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<th>UCD Working Papers in Italian Studies</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Authors(s)</strong></td>
<td>Acquaviva, Paolo; Cappellaro, Chiara; Casalicchio, Jan; Franco, Ludovico; Larrivée, Pierre; Lorusso, Paolo; Masutti, Vania; Passino, Diana; Pescarini, Diego; Poletto, Cecilia; Ursini, Frecesco-Alessio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Publication date</strong></td>
<td>2018-09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Series</strong></td>
<td>Foundation for Italian Studies Working Papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Publisher</strong></td>
<td>University College Dublin. School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Link to online version</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.ucd.ie/t4cms/Foundation_for_Italian_Studies_%20Working_Papers2.pdf">http://www.ucd.ie/t4cms/Foundation_for_Italian_Studies_%20Working_Papers2.pdf</a></td>
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On the syntax of Pantiscu aspectual subject clitics

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Abstract: In this paper we will address the unusual behaviour of subject clitics (sbj.cl) in Pantiscu, which express a progressive aspect (Prog) value; to account for their puzzling shape, we will proposed that sbj.cl can be associated to aspectual features, following Manzini & Savoia (2002). To explain the non-compositional behaviour of the Pantiscu Prog periphrasis, we will resort to a phrasal spell-out mechanism, assuming that the sbj.cl plus the lexical verb are spelt-out (as a whole) as ProgP. Finally to account for the fact that an aspect particle can agree with the external argument in phi-features we will assume, along the lines of Kalin & van Urk (2015), that an imperfective projection (here Prog) can act as a phi-probe. Alternatively, we can assume that aspectual Prog features are attracted by the TP yielding agreement (Manzini & Savoia 2002).

Keywords: subject clitics, aspect, imperfective, progressive, phrasal-spell-out.

1. Introduction

In recent work Loporcaro (2012, cf. Loporcaro et al. 2010, cf. also Benincà 1992, Tropea 1975 for the original observation) has described a very unusual pattern in the semantic value expressed by subject clitics (sbj.cl) in Pantiscu, namely a progressive aspect (Prog) value. In previous literature concerning the features expressed by sbj.cl in other Italo-Romance varieties (cf. e.g. Cardinali & Repetti 2008: 549, Rizzi 1993 [2000]: 86, Manzini & Savoia 2005, I: 69–196, among many others), they have been considered as encoding the inflectional categories of person, number and gender. Mood/Aspect/Tense shifts related to the presence/absence of sbj.cl were previously unknown in the literature on Romance languages and elsewhere. Consider the Pantiscu examples in (1), taken from Loporcaro (2012: 755) and Loporcaro et al. (2010: 101).

(1) a. ˈɪɖːʐ-ɪ ˈpart-ʊnʊ
3-PL leave.PRS-3PL
‘they leave’ or ‘they are leaving’

(Unmarked for aspect values)

b. ˈɪɖːʐ-ɪ ˈsta-nːʊ  parˈt-enːʊ
3-PL stay.PRS.3PL leave.GER
‘they are leaving’

(Progressive aspect)

c. ˈɪɖːʐ-ɪ ɖːʐ-ɪ ˈpart-ʊnʊ
3-PL 3-PL leave.PRS-3PL
‘they are leaving’

(Progressive aspect)

1 Pantiscu is a Sicilian dialect spoken on the island of Pantelleria, which is located between the coast of Sicily and the coast of Tunisia.

2 Potentially, a similar behaviour can be assumed for a pronominal preverbal item (the so called ‘Tense Ezafe’) of the Bahdini dialect of Kurmanji Kurdish (Iranian), which Haig (2011) connects to the expression of tense/aspect. In general, however, Franco et al. (2015) have shown that this item can combine with a full set of different aspectual forms of the verb, excluding a specialized contribution of its own to the aspectual interpretation of the VP.
Example (1a) contains an unmarked present tense, so that the aspectual value can be either perfective or imperfective and, in the realm of imperfective aspect, unspecified among a habitual, continuous or Prog value (cf. Loporcaro et al. 2010: 95ff). Both (1b) and (1c) encode Prog while (1d) encodes habitual aspect and disallows the presence of the sbj.cl \(d\-z\-t\). Example (1b) represents the standard Prog periphrasis 'sta:ri ‘to stay’ + gerund’, which is available in practically all Sicilian dialects and in many Italo-Romance varieties including standard Italian (cf. Squartini 1998; Manzini & Savoia 2005).

Pantiscu is exceptional in that it shows another strategy for encoding Prog aspect, the one illustrated in (1c), where the presence of the 3rd person plural sbj.cl \(d\-z\-t\) in front of the verb - matching the person, number, and gender features of the subject - obligatorily triggers a Prog interpretation. Note in (1c) the presence of the strong pronoun \(\text{ˈɪɖːʐ}-ʊ\) (they) in subject position (following standard minimalist assumptions in Spec,TP) alongside with the subject clitic \(d\-z\-t\). Crucially, the clitic item \(d\-z\-t\) can be distinguished from the corresponding full pronoun \(\text{id}d\-z\-t\) through a well-established set of standard diagnostics implemented in the literature (cf. e.g. Kayne 1975, Poletto 2000, Rizzi 2000 [1993], among many others).

Consider the examples (2)-(5) below, adapted from Loporcaro (2012: 752-753) where the unstressed 3rd person sbj.cl series \(d\-z\-ʊ, d\-z\-a, d\-z\-ɪ\) is compared with the corresponding tonic pronoun series \(\text{id}d\-z\-ʊ, \text{id}d\-z\-a, \text{id}d\-z\-ɪ\).³

\[
\begin{align*}
(2) & \quad \text{who come.PRET-3SG} / \quad \text{who come.PRET-3SG} \\
& \quad \text{id}d\-z\-ʊ / \quad \text{id}d\-z\-ʊ \\
& \quad \text{‘who came? (was that) him?’} \\
(3) & \quad \text{come.PRET-3SG} / \quad \text{come.PRET-3SG} \\
& \quad \text{id}d\-z\-ʊ \quad \text{‘he came’} \\
(4) & \quad \text{and} \quad \text{id}d\-z\-a / \quad \text{id}d\-z\-a \quad \text{id}d\-z\-a \\
& \quad \text{‘he and she’} \\
(5) & \quad \text{NEG see.PRET-1SG} \quad \text{‘I didn’t see anybody, not even him’}
\end{align*}
\]

³ Note that Pantiscu has a complete paradigm of sbj.cl for all persons (Loporcaro et al. 2010: 87ff) encoding Prog aspect. In this paper we concentrate on third person sbj.cl only for brevity and because they are clearly distinguished (contra I and II person sbj.cl) from a phonological viewpoint (i.e. stressed vs. unstressed).
instance in the classic work of Brandi and Cordin (1981). Nevertheless, as already pointed out, the presence of sbj.cl in Pantiscu is constrained from a semantic viewpoint and necessarily expresses the feature Prog.

Actually, clitics seem to play a role in lexicalizing aspectual information in Romance. In Spanish, reflexive clitics are markers of telicity (Tenny 1987, Sanz & Laka 2002, among others), with proper φ features agreeing with the subject. The presence of reflexive clitics establishes a relation between the agent and the event: while the reflexive clitic *se* is compatible with a telic interpretation (7) its absence implies a preferential atelic reading (6), as shown by the ‘frame’ adverbial modification test (Dowty 1986).

(6)  
\[ Pedro (\star \text{se}) \text{ leyó un libro durante tres horas} \]
‘Pedro read a book for three hours’

(7)  
\[ Pedro \star \text{(*) leyó un libro en tres horas} \]
‘Pedro read a book in three hours’

Both Pantiscu (subject) and Spanish (reflexive) clitics entail a marked aspectual reading (progressive and telic, respectively) and both show overt φ features, suggesting that aspectual projections could carry a φ-probe, as assumed in Kalin & Van Urk (2015). In this paper, we argue that Pantiscu subject clitics enter the derivation as the head of ProgP, as part of a stored lexical structure. The pronounced form of the clitic is shaped by Agree between the clitic in Prog and the pre-moved subject in Spec,TP. An alternative account along the lines of Manzini & Savoia (2002) is also sketched.

2. The syntactic characterization of Italo-Romance subject clitics

The literature on Italo-Romance sbj.cl has addressed almost exclusively Northern Italian dialects (NID), because Pantiscu represents, up to now, the sole known Southern Italian variety in which the presence of sbj.cl is attested. Sbj.cl are considered as items realizing the Inflectional head (independently from the verbal morphology) so that the Inflection can license a null subject, taken to be invariably pro (see, e.g., Brandi & Cordin 1981, Kayne 1983, Rizzi 1986, Sportiche 1999, Poletto 2000, among many others). Rizzi (1993 [2000]) comparing NID and French - that is assumed to standardly host the clitic in a Spec, Infl position - elegantly accounts for a ‘cartographic model’ of Infl, arguing that an inflectional position, higher than the inflected verb, in declarative sentences must be assumed for NID sbj.cl to explain for their inversion in interrogatives.

Cardinaletti & Repetti (2008) depart from this line of research in assuming that obligatory NID sbj.cl are to be interpreted, as in French, as the true subjects of the clause, moved in Spec, TP from the thematic position. This seems not to be the case of Pantiscu in which sbj.cl surface only when Prog has to be signalled. Namely, it is likely that Pantiscu

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4 Note that crucially for such a characterization, Pantiscu allows null subject unlike, for instance, French (e.g. ‘*cova* vs. *il pleut*, both ‘it rains’).

5 Similar constructions are found in some northern Italian varieties (as suggested by an anonymous reviewer for Romagna varieties). We report here Spanish data due to their robustness.

6 Maybe, it would be more correct to say that subject proclitic are unknown in Southern Italian varieties, due to the facts that for instance (second person) subject enclitics are attested in Sicilian (cf. Cruschina & Rinollo 2013). Furthermore impersonal subject clitic pronouns are found in upper Southern Italian varieties (D’Alessandro & Alexiadou 2006).
sbj.cl enrich the Infl layer but not that they correspond to subject positions.

An interesting proposal concerning the status of NID sbj.cl has been put forth in Manzini & Savoia (2002) (henceforth: M&S). Within their model, sbj.cl is able to *lexicalize* an aspectual feature. They assume theta assignment as shaped in association of an aspectual feature on the verb with D(efiniteness) features, allowing the item bearing D features (the sbj.cl) to be interpreted as an argument. Following Borer (1994), they label *Originator* the aspectual feature associated to the thematic role of the agent, and in turn to the sbj.cl. A potential problem is that a Prog value — when encoded via a nominal device — is normally associated, from a cross-linguistic viewpoint to patient-like thematic roles, which are assumed to correspond to the aspectual feature of *Measurer* (cf. Borer 1994, Arad 1998, Ramchand 2008). Consider Finnish in (8) (Krifka 1992, Kiparsky 1998).

\[(8) \quad \begin{align*}
\text{a.} & \quad \text{Lapsi söi } \textit{kalan} \quad \text{kun Maija tuli silään.} \\
& \quad \text{child ate fish.ACC when Maija came in} \\
& \quad \text{‘The child ate a/the fish when Maija came in’} \\
\text{b.} & \quad \text{Lapsi söi } \textit{kalaa} \quad \text{kun Maija tuli silään.} \\
& \quad \text{child ate fish.PART when Maija came in} \\
& \quad \text{‘The child was eating a/the fish when Maija came in’}
\end{align*}\]

In (8b), the partitive case is used as a Prog encoding device and is associated with the internal argument (cf. Aikhenvald 2008 for cross-linguistic data). The use of partitive as a Prog is linked to the fact that Prog involves a (partitive) *measuring* operation in the domain of events (cf. Bonomi 1997). It seems that Prog constructions can be derived either by the eventive modification of the predicate (*measurer*) or the overt morphology of the subjects (*originator*). The typological literature (Bybee at al. 1994), in fact, notes that Prog is found in many languages in locative/unaccusative structures, in which the subject is centrally located (Hale 1986; Mateu & Amadas, 2001) within the timeframe denoted by the event expressed by the vP (Laka 2006). So, the overt morphology of the originator can have a central role in determining a Prog reading, crosslinguistically. M&S proposal is crucial to the interpretation of the Pantiscu facts, in that they have shown - in formal terms - that the heads hosting clitics are devoted to *lexicalize* the aspectual features of the verb, which are linked to the central location of the subjects within the event expressed by V. In what follows we will try to give an explanation of the Pantiscu data mainly basing ourselves on recent work of Harwood (2014) and on a phrasal spell-out machinery (cf. Starke 2009, 2011, Neeleman and Szendroi 2007, Caha 2009, among others).

### 3. The ‘Progressive phase’, phrasal spell-out and agreement

Once assumed that sbj.cl can be associated to aspectual features, broadly in the spirit of M&S (2002), we can try to delineate the derivational path they enter. Assuming the existence of a dedicated projection encoding Prog (cf. Harwood 2014), we may consider the subject clitic to be the X° head of a functional XP that is merged in a position higher than the position accessed by the lexical verb along the classic analyses of Brandi and Cordin (1981), Rizzi (1993 [2000]), De Crousaz and Shlonsky (2003), among others. Such analysis is also

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7 M&S (2002) argued for the existence of a D functional projection, which immediately dominates the inflectional node and is morphologically realized by the sbj.cl. Lexical subjects are realized in Spec, D and a head-Spec relation is assumed to explain agreement in phi-features of the clitic with the lexical subject. Parametrically, the element realizing D can be a sbj.cl, as in NID, a full DP as in English, or the finite verb, as in standard Italian and Southern Italian varieties.
favoured by the data in (9). We collected data from three Pantiscu native speakers (age range 66-84). In (9) the Prog sbj.cl co-occur with (non dislocatable) quantificational subjects.8

(9) a. ˈnːʊɖːʐʊ ɖːʐʊ ˈmantʃa / ˈvɛː ne
   nobody 3sg eat.prs.3sg / come.prs.3sg
   ‘Nobody is eating / coming’
   b. kwárˈkonʊ ɖːʐʊ ˈmantʃa / ˈvɛː ne
   someone 3sg eat.prs.3sg / come.prs.3sg
   ‘Someone is eating / coming’

The X° subject clitics of Pantiscu bears an uninterpretable inflectional feature [uT] valued for Prog aspect [uT: Prog] and in order to check this feature, the sbj.cl lands/merge in Prog°. Once in Prog°, the sbj.cl is able to check its feature and is spelt out in this position. A rough representation is the one sketched in (10).

(10) aspProgP
    aspProg° vP
    ɖːʐʊ, ɖːʐa, ɖːʐɪ mantʃa/ mantʃanʊ

At this point, there are at least two questions to be tentatively answered or indeed simply posed: (i) Why are Pantiscu subject clitics associated only to Prog and not to other aspectual values? (ii) Why — despite encoding a Prog value — do they display agreement with the subject in phi-features?

To answer the first question we may assume, following Harwood (2014) that Prog aspect is unique amongst aspectual forms: it is part of the clause-internal Phase (unlike Perfect and all the higher functional devices hosted within the CP/TP phase). The marking of the role of the originator is, in fact, instantiated within the vP phase. We should now consider that aspectual particles are commonly able to lexicalize a given aspectual head and can work compositionally (cf. Aboh 1996, 2004; Cinque 1999). Consider the examples in (11) from Gungbe.

(11) a. Sènə tò kiklo móto ɔ
    S. PROG wash car the
    'Sènə is washing the car.'
   b. Sènə ná tò dudu lesi ɔ
    S. FUT PROG eat rice the
    'Sènə will be eating the rice.'
   c. Àsíbá ná nɔ tò kpikpon vi lé go
    A. FUT HAB PROG take care of the children
    'A. will frequently be taking care of the children.'

Gungbe (Aboh 1996, Cinque 1999: 64-65)

8 Following Cardinaletti & Starke (1999), Corver & Delfitto (1999), Panagiotidis (2002) (cf. Arregi & Nevins 2012 on Basque), Pantiscu sbj.cl enter the derivation where referential and pronominal DP are standardly merged, as specifiers of vP. The clitics then move to an intermediate specifier (XP) to finally attach itself to the closest c-commanding head within the Inflectional layer, which in the specific case of the Pantiscu clitics would be Prog°. In any case, following this view, the syntactic subject, either a strong pronoun or a full DP, must be analyzed as a left-dislocated DP, contra the data in (9).
In (11a) the particle *tò marks Prog aspect, in (11b) *tò interacts with the future particle nà and in (11c) *tò works compositionally both with the future particle and the habitual morpheme nɔ. Such compositionality is banned in Pantiscu, and this fact possibly weakens the (reasonable) idea that they host the head of Prog, as shown in the representation in (10). Consider the examples in (12) where the sbj.cl does not show up with tenses other than plain present and imperfect and cannot interact with habitual items (cf. Loporcaro 2012: 758ff for the full set of constraints on Pantiscu pronominal Prog).

(12) a. 3-MSG PROG come.PST-3SG

‘he came’

b. in this village the weather is disgusting because prog rains always

(‘In this village the weather is disgusting because it always rains’)

Hence, as already noticed in Loporcaro (2012: 767) who proposes an externalist explanation of Pantiscu’s data based on grammaticalization theory:

“Prog meaning in the Pantiscu periphrasis does not result compositionally from the meanings of its parts […] since the verbal form in itself does not convey this aspectual meaning (the imperfect tense does signal imperfective aspect, though not specifically Prog, whereas the present is aspectually unmarked, […] and neither of course is it conveyed by the pronominal clitic itself.”

A solution to the ‘compositionality’ issue may be to assume that the Pantiscu Prog periphrasis possibly behaves (sensu lato) like idioms (of the kick the bucket type), which are usually defined as (series of constituents) for which the interpretation is not a compositional function of the formatives of which they are composed. Jackendoff (1997, 2002) assumes that idioms are conceived as constructional, namely as complex lexical items whose meaning is not syntactically determined, and has to be retrieved at the syntactic structure – conceptual structure interface component (contra this proposal see the compositional account of Marantz 1996, cf. also Mateu and Espinal 2007: 35-36). Specifically, Jackendoff argues that not only individual lexical items but also chunks of syntactic structure (e.g. idioms) can be listed in the lexicon of a given language, as shown in (13) (cf. also Harwood 2014).

(13) VP > die

kick

DP

the

NP

bucket

9 Note that the same proposal may in principle be formulated for standard Italo-Romance ‘stare + gerund’ (stay + gerund) or ‘andare + gerund’ (go + gerund) aspectual periphrases (cf. Squartini 1998; cf. Bertinetto & Delfitto 1996, Bertinetto 1997). Progressives are, in fact, typologically found with idioms which bring out the isomorphism between progressive and spatial location (Bybee at al. 1994). Such extension is beyond the scope of the present work.
Nanosyntax (cf. Stark 2009, 2011, Caha 2009) expresses the multi-word and multi-terminal aspect of idioms directly – by simply storing the entire constituent (e.g. [VP = *kick the bucket*]) in a lexical entry via the Phrasal spell-out device.10 Quite Interestingly, Svenonius (2005; cf. Harwood 2014) has noticed that there seems to be a rigid partition between the vP and TP domains with regards to idioms, namely verbs seem to regularly form idioms with their arguments and other material contained within vP, but they are unlikely to form idioms with material generated outside of it. Nevertheless, quite puzzlingly, there are many idioms which are reliant upon Prog aspect, as in (14), adapted from Harwood (2014). Prog seems to be unique in this regard.

(14)  

a.  XP_{subj} be dying to VP = XP is keen to do something.  
b.  Bob is dying to meet you = Bob is keen to meet you.  
c.  Bob has died to meet you = Bob has been keen to meet you.

The chunk in (14a) corresponds to the idiomatic interpretation ‘X is keen to do something’, as illustrated in example (14b). Without the presence of Prog aspect the idiomatic reading is lost as in (14c), where the interpretation, if any, must be literal. With a phrasal spell-out tool, we can simply store the entire ASP\textsubscript{Prog} constituent (e.g. [\textsubscript{ASP}\textsubscript{Prog} = XP_{subj} be dying to VP]) in a lexical entry. Now, if non-compositional periphrases of the Pantiscu pronominal progressive type are \textit{kind of} idioms, on the basis on phrasal spell-out machinery it is licit to assume that they enter the lexicon as full chunks of structures in a \textit{constructionist} fashion (cf. Jackendoff 1997, Hale & Keyser 2002, Starke 2009, among others). Hence, following this perspective, the Pantiscu Prog periphrasis, is stored as in (15).

(15)  \[ \text{asp}\textsubscript{ProgP} [vP [VP]] \] > \text{spells out as} \text{ Sbj.cl + lexical verb}

The availability of a Phrasal spell-out mechanism is enhanced by the assumption that Prog aspect is part of the clause-internal phase, as shown in Harwood (2014, cf. also Bošković 2014), once we assume broadly along the lines of Phase theory (Chomsky 2001, Kratzer & Selkirk 2000) that spell-out is restricted to a given phase domain. Within such a phase domain, other syntactic operations, like the \textit{event identification} of the originator (Kratzer 1996) apply. Event Identification is defined by Kratzer (1996) as a recursive mechanism involving the external argument and the VP. It relates the external argument introduced by \textit{v} or by other aspectual heads to the VP via an identification of the event variable of the embedded predication. Roughly, Event Identification allows to add further aspectual information to the event described by the verb.

Coming to the second question, namely how it is possible for an aspectual item to agree in phi-features with the subject, we may assume — following recent work by Kalin and Van Urk (to appear) on Senaya (Neo-Aramaic) — that Prog is special in that a phi-probe can be introduced by an imperfective (vs. perfective) Asp projection. In Pantiscu, Prog is likely to carry a phi-probe (16): since Prog is a structurally closer c-commander of the subject than T, the subject is targeted by the phi-probe on Prog instead of the phi-probe on T: the agreeing subj.cl. When T merges and probes, it does not find a matching goal, since the subject has already agreed with Prog.11

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10 We follow Nediger (2015, cf. Williams 2007) in assuming that a Distributed Morphology approach to idioms, forcing the spell out of terminal nodes only, is at odds with \textit{our intuitions about the distributivity of meaning} inherent to idiomatic expression.

11 Following Kalin & Van Urk (2015) we propose that the subject moves around the phi-probe on T, to spec-TP, before T probes. Furthermore, following Kalin & Van Urk (2015) and Preminger (2011) we assume here that a failure of agreement does not give rise to ungrammaticality (i.e. a probe attempts to agree, but the derivation
An alternative analysis could involve the role of the subject as the originator, aspectually (Manzini & Roussou 1997, M&S 2002). M&S (2002) assumes that thematic, hence aspecual, features are weak, and do not therefore need to be satisfied as soon as they are introduced within the derivation. The subject DPs, in fact, are merged to satisfy strong features such as D(efiniteness). So, following Manzini & Roussou 1997, the originator (Or) is not a strong property, and then ɪɖːʐ-ɪ is merged directly into [Spec, TP] to satisfy the strong D-feature of T (17).

\[
\text{(17) } [\text{TP } ɪɖːʐ-ɪ T [ASP\text{Prog } Or \text{ AspProg Or } [\text{VP } \text{part-ʊnʊ}]]] \\
\text{‘they leave’ or ‘they are leaving’ (unmarked for aspect values)}
\]

(17) simply includes a covert process of feature movement, whereby Or is attracted to the checking domain of TP: every DP is associated with a [-interpretable] Asp feature that needs to be checked. It is in order to check this feature that a [+interpretable] Asp moves to the checking domain of TP. By this mechanism of feature movement, the Or role is conveyed to the lexical DP subject in (18).

\[
\text{(18) } [\text{TP } ɪɖːʐ-ɪ [Or- T [ASP\text{Prog } Or \text{ ɪɖːʐ-ɪ Or } [\text{VP } \text{part-ʊnʊ}]]]}
\]

When we have an overt element such as the subject clitic in Pantiscu, the Asp feature is checked overtly by the subject clitic (19).

\[
\text{(19) } [\text{TP } ɪɖːʐ-ɪ [ASP\text{Prog } Or ɪɖːʐ-ɪ Or } [\text{VP } \text{part-ʊnʊ}]]]
\]

As M&S (2002) suggest, the subject clitic of Northern Italian dialects is an inflection, associated with a categorial D-feature that attract an Asp role. If the Asp feature is weak it does not of course require overt satisfaction. At the same time, we can assume that like all D-features it attracts Asp. This will mean that Asp itself can then take along the [-interpretable] phi-features of T yielding the desired agreement effect the subject DP and the subject clitic as a result (20).

\[
\text{(20) } [\text{TP } ɪɖːʐ-ɪ [ɪɖːʐ-ɪ [ASP\text{Prog } Or ɪɖːʐ-ɪ Or } [\text{VP } \text{part-ʊnʊ}]]]
\]

does not crash if agreement is unachievable. Further notes that Agree is not banned within lexicalized expressions (cf. e.g. he kicks the bucket/he kicked the bucket).
4. Conclusion

In this brief paper we have addressed the very unusual behaviour of sbj.cl in Pantiscu; to tentatively account for their puzzling shape, we have proposed that sbj.cl can be associated to aspectual features (M&S,2002). To explain the non-compositional behaviour of the Pantiscu Prog periphrasis, we have resorted to a phrasal spell-out tool, assuming that the sbj.cl plus the lexical verb are spelt out (as a whole) as ProgP. Finally to account for the fact that an aspect particle can agree with the external argument in phi-features we have assumed, following Kalin & van Urk (2015), that an imperfective projection (here Prog) can act as a phi-probe. Alternatively we may assume that asp ectual Prog features are attracted by the TP yielding agreement (M&S 2002).

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