

MARSAC, FABRICE. *Histoire d'S: ou le participe passé au Rasoir d'Ockham*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2016. ISBN 978-2-343-08287-5. Pp. 210. 22 €.

The ins and outs of past participle agreement are discussed in this volume, whose overarching goal is to untangle and simplify the current minefield of nearly 50 rules, exceptions, and *cas particuliers*. Marsac qualifies this current state of affairs as *abracadabrantique*, a term that most speakers (and probably all instructors) of French will agree with. Adopting the principle of Occam's Razor, the author aims to replace these sometimes incoherent accretions resulting from centuries of prescriptive endeavors with a unified, streamlined, and linguistically valid rule. Although the early sections sometimes verge on the alarmist—including a generous list of errors from educated sources, taken as evidence of a general *relâchement grammatical*—many of Marsac's later criticisms ring true. Take for example the familiar *règle de position*: a past participle with *avoir* as its auxiliary agrees with the direct object when the object precedes the past participle, but not when it follows (*les pommes que j'ai mangées* but *j'ai mangé les pommes*). As it turns out, no other agreement relations in French (e.g., subject-verb, noun-adjective) evince this (artificial) sensitivity to position. Marsac emphasizes the inconsistency in proscribing agreement with *en* (*des pommes, j'en ai mangé*), even though *en* pronominalizes a direct object and precedes a past participle *auxilié* by *avoir*. Likewise, why does *faire causatif* block agreement (*la maison qu'il a fait faire*)? Pronominal verbs are similarly thorny, requiring agreement with direct objects (*elles se sont vues*) but not indirect objects (*elles se sont parlé*), despite the strong tendency elsewhere for agreement in the context of *être*. A further criticism of the *règle de position* is that, although ostensibly formulated for auxiliary *avoir*, it is extended to auxiliary *être* in cases like *ils se sont acheté de coquettes maisons* (no agreement; direct object follows the past participle) versus *ils se les sont données eux-mêmes, la liberté et la démocratie* (agreement required; direct object pronoun precedes the past participle). Marsac's proposal would treat past participle agreement as simple verbal agreement and essentially do away with the *règle de position*, recommending for example *cette visite que j'avais projeté*; past participles of pronominal verbs would agree with the subject (rather than the direct object) across the board, thus *le premier ministre se les est attribué* (masculine singular subject) or *les deux premiers ne se sont pas plus* (masculine plural subject). Although Marsac's proposal is elegant in relying only on preexisting principles such as subject-verb agreement, it disregards how past participle agreement arose naturally in French prior to prescriptive intervention. Strengths of the volume are the exhaustive examples and the skill with which Marsac highlights the artificial and sometimes illogical nature of existing rules of past participle agreement, although linguists would have welcomed a better articulated theoretical framework and more consideration for data from speech. Finally, given its minimal functional load and declining presence in everyday spoken French, a fundamental—if perhaps heretical—question is entirely *passée sous silence*: why attempt to salvage past participle agreement at all?