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**On the status of subject clitics in Colloquial French:  
Evidence from "expletive" *il* and "negative" *ne***

It is well-known that in Colloquial French, 'weak' subject pronouns show typical morpho-phonological and distributional properties of affixes, whence the frequent claim that they constitute agreement affixes, rather than clitics. One morphological argument in favor of such an analysis pertains to impersonal constructions. As shown by Auger (1993), in Colloquial French, constructions with verbs such as  *falloir* 'to require' frequently have the subject pronoun  *il* omitted, contrary to other impersonal constructions, e.g. constructions with weather verbs:

- (1) (Il) faut y aller  
it requires there to-go 'We must go there.'
- (2) \*(Il) pleut beaucoup  
it rains a-lot 'It is raining a lot'

Auger accounts for these observations by arguing that in their sets of combinations in Colloquial French, 'weak' subject pronouns show arbitrary gaps, considered to be more characteristic of affixes than of clitics (Zwicky & Pullum 1983).

A distributional argument in favor of the affixal analysis of 'weak' subject pronouns is based on the observation that in Colloquial French, the co-occurrence of these pronouns and (pro)nominal subject DPs is highly frequent.

- (3) Jean il a parlé.  
John he has spoken 'John has spoken'

Specifically, such constructions are not considered instances of left dislocation, since it is claimed that in the wake of their overuse, the 'weak' subject pronouns have lost their status as clitics and have become agreement affixes (Sankoff 1982, Culbertson 2010).

In this talk, I will critically discuss these two arguments, showing that they do not adequately take into consideration the empirical data. First, I will challenge Auger's morphological account of "expletive"  *il* by data such as in (4) which seem to indicate that the omission of  *il* in impersonal constructions with verbs like  *falloir* is restricted to main clauses, hence underlies syntactic constraints:

- (4) Mais enfin  $\emptyset$  fallait ce qu' il fallait. (R. Queneau, *Zazie dans le métro*)  
but finally requires it that it requires 'We must do what we must do.'

Second, I will tackle the issue of the distribution of 'weak' subject pronouns together with other subject elements. One crucial difficulty which pertains to corpora of spoken French is the distinction between Standard French and Colloquial French, since it is only with regard to the latter that the affixal analysis of subject clitics has been adopted. The starting point of my study is the finding that the omission of "negative"  *ne* is a typical characteristic of Colloquial French only, evidenced by the observation that this omission is obligatory when "expletive"  *il* is omitted, as shown in (5) (Massot 2010):

- (5)  $\emptyset$  (\*ne) faut pas y aller  
NEG requires not there to-go 'We shall not go there.'

Based on this observation, the talk will focus on constructions in which this  *ne* is omitted, taken to be unequivocal instances of Colloquial French. The hypothesis I hereby adopt is that in such constructions, these subject pronouns should not be omitted, unless they are "expletives" (cf. (5)). Yet, these constructions are encountered:

- (6) Faut vous dire que maman  $\emptyset$  pouvait pas blairer papa (R. Queneau, *Zazie dans le métro*)  
requires you to-say that mummy could not to-stand daddy 'One must say to you that mummy could not stand daddy'

In my talk, I will investigate the frequency of such constructions and discuss the implication of the latter for an affixal analysis of subject clitics in Colloquial French.

## References:

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