accusative, yielding a German/Hindi-like pattern back again (5–6).

- (5) *Sandra è {te/\*tu} e io sono {io/\*me}*  
 Sandra be.3SG 2SG.ACC/\*NOM and 1SG.NOM be.1SG 1SG.NOM/\*ACC  
 ‘Sandra is you and I am me’ (i.e. ‘...and I play myself’) (Italian, assumed-identity)
- (6) *Credevano che lui fosse {te/\*tu} e io non fossi {io/\*me}*  
 think.PST.3PL that 3SG be.PST.3SG 2SG.ACC/\*NOM and 1SG.NOM not be.PST.1SG 1SG.NOM/\*ACC  
 ‘They thought that he was you and that I was not myself.’ (Italian, mistaken identity)

**ACC case as anti-gluttony repair** I argue that, much as Italian specificational clauses overtly pattern with their German/Hindi counterparts, Italian assumed/mistaken-identity clauses underlyingly do so too: in Italian just as in German/Hindi, a  $\varphi$ -feature hierarchy is active, and when the surface-lower DP is no less featurally marked than the higher one, a feature-gluttony problem ensues. Unlike German or Hindi, however, Italian has a syntactic repair—it exceptionally assigns accusative to the surface-lower DP (4), so that Heycock’s reasoning about English applies again: since finite verb agreement in Italian targets only nominative DPs, the now-accusative DP is inaccessible to agreement, leaving the higher nominative as the sole licit goal and defusing the feature-gluttony issue. In the same-pronoun cases (5–6), the two DPs are featurally identical, so no feature-gluttony issue arises; the default German/Hindi-like case pattern (both DPs nominative) thus obtains without repair.

**Italian : German/Hindi :: Strong PCC : Weak PCC** Finally, a closer look at the distribution of the accusative repair reveals one more asymmetry between Italian and German/Hindi: in the latter two languages, combinations of different participant DPs (1>2 and 2>1) unproblematically surface with both DPs bearing nominative and the copula agreeing with the higher one; in Italian, by contrast, such combinations also trigger accusative on the lower DP, suggesting that Italian’s feature-gluttony condition is stronger than German’s or Hindi’s. I propose that this mirrors the Weak vs Strong PCC distinction, which finds a natural account under Coon & Keine’s (2021) theory in terms of differently articulated probes. Specifically, the German/Hindi probe will be specified for  $[[u\text{PERS} - u\text{PART}]]_{\pi} \triangleright [u\text{NUM} - u\text{PL}]_{\#}$ , while the Italian one will be specified for  $[[u\text{PERS} - u\text{PART} - \{u\text{SPKR}, u\text{ADDR}\}]]_{\pi} \triangleright [u\text{NUM} - u\text{PL}]_{\#}$ .

**Cross-linguistic parallels** The proposed repair—deploying case to “hide” a DP goal so as to avoid violating an agreement constraint—is not an isolated example. In Inuktitut, assigning oblique case rather than absolutive to an object anaphor shields it from agreement and circumvents the Anaphor Agreement Effect (Yuan 2023). In Basque and Georgian, replacing a dative with a PP “hides” it from agreement and resolves what would otherwise be a PCC violation (Rezac 2011). The Italian case is distinctive in that the repair specifically employs case rather a PP layer, and is conditioned specifically by a  $\varphi$ -feature hierarchy effect.

**References** Béjar & Kahnemuyipour 2017. Non-canonical agreement in copular clauses. *J. Linguist.* • Bhatia & Bhatt 2023. Copular agreement in Hindi-Urdu. *Glossa* • Coon & Keine 2021. Feature gluttony. *LI* • Heycock 2012. Specification, equation, and agreement in copular sentences. *Can. J. Linguist.* • Keine, Coon & Wagner 2019. Hierarchy effects in copula constructions. *Can. J. Linguist.* • Moro 1997. *The raising of predicates*. CUP • Rezac 2011. *Phi-features and the modular architecture of language*. Springer • Yuan 2023. Case as an Anaphor Agreement Effect. *LI*.