

# Superiority effects and the French Plural Pronoun Construction<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Thanks to the two anonymous reviewers who encouraged me to fix my original account; I hope it looks less shaky now!

## The puzzle

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## 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.AUX gone to the movie theater.  
'With Jean, Marie went to the movies.'
  - b. Marie est allée **avec Jean** au cinéma.  
Marie is.AUX gone with Jean to the movie theater.  
'With Jean, Marie went to the movies.'
  - c. Marie est allée au cinéma **avec Jean**.  
Marie is.AUX 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**.

## Two readings for the plural pronoun associate

- 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)**.

## Zoom on the “inclusive” 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 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”**.

## Asymmetries with two pronouns

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

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

... sommes/êtes/sont allés au cinéma.

- The bracketed person combinations in (3) define possible I-readings of the associate; for instance, *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<sup>1</sup> combinations of I-readings appear grammatically possible.

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<sup>1</sup>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.

## Summary of the phenomenon

(4) General form of the I-reading (X and Y are singular entities):

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

$Y \rightarrow$ Avec $X \downarrow$	$\text{je}_{1.SG}$	$\text{tu}_{2.SG}$	$\text{il}_{3.SG}$
$\text{moi}_{1.SG}$	$\text{nous}_{1.PL} \stackrel{\#}{=} \text{moi+je}$	$\text{nous}_{1.PL} = \text{moi+tu}$	$\text{nous}_{1.PL} \stackrel{*}{=} \text{moi+il}$
$\text{toi}_{2.SG}$	$\text{nous}_{1.PL} = \text{toi+je}$	$\text{vous}_{2.PL} \stackrel{\#}{=} \text{toi+tu}$	$\text{vous}_{2.PL} \stackrel{*}{=} \text{toi+il}$
$\text{lui}_{3.SG}$	$\text{nous}_{1.PL} = \text{lui+je}$	$\text{vous}_{2.PL} = \text{lui+tu}$	$\text{ils}_{3.PL} = \text{lui+il}$

**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.  $\ast\{1, 2\}+3!$**
- 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).

- 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

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## A very similar pattern: the Weak PCC

- 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/absolute 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

IO	DO	Strong	Weak	Me-first	Ultrastrong
1	2	*			
1	3				
2	1	*		*	*
2	3				
3	1	*	*	*	*
3	2	*	*		*

**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):

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

- We assume the following person feature hierarchy:

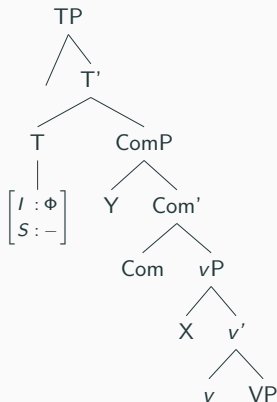
$\Phi > \text{PART} > \text{SPKR}, \text{ADDR}$

- We assume double-AGREE occurs in T, an insatiable probe ( $S : -$ ) which initially interacts with  $\Phi$ -features ( $I : \Phi$ ); **but will only interact with PART features once a PART feature has been agreed with:**

$$\text{T: } \begin{bmatrix} I : \Phi \\ S : - \end{bmatrix}$$
$$\text{AGREE}(\text{T}, \text{PART}) \implies \text{T: } \begin{bmatrix} I : \text{PART} \\ S : - \end{bmatrix}$$

# Connecting our data to the Weak PCC (our own assumptions)

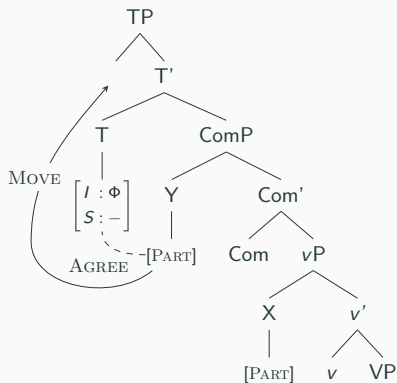
- Based on the restrictions in Table 1:
  - X in the French PPC seems analog to a **Direct Object**, i.e. is agreed with **first**;
  - Y seems analog to an **Indirect Object**, i.e. is agreed with **second**. We assume it is base-generated in Spec-ComP (for “COMitative”).
- We assume that agreement 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.).<sup>2</sup>



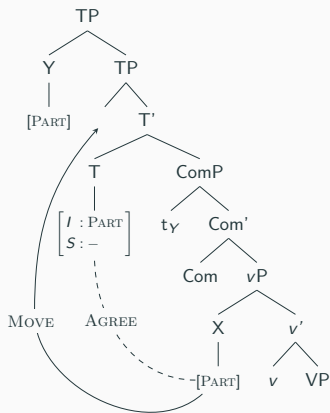
**Figure 1:** Putative structure of the PPC under the I-reading

<sup>2</sup>Not 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

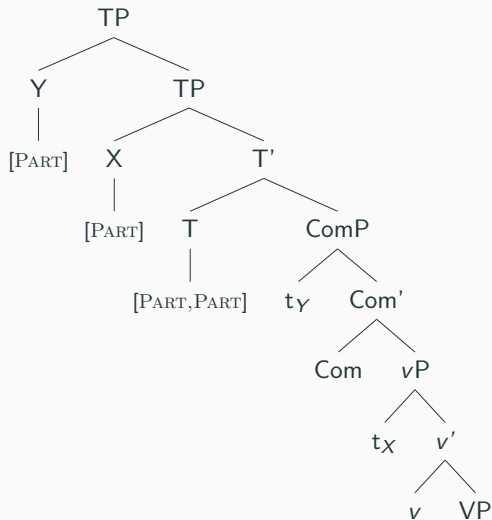


**Figure 2:** AGREE with the PARTICIPANT associate (Y), leading to an update of the interaction condition on T ( $\Phi \rightarrow \text{PART}$ ), and movement of Y to Spec-TP.



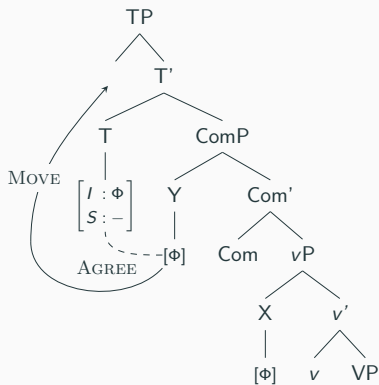
**Figure 3:** AGREE with the PARTICIPANT *with*-DP (X), which satisfies the updated interaction condition; subsequent movement of X to Spec-TP (“tucking-in”)

## Deriving the {1, 2}+{1, 2} readings cont'd

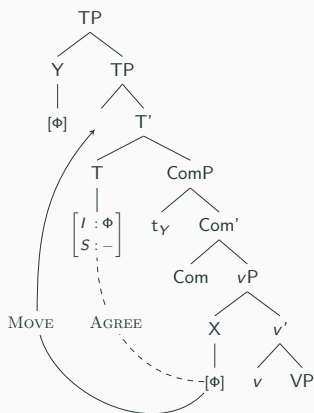


**Figure 4:** Representation of {1, 2}+{1, 2} configurations after T-probing

## Deriving the 3+3 reading



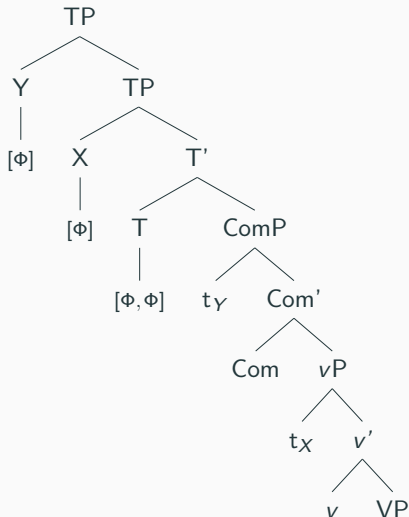
**Figure 5:** AGREE with the non-PARTICIPANT associate (Y), leading to no update of the interaction condition on T, and movement of Y to Spec-TP.



**Figure 6:** AGREE with the non-PARTICIPANT *with*-DP (X), which satisfies the original interaction condition; X “tucks in” Spec-TP.

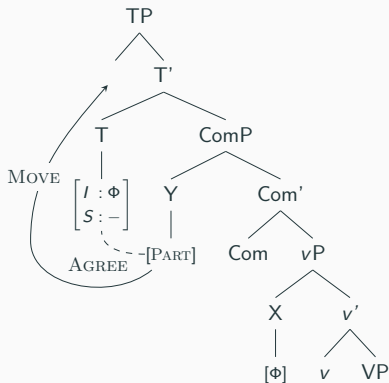


## Deriving the 3+3 reading cont'd

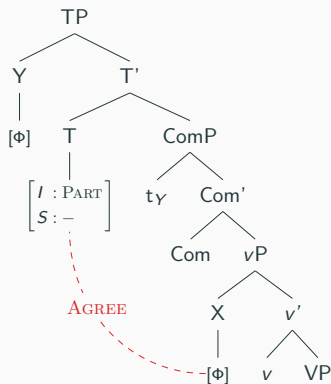


**Figure 7:** Representation of the 3+3 configuration after T-probing

# Deriving the \*{1, 2}+3 reading



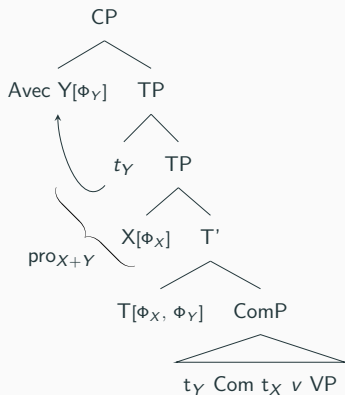
**Figure 8:** AGREE with the PARTICIPANT associate (Y), leading to an update of the interaction condition on T ( $\Phi \rightarrow \text{PART}$ ), and movement of Y to Spec-TP.



**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)),<sup>3</sup> leaving a trace in the higher Spec-TP.
- This trace is incorporated with *X* to surface as  $pro_{X+Y}$ , whose features result from the percolation of  $\Phi_X$  and  $\Phi_Y$ .



**Figure 10:** Deriving 'With  $pro_X$   $pro_{X+Y}$  VP'

<sup>3</sup>We think that when the comitative DP appears medially, as in (1b), the I-reading is disfavored

# Discussion

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## 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.).

- (6) a. \* Jean **me**            **lui**            présentera.  
Jean 1.ACC.CL 3.DAT.CL introduce.FUT  
Intended: ‘Jean will introduce me to him/her.’
- b. Jean **me**            présentera            à **lui/elle**.  
Jean 1.ACC.CL introduce.FUT to 1.ACC  
‘Jean will introduce me to him/her.’

- In the French Plural Pronoun Construction (of the form *With pro<sub>X</sub> pro<sub>X+Y</sub> VP*), the subject **pro<sub>X+Y</sub>** appears weak (Cardinaletti and Starke, 1999 a.o.), **but pro<sub>X</sub> 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 😊

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