When it's Tough to Agree[1]

Adèle Hénot-Mortier (Queen Mary University of London)

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Going Romance 40, Utrecht University

[1]I thank Coppe van Urk, Eimear McKnight, Luisa Martí and Lulu Guo for helpful comments and question on a previous version of this work.

The Tough-Construction

- *Tough*-constructions (**TC**s; Lees, 1960; Chomsky, 1964; Rosenbaum, 1967 i.a.) are typically built around a **matrix predicative construction** embedding a **gapped infinitive**.
  - The matrix predicate is often subjective and ranging over events: *tough*, *easy*, *annoying*, *important*, *impossible*, *risky*, *weird*...
  - The gap cannot be the embedded subject (which contrasts with raising/control constructions).

(1) a. This book is tough to read _. Object gap

b. Jo is tough to tell this news to _. Indirect Object gap

c. This pen is annoying to write with _. Adjunct gap

d. * Jo is easy _ to finish the exercise. *Subject gap

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Tough-alternations

- TCs engage in the following kind of **alternation**:

(1a) This book is tough to read __. "Fronted" TC

(1a′) It's tough to read this book. "*It*" TC

- The fronted variant, (1a), features a matrix subject playing the role of the object in the infinitive.
- The *it*-variant in (1a′) displays a *it*-subject upstairs and a full infinitive downstairs.
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Experiencers in English TCs

- TCs can feature **optional Experiencers**. In English, they are often thought to be part of the embedded clause, but can be forced to live upstairs, causing issues in fronted TCs.[2]

(2) This book is tough [$_{CP}$ **for Jo** to read _].

(3) "Defective intervention" (Chomsky, 1973; Hartman, 2011b)

a. This work is easy (*__for the rich__) [for the poor to do _].

b. Cholesterol is important (*__to Mary__) to avoid __.

(4) "Sandwiched" adjunct (Büring & Hartmann, 1997; Bruening, 2014)

The president is __to many people__ annoying [to listen to _].

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Experiencers in French TCs

- Romance languages like French exhibit an even crisper pattern, as embedded *for*-infnitives are disallowed (5a), while pre-adjectival Experiencers are fine (5b).

(5) From Hartman, 2011b:

a. Cette couleur est difficile (***pour les chiens**) à voir _.
This color is tough for the dogs to see
'This color is tough for dogs to see.'

b. Cette couleur est (**pour les chiens**) difficile à voir _.
This color is for the dogs tough to see
'This color is tough for dogs to see.'

Clitic Experiencers

- Experiencers can be clitics, realized right before the copula.

(6) Cette couleur **leur** est difficile à voir __.
This color 3.Pl.Dat is tough to see
'This color is tough for them to see'.

(7) Cette couleur **m'/t'/lui** est difficile à voir __.
This color 1/2/3.Sg.Dat is tough to see
'This color is tough for me/you/him/her to see'.

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Two main approaches to TCs

Two lines of analysis

- The structure and derivation of TCs is much debated. Very roughly:
  - "**Long-movement**" approaches analyze them similarly to raising constructions.[3]
  - "**Null operator**" approaches analyze them similarly to control constructions.[4]

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Long-movement view

- The Long-movement view is motivated by the fact TCs alternate with gapless "*it*"-variants, just like raising constructions do:

(8) a. It is **likely** [that Jo will win the match].

b. [$_{TP}$ Jo$_i$ is **likely** [t$_i$ to win the match]]. Raising



- This suggests **the *tough*-subject originates in the infinitive** and moves to the matrix via a sequence of $\bar{A}$[5] and A movement.

(9) a. It is **tough** [to read this book].

b. [$_{TP}$ [This book]$_i$ is [$_{aP}$ t$_i$ **tough** [$_{CP}$ t$_i$ to read t$_i$]]]. TC



- Extra evidence for this view comes from certain idioms and subtle reconstruction effects.[6]

[5] It can be checked via the usual diagnostics that the movement step from the original embedded position to the edge of the embedded clause has A-bar properties: long-distance, Weak Crossover, Binding-theoretic effects, Island-sensitivity, parasitic gaps.

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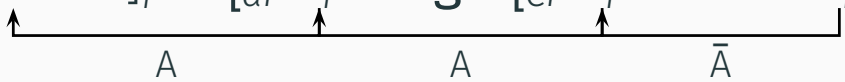
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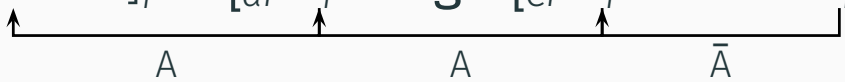
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Null operator view

- The fact Ā-A sequences are usually banned (e.g. hyperraising constructions) casts doubt on the Long-movement approach.
- Null operator approaches instead assume that an embedded null operator Ā-moves downstairs, and gets bound[7] by the matrix subject which A-moves upstairs.

(10) $[_{TP}$ [This book]$_i$ is $[_{aP}$ t$_i$ tough $[_{CP}$ OP$_i$ to read t$_i$]]].



- Crucially for us, **under the Long-Movement view the *tough*-subject will necessarily start its life lower than the Experiencer, while a Null operator view can accommodate for the opposite configuration**.

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Tough subjects and experiencers

Back to French TCs with Experiencers

- Recall clitic experiencers in French TCs are pre-copular.

(6) Cette couleur leur est difficile à voir __.
This color 3.PL.DAT is tough to see
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- What happens when the subject is made pronominal too (in a weak form), and the persons of subject and experiencer are manipulated?

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Subject-Experiencer person constraints in French TCs

(11) Elle lui est difficile à voir __.
3.Sg 3.Sg.Dat is tough to see
'It is tough for them to see'. 3+3 ✓

- Now changing the sentence a little bit to make it more plausible with 1st and 2nd person subject pronouns...

(12) ?? **Je/Tu lui** suis/es difficile à convaincre __.
1/2.Sg 3.Sg.Dat am/are tough to convince
'I'm/Your're tough for him to convince'. 1/2+3 ✗

- When the Experiencer is 3rd person, 1st and 2nd person subjects are awkward.
- Judgments are subtle but (imo) fairly constant across predicates and tenses of the copula.[8]

[8] Judgments don't depend on whether or not the clitic gets elided: using future forms of *be* starting with a consonant and preventing vowel elision on the preceding clitic does not affect the judgments.

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Subject-Experiencer person constraints in French TCs cont'd

- Other possible combinations are better:[9]

(13) a. ? **Je** **te** suis difficile à convaincre __.
1.SG 2.SG.DAT am tough to convince
'I'm tough for you to convince'. 1+2 ✓

b. **Tu** **m'** es difficile à convaincre __.
2.SG 1.SG.DAT are tough to convince
'You are tough for me to convince'. 2+1 ✓

c. **Elle** **m'** est difficile à convaincre __.
3.SG 1.SG.DAT is tough to convince
'She is tough for me to convince'. 3+1 ✓

d. **Elle** **t'** est difficile à convaincre __.
3.SG 2.SG.DAT is tough to convince
'She is tough for you to convince'. 3+2 ✓

[9] If (13a-13b) are also degraded, we are back in the more "familiar" Strong PCC pattern found in French ditransitives.

Robustness across predicates and tenses

- Though the judgments are subtle, they seem to replicate across predicates and tenses.

(14) ?? **Je/Tu lui** serai/seras dur(e) / facile / impossible / intéressant(e)
1/2.Sg 3.Sg.Dat will-be hard / easy / impossible / interesting
/ enthousiasmant(e) à convaincre.
/ thrilling to convince

'I/You will be hard/easy/impossible/interesting/thrilling for him to convince'. 1/2+3 ✗

(15) **Tu/Elle me** seras/sera dur(e) / facile / impossible /
2/3.Sg 1.Sg.Dat will-be hard / easy / impossible /
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interesting / thrilling to convince

'You/She will be hard/easy/impossible/interesting/thrilling for me to convince'. 2/3+1 ✓

Summary of the pattern

Exp.→ Subj.↓	1	2	3
1	-	?je te	??je lui
2	tu me	-	??tu lui
3	elle me	elle te	?elle lui

- The degradation of the *je-lui* and *tu-lui* combination is also **famously attested in French ditransitives**, between Direct Object (DO) and Indirect Object (IO) clitic pronouns, in what is called the Strong Person Case Constraint.[10]

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The Strong PCC in French ditransitives

(16)	a.	* Ed me lui présente. Ed 1.Sg 3.Sg introduces. 'Ed introduces me to him.'	1 DO + 3 IO ✗
	b.	* Ed te lui présente.	2 DO + 3 IO ✗
	c.	* Ed te me présente.	2 DO + 1 IO ✗
	d.	* Ed me te présente.	1 DO + 2 IO ✗
	e.	Ed me le présente.	3 DO + 1 IO ✓
	f.	Ed te le présente.	3 DO + 2 IO ✓
	g.	Ed le lui présente.	3 DO + 3 IO ✓

- The clitic DO cannot be a participant (1st/2nd person).
- **This constraint appears slightly stronger than the one displayed by Subject and Experiencer in TCs**, as it bans participant combos (2+1 and 1+2).

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Clitic Subjects and Experiencers in TCs aboey the Weak PCC

- The pattern shown by Subject-Experiencer combos in TCs is however attested in other languages, including Catalan, and was dubbed **"Weak" PCC**.[11]

(17) From Bonet i Alsina, 1991:

*A en Josep, { **me** | **te** } **li** va recomanar la Mireia.
to the Josep { 1.sg | 2.sg } 3.sg recommended the Mireia

Intended: 'She (Mireia) recommended me/you to him (Josep).'

[11] Meyer-Lübke, 1899; Perlmutter, 1971; Bonet i Alsina, 1991; Riedel, 2009; Stegovec, 2020 i.a.

Clitic Subjects and Experiencers in TCs aboey the Weak PCC

- The pattern shown by Subject-Experiencer combos in TCs is however attested in other languages, including Catalan, and was dubbed **"Weak" PCC**.[11]

(17) From Bonet i Alsina, 1991:

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Repairing PCC-violations with PPs

- Just like classic PCC cases, the bad examples in (12) can be repaired by changing the experiencer clitic into a PP sandwiched between the copula and the predicate...

(16a′) Ed **me** présente **à lui**.
Ed 1.Sg introduces to 3.Sg.
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(18) a. **Je** suis **pour lui** difficile à convaincre __.
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Consequences

The PCC as a failure of Agree

- The PCC is standardly captured as a **failure of Agree**, by assuming that DO and IO agree with the same head.
- Depending on the framework, the failure can be due to intervention,[12] "too much" Agree (leading to the ineffability of the clitic cluster),[13] or "too little" Agree (probe missing its second goal).[14]
- I will adopt Deal's (2023) framework, because it can cover both the Strong and Weak PCC, and does not hinge on the goals being clitic.[15]

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Dynamic Interaction and Satisfaction in Ditransitives

- In Deal's framework for ditransitives (and contra assumptions made in previous literature) **DO agrees first**, and something may go wrong when IO's turn comes, conditioned on DO's person features.
- Specifically, Deal derives Weak PCC effects assuming the probe (*v*) is **insatiable** (no Satisfaction condition), but **will only interact with participants once it has seen one** (Dynamic Interaction condition).

- If DO is a participant and IO a non-participant, the probe will agree with DO, but "miss" IO, leaving it "unhappy".
- This can be fixed by wrapping IO inside a PP, as P can independently agree with IO then.

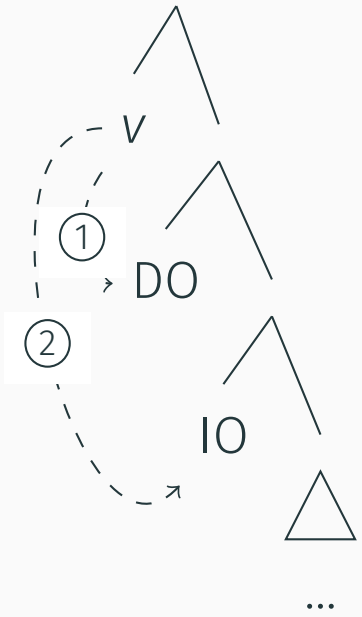
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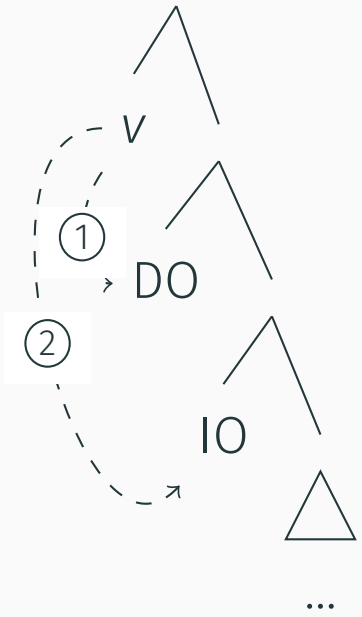
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- Beyond capturing the Weak PCC pattern in TCs, this (theory internal) ordering of Subject and Experiencer informs the syntactic analysis of TCs.

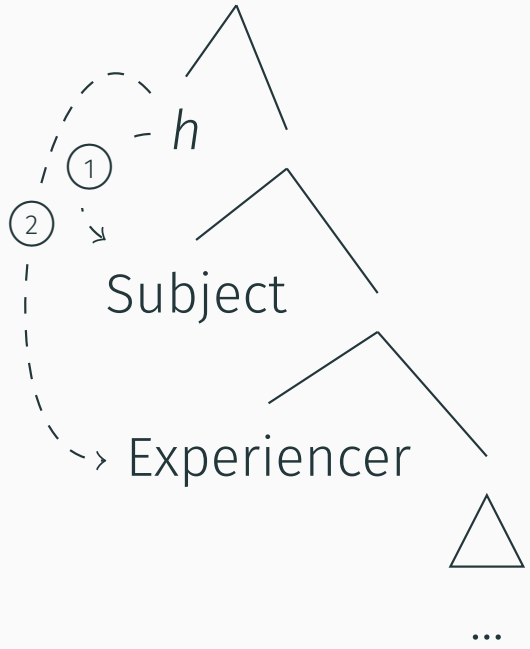
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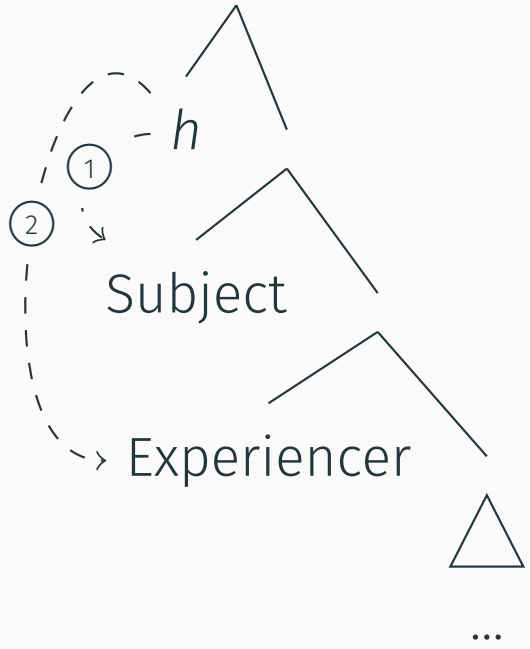
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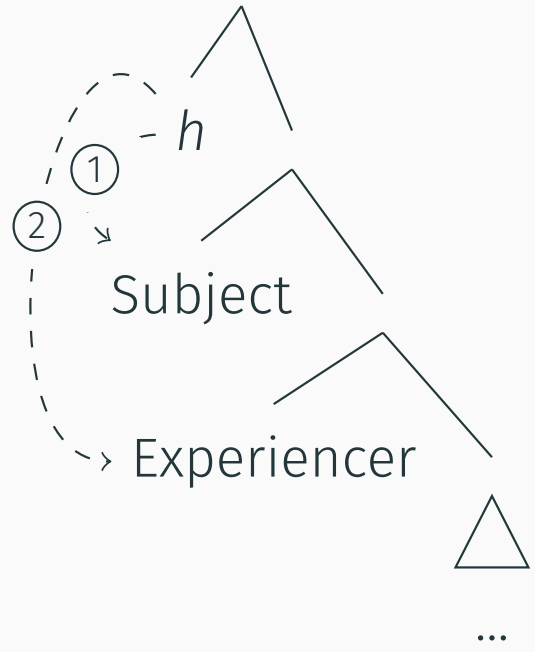
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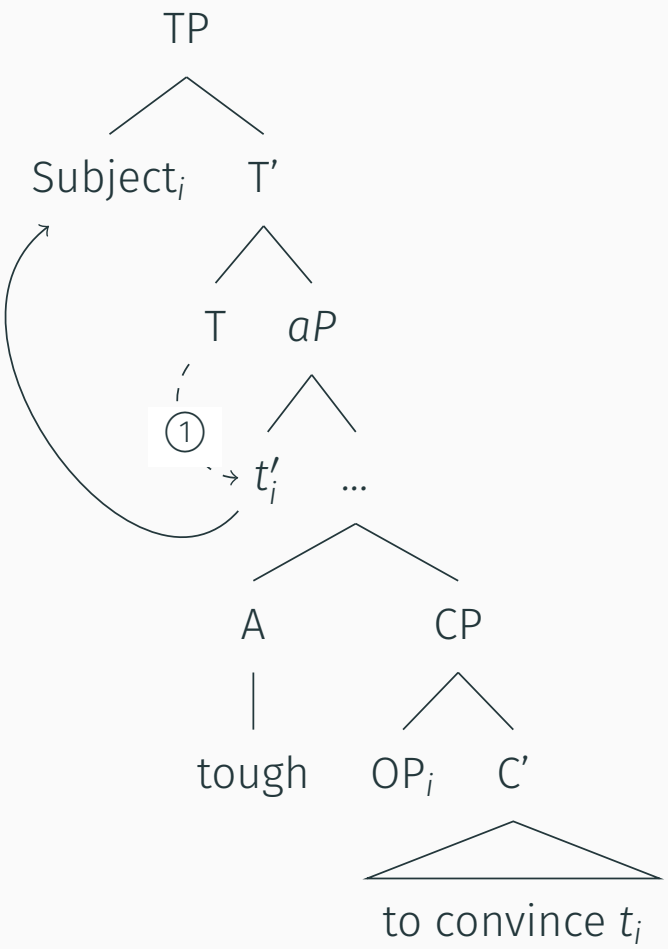
Comparing approaches to TCs in light of a Subject-Experiencer PCC

Subject > Experiencer favors Null operator views



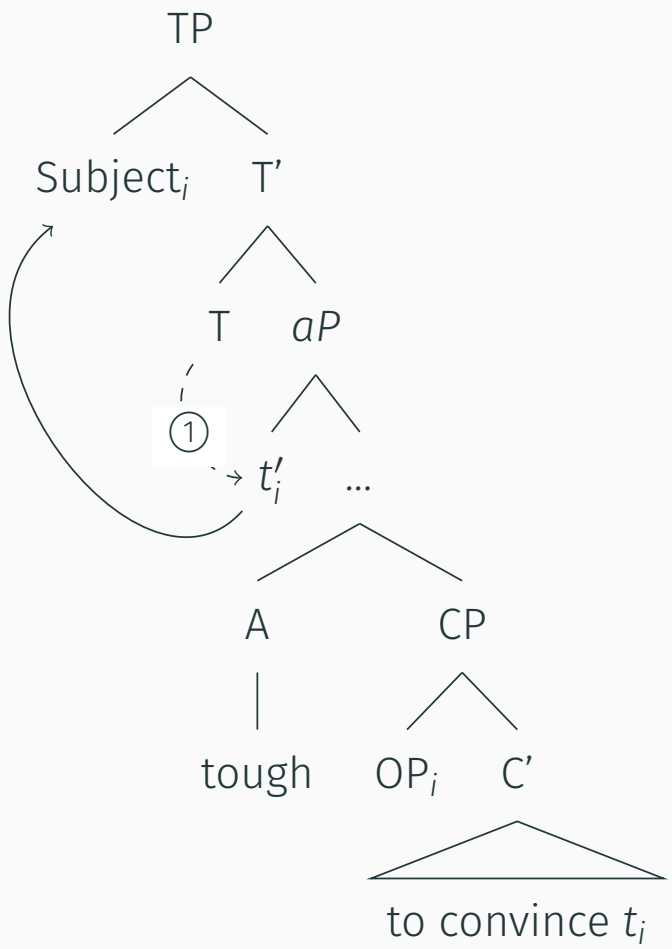
- The above configuration aligns with a null operator view of TCs, which, unlike Long-movement approaches, assume the Subject is base-generated in the matrix. Let's unwrap why.

Subject agreement in a null operator structure



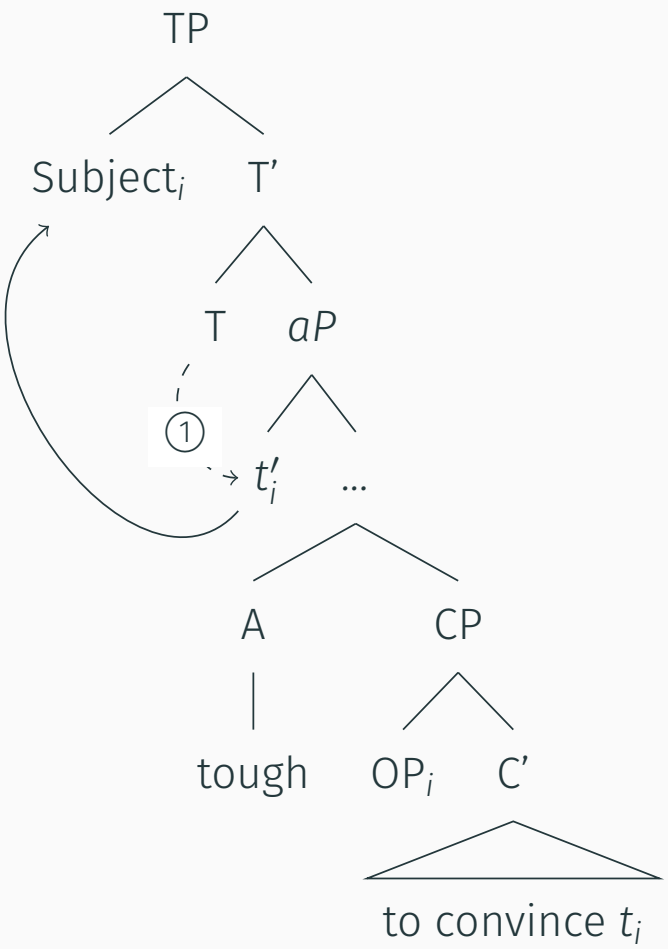
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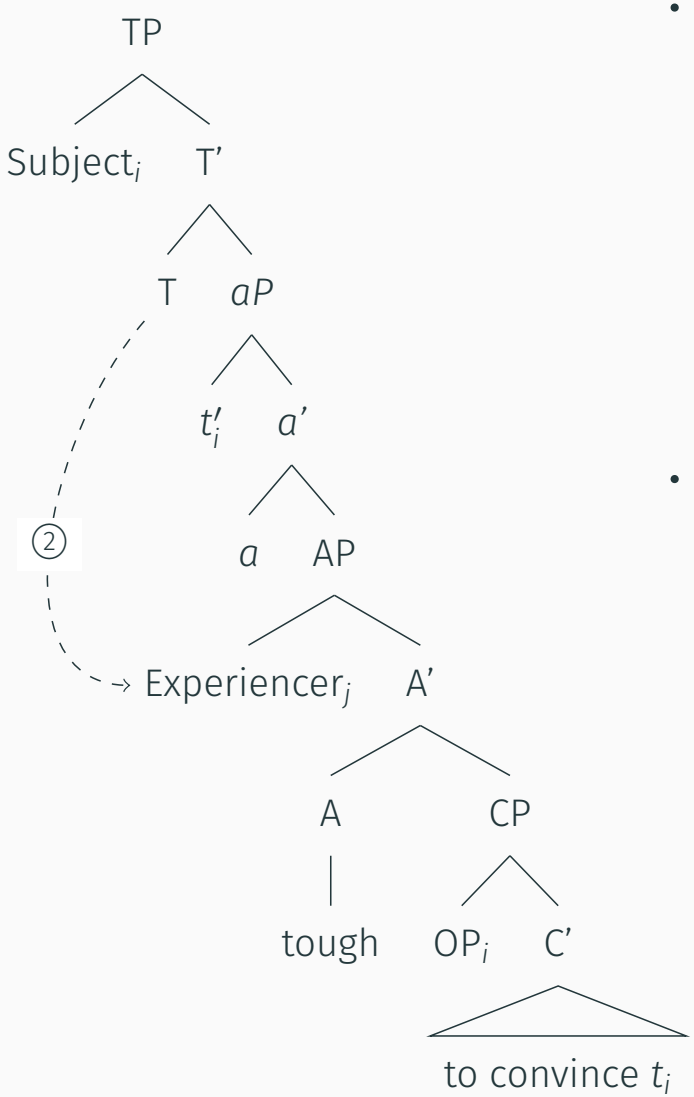
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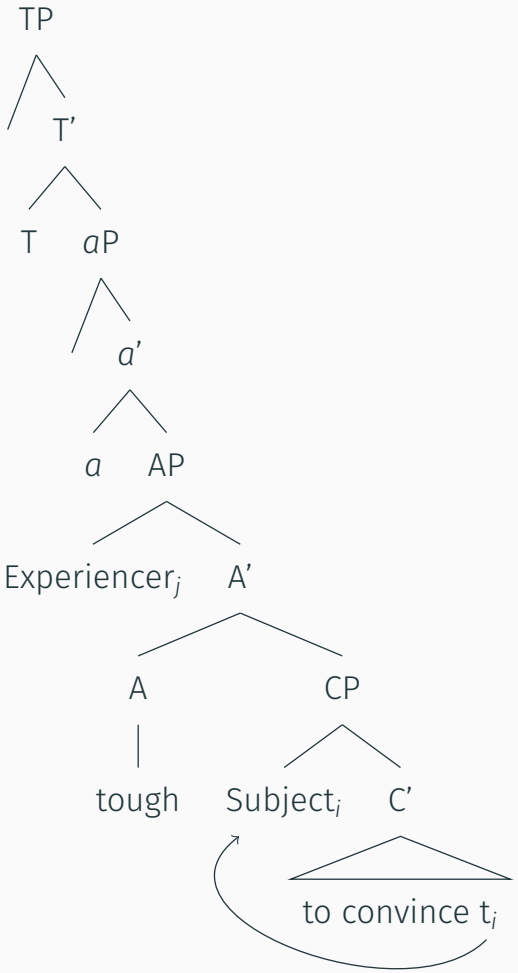


- Assuming the Experiencer agrees with T too, it must agree *after* the Subject, i.e. be lower than Spec-*a*P. This is expected under the current view: the Experiencer is often assumed to be in Spec-AP, right below *a*P.[16]
- The Null operator view thus comes with the right structural assumptions to explain Subject-Experiencer PCC violations.

[16] Not sure why the Experiencer clitic seems to "tuck in" between the Subject and the copula–but as a reviewer suggested assuming the Experiencer incorporates may help. Worth noting though is that (i) IO-DO clitic clusters display different linearizations depending on their persons; (ii) the sheer inconsistency between the Subject-Experiencer and IO-DO orders is a bit of a puzzle.

Long-movement approaches pose a hierarchy issue

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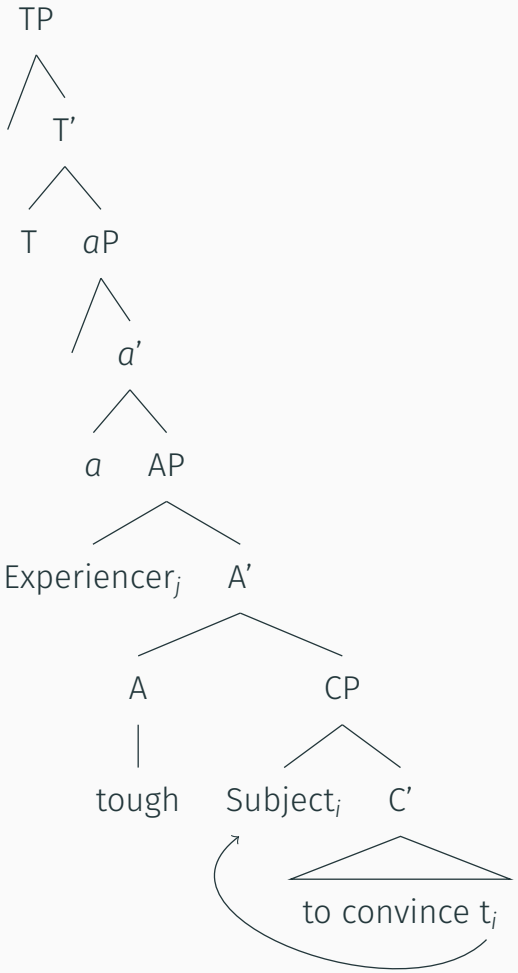


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- In sum, long-movement does not license a Subject-Experiencer hierarchy predicting the observed PCC pattern in TCs. If anything, it incorrectly predicts the *reverse* pattern: **Il/Elle m'/t'est difficile à….*

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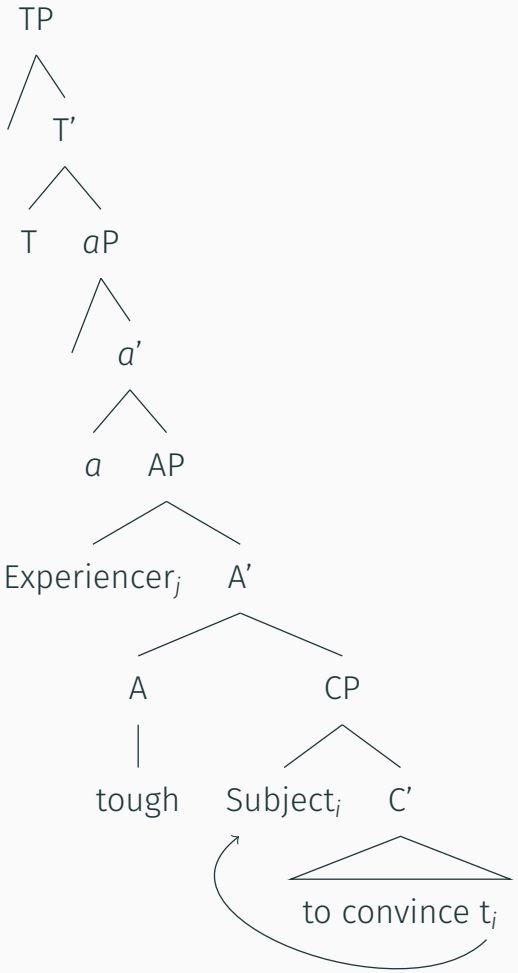


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Discussion/Conclusion

A modest conclusion

- Subtle contrasts between different Subject-Experiencer clitic combinations are best explained by a null operator analysis of French TCs, **assuming the Deal's Dynamic Interaction and Satisfaction framework**.
- Under that view, Subject and Experiencer agree with the same probe (T, I assumed) s.t. the subject does so first.
- This assumption however, is not theory-neural. Many accounts of the PCC (including ones covering its different "flavors") **build on the reverse assumption: IO/Experiencer agree first and DO/Subject second**.[18]
- A more modest conclusion is thus the following: whatever account of the PCC we think is right in French (and beyond), it may illuminate the view of French TCs (and beyond). And vice versa.

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- This would be in line with some of my past work dealing with pronominal restrictions in French Inclusive Plural Pronoun constructions (Hénot-Mortier, 2024), which are also subtle, but if anything in line with the Weak instead of the Strong PCC.

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Motivating Subject > Experiencer via Condition A

- Suppose the underlying order had been Experiencer > Subject at some point of the derivation. We would expect the Experiencer to be able to bind anaphors[20] in the subject.

(19) a. ? Sa propre voiture (lui) est (pour Jo) difficile a conduire _.

b. Jo est pour sa propre mère difficile a consoler _.

(20) a. Cet aspect d'elle-même (lui) est (pour Jo) difficile à apprécier _.

b. ?? Jo est pour elle-meme difficile a se raisonner _.

(21) a. * L(es/') un l(es/') autre(s) (leur) sont (pour Jo et Ed) difficile à comforter _.

b. ?? Jo et Ed est pour l'un l'autre difficiles à comforter _.

[20] Problem: French anaphors with *propre* nd *même* have been argued to be more flexible (potentially logophoric) than English ones (Charnavel & Sportiche, 2016). A fix is to use inanimate binders, but inanimates can't experience!

Motivating Subject > Experiencer via Variable Binding

- Assuming QP Experiencers behave like clitic Experiencers, we may also expect such Experiencers to bind variables in the Subject.

(22) a. ? Son stagiaire est pour chaque encadrant difficile à évaluer _.[21]

b. Chaque stagiaire est pour son encadrant difficile à évaluer _.

[21] As bad as *Son papa va chercher chaque écolier.* ('His dad come pick up each schoolkid.')