Patterns of number (dis)agreement in Pyrenean varieties

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Abstract

This paper examines number agreement patterns in unaccusative constructions within Pyrenean varieties, focusing on Spanish spoken in the Aragon area and North-Western Catalan. Adopting Chomsky's (2000, 2001) Probe-Goal system and Obata et al.'s (2015) approach to parametric variation, we address the syntactic behavior of postverbal indefinite noun phrases (NPs) in these varieties. The data reveal systematic agreement asymmetries tied to unaccusativity and the presence of locative / expletive elements, which, we defend, has an effect on the dynamics of the operation Agree. Our analysis submits that dialectal variation emerges from differences in the ordering of syntactic operations (in the spirit of Chomsky's 1993 analysis of verb raising), thus offering a unified account of these patterns across related languages.

Keywords: syntax, agreement, dialects, Romance, variation, parameters.

1. Introduction

In certain Pyrenean dialects, such as Aragonese Spanish and North Western Catalan, verbs in unaccusative constructions frequently exhibit lack of number agreement with postverbal subjects. This is shown in the examples in (1), where the the verb and the postverbal NP (the internal argument) are in bold:

(1)   Aragonese Spanish, Saura (2010:575)
       a. **Empieza** a venir   **truchas**   allí
          start.3SG to come-inf trout.3PL there
          'Trouts start to come there'
       b. **Entraba**   **hombres y   mujeres**
          come in.3SG men   and   women
          'Men and women came in'
       c. **Ha   venido   muchos turistas**   este año
          have.3SG come-PTCP   many   tourists.3PL this year
          'Many tourists have come this year'

        This phenomenon, where singular verb forms co-occur with plural noun
phrases (NPs), contrasts with standard agreement patterns (where full agreement
occurs), and raises questions about how the relevant underlying syntactic mechanisms
are deployed in the relevant varieties. Previous work on this phenomenon (see Saura
2010, Massanell 2011, Rigau 1994, 1997, 2005, 2013, 2020, and references therein)
have documented these patterns, noting their association with unaccusative verbs,
postverbal indefinite NPs, and locative or existential contexts.
        This paper provides a description of the facts, which we anchor to a more ample
phenomenology of disagreement patterns in Romance—and other languages.
Technically, we provide a formal account grounded in Chomsky's (2000, 2001) Probe-
Goal framework, supplemented by Obata et al.'s (2015) theory of parametric variation.
Therefore, assuming that T is endowed with a bundle of φ-features, we take the starting
configuration to be as in (2), where XP stands for a locative element the postverbal NP
is merged with (within a small clause, which can be implemented in various ways; see
Bowers 1993, Moro 2002, Heycock 2013, Matushansky 2019), and "loc" stands for a
locative / defective element associated to XP, much as clitics are associated to their
doubles. I further assume this *loc* is endowed just with person (much like Romance
"se / si" or English "there"), as in Richards (2012), López (2007), Kayne (2008), and
Rigau (1994, 1997, 2005, 2013, 2020).

(2)   [$_{TP}$ Tφ [$_{vP}$ v [*loc* [$_{SC}$ NP XP]]]]

        In (2), we assume that v is φ-defective,[1] therefore unable to assign structural
Case to (and deactivate) the NP, which is assigned partitive Case (Belletti 1988). It
nevertheless qualifies as a Goal for T, under Chomsky et al.'s (2019) approach to
AGREE, whereby inactive / Case licensed elements can be Goals, as long as their only
role is to value a higher Probe (see fn. 10). From here, and taking *loc* to check T's
[person], I submit that there can be two derivational routes, corresponding to two
different varieties that ultimately yield agreement or disagreement. In variety A, T first
agrees with the NP and then the XP undergoes Internal Merge (I-MMERGE) to the
edge of the vP:

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[1] See Richards (2012) for an alternative approach, with no consequences for the facts under
consideration in this paper.

(3)   Dialect A
        a. [TP Tφ [vP v [P [SC NP XP]]]]   AGREE (T, NP)

                (AGREE)
        b. [TP Tφ [XP [vP v [P [SC NP <XP>]]]]]   I-MERGE (NP, vP)

                (Internal MERGE)

In the flipside (variety B), the steps reverse: XP first raises to the edge of the vP (for reasons that could be accommodated in the proposals of Moro 2002 or Chomsky 2013), a position in which it blocks AGREE (T, NP) (Chomsky 2004), yielding disagreement:

(4)   Dialect B
        a. [TP Tφ [XP [vP v [P [SC NP <XP>]]]]]   I-MERGE (NP, vP)

                (Internal MERGE)
        b. [TP Tφ [XP [vP v [P [SC NP <XP>]]]]]   MATCH (T, XP)

                (AGREE)

The idea behind (3)-(4) is that the same derivational steps are present in all varieties, but the timing of operations differs. Differently put, the raising of the locative XP occurs in all varieties, but this step takes place before TRANSFER in some of them, whereas it does after TRANSFER in others. Obata et al. (2015) make this very point, arguing that some parameters can be captured by ordering of computational operations (as in Chomsky 1993, where verb movement or wh-movement occurs before or after the application of the Spell-Out rule). This naturally brings us into the domain of optionality (Biberauer & Richards 2006, Chomsky 2001, Uriagereka 2002, among others), which has consequences for interface effects and parametric variation itself, which has been cornered to TRANSFER and whatever processes take place under the "externalization" cover term, plausibly so (see Gallego 2011, Chomsky 2007, 2008, 2012).

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 introduces the empirical data from Aragonese Spanish, North Western Catalan, and related Pyrenean varieties, making the point that number disagreement belongs to a more general situation in which the operation AGREE fails to value the φ-features of T in a one-fell-swoop fashion; in section 3 we explore the syntactic variation observed, attributing it to the timing in which operations occur (following Obata et al.'s 2015 analysis, which revamps Chomsky's 1993 Spell-Out based approach to parameters); section 4 offers a theoretical analysis based on the Probe-Goal framework of Chomsky (2000, 2001), whose key idea is that number disagreement obtains due to the presence of an locative/expletive element; section 5 summarizes the main conclusions.

2. The data: agreement patterns in Pyrinean varieties

The literature of agreement, both about Romance languages and beyond, has discussed situations in which a postverbal NP does not exhibit full / complete agreement with

the verb (Boeckx 2008, Mensching & Remberger 2006, D'Alessandro et al. 2008, D'Alessandro 2022, López 2007, Loporcaro 2024, among others). For the most part, this concerns situations in which agreement is either partially (just numer) or totally defective (i.e., default). The following examples provide some relevant instances, featuring existential sentences, long distance agreement, and SE sentences (Etxepare 2006, López 2007, Ormazabal & Romero 2024, and references therein). Notice that the relevant structures are unaccusative, so they do not project an agent NP in [Spec, vP], and accusative Case is not active.

(5)   English
       a. There are three cars in the yard
       Catalan
       b. S' han   escrit   moltes ximpleries
          SE have.3PL written many   stupidities
          'Many stupidities have been written'
       Spanish
       c. Me   gustan   ver   películas de acción
          to me.CL like.3PL see.INF   movies   of action
          'I like watching action movies'

In all the examples in (5), the verb agrees with a postverbal NP (the internal argument) in number (not person, which is always expressed as 3rd). Such NPs and T can be clause-mates (as in (a) and (b)), or not (as in (c)). Sometimes, the number features of the NP fail to interact with the φ-complete of T, yielding totally defective agreement—no agreement at all. In Romance, this typically happens when the internal argument is a clause, as in (6) (see Picallo 2002):
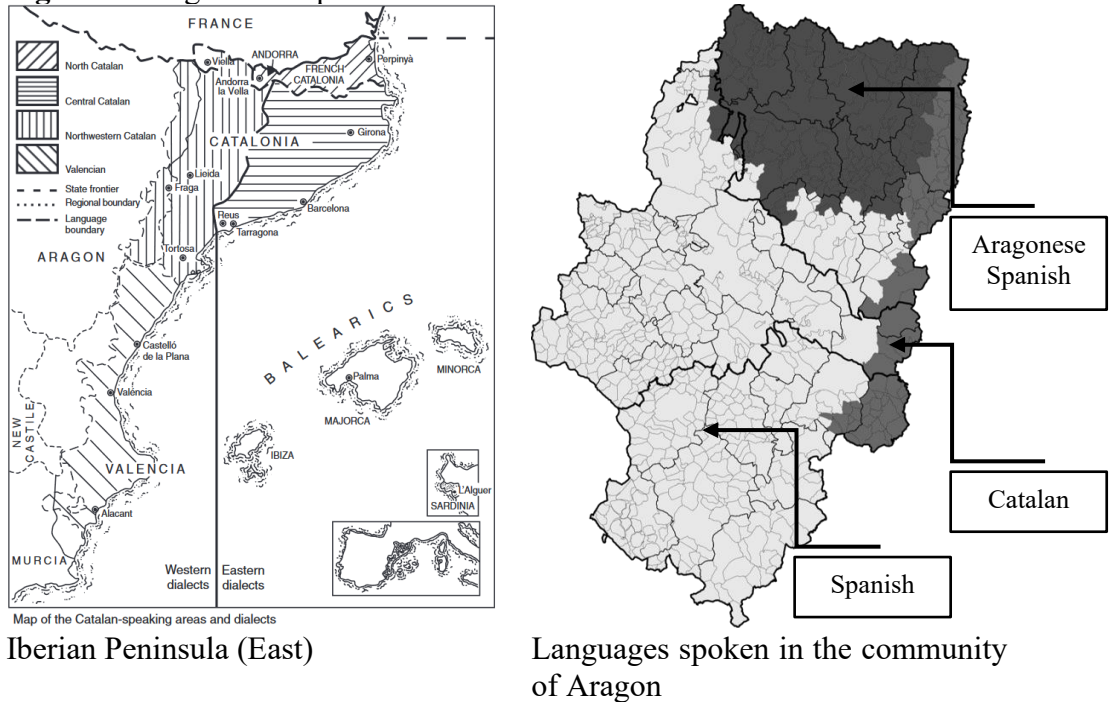
(6)   Catalan
       a. {S'ha / *S'han}   dit [que arribaran   pluges]
          SE have.{3SG/3PL} said that arrive.FUT.3SG rains
          'It has been said that rains will hit'
       b. {S' ha / *S'han}   dit [que arribaran   pluges] i [que
          SE have.{3SG/3PL}said that arrive-FUT.3SG rains   and that
farà   fred]
make.FUT.3SG   cold
'It has been said that rains will hit and that it will be cold'

Along with these well-known facts, the literature has reported evidence indicating that varieties of Spanish spoken in Aragon (referred to as Aragonese Spanish hereafter) and North Western Catalan manifests number disagreement in potverbal NP unaccusative structures. The precise areas we these data appear are shown in (7), and we will use the label "Pyrenean varieties" to name the relevant dialects manifesting lack of number agreement.

(7)   **Figure 1.** Aragonese / Spanish Northwestern / Catalan

Iberian Peninsula (East)   Languages spoken in the community
                                            of Aragon

Sources:
https://script.byu.edu/catalan-handwriting/tools/language]
https://eapc-rld.blog.gencat.cat/tag/aragones/]

In his work, Saura (2010) reports data like the ones in (8), which he claims to be possible in Aragonese Spanish, Benasquese, North Western Catalan, and also Gascon (an group of linguistic varieties I label 'Pyrenean varieties'). The non-agreeing NPs and the verbs appear in bold.

(8)   Pyrenean varieties, Saura 2010:575
       a. **Empieza** a venir   **truchas**   allí.
          start.3SG to come.INF trout.3PL there
          'Trouts start to come there.'
       b. ¿**Ha**   salido   **muchos rovellones**   o qué?
            have.3SG gone.out many   mushroom.3PL or what
             'Have many rovellons come out or what?'
       c. Parece   que **sube**   **pocos coches**   hoy.
          seem.3SG that go up.3SG few   cars.3PL today
          'It seems that few cars are going up today.'
       d. **Ha**   venido **muchos turistas**   este año.
          have.3SG come   many   tourist   this year
          'Many tourists have come this year.'
       e. **Puede**   dormir   **tres** en esa cama, pero que muy bien.
          can.3SG sleep.INF three in that bed   but   that very well
          'Three people can sleep in that bed, and very comfortably at that.'
       f. Ya   **nace**   **tres cinias**   en la pila de la   era.
          already be born.3SG three zinnias   in the stack of the threshing.floor
          'Three zinnias are already sprouting in the pile on the threshing floor.'

g. Me   **pone**   **dos gallinas** que compré   esta primavera.
   to me.CL put.3SG two hen   that bought.1.SG.PST this spring
   'Give me two hens that I bought this spring.'
h. **Entraba   hombres y   mujeres**   a   montones.
   entered.3SG men   and woman.3.PL in heaps
   'Men and women were coming in by the dozens.'
i. El otro día **caía   unas piedras** como el puño.
   the other day fell.3SG some stones like the fist
   'The other day, some stones as big as a fist were falling.'

As can be seen, all the examples include an internal argument NP that is indefinite, plus an unaccusative vP. Interestingly, the Pyrenean paradigm in (8) seems to manifest itself in other areas (from the Basque Country, Castilla León, and Castilla la Mancha), as data from COSER [Corpus Oral Sonoro del Español Rural] reveal:

(9)   Leza (Álava, Spain), COSER (COSER-0106_01) (21/03/2025))
       a. … en vez   de la leche limpia, **salía   cuajones**.
          in stead of the milk   clean   came out.3SG curdlings
          '… Instead of the clean milk, there came out curdlings'
       Burgos (Spain), COSER (COSER-0959_01) (21/03/2025)
       b. El último año le   **queda   matemáticas y   música**
          the last   year to him.CL remain.3SG maths   and music
          'On the last year, she failed maths and music"

Similar to the data in (9), which feature unaccusative predicates, copular predicates can also give rise to the pattern we are studying:

(10)   Liétor (Albacete, Spain), COSER (COSER-0214_01) (21/03/2025)
       a. La seda... **Era   gusanos** […]
          the silk   be.3SG   worms
          'The silk... they were worms'
       b. Mira,   ¿sabes   lo que **era   migas ruleras**?
          look.2SG know.2SG it that be.3SG migas ruleras
          'Look, do you know   what migas ruleras were?'
       (Asturias, Spain, [from COSER (COSER-0214_01)] (21/03/2025))
       c. Y   entonces yera,   **era   caminos** que to era   barro
          and then   was.3SG be.3SG paths   that all was.3SG mud
          'And then there was, there were paths in which mud abounded'

To round up the picture within Spanish varieties, social networks like X (previously Twitter) also feature the same unagreeing V-NP configuration. Consider the data in (11):

(11)   Spanish, source: www.X.com
       a. Porque en Cádiz cuando **cae   4   gotas**
          because in Cádiz when   fall.3SG four drops
          '… because in Cádiz when 4 drops fall'

b. En septiembre **nace**   **personas maravillosas** como manzanita
   in September be born.3SG people   wonderful   like   manzanita
   'In September wonderful people like manzanita are born'
c. **Viene   días de gloria** para Venezuela
   come.3SG days of glory   for   Venezuela
   'Days of glory are coming for Venezuela'
d. voy   en [e]l metro-bus y **entra   personas mayores**
   go.1.SG in the metro-bus and get in.3SG people   old
   'I am on the subway-bus and old people get in'
e. [...] Y   compra   fantas que **viene   días movidito**s… :)
      and   buy.2SG fantas that come.3SG days hectic
   'And buy some fantas because hectic days are coming'
f. Del   cielo solo **cae   gotas de agua**!
   from-the sky   only fall.3SG drops of water
   'From the sky only fall rain drops'
g. Aquí **entra   personas**, no animales
   here get in.3SG people   not animals
   'People get in here, not animals'

If nothing else, these examples simply confirm the observation that data featuring non-agreeing postverbal NPs can be gathered from different venues, and in different Spanish-speaking areas.

Moving beyond Aragonese Spanish and other Pyrenean varieties, the literature has shown that similar facts have been reported in Northwestern Catalan, whose varieties are in direct contact with the areas where Saura (2010) collected the data in (8) above (as the maps in (7) indicate):

(12) Northwestern Catalan, Rigau (2013:130)
   a. Ja **entra   clients**
     now enter.3SG clients
     'Clients enter now'
   Northwestern Catalan, Massanell (2011:117)
   b. Enguany **arribarà   molts turistes**
     this year arrive.FUT.3SG many tourists
     'Many tourists will arrive this year'
   Northwestern Catalan, Rigau (1997:404)
   c. **Ve   pluges**
     come.3SG rains
     'Rains are approaching'

Similar patterns appear in Southern French dialects, as pointed out by Massanell (2011). In those varieties, agreement varies depending on the presence of the expletive *il* (Eng. it):

(17) French
   a. Il   {est   arrivé /   sont   arrivés}   deux trains
     cl.expl be.3SG arrived.3SG   be.3PL arrived.3PL two trains
     'There have arrived two trains'

   b. Deux trains {*est   arrivé /   sont   arrivés}
      two   trains   be.3SG arrived.3SG be.3PL arrived
      'Two trains have arrived'

To conclude this section, it is worth mentioning some apparent counterexamples to the general situation we are discussing, in which disagreement obtains when the relevant NP stays in a vP internal position. The relevant data come from Northwestern Catalan and Aragonese Spanish. As the examples below reveal, we have disagreement, but the subject shows up in a preverbal position (signaled with bold letters):

(18) Northwestern Catalan, Veny (1993:281-282)
      Quantes   dones hi   passa,   per aquest carrer, cada dia?
      how-many women CL.LOC go.3SG for this   street   every day
        'How many women cross this street every day?'

(19) Aragonese Spanish, Saura (2010:576)
      Servilletas sobrará,   eso   ya   te   lo   digo   yo
      napkins   exceed.3SG that already you.CL it.CL   say.1SG I
        'There will be more napkins than we need, I can assure you'

Despite appearances, there is a crucial fact about the examples in (18) and (19) that makes them differ from the previous data substantially: the internal argument is Ā-moved (not A-moved) to the relevant left-peripheral position, so Case-agreement dependencies should not be affected. (18) and (19) are instances of wh-movement and verum focus (Leonetti & Escandell 2009), respectively. If this is so, we can consider that the agreement mechanism operates as before: T's φ-features seek the closest Goal in its c-command domain: P checks perseon, whereas number fails to be valued, yielding disagreement, and a subsequent transformation rule applies, raising the internal argument to some peripheral position, with interpretive consequences (Chomsky 2001).

Let us recap so far. This section has introduced various pieces of information indicating that number disagreement is found in certain Iberian Romance varieties. In all the cases, a plural indefinite NP Goal remains within the vP (in a postverbal position), and T shows default agreement (disagreement). In the next section, we discuss some phenomena that deploy a behavior similar to the data that are the focus of this paper.

3. Third Section

The disagreement pattern reviewed in the previous section extends beyond unaccusative vPs to other well-known constructions, such as existential-locatives, SE impersonals/passives, or DAT-NOM sentences. Let us start by considering the latter, which are illustrated in (20) (I use the % diacritic to indicate that the relevant example is subject to variation):

(20)   Spanish, Lope Blanch 1971:306
    a. A mí me   {**gustan** / %**gusta**} **todas las cosas rápidas**
      to me to me.CL like.3PL/SG   all   the things quick
      'I like all quick things'
    Spanish, Villa-Garcia 2010:255
    b. Me   {**faltan** / %**falta**} **varias   piezas del   puzzle**
      to me.CL lack.3PL/SG   several pieces of-the puzzle
      'I need several pieces of the puzzle'

      Both (20a) and (20b) feature a DAT-NOM configuration. However, (20a) has a psych-predicate, whereas (20b) shows a deontic predicate (semantically, related to the "necessity of possibility of acts performed by morally responsible agents", as Lyons 1997 put it). More examples of this sort are provided in (21):

(21)   Northwestern Catalan, Rigau (2005:787)
    a. Mos   {**calevan** / %**caleva**} **istes cadires**
      to us.CL need.3PL/SG   these chairs
      'We need these chairs'
    Spanish, Franco & Huidobro (2021:148)
    b. Me   {**tocan** / % **toca**} **los peores papeles**
      to me.CL touch.3PL/SG   the worst   roles
      'I get the worst roles'
    Spanish, Melis & Flores (2007:16)
    c. Solo les   {**bastan** / %**basta**} **amenazas**
      just   to them.CL suffice.3PL/SG   threats
      'They just need threats'

      Consider next SE impersonal/passive constructions, which have been te focus of much research in the literature (Mendikoetxea 1999, NGLE 2009, Raposo & Uriagereka 1990, D'Alessandro 2007, López 2007, Sánchez-López 2002, Gallego 2016, Armstrong & MacDonald 2021, Ormazabal & Romero 2024, Torrego 2008, and others). As has been noted, the clitic SE restricts agreement to 3rd person, whereas number agreement exhibits a wide range of variation. For the purposes of this paper, we are interested in would-be passive SE constructions that behave as impersonals— that is, structures in which a plural NP occupies the internal argument position, but T shows default (3rd singular) agreement.

(22)   Spanish
    a. Se {**dijeron** / %**dijo**} ese día **muchas tonterías**.
      SE say.3PL/SG   that day many   stupidities
      'Many stupidities were said that day'
    b. Se {**modificaron** / %**modificó**} a propósito **los resultados de la   votación**
      SE modify.3PL/SG   on purpose the results   of the voting
      'The results of the voting were modified on purpose'

      Whereas the examples in (20) through (22) do display disagreement, they differ from the properties illustrated by the data that this study focuses on. Here is why. The evidence in (20), (21), and (22) do not need to adhere to any indefiniteness requirement

(as internal arguments can be headed by definite determiners) and their verbs can be transitive.[2] Thus, and although we exclude such cases from the core paradigm we are investigating, we would like to emphasize—as it will be relevant—a key similarity: the presence of a dative (quirky) element or SE on the external argument position. Somewhat descriptively, we could go on and say that the pattern in (23) seems to be at stake in all the phenomenology that we are discussing:

(23)   Disagreement configuration
       [$_{TP}$ T (singular) [$_{vP}$ SE / DAT / EXPL (= loc) [$_{VP}$ V NP (plural) XP]]]

     The fact that some oblique / defective element occupies the [Spec, vP] position does not seem to be a coincidence. The existence of such element has also been noted in a series of works pointing out that there is a connection between datives, expletives, se, and locatives (Moro 1997, Kayne 2008, 2020, Longenbaugh 2019, Rizzi 1986, D'Alessandro 2007, and references therein)—a list to which we can safely add SE, as it features a behavior that easily assimilates it to expletives, at the very least for agreement purposes (Sánchez-López 2002, Ormazabal & Romero 2024, and references therein). In our account, we are referring to this element as "P" (see section 1).
     Consider now, to conclude, impersonal sentences and existential-locative structures, all of which are present in North Western Catalan too:

(24)   Northwestern Catalan, Massanell (2011:117)
       a. **Falta   dos dies** per a la festa
          lack.3SG two days for to the party
           'There are two days to go for the party'
       Northwestern Catalan, Rigau 2005:791
       b. En aquesta coral hi   **canta   nens**
          in this   choir there.CL sing.3SG kids
          'Kids sing in this choir'

     The data in (24) involve an existential-locative nature—morphologically visible in the case of (24b), which features the locative clitic *hi*, analogous to English *there*.
     Let us take stock. This section has offered a quick overview of other constructions in which disagreement occurs, just like it does in the unaccusative patterns discussed in section 2. Unlike the latter, though, not all the constructions just reviewed qualify as unaccusative. They do, nevertheless, involve an expletive / dative / locative element that seems to be key to defective agreement.[3] We will see precisely how in the following section, where a Probe-Goal analysis of the facts in section 2 is put forward.

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[2] This paper does not account for the indefinite nature of disagreement constructions in section, as our main focus is agreement itself. See Fischer et al. (2016), Kayne (2019b), and references therein for relevant discussion.

[3] The facts that we are discussing go beyond Pyrenean varieties, as they extend to French (as already noted, Italian, and Portuguese (Costa 2001, Mensching & Remberger 2006, Manzini & Savoia 2002, D'Alessandro 2021, Uriagereka 2002).

4. Fourth Section

This section puts forward a Probe-Goal analysis of the agreement facts discussed so far. The optionality we have witnessed is here handled by assuming a different timing in the relevant operations: AGREE and I-MERGE. In so doing, we also address some empirical problems that the proposal raises.

4.1. Parametrizing the timing of operations
All the data revised so far indicate that we are dealing with an unaccusative pattern involving a vP-internal locative / expletive / defective element (overt or covert), as the data in (25) (taken from section 2) show:

(25)   Aragonese Spanish
    a. **Entraba   hombres y   mujeres**   a   montones.
       entered.3SG men   and woman.3PL in heaps
       'Men and women were coming in by the dozens.'
    b. Aquí **entra   personas**, no animales
       here get in.3SG people   not animals
       'People get in here, not animals'

Such element should correspond to the abstract preposition of Rigau's (1994, 1007, 2005, 2013, 2020) analysis of locative and existential constructions, which also display a postverbal NP, typically indefinite, and where disagreement can obtain. This phonologically null (abstract) element, embedded in the structure of change-of-location or state predicates (Moro 1997, Mateu 2015) has a key impact on the dynamics of AGREE.[4] Here I put forward an analysis within Chomsky's (2000, 2001) Probe-Goal system, where the T head acts as a Probe seeking a Goal to check its φ-features (person and number). In particular, we assume that the person feature is checked by a covert locative / expletive / defective element, whereas number is valued (or not, in disagreement contexts) by the NP within the vP, as in other split-probing, covaluation or multiple AGREE accounts (see Béjar 2003, Anagnostopoulou 2005, Boeckx 2008, Sigurðsson & Holmberg 2008, López 2007, Hiraiwa 2005, D'Alessandro 2022, and references therein).
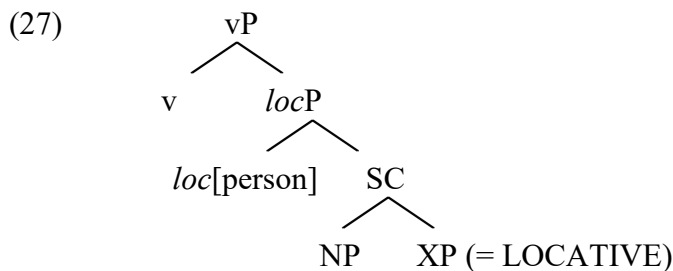
In her approach, Rigau (1994, 1997, 2005, 2013, 2020) assumes the structure in (26), where a overt locative element—the clitic *hi* (Eng. *there*)—occupies the specifier position of a small clause occupying the internal argument position:

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[4] According to Rigau (2013), the abstract preposition is responsible for turning the predicate unaccusative: "We attribute the unaccusative behaviour of local movement verbs to the presence of an abstract preposition within the syntactic structure, a phonologically empty preposition but with syntactic and semantic properties" (Rigau 2013:127).

(26)   from Rigau (2013:129)

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                    VP
                   /\
              V       SC/PP
                      /\
                clitic hi   C'/P'
                            /\
                          P     NP
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We can assume the basics of Rigau's (1994, 1997, 2005, 2013, 2020) proposal, and adapt it to the paradigm of Pyrenean varieties, but with a slight twist: following Moro (1997, 2002) and Mateu (2001, 2002, 2017), we assume that the locative element (XP) is a predicate externally merged with the NP.[5] I also adopt (and adapt) Richards' (2012) analysis of quirky elements, and assume that the SC is dominated by a layer whose head is the abstract locative (*loc*) element posited by Rigau (1994, 1997, 2005, 2013, 2020), much like in clitic doubling analyses (Torrego 1994, Uriagereka 1995, and subsequent literature). This *loc*, as in Rigau's (1994, 1997, 2005, 2013, 2020) account, is responsible for checking the person feature of T. Thus, I assume the structure in (27), which was already introduced in (2):[6]

(27)

```
                    vP
                   /\
              v       locP
                      /\
              loc[person]   SC
                            /\
                          NP     XP (= LOCATIVE)
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Assuming the derivational approach to Case assignment in Chomsky (2000, 2001), after the vP is built up, T is introduced into the workspace, and its unvalued features seek the closest Goal in its c-command domain (in a split / covaluation / multiple fashion, as noted). At that point, I submit that the agreement / disagreement

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[5] In a more articulated syntax of the small clause, the locative would be analyzed as a relational element (P) with a complement (the Ground), using Mateu's (2002) terminology. Since nothing hinges on this representational choice, so we adopt the structure in (27).

[6] An anonymous reviewer points out that the proposal is not explicit about what happens with definite NPs (which are not the main focus of the discussion, as noted in fn.2), as well as first and second person arguments. As mentioned above (see discussion around examples 20, 21, and 22), definite DPs can indeed appear in the data under consideration, although then disagreement seems to go away (see section 4.3). The fact that definite NPs are generally barred should be related to the same constraint on existential constructions, which typically (though, again, not always) requier indefinite dependents (Milsark 1974, 1977; Leonetti 2019). As for the fact that first and second person pronouns are ruled out in the unaccusative constructions I am exploring, it follows from the analysis put forward here: a pronominal locative (labeled "*loc*") checks person, which makes it impossible for the internal argument to show up in first / second guise, similarly to what happens in Person Case Constraint situations. In section 4.3, this is further related to the assignment of partitive Case.

parameter follows from the timing of operations: *loc* always checks person, and then the NP checks number if AGREE (T,NP) is prior to I-MERGE (NP, vP). In particular, we adopt Obata et al.'s (2015) analysis of variation, according to which the famous 'switch' envisaged by James Higginbotham is better regarded as a difference in the application of operations.[7]

I assume, for concreteness, that we are dealing with two dialectal / variants, as the data we have shown reveals. In one variety, call it A, AGREE (T, NP) occurs. In the other, call it B, it does not—hence disagreement obtains. The relevant examples are shown in (28):

(28)   Standard Spanish
    a. **Han**   venido **muchos turistas** este año.   VARIETY A
       have.3.PL come   many   tourists   this year
      'Many tourists have come this year'
    Aragonese Spanish
    b. **Ha**   venido **muchos turistas** este año.   VARIETY B
       have.3.SG come   many   tourists   this year
      'Many tourists have come this year'

I argue that the examples in (28) involve the base configuration in (29), with the covert locative element, and the defective *loc* head endowed with [person], both of which, I assume, are present in all the change-of-location unaccusative verbs seen in section 2 (for arguments of the presence of a locative element in locative unaccusative structures, see Mateu 2001, 2002, 2017, Rigau 1994, 1997, 2005, 2020, and references therein). Following Moro (2002) and Chomsky (2013), I further assume that either the NP or the locative predicate within the small clause (XP) must leave its base generation position. Since the NP is always postverbal in the data we are considering, I assume it is always XP that moves (as in Moro's 1997, 2002 analyses of copular and existential sentences).[8] Most importantly, I-MERGE of the locative can take place before or after aGREE, and that yields different derivational outcomes, crucially affecting agreement.

(29)   [$_{TP}$ T han [$_{vP}$ venido [$_{locP}$ *loc* [$_{SC}$ [$_{NP}$ muchos turistas] XP (LOCATIVE)]]]]

Now, from (29), I argue that the derivation can take two routes, detailed in (30a) and (30b):
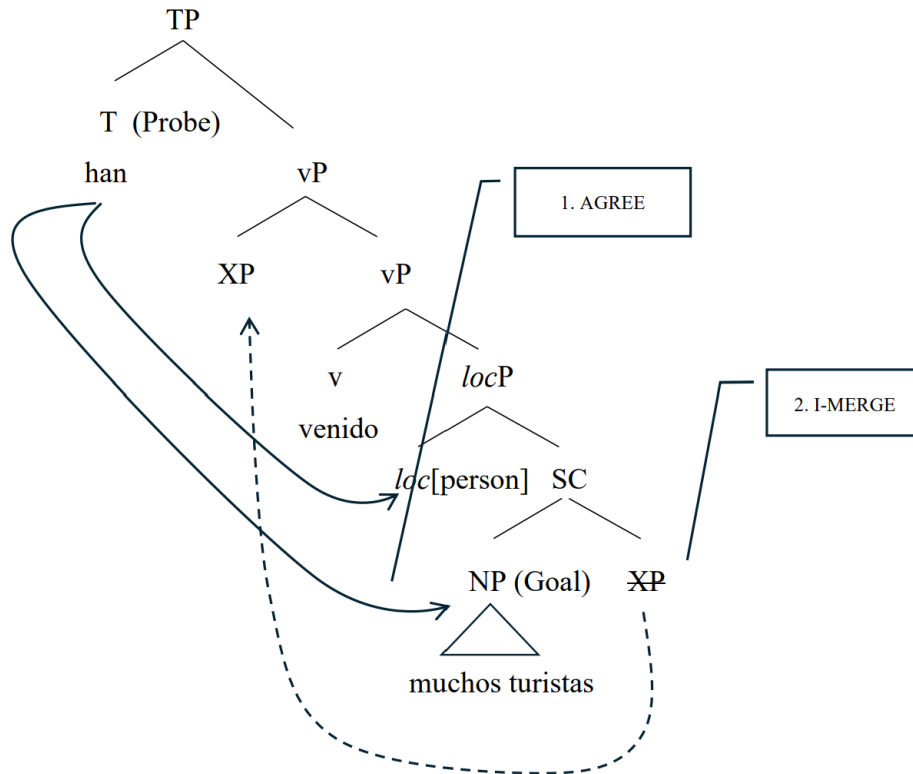
(30)   a. Variety A (agreement):
    ①   AGREE (T, NP) ☑
    ②   Internal MERGE (XP, vP) ☑

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[7] I do not address here the issue of what determines the precise ordering of operations. It may well be a third-factor principle, as Obata et al. (2015) suggest, or else it is determined by morpho-phonological (externalization) constraints that must be met by the language-specific interfaces. I leave this matter open, as it is not crucial for the purposes of this paper.
[8] Such possibility (but applied to the whole vP) is also discussed by Chomsky (2004, 2013, 2015) to account for postverbal subjects. Similar ideas are explored in Belletti (2004) and Gallego (2010).

The first step is key, for it accounts for number agreement. The second step is related to the observation that some element must abandon the vP structure (as noted), for reasons that remain unclear, and are actually orthogonal to the goal of our discussion (see Chomsky 2001, 2008, 2013, 2015 for a labeling-based solution, and Moro 2002 for an LCA-based account). Graphically, the derivation would run as in (31):
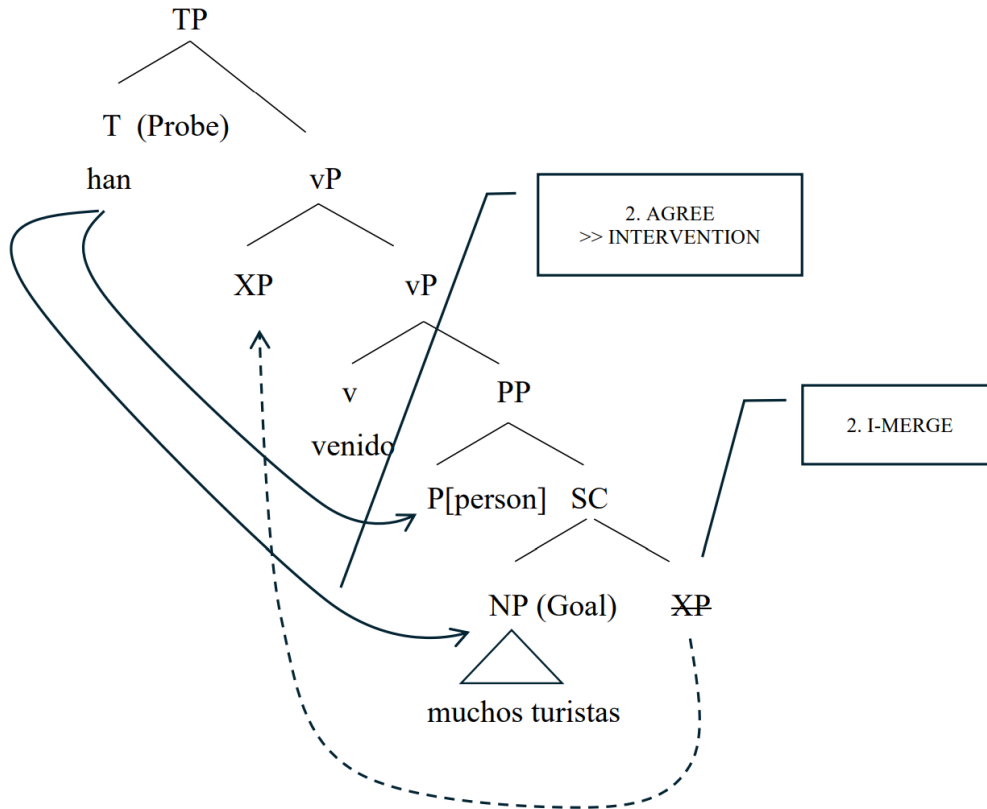
(31)   Derivation of VARIETY A (agreement)

Let us now consider Variety B.

(32)   b. Variety A (disagreement):
　　① 　Internal MERGE (XP, vP) ☑
　　② 　AGREE (T, NP) ☒ (blocked by XP)

In this variety, the locative predicate raises to [Spec, vP], where it blocks agreement between T and the NP (assuming this element is an XP, and thus triggers an instance of "defective intervention"; Chomsky 2000, 2001, Lasnik 1992, 1995, 1996). As before, let us consider the relevant two-step derivation:[9]

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[9] I put aside the person-checking process that "*loc*" is involved in. I assume this is a head, as in Richards (2012), and Rigau (1994, 1997, 2005, 2013), so does not qualify as an intervener for number checking with the NP—instead the XP locative does.

(33)   Derivation of VARIETY B (disagreement)

The process we have just discussed mirrors the behaviour of existential constructions in English, where agreement varies with the locative / expletive *there*. Thus, when the NP *cookies* raises to [Spec, TP], number agreement takes place, for whatever reason full agreement targets such position in English (probably, part of the EPP puzzle).[10]

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[10] An anonymous reviewer suggests that the proposal involves non-standard assumptions and theoretical choices that are not properly motivated. Crucially, as she points out, "even though the analysis seemingly works, I miss a proper discussion on why this analysis would do better than perhaps simpler or more obvious alternatives". The reviewer hints as a potential alternative herself, one where "the relevant contrast could be captured in terms of the features of the proposed "loc" head: if "loc" bears a certain feature, it agrees with the postverbal NP, rendering the NP inactive for further agreement; if not, "loc" remains inactive and the NP agrees with T." Such alternative is deemed as "simpler", and it is said to "rely on more traditional theoretical machinery". Since I am not sure what metrics should be used to determine whether an analysis is "simpler" or deploys "more traditional theoretical machinery", I will simply not dwell into that. It is important to note, though, that the sketched alternative is not obviously more principled. This is so because its logic lies on the feature composition of "*loc*". Of course, we could add as many features to "*loc*" as we need to make things work, but to the extent that this head bears any resemblance with "there" or "se", peson is the only feature that it should be endowed with. If we followed the alternative, we'd have to say that in one variety, "*loc*" is endowed with number (singular), and in the other it is not

(34) a. There's/are cookies on the table
        b. Cookies {are/*is} on the table

4.2. Covert / Overt locatives
A reviewer raises a question that targets the very core of the proposal. As she notes, an empirical problem comes from the fact overt locative arguments do not intervene in agreement in any Romance dialect I am aware of. In order to make her point, she provides the data in (35) (I indicate the locative elements with bold letters):

(35) Spanish
        a. Ayer   llegaron   **a esta oficina** tres nuevos empleados
           yesterday arrived.3.SG to this office   three new   employees
           'Three new employees arrived at the office yesterday'
        b. Por este motivo faltaron   ayer   **en esta oficina** nuevos empleados
           for this reason be absent.3PL yesterday in the   office   new   employees
              'For this reason, new employees were absent from this office yesterday'

        The reviewer concludes that it is quite implausible that covert PPs prevent agreement while overt ones do not. This point is well taken, and I address it in what follows. There are three different issues involved with the examples in (35) and their potential impact for the analysis put forward here: (i) the timing of the parameter, (ii) the categorial (and structural) status of the locative, and (iii) the cover-overt distinction (that is, the tacit assumption that covert and overt versions of an element deploy an identical behavior).
        Let me start by saying that totally agree with the judgments provided by the reviewer in the examples in (35). However, the data do not provide a knock-down argument for the proposal just outlined. To see how, consider (i) first—the timing of the parameter. The reviewer has in mind variety A speakers (like myself), for whom AGREE precedes I-MERGE. Thus, her logic is as follows: if variety A speakers display agreement, the presence of an overt locative should disrupt it, contrary to fact. Though apparently sound, this reasoning ignores the very logic of the proposal: AGREE operates

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(which would then allow for agreement with the internal argument. The parameter would be lexical, as are other Borer-Chomsky Conjecture compatible parameters. In the alternative here, the parameter has to do with the timing of operation, as in GB / early minimalist accounts of V/wh-movement (which, incidentally, should make the proposal tradictional enough). An empirical argument that supports an operation timing analaysis (as it argues against the activity condition, which is pressuposed by the reviewer) comes from the fact that since Richards (2004), different pieces of evidence suggest that NPs are active after getting Case. One example comes from long distance agreement (LDA), such as (i):
    (i)   Spanish, from Gallego (2019:91)
             Me   faltaron   corregir esos   exámenes
             to.me lacked.3PL mark   those exams
             'I couldn't mark those exams'
This kind of evidence is mean to show that a Probe can access an already transferred domain for valuation purposes, as long as the process does not alter the Goal—that is, the Goal is available, but cannot be changed. See Chomsky, Gallego and Ott (2019) for discussion.

before the raising of the locative; therefore, even if we see the locative (after I-MERGE operates), agreement cannot be undone, for it has already happened.

There are other situations where a would-be intervener does not tamper with AGREE, presumably because AGREE has taken place before too. One such case is VOS structures in Spanish, as in (36), where the raised object c-commands the subject (as discussed in Gallego 2013), but does not block verb-subject agreement:

(36) Spanish
      Recogieron   cada coche sus   propietarios
      picked up.3PL   each car   their owner
      'Their owners picked-up each car'

In (36), T agrees with the postverbal subject *sus propietarios* (Eng. their owners), even though the direct object *cada coche* (Eng., each car) finds itself in the c-command path, as shown by the variable binding effects.

Consider next (ii). The analysis in (27) takes the predicate of the small clause to be a covert locative (XP = LOC), without making any reference to its categorial status. I am assuming the locative is akin to a pronominal adverb, such as *it* or *there* (for which there are grounds to presuppose a person feature; Chomsky 2000, 2004, Cardinaletti 1997, Lasnik 1995, Sabel 2000, Kayne 2018, and references there in), for which it is plausible to assume a nominal feature: person. The reviewer is instead concentrating on prepositional phrases, which should not (and, to the best of my knowledge, do no) yield intervention effects, at least in Spanish.[11]

Finally, consider the the cover-overt distinction—that is, point (iii) above. The strength of the reviewer's argument lies on the assumption that when an element has both covert and overt counterparts, they behave alike. There are empirical grounds to reject this claim. Let us consider some of them. First, Spanish has dative / applicative

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[11] The difference between PPs and pronominal expletives is reinforced by the fact that, even though the former seem to have a similar distribution to that of expletives (in locative inversion), they are not always good candidates to occupy the standard subject / EPP position—[Spec, TP]. As Bruening (2011) observes, passives allow expletives and locatives to occupy the subject position, as in (i) and (ii), but the locative cannot move to [Spec, TP] in situations like (iii), where the preparticiple position is incompatible with a displaced PP and no overt *there*.
      (i)   There were many topics discussed during the conference.
      (ii)   During that time period were constructed numerous monuments and temples.
      (iii) {*During that time period / There} were numerous monuments and temples constructed.
                                                                    [from Bruening 2011:1]
Likewise, pseudopassives allow expletive passives, but locative inversion yields a deviant outcome (Bresnan 1994):
      (iv)   There wasn't a single bed slept in on that fateful night.
      (v)   *During that time period were slept in many beds built originally for chipmunks
                                                                    [from Bruening 2011:2]
From all this we can reasonably conclude that whatever their superficial simmiliarities may be, locatives of the *it/there* kind and locative PPs are not to be treated as identical. In fact, the possibility that PPs check person has also been discarded for locative inversion (see Bresnan 1994), for which a hidden expletive analysis occupying the [Spec, TP] position has been proposed (see Heck 2002 and references therein for discussion).

elements that can manifest themselves as null or as clitics, as in (37) (see Pineda & Mateu 2020, and references therein):

(37) Spanish
      a. Le   envié   un regalo a María
         to.her sent.1SG a   present to María
         'I sent a present to María'
      b. Envié   un regalo a María
         sent.1SG a   present to María
         'I sent a present to María'

Although the presence of the overt version (of the clitic) is optional in (37), it is not in (38), where it must appear to license the dislocated argument:

(38) Spanish
      a. A María, le   envié   un regalo
         to María to.her sent.1SG a   present
         'To María, I sent her a present'
      b. */?A María, envié   un regalo
          to María sent.1SG a   present
         'To María, I sent her a present'

If nothing else, the contrast in (38) indicates that, regardless of wthether we analyze overt and covert versions as identical, they do not display the same effects. The next obvious example, still within the pronominal domain, concerns the null / strong pronoun distinction. As Montalbetti (1984) showed for Spanish (see also Luján 1984 and Fernandez-Soriano 1989), null pronouns can act as variables, whereas strong ones cannot:[12]

(39) Spanish
      a. Toda alumna cree   que aprobará
         every student think.3.SG that pass.FUT.3SG
          'Every student thinks that she will pass'
      b. */?Toda alumna cree   que ella aprobará
          every student think.3SG that she pass.FUT.3SG
          'Every student thinks that she will pass'

In a similar vein, overt subjects have been shown to induce island effects, unlike covert ones (Uriagereka 2002):

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[12] A similar observation comes from cleft constructions, where overt and cover elements simply do not behave on a par (see Fernández-Soriano 1989 for some seminal insight on these matters):
   (i)   Spanish
            Quien dijo eso es   {ella / * pro}
            who   said that be.3SG she
            'Who said that is her'

(40) Basque, Uriagereka 2002:91

    a. [Ez   dkit   [CP zer [TP **pro** . . . bidali   dion]]]

        not know.1SG what.ACC   sent   3.HAVE.3.3.if

        'I don't know what (he / she) sent'

    b. *[Ez   dkit   [CP zer [TP **Jonek** . . . bidali   dion]]]

        not know.1.SG what.ACC Jon.ERG   sent   3.have.3.3.if

        'I don't know what Jon sent'

As the pair in (40) illustrates, it is not immediately obvious why the presence of the overt subject (*Jonek*) blocks wh-extraction, if "the only difference between a normal argument and pro is their pronunciation (the structures being otherwise identical)" (p.91).

A final case is provided by lexical aspect (Aktionsart). As Mateu (2002) discusses, the Aktionsart calculation of the VP in (41) seems to ignore the shape of the theme argument (a definite NP), which should be key in 'measuring out' the event (Tenny 1994), *ceteris paribus*.

(41) Spanish

    María pintó   la valla {en / durante} dos horas

    María painted.3SG the fence in / for   two hours

    'María painted the fence in / for two hours'

The puzzle about (41) is that the theme argument, *la valla* (Eng. the fence), should make the VP lexical aspect telic, since it is a definite NP, but it does not. Mateu (2002) argues that the atelic nature of *pintar* (Eng. paint) follows from the [+mass] status of the root √PAINT that incorporates into the light verb DO (see Harley 2005 for a more detailed discussion of the measuring-out effects of roots). Now for the punch line, notice that the moment the root is spelled-out, the lexical aspect tests show a different result:

(42) Spanish

    a. María puso   pintura en la valla {*en / durante} dos horas

      María put.3SG paint   on the fence   in for   two hours

      'María put paint on the fence in / for two hours'

    b. María puso la pintura en la   valla {en / *durante} dos horas

      María put   the paint   on the fence in   for   two hours

      'María put paint on the fence in / for two hours'

This clearly revolves around the overt-covert distinction, and shows that the asymmetry between the relevant elements is not merely phonological, thus pointing to the conclsuion that "silent elements are not simply phonologically null variants of their overt counterparts; rather, they often occupy different syntactic positions." (Kayne 2005:4-5) (see also Kayne 2010 and references therein for much detailed discussion).[13]

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[13] An alternative way of capturing the difference between covert and overt elements would be to resort to a doubling analysis, of the same sort that has been deployed for both strong and weak pronouns (see Belletti 2005 and references therein). Under that scenario, one would just

In sum, all these facts point to the conclusion that the appearance of an overt locative should not alter the agreement patterns discussed in the relevant varieties.

4.3. A note on Case and the EPP

Two final questions need to be quickly addressed. One is how the postverbal NP is Case licensed. The other is how the EPP is licensed. Let us start by the latter. In the cases we are considering (just like in Romance, more generally), there is no knock-down argument to assume that the EPP is a requirement, so I will assume it is not—it does not impact the logic of the proposal. As for the Case licensing part, I assume the NP receives partitive Case (Belletti 1988), which is enough to account for its indefinite nature (see footnote 2). As Massanell (2011) points out, it is possible to have definite NPs in these constructions, but then the disagreement option seems to be out (see 43c):[14]

(43) Northwestern Catalan, Massanell 2011:118
    a. Ve   pluges
      come.3SG rains
        'Rains are coming'
    b. Ja   arriben   les pluges
      now arrive.3PL the rains
        'The rains are arriving now'
    c. *Ja   arriba   les pluges
       now arrive.3SG the rains
        'The rains are arriving now'

We can leave the discussion here. Let us, nevertheless, summarize the key aspects of the theoretical proposal. In this section, I have adopted the basics of Rigau's (1994, 1997, 2005, 2013, 2020) approach to existential / locative unaccusative constructions, which involve a vP internal small clause with a locative element. As has been argued in the literature (Moro 2002, Chomsky 2001, 2013), one of the elements of the small clause must raise to a higher up position, for reasons that may be attributed to linearization, labeling or Case checking—this is immaterial for our purposes. Additionally, I have adopted Obata et al.'s (2015) approach to variation, which in a way revamps Chomsky's (1993) take on parameters as the result of the different timing of operations; whereas the key operation was Spell-Out in Chomsky, I have focused on two narrow syntactic operations: AGREE and Internal MERGE. This suffices to account for agreement and disagreement varieties, leaving aside Logical Form related questions (relevant in Chomsky's 1993 analysis, but not here).

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have to claim that the overt PPs mentioned by the reviewer would be the double in a big locative phrase, thus reinforcing its impossibility to alter or tamper with agreement.

[14] See Massanell (2011) for more evidence and discussion about the definiteness effect and its relevance for disagreement to be possible. See the references in fn. 2 for a wider empirical panorama.

5. Conclusion

This paper has analyzed a number disagreement pattern in unaccusative constructions reported in Pyrenean dialects, mostly focusing on Aragonese Spanish and North Western Catalan (Saura 2010, Massanell 2011, and Rigau 1994, 1997, 2005, 2013, 2020). The basic empirical observations are as follows: (1) these patterns are tied to unaccusativity and postverbal indefinite NPs; (2) a covert locative predicate (XP – LOC), together with an expletive / defective of sorts (dubbed "*loc*"), modulate (dis)agreement; and (3) dialectal variation reflects differences in the timing of syntactic operations, as per Obata et al. (2015). By integrating Chomsky's (2000, 2001) Probe-Goal system with insights from unaccusative syntax (Moro 2002, Chomsky 2013), we have offered a unified account that naturally extends to related languages.

The unaccusative pattern we have discussed naturally extend to other constructions, such as DAT-NOM structures (44), SE sentences (45), and of course other locative-existential sentences (46). All these constructions display singularities of their own, but they all feature a defective v. Crucially, in all these constructions, number agreement is possible, but in some varieties it is absent, and disagreement emerges:

(44) Spanish, Melis & Flores 2007:16
   Para los pecadores [. . .], sólo les   basta   amenazas
     for   the sinners   just to.them.3PL suffice.3SG threats
   'For sinners [. . .], just threats are enough for them'

(45) Spanish, Atlas Sintáctico del Español (on-line) 05/04/2025
   Se descubrió   las verdaderas causas de su   muerte
   SE discover.3SG the true   causes of her death
     'The true causes of her death were discovered'

(46) Spanish, López 2010:132
   Había   tres libros sobre la mesa
   there be.3SG   three books over the table
   'There were three books over the table'

In all these structures, a Probe-Goal approach (Chomsky 2000, 2001) seems tenable, assuming that person feature is checked by the *loc* element we have posited (following Richards 2012, and Rigau 1994, 1997, 2005, 2013, 2020), and number by the vP internal NP (a process that has had different implementations: split probing, covaluation, or multiple AGREE; see Béjar 2003, Anagnostopoulou 2005, Boeckx 2008, Sigurðsson & Holmberg 2008, López 2007, Hiraiwa 2005, D'Alessandro 2022, and references therein).

But all that is not enough. In order to account for the variation, we must posit a way to account for the options that speakers seem to display—a "parameter", in GB terminology. Here we have adopted Obata et al.'s (2015) approach to variation, according to which different derivational histories suffice to derive different outcomes. This is very much in the spirit if not the letter of Chomsky's (1993) analysis of parameters, whereby the points of variation correspond to the different application of

the Spell-Out rule. It remains to be understood whether the ordering is due to an interface-sensitive filter or else it is totally free (which could account for the very same speakers deploying, in some instances, both strategies), but I leave that for future work.

Acknowledgments

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