Superiority effects and the French Plural Pronoun Construction¹

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March 19, 2023

The Penn Linguistics Conference 47

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

- French comitatives are introduced by the preposition *avec* (‘with’) and can appear at various places in the sentence.

(1) a. *Avec Jean*, Marie est allée au cinéma.
   With Jean, Marie is gone to the movie theater.
   ‘With Jean, Marie went to the movies.’

b. Marie est allée *avec Jean* au cinéma.
   Marie is gone with Jean to the movie theater.
   ‘With Jean, Marie went to the movies.’

c. Marie est allée au cinéma *avec Jean*.
   Marie is gone to the movie theater with Jean.
   ‘With Jean, Marie went to the movies.’

- Following the past literature (Matushansky and Ionin, 2002 a.o), we call the main subject of the sentences in (1) the **associate** of the comitative phrase, and the complement of *with* the **comitative DP**.
When the associate is a plural pronoun, two readings of the French comitative construction are available: an exclusive (“E”) reading and an inclusive (“I”) reading.

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

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

The I-reading will be the focus of this talk.

Following the past literature (starting with Vassilieva and Larson, 2005), we call the comitative construction in (2) Plural Pronoun Construction (PPC).
(2)  

(Avec Jean, nous sommes allés au cinéma. With Jean, we are gone to the movie theater.

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

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

• The I-reading has been previously documented in Russian (Vassilieva and Larson, 2005), Polish (Dyła, 1988), Turkish (Turgay and Öztürk, 2020) Tlingit (Cable, 2017), among others.

• Under the I-reading, the comitative DP seems to be “counted in” the interpretation of the associate plural pronoun (s.t. we = Jean and I in (2)).

• We will call the interpretation of the associate “minus” the comitative DP (e.g. I in (2)) the “underlying associate”.

3
Asymmetries with two pronouns

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

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

... sommes/êtes/sont allés au cinéma.

- The bracketed person combinations in (3) define possible I-readings of the associate; for instance, \text{nous} (1.PL), can be understood as you and I, where I also refers to the comitative DP.

- (3) then shows that a 1.SG or 2.SG comitative DP cannot be "counted in" the plural associate, if it is underlyingly 3.SG.

- All other pragmatically plausible\(^1\) combinations of I-readings appear grammatically possible.

\(^1\)The combinations 1+1 and 2+2 are not pragmatically plausible under the I-reading because they would involve a comitative DP identical to the underlying associate, which is weird. Setting up a de se scenario fixes this weirdness and results in grammaticality.
(4) General form of the I-reading (X and Y are singular entities):

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Y →</th>
<th>je\textsubscript{1.SG}</th>
<th>tu\textsubscript{2.SG}</th>
<th>il\textsubscript{3.SG}</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avec X ↓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>moi\textsubscript{1.SG}</td>
<td>nous\textsubscript{1.PL} # moi+je</td>
<td>nous\textsubscript{1.PL} = moi+tu</td>
<td>nous\textsubscript{1.PL} * moi+il</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>toi\textsubscript{2.SG}</td>
<td>nous\textsubscript{1.PL} = toi+je</td>
<td>vous\textsubscript{2.PL} # toi+tu</td>
<td>vous\textsubscript{2.PL} * toi+il</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lui\textsubscript{3.SG}</td>
<td>nous\textsubscript{1.PL} = lui+je</td>
<td>vous\textsubscript{2.PL} = lui+tu</td>
<td>ils\textsubscript{3.PL} = lui+il</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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

- We argue that the superiority effects witnessed in the French “Inclusive” PPC are a manifestation of the Weak Person Case Constraint (Weak PCC).
- Building on Deal’s Dynamic Satisfaction & Interaction framework (Deal, 2022), we will propose a concrete solution to the puzzle.
- We will finally discuss potential objections to the account, and further implications thereof.
The proposal
• The Person Case Constraint (PCC) is a constraint on the co-occurrence of personal pronouns in double Agree configurations – typically ditransitive constructions.

• The Weak PCC (Perlmutter, 1971; Bonet, 1991; Riedel, 2009; Stegovec, 2019 a.o.) is an variant of this constraint, stating that a 3rd person dative cannot co-occur with a 1st/2nd person accusative/absolutive pronoun.

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

a. * A en Josep, me li va recomanar la Mireia. to the Josep 1.ACC.CL 3.DAT.CL recommended the Mireia Intended: ‘She (Mireia) recommended me to him (Josep).’

b. * A en Josep, te li va recomanar la Mireia. to the Josep 2.ACC.CL 3.DAT.CL recommended the Mireia Intended: ‘She (Mireia) recommended you to him (Josep).’
Deal’s account of the different flavors of the PCC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IO</th>
<th>DO</th>
<th>Strong</th>
<th>Weak</th>
<th>Me-first</th>
<th>Ultrastrong</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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

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

- We assume the following person feature hierarchy:

\[
\Phi > \text{Part} > \text{Spkr, Addr}
\]

- We assume double-$\text{Agree}$ occurs in $T$, an insatiable probe ($S: -$) which initially interacts with $\Phi$-features ($I: \Phi$); \textbf{but will only interact with} $\text{Part}$ features once a $\text{Part}$ feature has been agreed with:

\[
T: \begin{bmatrix}
I: \Phi \\
S: -
\end{bmatrix}
\]

\[
\text{Agree}(T, \text{Part}) \implies T: \begin{bmatrix}
I: \text{Part} \\
S: -
\end{bmatrix}
\]
Connecting our data to the Weak PCC (our own assumptions)

- Based on the restrictions in Table 1:
  - X in the French PPC seems analog to a **Direct Object**, i.e. is agreed with **first**;
  - Y seems analog to an **Indirect Object**, i.e. is agreed with **second**. We assume it is base-generated in Spec-ComP (for “COMitative”).

- We assume that agreement with T triggers movement to Spec-TP; if T agrees twice, then the **second element “tucks-in”** below the already existing specifier (Richards, 1997; McGinnis, 1998; Rackowski and Richards, 2005 a.o.).

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

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²Not crucial to our present account, but worth keeping in mind if one wants to see *avec* (‘with’) as a probing P rather than an agreement marker (as we do here).
Deriving the \(\{1, 2\} + \{1, 2\}\) readings

**Figure 2:** Agree with the Participant associate \((Y)\), leading to an update of the interaction condition on \(T\) \((\Phi \rightarrow \text{Part})\), and movement of \(Y\) to Spec-TP.

**Figure 3:** Agree with the Participant with-DP \((X)\), which satisfies the updated interaction condition; subsequent movement of \(X\) to Spec-TP (“tucking-in”).
Deriving the $\{1, 2\} + \{1, 2\}$ readings cont’d

Figure 4: Representation of $\{1, 2\} + \{1, 2\}$ configurations after T-probing
Deriving the 3+3 reading

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

**Figure 6:** Agree with the non-Participant *with*-DP (X), which satisfies the original interaction condition; X “tucks in” Spec-TP.
Deriving the 3+3 reading cont’d

Figure 7: Representation of the 3+3 configuration after T-probing
Deriving the \( *\{1, 2\} + 3 \) reading

**Figure 8:** Agree with the Participant associate (Y), leading to an update of the interaction condition on T (\( \Phi \rightarrow \text{Part} \)), and movement of Y to Spec-TP.

**Figure 9:** Failure of Agree with the non-Participant with-DP (X), which does not satisfy the updated interaction condition.
Getting to the surface form

- All successful **Agree** configurations end up with Y in the higher Spec-TP and X in the lower Spec-TP.
- We assume that *avec* (‘with’) is a reflex of **Agree** between T and Y.
- **Avec** Y is then **topicalized** (to yield the word order in e.g. (1a)) or **extraposed** (to yield the word order in e.g. (1c)), leaving a trace in the higher Spec-TP.
- This trace is incorporated with X to surface as pro<sub>X+Y</sub>, whose features result from the percolation of Φ<sub>X</sub> and Φ<sub>Y</sub>.

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3We think that when the comitative DP appears medially, as in (1b), the I-reading is disfavored.
Discussion
An issue with Pronoun Weakness?

• The definition of the PCC generally restricts the phenomenon to **phonologically “weak” elements**: clitics, agreement markers, and weak pronouns.

• This claim is supported in French by the possibility to repair (Strong) PCC violations in ditransitives *via* the use of a “tonic” dative pronoun instead of a clitic as in (6) below (Rezac, 2011 a.o.).

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(6) a. } & \quad \text{* Jean } \underline{\text{me}} \quad \underline{\text{lui}} \quad \text{présentera.} \\
& \quad \text{Jean 1.ACC.CL 3.DAT.CL introduce.FUT} \\
& \quad \text{Intended: ‘Jean will introduce me to him/her.’} \\
\text{b. } & \quad \text{Jean } \underline{\text{me}} \quad \text{présentera } \text{à } \underline{\text{lui/elle}.} \\
& \quad \text{Jean 1.ACC.CL introduce.FUT to 1.ACC} \\
& \quad \text{‘Jean will introduce me to him/her.’}
\end{align*}
\]

• In the French Plural Pronoun Construction (of the form *With pro}_{X} pro}_{X+Y} \text{ VP*}, the subject *pro}_{X+Y} \text{ appears weak*} (Cardinaletti and Starke, 1999 a.o.), *but pro}_{X} \text{ definitely is not*}, given that it has the exact same form as the PCC-repairing pronoun in (6b)!
PCC effects do not actually correlate with Pronoun Weakness

- PCC-like restrictions have been witnessed in languages in which one of the two objects is not realized in a weak form:
  - Tlaxcala Náhuatl (and many other languages, cf. Deal, 2022 for an overview) exhibits the Strong PCC, despite the absence of overt Direct Object marking on the verb;
  - Same in Swahili with the Weak PCC (Riedel, 2009; Deal, 2015)

- Moreover Sheehan, 2020 notes that French faire-à causatives exhibit the Strong PCC when the Indirect Object is explicitly "strong", i.e. would rescue PCC violations in constructions such as (6b)!

- These data can be reconciled in Deal’s framework (the one we used here!), which unlike (Bianchi, 2006; Stegovec, 2017; Coon and Keine, 2021 a.o.) is not dependent on morphosyntactic constraints such as cliticization.
Linking our puzzle to faire-à causatives

(7) Postal’s “fancy constraint” (Postal, 1989), adapted from (Sheehan, 2020)
   a. Marcel t’ a fait épouser \{*à/par\} ce médecin.  
      Marcel 2.SG has made marry.INF \{to/by\} this doctor  
      Intended: ‘Marcel had this doctor marry you.’

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

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

   • The same preposition (à) that rescues (7b) from a PCC-violation  
     seems to trigger a similar violation in the faire-à causative in (7a)!

   • Deal, 2022 proposes that à in the causative structure is an  
     agreement marker, which makes à ce médecin in (7a) analog to a  
     clitic as far as agreement is concerned. We think the same can hold  
     for avec in the French PPC.
Conclusion and further implications

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


