Agreement displacement/mismatch (AM), is a phenomenon found in languages like Basque, Georgian, Karok, and Ezra Mordvinian, whereby the agreement controller of a transitive verb is sometimes the external argument (EA), sometimes the internal argument (IA), or even both (see Bright 1957, Harris 1981, Abondolo 1982, Hewitt 1995, Nash 1995, Hale 2001, Rezac 2003, Bejar & Rezac 2009). AM is traditionally claimed not to be found in Romance languages. Moreover, AM is not expected to take place for gender, at least for languages like the Romance (see Corbett 1990, Tsoulas 2008, Nevins 2010).

In this paper, I wish to discuss a set of data on agreement in an Italo-Romance variety where AM takes place for both gender and number. In this variety, Ripatransone (RT), a central Italian dialect, if EA and IA have different gender or number, the verb is marked with a "mismatch marker" [2]. I wish to propose that this mismatch arises because of the more articulated structure of *v* in RT, which brings about an ergative-like structure.

According to Müller (2004), the EA in ergative languages is licensed by *v*. After showing that this is also the case for the RT dialect group, I discuss the following generalizations: 1. Languages that present AM phenomena have the EA licensed by *v* and have a richer *v* field; 2. A rich *v* is also an indication for the null-subjecthood of a language (following D'Alessandro & Roberts 2010), hence languages which present AM phenomena tend to be null-subject; 3. the dialect group of RT is neither ergative-like not accusative-like, but exhibits features of both language groups, suggesting the existence of a "Case"-continuum.

THE DATA. In RT, the finite verb is marked for gender[1] (Parrino 1967, Harder 1998). Moreover, when the EA and the IA gender or number features do not coincide, the verb is marked with a neuter ending (-ə) [2]. Obviously, no mismatch is marked on the verb when both the subject and the object exhibit the same gender [3].

Following Silverstein (1976) and Zwicky (1977) on animacy hierarchies, as well as Benveniste's (1966) idea of 3rd person being equivalent to no person, several accounts have been proposed for AM facts. Notably, Bejar & Rezac (2009) propose an analysis of agreement displacement phenomena through a mechanism of Cyclic Agree, whereby the *v* head first probes the IA and subsequently the EA, which is in the c-command domain of *v* after the extension of the search space via cyclic reprojection of *v* (for Agree see Chomsky 2001 and ff.). Cyclic Agree cannot easily account for AM in RT, as the IA Agrees with, and values all, the φ-features of *v*. Hence, there is no reason for the fully valued *v* to probe again the EA for gender and number.

Thus RT, a Romance language, presents striking agreement patterns: first, it marks gender on the verb; second, it exhibits AM for gender and number and marks it on the verb.

THE ANALYSIS. It has been recently proposed that features on functional heads can be of at least two kinds: structure-building, and probing [Pesetsky & Torrego 2006, Rizzi 2008, Adger & Svenonius 2009, Cecchetto & Donati 2009, Müller to appear]. According to Müller (to appear), features are ranked and only the features on the top of a feature list are accessible for computation. Syntactic operations are feature-driven, and every syntactic operation must discharge either a structure-building/Merge feature or a probing/Agree feature. Building on Müller, I propose the following: 1. RT and the dialects of the surrounding area have a complex *v* shell [4] and 2. All Merge features on *v* precede Agree features. This means that *v* will not Probe for its IA right after its Merge but it will wait until the higher *v* is Merged. At this point, the higher *v* will Probe for the EA while the lower *v* will Probe for the IA simultaneously, with the result that the two *v*s, which are in a SHARE relation (i.e. display identical feature sets, Chomsky 2005, Ouali 2008) might display gender and number feature value mismatch. This mismatch is resolved at PF by

inserting a neuter ending on the verb. Person is instead encoded in T, which is otherwise defective (D'Alessandro & Roberts 2010).

'Delayed' Agree brings about AM, and together with the complex *v* shell sketches an ergative-like pattern for RT, to which we return below.

Evidence for the existence of a complex *v* is given by dialects of the RT group, which exhibit double auxiliary constructions like in [5] where BE+HAVE form a complex auxiliary and share φ-features [D'Alessandro & Ledgeway 2010], and split auxiliary selection according to the subject's person [Mahajan 2004, Manzini & Savoia 2005]. All these instances are taken to indicate the existence of a complex *v* field, where the *v* features are shared between two *v* heads [see also Cocchi 2009 for a similar proposal on Bantu].

Building on an intuition by Contreras (1991), if *v* is rich and licenses the EA the language will be null-subject. Under this view, given that AM in RT is caused by a rich *v* which licenses the EA, we expect RT to be null-subject. This is in fact the case. This also predicts that all languages that present AM phenomena determined by a rich *v* (like Basque, Georgian, Karok etc) must be null-subject. This prediction is, to my knowledge, borne out.

Last, according to Müller (2004) *v* licenses the EA if the language is ergative. Hence, given this proposal, RT should also be ergative. Although the RT pronoun system is a Nominative-Accusative one, RT and its language group do exhibit many features in common with (split-)ergative systems: a. split auxiliary selection according to person (1st and 2nd vs 3rd), also found in ergative languages [Dixon 2004]; b. defective T not licensing the subject and not hosting the subject in its specifier [D'Alessandro & Roberts 2010] . These facts suggest that Nominative-Accusative and Ergative-Absolutive systems are distributed along a continuum and do not constitute completely separate groups; feature ranking can determine also intermediate types of languages. While some properties of Ergative or Nominative languages cluster together, possibly because of uniformity of feature on functional heads [Roberts & Holmberg 2009], this is not always the case.

(1) a. I' ridu (I-masc laugh-masc)
tu ridu (you-masc laugh-masc)
issu ridu (he laughs-masc)
noja ridemi (we-masc laugh-masc)
voja rideti
issi ridi
c. se ridə ('it is laughed'-neuter)

b. ìa ride (I-fem laugh-fem)
tu ride (you-fem laugh-fem)
esse ride (she-fem laughs-fem)
noja ridema (we-fem laugh-fem)
voja rideta
essaride

(4)
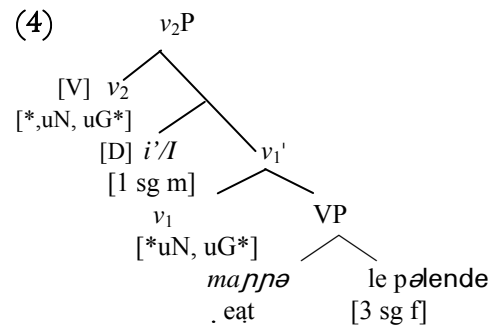
[2] a. Babbu   dicə   la   vərità
       dad-m sg says-3rd sg neu the-f sg truth-f sg
       'Dad told the truth'
   b. Mamme   e   kkottə   li   makkaru'
       mum- f sg is-3rd sg cooked- pp neu the- m pl pasta- m pl
       'Mum cooked pasta' [Mancini 1993: 107]
(5) a. So   've fatte   b. S'   avaveme fitte
       BE-1stsg HAVE-pst done-sg1st/2nd HAVE-1st pl done-pl
       'I had done'   'We had done'

(3) le frəkine e vvəlute ne
      the- f sg girl-f sg is wanted-f sg an-f sg
mele
apple-f sg
'The girl wanted an apple'