

Mass Agreement Patterns in Asturian and Spanish

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Asturian, a minority Romance language spoken in northern Spain exhibits a unique agreement pattern with mass nouns, which I will refer to as *mass agreement*. This phenomenon is also found in Spanish spoken in the same region. In this investigation I propose an analysis of the phenomenon based on the work of Pollard and Sag [1994], Kathol [1999], and Wechsler and Zlatic [2003], which accounts for the patterns of interference from Asturian to Spanish.

In Asturian, all nouns are specified as masculine (morphologically marked by *-u*, *-os*) or feminine (marked by *-a*, *-es*). Non-mass nouns must agree in gender and number with all articles, demonstratives, pronouns and adjectives, as illustrated in 1 and 2.

- (1) **Les** maletes **negres** son **bones**. (*feminine plural non-mass*)
The.F.PL suitcases black.F.PL are good.F.PL
'The black suitcases are good'
- (2) **El** llibru **negru** ye **bonu**. (*masculine singular non-mass*)
The.M.SG books black.M.SG is good.M.SG
'The black book is good'

Mass agreement is marked by the presence of the mass morpheme **-o** when the referent is a mass noun; there is no plural form [D'Andrés, 1994]. The mass feature is expressed on postnominal elements, as illustrated in 3; it is not found prenominally. In this position, only gender and number are expressed, as in 4. Articles are only found in mass agreement in cases of nominal ellipsis, like in 5, in which case all elements of the NP exhibit mass agreement if the referent is a mass noun. Pronouns also reflect mass agreement, exemplified by 6.

- (3) La lleche **fresco** / ***fresca** ye **bono** / ***bona**.
The.F.SG milk fresh.MASS / fresh.F.SG is good.MASS / good.F.SG
'The fresh milk is good.'
- (4) Préstame **la bona** / ***bono** lleche.
Pleases-me the.F.SG good.F.SG / good.MASS milk
'I like the good milk.'
- (5) **La bona** sidra ta escondío. / **Lo bono** ta escondío.
The.F.SG good.F.SG cider is hidden / The.MASS good.MASS is hidden
'The good cider is hidden.' / 'The good stuff (cider) is hidden.'
- (6) Préstame muncho la sidra y **lo** / ***la** bebo devezu.
Pleases-me much the cider and it.MASS / it.F.SG I-drink often
'I like cider a lot and I drink it often.'

As *mass* is a semantic concept, I propose the addition of the feature *countability* (COUN) to the INDEX with values of either *mass* or *non*, illustrated in 7 for the mass noun *lleche* (milk).

(7) *lleche*

$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \dots | \text{CONCORD} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{NUM} \quad sg \\ \text{GEN} \quad fem \end{array} \right] \\ \dots | \text{INDEX} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{PER} \quad 3 \\ \text{NUM} \quad sg \\ \text{GEN} \quad fem \\ \text{COUN} \quad mass \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right]$$

Prenominal agreement in Asturian is formed through structure sharing of CONCORD. Seeing that COUN is not a feature of CONCORD, this correctly predicts that mass agreement cannot be expressed prenominally. Postnominal agreement is formed through the values in INDEX, which allows the value of COUN to be expressed in these positions. This analysis also correctly predicts that in cases of an elided mass noun, all elements in the NP exhibit mass agreement, as there is no explicit CONCORD structure which can be shared.

It is now possible to make some general predictions of how mass agreement will present itself in Spanish that is in contact with Asturian. The least likely position for mass agreement to manifest itself is in postnominal adjectives within the NP, since in Spanish, agreement in this position is made via CONCORD [Kathol, pg. 240]. Predicative adjectives are more likely to show mass agreement since agreement is made via INDEX in both Spanish and Asturian in this position. Pronouns and cases of nominal ellipsis will be most influenced by this phenomenon not only because both languages form agreement in these cases via INDEX but also because Spanish has a similar feature to COUN for indefinite referents in such cases. Detailed analyses by Fernández-Ordóñez [2006] concerning Asturian mass agreement in the Spanish of northern Spain indicate that the data do indeed reflect the predictions.

References

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