

Copular inversion and non-subject agreement

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The phenomenon of copular inversion (CI) is illustrated in the Catalan examples (1) and (2) (examples in (1) from Alsina, 2007), where the copula agrees with the postverbal DP:

- (1) a. El problema són els impostos
the.masc.sg problem.masc.sg be.pres.3.pl the.masc.pl tax.masc.pl
 ‘The problem is taxes’
- b. *El problema és els impostos
the.masc.sg problem.masc.sg be.pres.3.sg the.masc.pl tax.masc.pl
- (2) La guanyadora ets/*és tu
the.f.sg winner.f.sg be.pres.2.sg/be.pres.3.sg you
 ‘The winner is you’

We follow Alsina (2007) in assuming that the postverbal DP in the previous examples is not the subject, even though it agrees with the verb. The relevant evidence includes word order, subject *pro*-drop, raising, and partitive cliticization. The fact that the preverbal DP in (1a), but not the postverbal DP, can be omitted in a subject *pro*-drop language such as Catalan, as in (3)–(4), indicates that the postverbal agreeing DP is not the subject:

- (3) Són els impostos
are the.masc.sg taxes
 ‘It is (the) taxes’
- (4) *El problema són
the.masc.sg problem.masc.sg are

Alsina (2007) attempts to explain this phenomenon by preserving the standard LFG idea that the verb agrees with its subject and, consequently, the lexical entry of a finite verb specifies the person and number features of SUBJ. This is achieved by assuming that the preverbal element in sentences like (1a) is actually a topic (Vallduví, 1992). This topic is anaphorically linked to a null pronominal subject. The null subject takes its features from the topic or the complement (predicate), whichever has the more marked person–number features, where 1st and 2nd person DPs are the most marked, followed by 3rd plural ones, with 3rd singular DPs being the least marked.

This approach, like Moro’s (1997), makes the claim that copular inversion depends on there being a null subject in the clause. We argue that this claim is incorrect: (a) CI is not restricted to subject *pro*-drop languages; (b) even in *pro*-drop languages, it also occurs with overt subjects; and (c) not all *pro*-drop languages have CI (e.g. Basque). German illustrates point (a), as it is a non-*pro*-drop language that has CI:

- (5) Das Problem sind/*ist die Steuern
the.n.sg problem.n.sg are/is the.pl tax.pl
 ‘The problem is taxes’

The case of German cannot be explained away by assuming that, in a free word-order language like German, the initial DP need not be the subject (Berman, 2003), so that in (5) the subject is *die Steuern* and *das Problem* is a focalized complement. The problem with this approach is that it does not predict why it is impossible to have *das Problem* as a focalized subject and thus have the verb agree with it in singular in (5). The best option is to assume that the situation here is exactly the same as in Catalan (1a), i.e. that the verb is agreeing with its complement.

This paper claims that CI shows that verbs sometimes do not agree with their subject; they agree instead with a *cosubject*. A cosubject is defined as any GF that is coreferential with the SUBJ, including the SUBJ itself. It is only in copular sentences where two cosubjects with different person–number features may be present, as only this kind of sentence is able to define two entities as coreferential by means of a verb. This leaves other kinds of sentences, e.g. transitive ones, completely untouched, as these have one possible cosubject, namely the subject itself. Reflexive expressions are irrelevant for present concerns as both reflexive and antecedent have the same agreement features.

This hypothesis is formally implemented as follows. A lexical entry like Catalan *són* ‘are’ does not define the subject as 3 person plural, but specifies the person and number of the feature bundle AGR. The f-structure of the clause must comply with the agreement principle (6), which establishes identity of the verb’s AGR with the AGR of one of the clause’s GFs.

- (6) **GF–Verb Agreement:**

$$\left[\begin{array}{cc} \text{AGR} & \boxed{1} \\ \text{GF}_j & \left[\text{AGR} \quad \boxed{1} \right] \end{array} \right]$$

