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# Gestures as Expletives : Multichannel Syntax

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## 1. Obligatory preverbal sounds or gestures in subject drop contexts

The preverbal position in ‘Atlantic French’ can be filled by either a DP subject as is normally the case in standard French, a sound or a gesture. This is illustrated in (1-4) where  stands for a sound and  for a gesture.

- (1) Context: ‘Il est encore pas là aujourd’hui...  
He is again not here today.’  
(DP<sub>subject</sub> /  / ) viendra demain, tu verras...  
will-come tomorrow, you will.see  
‘He’ll come tomorrow, you’ll see.’
- (2) Context: ‘J’tu prends en voiture à la gare si tu loupes ton train ?  
Do you want me to fetch you with the car if you miss your train?’  
(DP<sub>subject</sub> /  / ) prendra le train d’après et py c’est tout.  
will.take the train of after and then it is all  
‘I’ll take the next train and that’s all.’
- (3) Context : Someone is looking desperately for something...  
(DP<sub>subject</sub> /  / ) trouvera ça une aut’ fois.  
will.find that an-other time  
‘I / you / he / she / we will.find that another time.’
- (4) Context : entering a room where children are playing...  
(DP<sub>subject</sub> /  / ) feriez bien de ranger !  
would.do good P clean up  
‘You (really!) should clean up!’

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The pattern illustrated in (1-4) is productive at least along the Atlantic coast (setting Low Brittany apart). This pattern shouldn't be confused with the subject drop phenomena found in some other varieties of French. Poitevin speakers can uniformly use the preverbal 'i' for all persons of the paradigm, suggesting an analysis in terms of a null subject licensed by an abstract AGR head of the Franco Provençal type (see De Crouzas and Shlonsky 2003). Subject-drop is found in written corpus (see Goscinnny & Uderzo 1967:15 for an example in French comics) but is maybe not ascribed to the presence of . The phenomenon illustrated in (1-4) is different: it shows obligatory insertion of a preverbal sound or gesture in sentence initial contexts<sup>2</sup>. Omitting  in missing subject environments is ungrammatical: the speaker's reactions when  is dropped vary from '*[laughs]...of course you cannot do that!*' to '*It is completely strange, because the beginning is missing*'. The preverbal sound or gesture is a syntactic element despite its unusual morphology since it is obligatory in missing subject contexts.

The preverbal sound can be an intake of breath or minimal vocalic production. The preverbal gesture consists of facial expressions or movements (nod, head dip, head-shake, various movements of the lips, furrowed or raised eyebrow...) or movements of hands and body parts (shrug, hands opened, movement of one hand up or down, head scratch, slap of the knee, slap of the hand, shake of finger, snap of fingers). Gestures or sounds that could pass for unintentional are banned (sneeze, burp, ear lobe pull, drool, yawn, twirling of one's hair...). Movements have to be motorically simple and ostensible: hidden movements (of hands hidden under a table or of toes in one's shoes) trigger ungrammaticality<sup>3</sup>. However, ostension of the sign does not serve the purpose of facilitating the hearer's comprehension of the utterance. Indeed the pattern in (1-4) is freely produced on the phone. It is thus a production constraint.

I first establish in section 2 the syntactic function of . I argue it is an expletive satisfying the PF side of the EPP along the lines of Holmberg (2000, to appear) and Platzack (1998). This hypothesis explains why its insertion is obligatory only in missing subject contexts. This context is created by an erasure process investigated in section 3 where I discuss identification of the null subject and the level at which the erasure process takes place. In section 4, I provide semantic and

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thanks also to the confidence of my father who offered me the trip to California without having a clue of what it was about.

<sup>2</sup> I set aside here a restricted set of constructions that show complete expletive drop in standard French, such as '*Faut partir*'-(must go).

<sup>3</sup> See Alibali and al. (2001) for experimental evidence that both lexical and beat gestures of spoken languages can be analysed as a production constraint.

distributional arguments that  $\text{C}^*/\text{C}^{\text{ph}}$  is syntactically a C head that can bear agreement features. Finally, section 5 discusses the crucial point of this article, that is the multichannel dimension of Spoken Languages and its consequences.

## 2. $\text{C}^*/\text{C}^{\text{ph}}$ is an expletive satisfying the PF side of the EPP.

I analyse the preverbal sound or gesture as an expletive satisfying the PF side of the EPP, for concreteness, either along the lines of Holmberg (2000) or Platzack (1998). Holmberg (2000) proposes a split version of the Extended Projection Principle (henceforth EPP) whereby the EPP is split into two features on T: a [D-] feature (Chomsky 1995), and [P-], a phonological feature checking requirement. This feature tracks any phonological matrix and as such is blind to the X/XP distinction. This proposal is designed to account for Stylistic Fronting in Icelandic and Faroese. In (5), the verbal head *stolið* seems to violate the Head Movement Constraint as it moves across the auxiliary into the subject gap position created by *wh* movement. Past-participle fronting in (5) is thus analysed as an expletive strategy<sup>4</sup>.

Holmberg (2000)

- (5) Hver heldur þú að ~~Hver~~ stolið hafi \_\_\_ hjólinu  
 Who think you that stolen has the-bike  
 ‘Who do you think has stolen the bike?’

Accounting for different data in Germanic languages and Italian, Platzack (1998) explores the consequences of a Visibility Condition on the C domain. This Visibility Condition ensures that the C head and SpecCP cannot be both simultaneously phonologically empty. This proposal takes into account both XPs and heads and could ultimately be reduced to a split EPP along the lines of Holmberg (2000).

Both the Visibility Condition on the C domain and Holmberg’s phonological checking feature requirement represent the PF side of the EPP and predict that, at PF, a phonological matrix has to precede T<sup>5</sup>. Such a view widely extends the typology of expletives in allowing elements such as heads (Platzack 1998) or phonological matrices (Holmberg 2000) to satisfy the EPP. This proposal accounts for English non-*wh* exclamatives such as (6). According to Pesetsky and Torrego (2000; footnote 39), ‘a whistle or a sharp intake of breath’ can replace the fronted interjection; ‘something’ has to precede the auxiliary.

<sup>4</sup> The Head Movement Constraint is not violated in so far as only the phonological matrix of the head has moved.

<sup>5</sup> See Joutteau (forthcoming a) for discussion of these proposals and their conflicting predictions, in particular with respect to the filling of SpecTP.

(6) ('Boy !'/ intake of breath / \* $\emptyset$ ), is syntax easy!

(7) (Damned! / whistle / \* $\emptyset$ ), is my car beautiful! Bob Tootle  
 The phonological matrix of the preverbal element in (6) and (7) is an expletive obeying the PF side of the EPP. Since neither heads nor phonological matrices are concerned with Case checking requirements, the EPP cannot entirely be reduced to Case (contra Miyagawa 2001, Bošković 2002, among others). I briefly illustrate below the range of data that the PF side of the EPP accounts for<sup>6</sup>. Fronting of a verbal head across an auxiliary in Slavic and Breton is known in the literature as Long Head Movement (see Borsley, Rivero and Stephens 1996). Holmberg (2000, to appear), Dalmí (2003), Jouitteau (forthcoming a), Roberts and Roussou (2002) propose to reduce this phenomenon to an expletive strategy, in (8) to (11).

*Breton*

(8) **Kuzhet** he doa Manon \_\_\_\_\_ ar c'hazh.  
 Hidden have.3.SG.F Manon the cat  
 'Manon had hidden the cat.'

(9) **Skrivañ** a rin \_\_\_\_\_ ur gerig dit-te.  
 to-write ® will-I a little-word [to-you]-you  
 'I'll write a little word to you'.

*Czech*, Rivero (1991)

(10) **Koupil** jsem knihy.  
 Bought I-have books.  
*I have bought books.*

*Serbo-Croatian*, Ackema and Čamdžić (2003)

(11) **Pojeo** je sve gljive.  
 eaten is all mushrooms  
 'He has eaten all the mushrooms.'

No constraint on head movement is violated here. Recall that the moved element is merely a phonological matrix. The PF side of the EPP can be satisfied by an alternative strategy: merge of a C head as illustrated with the matrix particles of Welsh (12) and of Breton (13).

(12) a. **Fe/mi** welais i Megan. Roberts and Roussou (2002)  
 C saw I Megan  
 'I saw Megan.'

<sup>6</sup> Dalmí (2003) also makes verb incorporation in Polish and prefix movement in Hungarian follow from the PF side of the EPP.

- (12) b. **A** welaist ti Megan.  
 Q saw you Megan  
 'Did you see Megan?'  
 c. **Ni** welais i ddim Megan.  
 C saw I not Megan  
 'I didn't see Megan.'
- (13) a. **Emañ** Manon el levraoueg. *Breton*  
 C-is Manon in-the library  
 'Manon is in the library.'
- b. **N'** he doa ket \_\_\_\_ Manon kuzhet ar c'hazh.  
 NEG have.3.SG Adv-NEG Manon hidden the cat  
 'Manon hadn't hidden the cat.'

This is also the case in romance languages such as Mayennais French (14), Gascon (15) and Catalan Child Language (16).

- (14) **Que** pleut! *Mayennais French*  
 C rains  
 'It rains.'
- (15) **Qu'** ei pintrat jo medish las portas. Campos (1992:912)  
 that have painted I myself the doors  
 'I myself have painted the doors.'
- (16) adult: **Què** he fet? S. Tubau-Muntaña (2003)  
 'What did I do?'  
 child: **Que** has llençat l' altra tortugueta a l' aigua.  
 that have.2.SG thrown the other little turtle into the water  
 'You threw the other little turtle into the water.'

The PF side of the EPP is a Parameter, not a Principle. The grammar of Catalan Child Language will later conform to Adult Catalan where the PF side of the EPP is negatively set. More generally, *pro*-drop languages such as Greek, Catalan or Spanish that instantiate verb first are not concerned with this requirement. Even if we assume that preverbal *pro* satisfies the [D] side of the EPP, its lack of phonological content should always trigger ungrammaticality. The optionality of Stylistic Fronting in Icelandic in (5) is further evidence that the PF side of the EPP is a parameter.

I argue that  $\emptyset$ / $\emptyset$  in Atlantic French is an expletive head merged into C to satisfy the PF side of the EPP. This correctly predicts the following generalisation:  $\emptyset$ / $\emptyset$  is obligatory only when no other phonological

material precedes the verb in the oral chain. In the following section, I investigate the subject drop mechanism. I show that the null argument is a weak pronoun erased at the syntax / phonology interface. This analysis provides further evidence to support the proposal that  $\emptyset$ /ʔ insertion is an expletive strategy at the syntax/phonology interface.

### 3. Preverbal sound or gesture insertion context

Contrast (17) with (18). When a verb starts with a vowel, the consonant that would have served as liaison if the pronoun was overt appears.

(17) %  $\emptyset$ /ʔ ont chanté faux que c'est pas possible.  
 have.3.PL sang wrong that it is not possible  
 'They sang incredibly bad.'

(18) (Elles / Ils) Zont chanté faux que c'est pas possible.  
 3.PL.F/M liaison-have.3.PL sang wrong that it is not possible  
 'They sang incredibly bad.'

As shown in (19), the liaison triggered by vowel initial verbs in (19)a appears systematically in missing subject contexts in (19)b.

(19)a.				b.	
1SG	ʒə.j	ə elision	a/ε s̃âtefo...	ʒ / j	a/ε s̃âtefo...
2SG	ty	y elision	a s̃âtefo...	t	a s̃âtefo...
3SG.F	ε, a	l	a s̃âtefo...	l	a s̃âtefo...
3SG.M	i	l	a s̃âtefo...	l	a s̃âtefo...
1PL	õ	n	a s̃âtefo...	n	a s̃âtefo...
2PL	vʊ	z	ave s̃âtefo...	z	ave s̃âtefo...
3PL.F	ε	(l) z	õn s̃âtefo...	(l) z	õn s̃âtefo...
3PL.M	i	(l) z	õn s̃âtefo...	(l) z	õn s̃âtefo...

Liaison is determined by the phonological shape of weak pronouns. This entails that the null argument in (1-4) is neither *pro* nor an erased strong pronoun. This in turn gives us the syntactic locus of erasure as weak pronouns are never found higher than SpecTP. The following sequence of operations takes place. Liaison operates first at the syntax/phonology interface. Subject erasure comes next, leaving intact the preverbal result of liaison when there is one. Finally, the PF side of the EPP requires an element before the tensed verb. Either the required material has already been created liaison, or expletive insertion of  $\emptyset$ /ʔ is called for.

I now turn to the question of how the erased subject is further identified. Null arguments are identified by AGR in languages with rich agreement systems (Chomsky 1981, Rizzi 1982 among others), but this is obviously not the case in Atlantic French since only 2.PL and 3.PL are morphologically individuated in the verbal paradigm.

- (20)  $\emptyset$  /  $\emptyset$  va souvent à la plage, ces temps-ci.  
 go often to the beach that times that  
 ‘I / you / he / she / we go often to the beach, these times.’

This entails, contra Jaeggli and Safir (1989), that languages with an impoverished but existing agreement system do allow null subjects.

Assuming that a constituent that is not Focus-marked must be GIVEN by discourse or context (see Schwarzschild (1999) among others) predicts that GIVENness is required for all deaccented constituents, including of course non-pronounced elements. This proposal nicely derives the Recoverability Constraint for non-pronounced elements as given by Pesetsky (1998): ‘a syntactic unit with semantic content must be pronounced unless it has a sufficiently local antecedent’. This constraint can be generalized to all deaccented elements. Subject erasure is not ascribed to GIVENness as such, but the process is restricted to deaccented elements.

Subject erasure is further restricted by the availability of a Null Topic merged in the highest CP. Null Topics are restricted to matrix sentences and so is the subject erasure process, independently of a preverbal sound or gesture as illustrated in (21). I thus propose that identification of the null subject is uniformly achieved by a Null Topic in the highest CP domain (along the lines of Huang 1984 for Chinese).

- (21) \* Pouchka dit partout que  $\emptyset$  /  $\emptyset$  prend l’ avion.  
 says everywhere that take the plane  
 ‘Pouchka says everywhere that s/he takes the plane.’

#### 4. $\emptyset$ / $\emptyset$ is a C head.

The first clue that  $\emptyset$  /  $\emptyset$  is the syntactic realisation of a C head is its possible semantic import: example (22) could not be an assertion because  $\emptyset$  /  $\emptyset$  types it as a question.

- (22) hé ! / raised head/ raised eyebrow peux boire mon thé ?  
 can drink my tea  
 ‘Can I drink my tea (now)?’

Moreover, the complementary distribution of  $\bullet_{\text{C}}/\text{wh}$  with low C heads provides a strong argument for its syntactic identification. With a realised low CP domain, subject erasure is possible but the preverbal gesture is banned. This is illustrated for *when/where* questions in (23)<sup>7</sup>.

- (23) Quand/ où ( $\bullet_{\text{C}}/\text{wh}$ ) prennent l' avion ?  
 when / where take the plane  
 'When/where do they take the plane?'

Complementary distribution of Topic drop with *wh* is classically ascribed to movement of a null operator (Raposo 1984 for Portuguese, Cardinaletti 1990 for German). A weak pronoun erasure process however involves no movement and the gesture is not in complementary distribution with *why* questions as shown in (24).  $\bullet_{\text{C}}/\text{wh}$  is in complementary distribution such as low heads like *when, where* and a selected C because they compete for the same locus in an articulated CP domain. As expected,  $\text{wh}$  can be realised in subject erasure contexts with *why* questions (24), and for Hanging Topics (25). *why* and Hanging Topics are merged higher in the structure (Rizzi 2002) and  $\bullet_{\text{C}}/\text{wh}$  can thus be inserted.

- (24) Pourquoi ( $\text{wh}$ ) prend l' avion ?  
 why take the plane  
 'Why do I /you/he/she/we take the plane?'
- (25) Julie et Manon, ( $\text{wh}$ ) prendront l'avion. (with break)  
 Julie and Manon will take the plane  
 'Julie and Manon will take the plane.'

Finally,  $\text{wh}$  is banned with a lexical DP subject in (26), and for locative inversion in (27), just as a C head would.

- (26) Julie et Manon ( $\bullet_{\text{C}}/\text{wh}$  / \*que) prendront l'avion. (without break)  
 Julie and Manon C will take the plane  
 'Julie and Manon will take the plane.'
- (27) Dans le jardin ( $\bullet_{\text{C}}/\text{wh}$  / \*que) cherchent les oeufs.  
 in the garden C look for the eggs  
 'They look for eggs in the garden.'

Given the possible semantic import and distributional properties of  $\bullet_{\text{C}}/\text{wh}$ , I conclude it is a C head. I show next that this C head can bear agreement.

<sup>7</sup> See below discussion of (35) for the relevance of intonation.



### 5. Multichannel Syntax

I discuss here why the morphology of  is not surprising and why it is. All language productions are embodied by gestures (glottal stops, openings of the mouth...). There is no a-priori reason why non-oral gestures would be disqualified. We are familiar with the importance of the role of gestures in discourse. We know already from deictic gestures that non oral messages can have a semantic and syntactic effect. A deictic gesture contributes to the scalarity of referent entity salience of an oral pronoun (Ariel 2000 :8). The deictic *na* in Modern Greek can occur on its own only if accompanied by the relevant deictic gesture (Roberts and Roussou 2003). Such a deictic gesture is obligatory with demonstratives in out of the blue contexts (32). It is needed for the demonstrative use of a definite (33).

(32) It is \*this girl/ \* THIS GIRL /  this girl.

(33) I saw the film ( at a commercial).  
'I saw that film.'

Furthermore, we know that gestures can compete with contrastive stress intonation for 'ostension' in French (Cardinaletti and Starke 1999:152).

(34) J'ai vu Marie puis j'ai vu \*elle / ELLE /  elle.  
I have seen Mary then I have seen her.  
'I saw Mary then I saw her.'

Compare the two versions of (35). Rising intonation clause types yes/no questions in French. Cheng and Rooryck (2000) take the rising intonation to be the reflex of a Q-morpheme which is obligatory for interpretation purposes. If this is so, the falling intonation in (35)a. indicates that the reflex of the obligatory Q-morpheme is the preverbal gesture<sup>8</sup>.

(35) a.  eyebrow/  head (tu) veux passer en premier  ?  
b. Tu veux passer en premier  ?  
'You wanna get first?'

<sup>8</sup> We naturally raise our head while producing high intonations. The morphology of the two Q morphemes (intonation / gesture in (35)) show the same directionality (up). Likewise, the Q morpheme in sign languages has the same directionality than intonation in the correspondent spoken language in English, French and German. Direction of the sign itself is arbitrary but it is multichannelly consistent once set.



expressions. As Icelandic, Atlantic French requires a preverbal expletive in phonologically null subject environments. As is the case in other romance languages (Mayennais, Gascon, Catalan Children) and in Brythonic, the expletive is a merged C head. As in Sign Languages, the functional projection C can be embodied by upper body movements or facial expressions. French being SVO, expletive insertion shows up as an effect of the PF side of the EPP only when the subject is phonologically erased. The erased subject is further identified by a Null Topic restricted to matrix sentences. Subject erasure is restricted to deaccented elements.

All spoken languages are potentially multichannel. The arbitrary dimension of the linguistic sign extends to the channel realising particular phonological embodiment. We should then wonder why it isn't the case that more oral languages use multichannel signs. My guess is that we are not sure they do not. Rarely are the methodologies adjusted to the multichannel dimension of the message. We are in danger of trying to account for truncated data if only the acoustic string is taken into account. The pattern of crosslinguistic 'disappearing' functional heads (such as particle *-ka* in Japanese or *Mi/Fe* matrix particle in Welsh) in particular should be reviewed under this light. Multichannality of Spoken Languages is a concern for syntax too. Syntax is multichannel, be it in signed or spoken languages.

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*Methodology points.* Although I'm a native speaker of this variety of French, the judgements here come from elicitations with three young speakers (S. Rivière, L. Martin and P. Dauriac from Nantes, Mayenne, Bordeaux). They could be described as bilinguals adjusting to different sociolects in contact. They judge that the distance between the language they produce in everyday life with both written French and 'TV French' is huge. Sociolects and dialects in contact with Atlantic French are Standard French, High French, Poitevin on the south of the Atlantic coast and Gallo (High Brittany). The general pattern has been checked to be productive for at least ten speakers of various ages and social levels. Some other speakers show strong reluctance to the data. I take it to be crucially due to the internalized written representation of the language in which, of course, no encoding for sounds or gestures is allowed. Moreover, any study of the French languages has to deal with French politics on minority languages and the afferent negation of dialects (Sonntag 2003). The  $\bullet/\text{☞}$  data is identified with the countryside area and thus with a lower class which is not well represented in, say, a university. Code switching plays an important role due to this social parameterization. Import of high-speech level vocabulary or uses of structures typical of written French (raising structures with *semble-seem*, verb/subject inversions) automatically rule the  $\bullet/\text{☞}$  sentences out. For one of my informants, even reference to a mental universe touching to work or to big cities like Nantes induces code switching to standard French. Conversely, anger is a typical trigger for code-switching into the  $\bullet/\text{☞}$  pattern. Curiously, non-standard linguistic signs

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are not homogeneously socially filtered: replacement of the subject by a preverbal sound seems more widely spread/accepted among 'educated speakers' than the gesture counterpart.

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