The Root where it should not be
On internal argument drop sentences in Italian*

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Early on in the generative literature some phenomena that were considered to be limited to root clauses have been identified (cf. Emonds 1969 and Hooper & Thompson 1973). As Aelbrecht et al. (2012) note in their assessment of this literature, phenomena that have been traditionally analyzed as occurring only in main clauses come in at least two varieties: those that are root phenomena in a strict sense and those for which the characterization as root phenomena might be questioned. For example, a phenomenon that was initially treated as restricted to the root is argument fronting in English, based on contrasts like the one in (1)–(2):

(1)   This book you should read.

(2)   *It is impossible that this book he has read.

However, as already noted in the early literature cited above, argument fronting is possible also in clausal complement of verbs of *saying*. Although these cases might not be strong counterexamples since clausal complement of verbs of *saying* might be sufficiently "root-like"; subsequent work by Liliane Haegeman (cf. Haegeman 2012 for a systematic presentation) has shown that argument fronting is possible also in certain types of adverbial clauses, those which Haegeman calls peripheral adverbials (cf. Haegeman 2003). An example is (3).

(3) While YOUR *book* they are using in two courses, mine they haven't even
     order for the library.   (Haegeman 2003: 332)

For "root phenomena" like argument fronting, Haegeman developed an account
based on intervention which does not make a crucial use of the distinction be-
tween root and non-root clauses. This seems a welcome fact given that these
phenomena do not occur only at the root, despite the initial characterization in
this direction.

   However, there *are* genuine root phenomena. A well-known case is V2 in
Dutch and German. Less well-known cases include hanging topics in Italian (cf.
Cinque 1977) and right dislocation in "strict OV languages" like Japanese and
Turkish (cf. Cecchetto & Donati 2015 for an account that unifies these three phe-
nomena and tries to explain why they are restricted to main clauses). My limited
goal in this squib is to discuss a new case of root phenomenon in Italian that, as
far as I know, has not been previously systematically studied. This can be illus-
trated by the question-answer pair in (4):

(4) E   il   ragazzo? Partito
     And the boy?   Left
     'What about the boy?' 'He left.'

The answer in (4) is interpreted as a declarative tensed clause although it is very
reduced, the only overt element being the past participle *partito*. Neither the
auxiliary nor the only argument of the verb are overtly expressed. For concrete-
ness, I will use the label "internal argument drop sentences" to refer to the con-
struction exemplified in (4), but I want to stress that in addition to the internal
argument the auxiliary is dropped as well. The choice of the label is motivated
by the fact that the construction is attested only with internal arguments. This
is confirmed by sentences (5) to (7). (5), which contains a passive, is fully accept-
able, much like (4), which contains an unaccusative verb. However, (6), which
contains an unergative verb, and (7), which contains a transitive verb, are sharply
ungrammatical.

(5) E   il   dessert? Mangiato (da Leo)
     And the dessert? Eaten   (by Leo)
     'What about the dessert?' 'Leo ate it.'

(6) E   il   ragazzo? *Pianto
     And the boy?   Cried

(7)   E   il   ragazzo? *Mangiato la   torta
      And the boy?   Eaten   the cake

In Italian, the past participle agrees in gender and number with the internal argument of passive and unaccusative verbs. This extends to internal argument drop sentences, where agreement is with contextually given internal argument. While in (4) and (5) the make-up of the past participle is compatible with its default value (singular, masculine), (8) and (9) show that the past participle is inflected in gender and number.

(8)   E   le   torte?   Mangiate   (da Leo)
      And the cake-PLUR-FEM? Eaten-PLUR-FEM (by Leo)
      'What about the cakes'. 'Leo ate them.'

(9)   E   le   ragazze?   Partite
      And the girls-PLUR-FEM? Left-PLUR-FEM
      'What about the girls?' 'They left.'

Internal argument drop sentences are not restricted to question-answer pairs, as long as the dropped argument is contextually salient. For example, imagine a context in which I enter my office and I notice that the desk next to mine has been fully emptied. A colleague might react to my puzzled look by uttering (10).

(10)   Licenziata   dal capo.
       Fired-SING-FEM by the   boss
       'She has been fired by the boss'

Internal argument drop is not allowed in a declarative with a fully-fledged verb, as shown in (11). For internal argument drop to be possible, the verb must be a past participle.

(11)   *E   quel film?   vedrò   (domani)
        And that movie? (I) will-watch (tomorrow)

It should be clear that the internal argument drop construction is not a simple case of ellipsis to be analyzed only at the discourse level but obeys very specific syntactic constraints and thus require a syntactic analysis. In fact, the constraints on the internal argument drop construction are reminiscent of those governing another reduced construction in Italian, namely the one called absolute small clause by Belletti (1990). An absolute small clause is an adjunct clause composed by a past participle which agrees with an internal argument DP, which can remain

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unexpressed:

(12) Partite   (le ragazze),   restammo   soli
Left-PLUR-FEM (the girls-PLUR-FEM) remain-PAST-1-PLUR alone
'After the girls left, we remained alone.'

(13) Mangiata   la torta,   facemmo   una passeggiata
Eaten-FEM-SING the cake-FEM-SING make-PAST-1-PLUR a   walk
'Having eaten the cake, we took a walk.'

An obvious analogy between absolute small clauses and the internal argument drop construction is that they are both restricted to past participles that combine with an internal argument (also absolute small clauses are restricted to passive and unaccusative verbs). But the analogies do not stop here. As Belletti (1990) discusses, negation is not allowed in absolute small clauses (cf. (14)). (15) shows that the same holds for the internal argument drop construction.

(14) *Non mangiata   la torta,   facemmo   una
NEG eaten-FEM-SING the cake-FEM-SING make-PAST-1-PLUR a
passeggiata
walk

(15) E   le ragazze?   *Non partite[1]
And the girls-PLUR-FEM?   NEG Left-PLUR-FEM

Belletti (1990) also notices that, although *ne*-extraction is possible from the internal argument of a transitive verb (cf. (16)), *ne*-extraction is not possible in absolute small clauses (cf. (17)). The same holds for internal argument drop sentences (cf. (18)).

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[1]There is just one context that licenses a negated past participle in isolation and this is enumeration in a list. For example, in the old days of the Italian weather broadcasting a list of cities would be read and the minimum/maximum temperature registered in each city the previous day would be given. In those radio broadcastings, the frozen expression *non pervenuta* ('not arrived') was used, as shown in (i):

(i) Bari   20-28
    Bolzano   non pervenuta
    Milano   18-28
    Roma   20-30
    Etc.

(16) (Di quei film) ne ho   visti   tre.
     (Of those movies) *ne* (I) have seen-MASC-PLUR three
     'I saw three of those movies.'

(17) *Vistine   tre, mi stancai.
     Seen-MASC-PLUR-*ne* three I got tired

(18) *E   quei film?   *Vistine   tre.
     And those movies?   Seen-MASC-PLUR-*ne* three

Despite these analogies, there is a striking difference between absolute small clauses and internal argument drop sentences: absolute small clauses, being adverbial clauses, need to be embedded, while the internal argument drop construction can never be embedded. We can check this by trying to embed it under a verb of saying. The result is ungrammatical (cf. (19))

(19) E   quel film?   *Ha detto che già   visto.
     And that movie?   (he) said that already seen

The same ungrammaticality is observed when the internal argument drop construction is embedded in a peripheral adverbial clause (i.e., the structures that Haegeman has shown to allow argument fronting). This is shown in (20) and (21). (21) is a telling case, as it contains a premise conditional, which is prototypical example of peripheral adverbials.

(20) Vieni   a vedere quel film?   *No, perché già   visto.
     (you) come to see   that movie?   No, because already seen

(21) E   quella torta? *Se vuoi   assaggiare, c'è   una pasticceria
     And that cake?   If (you) want to-taste   there is a   bakery
     sotto casa.
     under house

We can conclude that internal argument drop is rigidly a root phenomenon. An even more striking observation is that internal argument drop sentences, despite being very reduced (in fact, they typically contain only a past participle) have a full force specification. They can be declaratives as in the example discussed up to now, but they can also be interrogatives (cf. (22)) or exclamatives (cf. (23)).

(22)   Licenziato?
       Fired-SING-MASC

'Has he been fired?'
Context: Leo enters his office, notices that the desk next to his has been fully emptied and utters (22) to elicit information from a colleague.

(23)   Bruciata!
Burned-SING-FEM
Context: Leo arrives next to the Opera House, notices that it has been destroyed by a fire and utters (23) to express his surprise/ disappointment.

Internal argument drop sentences raise several interesting questions. One is the nature of the dropped argument. A possibility is that it is *pro*, somewhat licensed by the agreement morpheme on the past participle (cf. Rizzi 1986). A more complex issue is the following. On the one hand, internal argument drop sentences share many properties with small clauses: they cannot contain an external argument, they are not compatible with a full verbal morphology (either in the form of an auxiliary or in the form of a finite verb) and they cannot be negated. In structural terms, this seems to suggest that they are reduced structures, possibly smaller than *v*P (assuming that Spec,*v*P is where the external theta role assigned, cf. Chomsky 1995 and Kratzer 1996). On the other hand, internal argument drop sentences have a full force specification and the projection ForceP is taken to be the highest projection in the CP area (cf. Rizzi 1997 and much following work).

Confronted with this puzzle there are at least two ways to go. Either we assume that ForceP can be projected in the lower segment of the structure, say in the VP periphery. Or we can assume that the intermediate projections between VP and ForceP can be deactivated. It is not even clear that these two proposals are not notational variants of each other, since they both boil down to saying that an extended middle portion of the structure can be absent under certain conditions.

But the real issue is explaining why this middle portion can be missing in internal argument drop sentences and (apparently) only in them. Although I am not in the position to answer this question, I hope to have shown that internal argument drop sentences are challenging enough to deserve a serious investigation.

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