

It's Not You, It's Your Probe: A Reply to Béjar & Kahnemuyipour (2023)

Brian Gravely^{1,2}, Carlos Krapp-López³, Daniel Greeson⁴

Emory University¹, University of Southern Maine², University of Arizona³, Stony Brook University⁴

[Comments on this draft are welcome! brian.gravely@icloud.com]

Abstract

In this paper, we challenge recent claims made by Béjar & Kahnemuyipour (2023) and their assumptions with respect to agreement in both mono- and biclausal specificational structures. In particular, we refute the idea that agreement in these constructions may result from a local target DP bearing no substantial ϕ -features and, as a result, an Agree relation is established with a more distant nominal. We show that there are two derivational patterns to specificational agreement: agreement with the specificational subject via a probe specified for $[_\phi]$ and agreement with the referential subject via a probe specified for either $[_{PART}]$ or $[_{PL}]$ (i.e., specified features of person and number branches of a feature geometry). Moreover, we argue that resorting to *ad hoc* assumptions about the proposal of “probe reduction” need not be employed, as agreement may be accounted for in both mono- and biclausal constructions without the need to modify the probe. Consequently, we show that Agree may indeed take place between T^0 and the non-referential subject in monoclausal constructions in languages that consistently show agreement with the referential subject of specificational clauses (e.g. Persian and Spanish), a pattern deemed impossible in the system proposed by these authors.

Keywords: copula, agreement, Agree, feature geometry, specificational

1. Introduction

Recent work on copular structures has resulted in fruitful theoretical advancement, particularly with respect to the extensions and limitations of Agree. In this paper, we challenge recent claims made by Béjar & Kahnemuyipour (2023) (henceforth B&K23) and their assumptions with respect to agreement in both mono- and biclausal specificational structures. In particular, we refute the idea that agreement in these constructions may result from a local target DP bearing no substantial ϕ -features (i.e., those of person, number, and gender) and, as a result, an Agree relation is established with a more distant nominal. We show that there are two derivational patterns to specificational agreement: agreement with the specificational subject via a probe specified for $[_\phi]$ and agreement with the referential subject via a probe specified for either $[_{PART}]$ or $[_{PL}]$ (i.e., specified features of person and number branches of a feature geometry). Moreover, we argue that resorting to *ad hoc* assumptions about the proposal of “probe reduction” need not be employed, as agreement may be accounted for in both mono- and biclausal constructions without the need to modify the probe. Consequently, we show that Agree may indeed take place between T^0 and the non-referential subject in monoclausal constructions in languages that consistently show agreement with the referential subject of specificational clauses (e.g. Persian and Spanish), a pattern deemed impossible in the system proposed by these authors. As a result, we claim a theory which relies on (i) the featural makeup of the probe and (ii) the locality of each potential goal, should be preferred.

In Section 2, we review the data from Persian and theoretical underpinnings presented in B&K23. In Section 3, we present data from Romance (Spanish), showing that there exists a variety in Spanish which patterns identically in both the mono- and biclausal aspects of the specificational patterns highlighted by B&K23 for Persian. We provide an analysis that is

conceptually and theoretically superior in that (i) it relies on multiple probes with specifications that are cross-linguistically attested; (ii) it may account for all potential specificational agreement outcomes, unlike the proposal in B&K23; and (iii) it allows Agree to fail with no recourse to a last resort strategy. We call attention to a specific data point not present in B&K23 which undermines their theoretical proposal and, in turn, we show that our system makes the correct predictions for both Spanish and Persian. In Section 4, we discuss the patterns of languages in which agreement with the specificational subject is systematically borne out (e.g. English and French). We abstract away from the notion of a secondary licenser in copular monoclausal constructions, opting for a system in which default Case is assigned to the nominal that fails to agree with the probe. Section 5 concludes.

2. Featural deficiency and the path to agreement

In this section, we outline the characteristics of specificational structures, focusing on the Persian data and theoretical outline of B&K23. We show that, per their proposal, biclausal specificational constructions in this language differ from their monoclausal counterparts in that in the former, the probe is unable to reach the referential subject in the subordinating clause. However, the specification of the probe is such that Agree with the specificational subject fails, which these authors claim triggers a mechanism called *probe reduction*. This minimization is not needed in monoclausal specificational structures, however, as the probe may simply bypass the hierarchically higher DP in order to agree with the notional subject.

2.1 What is different about specificational structures

Since Higgins (1973), there have been four primary copular patterns investigated in the literature: predicational (1a), specificational (1b), identificational (1c), and equative (1d).¹

- (1) a. **You** are the criminal.
b. The criminal is **you**.
c. This is **me**.
d. **Bruce Wayne** is **Batman**.

In all four examples in (1), we may distinguish the referential nominal (bolded) from its predicating counterpart.² The lone exception to this is the equative construction in (1d), where both nouns may be understood as being referential to one another.

Specificational copulas are distinctive in that the word order is flipped from the more canonical predicational pattern in (1a). Instead of the referential noun, it is the ‘predicating’ DP that takes the canonical subject position (although see Arregi et al. 2023 on arguments against

¹ Identificational patterns have often been assumed to be a subtype of specificational copulas due to the fact that they both involve inversion of the non-referential nominal to canonical subject position. We follow B&K23 in focusing strictly on specificational data, although we welcome the idea that the theoretical claims made for specificational clauses may also apply to identificational copulas.

² Other ways of identifying these two DPs in the literature is in reference to the ‘extensional’ and ‘intensional’ arguments (Romero 2005) or the more popular ‘DP1’ and ‘DP2’ (Béjar & Kahnemuyipour 2017, Hartmann & Heycock 2017, a.o.). We abstain from this terminology here for reasons of simplicity.

this terminology). This inversion often places a lesser specified nominal in a higher position hierarchically than the referential nominal, a process that has been observed derivationally from numerous aspects (Moro 1997, den Dikken 2006, Béjar & Kahnemuyipour. 2017, a.o.). In turn, it has been shown in a number of languages that, despite the predicating nominal being in the canonical subject position, it is the referential DP that shows agreement with the verb.

(2) *Spanish*

- a. Las bailaoras somos **nosotras**
 the flamenco.dancers be.PRS.1PL **we.F.NOM**
 ‘The flamenco dancers are us.’

Hungarian

- b. A legjobb barátom **te** vagy
 the best friend.POSS.1SG **you.NOM** be.PRS.2SG
 ‘My best friend is you.’

These patterns are unlike what the glosses show for English whereby the specificational subject shows agreement with the verb.

Movement of the non-notional subject to the canonical subject position in (2) has been a concern for a number of reasons, namely the type of movement that is undergone here and what provokes it. Of particular interest has been this movement in contexts in which a verb like *consider* selects a small clause. It has been hypothesized that specificational clause patterns must be structurally distinct based on the fact that the specificational order requires an overt copula (3b), whereas a predicational order does not (3a).

(3) *Modified from den Dikken (2006:1)*

- a. I consider [_{SC} Brian (to be) the best candidate]

- b. I consider [_{XP} the best candidate_i *(to be) [_{SC} *t_i* Brian]

These data led den Dikken (2006), expanding on observations in Moro (1997), to claim that this movement, as in cases of (2) as well, is A-movement. As we show in our overview of B&K23, these authors also understand specificational clauses to be unique with respect to their agreement patterns. However, we find the arguments in den Dikken (2006), much like those in B&K23, unconvincing for numerous reasons. First, as we show in Section 3.1, there is no reason to assume A-movement in (2) or (3b), as neither feeds Agree or Case assignment (cf. van Urk 2015). Second, the distinction between (3a) and (3b) seems largely language specific. Whereas Spanish does not require an overt copula for either small-clause order (4), only the predication order is available with or without the copula in Hungarian (5).

(4) *Spanish*

- a. Considero [esa pintura el mejor cuadro]
 consider.PRS.1SG that painting the best picture
 ‘I consider that painting the best picture.’
- b. Considero [el mejor cuadro esa pintura]
 consider.PRS.1SG the best picture that painting
 ‘I consider the best picture (to be) that painting.’

(5) *Hungarian*

- a. En Csongor-t tartom a vőfelynek
 I.NOM Csongor-ACC consider the best.man
 ‘I consider Csongor the best man.’
- b. *En tartom a vőfelynek Csongor-t (lenni)
 I.NOM consider.PRS.1SG the best.man Csongor.ACC be.INF

Intended: ‘I consider the best man (to be) Csongor.’

As we show in our analysis in Section 3, specificational clauses are distinguishable from other copular patterns in numerous ways. However, we contend that many of the reasons considered up until this point are largely semantic in nature and lack privatives that are truly syntactic.

2.2 Persian specificational agreement

Subjects of specificational copulas (SSCs) in Persian, an SOV language, do not typically show agreement with the verb. Instead, it is the referential subject that provides the featural specification for the verbal predicate.

(7) *Persian* (Béjar & Kahnemuyipour 2023:2)

Qātel **man** (hast)-**am**
murderer.NOM **I.NOM** be.PRS-**1SG**
‘The murderer is me.’

Crucially, B&K23 show that this agreement pattern does not hold up under embedding of a raising verb. Here the SSC of a raising verb bears agreement and, in turn, the referential nominal in the embedded clause agrees with the lower verb. These authors show that these patterns are found with raising predicates such as *tavānestan* (‘can’). For expository purposes, we shall refer to these structures as biclausal specificational constructions (BSCs).³

³ A significant portion of B&K23’s analysis is dedicated to distinguishing raising predicates from those of control such as *xāstan* (‘want’) and *jor’at kardan* (‘dare’). We do not revisit the points made there but refer the interested reader to Béjar & Kahnemuyipour (2023:3-9) for the specifics of this distinction.

(8) *Agreement in Persian BSCs*

Qātel-e tahte-taqib_i mi-tun-e [CP to bāsh-i t_i]

murderer-EZ under-chase DUR-can-**3SG** you be.SBJV-**2SG**

‘The wanted murderer can be you.’

In (8), we may see that *qātel-e tahte-taqib* (‘the wanted murderer’) agrees with *tavānestan* (‘can’) in the upper clause, whereas the copular verb in the subjunctive bears 2nd-person agreement with *to* (‘you’) in the subordinating clause.

Based on the monoclausal specificational agreement pattern shown in (7), B&K23 call into question how this pattern must be derived within the syntax. They quickly rule out default agreement, citing evidence that when the BSC subject is 3rd-person plural, this is the specification borne on the (main-clause) verb.

(9) *3rd-person plural agreement in Persian BSCs* (Béjar & Kahnemuyipour 2023:12)

Qātel-ā-ye tahte-taqib mi-tun-an to o Ali bāsh-in

murderer-PL-EZ under-chase DUR-can-**3PL** you and Ali be.SBJV-2PL

‘The wanted murderers can be you and Ali.’

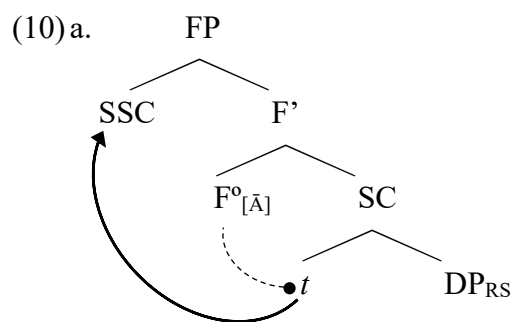
Indeed, the plural agreement in (9) shows that the BSC agreement tracks the ϕ -features of the BSC subject, in this case the 3rd-person plural *qātel-ā-ye* (‘the murderers’).

2.3 Probe reduction, phi-feature deficiencies, and the effects on Agree

For B&K23, the primary question to be answered regarding these data concerns the inability of the SSC to value the probe in monoclausal copular environments and, yet, be sufficiently rich for Agree with the probe in BSC constructions. We follow their order of argumentation, addressing

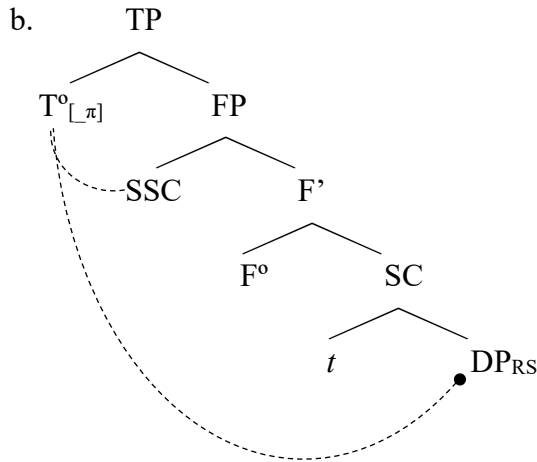
first the proposal for agreement found in Persian (monoclausal) specificational sentences and, then, turn to the pattern found in BSCs.

Assuming a small-clause approach to copular predication as in Moro (1997), *i.a.*, B&K23 claim that there is an intermediary position between the small clause and T^0 (for these authors, a functional head F^0) that is responsible for the inverted pattern found in specificational clauses (10a).^{4,5} Upon the introduction of T^0 in the derivation, the SSC is now the highest nominal in the search space of the probe. However, the SSC fails to satisfy the probe, which permits T^0 to find the referential subject (labeled DP_{RS} in (10)) within the small clause and, in turn, agree with it (10b).



⁴ B&K23 do not specify the type of movement undergone here, although we tentatively assume it is \bar{A} -movement based on arguments laid out in Section 3.2 for Spanish.

⁵ In our analysis below (Section 3), we adopt a PredP approach without argument. We acknowledge that this neither favors nor jeopardizes our analysis against that of B&K23, in particular due to the fact that we follow their assumption that there is an intermediate landing site, with the potential for the moved nominal to continue to Spec, T^0 . Thus, our approach is seamlessly compatible with a small clause approach to copular predication, as well.

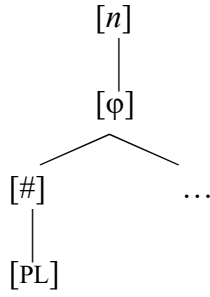


In order for this pattern to be realized, B&K23 make several assumptions about both the features borne by the clausemate nominals and the specification of the probe. Importantly, they claim that no SSC may serve as a suitable goal for T^0 due to the scant featural makeup of this constituent. Specifically, they claim that SSCs lack the person $[\pi]$ branch of their feature geometry entirely, only bearing the feature $[n]$ and any potential number $[\#]$ feature that may be associated with the nominal in question.⁶ In reference to $[n]$, they claim that this is a categorial feature inherent to the minimal specification for all nouns. Referential DPs, on the other hand, bear both $[n]$ and a full set of ϕ -features, as is prototypical of nominal arguments.⁷

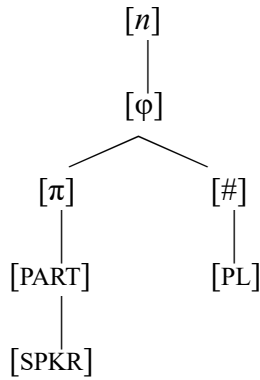
⁶ Although B&K23 do not overtly state this, their theoretical assumptions lead one to believe that, in the same sense that 3rd-person entails the complete lack of a $[\pi]$ branch, singular nouns should lack a $[\#]$ branch altogether. These assumptions will be relevant in Section 3.2.

⁷ It should be noted that B&K23's reference to $[n]$ should not be confused with their previous work (Béjar & Kahnemuyipour 2017) on other types of copular agreement wherein they propose the presence or absence of the feature $[d]$. There, $[d]$ is proposed to be part of the makeup of the

(11) a. *SSC feature geometry*⁸



b. *Referential nominal feature geometry*



It is in this manner that SSCs are never potential goals for T^o in specificational clauses due to the fact that the probe is specified for at least $[_\pi]$.⁹

person branch of a given feature geometry, being the “minimal feature that all person forms have” (Béjar & Kahnemuyipour 2017:487) as a means of referencing all deictic nouns.

⁸ For expository purposes, we abstract away from other potential feature specification, e.g. gender $[\gamma]$, as it bears weight neither on B&K23’s argument nor ours.

⁹ B&K23 (2023:11) show a representation of $[[_n],[_\pi]]$ for the probe, the latter of which is entailed by the first, as depicted in (11b). We follow these notations below.

$$(12) \quad [TP [T^o [\pi] [FP SSC_{[n]} [F^o [SC t DP_{[n]}[\pi]]]]]]$$

A question then surfaces from data in languages such as English and French, where the SSC seems perfectly viable as a target for Agree and, in turn, the referential nominal is assigned a Case other than nominative.

(13) *English Specificational Agreement*

a. The loser is **him**

French Specificational Agreement

b. C'est **moi** la gagnante

EXP-be.PRS.3SG **me.OBL** the winner

‘The winner (it) is me.’

We return to B&K23’s analysis of this cross-linguistic variation and our critiques in Section 4 as it relates to the theory discussed here.

2.4 BSCs and 3rd-person agreement

As described above, BSCs differ from standard specificational sentences in Persian in that, unlike the latter, the former fail to agree with the referential nominal within the embedded clause.

Observe the 3rd-person plural BSC subject, repeated below from (9).

(14) *3rd-person plural agreement in Persian BSCs* (Béjar & Kahnemuyipour 2023:12)

Qātel-**ā**-ye tahte-taqib mi-tun-**an** to o Ali bāsh-in

murderer-**PL**-EZ under-chase DUR-can-**3PL** you and Ali be.SBJV-2PL

‘The wanted murderers can be you and Ali.’

B&K23 cite two possible ways in which the ‘downstairs’ DP may not be able to value the ‘upstairs’ probe: (i) the nominal is inactive (i.e., it has undergone Agree with the embedded probe on T^0 and is thus inactive for further probe-goal relations; cf. Chomsky 2000, 2001), or (ii) it is simply inaccessible due to an issue of locality.

Addressing the first possibility, these authors show that the Activity Condition does not hold in other raising situations, as shown below.¹⁰

(15) (Béjar & Kahnemuyipour 2023:13)

Mā emshab mi-tun-**im** barande bāsh-**im**
 we tonight DUR-can-**1PL** winner be.SBJV-**1PL**
 ‘We can be the winners tonight.’

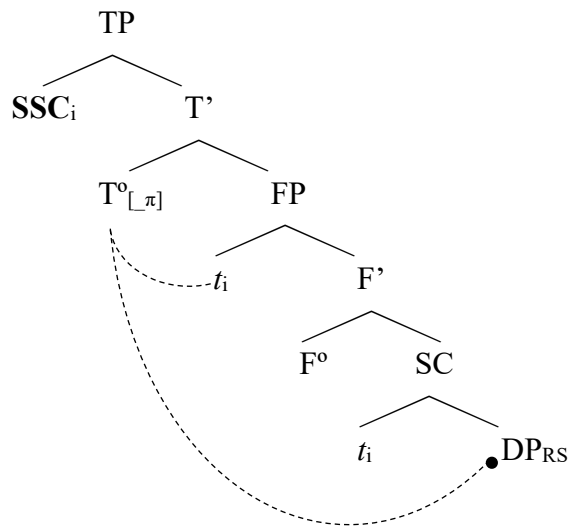
Arguing in favor of the idea that the nominal in BSCs is simply not accessible by the matrix-clause probe, B&K23 argue that there is a domain boundary between the probe in the upstairs clause and the embedded referential DP. Their proposal is as follows. As presumed in monoclausal specificational construction, B&K23 claim that the SSC is not a viable goal for valuation of the probe in the embedded clause and, therefore, the probe bypasses it. However, as the SSC must raise, the authors posit that it satisfies the EPP feature of the probe (16a).¹¹ This places the SSC above the embedded T^0 so that, when the probe on the matrix T^0 bearing

¹⁰ As noted in Oxford (2017), the Activity Condition does not hold up universally. For a comprehensive example of when the Activity Condition is not upheld, see Halpert (2019).

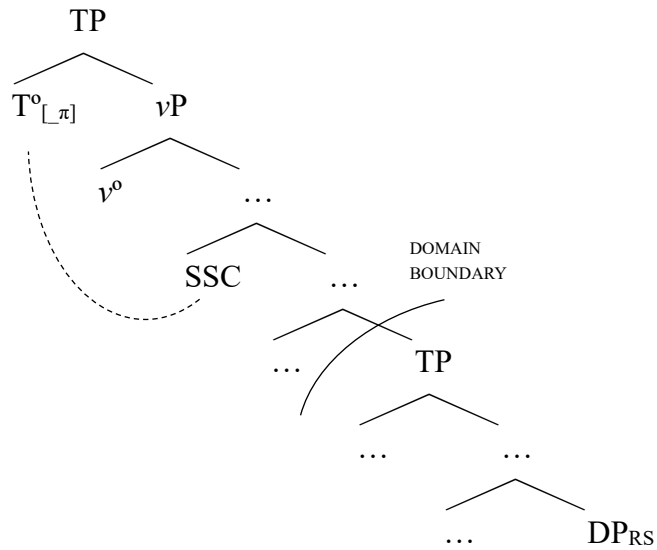
¹¹ Our schematization of this process assumes the presence of an intermediary landing site for the SSC, although this option is only specifically highlighted by B&K23 for monoclausal specificational copulas.

tavānestan (‘can’) is merged it may reach the SSC. Much like the embedded probe, the SSC lacks any substantial feature in order to value it. Nevertheless, unlike in monoclausal scenarios, B&K23 claim that the referential subject is inaccessible due to a domain boundary between the matrix probe and the lower-clause DP (16b). At this point, the person-based portion of the probe fails. However, as the example in (14) shows, this does not result in default agreement. In order to account for successful agreement at this stage, the authors claim that the probe undergoes reduction (17), diminishing the specification required in order for the SSC to agree with and value the probe (16c).

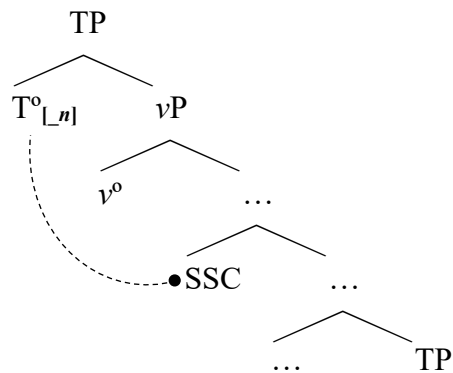
(16) a. *Embedded specifiational clause*



b. *Matrix specificational clause*



c. *Probe reduction and successful Agree*



(17) *Probe reduction* (Béjar & Kahnemuyipour 2023:14)

Failure to Agree reduces the feature structure of a probe.

In this sense, Persian differs from, e.g. European Portuguese, a language that permits the probe on T° in the matrix clause to see into the embedded clause and agree with the most specified DP.

(18) *European Portuguese* (Costa 2004:49)

O assassino **posso** ser **eu**
 the murderer **can.PRS.1SG** be.INF **I.NOM**
 ‘The murderer may be me.’

Although Costa invokes phase theory (Chomsky 2001) in order to explain these results, B&K23 provide reasoning both for and against such an approach in order to derive the Persian data. Therefore, we leave aside the possibility of a phase-based approach in order to account for the cross-linguistic differences in these biclausal constructions. In Section 3.1, we provide evidence that favors an alternative to phases.

2.5 Persian conclusions

In this section, we have outlined the basic characteristics of both specificational clauses and biclausal specificational clauses (BSCs) in Persian as laid out by B&K23. For specificational clauses, they claim that the SSC moves to a position from within the small clause, serving as the highest potential goal for the probe on T^0 when merged. As SSCs are bereft of all person-related features, they are not viable targets for Agree with the probe specified for $[_\pi]$. Thus, agreement with the in-situ referential subject is always predicted, as it often bears a local person specification. In turn, agreement with the SSC in BSCs is attested. However, B&K23 claim this is only possible due to the fact that, first, the referential subject in the embedded clause is inaccessible (i.e., it is not within the probing domain of matrix T^0) and, second, the probe undergoes a reduction process whereby it reduces its featural specification, enabling Agree to take place with the lesser specified SSC (specifically, via the feature $[n]$).

In the subsequent section, we present similar data from Spanish, arguing for a theoretical approach that does not rely on probe reduction. Instead, we argue that, in a privative feature geometry, the patterns in both Persian and Spanish may be accounted for by (i) a two-pronged probe specified for $[_{PART}],[_{PL}]$ or (ii) a complete failure of the probe to agree with either nominal when it bears 3rd-person singular.

3. Spanish specificational clauses

We begin by laying out several important data points in Spanish, including evidence of postverbal patterns not present in Persian that we believe aids in understanding the behavior of copular probes more generally. We then address biclausal patterns in Spanish, focusing on what we call *Spanish variant 2*, which we show patterns identically to Persian with respect to the inability of the raising verb probe to agree with the referential subject in the downstairs clause. We then implement our theoretical proposal, showing how it may better account for all Persian and Spanish data, particularly the novel Persian data presented in 3.3.

3.1 Omnivorous probing, not sidestepping Agree

There are varieties of Spanish specificational copular agreement which show direct parallels with Persian in both mono- and biclausal constructions. We begin with monoclausal patterns, for which we also provide data not available in Persian that we believe sheds light on the derivational mechanisms at play.

Spanish specificational constructions, as is the case with most of Romance, may be thought of as inverted predication structures with respect to their agreement patterns.¹²

¹² See Costa (2004) for both Brazilian and European Portuguese, Moro (1997) for Italian, and Croitor (2018) for Romanian. We review the French data and the relevant references in Section 4.

(19) a. *Predicational*

Nosotros somos / *son los elegidos
we.NOM be.PRS.1PL / be.PRS.3PL the.PL chosen.PL
 ‘We are the chosen ones.’

b. *Specificational*

Los elegidos *son / **somos nosotros**
 the.PL chosen.PL be.PRS.3PL / **be.PRS.1PL we.NOM**
 ‘The chosen ones are us.’

Whereas both Persian nominals move above the verb on T°, the canonical order in Spanish, an SVO language, places one noun before and after the verb (in Spec,T° and in situ within the predicational phrase, respectively). However, also available are predicational- and specificational-like patterns where both DPs are postverbal.

(20) a. *Post-verbal predicational pattern*

Son / *es [FP **los niños de este tipo**_i [PredP *t_i* un problema]]
be.PRS.3PL/ be.PRS.3SG **the boys of this guy** a problem

b. *Post-verbal specificational pattern*

Son / *es [FP un problema_i [PredP **los niños de este tipo** *t_i*]]
be.PRS.3PL/ be.PRS.3SG a problem **the boys of this guy**
 ‘This guy’s kids are a problem.’

In (20), we assume that highest nominal has raised to an intermediary position as assumed above in canonical order copular derivations. However, there is a lack of further movement either by the reflex of ϕ -agreement in the predicational-type sentence (20a; cf. 19a) or a lone EPP feature in the specificational-type pattern (20b; cf. 19b).

What we wish to highlight with these data is something we believe to be key for all specificational clauses. It has been assumed in work by Caroline Heycock and Jutta Hartmann that when the result of Agree is between the probe and the referential subject (in their terms, NP2), this is because the SSC has vacated the search space of the ϕ -probe (Hartmann & Heycock 2016, 2017, 2020, 2022; Heycock 2009, 2012). That is, the SSC is never a potential target for ϕ -agreement. What we see above, particularly in (20b), is that the SSC is as much of a target for agreement as the referential DP in situ. However, the pattern exhibited in (20b) shows that, while the SSC is indeed within the search space of the probe, it is bypassed in favor of a more specified nominal, the referential DP. These data raise the question of both the relationship of the probe with the SSC and, in turn, the specification of the probe, which we address in the following subsection.

Turning to BSCs, we find considerable variety between Spanish speakers regarding whether the raising verb may or may not agree with the referential subject in the subordinating clause, much in the same way that Costa (2004) discussed for European and Brazilian Portuguese. The more conservative variety, what we shall call *Spanish variant 1*, does indeed permit probing into the downstairs clause and agreement with the notional subject as we saw above for European Portuguese (cf. 18). In turn, *Spanish variant 2* does not, thus patterning with Persian and Brazilian Portuguese.¹³ For simplicity purposes, it is this variety that we shall refer to as ‘Spanish’ below. These patterns are shown in (21).

¹³ We wish to point out that we focus on this particular variety of Spanish for several key reasons. First, Brazilian Portuguese boasts the phenomenon of inflected infinitivals. Situations in which the referential subject agrees with the downstairs verb via inflection on the infinitive

(21) *Spanish variant 1*

- a. Su preocupación **pareces** ser **tú**
his preoccupation seem.PRS.2SG be.INF **you.NOM**

Spanish variant 2

- b. **Su preocupación parece** ser **tú**
his preoccupation seem.PRS.3SG be.INF you.NOM

‘His worry seems to be you.’

In (21b) we see the same pattern in Spanish as in Persian: raising verbs agree with the SSC that has moved to the upstairs clause and resist agreement with the referential DP in the embedded clause. The primary difference between the two languages is that Persian embedded clauses are finite, unlike what is found Romance. Differently than what B&K23 showed for Persian, not only may *parecer* (‘seem’) and *poder* (‘can’) participate in this construction, but also other modals such as *deber* (‘must’). What we argue for below, *pace* Costa (2004), is that there is no phase between matrix T^0 and embedded T^0 , which forces us to consider a *horizons*-based

could, in theory, be used to argue that SSCs only agree because the lower DP has already been agreed with and is rendered ‘inactive’ for further agreement. In Spanish, we do not face this problem, as infinitives never agree and, thus, it may be straightforwardly concluded that there is no agreement head in infinitive clauses in Spanish. Second, as we describe below, Spanish presents an optimal scenario in order to argue against a phase-based approach to probing into the lower clause, as there is arguably no CP boundary.

approach (Keine 2019, 2020).¹⁴ Even in languages that permit matrix-clause agreement with the downstairs nominal (e.g. European Portuguese and Galician), these effects disappear when the subordinating clause is introduced by a complementizer, which subsequently forces finiteness on the verb.

(22) *Galician*

- a. Os parrulos **poderíamos** ser **nós**
the geese **can.PRS.1PL** be.INF **we.NOM**
- b. *Os parrulos **poderíamos** que sexamos **nós**
the geese **can.PRS.1PL** COMP be.SBJV.1PL **we.NOM**
- c. Os parrulos **poderían** que sexamos nós
the geese **can.PRS.3PL** COMP be.SBJV.1PL we.NOM
‘The gullible ones could be us.’

However, there is arguably no CP heading the construction under question here of an infinitival verb in the lower clause.

Our main point of interest in the subsection that follows deals with determining how the specification of a probe may account for the patterns in a given construction. Specifically, we argue that the specificational agreement facts need not induce such heavy derivational machinery as that of probe reduction, although this strategy may be viable for a more complex pattern of agreement.

¹⁴ We refer the interested reader to the discussion in Keine (2019:55-56) regarding the differences between horizons and phases.

3.2 Accounting for successful Agree

We begin with the facts of monoclausal specificational agreement in Spanish and Persian:

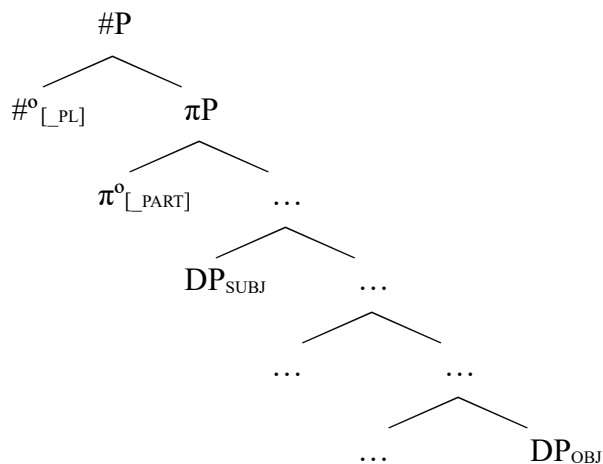
(23) *Monoclausal Specificational Agreement* (first approximation)

- a. Agree with the referential subject is always borne out
- b. Patterns in which the SSC and the verb seemingly agree (3SG) are only licit when the referential subject also bears 3rd-person singular

We argue that agreement with the SSC is not normally borne out in monoclausal constructions in these languages due to the specification of the probe (but see Section 3.3 for a counter example). More specifically, we argue that the probe must bear a higher specification than simply $[_\pi]$ *pace* the claims in B&K23. We implement a Preminger-style pattern to person and number agreement by which person is probed for first, then number.¹⁵ In the Kichean agent focus construction (henceforth KAF; Preminger 2014), Preminger shows that Agree with either probe may be established with either nominal, regardless of its taxonomic label of subject or object.

¹⁵ The proposal of multiple featural specifications that probe cyclically is nothing new. The original work outlined in Béjar & Rezac (2003, 2009) highlights agreement patterns such as those shown in this paper as “characterized as having a single core agreement slot, for the control of which multiple arguments compete” (Béjar & Rezac 2009:35). As we show below, there are situations in which the SSC may provide agreement on the verb in the presence of another reachable goal (i.e., in monoclausal constructions). Therefore, specificational copulas should be viewed in this light and, thus, should not be treated differently than other syntactic structures of this makeup.

(24) π -# *Probing* (modified from Preminger 2014:55)



The crux of his argument is that Agree may fail without any incurred derivational penalty such as ‘crashing’ (*pace* Chomsky 2000, 2001). That is, agreement is realized when possible, but nothing inherently forces this result as in Chomsky’s ‘derivational time-bombs’ system of Agree. In KAF, failed Agree amounts to no morphological spell-out. However, we contend that failed Agree may produce a morphological output based on the functional head in question.¹⁶ This, we claim, is what occurs in the case of Spanish and Persian.

¹⁶ Heidi Harley (p.c.) points out that, in the Distributed Morphology (DM) literature, it is a background assumption that a given morphological exponent may be associated with a particular syntactic terminal, particularly that of a specific category (e.g. D°). We take this to be revealing for cases of failed Agree whereby a given syntactic node may or may not be associated with an overt morphological spell-out. This explains the difference from what we understand as 3rd-person singular agreement in Spanish and Persian versus, e.g. what occurs in Kichean, where a failure to agree results in no morphological exponence.

We begin by simplifying the tree in (24) by placing both probes on T^0 , assuming that $[_\pi]$ probes before $[_\#]$. As in the case of KAF, we claim that the person probe is specified for $[_{PART}]$ and the number probe for $[_{PL}]$.

(25) *Spanish Copular T^0* : $[_{PART}] [_{PL}]$

Following Hartmann & Heycock (2017:4-7), we claim that SSCs may only appear with 3rd-person singular or 3rd-person plural specifications.¹⁷ In this sense, SSCs are never viable targets for Agree (i.e., they may never value and/or satisfy the probe) when the referential subject bears $[_{PART}]$ or $[_{PL}]$.

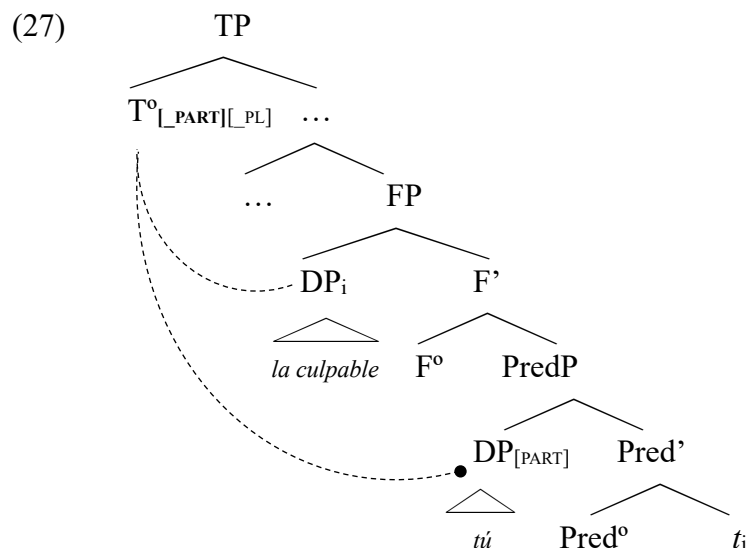
Let us recall the patterns that correspond to both situations, those of local-person referential subjects and those that bear 3rd-person plural.

(26) *Spanish*

- a. La culpable *es / eres tú
the guilty be.PRS.3SG / be.PRS.2SG you.NOM
‘The guilty one is you.’
- b. La causa del infarto *fue / fueron sus hijos
the cause of.the heart.attack be.PST.3SG / be.PST.3PL his kids
‘The cause of his heart attack was his kids.’

¹⁷ A concomitant of this fact is that SSCs are semantically what B&K23 (2023:10) refer to as “a higher-order intensional expression that serves to identify a class of entities” which is not exclusive of the findings in Arregi et al. (2021). Taking this at face value, we should not expect 1st- and 2nd-person DPs to be considered a potential candidate for the group of SSCs.

In (26a), we assume that *la culpable* (‘the guilty’) is found first by the person probe, as it is the SSC that moves to the intermediary position (Spec,F⁰), but it is skipped over. The probe then finds *tú* (‘you’) in its base generated position and agrees with it.¹⁸



In Preminger (2014), the result of successful Agree in KAF was posited to be a case of clitic doubling, not pure agreement (see also Preminger 2009). The distinction for Preminger was made via the property in (27).

(28) *The coarseness property of clitic doubling* (Preminger 2014:51)

If CL⁰ is the result of clitic doubling of some noun phrase α , then CL⁰ will reflect the full set of ϕ -features on α .

¹⁸ As discussed above surrounding the data in (20), we assume that the SSC need not move prior to Agree between the probe and the referential subject. Thus, when the SSC does indeed reach Spec,T⁰, we assume it is via some \bar{A} -bar feature, as this movement does not feed Agree or Case assignment in specificational patterns (cf. van Urk 2015).

In principle, it would appear that verbal agreement in Spanish is not due to clitic doubling (*pace* Ordóñez & Treviño 1999), as all nouns in Romance are thought to bear a gender specification yet this feature never surfaces on T°. ¹⁹ Amy Rose Deal (p.c.) points out that this may be a limitation of what Vocabulary Items are available for the corresponding inflectional morphology, although Preminger (2014:248-249, fn. 17) cautions that this may undermine the coarseness of clitic doubling altogether. An alternative, which we assume without further elaboration, is the employment of a copying specification to the probe as proposed in Gravely (2023a). This results in only [π] and [#] being copied back to the probe. ²⁰

What occurs when the referential subject has no person feature (i.e., is 3rd-person) but only a specified number feature? Recall from Section 2.3 that B&K23 assume 3rd-person nominals have no [π] branch in their feature geometry. Without a local person feature, we should expect the [_{PART}] probe to fail, as neither the SSC nor the referential subject is capable of valuing it. Like

¹⁹ Even with pronouns that show no overt gender marking, it is assumed that these carry a gender feature based on morphological evidence as in (i):

(i) *Spanish*

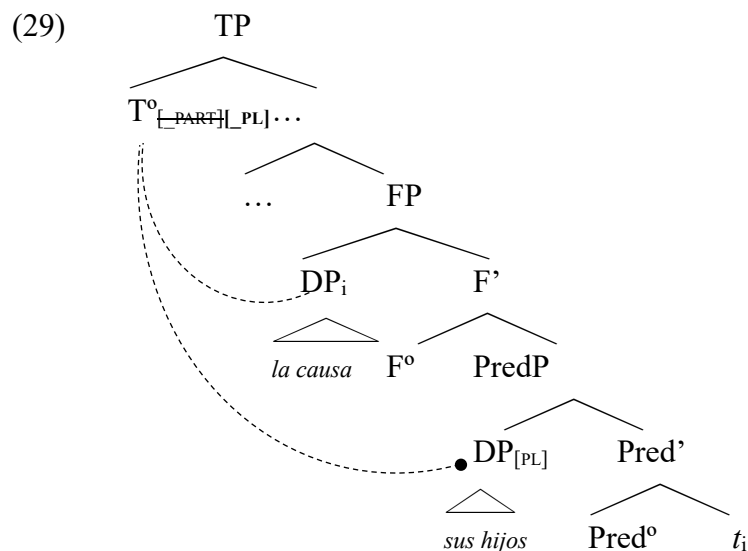
Nos ven **cansadas**

CL.1PL see.PRS.3PL **tired.F.PL**

‘They see us as tired.’

²⁰ As this aspect is largely tangential to our purposes here, we abstain from elaborating on the specifics. See the data in Gravely (2023a) for a case in which, without a copying condition, the vocabulary insertion process runs the risk of selecting the wrong Vocabulary Item.

Preminger, we assume that it is then that the number probe $[_{PL}]$ is activated. In (26b), the probe is able to again skip the SSC but agree with *sus hijos* (‘his kids’).



We find the same pattern in (27) for $[PL]$ -bearing 3rd-person referential subjects as with those that bear $[PART]$: the SSC is bypassed by the probe and its clausemate is agreed with.

We wish to highlight that the derivational steps outlined above (cf. 27 & 29) are not probe reduction; this is a situation in which one probe fails completely and a second, featurally-distinct probe is then activated. Moreover, as we shall see in the subsequent subsection, nothing about this order of operations “forces” Agree to be realized. Unlike what occurs with probe-reduction, this probe may also fail, which we claim is the result when both the SSC and the referential DP bear 3rd-person singular. We claim that there is nothing about the categorial feature $[n]$ posited in B&K23 that bears any relevance in the agreement patterns seen above.

The two patterns illustrated in (27) and (29) account for the majority of agreement patterns in SSC. However, in the next subsection, we provide another piece to the puzzle via novel Persian data that will aid in our understanding of how Agree in BSCs may proceed without resorting to the notion of probe reduction.

3.3 When Agree fails

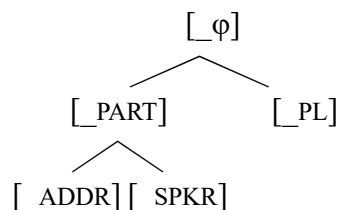
In Chapter 6 of Preminger (2014), this author provides two case studies of failed agreement that result in an overt morphological output: the disjoint morpheme in Zulu (Halpert 2012, 2016) and 3rd-person singular ergative agreement in Basque.²¹ While a full review of these phenomena would take us too far afield from our focus here, there is ample evidence in natural language that certain agreement exponence may result from the failure of Agree to be realized. Much like the case of 3rd-person ergative agreement in Basque, we contend that 3rd-person singular agreement in Spanish and Persian is the result of failed Agree.²²

What may be determined from this claim? The first assumption proffered by B&K23 regarding the lack of $[\pi]$ node in the featural makeup of SSCs may be extended to 3rd-person more generally (at least for T^0 in these languages). While it is not our assumption that 3rd-person is absent in all contexts (i.e., cliticization), by claiming that the probe on T^0 in Romance and Persian (as well as other languages with this agreement pattern) lacks $[\pi]$ in 3rd-person contexts, we may follow the original proposal of Harley & Ritter (2002) more closely, whereby $[\phi]$ feeds $[\text{PART}]$ and $[\text{PL}]$ directly.

²¹ Giovanni Roversi and David Adger (p.c.) point out that the 3rd-person singular *-s* in English can also be considered a case of failed Agree, and Gravely (2023b) argues that another example is allocutive agreement.

²² See Ghomeshi (1996, 2001) for Persian and Oltra-Massuet & Arregi (2005) for Spanish regarding 3rd-person singular as default agreement, which we understand as the result of failed Agree.

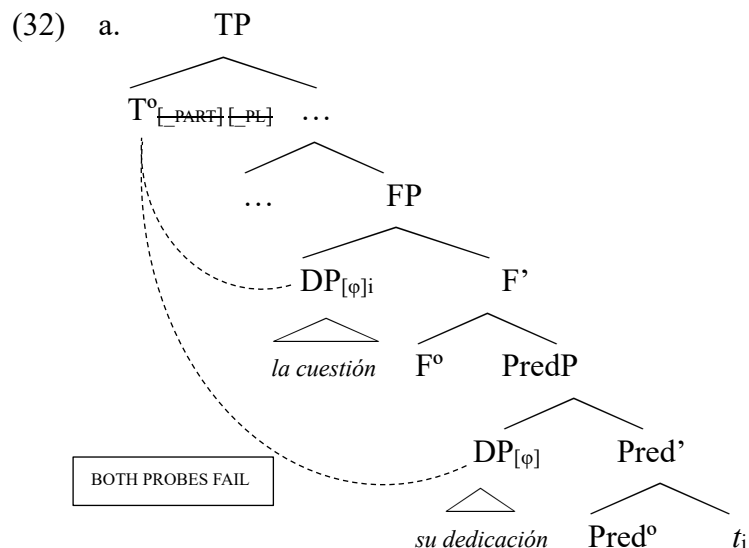
(30) *Feature Geometric T^o*



Following the work on Agree in Deal (2015, 2022, 2023), a probe specified for $[_PART]$ need not interact with a 3rd-person goal (regardless of whether 3rd-person is present in the syntax as $[\pi]$, for example) *pace* Coon & Keine (2021). That is, Agree will only take place if the nominal matches the featural specification of the probe, which we have argued above is $[_PART]$ and $[_PL]$.

Therefore, we should assume that, in scenarios such as (31), the derivation will proceed as in (32a), resulting in the spell-out of 3rd-person singular morphology based on the failure of both probes to find a viable goal (32b).

- (31) La cuestión es su dedicación a la familia
the question be.PRS.3SG his dedication to the family
‘The question is his dedication to his family.’



- b. $\{T^{\circ}, -PST, \sqrt{SER}\} \leftrightarrow /es/$

The same result may be claimed for Persian.²³

- (33) $\{T^{\circ}, -PST, \sqrt{HAST}\} \leftrightarrow /e/$

How does this relate to agreement patterns in BSCs? We observed above for Spanish, much like B&K23 show for Persian, that the horizon of the matrix T° probe prohibits it from reaching the referential subject in the downstairs clause. However, B&K23 showed that the upstairs agreement cannot simply be default agreement, as shown in (14) repeated below (34a). The same is true for Spanish (34b).

- (34) a. *Persian*

Qātel-ā-ye tahte-taqib mi-tun-**an** to o Ali bāsh-in
murderer-**PL-EZ** under-chase DUR-can-**3PL** you and Ali be.SBJV-2PL
‘The wanted murderers can be you and Ali.’

- b. *Spanish*

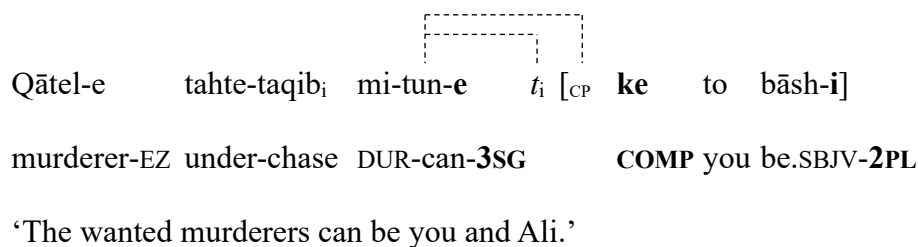
Sus frustraciones parecían ser vosotros
his.PL frustration.PL **seem.IPFV.3PL** be.INF you.PL
‘His frustrations seemed to be you (PL).’

We follow the proposed derivational steps laid out above for monoclausal specificational clauses. First, it is important to establish the precise point in which the probe must stop. B&K23 showed

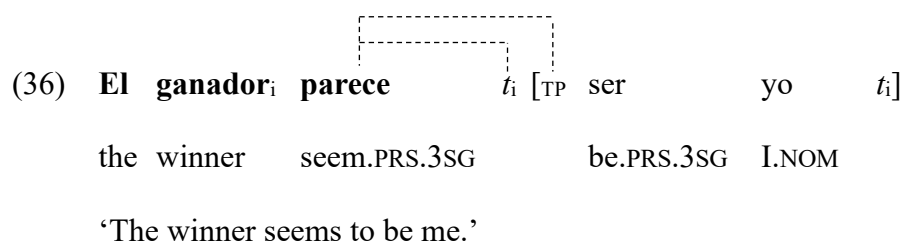
²³ We follow the analysis in Okubo & Nomoto (2023) in assuming that specificational copular structures take the reduced dependent form of the copula. We refer the interested reader to the specifics of the full copular paradigm and its alternations in the table in Okubo & Nomoto (2023:40).

that BSCs in Persian may materialize an overt complementizer, as in (35). Whereas B&K23 suggest that the horizon in Persian is T^0 , we claim that it is in fact CP, due to the fact that the embedded clause shows the subject in a position above the verb.

(35) *Persian Matrix-Clause Horizon* (example from Béjar & Kahnemuyipour 2023:17)



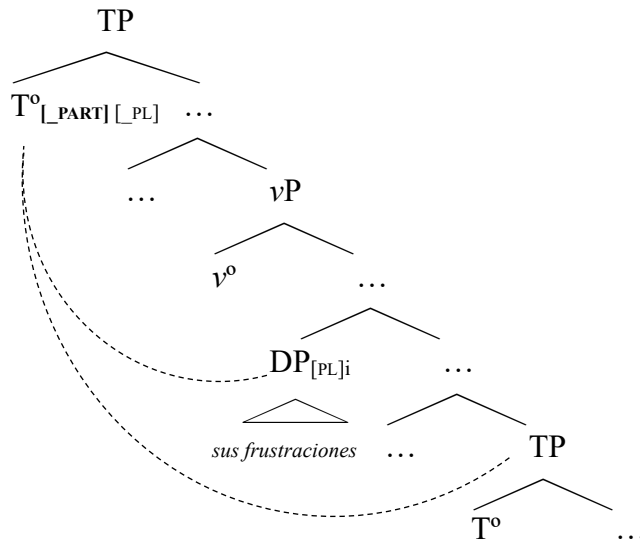
For Spanish, as there is no overt complementizer (thus, arguably, no CP), we claim the horizon to be TP. As in Persian, the matrix probe will be unable to reach the referential DP, which in Romance remains in its base-generated position below T^0 .²⁴



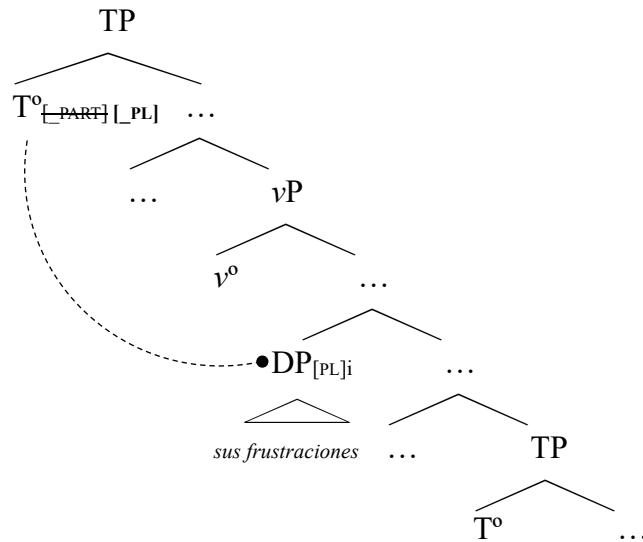
²⁴ The understanding of horizons may be couched in an *interaction & satisfaction model* of Agree, as outlined in Deal (2023), as horizons are a limiting factor for probes much in the same way that satisfaction conditions are. Here, we may account for this by positing a satisfaction condition of [CP] and [TP], respectively. We leave this annotation aside in the models of the subsequent trees, although we consider this postulation a valid pathway of understanding the horizons of probes.

However, when agreement is indeed borne out with a 3rd-person plural SSC (cf. 34), we claim that, much like in monoclausal specificational clauses of a 3SG>3PL combination, it is a second-cycle effect that allows Agree to be realized.

(37) a. *First Cycle: Failed Agree* [_{PART}]



b. *Second Cycle: Successful Agree* [_{PL}]



Just as in (29), the probe [_{PART}] searches its c-command domain, finds *sus frustraciones* (‘his frustrations’), but cannot agree with it. It continues, until it reaches its horizon (TP), at which

point Agree fails. The second-cycle probe [_{PL}], however, is able to probe and agree with the specificational subject.

While it is true that the raising verb in BSCs need not bear default agreement obligatorily, it is this fact that allows us to claim such a probe as in (25) for Persian and Spanish. Our reconciliation with the approach from B&K23 is their positing the lack of [π] in specificational constructions. However, we contend that the absence of this feature does not justify the addition of [n] as in the proposal of these authors. That is, there is no conceptual advantage for the following postulation implicit in B&K23: a probe which is simultaneously (i) specified for (3rd-)person that may only ‘over-agree’ with a local person, but (ii) must force Agree with less than [π] when person agreement fails.²⁵

3.4 What we missed from Persian

Let us now observe further reasoning for postulating both a person- and number-based probe on T^o in these constructions. Particularly, we would like to observe a data point from Persian, only addressed in Béjar & Kahnemuyipour (2017).²⁶ In Spanish, we saw a clear parallel between

²⁵ ‘Overagreement’ refers to the phenomenon in which a probe relativized for, e.g. [_{PART}], may copy back a further specification of the [π] branch, e.g. [SPKR].

²⁶ Béjar & Kahnemuyipour (2017) is centered around distinguishing patterns of inverted structures such as specificational constructions from those of assumed-identity copulas, with a focus on the differing patterns in Persian and Eastern Armenian. While a full analysis of this theoretical proposal falls outside of the purview of this paper, the theory proposed there does not differ significantly from that outlined here: an impoverished SSC is never a target for agreement

mono- and biclausal specificational patterns in that (i) 3rd-person singular SSC are never targets for agreement (cf. 27); (ii) when no local person is present, a 3rd-person plural nominal may serve as the target for Agree (cf. 29, 33b); (iii) 3rd-person singular is the default spell-out when neither a local person nor a plural feature is within the horizon of the probe (cf. 32). Above we saw that (i) is commonly due to the fact that the referential subject typically bears 1st- or 2nd-person. However, when both nominals are 3rd-person, a 3rd-person plural referential subject may bear agreement (ii). Finally, in 3SG>3SG combinations, we have shown that Agree simply fails (iii), resorting to a default spell-out, without the need to resort to probe reduction.

A few comments are in order. First, we showed above that observation (ii) is borne out in Spanish in both contexts under investigation in this paper (cf. 29, 37). Specifically, we highlighted the fact that [_{PL}] is only activated once [_{PART}] fails, showing this for both monoclausal specificational constructions and BSCs. In Persian, the same patterns are found (cf. 34a for BSCs).

(38) *Persian Specificational Agreement (3SG>3PL)*

moshkel-e-sh beche-**has**-sh hast-**an**
 problem-EZ-CL.POSS kid-**PL**-CL.POSS be.PRS-**3PL**
 ‘His problem is his kids.’

A question then arises: Based on the observation (i), should plural SSCs take agreement if their referential clausemate is 3rd-person singular? Per the system laid out in Section 3, they should. This prediction is borne out.

(only bearing [*n*]), whereas the referential subject may bear a local person (or [*d*], which they take to be deictic feature present on all nouns).

(39) *Context: There are multiple, seemingly unrelated murders. However, after further investigation, the police conclude that all of the previously thought murderers/guilty parties were, in fact, one person.*

a. *Persian (3PL>3SG)*

Ghatel-**ha** yek nafar-Ø-**an**
murderer-PL one person-Ø-PL
‘The murderers were one person.’

b. *Spanish (3PL>3SG)*

Los culpables eran él
the.PL guilty.PL **be.IPFV.3PL** he.NOM
‘The guilty parties were him.’

While the analysis in B&K23 does not rule out the possibility of SSCs having a salient number feature (Béjar & Kahnemuyipour 2023:11), their approach to Agree being predicated on the presence or absence of [π] does not predict the agreement patterns shown above. Specifically, although their probe reduction mechanism may account for data in which the referential subject is either more specified than the SSC (monoclausal patterns of 3>1/2 or 3SG>3PL) or inaccessible by matrix T° as in BSCs, it is unable to account for the 3PL>3SG split seen above.

We claim that this is evidence against their proposal as being adequate for the specificational patterns in languages like Persian and Spanish. Thus, it is clear to us that SSCs often bypassed by the agreement probe stems from the fact that it is most commonly less specified than its referential clausemate. However, nothing about SSCs’ lack of [π] (i.e., [PART]) should (i) prevent it from being a genuine target simply based on its missing person specification or (ii) force us to assume a derivational mechanism such as probe reduction.

4. Systematic Agree with SSCs

In this section, we make brief comments on languages that systematically show agreement with the SSC regardless of its featural specification or that of the referential nominal such as English and French. We review several points of French copular data and the agreement patterns found there and argue for a default Case approach to French. In turn, we use this evidence in order to argue for an approach to English default Case *pace* the claims in B&K23.

4.1 French default oblique Case²⁷

Of the four copular types outlined above in (1), only predicational copulas may be formed without the expletive *ce* (Roy & Shlonsky 2019).

(40) *French Copular Patterns*

a. *Predicational*

Marc (c')est mon meilleur ami

Marc EXPL-be.PRS.3SG my best friend

‘Marc is my best friend.’

b. *Specificational*

Mon meilleur ami *(c')est Marc

my best friend EXPL-be.PRS.3SG Marc

‘My best friend is Marc.’

²⁷ For expository purposes, we make reference to ‘oblique’ Case here as any Case that is not nominative, as this form may appear in various syntactic configurations which do not license nominative Case (cf. Detges 2013).

c. *Equative*

Superman *(c')est Clark Kent

Superman EXPL-be.PRS.3SG Clark Kent

‘Superman is Clark Kent.’

The preverbal DP is often identified as a type of left-dislocation (although this is also possible at the right edge in most clause types; cf. Detges & Waltereit 2014). When considering other Romance patterns, an unexpected aspect of specificational clauses in French comes from the fact that nominals with both local-person specification as well as those that bear [PL] take 3rd-person singular agreement on the verb.

- (41) Les gagnants c'est vous
the winners EXPL-be.PRS.3SG you.PL

‘The winners are you (PL).’

This is also true for cleft-like copular constructions in which both DPs are postverbal.²⁸

- (42) C'est toi le problème
EXPL-be.PRS.3SG you.SG the problem

‘It is you (that is) the problem.’

²⁸ Unlike what we saw for Spanish in (20), the only viable word order in this structure is BE+REFERENTIAL DP+PREDICATIONAL DP. This is plausibly due to the fact that (42) is a reduced form of (i):

- (i) C'est vous (qui êtes) les gagnants
EXPL-be.PRS.3SG you.PL who be.PRS.2PL the winners

Lit. ‘It is you (who are) the winners.’

A second aspect is worth noting which parallels with the Case found on certain pronouns. Much like in English, French pronouns take the accusative (or oblique) forms, contrary to the nominative Case patterns we saw above for Spanish.

(43) a. *English*

The problem is **me** / *I

b. *French*

Le problème c'est **moi** / *je

the problem EXPL-be.PRS.3SG **me.OBL** / I.NOM

For B&K23, accusative Case seen on the referential subject in (43a) was hypothesized to be a matter of Agree between v^0 and said nominal. In turn, the SSC is able to escape to the edge of vP , where B&K23 claim it is the only available DP the probe on T^0 can agree with.²⁹ However, as they claim for Persian, this is only possible after the probe $[_\pi]$ fails and is reduced to $[_n]$.

(44) $[_{TP} SSC_i [_{T^0} [_n] [\pi] [_{vP} SSC_i [_{v^0} [\pi] [_{SC} DP t_i]]]]]]$

In order to argue against the idea of more than one agreement probe in the derivation, observe the differences below in an *assumed-identity* context.³⁰

²⁹ B&K23 do not specify whether the domain boundary that results in Agree between v^0 and the referential nominal is a phase or a horizon-based boundary of the probe.

³⁰ Although *assumed-identity* copulas have been postulated as a subtype of equatives, from a purely semantic point of view, we take this to be an erroneous overgeneralization. Unlike in equative constructions, reversing the two nominals reverses its meaning in some languages (cf. 46).

(45) **Moi** c'est **toi**
me.OBL EXPL-be.PRS.3SG **you.OBL**

‘I am you.’

Were we to assume that *moi* (‘me’) in (39b) surfaces due to agreement (and subsequent Case assignment) with ν^0 , what derivational mechanisms must be present for both nominals to bear oblique Case in (45)?

It is our conclusion that neither nominal enters into an Agree relation with T^0 due to the presence of the expletive *ce*. When *ce* is not present, as seen from the variation of (45) below, nominative Case is indeed borne out on the agreeing (preverbal) DP.³¹

(46) **Moi je suis toi et toi t'es moi**
me.OBL I.NOM be.PRS.1SG **you.OBL** and **you.OBL you.NOM-be.PRS.2SG** **me.OBL**

‘I am you and you are me.’

It is clear to us that *ce* interacts in some way with the probe that results in subsequent blocking of any possible agreement with either of the nominals merged in copular constructions. The three questions that then arise are: (i) what features does *ce* bear, (ii) where does *ce* base generate along the clausal spine, and (iii) what is the specification of the probe if not [π]?

The last question seems to us the easiest to answer, which, in turn, answers the first two as a result. Simply put, in the system put forth by B&K23, although the specification of the probe is [π], only a local person feature may Agree with and value it due to the fact that 3rd-person is

³¹ In fact, we contend that the left-dislocated strong pronouns *moi* (‘me’) and *toi* (‘you’) preceding their nominative counterparts are the result of the lack of an Agree relation in the exact same sense as in (45).

simply the lack of person. As 3rd-person singular agreement surfaces on the verb when Agree between the probe on T° and *ce* is realized, we should not expect *ce* to be capable of valuing a probe specified for [π]. Instead, it should be clear that what we find on T° is akin to what Béjar (2003) referred to as a ‘flat’ probe, which describes a probe that bears a specification ([φ]) that would permit it to enter into an Agree relation with any DP no matter the features associated with it.³²

While B&K23’s nominal category feature [*n*] could also be a viable candidate, we wish to make it clear that [*n*] must not arise as the probe specification via probe reduction. That is, there is no [π] probe that fails first, as there is no reason to believe that *moi* and *toi* in (45) are not viable goals for a probe specified for this feature. This immediately answers the question of the featural makeup of *ce* ([φ] or simply [*n*]), in addition to where it must be located. Roy & Shlonsky (2019) identified the base-generated position of *ce* as above T° in a projection they label SUBJ1. For these authors, there are two preverbal positions: SUBJ1 just above TP and SUBJ2 which takes SUBJ1 as its complement.³³ They claim that SUBJ1 is saturated by *ce* when the features of the predication nominal fail to satisfy those of the probe. As a consequence, *ce* is inserted on SUBJ1 and the nominal moves above it to SUBJ2.

(47) (modified from Roy & Shlonsky 2019:162)

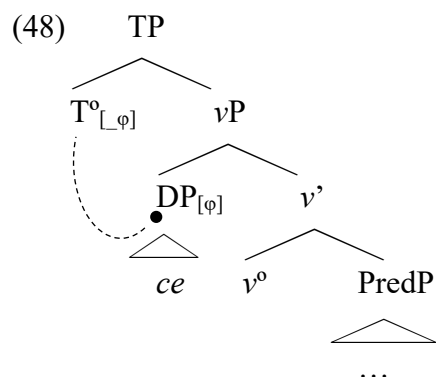
[SUBJ2 mon meilleur ami_i [SUBJ1 *ce* [TP est [_{FocP} Jean_k [_{PredP} *t_k* [PRED° *t_i*]]]]]]]

³² This has, in fact, been claimed for English by Deal (2021:8).

³³ A similar proposal has been put forth by De Cat (2005) in order to account for the subject clitic and its left-dislocated coindexed DP. In these instances, however, there is person and number agreement between the two constituents (i.e., *ce* is not considered in these scenarios).

We find several points of contention with this approach. First, Roy & Shlonsky fail to specify what features fail to value on the probe. However, as we have seen above, *ce* may feed Agree on the verb even when both DPs bear local-person features, which should be sufficient in order for Agree to be realized. On another note, we have proposed above that *ce* seemingly bleeds Agree between the probe on T^o and both clausemate nominals, exhibited by the Case effects of agreement seen above between (45) and (46). That is, variation is not predicted under a last resort account, as the one in Roy & Shlonsky.

Instead, we claim that *ce* is merged in the specifier of *v*^o above both nominals, akin to Deal's (2009) account for existential *there* in English. This assures that when T^o is merged, its probe will always find *ce* first, which bleeds Agree with the two DPs within PredP, thus resulting in 3rd-person singular agreement. In turn, the morphological spell-out of the unlicensed local features (e.g. in (45)) is that of default Case.³⁴



Below, we observe if the same conclusion may be reached for English without the presence of an expletive.

³⁴ See Gravely & Gupton (2020) for another situation in which default Case surfaces in Romance due to the lack of Case-licensing heads in the derivation.

4.2 Not everything needs licensing

The last point of interest we wish to address stems from the reference made by B&K23 against default Case. B&K23 cite the arguments in Maling & Sprouse (1995) for their position against default Case. It is our understanding that these arguments fall flat both at the empirical and the theoretical level, which we claim is unable to account for the patterns shown above for French. The baseline argument for these authors lies in their adoption of the Structural Case Hypothesis (Sigurðsson 1989, Lasnik 1992, a.o.) by which they claim Infl^o (or T^o) may assign Case to two nominals. The first is predicated on a Spec-Head relationship by which T^o assigns Case to the DP in its specifier via m-command, and the second allows long-distance Case assignment to a second nominal constituent in its c-command domain. For Maling & Sprouse, this system is found in languages like Spanish or Persian wherein both DPs bear nominative Case. In turn, they claim that what occurs in English, Frisian, Danish, and Norwegian is a matter of parametric variation in which V^o may intervene and assign the lower nominal accusative Case. It is here that the Structural Case Hypothesis equates copular constructions to other two-argument constructions. Under this approach, all nominals are treated as arguments of the verb and, thus, may not escape formal licensing/Case assignment.

The first issue we take with this approach is the assumption that all DP goals require licensing. Recent work by Kalin (2018) has shed light on the fact that this line of investigation is problematic on numerous fronts, particularly in situations in which the derivation must decide how to handle different types of objects (e.g. those that must be differentially marked versus those that do not require such licensing). It is our claim that equating transitive patterns to those observed in copulas is empirically controversial. Copular verbs, as correctly pointed out by Maling & Sprouse, have no external argument and assign no theta role. Moreover, whereas in

transitive constructions it has been shown that Agree may take place with both the external and internal arguments (Preminger 2014, Bárany 2015, a.o.), Agree with both nominals in a copular clause results in ineffable outputs (Keine, Wagner, Coon 2019; Coon & Keine 2021).

Finally, the approach by Maling & Sprouse is unable to predict the pattern in French shown in (45). As we have assumed *moi* ('me') and *toi* ('you') are the spell-out of oblique 1st- and 2nd-person forms respectively, this would entail V^0 (or v^0) assigning oblique Case to both pronouns. However, *moi* is not spelled out in the specifier of V^0/v^0 and, thus, may not receive Case from this functional head via m-command. Assuming that V^0/v^0 must be the assigner of this oblique Case, it is unclear how both *moi* and *toi* may receive it.

4.3 Agreeing SSCs conclusions

In this section, we have argued in favor of a clear split between languages that systematically employ SSC agreement (English, French) and those that do not (Spanish, Persian) in monoclausal constructions. Using data from French, we have shown evidence in favor of an analysis that considers the probe less specified than that which we posited for Spanish and Persian due to the fact that these languages freely agree with 3rd-person nominals in the presence of DPs that bear a local person and/or a plural feature. Moreover, we have shown reason to cast considerable doubt on the argument of Maling & Sprouse (1995) where they claim V^0/v^0 is an accusative or oblique Case assigner in copular structures.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we have argued against the theoretical claims in B&K23 regarding how agreement arises in both mono- and biclausal constructions in languages like Persian and Spanish. Our

claim is that the derivational mechanism of probe reduction posited by B&K23 is not only unnecessary but makes the wrong prediction when the SSC bears 3rd-person plural and the referential subject is less specified, essentially being bereft of all potential ϕ -features. We showed that a cross-linguistically attested pattern in which [_{PART}] probes before [_{PL}] may account for a considerable number of both mono- and bi-clausal agreement phenomena. However, when the probe is unable to find an agreement target, Agree may fail with no need to reduce the probe and force Agree. In this sense, the work here expands on documented cases in which failed Agree is not only permissible but leads to an overt morphological spell-out. Most importantly, however, we believe that our primary contribution is that which argues that a system wherein *ad hoc* person-based featural distribution and its control on agreement (even over specified number features) misrepresents the way in which Agree operates (cf. Georgi 2010).

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