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Identifying the transitivity roles of postverbal prepositional phrases:  
the participant/circumstance interface

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The objective of this paper is to propose an analysis of the transitivity status of a selection of prepositional phrases (PrepP) in post-verbal position in modern French. Although PrepP are typically considered as circumstantial in systemic functional linguistics, the distinction between circumstances and participants is not, as Halliday himself has pointed out, a clear-cut one in all languages (1994: 150) and in French cannot be decided on a strictly formal basis. We will discuss different syntactic, semantic and informational criteria that can also have a bearing on the status of PrepP as either sentence participant or circumstance.

## 1. Introduction

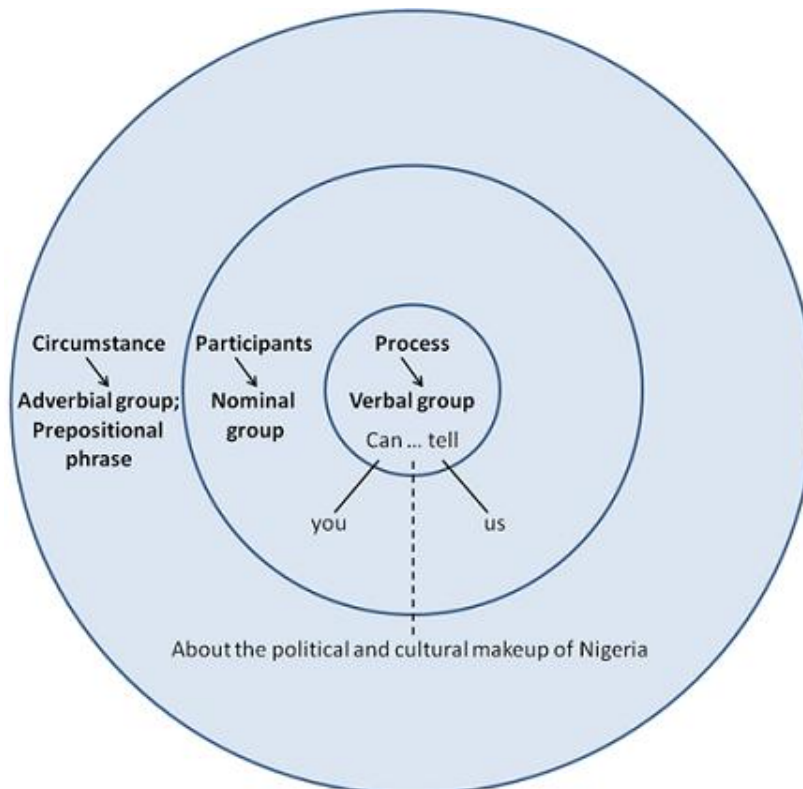
In the traditional Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) perspective, PrepP are usually considered as circumstances and as such less central to the grammar of the clause than participants. The three main types of transitivity roles – process, participant and circumstance – are correlated with verbal groups, noun groups and adverbials respectively – the latter often in the form of prepositional phrases (Halliday 1970; 1994, Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). In Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), this tripartite division of the sentence and its correspondence with the three word classes is represented as three concentric rings:

Figure 1: Central and peripheral elements in the experiential structure of the clause (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004: 176)

The inner ring containing the process is the most central element in the configuration. Participants, in the middle ring, are considered close to this centre and directly involved in the process in some way. The elements contained in the outer ring, the circumstances are said to augment this centre in some way but as they do not directly participate in the process their status is considered less central or more peripheral and are thus considered optional (2004: 175/176). They are “circumstances associated with” or “attendant on the process” (2004: 260), representing location (spatial or temporal), manner etc. In the mood grammar participants function as Subject or Complement and circumstances map onto Adjuncts. Looked at on the level of grammatical realisation, Halliday draws an explicit parallel between participant roles and bare nominal coding. Participant functions are presented as “*elements that typically relate to the verb without having a preposition as intermediary*” (1994: 144). Circumstances, on the other hand, as peripheral elements, are expressed by adverbs (especially manner adverbs) or adverbial phrases introduced through a preposition.

The systematic positioning of PrepP in the outer ring is however problematic for several reasons. Firstly whereas circumstances are typically realised by PrepP, PrepP do not always function as circumstances. In French, as in English, the correspondence established between the semantic category of circumstance and its realisation as a PrepP is misleading. There are some universally recognised exceptions where PrepP expressing, for example, the by-agent (1) or the beneficiary roles (2) (*par X* or *à X* in French) function as participants and play an integral role in the Process:

(1) Le pont était construit par l’armée (The bridge was built by the army)



Le pont	était construit	par l’armée
Affected	Process	Agent

(2) J'ai envoyé une lettre à mon amant (I sent a letter to my love)

J'	ai envoyé	une lettre	à mon amant
Actor/Agent	Process	Goal/Affected possessed	Beneficiary /Affected carrier <sup>1</sup>

We would like to suggest, however, that the exceptions do not stop at a “few general headings” (1994: 159) and that the traditional mapping from prepositional phrases to Adjunct to circumstance is rather unsatisfactory for analysing the transitivity status of PrepP in French. PrepP of place for example, are often obligatory from both a syntactic and semantic viewpoint and relegating them to the outer ring as circumstances ‘merely attendant on the process’ does not reflect this integral role.

It would also seem essential to draw clear distinctions between the various levels of analysis (semantic, syntactic and pragmatic). We will show for example that the usual criteria of optionality and mobility of Adjuncts are the result of a complex interaction between the above mentioned levels. Some PrepP, whilst optional from a syntactic viewpoint, are nevertheless strongly bound to the process because they carry an important information load.

In the remainder of the article, we will first review some of the literature and tests relating to the mapping of Complements (argument)<sup>2</sup>/Adjuncts to participants and circumstances (§2). We will then describe the corpus and the methodology adopted (§3). This will be followed by our own classification of PrepPs, from those most integrated in the process to the more peripheral (§4); to conclude, we will discuss how the different levels of analysis come into play within the SFL framework.

## 2) Mapping of Complements and Adjuncts with participants and circumstances

The general position proposed in Halliday (1994) and in Halliday and Mathiessen (2004) is as we have seen to match form to function: PrepP are thus usually circumstances. On the grammatical level, participants function in the mood grammar as Subjects or Complements and circumstances map onto Adjuncts. Adjuncts do not have the potential of becoming Subjects (1994: 150). Halliday draws attention to a few borderline cases, proposing a certain number of tests to decide whether a PrepP can in fact have a participant role (1994:159-160). Wherever for example there is a systematic alternation between a PrepP and a noun group as in (3), the PrepP in question is interpreted as a participant<sup>3</sup>.

(3) *Peter sent John a message / Peter sent a message to John.*

However the mapping from Complement/Adjunct to participants/circumstances does not extend to exceptions such as these (cf. also examples (1) and (2) above) and the PrepP fulfilling indirect participant roles as beneficiary or agent are considered to be Adjuncts in the mood grammar and not Complements. As frequently “optional extras” Halliday appears to consider them as less inherent in the process (1994:144). However this

<sup>1</sup> The second set of labels are those proposed by Fawcett (in preparation : chapter 2), cf. *infra*. In the remainder of this article is these terms that will be adopted.

<sup>2</sup> The term Complement of Systemic Functional Grammar is generally referred to as ‘argument’ in other approaches.

<sup>3</sup> There is no such dative alternation in French, but the beneficiary role can always become the subject of a reverse sentence with a receptive or beneficiary type verb: *Jean a reçu le message.*

blurring between levels seems unhelpful<sup>4</sup> and is moreover difficult to apply to an analysis of French.

In the Cardiff variant of Systemic Functional Grammar (Fawcett 1987; 1996; in preparation) the relationships between the various levels of analysis is more straightforward. The criterion for the distinction between participant and circumstantial roles is that the participants are inherent to the Process and expected by it whereas circumstances are not (Fawcett in preparation, chapter 2). This distinction is also related to that between Complements and Adjuncts at the grammatical level. Complements systematically realise any participant role not realised by the Subject and Adjuncts map onto circumstances. The example (4) from Butler (2003: 393) illustrates this important difference between the two approaches:

(4)	<u>Mandela</u>	was to be assissinated	<u>by a sniper</u>	<u>on his return</u> <u>from abroad</u>	<u>in mid-July</u>
	Participant		Participant	Circumstance	Circumstance
Cardiff G	Subject		<b>Complement</b>	Adjunct	Adjunct
SFG	Subject		<b>Adjunct</b>	Adjunct	Adjunct

In both approaches, the PrepP *by a sniper* plays a participant function. However whereas in traditional SFG it is still an adjunct, in the Cardiff variant it is a Complement. The Cardiff position seems the more logical to us, particularly as the agentive participant can become the Subject of an active clause (*A sniper was to assassinate Mandela...*) and our analysis will be based on the same approach.

Another important difference between the traditional SFG approach and the Cardiff variant concerns their respective analysis of certain locative constructions. Locative PrepP are not treated as oblique participants but as circumstances in mainstream SFG. Fawcett, on the other hand, proposes including locational and directional process types as sub-types of relational processes, alongside possessive and attributive processes.

(5) Ivy is in Peru

(6) Ike went to Lima

For Fawcett, the most important reason for treating (5) and (6) as locative and directional relational processes respectively and not as circumstantial processes is that the four roles, i.e. Ivy, Ike, Peru and Lima are equally expected by the processes: *in Peru* and *to Lima* are therefore participant and not circumstantial roles. Fawcett also recognizes the existence of three-participant configurations:

(7) They threw stones at the bridge  
 Circumstance (SFG)  
 Participant (Cardiff)

In example (7), the PrepP would not be a circumstance but an inherent role of the process, i.e. a participant<sup>5</sup>. We will also adopt this position in analysing locative expressions of these types

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<sup>4</sup> The participant role of range is also that has posed a number of problems to SFG analysts. See Banks (2000) for a discussion of the issues.

In order to evaluate the syntactic and semantic integration of PrepP it is essential to consider their degree of involvement with the verb. Different commentators underline different aspects of this relationship. To evaluate how closely the preposition is bound to the verb, Halliday (1994) suggests for example “a simple diagnostic criterion” provided by the thematic structure:

- (8) Where were you waiting? – I was waiting on the shore  
It was on the shore that I was waiting *not* It was the shore that I was waiting on  
(9) What were you waiting for? – I was waiting for the boat  
It was the boat that I was waiting for *not* It was for the boat that I was waiting

Through this kind of manipulation, Halliday suggests that the Process in (8) consists of the Process *wait* plus circumstances *on the shore*, whereas (9) consists of the process *wait for* plus Participant *the boat*. However, in French the preposition cannot be separated from the constituent it governs, nor can it be used alone in combination with a verb. A change in meaning such as that between *wait* and *wait for* is grammatically expressed through the direct/ indirect construction alternation:

- (10) Il attend le bateau/ il attend sur la rive;  
(11) c'est le bateau qu'il attend, c'est sur la rive qu'il attend.

A different approach towards the clarification of Complement/Adjunct division and the degree of dependency of PrepP on the verb is adopted by the French linguist Gilbert Lazard. Lazard (1994) proposes distinguishing constraints of presence from constraints of form. He defines three types of Complements: (i) those which are not only syntactically required but also governed by the verb: in other words their presence is required and their form constrained (*rencontrer un ami*; ‘meet a friend’); (ii) those which are merely governed: their presence is not obligatory but when occurring their form is constrained by the verb (*je pense/ je pense à un ami*; ‘I’m thinking/ I’m thinking of a friend’); and (iii) those which are only required: their form is free but their presence is syntactically required (*Pierre habite la campagne, dans un chateau, en haut de la colline*; ‘Peter lives  $\emptyset$  the country’<sup>6</sup>, in a castle, up the hill’). Other constituents which are neither required nor governed are analysed as Adjuncts and as circumstantial. If Lazard’s proposal is initially seductive, it is however difficult to implement in practice, when confronted with the reality of corpus examples. In particular the constraint of ‘required presence’ in the sentence is rather unhelpful as it leads to certain confusion between syntactic and pragmatic constraints of presence as will be illustrated in section 4.2.1. below.

Another arguably more useful distinction is that proposed by Halliday (1967) and further refined by Fawcett (1980, in preparation) between overt and covert roles<sup>7</sup>. A participant role can be obligatory to the Process, but not overtly realized in the structure and so “the expression of any given Participant Role is not obligatory” (Halliday 1967:44). In order to separate Complements from Adjuncts it is important to distinguish between elements inherently expected by the process, whether expressed (overt) or unexpressed (covert), and those elements that are inherently optional, i.e. circumstantial elements that are not

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<sup>5</sup> In a slightly different perspective Laffut and Davidse (2002) propose to analyse such locative constructions as relational complements which are necessary to complete the verbal head.

<sup>6</sup> Literal translation: the French verb *habiter* can occur with a direct object or a prepositional object.

<sup>7</sup> See also the notion of null instantiation cf. Fillmore & Kay 1996.

automatically expected by the process even if they occur quite frequently. Fawcett (Chapter 2 in preparation) illustrates this distinction with the example (12):

(12) Ivy sold (it) (to Fred) for £200

The process of selling expects a seller, a buyer and the item sold. All three play participant roles. If either buyer or item remains covert (i.e. is not grammatically expressed) the addressee is either expected to know their identity sufficiently or entitled to ask. The amount of the exchange however, although frequently occurring with such verbs of purchase, is not inherently expected and the prepP *for £200* is analysed as a circumstance.

There are also a number of syntactic tests which can prove useful in identifying the status of different PrepP (Lakoff & Ross, 1976 [1966]; Reinhart, 1983; Netter & Rohrer, 1987; Hoekstra & Mulder, 1990; Bresnan, 1994). For example, Lakoff & Ross 1976 (1966), and later Bresnan (1994), show that locative adjuncts can be optionally excluded from the interpretation of *so anaphora* (13), while locative arguments cannot (14).

(13) My friend Rose was knitting *among the guests*, and so was my sister (alone in her bedroom). = adjunct

(14) My friend Rose was sitting *among the guests*, and so was my sister (\*alone in her bedroom). = argument

Bresnan suggests that (14) contains a locative argument and includes the location or direction of the antecedent clause. This is why the parenthesized locative in (14) is a contradictory addition to the *so*-clause.

Another interesting test concerning the status of locative PrepP has been proposed by Guillet & Leclère (1992: 17): The PrepP is an Adjunct if the sentence (15) where it occurs can be viewed as a reduced form of a complex sentence *The fact that [S] V(happen) Adjunct* as in (16):

(15) Max est tombé dans une mare à la campagne  
(Max fell into a pond in the countryside)

(16) Le fait que [Max est tombé dans une mare]<sub>S</sub> s'est passé à la campagne  
(The fact that [Max fell into a pond] S happened in the countryside)

(17) \*Le fait que [Max est tombé]<sub>S</sub> s'est passé dans une mare à la campagne  
(The fact that [Max fell]<sub>S</sub> happened in a pond in the countryside)

Downing and Locke (2002:27) suggest a comparable test. They show the difference between locative or directional adjunct and locative or directional Complements through the paraphrase with *that*:

(18) John runs at the week-end. John runs. That happens at the week-end.

(19) John runs to work. John runs. \*That happens to work.

They underline that “there is no one-to-one correspondence (...) between class of unit and its syntactic function”. The PrepP *at the weekend* functions as Adjunct, the PrepP *to work* as Complement. They also note that some oblique complements can still become the Subject in a passive clause (20), but that all Complements (Predicator complements), unlike objects do not become Subject in a passive clause (21):

- (20) You can rely on Tom > Tom can be relied on.  
(21) The fare cost 150\$ > \* 150\$ was cost the fare.

The same line of argumentation is provided to distinguish the instrument which is a participant from the means which is a circumstance. The former can become the Subject in the same basic clause (22), the circumstance of means cannot (23).

- (22) The child broke the window with a stone > a stone broke the window  
(23) He watered the garden with a hose > \*A hose watered the garden

This test is equally applicable to French:

- (24) L'enfant a cassé la vitre avec une pierre / une pierre a cassé la vitre  
(25) Il a arrosé le jardin avec un tuyau/ \*Un tuyau a arrosé le jardin.

Other noteworthy tests are the combination of the clefting and mobility tests (Molinier 2009; Molinier and Levrier 2000). The first test deals with the feasibility of extracting and clefting the prepositional phrase. An element that can be focussed on through the cleft construction (*c'est X qui/que* in French) is judged to be more dependent upon the verb than one that cannot. The second test focuses on the possibility of placing the PrepP in a detached position at the head of sentence. A detached PrepP will then have scope over the whole of the incoming sentence. According to Molinier (2009: 9) circumstantial adverbials must be both detachable and impossible to cleft in order, as in the case of *au fond* (at bottom/basically) in sentences (26-27) below:

- (26) Au fond, cet homme est dangereux (At bottom, this man is dangerous)  
(27) \*C'est au fond que cet homme est dangereux.

Complements, on the other hand, are cleftable but awkward to place separately in sentence initial position.

- (28) Tom est allé à Londres (Tom went to London)  
C'est à Londres que Tom est allé (It's to London that Tom went)  
?A Londres, Tom est allé (To London, Tom went)

### 3. Corpus and methodology adopted

Our study is based on the analysis of a selection of post-verbal prepositional phrases introduced by *sur* (on) and *dans* (in) taken from the French newspaper *Le Monde*. We firstly analysed 450 occurrences according to a number of syntactic, semantic and informational criteria<sup>8</sup>. We took into account, for example, the semantic class of each PrepP (spatial, temporal, causal, manner etc.), its position in the sentence, the elements which govern it and the elements which depend on it, its collocational status and its scope. We also noted the possible presence within the sentence of other PrepPs, of a Complement or of a constituent in an initial detached position in the sentence.

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<sup>8</sup> This study is based on a previous analysis of all occurrences of PrepP in a 2M words corpus from *Le Monde* (December 2000). This large-scale corpus annotated project was funded by the *Agence Nationale de la Recherche* (ANR-05-BLAN-016201).



From this initial analysis and a review of the tests and literature relating to Complement/Adjunct to circumstance/participant mappings, we suggest a classification of PrepP according to their degree of attachment to the process, analysing some PrepP as fulfilling participant roles (PR), irrespective of their form. Following Fawcett (1987; in preparation), we do not thus systematically map PrepP forms onto circumstantial roles. We will first discuss examples of the PrepPs which can enter the inner “circle of participants”. We distinguish here obligatory overt PrepP, those which can either be overt or covert, and those which form part of a collocational construction. We will then turn to circumstantial PrepPs, focussing on the fact that, although both Adjuncts and circumstances, they may sometimes be obligatory for pragmatic and informational reasons.

#### 4. Classification

##### 4.1. From the most closely bound to the process ...: Participant PrepPs

###### 4.1.1. Obligatory overt PrepPs

When used with certain verbs, PrepPs must be expressed, ie. overt. This category is essentially made up of different types of relational processes (cf. Fawcett in preparation) and in general there is no restriction on the form of the preposition. Processes expressed by the verb *être* (to be) for instance require a complement that can show up as an adjective, a noun group or a PrepP. When followed by PrepP with *sur* or *dans*, the verb *be* mostly expresses a locational process either with a literal or a metaphoric meaning.

(29) le tabou était dans les têtes (LM)<sup>9</sup>

Le tabou <i>The taboo</i>	était <i>was</i>	dans les têtes <i>in their heads</i>
Carrier	Process	Location

In (29) the PrepP is an obligatory part of the locational process with the verb *être*. In (30) below, the PrepP with *dans* is used with the verb *replacer* (to replace) to characterise metaphorically speaking the position of the Lens football team.

(30) Lens se replace dans la course (LM)

Lens <i>Lens</i>	se replace <i>is back again</i>	dans la course <i>in the race</i>
Carrier	Process	Location

Verbs like *réside*, *habiter*, and a specific meaning of the verb *vivre* also require an overt complement ‘conflated’ with a locative participant role.

(31) La réponse aux difficultés réside dans la capacité à anticiper de l'Etat, de la profession et des entreprises (LM)

La réponse aux difficultés <i>The answer to these difficulties</i>	réside <i>resides</i>	dans la capacité à anticiper de l'Etat, de la profession et des entreprises <i>in the capacity of anticipation of the State, the profession and companies</i>
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<sup>9</sup> Examples taken from our press corpus (*Le Monde*) are all signaled by initial letters (LM)

Affected carrier	Process	Location
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(5)

(32) M<sup>me</sup> Cottin n'habite pas actuellement sur les lieux (LM)

M <sup>me</sup> Cottin 6M <sup>me</sup> Cottin	n'habite pas <i>doesn't live</i>	actuellement <i>at present</i>	sur les lieux <i>on the site</i>
Carrier	Process	Circ: temporal	Location

(33) Depuis, il vit sept mois l'an dans l'autre hémisphère (LM).

Depuis, il <i>Since then, he</i>	vit <i>lives</i>	sept mois l'an <i>(for) seven months of the year</i>	dans l'autre hémisphère <i>in another hemisphere</i>
Carrier	Process	Circ: temporal	Location

In examples (33) and (34), the locative PrepP are preceded by a temporal adverbial. The semantic status of the two groups (temporal and locative) is however very different. The temporal group preceding the locative is optional. Although the verbs *habiter* and *vivre* are frequently accompanied by some kind of temporal qualification, the verbs' meanings do not inherently require it and the temporal adverbials in each case are allotted a circumstantial role. There is however a difference between *habiter* which always requires a locative participant and *vivre* which can also be part of an intransitive construction, meaning *to be alive*. In the latter case, it can thus be modified by a duration adverb (*il vit longtemps*) ou a manner adverb (*il vit bien*). When however it is qualified by a locative, it has the same meaning as *habiter* ('*to reside*'), and cannot be accompanied by duration or manner adverbials (*\*il habite longtemps*, *\*il habite bien*). As underlined by Fawcett (in preparation, chapter 2: 6) it is not the form of the main verb that 'expects' the participant roles, but the verb's meaning. As an inherent part of the process, the locative expression is therefore assigned a participant role. The role is 'expected' by the process and the actor/carrier is identified by means of its localisation.

As Bresnan's test (cited above) also shows the PrepP in (34) *dans l'autre hémisphère* cannot be excluded from the interpretation of *so anaphora* as in (35)

(35) Depuis, il vit sept mois l'an dans l'autre hémisphère, et sa femme de même (en \*Australie)

*Since then, he lives seven months of the year in another hemisphere, and so does his wife(\*in Australia).*

#### 4.1.2. Overt/ Covert PrepPs

Some verbs select a PrepP that can either be explicitly realised or sometimes simply inferred from the context. The non realisation of the PrepP does not entail a radical change in meaning but a less specific content. Such PrepPs, whilst not obligatorily expressed, are nonetheless strongly bound to the verb. When occurring, the form of the prepositions introducing the nominal expression is imposed by the verb. In (36) and (37) below the verbs *insister* (to insist) and *faire pression* (put pressure/pressurise) require the preposition *sur*.

(36) M Thomas, ancien trésorier du PR, avait lui aussi insisté sur le «cadre légal » de ses interventions (LM).

M. Thomas, ancien trésorier du PR, <i>Mr. Thomas, former treasurer of the PR,</i>	avait lui aussi insisté <i>had himself also insisted</i>	sur le «cadre légal » de ses interventions. <i>on the 'legal framework' of his interventions</i>
Agent	Process	Affected

(37) Greenpeace fait pression sur les entreprises (LM).

Greenpeace <i>Greenpeace</i>	fait pression <i>puts pressure</i>	sur les entreprises <i>on companies</i>
Agent	Process	Affected

Mention of the participant can remain potentially covert, with the addressee being expected to fill in himself the missing information or entitled to ask about it.

(36') M. Thomas, ancien trésorier du PR, avait lui aussi insisté  
*Mr. Thomas, former treasurer of the PR, had himself also insisted*

(37') Greenpeace fait pression  
*Greenpeace puts pressure*

However when overtly expressed this set preposition is used. As a role expected by this process we also therefore assigned it a participant role in the same way as the obligatory overt PrepP class examined above. These two examples also pass the clefting and mobility tests described above: the PrepP is cleftable (38) and (39) but the positioning of the Prep in a detached position at the start of the sentence is extremely awkward (38') and (39')

(38) C'est sur le «cadre légal » de ses interventions que M Thomas (...) avait lui aussi insisté

(39) C'est sur les entreprises que Greenpeace fait pression

(38') ? Sur le «cadre légal » de ses interventions, M. Thomas(...) avait lui aussi insisté

(39') ? Sur les entreprises, Greenpeace fait pression

With the verbs associated with the overt/covert category of PrepP, the meaning conveyed by the process alone (i.e. with a covert participant) is not fundamentally different from that conveyed by the process with an overt participant. It is important however not to assimilate the possible alternation between required overt and covert participants, with the alternation between the intransitive and transitive (indirect) use of verbs entailing a semantic difference. Thus it is important not to confuse the alternation between *Greenpeace fait pression [sur les entreprises ]* or *il entre [dans le bureau]*, where the basic sense of *faire pression* (to put pressure on )or *entrer* ('to enter') is the same whether the Complement is expressed or not, with the intransitive and transitive uses of a verb such as *passer*. The intransitive use of the verb denotes a movement of the Subject, *elle passe* ('she passes by'), whereas when the verb is used with preposition *sur* and a non locative nominal group, the meaning created by the construction is 'to neglect' or to 'ignore': *elle passe sur les details* (She ignores the details).

#### 4.1.3. Collocational PrepPs

The third category distinguished contains PrepP which contribute non-compositionally to the meaning of the process. The following expressions : *porter sur, revenir sur, reposer*

*sur, déboucher sur* have a very different meaning from when the verb is used alone, *porter* (carry/wear), *revenir* (return), *(se) reposer* (rest/sleep), *déboucher* (unplug), or with another preposition *porter à, revenir à, reposer en, déboucher avec* etc.

- (40) Les critiques européennes portent surtout sur l'incapacité de la France et de l'Allemagne à s'entendre avant le sommet de Nice (LM).  
*European criticism focuses mainly on the inability of France and Germany to reach an agreement before the Nice summit*
- (41) «Montagnes Magazine » revient sur l'avalanche de Montroc (LM).  
*«Montagnes Magazine » looks back at the Montroc avalanche*
- (42) Les disparités ne reposent pas sur la différence de sexe (LM).  
*These disparities are not based on gender differences*
- (43) Le mouvement de grève en faveur d'une réforme de l'aide juridictionnelle devait déboucher, vendredi 1er décembre, sur une manifestation unitaire à Paris (LM).  
*The strike call in favour of a reform of the legal aid system was expected to lead to a combined demonstration in Paris on Friday December 1st.*

In the three categories above we have thus classified PrepP which are closely bound to the process. They are syntactically required and/or governed by the verb, or involved in the constructional meaning of the process. Although we have presented these three categories separately they are not however mutually exclusive. Collocations can occur for example in the obligatory overt PrepP category: *Il est dans les affaires* ('he's' in business') and in this case, it is no longer a locational process but an attributive process. When the verb stem is always systematically associated with the same preposition, we obtain a high degree of constraint and frozenness, as is illustrated by such constructions as *tabler sur* ('count on') where the verb never appears without the proposition:

- (44) En 2001, les constructeurs tablent sur une stabilisation du marché. (LM)  
*In 2001, manufacturers are counting on a stabilisation of the market*

The PrepP in the three categories presented are all thus considered as participants that are directly involved in the process.

#### 4.2. ... to the most peripheral: obligatory and optional Adjuncts

Peripheral PrepPs are not required by the verb. As genuine circumstances, their presence is syntactically optional and when they appear their form is neither constrained as in the case of covert PrepP discussed above, nor do they participate in the collocational meaning of the process. In addition they will normally be non-cleftable and highly mobile (see section 3 supra).

- (45) ...mais elle était exceptionnelle [dans la réalité] (LM)

mais elle <i>But it</i>	était <i>was</i>	exceptionnelle <i>exceptional</i>	dans la réalité <i>in reality</i>
Carrier	Relational process	Attribute	Circ: spatial location

- (46) L'Algérie dispose de beaucoup de clés dans cette région... (LM)

L'Algérie <i>Algeria</i>	dispose <i>has</i>	de beaucoup de clés <i>a great deal of influence</i>	dans cette région <i>in this region</i>
Carrier	Relational process	Possessed	Circ: spatial

			location
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In these examples the PrepP occurs in a sentence where the two expected participant roles are already filled. The PrepP is both optional and highly mobile

However, within this peripheral zone, the degree of attachment to the Process can be affected by at least three factors which we will discuss in turn: the number of post-verbal constituents (4.2.1), the informational weight of the PrepP (4.2.2); the referential anchoring role of the PrepP (4.2.3). These three factors can sometimes make the expression of the circumstantial Adjunct obligatory.

#### 4.2.1. Multiple constituents

Sentences can often contain several post-verbal constituents. In (47) below, there are two PrepP (a duration adverbial and a locational adverbial) following a nuclear utterance made of an affected subject involved in a passive construction. If only one of the two PrepP was removed, the utterance would remain acceptable (47a). However if both of them were suppressed, the resulting utterance would sound rather odd (47b).

(47) L'image est diffusée, pendant quelques fractions de seconde, dans le journal télévisé de 20 heures (LM).

L'image	est diffusée	pendant quelques fractions de seconde	dans le journal télévisé de 20 heures
<i>The image</i>	<i>is broadcast</i>	<i>for a few seconds</i>	<i>in the 8 o'clock news programme</i>
Affected	Action process	Circ: Duration	Circ: spatial location

(47a) L'image est diffusée, dans le journal télévisé de 20 heures. / L'image est diffusée, pendant quelques fractions de seconde.

*The image is broadcast in the 8 o'clock news programme/ The image is broadcast for a few fractions of a second*

(47b) ? L'image est diffusée.

*The image is broadcast*

The oddness of (47b) raises an issue about the status of the two PrepP. Are they truly independent from the process? Do they fulfil the same function? One of them at least appears necessary, even though they do not express Participants Roles. This phenomenon has been well described (cf. Grimshaw & Vikner 1993, Goldberg & Akerman 2001) as a pragmatic constraint, where the importance of considering the whole situation of communication is stressed.

Example (48) also raises some interesting questions about the optional quality of circumstantial Adjuncts

(48) Samedi, la manifestation s'est achevée devant l'hôtel de ville, sur une note d'espoir (LM)

*On Saturday, the demonstration ended in front of the town hall on a hopeful note.*

As in (47) at least one of the two PrepP is necessary to avoid violating the Gricean maxim of quantity and creating a pragmatically odd or uninformative utterance (Grice 1975)

- (48a) Samedi, la manifestation s'est achevée devant l'hôtel de ville. / Samedi, la manifestation s'est achevée sur une note d'espoir  
 (48b) ? Samedi, la manifestation s'est achevée

However if we also take into account the co-textual environment of (48) and in particular the following clause, we note that it is the manner adverbial *sur une note d'espoir* ('on a hopeful note') that conveys the crucial information in this sentence. If it was omitted, it would be difficult to understand the significance of the following sentence which illustrates the form this hopeful note took.

- (48) Samedi, la manifestation s'est achevée devant l'hôtel de ville, sur une note d'espoir. Quand le maire a lancé «Votre lutte est légitime », parents et enseignants l'ont largement applaudi  
*On Saturday, the demonstration ended in front of the town hall on a hopeful note. When the mayor said « your campaign is legitimate », parents and teachers applauded warmly.*

Not only therefore is the adverbial non-optional but the respective positioning of the two PrepP is far from arbitrary. The placing of the manner PrepP in sentence final position, where readers expect focal information to occur can be seen as a deliberate textual choice by the text producer. Patterning of multiple constituents appears therefore to be closely linked to information structure and the choices made by the speaker when producing an informative utterance.

#### 4.2.2. Informationally required PrepP

We would like to argue that on many occasions the presence of circumstantial PrepP can be essential to the understanding of the sentence and thus obligatory from a pragmatic viewpoint.

In (49) below the PrepP is not syntactically required and would normally be attributed Adjunct status.

- (49) Il a des amis dans toutes les communautés.  
*He has friends in all the communities*

However the PrepP seems therefore to be doing far more than merely describing the circumstances associated with the state of affairs evoked. The point of message is not that the subject has friends but that he has friends in all the different communities.

In relational or existential processes in general, the informational weight of the PrepP is important. In (50) the scope of the questions is restricted by the Prep.

- (50) Ce risque existe-t-il aujourd'hui dans tous les pays de l'Union européenne ?  
*Does this risk exist today in all European Union countries?*

Without the PrepP the sentence (50a) is perfectly grammatical but carries quite a different meaning.

- 50a) Ce risque existe -t-il aujourd'hui ? (FM)  
*Does this risk exist today?*

The original question was not whether a risk existed at all but whether the risk existed in all European Union countries. Likewise in (51) the important point is not that someone no longer wishes to live but that they no longer wish to live in the particular circumstances stated:

- (51) *Fatiguée, elle n'en peut plus de vivre dans ces conditions (FM).*  
*Tired, she no longer wishes to live in these conditions*

In (51), the verb does not denote an historic present but refers to the time period detailed in the PrepP

- (52) *Ils étaient trois frères d'armes dans la résistance italienne (FM).*  
*They were brothers in arms in the Italian resistance movement*

In all these examples therefore the PrepP plays an essential role on the informational level. Without the PrepP, the focus of these sentences is unclear. All sentences require an information focus (Halliday 1967, 1994; Lambrecht 1994). PrepP are one of the ways on which the focal requirement is satisfied. We find support for this view in Goldberg and Akerman (2001), who speaks of “focus failure”, arguing that “adjuncts are just one of several ways in which the focal requirement can be satisfied” (idem: 798-799). They can become obligatory when they carry the main informative load in the discourse context.

#### **4.2.3. Spatial locative adjuncts and referential anchoring**

Finally, we notice (as shown in Carlier & Sarda 2010), that spatial locative adjuncts appear to be obligatory when they fulfil the pragmatic function of referential anchoring as through (53-55) below.

- (53) *Quelques drapeaux palestiniens, rouge, vert, blanc et noir flottaient dans l'assistance (LM).*  
*A few Palestinian flags, red green white and black, were fluttering in the crowd*

- (54) *Une petite pluie fine tremblotait dans l'air. (Frantext: Erckmann-Chatrion, *Le conscrit de 1813*, 1864, Page 190)*  
*A light drizzle was hovering in the air*

- (55) *Une éclaircie apparut dans le ciel gris et blanc, juste au-dessus du train. (Frantext: Malraux. A., *La condition humaine*, 1933, page 269)*  
*A shaft of light appeared in the grey and white sky, just above the train*

When the subject is expressed by an indefinite noun phrase, a spatial setting is required in order to anchor it in reality. In all these examples, the semantics of the verb is bleached by the presence of the prepositional group. In each case the verb is hardly more than a copular, serving to assert the existence of the referent.

## **5. Conclusions**

Our aim in this paper has been to propose an analysis of the transitivity status of a selection of PrepP in contemporary French. Our starting point was Halliday and Mathiessen's (2004) figure of three concentric circles, where PrepP in the outer ring are typically analysed as circumstances, and as “almost always optional augmentations of the

clause rather than obligatory components” (2004:175). It is true that Halliday (1994) and Halliday and Mathiessen (2004) are careful to specify that they are only referring to typical realisations and mappings. However, even when accounting for exceptions the traditional form to function pairings and the criteria of optionality seem unsatisfactory when confronted with the reality of our French corpus data. For this reason we preferred to adopt a different approach, distinguishing varying degrees of insertion of PrepP in the participant –circumstance zone (see Table 1). Our analysis has been greatly influenced by certain positions adopted by Fawcett in the Cardiff variant of SFG (Fawcett 1997, Fawcett in press), particularly with respect to the notion of “inherent roles” expected in the Process. At bottom, participants are inherent to the Process and predicted by it whereas circumstances are not. We have identified the type of Process and the participant roles associated with it, not in relation to the form of the verb, but in relation to the verb’s meaning (metaphorical or otherwise) within the complete cotextual and contextual environment. Like Fawcett, we have opted to move away from the transitive/ergative labelling favoured by Halliday and Mathiessen (2004) and to focus instead on the number of roles expected by the processes: one, two or three-role processes, with the labels ‘agent’ and ‘affected’ being used to describe the kind of configuration at issue.

Prepositional Phrases					
Complement			Adjuncts		
Obligatory overt PrepP	Either overt or covert PrepP	Collocation (constructional meaning)	Informationally required	Referentially required	Optional
Participants			Circumstances		

Table 1. Degree of insertion of PrepP: participants or circumstances

The left hand columns of the table show the PrepPs that play a participant role in the process, bringing it about or being affected by it in some way. As inherent roles selected by the verb, it therefore seems natural that these are systematically conflated with the grammatical role of Complement. The three sub-categories refer to whether the expression of the PrepP is obligatory, if it can be covert or overt, or if it forms part of the constructional meaning of the Process. On the right of the table are the PrepP we have classified as circumstances. Once again we follow Fawcett in conflating the categories of Adjunct and circumstances. Three main categories have subsequently been distinguished: informationally required circumstantial roles, referentially required circumstances and lastly optional circumstances. Only the third category of circumstance is, we would contend, truly optional, from both the syntactic and pragmatic point of view.

As this study has shown, the semantic roles of French post verbal PrepP cannot be decided on a purely formal basis. The range of relationships they can enter into depends on their degree of attachment to the process, and this involves taking into account not only syntactical requirements but also informational constraints.

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