

Past-Participle Agreement in French : a Post-Syntactic Phenomenon

1. Outline. The purpose of this paper is to explore the nature of French Past-Participle Agreement (PPA). It will be demonstrated that adopting the derivation by phase model (Chomsky 2001, 2008) in combination with the hypothesis that agreement is a post-syntactic phenomenon (Marantz 1992, Bobaljik 2008 among others) allows for a straightforward account of some problematic cases of PPA in French and for the observed variation between ‘Standard French’ and ‘Colloquial French’.

2. Past-participle agreement in French: the standard analysis. PPA (cf. (1) and (2)) is often argued to be triggered by the raising of the internal argument to (or through) the specifier of the head hosting the past-participle, i.e. specAgrOP or specAgrPstPrtP (Belletti 2001, Chomsky 1991, 1993, Friedemann & Siloni 1997, Kayne 1989,...).

3. Two problems for the account. (i) If raised internal arguments (RIA) can trigger PPA, then the question arises why PPA is ungrammatical on the past-participles of the anticausative and unaccusative verbs in (3) and (4). These verbs, unlike unaccusative *arriver* (‘arrive’) in (1), typically form their perfect with the auxiliary *avoir* (‘have’) rather than *être* (‘be’). To the best of my knowledge, the literature provides at best very stipulative accounts, often these (apparent) exceptions are not even mentioned.

(ii) While the object clitic triggers PPA in Standard French (2), it fails to do so in Colloquial French (5).

4. One argument verbs and subject agreement. I will develop an analysis of PPA in terms of derivation by phase coupled with the hypothesis that agreement morphemes are realized in the phonological component of the grammar (PF). Extending and adapting Bobaljik (2008)’s analysis of finite verb agreement, I propose that PPA can only take place if the DP controller of Agreement belongs to the complement of the same phase as the receiver of Agreement, namely the past-participle. Thus, in (6) the DP controller of Agreement *Marie* belongs to the complement of the same phase as the receiver of agreement, the past participle *arrivé*.

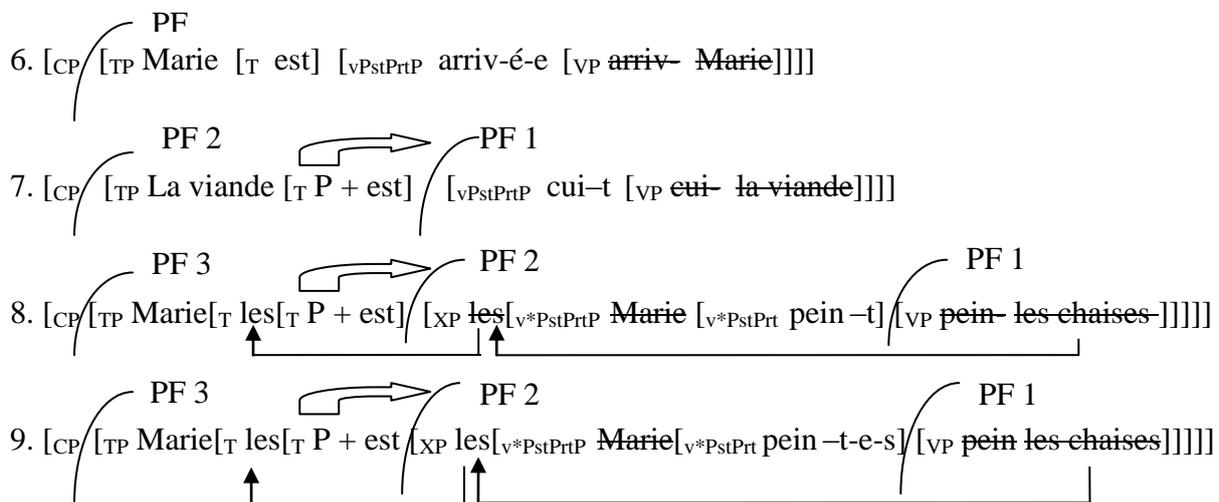
Following Freeze (1992) and Kayne (1993), I postulate that the auxiliary *avoir* is composed of the auxiliary *être* and an abstract preposition P. The latter, I suggest, creates a phase boundary. This enables me to account in a straightforward way for cases like (3) and (4), where the RIA does not trigger PPA : the preposition creating a phase boundary, the RIA does not belong to the complement of the same phase as the past-participle and is therefore not sent to PF together with the participle (7). As a consequence, it fails to trigger PPA.

5. Transitive sentences and object agreement. In Colloquial French (5), the object clitic does not trigger PPA. If we assume that in the syntax the clitic in (5) raises from its object position in VP to the auxiliary, then absence of PPA is due to the fact that the past-participle is sent to PF before the clitic (8).

On the other hand, the fact that in (1) PPA does occur suggests that the clitic and the past-participle must be sent to PF at the same time, i.e. they belong to the complement of the same phase. For such cases I propose that in the syntax the clitic raises only to an intermediate position, which is within the phase containing the past-participle, and that further movement to the auxiliary is an instance of Local Dislocation, a reordering effect taking place after Vocabulary Insertion and more specifically after morphological realization of the agreement morphemes at PF (9) (cf. Embick & Noyer 1999, 2001).

The variation between Colloquial French and Standard French then rests on whether the movement of the object clitic to T takes place in the syntax or at PF.

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| 1. Marie est arrivé-e
Marie has arrived-fem | 2. Marie les a peint-e-s
Marie them _(cl, fem-plur) has painted-fem-plur |
| 3. La viande a cuit (*-e)
The meet has cooked (*-fem) | 4. Marie a disparu (*-e)
Marie has disappeared (*-fem) |
| 5. Marie les a peint
Marie them _(cl, fem-plur) has painted | |



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