Annotated Bibliography

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# Coveney (2005)

Coveney examines subject doubling from a sociolinguistic approach. He reviews grammarians’ feelings towards subject doubling, estimated frequency from previous literature, and what should count as SD. He draws utterances from the Picardy Corpus of Spoken French; the speakers are thirty adults working in colonies de vacance.

He finds that SD typically has a stigma, as early as the 17th century. Instead of SD appearing in an “all-or-nothing” type parameter in varieties of French, it is more useful to view it as a “more-or-less” type, similar to ne-retention. Through the corpus, he finds an age-grading with respect to SD, where it becomes less common as one gets older. He attributes this to people conforming to a more standard speech once they get a stable job. Despite it appearing more frequently in children, standard non-SD is still more common and overestimated by some previous studies.

In the study, he includes two speakers of Picard, in which SD is obligatory. These speakers had the lowest rates of SD, which he claims is because they are hyperaware of SD due to Picard’s quasi-obligation of SD and the stigmatization of it in French.

Of interest in the low rates of SD in francophone adults than predicted (although it is present to varying degrees), and the high frequency of SD in Picard. Why does Picard feature SD so often?

# Culbertson (2010)

Culbertson argues for an analysis of French subject clitics as agreement markers, instead of syntactic arguments (see:De Cat), specifically in “European Colloquial French” (in contrast to “European Standard French”). She claims that Colloquial French is in the middle of a “continous cline” (Hopper & Traugott 1993), as opposed to a discrete change, of how subject clitics are treated.She posits French subject clitics on this cline by demonstrating the continous weakening from Old French strong subject pronouns to clitics to affixes (in Colloquial French). She claims that European French speakers have access to the two separate grammars of Colloquial and Standard French, which she uses to explain variation and optionality in the data. Although she does not claim assumptions from a particular framework, she appeals to Distributed Morphology (Halle & Marantz 1993) most often to give examples of how her hypotheses would function within a framework. She uses various evidence, including experiments (AJT), prosody analysis, crosslinguistic typology, and corpora analysis (child directed speech comes from the Lyon corpus [Demuth & Tremblay 2008] while adulted directed speech comes from the PFC Corpus [Phonologie du francais contemporain, Durand et al. 2002, 2005]).

Culbertson first examines a number of phenomena previously discussed in the literature, and positions them in relation to her current arguments. She examines: reduction of French clitics and lexical attachment, liaison and implications about attachment, “ne”-retention, inversion, wide- and narrow-scope of subject clitic in VP coordination, and complement clitics.

She argues that the phonological reduction of French clitics is indicative of a high level of fusion between the element (the clitic) and the host (the verb). She argues that the clitic cannot be attached at the synactic level, because it can modify specific lexical items (eg: “je suis” /ʒøsɥi/ [ʃɥi]). This form is also not derived from a phonological rule because, according to her, no such rule exists. I am skeptical on this.

She then claims that liaison characteristics posit the clitic attachment at the word-level, as opposed to phrase-level (which would have indicated that it were a phonological clitic). However, I am unsure that I believe that liason is a word-level phenomenon (re:Nespor 1986).

Culbertson moves onto “ne”-retention, where she agrees that it is most logical to posit that it is not an affix. She finds that in Colloquial French, “ne” has a pattern of distrubtion with the subject DP and clitic. She analyzes the Lyon corpus and takes the percentage of ne-retention “by dividing the actual number of ne uses by the number of possible contexts for ne.” “Ne” appears in decreasing frequency with: DP subject (83%) > No DP or subject clitic (14%) > Subject clitic (6%) > DP and subject clitic (7%) (remember that each percentage is individually out of 100%, not combined). “Ne”, according to this data, is preferentially dropped when it would intervene between a subject clitic and verb. Crosslinguistically, she adds that some Friulian dialects show complementary distrubtion between agreement subuject clitics and negative markers. She goes on to use a likelihood-ratio statstic to compare her two-grammar model (where speakers have access to two separate grammars for Standard and Colloquial French) and a one-grammar model (like De Cat’s). She finds that her model is statistically more likley, but given that it is much more flexible, I don’t find this particularly groundbreaking or suprising; I do not believe that she gives enough evidence for why speakers would have two grammars, though, or examples of speakers who might have only one of those grammars (so it would be interesting to investigate heritage speakers of “Colloquial French”). I would be interested to look at “ne”-retention and subject clitics in other languages, like Picard and Friulian.

She then examines inversion in Colloquial French. She finds that inversion of the verb and subject clitic is “vanishingly rare”, but inversion with a full subject DP and verb is fully available and the preferred strategy for WH-question formation (88% 46/52 tokens featuring inversion in the Lyon corpus).

She looks at subject-clitic repetition in coordinated VPs. In Northern Italian languages, agreement clitics are obligatorily repeated. In Standard French, this is not the case for subject clitics; in Colloquial French, subject clitics cannot take wide scope for coordinated VPs (similarly high frequencies of repeated subject clitics in both the Lyon and PFC corpora).

She then looks at complement clitics (e.g. object, reflexive, and locative clitics). She poses the question of object-clitic climbing, as De Cat (2005) had, and positions the phenoemon within the cartographic framework (Cardinaletti & Shlonsky 2004), but does not provide anything novel to explain this.

Culbertson then examines a number of features on subject doubling in French. She mentions that Pied Noir French (Roberge 1990) and Picard (Auger 2003) both allow subject doubling, but it is unknown if Standard or Colloquial French does. Although “Jean il parle” is possible, “personne (\*il) ne parle” convinces some that the first is left dislocation of “Jean”, not true subject doubling. This is in contrast to Trentino and Fiorentino, which allows doubling of quantified subjects. Culbertson argues, conversely, that true subject doubling is allowed in Colloquial French through experimental evidence (prosody analyses and an AJT),as well as corpora analysis.

Her first experimental evidence comes from prosodic analysis of productions of left dislocation in French. She compares DP-subj, DP-subj+clitic, and DP-object constructions (eg: David(i) l(j)’a déjà invité vs David(i) il(i) déjà l(j)’a invité vs David(i) il(j) l(j)’a déjà invité. She finds that speakers do not differentiate productively between DP-subj and DP-subj+clitic in terms of F0 (the main factor for left dislocation in French), but they do for DP-obj. This indicates to her that only DP-objs are left dislocated. Furthermore, only the DP-obj features optional resyllabification and pause, whereas in cases of DP-subj+clitic feature resyllabification more frequently (e.g. [da.vi.di.la]).

According to De Cat (2004), DP subjects with a focus interpretation cannot cooccur with subject clitics. Culbertson argues against this based on De Cat’s experimental design and with results from Culbertson’s own AJT. Her results agree with De Cat in that DP-subj+clitic is less acceptable when the subject is narrowly focused or indefinite, but she finds that it is acceptable in topic contexts and broad-focus contexts, “where the subject is just one part of the focused verb phrase.” Since doubled subjects appear in a focused context, where the two elements should be competing for a single theta role, Culbertson argues that the subject clitic must be an agreement marker, not a syntactic argument.

Like Gotowski (2005), Culbertson finds in the Lyon corpus that subject doubling in children is extremely common. In the PFC corpus (adult-directed speech), she finds that age has an effect; those younger than 35 years old are more likely to produce subject-doubling (almost 70%), while those older are less likely (50%). Subject doubling with strong pronouns, however, were near ceiliing across speakers.

Culbertson combats the argument that agreement is obligatorily overt. She positions French within a similar framework to Poletto (2000) who created a hierarchy of possible patterns of subject doubling in Norther Italian language: strong pronouns > DPs > quantified phrases > WH-variables. That is to say, if a language allows doubled subjects for WH-variables, it will obligatorily allow subject doubling for the other three categories; if it allows it for quantified phrases, it will be allowed for the lower two, and so on. French would then be positioned on the lowest tier, where strong pronouns are the only elements that obligatorily feature subject doubling. This is in line with the following exchange: “Qui a appelé Jean?” “Moi \*(je) l’ai appelé.” Here, even though “Moi” is narrowly focused, and should not appear with a doubled subject, it obligatorily does.

She finally appeals to the Matching Hypothesis (Suñer 1988, 1992) to constrain subject doubling in Colloquial French, explaining that “an agreement marker and its argument controller must match featurally.” Subject clitics, then have phi features for person, gender, and number, as well as [+definite] and [+accessible]. Subject doubling will only occur if the DP-subj is [+definite] and [+accessible], explaining why indefinites and WH-words would not surface with doubled subjects.

She concludes by explaining that the consequence of this analysis is that Colloquial French would be treated like an NSL. She defends her position briefly by explaining that Colloquial French does exhibit some features of NSLs (null nonreferential subjects, postverbal subjects, and ‘that’-trace effect violations), but some of these features can also be found in uncontested non-NSLs, like English.

# De Cat (2005)

De Cat argues against the claims that a morphological analysis (MA, henceforth) of French subject clitics is possible.

She first tests 4 predictions from the MA, which she reviews individually.

“a) Subject-verb agreement can be marked twice morphologically.” She claims that this would posit a randomly redundant and extremely asymmetrical system of French morphology.

“b) Subject clitics should not be available for syntactic operations independently of their host.” She provides evidence from the York and Cat corpora that inversion is productive in Canadian and Belgian French, which would not be possible under the MA unless a wide range of homophonous pre- and postverbal affixes with differing feature specifications were assumed. Since the MA claims to apply to spoken Colloquial Parisian French, this is not very strong evidence against it; however, 2% (18/903 tokens) of wh-questions (with wh-movement) features inversion, which means that it is possible, although a locutionary strategy (73%, 656/903 tokens) is clearly preferred. I would like to find a paper exploring the productiveness of inversion in Colloquial Parisian French.

“c) Preverbal clitics appearing between the subject clitic and the verb also have to be analysed as affixes. These elements include en, y, object clitics and the negation particle ne.” Although ne is believed to be absent in colloquial speech, it is still productive and sometimes obligatory. In the MA, a number of homophonous “ne” affixes would need to be proposed to account for a negative “ne V pas” and a restrictive “ne V que…”, as well as a non-affixal “ne pas V”. Furthermore, ne is syntactically constrained, whch is not predicted if it is a morpheme affixed on the verb pre-syntactically.

She goes on to refute object clitics as affixes by explaining that the variability of which verb they appear with in multi-verb complexes cannot be determined in the absence of structural information, which is what the morphological analysis supposes; it should appear with the verb that it is an argument of (under the MA), but this is not the reality.

She refuted y and en under the analysis that their presence must be structurally licensed when associated with human antecedents. More specifically, this behavior is licensed when en and y are not bound by a c-commanding DP (Lamiroy 1991).

“d) Subject doubling is predicted (i.e. the cooccurence of an XP in [spec, TP] and of an adjacent subject clitic).” Here, she appeals to the information structure of the French sentence. She argues that the structure [CP [TP XP(i) [T` clitic(i)+T …. ]]] are never found in spoken French, but instead it is realized as [CP XP(i)… [TP clitic(i) [T’ …]]], where CP is topic position and must appear with a resumptive subject clitic. However, an overt focused XP will not appear with a subject clitic. An XP cannot be both topicalized and focused. This is based off grammaticality judgment tests administered to 14 natives speakers from Beglium, Canada, and France.

She further appeals to variable binding in a sentence like, "Sa(i) mere (\*elle) accompagnera chaque enfant(i)." The DP “sa mere” must be focused to obtain the desired reading, so it cannot be topicalized; as such, it cannot appear with the subject clitic. The DP must appear in spec-TP if it is not focused and there is no subject clitic.

She concludes her argument by appealing to availability of a topic interpretation of the XP. In thetic sentences, typically answers to a question like “What happened?”, there is no “aboutness topic.” The sentence consists of entirely new information, so there is no topic.

She explains that some predicates, Individual Level Predicates (Milsark, 1974) can never appear in thetic sentences. “The subject of ILPs is obligatorily interpreted as the topic of the sentence (Erteschik-Shir, 1997), except when there is narrow focus on that constitutent (De Cat, 2002).” One expects ILPs to always take a subject clitic since the subject is always topicalized, except when there is a narrow focus on the subject, which is confirmed in the York and Cat corpora. This means that the subject of ILPs are found in the CP with the subject clitic in spec-TP, while in narrow focus readings, the subject is found in spec-TP without any subject clitic.

De Cat then positions French in the framework developed by Bresnan & Mchombo (1987), comparing the properties of French subject clitics to the categories discussed in the mentioned paper: grammatical agreement (which would correspond to the MA) and anaphoric agreement.

She finds that French subject clitics act more like anaphoric agreement based on four arguments. First, French subject clitics are not required to be local to the DP (in the same clause). Second, the subject clitic is not able to be present in subject questions in Spoken French, which is predicted if it were a grammatical agreement marker. Third, in idioms, the presence of a clitic marker will destroy the idiomatic interpretation (e.g.: “Les carrotes(i) elles(i) sont cuites”). Fourth, in French, a DP must be peripheral for there to be a resumptive subject clitic to be present; this should not be necessary if they were grammatical agreement markers. De Cat appeals to the prosody of left dislocation to argue that the XP is, in fact, dislocated.

She proposes that subject clitics could act as topic markers, but this would still leave many consequences of the MA unresolved. Furthermore, she explains that feature mismatch in a sentence like “Les banques(pl), c’est(sg) les banques” would remain unexplained under this analysis.

She proposes three more properties expected under an MA approach that she did not explore: “Subject clitics in spoken French a. cannot be conjoined…, b. cannot take wide scope…, c. display (very rare instances of) idiosyncrasy”. Labelle (1985) explains away the first two issues by ascribing the subject clitics as phonologically weak.

In all, this is a convincing argument that the MA approach does not work in its current state.

# Gotowski (2015)

Gotowski outlines a syntactic and a morphological approach to subjects in French, where they can be treated as either syntactic arguments or as preverbal inflectional affixes respectively, in both child and adult French despite contrasting data. Gotowski proposes another approach, the “developmental” approach”, influenced by competition-based models of language acquisition. She claims that the contrast between child and adult speech in respect to subjects can be explained by children and adults having two separate grammars. Children treat subjects as preverbal affixes (morphological approach), whereas adults treat subjects as syntactic arguments (syntactic approach). Children then adopt the syntactic approach as that grammar is rewarded more as they grow.

She uses the CHILDES corpus to test the following hypothesis: 1) Do children produce double subjects more often than adults? 2) Do children exhibit ne-retention less frequently than adults? 3) Do children exhibit subject-verb inversion less frequently than adults? In her developmental model, children will produce double subjects more often and exhibit ne-retention and subject-verb inversion less often.

All three of her predictions were found to be true and significant. She used these arguments to claim that children and adults have different grammatical representations of subjects, and that children have competing grammars of subjects as affixes vs syntactic arguments.

I am not convinced about the model that she uses to explain the results; I would like to see this interpreted in a different way. She claims that francophone children produce more root infinitives than would be expected by an NSL, but she is claiming that a competing grammar they have is NS. Do francophone children produce subjects with RIs? I also find a problem with the corpus as a source of data for adult speakers, as it is primarily child-addressed speech when it’s known that children pay attention to adult-to-adult conversations. In sum, I believe there is another, better explanation to this than what is proposed here.

# Poletto & Tortora (2016)

Poletto & Tortora describe the subject clitics of languages found in northern Italy and southern France.

A langauge Paduan features a clitic “a” that is used to mark the entire sentence as new information, as well as inflectionally marking fist person singular and plural and second person plural. Beninca 1983, the one who describes this phenomenon, proposed that the clitic is found in Topic head in the left periphery of the clause.

The authors explain that common diagnostics used by others to determine if a language like French has subject clitics as inflectional markers are often misleading. There are many NI langauges that indisputibly of this type, but they do not perform as one might expect under diagnostics because of the variety even among these languages. Diagnostics include the impoverishment of a personal subject clitic system, but this is not universal. Another, if negation can come between the clitic and verb, but this presupposes that all negation is of the same type, which is not the case. VP-cooridnation is another test, but it is again inadequate; there are northern Italian languages that do not repeat the clitic in each conjuncted clause, yet they are shown to be heads.

The authors then typologically classify the subject clitics available to the described languages. Renzi & Vanelli (1983) propose an entailment relationship in the occurence of subject clitics across these languages in the following order, where each one entails the one to the left: person > number > deictic > invariable. For each type, they describe various, specific properties that group the languages’ uses of these types together. French can be compared to these. Culbertson 2010 had compared French subject doubling to a similar entailment chain proposed by Poletto 2000.

De Cat 2005 proposed that subject clitics in French may serve a pragmatic function in cases of subject doubling, indicating that the subject DP is [-focus] and [+topic]. Poletto & Tortora explain that some NI languages display just this type of behavior. The subject clitic can only occur if the subject is a topic, and this environment is apparently the first place where subject clitic doubling occurs. Culbertson 2010 suggested that the subject’s definiteness or specificity played a role in licensing subject doubling, which is recapitulated here. The authors do not, however, specify any languages in which this occurs.

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