Topic-comment resumptive pronouns in Modern French and Old and Middle French

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Topic-comment structures in Old and Middle French allow null resumptive pronouns in the comment clause when the topic is referential, whereas the resumptive pronoun must be overt in Modern French. I explore this difference in terms of feature checking on the resumptive pronoun (Uriagereka 1995, Sportiche 1996) within Rizzi’s (1997) split CP system. I suggest that referential features are overtly checked in archaic French, establishing the necessary predication relation between the topic and the empty category in the comment clause before Spell-Out. On the other hand, these features are covertly checked in Modern French, so that the predication relation is dependant on an overtly realized object clitic at Spell-Out. Feature strength is understood to be a function of the categorial status of the object clitic, argued to be morphologically weaker in Modern French. Instances of clitic-drop are therefore seen to be significantly different during the two stages of French.

0 Introduction

This work examines topic-comment structures in Old French (OF) and Middle French (MidF) in which null resumptive pronouns are permitted in the matrix clause (1a, 2a) unlike the corresponding structures in Modern French (ModF) (1b, 2b). When the topic consists of a referential item corresponding to the direct internal argument in the comment, it must be coindexed with a resumptive pronoun in ModF: 2

\[ \text{(La bleue, je prends __.) (Fonagy 1985, 9)} \]

The blue one, I’m taking

\[ \text{‘The blue one, I’m taking’} \]

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1 These kinds of expressions are known by several denominations: left dislocation structures, reprise constructions (Priestly 1955), Clitic Left Dislocation (CLLD) (Cinque 1990).

2 Non-referential direct objects and lexically restricted quantified expressions do not require resumptive pronouns in the matrix in OF/MidF, nor do they in ModF, when they occur as topics. These cases will not be discussed here. A restricted class of verbs in ModF, aimer, adorer, connaître, permit topic-comment structures without a resumptive pronoun. Moreover, Fonagy (1985) identifies a similar structure with the verb prendre (to take):

\[ \text{(La bleue, je prends __.) (Fonagy 1985, 9)} \]

‘The blue one, I’m taking’
This paper explores why OF and MidF allow null resumptive pronouns in the matrix clause of a topic-comment structure, or conversely, why ModF does not permit them. In the spirit of recent work on clitic pronouns in Romance languages (Uriagereka 1995, Sportiche 1996, Corver & Delfitto 1999), I explore the possibility that overt vs. covert movement into the checking position of the resumptive pronoun may provide some answers. My analysis adopts the notion of Familiar features (also known as specificity, or definiteness) encoded in a left peripheral functional projection for which clitic movement is semantically motivated (as opposed to morpho-phonologically motivated). I build on the importance of overt and covert operations, particularly with respect to establishing the predication relation between the referential topic and the empty

However, if a *Wh*-element is introduced, the structure is considerably less acceptable:

(ii) (*?) La bleue, qui prend ___?
    ‘The blue one, who is taking?’

The same is observed for a pair such as:

(iii) Ce film, j’adore __.
    ‘This film, I adore’

(iv) (*?) Ce film, qui adore ___?
    ‘This film, who adores?’

Typically, topic-comment structures of the Romance kind (see section 1) are not affected by the introduction of a *Wh*-element. I will assume then, that ModF structures such as these are not representative of Romance-type topic-comment structures. I have no insights to offer here about why these particular expressions are acceptable but structures such as (1b) are not.
category in the comment3. This paper is part of a larger work that examines the licensing of internal arguments and diachronic valency change in French.

In section 1, I argue that OF/MidF topic-comment structures are of the Romance kind – as in the case of ModF – and not of the English kind, which involves operator movement and no resumptive pronoun. I adopt criteria proposed in Cinque (1990) to make the distinction between these two types of languages and Rizzi’s (1997) proposal of a split CP system to represent it. Section 2 briefly reviews previous interpretations of OF/MidF topic-comment structures. Section 3 treats topic-comment structures in ModF. I adopt a representation of ModF object clitics as verbal affixes and show that their familiar features are checked covertly under a functional head in the left periphery. Some implications this has for the interpretation of clitic-drop constructions are discussed. Section 4 treats topic-comment structures in OF/MidF. OF/MidF object pronouns are considered to be weak pronouns, and the relative syntactic autonomy of these pronouns is shown to be crucial to overt feature checking of familiarity, ultimately permitting null resumptive pronouns in the matrix clause of topic-comment structures. I finish with concluding remarks in section 5.

1 Topic-comment structures

1.1 English vs. Romance-type topic-comment structures

According to Rizzi’s (1997) split CP system, the topic-comment structure consists of a preposed element (a referential direct object, in our case), the topic, which is set off from the rest of the clause by a pause. It expresses old information available in the previous discourse. The comment is an open sentence (the internal argument is “missing”) predicated of the topic. It generally introduces new information. Rizzi discusses two types of topic-comment structures, the English kind (3) and the Romance kind (4).

(3)  Your booki, you should give ti to Paul (not to Bill).  (Rizzi 1997, 285)

(4)  Ton livrei, tu devrais lei donner à Paul (non pas Bill).

The English-type topic-comment structure is seen to be a relationship held between the element in topic and an empty operator that has moved from its argument position in VP to the head of FinP in the left periphery. The operator binds the empty category (a variable) in argument position to its antecedent (the topic) in Spec,TopP, much like a relative pronoun would.

(5)  \[\text{TopP} \text{Your booki Top} [\text{FinP Op}_i [\text{ip you should give ti to Paul}]]\]

The distinction between overt and covert syntax has parallels with the levels of representation in the GB framework. For example, parasitic gaps require movement of the Wh-element at S-Structure. The same point applies here for coreferencing between the topic and the comment in overt syntax.

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The Romance-type topic-comment structure is understood on one hand to be an agreement relationship held between the resumptive pronoun (or clitic) and an empty category in argument position, and on the other hand, a standard binding relation (c-command, coindexation) between the topic and the clitic\(^4\). There is, thus, no operator involved.

(6) \([\text{Top} \ \text{Ton livre}, \ \text{Top} \ [\text{IP} \ tu \ devrais \ le, \ donner \ \text{à Paul}]\])

Topic-comment structures differ from a similar structure known as focus-presupposition. Focus-presupposition is characterized by \textit{Wh}-like movement of the internal argument into the left periphery. In addition, the preposed argument represents new information and bears intonational stress. This structure doesn’t seem to exist in ModF, but it is attested in other Romance languages.

(7) a. THAT BOOK\(_i\) I like \(t_i\) (not this one).

b. \([\text{FocP} \text{That book}, \ \text{Foc} \ [\text{IP} \ I \ like \ t_i]]\)

The A-bar movement involved in English-type topic-comment and focus-presupposition structures distinguishes them from Romance-type topic-comment constructions. Movement in the former structures entails a certain amount of blocking effects. For instance, English-type topic-comment expressions cannot co-occur with a \textit{Wh}-element, as shown in (8b), since head-to-head movement by the verb to Foc (the specifier of which contains the \textit{Wh}-element) would be blocked if the lower head, Fin, were occupied by the null operator binding its trace to the topic. As for the focus-presupposition construction, Cinque (1990) and Rizzi (1997) show that focused elements are quantificational and thus in complementary distribution with \textit{Wh}-elements (9b).

(8) a. This movie\(_i\), I saw \(t_i\) last week (not this week).

b. *This movie\(_i\), who saw \(t_i\) last week?

(9) a. THIS MOVIE\(_i\) I saw \(t_i\) last week (not that one).

b. *THIS MOVIE\(_i\) who saw \(t_i\) last week?

On the other hand, Romance-type topic-comment structures are perfectly acceptable in an interrogative structure:

(10) a. Ce film\(_i\), je l’\(i\) ai vu la semaine dernière.

\begin{quote}
this film I it have seen the week last
\end{quote}

‘I saw this film last week’

\(^4\) Rizzi assumes a Kayne-like (1991, 1994) relationship between the clitic and the empty category, where the clitic moves as an XP and then undergoes head incorporation with the verb. The empty category is understood to be a trace. An alternative analysis is adopted here, outlined in Section 3.
b. Ce film, qui l’a vu la semaine dernière?
   this film who it has seen the week last
   ‘Who saw this film last week?’

It is precisely the apparent lack of A-bar movement that defines OF and MidF topic-comment structures without a resumptive pronoun as being of the Romance kind, not the English kind.

1.2 Topic-comment in Old and Middle French

In this section, I show that Old and Middle French topic-comment structures with null resumptive pronouns should not be mistaken for English-type structures or focus-presupposition expressions. Nor do they represent a V2-OV(S) sequence. As grammaticality judgement tests are unavailable for the OF/MidF data, left dislocation structures taken from a range of texts are used to illustrate that these are not cases of movement of an operator or of an argument to the left periphery. Finally, the data suggest that comment clauses with null resumptive pronouns are structurally and semantically equivalent to those containing overt resumptive pronouns.

Examples (11-12) demonstrate that OF topic-comment structures can be interrogatives, characteristic of the Romance-type that do not involve A-bar movement, and unlike English-type structures:

(11) [Vostre terre] qui defandra ec?
        [your land] who will-defend ec
   ‘Who will defend your land?’  (Arteaga 1997, 2: Chanson de Lyon 1617)

(12) [Cest nostre rei], por coi lessas ec PROi cunfundre?
        [This-one our king] why (you) let ec PROi flounder
   ‘Why do you let our king flounder?’  (Arteaga 1997, 2: Roland 1.2583)

Example (2a) reproduced below, offers an interesting example of a Romance-type topic-comment structure in which the empty category does not behave as a variable since it is not constrained by subjacency. Movement of an operator into Fin would be blocked by the subordinate complementizer de heading the infinitival phrase. And, if les letres were a focused element characterized by Wh-type movement, the movement would presumably be blocked by the DP constituent mes usages.

(13) Car [TopP les letres que li messages aportoit,]Top [Ip c’estoit [DP mes usages
        [CP de [Ip regarder ec i avant toute oeuvre]]]].

These OF and MidF topic-comment structures, and those that follow, do not represent cases of V2-OV(S) structures. Using the diagnostic of postverbal subjects as an indication of verb raising into the CP layer (taken here to be FinP), one can distinguish...
between topic-comment structures without a resumptive pronoun in the matrix clause, and a typical V2-OV(S) structure such as that in (14) and given schematically in (15).

(14) Quatre saietes ot li bers au costé
four arrows had the baron at-the side
‘The baron carried four arrows at his side’ (Hasenohr 2000, 232: Charroi 21)

(15) \[ \text{FinPQuatre saietes}_{k} \text{ ot}_{i} \text{ [IP li bers}_{j} \text{ ti} ... \text{[vP ti} vP[vP ti} t_{k}]]) ]

It would appear then, that topic-comment structures without pronominal reprise in OF and MidF are neither instances of V2-fronted elements nor do they involve operator-like movement, characteristic of similar structures in English. Rather, the structures in OF/MidF behave more like those found in ModF, except coreferencing with an overt resumptive pronoun in the matrix clause is not required. I will assume that these structures contain resumptive pronouns, but that these elements are not phonologically realized.

Topic-comment structures in OF/MidF can also have overt pronominal reprise in the matrix clause. The examples that follow attempt to show that if there exist structural environments favouring null resumptive pronouns in the comment clause, the available data have not brought them to light. In fact, for every comment clause in which an overt resumptive pronoun does not appear, a similar structure can be found where the pronoun is realized.\(^5\)

Simple DP topics are attested both with and without a resumptive pronoun:

(16) Ses dras \(i\), il les \(i\) ostad \(\bar{e}\) od les altres prophetizad devant Samuel.
his clothes \(i\), he them \(i\) took-off and with the others he prophesied before Samuel
‘His clothes, he took off, and with the others he prophesied before Samuel.’
(Härmä 1990, 163: Livre des Reis, 39,76)

(17) Et ce conseil, nous vous donnons \(\bar{c}c\).
and this counsel we to-you give \(\bar{c}c\)
‘And this counsel, we give you.’
(Adams, 1987, 195: Chroniques XII, 152, 16)

Modal verbs do not seem to trigger either the presence or the absence of the resumptive pronoun:

(18) Les deuxiesmes \(i\), on les \(i\) doit aussi ouyr,
the second ones \(i\), we they \(i\) must also hear
‘The second ones, we must also hear.’
(Écrits politiques I 456, 25)

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\(^5\) Given the evidence that movement is not involved in OF/MidF topic-comment structures, I assume that the following examples, although not all are candidates for Wh-movement and subjacency tests, likewise represent the same type of structure. In order to rule out the possibility that some may be focus-presupposition expressions, the topic has been identified as old information from the context.
(19) Ceste persuasion, tu puex aussi fonder en la nature.
‘This reasoning, you can also base in nature.’

(Combettes 1989, 340: Archiologue 109)

Matrix clauses with and without a resumptive pronoun can follow a topic modified by a relative clause:

(20) Comme j’ai dit, [cest abbaye qui n’a cy point de nom] les predecesseurs de Madame lai fondirent.
‘As I said, the ancestors of Madame founded this abbey which still hasn’t a name.’

(Vance 1997, 284: Saintré 244, 12)

(21) Et [l’entreprise qu’il avoit sur icelle place] il fist savoir d’Angleterre.
‘And he made it known to the king of England the design that he had on this place’

(Vance 1997, 284: Saintré 244, 12)

Interrogative sentences with a direct object in topic position don’t appear to favour the presence or absence of a resumptive pronoun in the comment:

(22) [Ces 3 petits morceaulx becuz], / lesi m’appelez vous pilloueres?
‘These 3 little black things, are you telling me that they’re pills?’

(Maistre Pathelin 98)

(23) Cellai ne vous ay je pas dist ec?
‘Did I not tell you this?’

(Mystère de la Passion 3141)

Imperatives can also form topic-comment structures that appear with and without a resumptive pronoun:
et [celi que je vous envoie a present], voellies le, prendre en gre
and [that-one that I to-you send at present], (you) want SUBJ it, to-take at will
‘and that which I am sending you at present, please accept willingly’

(Härmä 1993, 720: La Prison 103)

[Les mau que avés fais], metés en oublier cci.
[i, put IMP to-forget cci]
‘The wrongs that you have done, try to forget.’

(Härmä 1990, 175: La Chanson d’Antioche 7190)

[Les mau que avés fais], pensés de l’amender.
[i, think IMP of it i to-amend]
‘Think about amending the wrongs that you have done’

(Härmä 1990, 175: La Chanson d’Antioche 7190 ms C)

Examples (25-26) show different readings, from the same text, of a topic-comment construction in the imperative; one takes the resumptive pronoun, the other doesn’t. Although they are not minimal pairs, it is interesting to note that ms C inserts a resumptive pronoun to maintain the meter, but can only use the singular form, because the agreeing plural would add an unwanted syllable. Taken from verse, these examples illustrate an apparent flexibility in terms of including the resumptive pronoun in the matrix clause - and perhaps a sensitivity to dysphony, such as what metés en l’oublier might give for (25).

There may be evidence that the immediate phonetic environment has some say about whether or not the accusative resumptive pronoun is realized with dative pronouns and negatives, for example. Yet, besides the similarity to the phenomenon of écrasement, I am unaware that these possible examples of reduction are well represented in other contexts.

The data do not show that resumptive pronouns are sensitive to aspect, nor do they suggest that the absence of the resumptive pronoun in the matrix is preferred by a certain semantic class of verbs. Likewise, sociolinguistic or discourse factors do not seem to favour the absence of pronominal reprise. The texts examined represent a range of registers, from verse to prose and from formal registers (Juvenal, Legrand) to more colloquial ones (Maistre Pathelin). Moreover, Härmä (1990, 1993) observes that while constructions with a resumptive pronoun are clearly more frequent in the texts, not a single text seems to have a preference for topic-comment structures either with or without a resumptive pronoun in the matrix. Whatever the subtle (or perhaps not so subtle) reasons a speaker had for choosing one form over the other is not evident from the available data.

To sum up, the data suggest that both the presence and the absence of pronominal reprise in the comment of a topic-comment structure are possible in equivalent structural contexts. Therefore, in the absence of any contradictory evidence, I assume that when the comment clause does not contain an overt resumptive clitic, this element is still present in its null form in the underlying structure.
2 Previous accounts

Rizzi assumes a relationship between the clitic and the empty category much like that described in Kayne (1991, 1994), where the clitic moves as an XP, undergoing head incorporation via a functional projection containing the verb. The clitic is thus an overt pronominal head that licenses a trace in argument position. Rizzi rules out the possibility of a null clitic in the comment on the grounds that, to license its trace, it must, as the head of a chain, be an overt lexical item. Otherwise the trace is unidentified, a clear violation of the ECP. The trace status of the empty category in argument position is therefore ill suited to address the OF/MidF topic-comment structures described thus far. I adopt an alternative representation of the clitics in section 3 that treats the clitic-empty category relation as a licensing relation between an agreement morpheme and a null pronominal, pro (Roberge 1990, Uriagereka 1995, Sportiche 1996, Corver & Delfitto 1999, among others).

Adams (1987) claims that topic-comment structures without pronominal reprise were generated as V2 structures. Among others (see references cited there), she observes that the sequence OSV is generally attested only in contexts where the subject is pronominal. Adams maintains that MidF subject pronouns were optional syntactic clitics on the verb, therefore allowing OsV (s=subject pronoun) sequences to conform to strict V2 constraints: $[\text{SpecCP O } [\text{CP s+V [IP ... ]}]]$. It was only after MidF lost its V2 requirement (at the end of the 15th century, according to Adams) that these structures would be generated as topic-comment structures: $[\text{SpecCPX [IP s oV ... ]}](o=object pronoun)$. Both Priestley (1955) and Härmä (1993) observe that there was a decrease in non-reprise OSV sequences and an increase in reprise XSoV structures during the MidF period, which would corroborate Adams’ thesis. However, her analysis of OsV sequences as representations of V2 structures has been independently questioned by both Clark and Roberts (1993) and Vance (1997) on theoretical grounds. Moreover, Kroch (1989) shows empirically that there is no reason to assume that OsV sequences represent pure V2 constructions. He points out that topicalized direct objects can indeed be separated from the main V2 clause. (27) is a good example of such a case. (28) shows that topic-comment structures did not occur exclusively with subject pronouns.

(27) [Cels qu’ ils unt mort], ben les i poet hom priser.  
[those that they have killed], well they i could one to-praise
‘Those that they killed, one could praise indeed.’

(Priestly 1955, 10: Roland 1683)

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6 She sees OSV (and XSV sequences in general) as crucial to the loss of V2 cues in MidF.
‘And while they danced, Madame’s eyes did not cease to look at the young
Saintré, so well did he sing and dance’

(Vance 1997, 283 : Saintré 55, 32)

Yet, topic-comment structures should be marked in a V2 grammar. Kroch (1989)
presents a convincing argument (based on Adams’ work and insights) as to why such
structures would arise in OF. He proposes that topic-comment structures (with
pronounal reprise) increased in frequency as a topicalization strategy. As initial phrasal
accent diminished, V2-topicalized arguments no longer fell within a strongly accented
position. According to Kroch, these constituents would consequently be placed, for
semantico-pragmatic reasons, into an intonation phrase separate from the one containing
the subject and the verb.

In her analysis of null objects in OF, Arteaga (1997) discusses cases of left
dislocation (two of them are cited here). She identifies these structures as equivalent to
those containing a resumptive pronoun and argues that the empty category in argument
position is pro. In terms of the licensing of pro, she suggests an analysis similar to that
given for Brazilian Portuguese in Bianchi & Figueiredo Silva (1994). Her analysis
proposes that the parameter for licensing referential pro in argument position is the
specification of the features Number and Person in AgrO. Arteaga maintains that AgrO
has optionally strong nominal features, but admits that there is no evidence, syntactic or
morphological, that AgrO contains a strong Person feature in OF. She leaves the question
open for further research. Interestingly, the importance of the feature Person figures
significantly in Uriagereka’s (1995) analysis of clitics, as does the feature Human in
Corver & Delfitto (1999) and Cardinaletti & Starke (1999). This notion will be addressed
in Section 3 and 4.

In sum, Rizzi’s analysis of a clitic-trace relationship in the comment is
incompatible with the possibility of a null object clitic in OF/MidF comment clauses.
Adams’ interpretation of OsV sequences as main V2 clauses do not seem to account for
the empirical evidence, while Kroch’s reinterpretation does. Arteaga offers valuable
insight into the pronominal nature of referential null objects in OF that is directly relevant
to the analysis adopted here for topic-comment structures. This paper builds on questions
she raises about the licensing of pro in OF.
3 Topic-comment in Modern French

In this section, it is shown that the empty category in the comment clause of a topic-comment expression in ModF can only be identified as familiar and referential in covert syntax. This is seen to be a result of the affixal status of the resumptive pronoun. The generic interpretation of the null object in ModF clitic-drop constructions is suggested to be a result of the covert licensing of the null argument.

3.1 Generic null objects

In most Romance languages, as discussed in section 1, the topic is bound to the resumptive pronoun by c-command and coindexation. The resumptive pronoun in turn identifies the empty category in VP. In order to identify where this relation breaks down when the clitic is phonologically unrealized in ModF, consider the following topic-comment structure, which is unacceptable in the registers with which I am familiar:

(29) *[Cet article], j’ai lu ec hier.

[This article], I have read ec yesterday
‘This article, I read yesterday’

On its own, the matrix argument is acceptable, but the null argument is understood to be generic:

(30) J’ai lu hier.

I have read yesterday
‘I read yesterday.’

In example (29), the ECP is clearly not violated; the empty category is identified, but, without a clitic, it is not referential. Indeed, it is as if there were no contextually identifiable referent, despite the presence of the topic. Likewise, the referential topic finds no coreference in the matrix. The predication relation is not established.

Cummins & Roberge (2004) propose a syntactically present null object for expressions such as (30) in which the generic null object (they refer to it as a ‘null cognate object’) is internally licensed, identified by the lexical semantic content of the verb. Because generic null objects do not refer and are not anaphoric, Cummins & Roberge propose that they should be represented as bare empty nouns, recovering their semantic content from the verb. Accordingly, the null cognate object in (30), the thing that is readable, would be represented as (31):

(31) VP
   /   \\  
  V    N
  lire lisible
In the absence of an appropriate referent in the discourse, this null cognate object remains generic (cf. (30)). On the other hand, if a referent is present in the discourse, the object acquires a specific, referential reading. These cases are referred to as instances of clitic-drop, since the null cognate objects correspond structurally and semantically to their counterparts with the accusative clitic7.

(32)  

a.  - As-tu lu [cet article]?
    ‘Have you read this article?’

b.  - Oui, j’ai lu ec hier.
    ‘Yes, I have read ec yesterday.’

c.  - Oui, je l’ai lu hier.
    ‘Yes, I read it yesterday.’

Note that the null internal argument in (32b) does not need an overtly realized clitic to link it to its referent.

Why should (32b) be available for pragmatic coindexation and yet (29) be barred from it, so that the null object in the comment clause maintains its generic interpretation? I suggest quite simply that (29) must satisfy the predication relation between the lexical item in the topic and the null argument in the comment by Spell-Out. This is not the case for (32b). Coindexation between pro and the discourse-linked argument is necessarily made after PF. Since the topic-comment predication relation is essentially based on the familiarity effects of both the topic and the object clitic, it follows that the Familiar features on the clitic, and in turn on pro, have not been licensed in the overt syntax of (29). The next section outlines the nature of these familiar, referential features and where they are licensed.

3.2 Familiarity

I will briefly discuss several proposals of what is understood by the terms familiar, specific, and referential, which are used rather loosely here, and how these functional notions can be structurally represented. Uriagereka (1995) identifies a number of features that define the nature of Romance accusative clitics. In terms of familiarity

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7 See Cummins & Roberge (2004) and references cited therein. They show that instances of clitic-drop are not equivalent to null pronominal variables bound by a null operator, posited for instance, for colloquial German and for Dutch. Rather, they argue that the clitic is structurally present, just as its overt counterpart, but that its phonological form is deleted at some level of representation.

Not all native French speakers find (32b) completely acceptable. Clitic-drop seems to be a trend more typical of European French and is considered innovative, stylistically marked and characteristic of familiar speech. Fonagy (1985) draws much of his data from young speakers and commercial advertising, while Lambrecht and Lemoine (1996) base their data on informal conversations.
(sometimes referred to as specificity), Romance clitics of the type le/la/les do not introduce new information, but rather familiar information, previously introduced in the discourse. They are specific, agreeing with the referent in number, gender and person (except for impersonal uses of se and predicative uses of le). By referentiality, it is understood that the accusative clitic always has a definite, identifiable referent that is salient in the discourse.

Recently, arguments have been proposed for a functional projection in the left periphery that is encoded with specificity features. Instead of a morpho-phonological approach to pronoun movement where head movement of the pronoun is motivated by its subcategorization grid (Kayne 1975, 1989, 1991, 1994), alternatives have been proposed where the motivation for pronoun movement is semantic. Uriagereka (1995) and Sportiche (1996, 1999), among others, suggest that pronouns must be checked in a functional projection FP (for Uriagereka) or ClP (for Sportiche) containing specificity features. The spirit of this projection relies on Diesing’s (1992) proposal that specific/presuppositional lexical material has to be projected outside of the VP at LF. Because object pronouns are specific, they must raise out of this position at some point in the derivation. Uriagereka suggests that the Person feature is checked in this functional projection, whereas Sportiche allows anything related to definiteness to be checked in this projection. For the purposes of the present analysis, the projection is understood in general terms of familiarity to the linguistic or extralinguistic context, and definiteness, in which the referent of the linguistic item is specific and salient in the discourse. I will call the feature(s) encoded in the projection Familiar features for consistency.

3.3 Categorial status and movement of the resumptive pronoun

I adopt the hypothesis that ModF object clitics are in fact verbal affixes, incorporated into the verb much like inflectional morphemes, a view that has been argued by Jaeggli (1982), Roberge (1990), Cummins and Roberge (1994) and Auger (1995), among others. This approach to Modern French clitics is known as the ‘base-generation’ approach as opposed to the ‘movement’ analysis originally proposed by Kayne (1975, 1989, 1991, 1994) in which all clitics are pronominal heads bound to a trace in argument position. Base-generated affixes have been argued to better represent the behaviour of ModF object clitics with regard to variation in ordering, clitic doubling, obligatory realization of object clitics in coordination structures etc.

The basic argument structure of a ModF accusative clitic can be represented schematically in the following way:

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(33)       VP
    |   
  cl-V NP  pro
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The general idea is that the grammatical content of *pro* in argument position is recovered through the clitic (or agreement morpheme)\(^8\), which in turn binds *pro* with a lexical element, providing it with lexical semantic content. The traditional phi-features, including Familiarity (or Human features as proposed by Corver & Delfitto 1999), must be checked on the object clitic under a higher functional projection. Furthermore, assuming that agreement of features is established in a Spec-Head configuration, *pro* must undergo a series of movements in order to license its agreeing features. Ultimately, the Familiar features on *pro* are licensed when *pro* moves into an agreeing Spec-Head relation with the object clitic in CIP\(^9\).

The relevant derivation of a ModF topic-comment expression would proceed as follows: the cl-V complex raises via head movement through AgrO and T to position itself in agreement with the grammatical subject features in AgrS. From AgrS, it raises covertly to Cl in order to check the Familiar features on the object clitic. Likewise, the empty category *pro* raises covertly to Spec,CIP, passing through AgrO, to license its features with the clitic. At some point, the coindexed topic merges in Spec,TopP in order to check its illocutory features with those encoded in TopP. An abbreviated representation is given in (34):

(34)  TopP\(_i\)
    \[\begin{array}{c}
    \text{XP}\(_i\) \\
    \text{Top} \\
    \text{CIP}\(_i\) \\
    \text{pro}_i \\
    \text{cl-V} \\
    \text{AgrSP} \\
    \text{subj.} \\
    \text{cl-V} \\
    \text{VP} \\
    \text{cl-V} \\
    \text{pro}_i
    \end{array}\]

Covert movement of the verbal complex to the head of CIP is justified on empirical evidence that grammatical subjects and verbs (and consequently the affixal object pronouns attached to them) do not overtly raise past AgrS in French declaratives. Furthermore, Sportiche (1996) posits covert movement of *pro* to Spec,CIP based in part on the general observation that accusative clitics do not license parasitic gaps in ModF. In fact, he proposes that it is not the clitic that is involved in the binding relation, but that it is *pro* on which the gap is parasitic (I will return to this in section 4). It follows, then, that movement of *pro* into an A-bar position must be delayed until LF.

Reconsidering the topic-comment structure with a null resumptive pronoun such as (29), the merged XP element (*cet article*) in Spec,TopP will be coreferential with nothing in the overt syntax since the Familiar features on *pro* can only be properly licensed by the null clitic at LF. Crucially, coreference is not established between the

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\(^8\) Roberge (2002) offers a formal account of the licensing of the position of object *pro*.

\(^9\) I will adopt Sportiche’s general abbreviation, CIP, for ‘clitic voices’.
topic and pro in the overt syntax where the predication relation must hold. Without its referential features checked under CIP, it seems as though pro maintains a default generic interpretation - which cannot be over-ridden by the presence of a referential topic. Yet, how can one account for the fact that utterances such as (32b) are not generic?

Cummins and Roberge (2004) hypothesize a general pragmatic strategy for identifying nominal elements in which all nominals are interpreted as coreferential, given the standard discourse sequence [lexical noun…pronoun…null object]. Assuming a structurally present null clitic in (32b), coreference is established between the lexical noun and the null clitic in (32b) just as it is between the lexical noun and the overt clitic in (32c), by pragmatic means. The hearer assumes coreference, barring any contradictory information. The link is, in this sense, accidental and defeasible. In other words, any semantically appropriate noun could be identified with the null clitic in (32b). This means that while the coreference between the discourse-linked lexical noun and the (null) clitic is established purely pragmatically, that between the null clitic and pro is established grammatically, by covert feature checking. Most importantly, the covert nature of the feature checking in CIP has no effect on the acceptability of the derivation, since there exists no predication relation that must be satisfied in the overt syntax. If indeed instances of clitic-drop in ModF represent a default generic object on which is forced, in a sense, a referential reading from the discourse, this may also account for the relatively narrow context in which expressions such as (32b) are used10.

Now that we have an account for the unacceptability of topic-comment expressions in ModF with null resumptive pronouns (covert movement to CIP, predication relation not established), it is necessary to account for the complete acceptability of the same expression with an overt resumptive pronoun:

(35) [Cet article], je l'ai lu pro i.
    [This article], I it i have read pro i
    ‘This article, I read.’

In (35), the predication relation between the topic and the empty category in the comment clause is evidently established by Spell-Out. I have argued that neither the clitic nor pro have moved into the head of CIP in the overt syntax, which suggests that pro is identified with the lexical item in TopP pragmatically, via the overt clitic, before the formal licensing of pro under CIP, much as it is in (32b). An overtly realized resumptive pronoun can link pro to its antecedent in topic by means of the general pragmatic strategy described by Cummins and Roberge (2004). This means of coindexation, for topic-comment structures, is naturally unavailable if the clitic is null (cf (29)).

To recapitulate, it has been observed that null objects carry a default generic interpretation in ModF. In instances of clitic-drop, an appropriate referent in the discourse can over-ride this interpretation to give the null object a familiar and definite reading. However, such a referent in topic position cannot over-ride the generic interpretation of the null object (and clitic) since coreference is dependent on establishing a pre-Spell-Out predication relation between the topic and the internal argument in the comment. In this

10 Cummins & Roberge propose a similar explanation for the particular stylistic effects of clitic-drop expressions.
case, the predication relation does not hold, since formal feature checking of Familiarity on the null clitic and pro is done covertly in ModF, and this because of the affixal nature of the accusative clitic.

4 Topic-comment in Old and Middle French

Object clitics are argued to be weak pronouns in OF/MidF. This relative syntactic independence with respect to ModF object pronouns allows the weak pronoun to check its Familiar features in overt syntax. The overt licensing of pro establishes the necessary predication relation in topic-comment structures, allowing them to appear without an overtly realized object clitic. The licensing of parasitic gaps in OF/MidF is another consequence of the overt licensing of pro. Finally, I suggest that clitic-drop constructions may be more common in OF/MidF since the identification of pro is not a case of over-riding a default generic interpretation.

4.1 Categorial status and movement of the resumptive pronoun

It has been convincingly argued by Wanner (1996), Hirschbühler & Labelle (1998, 2000, 2002) and Labelle & Hirschbühler (2004) that object pronouns in OF and MidF are syntactically autonomous weak pronouns, unlike their modern counterparts. During this period, object pronouns were pronominal heads in overt syntax, moving independently of the verb and incorporating with it according to the position of the verb in the main intonational phrase (described as Tobler-Mussafia effects). For example, OF/MidF object clitics are generally preverbal, but are postverbal in V1 declaratives. An important distributional distinction between object clitics in OF/MidF and those in ModF is the fact that in OF/MidF they have scope over V-headed constituents:

(36) La fille au seignori lei sert et porte proi grant enoi

The daughter to-the lordi himi serves and brings proi great honour
‘The lord’s daughter serves him and brings great honour to him.’

(Arteaga, 1997, 3: Yvain 5406)

In this sense, object clitics must be heads as opposed to affixes. In this section I will show that it is the relative syntactic independence of the weak object pronoun in OF/MidF that allows the possibility of topic-comment structures without a phonologically realized resumptive pronoun in the matrix clause.

Most analyses of OF/MidF object clitics as weak pronouns treat the distribution of this element, but do not suggest a formal representation of it. I will adopt the model proposed by Corver & Delfitto (1999), which schematically resembles that of Postal (1969), Uriagereka (1995) and Cardinaletti & Starke (1999). Corver & Delfitto represent the weak object pronoun as a transitive determiner heading a DP with a null NP-pro complement:
This model is conceptually appealing as it represents the object clitic as a functional head taking a lexical projection as its complement (as opposed to models which do not include a null NP-*pro*). In addition, it captures the correlation between pronominal clitics and determiners, where the familiarity effects of accusative object clitics can be seen as related to the definiteness feature of definite articles.\(^{11}\)

The different categorial status of the object pronoun in OF/MidF predicts, as mentioned above, different syntactic behaviour than is seen in ModF. This can also be observed in OF/MidF topic-comment structures. Roughly following Corver & Delfitto, an abbreviated derivation would go something like this: the entire DP moves out of argument position to Spec,AgrOP where substantive content from the lexical semantics of the verb (posited to be the Human feature) licenses the object clitic and *pro* (assuming Gender and Number are licensed within the DP) and where accusative case can consequently be realized. The object pronoun must then move as a head to the higher functional projection encoding Familiar features, which, crucially, it can do in the overt syntax since the object clitic is not tied to the verb as it is in ModF. It is therefore in a position to license *pro*, which subsequently raises. Assuming a V2 grammar, the object pronoun in the head of ClP would be picked up by the verb as it moves through Cl to Fin. The relevant aspects of the derivation are shown in (38):

\(^{11}\) See Uriagereka (1995) and the references cited therein for a diachronic point of view. I am unaware of a shift in the semantic content of the determiner from OF to ModF that might affect the derivation sketched here, but I acknowledge that such a change could possibly have consequences for my proposal.
As shown earlier, it is due to the morphological attachment of the object clitic to the verb in ModF and the verb’s position in the head of AgrSP in the overt syntax that prevent overt raising of the clitic to CIP. This is not the case in OF/MidF. The weak object pronoun is a syntactically autonomous head that raises overtly to CIP. Licensing of referential pro is thus independent of an overtly realized resumptive pronoun as the predication relation is established grammatically in the overt syntax and not pragmatically.

Adopting Sportiche’s (1996) claim that pro is the element that enters into binding relations with parasitic gaps, the fact that it raises overtly to CIP in OF/MidF can be confirmed by the fact that such gaps are licensed in OF/MidF:

(38) Ja \(l_{a_{i}}\) voloient en feu mettre / Por rostir \(p_{r_{o}}\) et \(p_{o_{r}}\) greillier \(p_{r_{o}}\).
ADV her, wanted in fire to-put / for to-roast pro and for to-grill pro.
‘Who wanted to put her in the fire to roast and grill her.’

(Labelle & Hirschbühler 2004, 5: Cligès 5936-37)

### 4.2 Old French and Middle French phrase structure

The derivation in (38) makes some assumptions about the phrase structure of OF/MidF that deserve a brief discussion. Following observations made by Hirschbühler & Labelle (2000, 2002) and Labelle & Hirschbühler (2004), and references cited therein, from the earliest documents, the object pronoun is never separated from the verb by a lexical item. This is one argument for the head status of the object pronoun and its incorporation with the verb. However, in (38), if V does not raise to Fin, a completely unattested declarative oSV sequence would result. Of course, one could assume uniform V2 raising in OF and MidF for all main clause types, where the object clitic would incorporate with the verb as the verb moves to Fin. This would conceivably solve the problem of the oSV order.

I do not assume uniform V raising for two reasons. First, it would subsume the overt licensing of the Familiar feature to the V2 grammar of archaic French. The intuition that licensing of referential pro is directly related to its stronger categorial status in OF/MidF would thus be lost. Second, it has been argued by Roberts (1993) and Vance (1997), among others, that OF and MidF SV(O) main clauses do not raise to FinP, but remain in the IP-layer due to principles of economy. Moreover, MidF represents a period when the old V2 grammar is in competition with (and losing to) a standard SVO grammar. It would be a stretch to assume that all SV(O) sequences were still raising to the CP-layer.

In fact, IP-SV(O) main clauses do not present an obstacle. First, it has been argued that subject pronouns in OF and MidF were enclitics on Fin. This means that when the subject doesn’t raise to Spec,FinP, it must still raise above CIP to a functional projection adjacent to Fin (Sportiche calls this projection Nominative Voice, and it is analogous to that of the object). A topic-comment expression without verb raising would therefore still result in the sequence X-soV. Second, in the case of lexical noun subjects, one can argue that the lexical subject continues to be topical and induces V2 raising. Alternatively, it is possible that lexical subjects raise to FocP, leaving the verb in IP. In
any case, there is still ample reason to assume that non-pronominal subjects carry prosodic and discourse import in MidF, moving out of the IP to a position above the object clitic in the left periphery.

The syntactic independence of OF/MidF direct object pronouns also accounts for the topic-comment expression in (2a) where the null resumptive pronoun is associated with an infinitive. According to the argument presented so far, the pronoun raises overtly to CIP, establishing coreference with the topic. It is not obvious how this would happen if the clitic must rely on V2 raising to check its Familiar feature in CIP. If, however, the null element moves there independently, the problem of overt feature checking doesn’t arise with infinitives.

4.3 Clitic-drop in Old French and Middle French

In section 3, instances of clitic-drop were discussed in order to demonstrate that the default interpretation of these expressions in ModF is generic. It was reasoned that this is a consequence of the verb’s position in AgrS at Spell-Out. Since the object clitic is understood to be part of verbal morphology, its movement is limited to that of the verbal head. This in turn rules out the possibility for pro to be grammatically licensed in the overt syntax.

This section attempts to show that instances of clitic-drop may not have had a default generic interpretation in OF/MidF. It is argued that this is a result of overt checking of the Familiarity feature on the null elements in the comment.

Referential null objects without an accompanying overt object clitic are quite common in OF/MidF and appear in a variety of contexts. The following examples show that instances of clitic-drop were not limited to a certain dialect, socio-linguistic group or discourse context as they are today. Clitic-drop constructions (sometimes referred to simply as null objects) in OF/MidF are remarked upon in most descriptive grammars, and have been examined by Härmä (1990, 1993), Arteaga (1997) and Donaldson (2004), among others.

Discourse-linked referential null objects are relatively common in OF/MidF texts. Example (40) describes how a dispenser of justice would sentence a particular defendant.

(40) et quant ilz lesi deliver, ilz NE use ADV of these words ‘we deliver proj and forgive proj’, mais seulement mettent ‘avons pugny proj’. ‘and when they pass them (the sentences), they do not use the words ‘we deliver and forgive him’, rather they only put ‘we have punished him’.

(Écrits politiques II 415, 1.25)
(41) [A lord to his valet who has come from doing specific tasks asked of him by the lord]
Janyn, as tu fait pro?
Janyn, have you done pro
‘Janyn, did you do it?’

(Manière 6, 1.34)

Similar expressions are possible in ModF, as discussed in (32b), but they are most often limited to informal oral exchanges, such as (42) and (43).

(42) -Maîtrisez-vous vos interviews? C’est capital, les interviews.
-control you your interviews i t’s important, the interviews

-Je maitrise proi.
-I control proi.

-‘Do you control your interviews? Interviews are very important.
-I control them.’

(Larjavaara 2000, 50)

(43) [Speaker holding up a bag]
Je laisse proi ici?
I leave proi here
‘I’ll leave it here?’

Subsequent referential null objects coordinated across multiple verbs are very common in OF and MidF.

(44) il monta son cheval et prent s’amie devant lui, baisant proi et
he climbed on his horse and took his beloved in-front him kissing proi and

acolant proi.
hugging proi.

‘he got on his horse and took his beloved in front of him, kissing and hugging her’

(Donaldson 2004, 4: Aucassin et Nicolette 26.20)

The ModF gloss on sentences such as (44) is unacceptable:

(45) Il est monté sur son cheval et a pris son amie devant lui, baisant et embrassant.

The important point in (45) is that the discontinuity between the first part of the ModF gloss and last part is a result of the generic interpretation of the internal arguments in the absence of an overt clitic. The sense is that the man was kissing and hugging in general, not just his beloved, when he lifted her onto the horse.

Instances of écrasement, where a third person accusative object is unpronounced when adjacent to a third person indirect object clitic, are amply attested in all registers of OF and MidF. It remains a feature of modern colloquial speech:
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(46) Et sil dit que l’on aport ses armes, et an li aporté pro. 
and that one said that one bring his weapons, and one to-him brought pro.
‘And he asked that someone bring him his weapons, and someone brought them to him’ (Donaldson 2004, 3: Le Roman de Perceval 2138-9)

(47) J’étais où quand tu lui avais donné pro?
I was where when you to-him had given pro?
‘Where was I when you gave it to him?’ (Cummins & Roberge 2003, 4)

However, I have not found any example of ModF écrasement in topic-comment expressions, which would confirm that phonetically reduced accusative clitics are only permitted in constructions where non-phonetically motivated null clitics are permitted.

In sum, instances of clitic-drop appear to be used in a wider context in OF/MidF. I have proposed that the limited use of clitic-drop in ModF is a result of the default generic interpretation of null internal arguments.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the categorial status of the resumptive pronoun in the matrix clause of a topic-comment structure determines if this pronoun can be null. OF/MidF object clitics are weak pronouns that raise overtly and independently of the verb to the functional projection ClP to check Familiar features and license pro. Overt feature checking of the object clitic and the licensing of the null argument pro associated with it, establishes the necessary predication relation between the referential topic and the null argument in the comment, regardless of whether the resumptive pronoun is overt or not. On the other hand, ModF object clitics are verbal affixes that raise covertly to ClP, since they are tied to the verb in AgrS in the overt syntax. Because grammatical coreference between the topic and the comment is not established before Spell-Out in ModF, the resumptive pronoun must be phonologically realized. The overt clitic prevents a generic interpretation of the comment clause and establishes coreference with the topic by purely pragmatic means. This analysis relates covert and overt movement (i.e. feature strength) to the morphology of the accusative pronoun.

In addition, I have reasoned that covert licensing of pro in ModF results in the default generic interpretation of null objects in clitic-drop constructions. It is only the overt presence of a clitic or discourse-linked antecedent that overrides a generic interpretation of the null argument. Since pro is licensed in the overt syntax in OF/MidF, it follows that clitic-drop constructions in archaic French do not have a default generic interpretation. Consequently, I have suggested that instances of clitic-drop in OF/MidF are permitted in a wider range of contexts. Clitic-drop in French must therefore be considered in terms of the strategy employed to recover the null argument’s referential content. OF/MidF recovers the content grammatically through the licensing of Familiar features, whereas ModF recovers it pragmatically. In fact, Cummins & Roberge (2003) note that clitic-drop may be a recent phenomenon, which is compatible with this analysis in the sense that referential null objects are recovered differently than they were in OF/MidF.
Finally, this paper has left unexplored many related aspects, among them topic-comment structures in other languages. There seems to be, for example, parallels between OF and MidF null referential resumptive pronouns and those found in Quiteño Spanish as described in Suñer and Yépez (1988). Also, a cursory look at clitic left dislocation in related languages such as modern Italian and Spanish show the same behaviour as ModF, but I am unaware of what topic-comment structures looked like in archaic forms of the languages.

References


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