

Superiority effects and the French Plural Pronoun Construction¹

Adèle Hénot-Mortier (MIT)

March 19, 2023

The Penn Linguistics Conference 47

¹Thanks to the two anonymous reviewers who encouraged me to fix my original account; I hope it looks less shaky now!

The puzzle

French comitative constructions

- French comitatives are introduced by the preposition *avec* ('with') and can appear at various places in the sentence.
- (1)
- a. **Avec Jean**, Marie est allée au cinéma.
With Jean, Marie is.AUX gone to the movie theater.
'With Jean, Marie went to the movies.'
 - b. Marie est allée **avec Jean** au cinéma.
Marie is.AUX gone with Jean to the movie theater.
'With Jean, Marie went to the movies.'
 - c. Marie est allée au cinéma **avec Jean**.
Marie is.AUX gone to the movie theater with Jean.
'With Jean, Marie went to the movies.'
- Following the past literature (Matushansky and Ionin, 2002 a.o), we call the main subject of the sentences in (1) the **associate** of the comitative phrase, and the complement of *with* the **comitative DP**.

Two readings for the plural pronoun associate

- When the associate is a plural pronoun, two readings of the French comitative construction are available: an **exclusive (“E”)** reading and an **inclusive (“I”)** reading.

(2) **Avec Jean**, nous sommes allés au cinéma.
With Jean, we are.AUX.1.PL gone.M.PL to the movie theater.

E-reading: ‘Jean, I **and someone else** went to the movies.’

I-reading: ‘Jean, I **and no one else** went to the movies.’

- The I-reading will be the focus of this talk.
- Following the past literature (starting with Vassilieva and Larson, 2005), we call the comitative construction in (2) **Plural Pronoun Construction (PPC)**.

Zoom on the “inclusive” reading

- (2) **Avec Jean**, nous sommes allés au cinéma.
With Jean, we are.AUX.1.PL gone.M.PL to the movie theater.
E-reading: ‘Jean, I **and someone else** went to the movies.’
I-reading: ‘Jean, I **and no one else** went to the movies.’

- The I-reading has been previously documented in Russian (Vassilieva and Larson, 2005), Polish (Dyła, 1988), Turkish (Turgay and Öztürk, 2020) Tlingit (Cable, 2017), among others.
- Under the I-reading, **the comitative DP seems to be “counted in” the interpretation of the associate plural pronoun** (s.t. *we* = *Jean and I* in (2)).
- We will call the interpretation of the associate “minus” the comitative DP (e.g. *I* in (2)) the **“underlying associate”**.

Asymmetries with two pronouns

- When both the comitative DP and its associate are pronominal, the I-reading becomes restricted...

$$(3) \text{ Avec } \begin{pmatrix} \text{moi}_{1.SG} \\ \text{toi}_{2.SG} \\ \text{lui}_{3.SG} \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} \text{nous}_{1.PL}(1+2; *1+3) \\ \text{nous}_{1.PL}(2+1); \text{vous}_{2.PL}(??2+3) \\ \text{nous}_{1.PL}(3+1); \text{vous}_{2.PL}(3+2); \text{ils}_{3.PL}(3+3) \end{pmatrix}$$

... sommes/êtes/sont allés au cinéma.

- The bracketed person combinations in (3) define possible I-readings of the associate; for instance, *nous* (1.PL), can be understood as *you and I*, where *I* also refers to the comitative DP.
- (3) then shows that a 1.SG or 2.SG comitative DP cannot be “counted in” the plural associate, if it is underlyingly 3.SG.
- All other pragmatically plausible¹ combinations of I-readings appear grammatically possible.

¹The combinations 1+1 and 2+2 are not pragmatically plausible under the I-reading because they would involve a comitative DP identical to the underlying associate, which is weird. Setting up a *de se* scenario fixes this weirdness and results in grammaticality.

Summary of the phenomenon

(4) General form of the I-reading (X and Y are singular entities):

With $\text{pro}_X \text{ pro}_{X+Y} \text{ VP}$

$Y \rightarrow$ Avec X \downarrow	je _{1.SG}	tu _{2.SG}	il _{3.SG}
moi _{1.SG}	nous _{1.PL} $\stackrel{\#}{=} \text{moi+je}$	nous _{1.PL} = moi+tu	nous _{1.PL} $\stackrel{*}{=} \text{moi+il}$
toi _{2.SG}	nous _{1.PL} = toi+je	vous _{2.PL} $\stackrel{\#}{=} \text{toi+tu}$	vous _{2.PL} $\stackrel{*}{=} \text{toi+il}$
lui _{3.SG}	nous _{1.PL} = lui+je	vous _{2.PL} = lui+tu	ils _{3.PL} = lui+il

Table 1: Availability of the I-reading of the plural associate.

- Our goal is to make sense of the ungrammaticality of the two red cells, i.e. $*\{1, 2\}+3!$
- The existence of a somewhat similar pattern in Russian is mentioned in a footnote by Vassilieva and Larson, 2005, although the restriction in that language seems to be “strictly descending” (i.e. the whole upper triangle of the above Table should be red).

- We argue that the superiority effects witnessed in the French “Inclusive” PPC are a manifestation of the **Weak Person Case Constraint** (Weak PCC).
- Building on Deal’s **Dynamic Satisfaction & Interaction** framework (Deal, 2022), we will propose a concrete solution to the puzzle.
- We will finally discuss potential objections to the account, and further implications thereof.

The proposal

A very similar pattern: the Weak PCC

- The Person Case Constraint (**PCC**) is a constraint on the co-occurrence of personal pronouns in double AGREE configurations – typically ditransitive constructions.
- The **Weak PCC** (Perlmutter, 1971; Bonet, 1991; Riedel, 2009; Stegovec, 2019 a.o.) is an variant of this constraint, stating that a 3rd person dative cannot co-occur with a 1st/2nd person accusative/absolute pronoun.

(5) The Weak PCC in Catalan (Bonet, 1991)

- a. * A en Josep, **me** **li** va recomanar la Mireia.
to the Josep 1.ACC.CL 3.DAT.CL recommended the Mireia
Intended: 'She (Mireia) recommended me to him (Josep).'
- b. * A en Josep, **te** **li** va recomanar la Mireia.
to the Josep 2.ACC.CL 3.DAT.CL recommended the Mireia
Intended: 'She (Mireia) recommended you to him (Josep).'

Deal's account of the different flavors of the PCC

IO	DO	Strong	Weak	Me-first	Ultrastrong
1	2	*			
1	3				
2	1	*		*	*
2	3				
3	1	*	*	*	*
3	2	*	*		*

Table 2: Different flavors of the PCC (Nevins, 2007)

- In a recent proposal (Deal, 2022), Deal proposes a unified account of PCC effects solely based on *AGREE* between a head and two goals.
- The core idea is that of probing as **Dynamic Interaction and Satisfaction**, which constitutes a refinement of (Deal, 2015):
 - The satisfaction (“*S*”) condition defines the feature that will cause a probe to stop probing;
 - The interaction (“*I*”) condition defines the feature with which a probe can *AGREE* with. **Crucially, this condition may depend on previously agreed with elements: it’s dynamic.**

Connecting our data to the Weak PCC (closely following Deal, 2022)

- (4) General form of the I-reading (X and Y are singular entities):

With $\text{pro}_X \text{ pro}_{X+Y} \text{ VP}$

- We assume the following person feature hierarchy:

$\Phi > \text{PART} > \text{SPKR}, \text{ADDR}$

- We assume double-AGREE occurs in T, an insatiable probe ($S : -$) which initially interacts with Φ -features ($I : \Phi$); **but will only interact with PART features once a PART feature has been agreed with:**

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{T: } \begin{bmatrix} I : \Phi \\ S : - \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{AGREE}(\text{T}, \text{PART}) \implies \text{T: } \begin{bmatrix} I : \text{PART} \\ S : - \end{bmatrix} \end{array}$$

Connecting our data to the Weak PCC (our own assumptions)

- Based on the restrictions in Table 1:
 - X in the French PPC seems analog to a **Direct Object**, i.e. is agreed with **first**;
 - Y seems analog to an **Indirect Object**, i.e. is agreed with **second**. We assume it is base-generated in Spec-ComP (for “COMitative”).
- We assume that agreement with T triggers movement to Spec-TP; if T agrees twice, then **the second element “tucks-in”** below the already existing specifier (Richards, 1997; McGinnis, 1998; Rackowski and Richards, 2005 a.o.).²

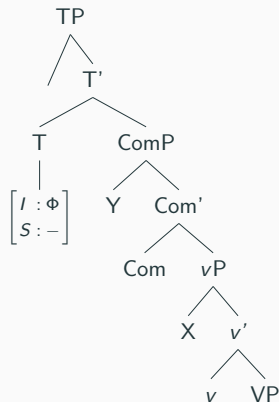


Figure 1: Putative structure of the PPC under the I-reading

²Not crucial to our present account, but worth keeping in mind if one wants to see *avec* ('with') as a probing P rather than an agreement marker (as we do here).

Deriving the {1, 2}+{1, 2} readings

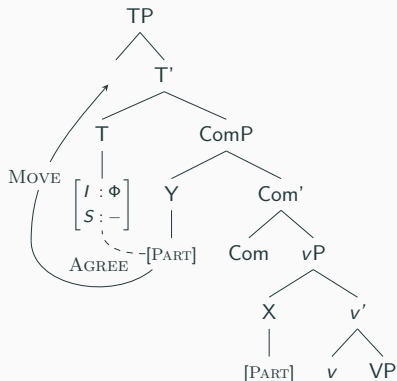


Figure 2: AGREE with the PARTICIPANT associate (Y), leading to an update of the interaction condition on T ($\Phi \rightarrow \text{PART}$), and movement of Y to Spec-TP.

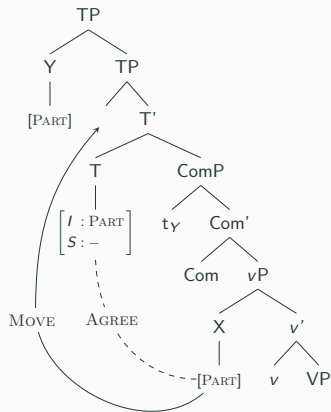


Figure 3: AGREE with the PARTICIPANT *with*-DP (X), which satisfies the updated interaction condition; subsequent movement of X to Spec-TP (“tucking-in”)

Deriving the {1, 2}+{1, 2} readings cont'd

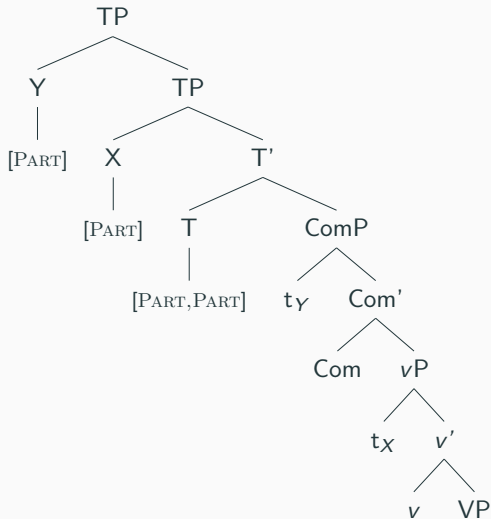


Figure 4: Representation of {1, 2}+{1, 2} configurations after T-probing

Deriving the 3+3 reading

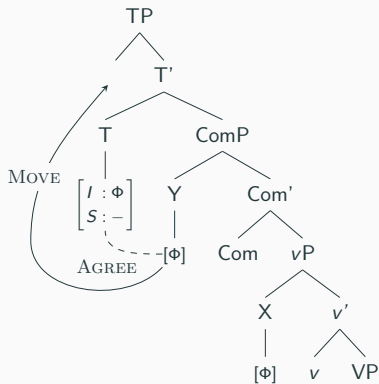


Figure 5: AGREE with the non-PARTICIPANT associate (Y), leading to no update of the interaction condition on T, and movement of Y to Spec-TP.

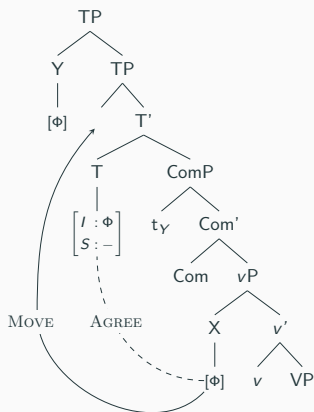


Figure 6: AGREE with the non-PARTICIPANT *with*-DP (X), which satisfies the original interaction condition; X “tucks in” Spec-TP.

Deriving the 3+3 reading cont'd

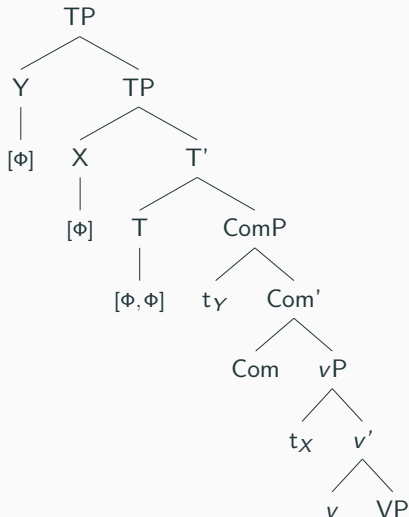


Figure 7: Representation of the 3+3 configuration after T-probing

Deriving the *{1, 2}+3 reading

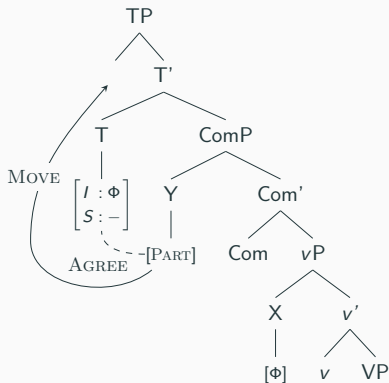


Figure 8: AGREE with the PARTICIPANT associate (Y), leading to an update of the interaction condition on T ($\Phi \rightarrow \text{PART}$), and movement of Y to Spec-TP.

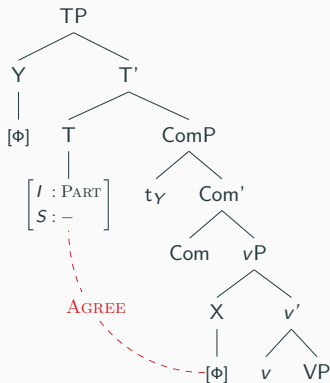


Figure 9: Failure of AGREE with the non-PARTICIPANT *with*-DP (X), which does *not* satisfy the updated interaction condition

Getting to the surface form

- All successful *AGREE* configurations end up with *Y* in the higher Spec-TP and *X* in the lower Spec-TP.
- We assume that *avec* ('with') is a reflex of *AGREE* between *T* and *Y*.
- *Avec Y* is then **topicalized** (to yield the word order in e.g. (1a)) or **extraposed** (to yield the word order in e.g. (1c)),³ leaving a trace in the higher Spec-TP.
- This trace is incorporated with *X* to surface as pro_{X+Y} , whose features result from the percolation of Φ_X and Φ_Y .

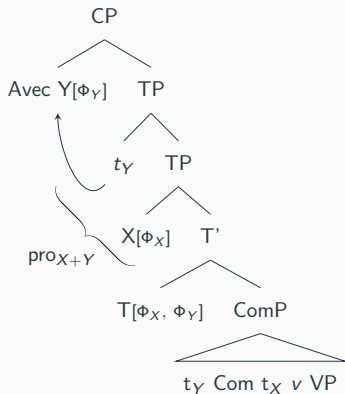


Figure 10: Deriving 'With $\text{pro}_X \text{ pro}_{X+Y} \text{ VP}$ '

³We think that when the comitative DP appears medially, as in (1b), the l-reading is disfavored

Discussion

An issue with Pronoun Weakness?

- The definition of the PCC generally restricts the phenomenon to **phonologically “weak” elements**: clitics, agreement markers, and weak pronouns.
- This claim is supported in French by the possibility to repair (Strong) PCC violations in ditransitives *via* the use of a “tonic” dative pronoun instead of a clitic as in (6) below (Rezac, 2011 a.o.).

- (6) a. * Jean **me** **lui** présentera.
Jean 1.ACC.CL 3.DAT.CL introduce.FUT
Intended: ‘Jean will introduce me to him/her.’
- b. Jean **me** présentera **à lui/elle**.
Jean 1.ACC.CL introduce.FUT to 1.ACC
‘Jean will introduce me to him/her.’

- In the French Plural Pronoun Construction (of the form *With pro_X pro_{X+Y} VP*), the subject **pro_{X+Y} appears weak** (Cardinaletti and Starke, 1999 a.o.), **but pro_X definitely is not**, given that it has the exact same form as the PCC-repairing pronoun in (6b)!

PCC effects do not actually correlate with Pronoun Weakness

- PCC-like restrictions have been witnessed in languages in which **one of the two objects is not realized in a weak form**:
 - Tlaxcala Náhuatl (and many other languages, cf. Deal, 2022 for an overview) exhibits the Strong PCC, despite the absence of overt Direct Object marking on the verb;
 - Same in Swahili with the Weak PCC (Riedel, 2009; Deal, 2015)
- Moreover Sheehan, 2020 notes that French *faire-à* causatives exhibit the Strong PCC when **the Indirect Object is explicitly “strong”**, i.e. would rescue PCC violations in constructions such as (6b)!
- These data can be reconciled in Deal’s framework (the one we used here!), which unlike (Bianchi, 2006; Stegovec, 2017; Coon and Keine, 2021 a.o.) is not dependent on morphosyntactic constraints such as cliticization.

Linking our puzzle to faire-à causatives

- (7) Postal's "fancy constraint" (Postal, 1989), adapted from (Sheehan, 2020)

a. Marcel **t'** a fait épouser {***à**/par} ce médecin.
Marcel 2.SG has made marry.INF {to/by} this doctor
Intended: 'Marcel had this doctor marry you.'

b. Marcel **t'** a présenté **à** ce médecin.
Marcel 2.SG has introduced to this doctor
'Marcel presented you to this doctor.'

c. *Marcel **te** **lui** a présenté.
Marcel 2.SG 3.SG has introduced
Intended: 'Marcel presented you to him.'

- The same preposition (à) that rescues (7b) from a PCC-violation seems to trigger a similar violation in the *faire-à* causative in (7a)!
- Deal, 2022 proposes that à in the causative structure is an agreement marker, which makes à *ce médecin* in (7a) analog to a clitic as far as agreement is concerned. We think the same can hold for *avec* in the French PPC.

Conclusion and further implications

- We proposed a derivation of the I-readings in the French Plural Pronoun Construction, heavily relying on Deal's take on the **Weak PCC**, and Sheehan's observations regarding *faire-à* **causatives**.
- If this analysis is on the right track, it may constitute additional evidence that **the PCC is not restricted to clitic clusters**.
- Moreover, it would suggest that PCC strength is not only language-dependent, but also **probe-dependent**, as French is subject to the Strong PCC in the *v*-domain.
- An extension of this account to Russian – which according to (Vassilieva and Larson, 2005) exhibits Ultrastrong PCC effects in its PPC – would suggest the same, as Russian (from what I know), does not have PCC effects in the *v*-domain (yet may use the same particle and the same case as it does in its PPC!).
- Experimental evidence would be welcome to confirm the judgments (mostly introspective as of now), and in particular probe(!) the **influence of the placement of the comitative DP**.

Thanks a lot for bearing with me in this hopefully
not too confusing talk about the **PCC** in the **PPC**
at **PLC** !! Phew 😊

Selected references i



Perlmutter, D. M. (1971). *Deep and Surface Structure Constraints in Syntax*. New York: Holt, Rinehart; Winston.



Dyła, S. (1988). Quasi-comitative coordination in Polish. *Linguistics*, 26(3).
<https://doi.org/10.1515/ling.1988.26.3.383>



Postal, P. M. (1989). *Masked inversion in French*. University of Chicago Press.



Bonet, E. (1991). *Morphology after Syntax: Pronominal Clitics in Romance Languages* (Doctoral dissertation). MIT.



Richards, N. (1997). *What moves where when in which language?* (Doctoral dissertation). MIT. Cambridge, MA.



McGinnis, M. (1998). Locality in A-movement.



Cardinaletti, A., & Starke, M. (1999). The typology of structural deficiency: A case study of the three classes of pronouns. In H. van Riemsdijk (Ed.), *Clitics in the Languages of Europe* (pp. 145–234). de Gruyter.



Matushansky, O., & Ionin, T. (2002). DPs with a twist: A unified analysis of Russian comitatives. In W. Browne, J.-Y. Kim, B. H. Partee, & R. A. Rothstein (Eds.), *Formal Approaches to Slavic Linguistics #11: The Amherst Meeting 2002*. Michigan Slavic Publications.



Rackowski, A., & Richards, N. (2005). Phase Edge and Extraction: A Tagalog Case Study. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 36(4), 565–599. <https://doi.org/10.1162/002438905774464368>

Selected references ii



Vassilieva, M., & Larson, R. K. (2005). The Semantics of the Plural Pronoun Construction. *Natural Language Semantics*, 13(2), 101–124. Retrieved March 16, 2023, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23748426>



Bianchi, V. (2006). On the syntax of personal arguments. *Lingua*, 116(12), 2023–2067. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lingua.2005.05.002>



Nevins, A. (2007). The representation of third person and its consequences for person-case effects. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory*, 25(2), 273–313. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11049-006-9017-2>



Riedel, K. (2009). *The Syntax of Object Marking in Sambiaa: A Comparative Bantu Perspective* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Leiden.



Rezac, M. (2011). *Phi-features and the modular architecture of language*. Springer.



Deal, A. R. (2015). Interaction and satisfaction in Phi-agreement. In T. Bui & D. Ozyildiz (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 45nd meeting of the North East Linguistics Society (NELS 45)* (pp. 179–192). GLSA.



Cable, S. (2017). Some Observations on the Plural Pronoun Construction of Tlingit, Polish, and Russian. In C. Halpert, H. Kotek, & C. van Urk (Eds.), *A Pesky Set: Papers for David Pesetsky*. MIT Working Papers in Linguistics.

Selected references iii



Stegovec, A. (2017). Between you and me: Two cross-linguistic generalizations on person restrictions. In A. Kaplan, A. Kaplan, M. K. McCarvel, & E. J. Rubin (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 34th West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics (WCCFL)* (pp. 498–508). Cascadilla Proceedings Project.



Stegovec, A. (2019). Taking case out of the Person-Case Constraint. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory*, 38(1), 261–311. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11049-019-09443-0>



Sheehan, M. (2020). The Romance Person Case Constraint is not about clitic clusters. In A. Pineda & J. Mateu (Eds.), *Dative constructions in Romance and beyond* (pp. 143–171). Language Science Press.



Turgay, T., & Öztürk, B. (2020). Structure of plural pronoun constructions. In *Studies in Language Companion Series* (pp. 156–189). John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1075/slcs.215.06tur>



Coon, J., & Keine, S. (2021). Feature Gluttony. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 52(4), 655–710. https://doi.org/10.1162/ling_a_00386



Deal, A. R. (2022). Interaction, Satisfaction, and the PCC. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 1–56. https://doi.org/10.1162/ling_a_00455

Appendix I: faire-à causative