Superiority effects and the French Plural Pronoun Construction

Adèle Hénot-Mortier (MIT)

Background. French, like Polish, Russian, Turkish or Tlingit, allows for "inclusive readings" of comitative "plural pronoun" constructions (PPC) such as (1) involving a sentence-initial or final *with*-PP, and a plural pronoun

> (1) Avec X, pro$_{PL}$ avons/avez/ont regardé un film.
> With X, pro$_{PL}$ have$_{PL}$ watched a movie.
>
> **Inclusive ("I") reading**: 'X and another singular individual Y s.t. "X and Y" can be referred to as pro$_{PL}$ watched a movie (2 people, pro$_{PL}$ = pro$_{X+Y}$).'
> **Exclusive ("E") reading**: 'X and pro$_{PL}$, which does not include X watched a movie ($\geq$3 people, pro$_{PL}$ = pro$_{Y+Z+...}$).'

as subject (pro$_{PL}$ = nous$_{1PL}$, vous$_{2PL}$, ils$_{3PL}$) ([1]–[4]). To convey a state of affairs similar to that of the inclusive ("I")-reading, English must use a singular pronoun (referring to Y only), instead of the plural one.

Puzzle. When X is pronominal, the I-reading in French gets restricted: as shown in Tab. 1, it is unavailable when X $\in \{moi_{1.SG}, toi_{2.SG}\}$ and Y tentatively refers to a non-participant (3.SG). This pattern seems reminiscent of the "Weak" Person Case Constraint (PCC), which in a variety of languages (from Romance, Bantu a.o., cf [5]–[8]) forbids a third-person dative to co-occur with a first/second-person accusative/absolutive. How does the PCC end up restricting the I-reading?

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

Table 1: Availability of the "X and Y" (=PPC) reading of the plural pronoun. Yellow cells: pragmatic infelicity, **red cells: PCC-like, focus of the paper**.
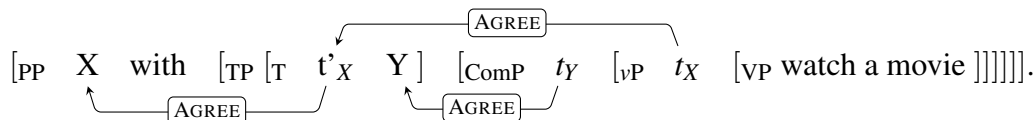
Claim. The French PPC under the I-reading results from agreement between T and two clitics: the underlying (singular) subject cl$_Y$ and another clitic cl$_X$. The surface form obtains via (1) further probing of cl$_Y$ by the P-head located above TP; (2) incorporation of the two clitics (cl$_Y$ and lower copy of cl$_X$) to form pro$_{X+Y}$. Restrictions of the I-reading in French can then be seen as a Weak PPC effect under a *Feature Gluttony* account, modulo a constraint we will dub "No Gluttony under concurrency".

Structural assumptions. We focus on the French PPC under the I-reading, whereby pro$_{PL}$ in (1) refers to X$\oplus$Y. We assume that the structure of such sentences involve a Comitative layer (ComP), which is somewhat similar to an Applicative layer, but merged above vP. We assume that a clitic cl$_Y$ (referring to Y in the I-reading) is hosted in Spec-ComP, and another clitic cl$_X$ (referring to X) is in Spec-vP. The two clitics sequentially agree with T – supported by the fact that the person and gender features of both X and Y influence agreement marking on the main verb or auxiliary. As shown in (2), a sentence of the form 'Y: *With X, we$_{X+Y}$ went to the movies*.', which features the auxiliary *be*, exhibits feminine agreement on the participle iff both X and Y are F (expected pattern for French plural agreement).

> (2) a. Marie$_F$: Avec Jean$_M$, nous sommes allés$_{M.PL}$ au ciné.
> b. Jean$_M$: Avec Marie$_F$, nous sommes allés$_{M.PL}$ au ciné.
> c. Jeanne$_F$: Avec Marie$_F$, nous sommes allées$_{F.PL}$ au ciné.

We assume that subject clitic agreement consists in head movement, although this is not essential to the analysis. After both clitics have moved to T, cl$_X$ is further attracted by a P-head (as suggested for other French prepositions by [9]) leaving a trace t$_X$, whose features are

incorporated with cl_Y to form pro_{X+Y} at PF ("summing" the number features of X and Y, and retaining the highest of their person features). The derivation is shown below (we assume that *with* moves to a higher head after probing, to yield the right linear order).

$$[_{PP} \quad X \quad \text{with} \quad [_{TP} [_T \quad t'_X \quad Y] \quad [_{ComP} \quad t_Y \quad [_{vP} \quad t_X \quad [_{VP} \text{watch a movie }]]]]]].$$

(AGREE annotations over the bracketed structure)

AGREE-related assumptions. We assume that pronouns have person (π) and number (#) features, based on the following hierarchies: PERS > PART > SPKR, ADDR and NUM > PLUR. We assume with [10], [11] that a Probe can agree independently with different DPs and comes with a hierarchy of subfeatures for π and #, which define satisfaction conditions. In particular we stipulate that the Probe present in I-PCC configurations is searching for (1) a SPKR π-feature; (2) a PLUR #-feature. With [11], we assume that PCC-like effects occur in *Feature Gluttony* configurations, whereby a Probe has agreed with two different DPs, leading to an impossibility to clitisize both of them at the same time. This can only happen when the higher DP is featurally poor and does not fully satisfy the Probe, leading it to search for a lower, featurally richer DP. **Novel assumption.** We finally stipulate that "there is No Gluttony Under Concurrency" (**NGUC** for short). By that, we mean that if a Probe has a target-feature F (e.g., SPKR), and ends up agreeing with a DP with a feature F' that is "concurrent" with F, meaning, a sister of F within the given feature hierarchy, then, F' get copied on the Probe but remains "outstanding": namely, if agreement with a subsequent goal yields the desired feature F, then F' will be allowed to be locally substituted by F on the Probe. In brief, agreement with two DPs having "concurrent", same-level features, one of them being the explicit goal of the Probe, leads to only *one* copied feature on the Probe, thus preventing Gluttony. **Deriving *{1, 2}+3.** Since the π-Probe's target is a SPKR feature, it will agree with the 2 clitics iff the first one (cl_Y) is 3 (PERS) or 2 (ADDR). However, according to the NGUC hypothesis, if cl_Y is 2, then agreement with a second 1st person clitic will be "digestible" because ADDR and SPKR are concurrent features. As a result, the combination $\{cl_Y = tu_2\} + \{cl_X = moi_1\}$ will be rescued from gluttony and generate the feature SPKR on π. The combinations $\{cl_Y = il_3/elle_3\} + \{cl_X = moi_1/toi_2 \}$ however, remain gluttonous, as desired. **Conclusion.** We accounted for person-restrictions in the French "inclusive" PPC using the concept of Feature Gluttony supplemented by the idea that agreeing with 2 Probes having the same level of specification (e.g. SPKR and ADDR) is better than agreeing with 2 Probes, one being the refinement of the other (e.g. PERS and PART). This line of analysis might be extended to French copular constructions, which, like the German ones, seem to exhibit subtle superiority effects (e.g. *il_3 est moi_1*, 'he is me') [11]. Finally, the disappearance of the I-reading when the *with*+DP complex appears post-verbally (e.g. *$Nous_{2.PL}$ sommes allés avec $toi_{2.PL}$ au ciné*) might be explained in our framework by an impossibility for T to agree with a pronoun that has already agreed with the lower P-head.

References

[1] M. Vassilieva and R. K. Larson, "The semantics of the plural pronoun construction," *Natural Language Semantics*, 2005. ★[2] S. Cable, "Some observations on the plural pronoun construction of tlingit, polish, and russian," in *A Pesky Set: Papers for David Pesetsky*, 2017. ★[3] T. Turgay and B. Öztürk, "Structure of plural pronoun constructions," in *Studies in Language Companion Series*, John Benjamins, 2020. ★[4] S. Dyła, "Quasi-comitative coordination in polish," *Linguistics*, 1988. ★[5] W. Meyer-Lübke, *Grammatik der Romanischen Sprachen, vol. 3*. 1899. ★[6] D. M. Perlmutter, *Deep and Surface Structure Constraints in Syntax*. 1971. ★[7] E. Bonet, "Morphology after syntax: Pronominal clitics in romance languages," Ph.D. dissertation, MIT, 1991. ★[8] K. Riedel, "The syntax of object marking in sambaa: A comparative bantu perspective," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Leiden, 2009. ★[9] R. S. Kayne, "Prepositions as probes," in *Movement and Silence*, 2005. ★[10] A. R. Deal, "Interaction and satisfaction in Φ-agreement," in *NELS 45*, 2015. ★[11] J. Coon and S. Keine, "Feature gluttony," *Linguistic Inquiry*, 2021. ★