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An asymmetry between personal pronouns and other Dps

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Italian shows an asymmetry in partitive wh-phrases with the preposition *di*: when the partitive phrase contains a personal pronoun, the wh-pronoun *chi* 'who' is used, and the wh-determiner *quale* 'which' is disallowed:

- (1) *Chi* /**quale* *di noi* (voi, loro) *dovrà farlo?*
Who/*which of us (you, them) will-have-to do-it

Conversely, when the partitive phrase contains a DP which is not a personal pronoun, the wh-determiner *quale* is used and *chi* is deviant:

- (2) *Quale*/**chi* *dei tuoi studenti* *dovrà farlo?*
Which/*who of your students will-have-to do-it

This asymmetry sets apart personal pronouns (including third person) from other DPs, and suggests some form of agreement with respect to (pro)nominality between the wh-word and the DP in the partitive phrase. The interesting question is which feature(s) cause this asymmetry.

The first possibility is the feature [+human], which is typical of strong pronouns and of impersonal pronouns. However, this feature is plausibly shared by lexical nouns like *student*, at least at the level where selectional restrictions apply. So, either we stipulate that the feature [+human] is *syntactically* visible on strong/impersonal pronouns only, or we have to assume two different features encoding humanness (cf. Hanson's (2003) [sentient] feature).

Another possible source of asymmetry is the number feature. According to Kayne (2000) and Wechsler (2002), "plural" first/second person pronouns are not specified for number; Di Domenico (2004) and Sigurdhsson (2004) argue that the same holds of third person pronouns. The wh-pronoun *chi* too might be underspecified for number: although it triggers singular agreement on the verb, this can be a default inflection -- in fact, an answer to (1) may involve either a singular or a plural DP. The wh-determiner *quale/quali* is instead inflected for number. Thus, a principle of number compatibility would rule in *chi* in (1) – since both *chi* and the personal pronoun in the partitive phrase are underspecified for number – and rule out *quale*, which is specified for number; the converse would hold in (2), since the non-pronominal DP is specified for number. This account, however, only holds if third person pronouns too are underspecified for number (see Kayne 2000 and Wechsler 2002 for the opposite view).

The third possible source of asymmetry is the person feature, but here we run

into serious troubles. Kayne (2000), Harley and Ritter (2002) and Wechsler (2002) argue that first and second person pronouns are specified for person, but "third person" pronouns – as well as non-pronominal DPs – are not. This would predict an asymmetry between first and second person pronouns, on the one hand, and all "third person" DPs (either pronominal or not), on the other. But this is not the split we observe in (1)-(2). Furthermore, if "third person" is simply person underspecification, there is no obvious way to express a difference between the wh-forms *chi* and *quale*.

Finally, according to Harley and Ritter (2002), personal pronouns are characterized by a feature geometry which is not shared by non-pronominal DPs. However, at least some features under their Individuation node (GROUP, encoding number, and CLASS, encoding gender) seem to be shared by non-pronominal DPs as well.

Thus, it appears that all the recently proposed featural analyses of personal pronouns fail to capture the unitary behaviour of first, second and third person pronouns as a coherent set, opposed to non-pronominal DPs, in (1)-(2).

References

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