

“Signor Marchetti, l’ho vista ieri”: When Gender plays hide and seek in Italian Past Participle Agreement with politeness pronouns

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With this talk we account for the mismatch of grammatical and natural gender in Italian past participle agreement (IPPA) in combination with polite pronouns, presenting the findings of a quantitative study. While IPPA has been studied from a theoretical as well as from an empirical perspective (see Hall 1958, Brinker 1984, among others), fine-tuned research on IPPA in politeness context is lacking and very much divided (see Reumuth & Winkelmann 1999, Maiden & Robustelli 2013). By building upon this instance Gaglia (2023) operationalized an online acceptability judgment task on Labvanced which showed that more than 50% of the informants recruited (n=97 L1-speakers of Italian) are more likely to evaluate the grammatical agreement between past participle and polite pronoun as the sole viable choice (see 1a). However 44% agree that the natural gender agreement (see 1b) is equally or mutually acceptable.

- (1) a. Signor Marchetti, l(a)’ ho vista ieri.
Mr Marchetti, DO.CL.3SG.F(POL) have see.PP-SG.F yesterday
‘Mr Marchetti, I saw you yesterday.’
→ IPPA with the grammatical gender of the feminine direct object clitic (polite clitic)
- b. Signor Marchetti, l(a)’ ho visto ieri.
Mr Marchetti, DO.CL.3SG.F(POL) have see.PP-SG.M yesterday
‘Mr Marchetti, I saw you yesterday.’
→ IPPA with the natural gender of the male addressee

The aim of our study is to expand on these insights and provide a more accurate depiction of IPPA in politeness on statistical grounds. Through an acceptability study deployed online on Labvanced, Italian native speakers will be evaluating four different types of constructions:

- direct object clitic *la* (both elided and not; see 1a and 1b)
- sequence of two past participle forms (2a)
- explicit direct objects (2b)
- passive constructions with ESSERE (2c)

- (2) a. Signor Marchetti, l(a)’ ho sentita / sentito
Mr Marchetti, DO.CL.3SG.F(POL) have hear.PP-SG.F / hear.PP-SG.M
preoccupata / preoccupato.
concerned.PP-SG.F / concerned.PP-SG.M
‘Mr Marchetti, I felt that you were concerned.’
- b. Signor Marchetti, ha visto / viste le foto?
Mr Marchetti, have see.PP-SG.M / see.PP-PL.F the pictures.ACC-PL.F
‘Mr Marchetti, have you seen the pictures?’
- c. Signor Marchetti, è stata / stato arrestata
Mr Marchetti, be be.PP-SG.F / be.PP-SG.M arrested.PP-SG.F
/ arrestato ieri?
/ arrested.PP-SG.M yesterday
‘Mr Marchetti, have you been arrested yesterday?’

To avoid confounder effects we control for:

- syntax and illocution type
- frequency of the main verbs
- natural gender of the addressee
- allocutive forms
- presence of polite personal pronoun *Lei*
- grammatical gender, number and inflectional ending of the explicit direct objects

We will provide evidence on the oscillation of the IPPA matching the natural gender of the addressee or the grammatical gender and number of the explicit direct objects and/or pronoun. Moreover, we will discuss variation linked to the geographical distribution of the informants. We do however hypothesize a correlation between IPPA and the allocutive form given by the activation of a more prescriptive register. Additionally, we will give an outlook on the syntactic analysis of our data.

References

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