Fluid intransitivity
in Romance languages:
a typological approach

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1. Introduction

This article deals with the Romance constructions of intransitive verbs in which the S argument in postverbal construction looses (some of) the subject properties it shows when occupying its canonical preverbal position. It aims at bridging the gap between analyses of Romance presentational constructions developed mainly within the frame of the Unaccusative Hypothesis and the general theory of ergativity/accusativity developed by typologists on the basis of more 'exotic' languages.

Romance languages have played a prominent role in the discussions about the Unaccusative Hypothesis, but possible connections with typological accounts of ergativity/accusativity have been obscured by usages of terms such as 'ergativity' or 'split intransitivity' that sometimes depart from the definitions found in the typological literature to a considerable extent. Typologists, for their part, tend to simply neglect the possible contribution of Romance data to the typology of ergativity/accusativity, implicitly considering that Romance languages are just unproblematic accusative languages.

The indiscriminate use of the term of alignment in the typological literature has resulted in confusions whose discussion will occupy an important place in the argumentation. In order to clarify the discussion, I will propose to consider ergativity/accusativity as a complex notion involving not only alignment proper, but also the encoding of prototypical transitive predication, and to replace the ambiguous terms of accusative/ergative alignment by the transparent terms of *A-alignment* (coincidence between the properties of S and A) and *P-alignment* (coincidence between the properties of S and P). Similarly, I will introduce the terms of *A-centered transitive constructions* and *P-centered transitive constructions* to characterize the types of coding of A and P commonly associated with accusativity and ergativity respectively. This distinction between A/P-alignment and A/P-centering of transitive constructions is crucial in the case of Romance languages, which invariably have A-centered transitive constructions (i.e., the kind of transitive coding expected in 'accusative' languages), but show variations in alignment that may question their traditional characterization as unproblematic 'accusative' languages.

I will also argue that the alignment variations found in Romance languages do not meet the definition of *split intransitivity* and are better analyzed in terms of *fluid intransitivity*. This distinction is found in classical typological works (such as Dixon 1994 on ergativity), but has not been developed properly, and the only type of fluid intransitivity commonly recognized is

semantically-driven fluid intransitivity (i.e., a choice between A-alignment and P-alignment both devoid of the strict lexical conditioning characteristic of split intransitivity proper, and sensitive to the semantic feature of agentivity). I will argue that this type of fluid intransitivity cannot account for the alignment variations found in Romance languages, which put into play what I propose to call *pragmatically-driven fluid intransitivity* (i.e., a choice between A-alignment and P-alignment sensitive to information structure). This type of alignment variation was first signaled by Maslova in a paper published in 2006 in which she analyzes data from Dogon and Yukaghir, but the relevance of this notion to languages less 'exotic' than those mentioned in Maslova's paper has passed unnoticed so far.

The paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, I discuss the notions of transitive coding and intransitive alignment as two logically independent components of the notion of ergativity/accusativity. Section 3 introduces the notion of split intransitivity and briefly discusses its relationship to unaccusativity. Section 4 introduces the notion of fluid intransitivity and the distinction between semantically driven and pragmatically driven fluid intransitivity. In Section 5, I show that two of the possible constructions of French intransitive verbs meet the definition of fluid intransitivity, and can be characterized as a construction with full P-alignment and a construction with partial P-alignment, respectively. Section 6 puts forward additional illustrations of similar construction in other Romance languages. Section 7 summarizes the main conclusions.[1]

2. Ergativity/accusativity as a complex notion

2.1. Transitive coding and intransitive alignment

Historically, two different kinds of observations on language structure have contributed to the emergence of the notion of ergativity / accusativity:

– In some Eurasian languages such as Basque or Avar, the asymmetry in the case marking of the two core terms A and P of the transitive construction is the opposite of that observed in languages more familiar to traditional grammarians, with A in a case form different from the quotation form of nouns[2] – ex. (1), whereas in the transitive constructions of all European languages that have a case contrast between A and P, with the sole exception of Basque, the core term in a case form different from the quotation form of nouns is P – ex. (2).
– In Amerindian languages having perfectly symmetric transitive constructions with no case contrast between A and P and obligatory indexation of both A and P, S may be indexed by

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[2] The notion of quotation form may be problematic for categories other than the noun, and the choice of a quotation form of verbs for example is clearly a matter of lexicographic tradition, but the experience of field work shows that quoting nouns in isolation is part of the speaker's competence independently of any grammar teaching. On the theoretical significance of the quotation form of nouns, in particular in the organization of case systems, see Creissels 2009.

means of the same set of person markers as A, or by means of the same set of person markers as P (Sapir 1917). Ex (3) & (4) illustrate these two possibilities.

(1)　　Avar

    a. *was* (M) 'boy',　　*ebel* (F) 'mother' (quotation forms)

    b. *Wasa̅ ebel　　j-it'ana.*
       boy:ERG　mother　　F-send:PF
       'The boy sent his mother.'

    c. *Ebelał　　was　w-it'ana.*
       mother:ERG　boy　　M-send:PF
       'The mother sent the boy.'

(2)　　Russian

    a. *muž* (M) 'husband', *žena* (F) 'wife' (quotation forms)

    b. *Muž　　poslal-Ø　ženu.*
       husband　send:PST-M　wife:ACC
       'The husband sent his wife.'

    c. *Žena poslal-a　　muža.*
       wife　send:PST-F　　husband:ACC
       'The wife sent her husband.'

(3)　　Nahuatl (Launey 1981)

    a. *Ø-C-āna　　in　　cihuātl　in　　tetl.*
       3SG-3SG-catch　DEF　woman　DEF　stone
       'The woman is catching the stone.'

    b. ***Ni**-c-āna.*　　　　　　　c. ***Ø**-Nēch-āna.*
       1SG-3SG-catch　　　　　　3SG-1SG-catch
       'I am catching him/her/it'　　'(S)he is catching me'

    d. ***Ni**-cochi.*　　　　　　　e. ***Ø**-Cochi.*
       1SG-sleep　　　　　　　　3SG-sleep
       'I am sleeping'　　　　　'(S)he is sleeping'

(4)　　K'ichee' (López Ixcoy 1997)

    a. *X-**Ø**-qa-chap　　ri　　ak'aal.*　　b. *X-**oj**-u-chap　　ri　　ak'aal.*
       PF-3SG-1PL-catch　DEF　child　　　　PF-1PL-3SG-catch　DEF　child
       'We caught the child.'　　　　　'The child caught us.'

   c. *X-**Ø**-tzaaq ri   ak'aal.*   d. *X-**oj**-tzaaqik.*
      PF-SG-fall   DEF   child   PF-1PL-fall
      'The child fell down.'   'We fell down.'

In languages having asymmetric transitive constructions of the type illustrated above by Avar, the coding characteristics of S and P tend to be identical, whereas languages having asymmetric transitive constructions of the type illustrated above by Russian tend to encode S in the same way as A – ex. (5) & (6).

(5)   S aligned with P in Avar

   a. *Wasa̅   ebel   j-it'ana.*
      boy:ERG   mother   F-send:PF
      'The boy sent his mother.'

   b. *Ebel   j-ač'ana.*
      mother   F-come:PF
      'The mother came.'

(6)   S aligned with A in Russian

   a. *Muž   poslal-Ø   ženu.*
      husband   send:PST-M   wife:ACC
      'The husband sent his wife.'

   b. *Muž   prišel-Ø.*
      husband   come:PST-M
      'The husband came.'

However, this correlation is very far from perfect. Recent works on ergativity / accusativity operate with a definition that refers exclusively to the possible relationships between the characteristics of the core terms of transitive and intransitive constructions (see among others Dixon 1994). The main motivation of this choice is probably that a definition of ergativity / accusativity in terms of alignment only is at first sight less problematic, since it does not imply previous considerations on the theoretical significance of the coding properties of A and P. It is also more general, since it can be applied to languages that have no asymmetry in the coding properties of A and P. However, the notion of alignment turns out to be a typical example of a notion quite straightforward from a strictly logical point of view, but very difficult to use consistently in linguistic typology, due to the complexity and heterogeneity of the linguistic phenomena involving variations in alignment.

2.2. The shortcomings of the current approach to ergativity / accusativity

In this section, I briefly comment some inconsistencies to which the current approach to ergativity / accusativity has led, in addition to the question of pragmatically driven fluid

intransitivity which constitutes the main point of this article and will be developed in the following sections.

2.2.1. Marked-nominative languages

In marked-nominative languages, nouns have the same form in A and S roles, but this form is different from the quotation form of nouns, whereas the quotation form of nouns coincides with the form of nouns in P role, as illustrated by ex. (7).

(7)   Oromo (Griefenow-Mewis & Bitima 1994)

   a. *Tulluu* (proper name), *makiinaa* 'car' (quotation forms)

   b. *Tulluu-n   makiinaa   bite.*
      Tulluu-SBJ   car   buy:PF:3SG:M
      'Tulluu bought a car'

   c. *Tulluu-n   gammada.*
      Tulluu-SBJ   be glad:PRS:3SG:M
      'Tulluu is glad'

Typologists are clearly reluctant to consider marked-nominative languages as 'normal' accusative languages. However, in terms of alignment, there is no difference between such languages and ordinary accusative languages. Definitions based exclusively on alignment cannot capture the specificity of marked-nominative languages, since this specificity lies in the uncommon combination of a given type of asymmetry in the transitive construction and a given type of intransitive alignment.

2.2.2. 'Hierarchical alignment' and other terminological inconsistencies

In the definition of 'ergative alignment' and 'accusative alignment', 'alignment' refers to possible similarities between the behavior of S and that of either A or P, and from a strictly logical point of view, this definition of alignment leaves just two possibilities: either S = A ≠ P, or S = P ≠ A. Consequently, the proliferation of terms including 'alignment' as one of their components cannot be justified on the basis of this definition, and implies an indiscriminate use of 'alignment' with meanings that at best have only an indirect connection with it, which can only obscure the comprehension of the phenomena to which such terms are applied.

For example, 'hierarchical alignment' (Nichols 1992) refers to a *type of coding of transitive clauses* in which the coding characteristics of A and P are determined by their *relative* ranking with respect to some hierarchy, and could be designated more adequately as 'relative hierarchical type of transitive coding' (Mallison & Blake 1981 speak of a 'relative hierarchical marking'). Moreover, from a strictly logical point of view, the very notion of alignment in the sense of similarities between the properties of S and those of A or P is problematic in languages with transitive constructions of the relative hierarchical type, because relative hierarchical coding presupposes the presence of two core arguments, and one may therefore argue that the coding of the single core argument of intransitive clauses in such

languages cannot strictly speaking put into play the same rules as the coding of either A or P in a transitive construction of the relative hierarchical type.

Similarly, 'tripartite alignment' is not a type of alignment, but rather the absence of alignment resulting from a tripartite pattern of core term coding, and 'active (or semantic) alignment' is not a type of alignment, but rather a type of alignment variation resulting from the existence of two classes of intransitive verbs differing in the coding properties of S.

2.2.3. Conclusion of section 2.2

DeLancey 1981 advocated a notion of ergative construction defined on the basis of the coding properties of the agent NP only, arguing that the intrinsic characteristics of the transitive construction may be more relevant to some questions than the alignment between transitive and intransitive constructions.[3] The interest of this suggestion has not been acknowledged so far, but the growing interest in the relative-hierarchical type of transitive coding, marked-nominative languages, various types of split or fluid intransitivity, etc. should perhaps lead to accept that, in order to achieve a satisfactory typological account of the phenomena commonly considered as involving ergativity / accusativity, transitive coding should not be treated as an epiphenomenon which is not worth being mentioned in the basic definitions. Transitive coding and intransitive alignment are two logically independent but typologically related domains, and my proposal is that ergativity / accusativity should be explicitly re-defined in terms of correlations between types of transitive coding and types of intransitive alignment.

2.3. Definitions

Transitive constructions characterized by a non-hierarchical encoding of A and P (i.e., transitive constructions in which the coding characteristics of A and P do not depend on their relative ranking in indexability hierarchy) may show more or less symmetry in coding characteristics of A and P that, cross-linguistically, tend to correlate with the contrast between core syntactic terms and obliques:

– core syntactic terms are often indexed on the verb, whereas the indexation of obliques on the verb is cross-linguistically uncommon;
– the use of nouns in a form identical to their quotation form, without the addition of any adposition, is cross-linguistically more common in core syntactic roles than in oblique roles.

In order to avoid the confusions that may result from the use of the same labels for types of transitive constructions and alignment types, I propose to use the transparent and non-committal labels of *P-alignment* and *A-alignment* for the types of intransitive alignment currently labeled 'ergative' (S = P ≠ A) and 'accusative' (S = A ≠ P) respectively, and to characterize asymmetric transitive constructions as *A-centered* or *P-centered*: in A-centered

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[3] "For our purposes, and perhaps in general, a definition of 'ergative construction' based solely on transitive agent-marking is more useful than the standard definition in terms of identity of marking for patient and for intransitive subject." (DeLancey 1981: 628)

transitive constructions, A shows more coding characteristics typical of core arguments than P, whereas in P-centered transitive constructions, P shows more coding characteristics typical of core arguments than A. In a fully A-centered transitive construction, A is in a form identical to the quotation form of nouns and governs verb agreement, whereas P is in a marked case form and has no incidence on verb agreement; in a fully P-centered transitive construction, P is in a form identical to the quotation form of nouns and governs verb agreement, whereas A is in a marked case form and has no incidence on verb agreement.

The dissociation of these two notions is particularly important for a proper account of languages in which a complex system of alignment variations co-exists with a simple and uniform situation with respect to transitive coding typology. Romance languages are a case in point.

3. Split intransitivity

3.1. Split intransitivity: definition and illustrations

A-alignment and P-alignment as defined in Section 2 constitute a particular case of a more general type of relationship between constructions: a term T of a construction C and a term T' of a construction C' are *aligned* for a given property if they show the same characteristics with respect to this property. Any pair of constructions including terms of the same nature can be analyzed from the point of view of alignment, but typologists as well as formal syntacticians have devoted a particular attention to *intransitive alignment*, i.e., the possible alignments of the single core NP of intransitive predications with one of the two core NPs of prototypical transitive predication.

The intransitive constructions of a given language are not necessarily uniform in their alignment with the prototypical transitive construction, and several types of alignment variations must be distinguished. Alignment variations governed by grammatical characteristics of the verbs or by the nature of the NPs representing their core arguments are commonly termed *split ergativity*. Alignment variations triggered by the TAM value of the verb form are particularly common. For example, in the Kurmanji variety of Kurdish, the S argument of intransitive verbs is uniformly in the nominative, and the verb uniformly agrees with it, whereas A and P show variations in case marking and indexation conditioned by the TAM value of the verb: in some tenses, A in the nominative contrasts with P in the oblique case, and verb agreement is governed by A (A-alignment) – ex. (8a-d), whereas in some others, A in the oblique case contrasts with P in the nominative, and verb agreement is governed by P (P-alignment) – ex. (8e-h).

(8) Kurmanji (Blau & Barak 1999)

a. *Ez   dikev-im*   e. *Ez   ket-im*
   1SG   fall:PRS-1SG   1SG   fall:PF-1SG
   'I am falling down.'   'I fell down.'

b. *Mirov   dikev-e.*
   man   fall:PRS-3SG
   'The man is falling down.'

f. *Mirov   ket-Ø.*
   man   fall:PF-3SG
   'The man fell down.'

c. *Ez   mirov-î   dibîn-im.*
   1SG man-OBL.SG.M see:PRS-1SG
   'I see the man.'

g. *Min   mirov   dît-Ø.*
   1SG:OBL man   see:PF-3SG
   'I saw the man.'

d. *Mirov   min   dibîn-e.*
   man   1SG:OBL see:PRS-3SG
   'The man sees me.'

h. *Mirov-î   ez   dît-im.*
   man-OBL.SGM 1SG   see:PF-1SG
   'The man saw me.'

Two other types of alignment variations, commonly termed *split intransitivity* and *fluid intransitivity*, are recognized in recent literature on alignment typology. They have in common that their conditioning does not involve the inflectional characteristics of verbs or the nature of their arguments.

In split intransitivity, intransitive verbs divide into two sub-classes differing in the alignment properties of S. For example, in the Papuan language Galela, according to Holton 2008, transitive verbs have two distinct sets of prefixes cross-referencing A and P respectively – ex. (9a-b), whereas intransitive verbs divide into a subclass whose sole argument is indexed via the paradigm used to index the A argument of transitive verbs – ex. (9c), and a subclass whose sole argument is indexed via the paradigm used to index the P argument of transitive verbs – ex. (9d).

(9)   Galela (Holton 2008)

a. ***No**-wi-doto.*
   2SG-3SG.M-teach
   'You teach him.'

b. *Wo-**ni**-doto.*
   3SG.M-2SG-teach
   'He teaches you.'

c. ***No**-tagi*
   2SG-go
   'You go.'
   (A-alignment)

d. ***Ni**-kiolo*
   2SG-sleep
   'You sleep.'
   (P-alignment)

Any contrasting property of the two core arguments of the prototypical transitive construction may be involved in an intransitivity split. Intransitivity splits may involve the coding characteristics of core arguments (case marking, argument indexation, and/or constituent order – *overt* split intransitivity), or their behavior in various syntactic mechanisms (*covert* split intransitivity). Ex. (9) above illustrates an intransitivity split manifested in indexation. In ex. (10), the intransitivity split involves both indexation and case marking, and in ex. (11), the intransitivity split manifests itself in constituent order.

(10) Basque[4]

  a. *Gizon-ak   ur-a   edan   du.*
    man-SG:ERG water-SG drink:PF AUX:PRS:3SG:3SG
    'The man drank the water.'

  b. *Gizon-a   etorri   da.*
    man-SG   come:PF   AUX:PRS:3SG
    'The man came.' (P-alignment)

  c. *Ur-ak   irakin   du.*
    water-SG:ERG   boil:PF   AUX:PRS:3SG
    'The water boiled.' (A-alignment)

(11) Ambonese Malay (Donohue 2008)

  a. *Dorang cari   betang   konco.*
    3PL   look_for my   friend
    'They are looking for my friend.'

  b. *Betang   konco   su-bajaang*
    my   friend   PF-walk
    'My friend walked away' (A-alignment)

  c. *Su-jato betang   konco*
    PF-fall   my   friend
    'My friend has fallen over.' (P-alignment)

    The impersonalization of Nahuatl intransitive verbs provides a good example of an intransitivity split not apparent in the coding properties of S, but manifested in one of its behavior properties. Nahuatl has two distinct morphological devices to encode unspecific agents (passivization by means of the suffix *-lo*) and unspecific patients (the so-called indefinite object prefixes *tla-* and *tē-*), and shows a tripartite split with respect to the morphological operations used to encode unspecific S arguments of intransitives: with some intransitive verbs, unspecific S is encoded via the same passive suffix *-lo* as A – ex. (12a-b), with some others, unspecific S is encoded via the same 'indefinite object' prefix *tla-* as an unspecific inanimate P – ex. (12c-d), and a third group of intransitive verbs uses a special impersonal suffix *-hua* – ex. (12e-f) (Launey 1981, 1994).

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[4] Note that, in Basque, intransitive verbs of the type illustrated by *irakin* 'boil' are conjugated with the transitive auxiliary *du*, which normally expresses agreement with two arguments. In its use with this class of intransitive verbs, *du* expresses agreement with S in the same way as it expresses agreement with the agent of a transitive verb, but is invariably in the form which, in combination with a transitive verb, would express agreement with a 3rd person singular patient.

(12) Nahuatl (Launey 1981)

a. *Mayāna   in   pilli.*
[3SG]be_hungry:PRS DEF enfant
'The child is hungry.'

b. *Mayāna-lo.*
be_hungry-PASS:PRS
'People are hungry.'

c. *Popōca   in   tepetl.*
[3SG]smoke.PRS DEF mountain
'The mountain is smoking.'

d. *Tla-popōca.*
IDFOBJ-smoke:PRS
'Something is smoking.'

e. *Tzàtzi   in   pilli.*
[3SG]scream:PRS DEF child
'The child is screaming.'

f. *Tzàtzī-hua*
scream-IMPERS:PRS
'Somebody is screaming.'

3.2. Split intransitivity and unaccusativity

Split intransitivity has attracted the attention of linguists working within very different theoretical frameworks. Sapir 1917 initiated a tradition with a marked typological orientation, which concentrates on cases of *overt* split intransitivity, i.e., split intransitivity apparent in the coding characteristics of S (case marking and/or verb agreement), and tends to neglect *covert* split intransitivity, i.e., split intransitivity manifested in some aspects of the behavior of S in languages in which the coding characteristics of S do not depend on the choice of a particular intransitive verb. The generative tradition was initiated within the framework of relational grammar by Perlmutter 1978, who introduced the *Unaccusative Hypothesis,* re-formulated by Burzio 1986 within the GB paradigm.

Unaccusativity primarily refers to a possible syntactic explanation of split intransitivity within the frame of multistratal theories of syntax, according to which "the single argument of unaccusative verbs is an underlying object, and thus displays many syntactic properties of direct objects of transitive verbs", whereas "the single argument of unergative verbs is a subject at all levels of representation, and thus displays the same syntactic behavior as the subject of transitive verbs" (Sorace 2004).

A problem with the notion of unaccusativity is that it has been extended to phenomena that are not straightforwardly definable in terms of alignment variations (S = A ≠ P *vs.* S = P ≠ A). 'Unaccusativity diagnostics' discussed in the generative literature also include variable properties of intransitive constructions that cannot be defined in terms of alignment of S with one of the core terms of the transitive construction.

This remark applies in particular to auxiliary selection in Germanic and Romance languages, which constitutes one of the most popular unaccusativity diagnostics. In spite of several proposals to establish a connection, many authors acknowledge that it remains unclear why auxiliary selection should be sensitive to a distinction between intransitive verbs whose S argument is an underlying A and intransitive verbs whose S argument is an underlying P (see among others Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995). In the languages in question, the perfect auxiliary in transitive constructions is invariably *have*. The choice of *have* as the perfect auxiliary in the transitive construction is a property of the construction, and it would simply be nonsensical to try to describe auxiliary selection as based on a contrast between A

triggering the choice of *have* and P triggering the choice of *be*, with extension to S along a split intransitive pattern. Therefore, there is no a priori reason to expect that subclasses of intransitive verbs established on the basis of auxiliary selection should coincide with subclasses of intransitive verbs established on the basis of distinctions straightforwardly involving intransitivity splits.

In the perspective of the distinction between split intransitivity as defined in section 3.1 and fluid intransitivity, it is interesting to observe an evolution in the discussions about unaccusativity. A thorough examination of 'unaccusativity mismatches' has resulted in that a growing proportion of studies devoted to phenomena considered as possible manifestations of unaccusativity have started expressing doubts about the possibility to explain this rather heterogeneous set of variable properties of intransitive verbs within the frame of the Unaccusative Hypothesis as it was initially formulated. In particular, recent generative studies of unaccusativity tend to focus rather on the representation of *unaccusative syntax* (i.e., on the configurations likely to account for constructions in which the S argument of intransitive verbs shows properties typical of objects), without necessarily postulating that unaccusative syntax should be reserved to a subclass of 'unaccusative' intransitive verbs.

In particular, as will be developed in section 5, recent studies of the presentational impersonal construction of French intransitive verbs with S in postverbal position and the 3rd person masculine clitic *il* as a dummy subject have concluded that this construction has 'unaccusative syntax', but does not involve a division of intransitive verbs into two classes – see in particular Cummins 2000.

4. Fluid intransitivity

4.1. Split intransitivity and fluid intransitivity

In split intransitive systems, intransitive verbs divide into two sub-classes according to the alignment of their single core argument S. Of course, fluctuations in the behavior of the S argument of some intransitive verbs are possible, leading to vacillations in their assignment to one of the two subclasses of intransitive verbs, but the recognition of a split intransitive systems implies that such cases can be considered exceptional. By contrast, in fluid intransitive systems, fluctuations in the behavior of S constitute the norm, and intransitive verbs whose S argument is invariably aligned with one of the two core terms of the transitive predication are exceptions that must be explained by the semantic properties of the verbs in question.

An important contrast is that split intransitive systems may be grammaticalized to such an extent that the subclass to which an intransitive verb belongs is no longer predictable on semantic grounds, and the original motivation of the intransitivity split (if any) may even be completely blurred, whereas in fluid intransitive systems, fluctuations in the behavior of the S argument of intransitive verbs can be expected to be driven by some functional distinction.

4.2. Semantically driven fluid intransitivity

Until recently, the only type of fluid intransitivity discussed in the typological literature was a type in which the alignment of the S argument of intransitive verbs depends on the

semantic feature of control (Dixon 1994: 78–83). The same feature is commonly involved in the distinction between two sub-classes of intransitive verbs in split intransitive systems. What distinguishes semantically driven fluid-S systems from split-S systems involving the feature of control is that, in a semantically driven fluid-S system, the semantic nature of the verb does not entirely determine the behavior of its S argument: in a fluid system, S may align either with A or with P, depending on the degree to which the referent of the S NP controls the activity in the particular event referred to.

Acehnese, a western Austronesian language from Sumatra, is one of the best-known and most cited cases of control-driven fluid intransitivity (Durie 1985).

4.3. Pragmatically driven fluid intransitivity

On the basis of Dogon and Tundra Yukaghir data, Maslova 2006 proposes the recognition of what she calls *focus-oriented split intransitivity*. Tundra Yukaghir has a marker *leŋ* with the following distribution: in transitive predication, regardless of information structure, it attaches to P and is incompatible with A – ex. (13a-b), whereas in intransitive predication, it attaches to S if and only if S is focalized—ex. (13c-d).

(13)   Tundra Yukaghir (Maslova 2006)

    a. *met   ten'i   n'awn'iklie-leŋ   toŋore-meŋ.*
       1SG   here   polar_fox-*LEꝒ*   chase-PF.1/2SG
       'I have been chasing A POLAR FOX here.'

    b. *nime-le   aq   pajp   wie-nun.*
       dwelling-*LEꝒ* only   woman:PL   make-HAB(AFOC)
       'Only WOMEN install dwellings.'

    c. *... qahime-leŋ   kelu-l.*
       ... raven-*LEꝒ*   come-SFOC
       '...A RAVEN came.'

    d. *qad'ir   apanala: me-kelu-j.*
       DISC   old_woman   AFF-come-STOP
       'The old woman CAME.'

The term of focus-oriented split intransitivity used by Maslova is somewhat misleading, since the phenomenon in question does not involve a division of intransitive verbs into two subclasses, and therefore constitutes a type of *fluid* intransitivity, which however differs from the type traditionally recognized in the typological literature by the pragmatic nature of its conditioning.

In the following sections, I show that, in a typological perspective, pragmatically driven fluid intransitivity is not an exotic phenomenon found only in lesser-studied languages like Dogon or Yukaghir. On the contrary, pragmatically driven fluid intransitivity is a cross-

linguistically common phenomenon, found among others in Romance and Bantu languages,[5] but its relevance to alignment typology has not been acknowledged by typologists so far.

5   Fluid intransitivity in French

5.1. The presentational construction of French intransitive verbs

French intransitive verbs have a construction, traditionally characterized as impersonal, which has no equivalent with transitive verbs. In this construction, illustrated by ex. (14b), the S argument is in postverbal position (i.e., in the canonical P position), does not govern verb agreement, and more generally shows no evidence of having any of the properties that, in the transitive construction, distinguish A from P.

(14)   French

   a. *Une   femme   viendra*
      INDEF:SG:F   woman   come:FUT:3SG
      'A woman will come.'

   b. *Il   viendra   une   femme.*
      3SG:M   come:FUT:3SG   INDEF:SG:F   woman
      lit. 'It will come a woman' – same denotative meaning as (a), but with a different perspective (something like 'There will be a woman coming')

As illustrated by ex. (15) to (17), in this construction, the postverbal NP representing the S argument of an intransitive verb patterns with P with respect to a range of properties that are not shared by A: *en*-cliticization – ex. (15), combinability with restrictive *que* – ex. (16), possibility to take the determiner *de* in negative environments – ex. (17), etc.

(15)   French

   a. *Le   garçon   a   mangé   trois **pommes.***
      DEF:SG:M   boy:SG   AUX:PRS:3SG eat:PTCP three apple:PL
      'The boy ate three apples.'

         → *Le garçon **en** a mangé trois.*
            'The boy ate three of them.'

   b. *Trois   **garçons**   ont   vu   ce   film.*
      three   boy.PL   AUX:PRS:3PL see:PTCP   DEM:SG:M   film:SG
      'Three boys have seen this film.'

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[5] See in particular Creissels 2008: 157-8 on the presentational impersonal construction of Tswana, and van der Wal 2008 on the variations observed in Bantu presentational constructions.

→ **Trois **en** ont vu ce film.*
   intended: 'Three of them have seen this film.' (OK: *Trois ont vu ce film*, or *Il y en a trois qui ont vu ce film)*

c. *Trois*   ***garçons***   *sont*   *entrés.*
  three   boy:PL   AUX:PRS:3PL enter:PTCP:PL:M
  'Three boys entered.'

→ **Trois **en** sont entrés.*
   intended: 'Three of them entered.' (OK: *Trois sont entrés*, or *Il y en a trois qui sont entrés)*

d. *Il*   *est*   *entré*   *trois* ***garçons***.
  3SG:M   AUX:PRS:3SG enter:PTCP:SG:M three   boy:PL
  'Three boys entered'

→ *Il **en** est entré trois.*
   'Three of them entered.'

(16) French

a. *Jean n'a*   *invité*   *que Marie.*
  Jean   NEG-AUX:PRS:3SG   invite:PTCP   RESTR Marie
  'Jean invited only Mary'

b. *Que   *Jean n'a*   *invité*   *Marie.*
  RESTR   Jean   NEG-AUX:PRS:3SG   invite:PTCP   Marie
  intended: 'Only Jean invited Mary.' (OK: *Il n'y a que Jean qui a invité Marie)*

c. *Que   *Jean n'est*   *venu.*
  RESTR   Jean   NEG-AUX:PRS:3SG   come:PTCP:SGM
  intended: 'Only Jean came.' (OK: *Il n'y a que Jean qui est venu)*

d. *Il*   *n'est*   *venu*   *que Jean*
  3SG:M   NEG-AUX:PRS:3SG   come:PTCP   RESTR Jean
  'Only Jean came'

(17) French

a. *Jean n'a*   *pas*   *mangé de*   *pommes.*
  Jean   NEG-AUX:PRS:3SG   NEG   eat:PTCP   *DE*   apple:PL
  'Jean did not eat apples.'

b. **De garçons n'ont*   *pas*   *vu*   *ce*   *film*
  DE   boy:PL   NEG-AUX:PRS:3PL   NEG   see:PTCP   DEM:SG:M   film:SG
  intended: 'No boy saw this film.' (OK: *Il n'y a pas de garçon qui ait vu ce film)*

c. *De garçons ne sont pas entrés.*
   DE   boy:PL   NEG   AUX:PRS:3PL   NEG   see:PTCP:PL:M
   intended: 'No boy entered.' (OK: *Il n'y a pas de garçon qui soit entré*)

d. *Il   n'est   pas   entré   de   garçons*
   3SG:M   NEG-AUX:PRS:3SG   NEG   enter:PTCP   DE   boy:PL
   'No boy entered'

The only evidence against identifying the postverbal NP as fulfilling the syntactic role of object is that it cannot be represented by an object clitic pronoun. But this impossibility can be viewed as a mere consequence of the presentational (or 'existential', 'thetic') meaning of the construction. This pragmatic function, repeatedly underscored in the literature (whatever the terms used to characterize it) is sufficient to explain the impossibility to cliticize the postverbal NP, since weak pronouns typically represent topical arguments.[6]

There is to my knowledge no convincing evidence against the analysis according to which the postverbal NP fulfills the same *syntactic* role as the postverbal patient NP in the prototypical transitive construction, but the *discourse* value of the construction blocks the manifestation of properties of the object implying topicality.

The theory according to which the postverbal NP in the presentational impersonal construction of French intransitive verbs fulfills the *syntactic* role of object, in spite of being assigned the same *semantic* role as the subject of the same verb in a canonical predicative construction, is not new in French syntax: it was already advocated by Brunot 1926,[7] and it has been re-discovered recently by formal syntacticians. For example, Cummins 2000 concludes her analysis of this construction by stating that French has "two basic types of intransitive clauses: subject-verb and verb-object". Although she does not state it explicitly (since her analysis did not aim at discussing the status of French in alignment typology), this implies recognizing the presentational construction of French intransitive verbs as an instance of P-alignment – or, to put it in more familiar (but unfortunately less precise) terms, as a manifestation of ergativity.

In addition to that, contrary to an opinion popularized by early studies within the frame of the Unaccusative Hypothesis, the presentational impersonal construction is not restricted to a limited subset of 'unaccusative' intransitive verbs. As shown among others by Cummins 2000

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[6] As discussed by Nocentini 2003, a narrow conception of topicality bound to the existence of a previous mention of the referent cannot adequately account for some uses of weak object pronouns in Italian (as in *La bevi una birra alla spina?* 'Will you have a draught beer?'), and similar uses of weak pronouns can be found in other Romance languages. However, Nocentini's conclusions do not contradict the idea that a broader notion of topicality is essential in the use of weak pronouns (at least in Romance varieties in which weak pronouns do not show a tendency to grammaticalize into pure agreement markers). They are consequently compatible with the idea that the impossibility to substitute weak pronouns for S NPs in postverbal position in presentational clauses can be analyzed as the mere consequence of a contradiction between the pragmatic function of presentational clauses and the pragmatic conditions on the use of weak pronouns.

[7] Although he explicitly analyzed the postverbal NP in the presentational construction of French intransitive verbs as an object, Brunot proposed to designate it by the non-committal term *séquence impersonnelle* ('impersonal sequence'), in order to avoid controversy. This term was subsequently adopted by many French grammarians. Its descriptive adequacy is unquestionable; however, it suggests that this construction involves a grammatical relation that cannot be assimilated to any of the grammatical relations recognized in other constructions, which is certainly not what Brunot had in mind when he introduced it.

on the basis of the corpus provided by Hériau 1980, the list of the 50 most frequent verbs in this construction also includes several verbs commonly considered typically 'unergative', and no semantic subclass of intransitive verbs can be considered as absolutely excluded from this construction. The fact that some intransitive verbs (including 'unergative' ones) occur with a particular frequency can be satisfactorily explained by the mere fact that their lexical meaning is "highly compatible with the 'presentational' value of the I[mpersonal] C[onstruction], expressing appearance or existence at location" (Cummins 2000: 239). Cummins also observes that, with other verbs whose compatibility with the presentational construction may at first sight seem questionable, the addition of a locative phrase regularly improves the acceptability of the presentational impersonal construction.

If one accepts this analysis of the presentational impersonal construction of French intransitive verbs, from a typological point of view, the only possible conclusion is that French is a *fluid-S* language, but with a pragmatic conditioning of fluid intransitivity similar to that described by Maslova for Tundra Yukaghir. In the French type of fluid intransitivity, ergative alignment is not triggered by the semantic feature [−control], but rather has the pragmatic function of expressing a 'presentational' (or 'thetic', 'existential') organization of predication.

The functional motivation of the French type of fluid intransitivity can be analyzed as follows: in the transitive construction, A is typically more topical than P, and new referents are typically introduced in P position; consequently, in a language in which accusative alignment predominates, it is natural to de-topicalize S by means of a construction in which S is aligned with P. According to Lambrecht,

> S[entence] F[ocus] marking involves cancellation of those prosodic and/or morphosyntactic subject properties which are associated with the role of subjects as topic expressions in P[redicate] F[ocus] sentences … One natural way of achieving non-topic construal (though not the only logically possible one) is to endow the subject constituent with grammatical properties which are conventionally associated with FOCUS arguments. Since in a P[redicate] F[ocus] construction the unmarked focus argument is the OBJECT, topic construal can be cancelled by coding the subject with grammatical features normally found on the object of a P[redicate] F[ocus] sentence.
>
> <div align="right">Lambrecht 2000: 624-5</div>

5.2. A construction with partial P-alignment in French

In addition to the presentational construction analyzed in Section 5.1, French has several constructions in which an NP representing the S argument of an intransitive verb occurs in postverbal position. These constructions are not clearly distinguished by traditional grammar, but have been analyzed in detail by Bonami, Godard and Marandin – see Marandin 2001, Bonami et al. 1999, Bonami and Marandin 2001.

In two of these constructions (inversion in extraction contexts and heavy subject NP inversion), A arguments of transitive verbs may occur in postverbal position too, and are equally concerned by the loss of some properties typical for canonical S/A NPs. Consequently, the constructions in question involve a non-canonical behavior of subjects, but no alignment variation, and there would be no justification in challenging the characterization of inverted NPs as subjects.

By contrast, the construction termed 'unaccusative inversion' in Marandin's terminology, illustrated by ex. (18), lends itself to an analysis in terms of fluid intransitivity, although in a less obvious way than the presentational impersonal construction examined in Section 5.1.

(18) French (Marandin 2001)

  a. *Je*   *voudrais*   *que*   *vienne*   *Marie.*
     1SG   want:COND:1SG   that   come:SBJV:3SG   Marie
     'I would like for Marie to come.'

  b. [Le silence se fit.]
     Alors   *sont*   *entrés*   *deux* *hommes.*
     then   AUX.PRS.3SG enter:PTCP:PL:M two   man.PL
     '[Silence fell.] Then entered two men.'

  c. *Pierre* *ne*   *savait*   *pas* *que* *suivaient*   *d'autres*   *personnes.*
     Pierre   NEG know:IMPF:3SG   NEG that follow:IMPF:3PL   INDEF-other:PL   person:PL
     'Pierre did not know that other persons were following.'

A first important observation is that, in such contexts, S arguments of intransitive verbs may be found in postverbal position, but A arguments of transitive verbs invariably occur in preverbal position. Moreover, in this construction, indefinite postverbal S NPs trigger *en*-pronominalization in the same way as P NPs in the transitive construction. But in other respects they are aligned with A: as shown in detail by Marandin 2001, unlike postverbal S NPs in the presentational impersonal construction, S NPs in the 'unaccusative inversion' can control adjuncts like canonical S/A NPs, and agree with the verb in number. Therefore, they do not lend themselves to a straightforward characterization, either as syntactic subjects in non-canonical position (as postverbal S's in inversion in extraction contexts), or as syntactic objects (as postverbal S's in the presentational impersonal construction). Postverbal S's in the 'unaccusative inversion' are best analyzed as a special type of complement (Bonami and Marandin, 2001: 123). In other words, from the point of view of alignment typology, this construction is an instance of *partial* P-alignment.

6. Fluid intransitivity in other Romance languages

6.1. Introductory remarks

All Romance languages have constructions in which the S argument of intransitive verbs is encoded as a postverbal NP, but not all constructions with an S NP in postverbal position are relevant to the discussion of the status of Romance languages from the point of view of alignment typology. As already discussed for French in Section 5.2, postverbal S's in contexts in which A NPs too can be found in postverbal position have no incidence on alignment typology, since they conform to the same principle of A-alignment as canonical intransitive predication with S in preverbal position.

Among the relevant constructions, i.e., constructions analyzable in terms of pragmatically driven fluid intransitivity, a distinction must be drawn between constructions in which S is fully aligned with P, and constructions in which the S argument occurring in postverbal position remains aligned with A as regards the control of verb agreement but is aligned with P

with respect to some other properties. This distinction has been illustrated in Section 5 by two constructions of French intransitive verbs: the presentational impersonal construction, and 'unaccusative inversion'.

Both types of pragmatically driven fluid intransitivity are widely attested in other Romance languages. A superficial look at Romance presentational constructions, limited to current descriptions of standard varieties of the best-known Romance languages, might suggest that constructions with postverbal S's having no property in common with transitive A's (as in the presentational impersonal construction of French) are exceptional in Romance, and that partial fluid intransitivity, with postverbal S's controlling verb agreement, is much more widespread. However, a closer look at non-standard and/or 'dialectal' varieties of Romance leads to the conclusion that presentational constructions with postverbal S's having no property in common with transitive A's are not so rare.

The following sections do not aim at providing a detailed account of the situation from the point of view of Romance dialectology. The illustrations have been selected in order to show the variety of the situations found in Romance languages, and to emphasize the contribution of Romance data to the general question of pragmatically driven fluid intransitivity.

6.2. Partial fluid intransitivity in Romance languages

Italian has a construction of intransitive verbs in which S in postverbal position lends itself to *ne*-cliticization, like the P argument of transitive verbs, but remains aligned with A with respect to verb agreement – ex. (19).

(19) Italian (Burzio 1986)

    a. *Molti   esperti arriveranno.*
       many:PL:M   expert:PL arrive:FUT:3PL
       'Many experts will arrive.'

    b. *Arriveranno   molti   esperti.*
       arrive:FUT:3PL   many:PL:M   expert:PL
       'Many experts will arrive.'

    c. *Ne   arriveranno   molti.*
       of_them arrive:FUT:3PL   many:PL:M
       'Many of them will arrive.'

    d. **Molti   ne   arriveranno.*
       many:PL:M of_them arrive:FUT:3PL

The claim that *ne* cannot represent the head of preverbal S NPs needs however some justification. The point is that, as observed by several readers of a previous version of this paper, ex. (19d) is in fact acceptable, but only if *molti* is pronounced with the intonation characteristic of a contrastive focus (*MOLTI ne arriveranno*). Consequently, the relative acceptability of (19d) is not a problem, since the position of *molti* in this construction is pragmatically marked, and therefore cannot be assimilated to the preverbal position

canonically occupied by S NPs. In other words, *MOLTI ne arriveranno* is not directly related to *Molti esperti arriveranno* via *ne*-cliticization, it rather constitutes a pragmatically marked variant of *Ne arriveranno molti*,

According to Burzio 1986, in Italian, *ne* can represent the head of an NP in P role, or of an NP encoding the S argument of a subclass of intransitive verbs, but cannot represent, either the head of an NP in A role, or of an NP encoding the S argument of another subclass of intransitive verbs. According to Burzio's analysis, *ne*-cliticization is consequently an instance of *split* intransitivity in the strict sense of this term. However, more recent studies have shown that the division of Italian intransitive verbs into two sub-classes according to this criterion is questionable (Lonzi 1986), and have pointed to a relation with sentence focus (Bentley 2004). In typological terms, this means that the construction of Italian intransitive verbs in which S lends itself to *ne*-cliticization is in fact an instance of pragmatically driven *fluid* intransitivity, which however affects only part of the properties by which S may show alignment either with A or P.

Similarly, in Spanish, discussions about unaccusativity have drawn the attention to the construction illustrated by ex. (20), in which S in postverbal position aligns with P with respect to the possibility to take a null determiner, but remains aligned with A with respect to verb agreement.

(20) Spanish (Ortega-Santos 2005)

a. *Llegaron   libros*
   arrive:PFV:3PL   book:PL
   'Some books arrived.'

b. ??*Corren   chicos.*
   run:PRS:3PL   boy:PL
   'Boys run.'

c. *Aquí   corren   chicos.*
   here   run:PRS:3PL   boy:PL
   'Boys run here.'

In the early literature on unaccusativity, it has been proposed that, in languages in which bare nouns can occur in P role but not in A role, the possibility to find bare nouns in S role with some intransitive verbs constitutes an unaccusativity diagnostic – see among others Torrego 1989 for Spanish. But here again, more recent studies have emphasized that the division of intransitive verbs into two classes according to this criterion is not so clear-cut as it may seem at a superficial look. In particular, as illustrated by ex. (20c), the acceptability of combinations that at first sight seem hardly acceptable is improved by adding a locative adverbial phrase in topic position. This suggests a parallel with locative inversion and points to a pragmatic conditioning in terms of presentational focus (Ortega-Santos 2005, Alexiadou 2007). In other words, this is another instance of pragmatically driven fluid intransitivity manifested in some of the characteristics of S only.

6.3. Full fluid intransitivity in Northern Italian dialects

This section deals with constructions of intransitive verbs in which S shows none of the properties that distinguish A from P, and in particular does not control verb agreement. In this respect, Northern Italian dialects provide particularly interesting data – see among others Saccon 1993.

Similarly to the presentational impersonal construction of French intransitive verbs, in Northern Italian dialects, the constructions of intransitive verbs in which S shows none of the properties that distinguish A from P generally include an expletive 3rd person clitic preceding the verb, and the same expletive clitic is generally found in other impersonal constructions. Depending on the morphology of the individual Romance varieties, the expletive subject clitic in P-aligned constructions of intransitive verbs is generally either a 3rd person masculine singular subject clitic, or a 3rd person subject clitic unspecified for gender and number. The use of an expletive *la* homonymous with a 3rd person feminine singular clitic has been signaled in the vernacular of Càsola (Lunigiana valley) by Manzoni & Savoia 2005 I: 166, but as observed by Floricic & Molinu 2008: 37-38, the historical significance of this coincidence remains an open question.[8]

An interesting observation is that, even in Romance varieties in which a subject clitic is obligatory in the presence of a subject NP in preverbal position, it may happen that no expletive subject clitic occurs in the presentational construction of intransitive verbs. This is in particular the case in Venetian – ex. (21).

(21) Venetian (Brunelli 2007)

    a. *Łe   carte   łe   xe   rivàe.*
       DEF:PL:F letter:PL 3PL:F   be:PRS:3 arrive:PTCP:PL:F
       'The letters have arrived.'

    b. *Xe   rivà   łe   carte*
       be.PRS:3 arrive:PTCP:SG:M   DEF:PL:F letter:PL
       lit. '[There] arrived the letters.' (French *Il est arrivé les lettres*)

    ~ *Gh' è   rivà   łe   carte*
       LOC be.PRS.3 arrive:PTCP:SGM DEF:PL:F letter:PL

In Northern Italian varieties, as illustrated by ex. (21), the presentational construction of intransitive verbs often includes an expletive locative clitic (i.e., an expletive clitic that in other constructions constitutes the equivalent of French *y*, Catalan *hi*, or Italian *ci*). This expletive locative clitic may be optional, as in Venetian – ex. (21) above, or obligatory, as in Piedmontese – ex. (22).

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[8] Manzini & Savoia do not discuss the historical significance of this coincidence, but given the tendencies observed cross-linguistically in the development of expletives, *illac* is, a priori, the most plausible source of Romance expletives having the form *la* (also found in some Alpine dialects of Occitan).

(22) Piedmontese (Parry 1998)

> *A-i   riva   i   client*
> 3-LOC arrive:PRS:3SG   DEF:PL:M customer
> 'There arrive the customers.' (lit. 'It there arrives the customers')

The presence of expletive locative clitics in presentational constructions is comparable to the presence of expletive locative clitics in existential expressions such as French *il y a* or English *there is*. It is consistent with the fact that, as mentioned above, the presence of a locative adjunct improves the acceptability of the presentational construction with verbs that have no particular affinity with this kind of construction.

It is also interesting to observe that, as illustrated by ex. (21) & (22) above, Northern Italian varieties do not seem to have the restrictions on the use of definite NPs observed in the presentational construction of French intransitive verbs. In other words, in Northern Italian dialects, the presentational impersonal construction of intransitive verbs is available in cases in which the only fully acceptable construction in French is the presentational periphrasis *il y a N qui ...* (lit. 'there is N that ...'). For example, the usual French equivalent of the Piedmontese example (22) is *Il y a les clients qui arrivent*, lit. 'There are the customers that arrive'. The literal equivalent *Il arrive les clients* is perhaps not entirely impossible, but it is clearly not fully acceptable either.

6.4. Variations between full and partial fluid intransitivity

Another interesting observation is that, in the presentational constructions of Romance varieties with the S argument of intransitive verbs in postverbal position, number agreement of the verb is often optional, which results in blurring the distinction between full and partial P-alignment. In French, the presence of the expletive clitic *il* entirely excludes agreement of the verb with the S NPs in postverbal position. By contrast, in Piedmontese, number agreement of the verb with a postverbal S is optionally possible even in the presence of an invariable 3rd person singular expletive clitic – ex. (23).

(23) Piedmontese (Parry 1998)

> *An   cost   lét   a-i   deurm   ij   mé   grand.*
> in   DEM:SG:M   bed   3-LOC sleep:PRS:3SG   DEF:PL:M 1SG:M grand-parent
> 'In this bed sleep my grand-parents.'

> ~ *An   cost   lét   a-i   deurmo   ij   mé   grand.*
> in   DEM:SG:M   bed   3-LOC sleep:PRS:3PL   DEF:SG:M 1SG:M grand-parent

Optional number agreement resulting in free variation between full and partial P-alignment seems relatively common in Romance, although this is not always apparent in the normative grammars of the standard varieties. For example, the normative grammars of Catalan ignore or stigmatize the variant of the presentational construction with full P-alignment (i.e., in which the verb does not agree at all), but Alonso Capdevila & Suïls Subirà 1998 observe that

lack of agreement in the presentational construction of intransitive verbs is widely attested in Catalan dialects.

A similar observation is made by Nocentini 1999 about colloquial varieties of Italian – ex. (24).

(24) Colloquial Italian (Nocentini 1999)

    Stasera **viene** *le tue amiche. (~ **vengono**)*
    tonight   come:PRS:3SG   DEF:PL:F 2SG:PL:F friend:PL:F
    'Your friends are coming to see you tonight.'

6.5. Extension of the presentational construction to transitive verbs

Nocentini 1999 observes that, in colloquial varieties of Italian, in clauses whose object is topicalized and resumed by a clitic pronoun, agents of transitive verbs may be treated in the same way as S arguments of intransitive verbs in typical presentational constructions. In ex. (25), the agent *i cinghiali* 'the wild boars' in postverbal position does not control the agreement of the verb.

(25) Colloquial Italian (Nocentini 1999)

    Queste patate me le **mangia** *tutte i cinghiali. (~ **mangiano**)*
    DEM:PL:F potato:PL 1SG   3PL:F eat:PRS:3SG all:PL:F   DEF:PL:M wild_boar:PL
    'My potatoes are all eaten by wild boars.'

Interestingly, the same phenomenon has been observed in some Bantu languages (Marten 2006). Its theoretical significance must be emphasized, since manifestations of presentativity affecting in the same way the single core argument of intransitive verbs and the agent of transitive verbs cannot be an analyzed as involving a variation in alignment. In other words, fluid intransitivity is a common consequence of the existence of a presentational construction restricted to intransitive verbs, but if the presentational construction is extended to transitive verbs, it cannot be analyzed as an instance of fluid intransitivity anymore.

7. Discussion and conclusion

Contrary to standard definitions formulated in terms of alignment only, ergativity/accusativity as it is implicitly conceived by most linguists is a prototype in which the intrinsic characteristics of the transitive construction (in particular, the fact that nouns in A or P role are in a form distinct from their quotation form) are at least as important as the alignment properties of intransitive verbs. At first approximation, a typical ergative language is a language in which a P-centered transitive construction coexists with P-aligned intransitive constructions, and a typical accusative language is a language in which an A-centered transitive construction coexists with A-aligned intransitive constructions, but mismatches between the two components of the notion of ergativity/accusativity are not rare, and current definitions in terms of alignment exclusively have resulted,

– on the one hand, in a tendency to forget the precise definition of alignment, and to indiscriminately apply this term to coding properties of core NPs that have nothing to do with alignment proper;

– on the other hand, in a tendency to ignore manifestations of P-alignment in languages whose transitive constructions are invariably A-centered, i.e., show the characteristics expected in a typical 'accusative' language.

Another problem with the distinction between P-alignment and A-alignment is that, if consistently developed without any further precision, it leads to grouping together a heterogeneous set of phenomena, quite obviously diverse from the point of view of both their historical origin and possible functional motivations, from which no significant typological generalization can be expected to emerge.

In some areas of morphosyntax (for example: imperative clauses, reflexivization), A-alignment tends to occur even in languages in which the predominance of P-alignment is at first sight striking, and conversely, in some other areas (for example: nominalizations, presentational sentences), P-alignment tends to occur even in languages in which the predominance of A-alignment is at first sight striking. Consequently, in any investigation of typological correlations involving intransitive alignment, it is important to put aside manifestations of A- or P-alignment that frequently occur in languages in which the opposite type of intransitive alignment is clearly predominant. Such 'unmarked' manifestations of A- or P-alignment are interesting for their functional motivations, but from a typological point of view, putting them on a par with typologically marked manifestations of A- or P-alignment can only be an obstacle to the recognition of correlations. This suggests to modify the definition of prototypical ergativity/accusativity as follows: in a typical accusative language, the transitive construction is invariably A-centered, and manifestations of P-alignment are limited to areas of morphosyntax in which P-alignment is typologically unmarked; in a typical ergative language, the transitive construction is invariably P-centered, and manifestations of A-alignment are limited to areas of morphosyntax in which A-alignment is typologically unmarked.

On this point, Romance languages provide particularly interesting data, since they combine invariably A-centered transitive constructions with clear manifestations of P-alignment in an area (presentational constructions) in which it has been established that languages with a basic AVP constituent order tend to de-topicalize intransitive subjects by moving them to postverbal position, which commonly goes with the loss of other characteristics typical of canonical subjects. If ergativity is identified to P-alignment without further precision, as suggested by current definitions, Romance languages cannot be considered typical accusative languages. By contrast, if ergativity is evaluated with respect to a prototype putting apart typologically unmarked manifestations of A- or P-alignment, then the current opinion that Romance languages are typical accusative languages need not be revised.

To summarize, a typological analysis of the presentational constructions of Romance languages supports the recognition of a type of fluid intransitivity whose existence is not acknowledged in classical works on ergativity/accusativity, but at the same time casts some doubts on the typological relevance of this type of fluid intransitivity, and consequently confirms the necessity to adopt a definition of ergativity/accusativity that explicitly distinguishes typologically marked from typologically unmarked manifestations of A- or P-alignment.

Abbreviations

A: agent
ACC: accusative
AFF: affirmative
AFOC : agent focalization
AUX: auxiliary
COND: conditional
DEF : definite
DEM : demonstrative
DISC: discourse particle
ERG: ergative
F: feminine
FUT: future
HAB : habitual
IDFOBJ: indefinite object
IMPERS: impersonal
IMPF: imperfect
INDEF: indefinite

LOC: locative
M: masculine
NEG: negation
OBL: (kurmandji) oblique case
P: patient
PASS: passive
PF: perfective
PL : plural
PRS: present
PST: past
PTCP: participle
RESTR: restrictive
S: single argument of a monovalent verb
SBJV: subjunctive
SG: singular
SFOC : S focalization
STOP : S topicalization

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