Unifying the French evidential construction *on di(rai)t que*[1]

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Abstract. The evidential constructions *on dit que p* (∼'one says that p') and *on dirait que p* (∼'one would say that p') differ in terms of meaning, compatibility with negation, and in terms of the moods they can embed. These factors additionally influence whether the speaker can be taken to endorse the prejacent. *On dit-* and *on dirait*-constructions were previously assumed to be distinct idioms, the former with an evidential reading, the latter, with an epistemic reading. In this paper, we propose that both forms are derived from the same core components, in particular, an evidential modal *dire* involving an accessibility relation which forces a homogeneity effect regarding the truth of its prejacent in evidentially accessible worlds. We show that the complex interaction between embedded mood, negation, and speaker endorsement in these constructions, can be explained assuming that *on di(rai)t*-constructions compete with structural alternatives differing w.r.t. the placement of negation, mood, and their subject pronoun.

Keywords: evidentiality, mood, presupposition projection.

1. Background on the French evidential construction *on dit*

In French, *dire* ('say') can combine with the indefinite pronoun *on*, as shown in (1).

(1) On dit   que Jo est malade.
     ON say.IND.3.SG that Jo is   sick.

On may refer to a third person singular, or plural indefinite individual–see (2a), or to a plurality of individuals which includes the speaker, but not the addressee–see (2b) (Kitagawa and Lehrer, 1990; Fonseca-Greber and Waugh, 2003; King et al., 2011; Creissels, forthcoming).[2]

(2) a. **On** a   cambriolé ma maison! La caméra montre que {le   / les}
        ON has broken-into my house!   The camera shows that {the.SG / the.PL}
        voleur(s) {est   / sont}   venu(s) la nuit.
        thieve(s) {is.AUX / are.AUX} come   the night.
        'People broke into my house! The cameras show they must have come at night.'

     b. Jo et moi, **on** est   allés au   cinéma, et j'ai   adoré le film.
        Jo and I,   ON is.AUX gone to-he movies, and I-have.AUX loved the movie.
        'We (Jo and I) went to the movies, and I loved the movie.'

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[2] *On* can be used to refer to the addressee *only*, in which case it conveys mockery or sarcasm. This use typically arises in rhetorical questions. Pronouns bound by *on* remain third person (see *ses* in (i)). This contrasts with the first person plural uses of *on*, whereby agreement with pronouns and participles shifts to first plural. We do not think that the second person reading of *on* shown in (i) interferes with the puzzles presented in this paper.

(i) **On** n'a   pas fini   ses   devoirs?
     ON NEG-has NEG finished his/her homework?
     'You did not finish your homework?' (I know you did not).

On dit suggests that its complement clause (**prejacent** p) is likely to hold (Kim, 2004; Rossari, 2012; Dendale, 2022; Kronning, 2023). Specifically in (1), *on dit* (indicative present, glossed IND) implies that its prejacent (IND too) results from hearsay, i.e. (**i**) people other than the speaker had access to evidence supporting p, and endorse p; (**ii**) the speaker did not have access to such evidence or does not fully endorse p. We take endorsement to correspond to some kind of universal commitment (epistemic/evidential) to p. Point (**ii**) is supported by the possible continuation *but I don't agree / but I don't think so* in (3), adapted from Kim (2004).

(3) On dit que Jo est malade, ✓mais je ne suis pas d'accord / je ne pense
 ON say.IND that Jo is.IND sick, ✓but I NEG am NEG agreeing / I NEG think
 pas qu'il le soit.
 NEG that-he it is.SBJV.

 'People say Jo is sick, but I don't agree / but I don't think he is.'

(4) additionally shows that the embedded verb *has* to be indicative in the *on dit* construction. In (4), SBJV stands for the French subjunctive mood, which is attested in embedded clauses under certain verbs (e.g. *vouloir*, 'want'), and sometimes only when the embedding verb is negated (e.g. *ne pas croire*, 'not believe'). In the later case, SBJV was dubbed a "polarity" subjunctive (Connors, 1978; Rivero, 1971; Farkas, 1992; Stowell, 1993; Quer, 1998; Bondarenko, 2022). Lastly, (5) shows that *on dit* cannot be negated and retain the aforementioned reportive function.

(4) On dit que Jo {✓est / ✗soit} malade.
 ON say.IND that Jo {✓is.IND / ✗be.SBJV} sick.

 'People say Jo is sick.'

(5) On dit **pas** que Jo {✗est[3] / ✗soit} malade.
 ON say **NEG** that Jo {✗is.IND / ✗be.SBJV} sick.

 Intended: 'People don't say Jo is sick.'

We now explore variations of this construction, in terms of matrix tense, matrix negation, and embedded mood. We will show that not all combinations are licensed, and that the well-formed combinations give rise to an intricate pattern of speaker endorsement.

2. Puzzles with Tense, Mood and Negation

2.1. The effect of matrix tense

On dit seems to get a different meaning when marked with the *conditionnel* (glossed CND) (Dendale, 2022; Kronning, 2023; Rossari, 2012; Kim, 2004). In (6), the reportive dimension of *on dit* seems to be lost, in the sense that the speaker must have had evidence for p and endorses p, contradicting (**ii**). Morphologically, CND is a transparent combination of past imperfective and simple future tense markings. Semantically, CND normally expresses future-in-past or counterfactuality in the consequent of conditionals (Iatridou, 2000). Therefore, it is surprising that CND appears to affect the core semantics of *dire* in (6). (7) additionally shows that *on*

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[3]*est* is grammatically fine (and *soit* borderline), but the sentence then means no one performs the speech act that amounts to saying *Jo is sick*. This is different from our target meaning, which does not highlight the speech act *per se*, but instead focuses on what kind of conclusions about the prejacent can be drawn from the available evidence.

dirait, at least in the absence of matrix negation, imposes the same mood restriction to the embedded clause as *on dit*: the embedded clause has to be IND.

(6) On **dirait** que Jo est malade, ✗mais je suis pas d'accord / je ne pense pas
ON **say.CND** that Jo is.IND sick, ✗but I am NEG agreeing / I NEG think NEG
qu'il le soit.
that-he it is.SBJV.
'Jo seems sick, but I don't agree / but I don't think he is.'

(7) On **dirait** que Jo {✓est / ✗soit} malade.
ON **say.CND** that Jo {✓is.IND / ✗be.SBJV} sick.
'Jo seems sick.'

2.2. The effect of embedded mood

On dirait, unlike its IND counterpart *on dit*, can be negated and in that case embeds either an IND or a SBJV clause. This is shown in (8).

(8) On dirait **pas** que Jo {✓est / ✓soit} malade.
ON say.CND **NEG** that Jo {✓is.IND / ✓is.SBJV} sick.
'Jo does not seem sick.'

The availability of SBJV under matrix negation is perhaps unsurprising, because it is not specific to the *on dit* construction: verbs like *croire* ('believe'), *admettre* ('admit'), *(s')imaginer* ('imagine'), *se rappeler* ('remember') also exhibit the same mood-negation interaction ("polarity subjunctive"). Differences in embedded mood however, lead to differences in terms of speaker endorsement. In the IND case, repeated in (9a), the speaker can endorse the prejacent without a contradiction. The opposite holds in the SBJV case, repeated in (9b). This shift in speaker endorsement between IND and SBJV clauses, appears more surprising.

(9) a. Matrix NEG+CND - Embedded IND: no speaker endorsement.
On dirait pas que Jo **est** malade, ✓mais moi je pense qu'il l'est.
ON say.CND NEG that Jo **is.IND** sick, ✓but I I think that-he it-is.
'Jo does not seem sick, but I think he is.'
b. Matrix NEG+CND - Embedded SBJV: speaker endorsement.
On dirait pas que Jo **soit** malade, ✗mais moi je pense qu'il l'est.
ON say.CND NEG that Jo **is.SBJV** sick, ✗but I I think that-he it-is.
'Jo does not seem sick, but I think he is.'

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. In Section 3, we introduce our core lexical entry for evidential *dire*, and explain why negation in only possible in the matrix when the tense on *dire* is CND. In Section 4, we explore the interaction between matrix negation and embedded mood. We explain the restrictions affecting embedded SBJV following Schlenker (2005)'s argument based on *Maximize Presupposition!* and the competition between IND and SBJV. In Section 5, we suggest the observed patterns of speaker endorsement could be explained assuming a form of pragmatic competition between the indefinite subject *on*, and a more specific, first person alternative *je*. Section 6 concludes.

3. Capturing the interaction between negation and matrix tense

Under a reportive interpretation of *on di(rai)t*, why is NEG+IND impossible in the matrix clause of (5) , while NEG+CND remains fine in (8)? In this Section, we suggest that (5), unlike (8), has a low-negation competitor expressing the same meaning, but in a way that better divides the labor between at-issue and presupposed material. This is why (5) is dispreferred while (8) remains fine. We start by defining the core components at work in the *on di(rai)t*-construction.

3.1. Key assumptions

We take propositions to be sets of world-event pairs (henceforth **WEP**). First, we take CND in sentences like (7) and (8), to be the realization of a covert evidential modal $M_{\mathscr{E}}$, outscoping the whole sentence (except for matrix negation). This is sketched in (10). (11) defines the modal operator $M_{\mathscr{E}}$: it is parametrized by the utterance speech act e^*, and takes a prejacent p, and a WEP $\langle e, w \rangle$, as arguments. It then states that its prejacent p holds for all WEP $\langle e', w' \rangle$ compatible with the evidence received in $\langle e, w \rangle$ by the speaker of the utterance speech act e^*.

(10)
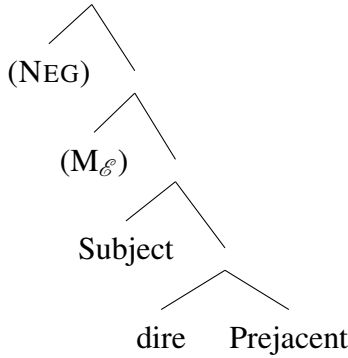
(11) $[\![M_{\mathscr{E}}]\!]^{e^*} = \lambda \langle p, e, w \rangle.$
$\forall \langle e', w' \rangle \in \mathscr{E}(spk_{e^*}, e, w). \ p(e', w')$

(12) $[\![dire_{\text{ev}}]\!]^{e^*} = \lambda \langle x, p, e, w \rangle :$
$\underline{e'' \sim_w e \text{ and evidentially settles } p \text{ for } x \text{ in } w.}$
$\forall \langle e', w' \rangle \in \mathscr{E}(x, e'', w). \ p(e', w')$

(13) *Event co-occurrence.* $e'' \sim_w e$ iff e and e'' co-occur in w.

Second, (12) defines evidential *dire* (as opposed to speech act *dire*) and is inspired by Schlenker (2005)'s entries for clause-embedding verbs like *penser* ('think').[4] The assertion of *dire* is very close in nature to that of the modal $M_{\mathscr{E}}$; the only difference is that the accessibility relation it introduces is based on the subject's evidence, given an event e'' (free variable). Evidential *dire* asserts that the prejacent holds for all WEP $\langle e', w' \rangle$ compatible with the evidence received by x in $\langle e'', w \rangle$. Additionally, we assume that *dire* carries an excluded-middle presupposition pertaining to the truth of the prejacent in evidentially accessible worlds. This presupposition is underlined in (12), like all presuppositions in the rest of this paper. It states that the free event e'' coocurs with the argument, "matrix" event e in w ($e'' \sim_w e$, see (13)), and additionally, that this event e'' provides enough evidence to settle the truth or falsity of p. In other words, the WEPs $\langle e', w' \rangle$ compatible with the evidence the subject gets from e'' in w, should all support or all reject the prejacent (see (14)). This property is insensitive to ¬-introduction at the level of the prejacent, see (15). This will be useful once we turn to negated *on di(rai)t*-constructions.

(14) *Evidential homogeneity.* e'' evidentially settles p according to x in w, iff the truth value of p is homogeneous across the worlds evidentially accessible for x, given e'' in w, i.e.:
$\forall \langle e', w' \rangle \in \mathscr{E}(x, e'', w). \ p(e', w') \lor \ \forall \langle e', w' \rangle \in \mathscr{E}(x, e'', w). \ \neg p(e', w').$

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[4]Using WEPs slightly deviates from Schlenker (2005)'s original proposal, which was quantifying over events, and introducing worlds dependent on them.

(15) *Evidential homogeneity and negation.* Evidentially settling p amounts to evidentially settling $\neg p$. I other words, e'' evidentially settles p according to x in w, iff e'' evidentially settles $\neg p$ according to x in w.

We now use these entries to show that (8) is pragmatically optimal while (5) is not, assuming a specific kind of competition between these forms and their respective low-negation alternatives.

3.2. Pragmatic competition predicts negated evidential *on dit* (IND) to be suboptimal

The excluded-middle presupposition posited in the previous Section for evidential *dire*, causes (5) to mean that *all* worlds compatible with the subject's (*on*'s) evidence, are such that Jo is not sick. This turns out to be equivalent to the denotation of (5)'s low-negation alternative (5′).

(5′) On dit   que Jo **n'**est   **pas** malade.
      ON say.IND that Jo NEG-is.IND NEG sick.

Let us first compute the meaning of the high-negation variant (5), and then compute that of the low-negation variant (5′). In doing so, we use the fact that evidentially settling p amounts to evidentially settling $\neg p$ (see (14) and its consequence in (15)).

$$\llbracket on\ dit\ p \rrbracket^{e^*} = \lambda\langle e,w\rangle : \underline{e'' \sim_w e \text{ and evidentially settles } p \text{ for } \llbracket on \rrbracket^{e^*} \text{ in } w.}$$
$$\forall\langle e',w'\rangle \in \mathscr{E}(\llbracket on \rrbracket^{e^*}, e'', w).\ p(e',w')$$

$$(5) = \llbracket \text{NEG } on\ dit\ p \rrbracket^{e^*} = \lambda\langle e,w\rangle : \underline{e'' \sim_w e \text{ and evidentially settles } p \text{ for } \llbracket on \rrbracket^{e^*} \text{ in } w.}$$
$$\exists\langle e',w'\rangle \in \mathscr{E}(\llbracket on \rrbracket^{e^*}, e'', w).\ \neg p(e',w')$$

$$(5') = \llbracket on\ dit\ \text{NEG } p \rrbracket^{e^*} = \lambda\langle e,w\rangle : \underline{e'' \sim_w e \text{ and evidentially settles } p \text{ for } \llbracket on \rrbracket^{e^*} \text{ in } w.}$$
$$\forall\langle e',w'\rangle \in \mathscr{E}(\llbracket on \rrbracket^{e^*}, e'', w).\ \neg p(e',w')$$

(5) and (5′) are defined under the same conditions, i.e. when the free event e'' is such that it settles the evidence in favor of p for *on* in w ($\forall\langle e',w'\rangle \in \mathscr{E}(\llbracket on \rrbracket^{e^*}, e'', w).\ p(e',w')$), or settles the evidence in favor of $\neg p$ for *on* in w ($\forall\langle e',w'\rangle \in \mathscr{E}(\llbracket on \rrbracket^{e^*}, e'', w).\ \neg p(e',w')$). In fact, (5) and (5′) turn out to have the same truth-conditions, as well. To show this, we assume the presupposition of (5)/(5′) is verified: $\forall\langle e',w'\rangle \in \mathscr{E}(\llbracket on \rrbracket^{e^*}, e'', w).\ p(e',w') \vee \forall\langle e',w'\rangle \in \mathscr{E}(\llbracket on \rrbracket^{e^*}, e'', w).\ \neg p(e',w')$. Let us call this condition (★). We now show that the truth conditions of (5) and (5′) are the same under (★).

(5) is true $\iff$ (★) $\wedge \llbracket \text{NEG } on\ dit\ p \rrbracket^{e^*}$ is true

$\qquad \iff$ (★) $\wedge \exists\langle e',w'\rangle \in \mathscr{E}(\llbracket on \rrbracket^{e^*}, e'', w).\ \neg p(e',w')$

$\qquad \iff \forall\langle e',w'\rangle \in \mathscr{E}(\llbracket on \rrbracket^{e^*}, e'', w).\ \neg p(e',w')$

$\qquad \iff \llbracket on\ dit\ \text{NEG } p \rrbracket^{e^*}$ is true

$\qquad \iff$ (5′) is true

(5) and (5′) are therefore equivalent. Why would the high-negation variant (5) be dispreferred then? Despite being equivalent, (5) and (5′) have different assertions: (5) is existential over the

relevant set of evidentially accessible worlds, while (5′) is universal. These distinct assertions entertain different logical relations with the presupposed material (★): (5)'s existential assertion is merely *compatible* with (★),[5] while (5′)'s universal assertion *entails* (★). We now use this observation to argue that (5′) better divides the labor between presupposition and assertion.

The general schema we are interested in is given in (16). In the two diagrams, the oblique line separates p from $\neg p$ worlds. q-worlds are compatible with both p and $\neg p$ worlds, and strictly contain r-worlds. q- and r-worlds coincide when restricted to the p-area (i.e., are equivalent if p is accommodated), but are in a strict containment relation in the $\neg p$ area–in fact, r may not even overlap with q in the $\neg p$ area (see variant (b)). In our case, p corresponds to the evidential excluded-middle presupposition (★), q corresponds to the existential assertion of (5), and r corresponds to the universal assertion of (5′). So, in our case, r is incompatible with $\neg p$; while q is (see variant (b)). (5) and (5′) thus correspond to $S : \underline{p}.\ q$ and $S' : \underline{p}.\ r$, respectively.

(16) $S : \underline{p}.\ q$ vs. $S' : \underline{p}.\ r$

with $\begin{cases} p \wedge q &\equiv& p \wedge r \\ r &\vdash& q \\ r &\not\vdash& q \end{cases}$
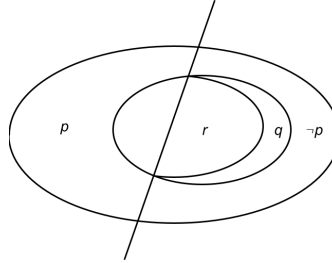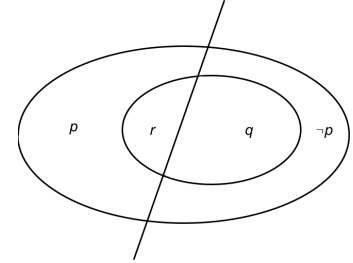
(a) Variant with $r \wedge \neg p \not\equiv \bot$.   (b) Variant with $r \wedge \neg p \equiv \bot$.

If the configuration in (16) holds, we suggest S' should be preferred over S, because the assertion of S' is less compatible with $\neg p$ (the undefinedness domain of both sentences) than S's assertion is. In other words, S' appears less misleading than S. This is formalized in (17).

(17)   *Don't be misleading!* Let $S' : \underline{p}.\ r$ and $S : \underline{p}.\ q$ be two logically equivalent sentences. S' is less misleading than S, and as such should be preferred, iff $(r \wedge \neg p)$ asymmetrically entails $(q \wedge \neg p)$, i.e. $(r \wedge \neg p) \vdash (q \wedge \neg p)$ and $(q \wedge \neg p) \not\vdash (r \wedge \neg p)$.

In our case, (17) is equivalent to saying that (5′)'s assertion (r) should asymmetrically entail (5)'s assertion (q). But (17) provides a motivation for this condition: if two sentences presuppose the same thing and assert the same thing granted their presupposition, then the last way to compare them from a pragmatic competition perspective is by looking at whether or not the assertions suggest the presupposition might not hold. The competitor whose assertion is the least misleading w.r.t. the status of its presupposition, i.e. the least compatible with the negation of its presupposition, should be preferred. In sum, (5′) is preferred because, unlike (5), its at-issue meaning (already universal) is not compatible with the negation of its presupposition. This in turn predicts (5) to be infelicitous under the evidential reading.

This discussion seems reminiscent of NEG-raising effects associated with verbs like *believe*. *I don't believe Jo is sick* typically implies its low-negation alternative *I believe Jo is not sick*, if it is reasonable to think the speaker is opinionated about Jo's health, i.e. either believes Jo is sick,

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[5]Saying *some* evidentially accessible worlds support $\neg p$, is compatible with saying *some* evidentially accessible worlds support p; in other words, (5)'s existential assertion does not necessarily verify (★).

or believes he is not. In other words, NEG-raising verbs with high negation are not blocked by their low-negation counterpart, which seems to contradict our claims. This difference with our account of *dire* might be explained if we adopt the idea that the opinionatedness assumption that is needed to get the equivalence between the high- and low-negation forms in NEG-raising cases, is either not a presupposition (Fillmore, 1963; Collins and Postal, 2014; Gajewski, 2012; Romoli, 2013), or, constitutes a "soft"/"pragmatic" presupposition (Bartsch, 1973; Abusch, 2005; Gajewski, 2005) that is not subject to our pragmatic competition principle.[6]

3.3. Pragmatic competition spares negated evidential *on dirait* (CND)

We now investigate how the competition account laid out in the above retains the felicity of both negated *on dirait* variants in (8). The LFs of (8) involve two layers of modality, coming from *dire* and the modal $M_{\mathcal{E}}$ licensing CND (see the LF in (10)). We show that $M_{\mathcal{E}}$ ensures that neither the IND nor the SBJV variant of (8), are equivalent to their low-negation counterparts (8′a) and (8′b). (8) is thus not subject to the *Don't be misleading!* constraint (17).

(8′)   a.   On dirait   que Jo **n'**est   **pas** malade.
           ON say.CND that Jo **NEG**-is.IND **NEG** sick.

           'Jo does not seem sick.'

       b.   # On dirait   que Jo **ne**   soit   **pas** malade.
           ON say.CND that Jo **NEG** is.SBJV **NEG** sick.

           Intended: 'Jo does not seem sick.'

Starting with the SBJV variant of (8): we notice that its low-negation alternative (8′b) is infelicitous, probably due to the absence of matrix negation to license the embedded SBJV (see

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[6]The pair in (i) and (ii), which builds on Simons (2001)'s "explicit ignorance" test, may indicate that the excluded middle inferences conveyed by *believe* vs. *on dit*, are not equally cancellable. Specifically, using *on dit* in a context where no event is susceptible to settle the truth or falsity of the prejacent (as in (i)), leads to infelicity; while using *believe* in a context where the belief holder is unopinionated (as in (ii)), is still fine. This is in line with a hard/soft distinction between the presuppositions of *on dit* vs. *believe*.

(i)   Context: somebody has been stealing snacks in the office's shared fridge. Jo is the primary suspect, because he tends to stay late at night. But there are no cameras or direct witnesses allowing to determine if he is the actual thief.

Je ne   sais pas s'il y a   un évènement qui   permette   de décider pour de bon si Jo est le
I   NEG know NEG if-there-is an event   which allow.SBJV to decide for good   if Jo is   the

voleur ou non, ??mais si au   bureau on dit   que Jo est le voleur, je lui demanderai une explication.
thief or not, ??but if at-the office ON says that Jo is the thief, I him ask.FUT   an explanation.

'I don't know if there's an event that'd allow to decide for good if Jo is the thief or not, but if at work he's said to be the thief, I'll ask him to give an explanation.'

(ii)   Context: same as in (i).

Je ne   sais pas si Ed a   une opinion sur le fait que Jo est le voleur ou non, mais si Ed pense que
I   NEG know NEG if Ed has an opinion on the fact that Jo is the thief   or not, but   if Ed thinks that

Jo est le voleur, j'irai   demander une explication à Jo.
Jo is the thief, I-go.FUT ask   an explanation to Jo.

'I don't know if Ed has an opinion on whether Jo is the thief or not, but if he believes that Jo is the thief, I'll ask Jo to give an explanation.'

Section 4.3). The SBJV variant of (8) is thus predicted to be fine, due to the unavailability of a well-formed competitor. What is left to be analyzed is the competition between the IND variant of (8) and (8′a). We start by computing the effect of the covert evidential modal $M_{\mathscr{E}}$ expressing CND on top of the core structure *on dit p*. We assume that *dire*'s presupposition projects universally across the modal.

$$[\![\mathrm{M}_{\mathscr{E}} \textit{ on dit p}]\!]^{e^*} =$$
$$\lambda\langle e,w\rangle : \underline{\forall\langle e',w'\rangle \in \mathscr{E}(spk_{e^*},e,w).\ e'' \sim_{w'} e' \text{ and evidentially settles } p \text{ for } [\![on]\!]^{e^*} \text{ in } w'.}$$
$$\forall\langle e',w'\rangle \in \mathscr{E}(spk_{e^*},e,w).\ \forall\langle e''',w'''\rangle \in \mathscr{E}([\![on]\!]^{e^*},e'',w').\ p(e''',w''')$$

In order to get the meaning of the IND variant of (8), we add negation on top. The excluded-middle presupposition allows us to see the lower existential as a universal, just like in the computation of the truth conditions of (5) in Section 3.2. According to the output of this computation, the IND variant of (8) is defined iff any WEP $\langle e',w'\rangle$ compatible with the speaker's evidence in $\langle e,w\rangle$, is such that e'' coocurs with e', and settles whether Jo is sick according to *on* in w'. If defined, it ends up meaning that there is a WEP $\langle e',w'\rangle$ compatible with what the speaker has evidence for, such that *any* WEP $\langle e''',w'''\rangle$ compatible with the evidence *on* has access to from e'' in w', is such that Jo is not sick.

$$[\![\mathrm{NEG}\ \mathrm{M}_{\mathscr{E}} \textit{ on dit p}]\!]^{e^*} =$$
$$\lambda\langle e,w\rangle : \underline{\forall\langle e',w'\rangle \in \mathscr{E}(spk_{e^*},e,w).\ e'' \sim_{w'} e' \text{ and evidentially settles } p \text{ for } [\![on]\!]^{e^*} \text{ in } w'.}$$
$$\exists\langle e',w'\rangle \in \mathscr{E}(spk_{e^*},e,w).\ \exists\langle e''',w'''\rangle \in \mathscr{E}([\![on]\!]^{e^*},e'',w').\ \neg p(e''',w''') =$$
$$\lambda\langle e,w\rangle : \underline{\forall\langle e',w'\rangle \in \mathscr{E}(spk_{e^*},e,w).\ e'' \sim_{w'} e' \text{ and evidentially settles } p \text{ for } [\![on]\!]^{e^*} \text{ in } w'.}$$
$$\exists\langle e',w'\rangle \in \mathscr{E}(spk_{e^*},e,w).\ \forall\langle e''',w'''\rangle \in \mathscr{E}([\![on]\!]^{e^*},e'',w').\ \neg p(e''',w''')$$

Below is the computation of the low-negation competitor (8′a), derived by adding $M_{\mathscr{E}}$ to the meaning of (5′). This computation results in a doubly universally modalized statement. It is defined iff any WEP $\langle e',w'\rangle$ compatible with the speaker's evidence is such that some free event e'' coocurring with e', provides *on* with enough evidence to settle whether Jo is sick or not in all WEPs evidentially accessible from w'. If defined, it means that any WEP $\langle e',w'\rangle$ compatible with the speaker's evidence, provides *on* with enough evidence to be certain that Jo is not sick in all evidentially accessible worlds.

$$[\![\mathrm{M}_{\mathscr{E}} \textit{ on dit } \mathrm{NEG}\ p]\!]^{e^*} =$$
$$\lambda\langle e,w\rangle : \underline{\forall\langle e',w'\rangle \in \mathscr{E}(spk_{e^*},e,w).\ e'' \sim e' \text{ evidentially settles } p \text{ for } [\![on]\!]^{e^*} \text{ in } w'.}$$
$$\forall\langle e',w'\rangle \in \mathscr{E}(spk_{e^*},e,w).\ \forall\langle e''',w'''\rangle \in \mathscr{E}([\![on]\!]^{e^*},e'',w').\ \neg p(e''',w''')$$

Crucially, this derived meaning turns out to be different from the high-negation one, whose at-issue contribution was existential on the speaker's part, and universal on the subject's part, and therefore weaker. The IND variant of (8) therefore does not compete with its low-negation alternative in terms of *Don't be misleading!* It is thus predicted to be felicitous.[7]

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[7]One might consider other kinds of competition between the two forms however. Because the high-negation

4. Capturing the interaction between negation and embedded mood

Why is SBJV infelicitous under *dire* in the absence of negation and regardless of matrix tense, as shown by (4) and (7), and summarized in (18) below?

(18)   On {dit   / dirait}   que Jo {✓est   / ✗soit}   malade,
       ON {say.IND / say.SBJV} that Jo {✓is.IND / ✗be.SBJV} sick.
       'People say Jo is sick / Jo seems sick.'

4.1. Key assumptions

Following Schlenker (2005), we assume that moods compete at the presuppositional level. Specifically, we take that IND presupposes that the world under evaluation is in the Context Set (**CS**, Stalnaker, 1974) of a salient speech or thought act v (free or bound event variable). This is summarized in (19a). SBJV on the other hand, is taken to be presuppositionless; see (19b).

(19)   a. $[\![\text{IND}]\!]^{e^*} = \lambda \langle p, e, w \rangle : \underline{v \text{ is a speech/thought act} \wedge w \in CS(v)}. \ p(e, w)$
            With v a salient event.
       b. $[\![\text{SBJV}]\!]^{e^*} = \lambda \langle p, e, w \rangle. \ p(e, w)$

This presuppositional asymmetry between IND and SBJV, makes minimal pairs varying only in terms of these two moods subject to *Maximize Presupposition!* This principle is stated in (20).

(20)   *Maximize Presupposition!* (Heim, 1991; Sauerland, 2008) If S and S' are contextually equivalent alternatives, and the presuppositions of S are stronger than those of S' and are met in the context of utterance c, then one must use S.

In our case, *Maximize Presupposition!* applies in the following way: if two sentences only differ in terms of mood, and IND's presupposition is satisfied in context, then the SBJV-variant should be infelicitous. For simplicity, we will ignore the presuppositions contributed by matrix mood, and focus on how the presuppositions contributed by embedded moods project from the embedded clause and interact with the semantics of the matrix predicate.

4.2. The matrix IND case

We start with (4). The presupposition contributed by the embedded IND mood, after universal projection above *dire* in (4), is given in (21a). This presupposition gets conjoined with the one

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variant is strictly weaker than its low-negation counterpart, one could imagine that it could be strengthened with the negation of the low-negation alternative:

$[\![\text{NEG } M_{\mathscr{E}} \text{ on dit } p]\!]^{e^*} =$

$\lambda \langle e, w \rangle : \underline{\forall \langle e', w' \rangle \in \mathscr{E}(spk_{e^*}, e, w). \ e'' \sim_{w'} e' \text{ and evidentially settles } p \text{ for } [\![on]\!]^{e^*} \text{ in } w'.}$

$\exists \langle e', w' \rangle \in \mathscr{E}(spk_{e^*}, e, w). \ \forall \langle e''', w''' \rangle \in \mathscr{E}([\![on]\!]^{e^*}, e'', w'). \ \neg p(e''', w''')$

$\wedge \neg \forall \langle e', w' \rangle \in \mathscr{E}(spk_{e^*}, e, w). \ \forall \langle e''', w''' \rangle \in \mathscr{E}([\![on]\!]^{e^*}, e'', w'). \ \neg p(e''', w''')$

In other words, *on dirait pas que p*, may end up meaning that the evidence the speaker gets, sometimes, but not always, ensures the subject *on* has enough evidence to conclude $\neg p$. We think this meaning is plausible. In any case, this kind of competition does not predict that the high-negation variant should be *dispreferred*; it predicts that this variant should be *strengthened*.

(8) On dirait **pas** que Jo {✓est / ✓soit} malade.
ON say.CND **NEG** that Jo {✓is.IND / ✓is.SBJV} sick.

'Jo does not seem sick.'

This optionality seems hard to capture *via Maximize Presupposition!*, which predicts IND to be favored over SBJV in (8). This is because both the IND and the SBJV variant of (8) are assertorically equivalent and, moreover, feature the same presuppositions as the IND and SBJV variants in (18), due to the fact that presuppositions project under negation. A solution is to assume that the subjunctive in (8) is simply a "polarity subjunctive" licensed by matrix negation (Rivero, 1971; Farkas, 1992; Stowell, 1993; Quer, 1998). Quer (1998) identifies four factors that distinguish between such polarity subjunctives and so-called "intensional subjunctives", which are directly licensed by the embedding predicate. We can evaluate sentences like (8) against two of them:[9] optionality and locality. Optionality is straightforward: IND and SBJV alternate in (8), and typically cannot do so in "intensional subjunctive" cases, like (23), featuring the embedding verb *vouloir* ('want').

(23) Jo veut que Al {✗fait / ✓fasse} ses devoirs.
Jo wants that Al {✗does.IND / ✓does.SBJV} his howework.

'Jo wants Al to do his homework.'

Additionally, "intensional subjunctives" are local, while SBJV in sentences like (8), is not. This is shown by the contrast in (24).[10]

(24) a. Lu veut que Jo soit certain que Al {est / ??soit} malade.
Lu wants that Jo is.SBJV certain that Al {is.IND / ??is.SBJV} sick.

'Lu wants Jo to be certain that Al is sick.'

b. On dirait **pas** que Jo soit certain que Al {est / soit} malade.
ON say.CND **NEG** that Jo is.SBJV certain that Al {is.IND / is.SBJV} sick.

'Jo does not seem certain that Al is sick.'

In brief, we have argued, following Schlenker (2005), that IND is the only possible mood under *on di(rai)t* in the absence of matrix negation, due to *Maximize Presupposition!* and the fact that embedded IND, unlike SBJV, contributes an extra (easily verified) presupposition. Following Quer (1998) (i.a.), we argued SBJV and IND alternate under negated *on dirait*, due to SBJV being a "polarity subjunctive" in that particular case. We proceed to further investigate how embedded mood interacts with matrix tense and negation to produce speaker endorsement.

5. Capturing speaker endorsement

We now focus on the well-formed sentences of our paradigm, and investigate why the speaker can hold contradictory beliefs in (3)/(9a) but not in (6)/(9b), repeated below.

(3) Matrix IND - Embedded IND: no endorsement.

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[9]The other factors have to do with the interpretation of null pronouns, but such pronouns are not licensed in French, and with sequence of tenses, in particular PRS-PST sequences, but *on dirait* is by definition not PRS.
[10]Note that *be certain* does not normally license a SBJV complement in French.

On **dit** que Jo **est** malade, ✓mais je ne suis pas d'accord.
ON **say.IND** that Jo **is.IND** sick, ✓but I NEG am NEG agreeing.

'People say Jo is sick, but I don't agree.'

(9a) Matrix NEG+CND - Embedded IND: no endorsement.
On **dirait** **pas** que Jo **est** malade, ✓mais moi je pense qu'il l'est.
ON **say.CND** **NEG** that Jo **is.IND** sick, ✓but I I think that-he it-is.

'Jo does not seem sick, but I think he is.'

(6) Matrix CND - Embedded IND: endorsement.
On **dirait** que Jo **est** malade, ✗mais je suis pas d'accord.
ON **say.CND** that Jo **is.IND** sick, ✗but I am NEG agreeing.

'Jo seems sick, but I don't agree.'

(9b) Matrix NEG+CND -Embedded SBJV: endorsement.
On **dirait** **pas** que Jo **soit** malade, ✗mais moi je pense qu'il l'est.
ON **say.CND** **NEG** that Jo **is.SBJV** sick, ✗but I I think that-he it-is.

'Jo does not seem sick, but I think he is.'

The observed contrast appears quite counterintuitive, given that IND typically conveys more commitment than SBJV, or a tense combination like CND,[11] and yet gives rise to an *absence* of endorsement. To account for this pattern, we consider yet another form of competition, this time between the indefinite pronoun *on* and the first person singular pronoun *je*. This leads us to evaluate the sentences compiled in (25) (judgments omitted due to multiple sources of optionality). Very roughly, the kind of competition posited here, will in some cases produce the inference that it is not the case the speaker has enough evidence to settle the truth of the prejacent (and so, cannot endorse it).

(25) **Je** (ne) {dis / dirais} (pas) que Jo {est / soit} malade.
I (NEG) {say.IND / say.CND} (NEG) that Jo {is.IND / is.SBJV} sick.

'I would not announce that Jo is sick.'

5.1. Justifying pronominal competition

We justify the existence and validity of pronominal competition between *je* and *on* by the fact that *je di(rai)s* is also compatible with an evidential interpretation. This interpretation is hard to tease apart from a speech act one, since *je* precisely denotes the speaker. However, using an adjunct such as *given her cough this morning*, nudges an evidential interpretation, and leads to the same kind of interaction between matrix tense, negation, and embedded mood, observed in the *on di(rai)t* case; see (26). In particular, the contrast between (26b) and (26c) when the embedded mood is SBJV, would be unexpected under a speech act interpretation of *dire*. [12]

(26) a. Both IND and CND **can** be used in the matrix when there is no matrix negation, and when IND is embedded (analog to (3)/(6)).

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[11]CND can have a reportive function in matrix sentences, widely attested in news articles (Kronning, 2018 i.a.).
[12](ia)/(iia) and (ib)/(iib) are analog to (26b)/(26c) but force a speech act interpretation in two different ways. In both cases, judgments differ from (26b)/(26c).

(i) a. Analog to (26b), except *déclarer* ('announce') is a pure speech act verb. Judgments improve.

Vu sa toux ce matin, **je** {dis / dirais} que Jo est malade.
Given her cough this morning, **I** {say.IND / say.SBJV} that Jo is.IND sick.

'Given her cough this morning, Jo appeared sick to me.'

b. IND **cannot** be used in the matrix in the presence of matrix negation.

?? Vu sa toux ce matin, **je** dis pas que Jo {est / soit} bien.
Given her cough this morning, **I** say.IND NEG that Jo {is.IND / is.SBJV} well.

Intended: 'Given her cough this morning, Jo did not appear to me to be well.'

c. CND **can** be used in the matrix in the presence of matrix negation, and can embed both IND and SBJV (analog to (9a)/(9b)).

Vu sa toux ce matin, **je** dirais pas que Jo {est / soit} bien.
Given her cough this morning, **I** say.CND NEG that Jo {is.IND / is.SBJV} well.

'Given her cough this morning, Jo did not appear to to me to be well.'

We will now focus on explaining how competition can explain the lack of speaker endorsement in (3), and will come back to (9a), (6), and (9b), towards the end of this Section.

5.2. Inclusion between referents, evidential accessibility, and monotonicity

Before comparing the *on-* and *je*-variants of (3), we note that a first person *plural* interpretation of *on* is possible (see (2b)), and may in fact be considered a default.[13] Such an interpretation strictly includes the speaker, and it is therefore reasonable to assume that the referent of *on* should receive more evidence for any given fact than the speaker alone. As a result, *on*'s evidence leaves less possibilities open, and ends up being compatible with a subset of the worlds compatible with *je*'s evidence. This is generalized in (27).

(27) *Evidential monotonicity.* If x and y are two plural individuals such that $x \sqsubset y$, then $\forall \langle e, w \rangle. \; \mathscr{E}(x, e, w) \supseteq \mathscr{E}(y, e, w)$.

Je ne **déclare**.IND pas que Jo {est / ?soit} malade.
I NEG announce.IND NEG that Jo {is.IND / ?is.SBJV} sick.
'I do not announce that Jo is sick.'

b. Analog to (26c). Judgment worsens with embedded SBJV.

Je ne **déclarerais** pas que Jo {est / ??soit} malade.
I NEG announce.CND NEG that Jo {isIND / ??is.SBJV} sick.
'I would not announce that Jo is sick.'

(ii) a. Analog to (26b), except the context (contrastive) nudges a speech act interpretation of *dire*. Judgments improve.

Je dis pas que Jo {est / ?soit} malade, je dis que Jo est pâle.
I say.IND NEG that Jo {is.IND / ?is.SBJV} sick, I say.IND that Jo is pale.
'I'm not saying Jo is sick, I'm saying Jo is pale.'

b. Analog to (26c). Judgment worsens with embedded SBJV.

Je dirais pas que Jo {est / ??soit} malade, je dirais que Jo est pâle.
I say.CND NEG that Jo {is.IND / ??is.SBJV} sick, I say.CND that Jo is pale.
Intended: 'I'd not say Jo is sick, I'd say Jo is pale.'

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[13]A purely third person reading obtains in situations in which it is very unlikely that the speaker is included. Such situations typically feature adverse circumstances, see (2a). A purely second person reading obtains in even more marked circumstances, where it is absolutely clear the speaker is only talking to the addressee–see footnote 1.

In particular, if $[\![je]\!]^{e^*} \sqsubseteq [\![on]\!]^{e^*}$, then $\forall \langle e, w \rangle. \, \mathscr{E}([\![on]\!]^{e^*}, e, w) \subseteq \mathscr{E}([\![je]\!]^{e^*}, e, w)$

(3)'s full entry is given below. In this entry, the first line refers to the evidential excluded-middle presupposition contributed by *dire*; the second line corresponds to the presupposition contributed by the embedded IND mood, after universal projection above *dire*; the last line is the sentence's assertion. This entry displays universal quantification over worlds evidentially accessible to the matrix subject, in both its presuppositional and assertive components.

$[\![on \; dit \; \text{IND} \; p]\!]^{e^*} =$

$\lambda \langle e, w \rangle : \; \underline{e'' \sim_w e \text{ and evidentially settles } p \text{ for } [\![on]\!]^{e^*} \text{ in } w}$

$\quad \underline{\wedge \; \forall \langle e', w' \rangle \in \mathscr{E}([\![on]\!]^{e^*}, e'', w). \, v \text{ is a speech/thought act } \wedge \; w' \in CS(v).}$

$\quad \forall \langle e', w' \rangle \in \mathscr{E}([\![on]\!]^{e^*}, e'', w). \, p(e', w')$

Since $\forall$ is downward-monotone w.r.t. its restrictor, and $\mathscr{E}([\![on]\!]^{e^*}, e, w) \subseteq \mathscr{E}([\![je]\!]^{e^*}, e, w)$, replacing *on* with *je* in (3) leads to an expression featuring a stronger assertion *and* a stronger presupposition. We now discuss which inference(s) can be drawn from such a configuration.

5.3. "Two-dimensional" pragmatic competition

Let $S : \underline{p}. \, q$ and $S' : \underline{p'}. \, q'$, be two sentences with presuppositions $\underline{p} \vDash \underline{p'}$ and assertions $q \vDash q'$. Meaning, S is presuppositionally *and* assertorically stronger than S'. How should S and S' compete, and which inferences should arise from this competition? A rather intuitive way to approach such configurations is to assume that competition may affect either the presuppositional component (yielding an anti-presupposition), or the assertive component (yielding an implicature), of S/S'. One may thus derive $\neg p$, or $\neg q$, and perhaps both. In our case, (3) corresponds to the overall weaker expression S', and the "*je*"-counterpart of (3), corresponds to the overall stronger expression S. One may then derive that either the presupposition or the assertion of the "*je*"-counterpart of (3), gets falsified. This gives rise to the inferences in (28)– to be interpreted disjunctively. We proceed to argue that, in fact, (28a) and (28c) are the most plausible inferences, and that both lead to infer a lack of speaker endorsement.

(28)   a. *Negation of the evidential excluded-middle presupposition.*
       It's not the case that $e'' \sim_w e$ and e'' evidentially settles p for $[\![je]\!]^{e^*}$ in w.

     b. *Negation of the presupposition induced by the embedded* IND *mood.*
       It's not the case that $\forall \langle e', w' \rangle \in \mathscr{E}([\![je]\!]^{e^*}, e'', w). \, v \text{ is a speech act } \wedge \; w' \in CS(v)$.

     c. *Negation of the assertion.*
       It's not the case that $\forall \langle e', w' \rangle \in \mathscr{E}([\![je]\!]^{e^*}, e'', w). \, p(e', w')$.

We start with inference (28b), which basically states that v is not a speech/tought act or some of the worlds compatible with the speaker's evidence are epistemically impossible given v. Given that v is a free event variable, it can probably be accommodated to correspond to a speech/thought act event. Moreover, Section 4 argued that evidentially accessible worlds are typically epistemically possible, too. The inference in (28b) is thus implausible.

This leaves us with two remaining possible inferences, (28a) and (28c). We show that these two inferences are plausible and lead to a lack of speaker endorsement, either way. (28a) basically

states that some of the worlds compatible with the speaker's evidence are such that Jo is sick, and some others are such that Jo is not sick. In other words, the speaker alone does not get enough evidence to be certain that Jo is sick, and therefore cannot endorse that Jo is sick. As for (28c), is states that some of the worlds compatible with the speaker's evidence are such that Jo is *not* sick, again, preventing the speaker from endorsing that Jo is sick. This derives the lack of speaker endorsement in (3).

5.4. Extension to (6) and (9a-9b)

What about (6), which features matrix CND instead of IND? The explanation we provide here is only tentative. Replacing *on* with *je* in (6) leads again to a stronger meaning, given below.

$$
[\![\mathrm{M}_{\mathscr{E}} \; je \; dis \; p]\!]^{e^*} =
$$
$$
\lambda \langle e, w \rangle : \underline{\forall \langle e', w' \rangle \in \mathscr{E}(spk_{e^*}, e, w). \; e'' \sim_{w'} e' \text{ and evidentially settles } p \text{ for } spk_{e^*} \text{ in } w'.}
$$
$$
\underline{\land \; \forall \langle e', w' \rangle \in \mathscr{E}(spk_{e^*}, e, w). \; \forall \langle e''', w''' \rangle \in \mathscr{E}(spk_{e^*}, e'', w'). \; v \text{ is a S.A.} \land w''' \in CS(v)}
$$
$$
\overline{\forall \langle e', w' \rangle \in \mathscr{E}(spk_{e^*}, e, w). \; \forall \langle e''', w''' \rangle \in \mathscr{E}(spk_{e^*}, e'', w'). \; p(e''', w''')}
$$

Due to the presence of an extra layer of universal quantification, the inferences derived by competition are weaker than in (3). Assuming again that the presupposition contributed by IND (second line of the above entry) cannot be plausibly negated,[14], negating either the evidential excluded-middle presupposition (first line of the above entry), or the assertion (third line), leads to the inference that there is *some* WEP compatible with the speaker's evidence, s.t. the prejacent is possibly false given the evidence in that WEP. In other words, in *some* WEP, the speaker cannot endorse the prejacent. We thus derive a very partial lack of endorsement.

Turning to (9a-9b), we first notice that replacing *on* with *je* in (9a) is fine, while doing so in (9b) is not. This is summarized in (29).

(29) **Je** ne   dirais   pas   que Jo {✓est   / ✗soit}   malade.
      I   NEG say.CND NEG that Jo {✓is.IND / ✗be.SBJV} sick.

Thus, pronominal competition is not expected to affect (9b), and so no lack of speaker endorsement should be predicted. (9a) on the other hand, should be subject to competition. To quickly see how it would play out, we note that (9a) is identical to (6) on the presuppositional side, and corresponds to its negation on the at-issue side. Therefore, competition between (9a) and its *je*-counterpart either yields the anti-presupposition that some WEP compatible with the speaker's evidence cannot evidentially settle the prejacent (negation of the presupposition in the first line of (6)'s entry above), or, the implicature (simplified) that all WEPs compatible with the speaker's evidence verify the prejacent (double negation of the assertion in the third line of (6)'s entry above). Assuming that the implicature is preferentially derived, would eventually yield the endorsement of the prejacent.

5.5. Closing remark on pronominal competition

We have argued that *on* pragmatically competes with *je*, and that this competition sometimes leads to the inference that the speaker does not have enough evidence to draw definitive con-

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[14]Roughly because what is compatible with the speaker's evidence should be in the common ground of some speech act. This is debatable.

clusions about the prejacent. This line of reasoning was relying on the idea that *on*'s referent is by default first plural and as such includes the speaker. But one could in principle think of other referents properly included in *on*'s referent–for instance, the referent of a third or second person pronoun–which could also enter the competition. Still, the sentences giving rise to a lack of speaker endorsement, do not similarly give rise to a lack of *non-speaker* endorsement. If the competition approach is on the right track, this implies that pronominal competitors other than *je* somehow should not be considered. There might be several reasons for this. One reason interfaces with morphosyntax: a first person pronoun is more featurally specified than a second or third-person one, so perhaps has precedence over the other forms while evaluating competing expressions. Additionally it is obtained from a first plural by just switching one feature, namely NUMBER; other forms may come about by altering more than one feature, i.e. PERSON *and* NUMBER. Another (perhaps related) factor is more semantic in nature, and pertains to indefiniteness: *on* typically denotes a plurality formed by the speaker, and some *indefinite* individual, whose features are unclear. As a result, which form should be considered for competition with *on*, beyond the first person *je*, is context-dependent. In some cases, it might end up being the addressee, in some other cases, it might be a non-participant. This indefiniteness of *on*, may prevent forms different from *je* to systematically compete with it.

6. Conclusion

We described intricate data pertaining to the evidential reading of *dire* ('say') in French, and showed that this reading is influenced by matrix negation, matrix tense marking, and embedded mood. We additionally argued that many aspects of this paradigm could be captured assuming that the constructions at stake are built using the same core components, but end up competing with their formal alternatives (low-negation, different mood, swapped pronouns) in distinct ways. This led us to investigate two unusual cases of pragmatic competition, that may be at play beyond the *on di(rai)t*-construction. In the first case (Section 3), two sentences appeared equivalent, but displayed a different division of labor between presupposition and assertion. To cash out this difference, we posited a new principle (*Don't be misleading!*), stating that a sentence whose assertion is characterized by a smaller overlap with the negation of its presupposition, should be preferred to an equivalent sentence characterized by a bigger overlap. This is an interesting principle to explore further, because it assigns a central role to the worlds in which a given utterance is *not* defined, and constrains how such worlds interact with the utterance's assertion. In other words, under *Don't be misleading!*, the truth or falsity of the utterance's assertion in its undefinedness domain becomes important when evaluating assertability. More broadly, this principle may be motivated by the idea that communication integrates uncertainty regarding the status of certain presuppositions, and that, as a result, assertions should corroborate presuppositions a much as possible. In the second case (Section 5), one sentence appeared strictly stronger than the other, in terms of both presupposed and asserted material. We assumed that, in such cases, either component could be the prime target of pragmatic competition, leading to either an anti-presupposition, or an implicature. If this is on the right track, the question is then to determine which component, if any, is preferentially targeted, and why. The end of Section 5 suggested implicatures should have precedence. The question of why it is so, is left for future work.

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