

Factors affecting the use of impersonal *il* in Spoken French: implications for change in the clitic system.

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The goal of this talk is provide a nuanced description of the factors affecting use of the pleonastic clitic *il* in impersonal constructions in Spoken (Colloquial) French. It is fairly uncontroversial that there are some contexts in which *il* can be dropped (e.g. *(il) faut que je pars*) and others in which it cannot (e.g. **(il) neige*), however there is significantly grey area between these two points. I will show, using data from formal acceptability judgment tasks, that the availability of *il*-drop in fact follows a hierarchy of construction classes, proposed by Travis (1986), which predicts possible cutoff points for null subject use typologically based on the level of referentiality of the subject in each construction type. This result has important implications for the broader debate concerning the status of subject clitics in Spoken French (Auger 1996; De Cat 2007; Culbertson 2010); if these clitics are agreement markers rather than true pronominal subjects, then Spoken French should be considered a null subject language, predicting the availability of null-impersonal subjects and potentially an effect of the level of referentiality of the subject in a given impersonal construction on the likelihood of dropping *il*. I also discuss the role of frequency in *il*-drop, and the interaction between impersonal *il* and the retention of the negative particle *ne* which is optionally dropped in Spoken French but appears to be sensitive to the presence of subject clitics.