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French subject clitics are not agreement markers [*]

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Abstract

In spite of the substantial literature dedicated to it, the status of French subject clitics is still an unresolved issue within morpho-syntactic theory. Two main analyses have been proposed and defended over the past three decades: one advocating that French subject clitics are syntactic arguments bearing a theta-role and the other viewing such clitics as inflectional morphemes on the verb. This paper demonstrates that the empirical basis motivating the morphological analysis of French subject clitics is much narrower than has been assumed in the literature and shows that the implementation of such an analysis faces numerous theoretical and empirical difficulties. It concludes that the limited similarities between the behaviour of French subject clitics and that of morphemes should be treated as accidental rather than as decisive factors in favour of a morphological analysis. Under a derivational approach to grammar, the syntactic analysis appears to be the only viable one.

Key words: affix, clitic, dislocation, French, information structure, subject, topic

1 Introduction and background

Two opposing analyses of French subject clitics have been proposed in the literature. According to the "syntactic" analysis, French subject clitics are syntactic entities (i.e. elements available for syntactic operations) bearing a θ-role and which transit via the canonical [spec,TP] subject position, from where they cliticise phonologically on the verb. These are the broad lines of

the position held by Kayne (1975); Rizzi (1986); Laenzlinger (1998); Belletti (1999) among others. According to the "morphological" analysis, French subject clitics are agreement morphemes generated directly on the finite verb in the lexicon (or at a lexicon-syntax interface). This analysis is generally argued to apply to spoken French only (and not to standard/formal/written French). Proponents of the "morphological" analysis include Jaeggli (1982); Roberge (1986); Hulk (1986); Auger (1994); Miller & Monachesi (in press).

The mechanisms implementing the morphological analysis have been described in e.g. Cummins & Roberge (1994) and Auger (1994) and related work. Cummins & Roberge (1994) propose that Romance clitics are associated with lexical roots prior to syntax (more precisely at the proposed Lexicon-Syntax Interface). At that point, the clitics are said to be mere bundles of features. The ungrammatical representations are later filtered out at LF (for semantic reasons — which are left vague) and PF (where language-particular constraints are defined, in the form of templates). An additional filtering-out mechanism is argued to operate in the Computational Component of grammar in the form of agreement between the clitic and the empty category in argument position.[1] Auger (1994, 196) proposes that *verbal forms are directly generated by morphological processes* (though these processes are not explicitly defined) and argues that no template needs to be postulated to derive the French facts. She assumes that French object clitics bear a Case feature (to account for the fact that object doubling is ungrammatical in that language) and that French subject clitics do not bear any Case feature. Object clitics are thus claimed to be affixes, while subject clitics are (affixal) agreement morphemes.

The remainder of this paper will abstract away from the exact mechanisms at work in the morphological analysis and concentrate on the broader issues raised by such an analysis.

2   Testing the predictions of the morphological analysis

The morphological analysis of French subject clitics has a number of theoretical and empirical consequences, listed in (1).

(1)   a.   Subject-verb agreement can be marked twice morphologically.
        b.   Subject clitics should not be available for syntactic operations independently of their host.

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[1] It is far from clear how the empty category is endowed with the relevant features in the first place. Object clitics have argument status in spoken French (Auger, 1994), so the verb cannot possibly select another (yet empty) argument with the relevant features.

c. Preverbal clitics appearing between the subject clitic and the verb also have to be analysed as affixes. These elements include *en, y,* object clitics and the negation particle *ne.*

d. Subject doubling is predicted (i.e. the cooccurence of an XP in [spec, TP] and of an adjacent subject clitic).

To my knowledge, these consequences have not been fully investigated in the literature. I address them in turn in sections 2.1-2.4 and show that they turn out to be problematic for the morphological analysis, at least in its current form.[2]

2.1 Implications for the system of agreement morphology in spoken French

The first consequence of the morphological analysis (listed as (1-a)) is that it generates a certain level of random redundancy in the French morphological paradigm of verbal agreement. The features identified by "agreement prefixes" (i.e. subject clitics) are identical to those of agreement suffixes whenever the finite verb does not correspond to an *elsewhere* form. *Elsewhere* forms are underspecified in the lexicon with respect to particular features such as person and number (following Halle & Marantz (1993)). The full paradigm of agreement verbal morphology in spoken French is given in Table 1. *Elsewhere* forms appear in phonetic transcription (indicating homophony). First person plural *nous* has been omitted from this table as it is generally considered not to be part of the grammar of spoken French (Blanche-Benveniste, 1997; Côté, 2001).

The only feature that can be marked on agreement prefixes but not on suffixes is [gender], although this feature cannot be marked on first and second person clitics and is only partly marked on third person plural clitics (where feminine is only marked if the individuals concerned are *all* female).

(2) je (1 p.sg.), tu (2 p.sg.), on,[3] vous (2 p.pl.):   not marked for gender
     il (3 p.sg.):   masculine
     elle (3 p.sg.), elles (3 p.pl.):   feminine
     ils (3 p.pl.):   masculine or mixed

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[2] A reviewer pointed out that some of the facts discussed below might not be problematic (or *would arise in different terms*) for the morphological analysis if it was modified in some ways. I do not dispute this. The point I would like to make is that, until it is shown that the morphological analysis can be amended to account satisfactorily for ALL the issues discussed in this paper (which is no small task), it might be wiser not to assume that it applies to (the main varieties of) spoken French.

		-er, -oir	-ir, -re, vouloir	être, avoir, aller
Present	1 p.sg.	[plœ:R]	[vø]	suis
	2 p.sg.	[plœ:R]	[vø]	[ɛ]
	3 p.sg.	[plœ:R]	[vø]	[ɛ]
	2 p.pl.	pleurez	voulez	êtes
	3 p.pl.	[plœ:R]	veulent	sont
Imperfect	1 p.sg.	[plœRɛ]	[vulɛ]	[etɛ]
	2 p.sg.	[plœRɛ]	[vulɛ]	[etɛ]
	3 p.sg.	[plœRɛ]	[vulɛ]	[etɛ]
	2 p.pl.	pleuriez	vouliez	étiez
	3 p.pl.	[plœRɛ]	voulaient	étaient
Future (synthetic)	1 p.sg.	pleurerai	voudrai	serai
	2 p.sg.	[plœRRa]	[vudRa]	[səRa]
	3 p.sg.	[plœRRa]	[vudRa]	[səRa]
	2 p.pl.	pleureriez	voudrez	serez
	3 p.pl.	pleureront	voudraient	seront
Subjunctive (present)	1 p.sg.	[plœ:R]	[vœj]	[swa]
	2 p.sg.	[plœ:R]	[vœj]	[swa]
	3 p.sg.	[plœ:R]	[vœj]	[swa]
	2 p.pl.	pleuriez	veuillez	soyiez
	3 p.pl.	[plœ:R]	[vœj]	[swa]

Table 1
Agreement verbal morphology in spoken French

Why should subject-verb agreement ever be allowed to be marked twice, in an entirely redundant fashion (and yet not systematically across verbal paradigms or tense paradigms)?

(3)　　a.　je　　　v-ais
　　　　　　[1 p.sg.] go-[1 p.sg.]
　　　　b.　vous　　pleur-ez
　　　　　　[2 p.pl.] cry-[2 p.pl.]

An anonymous reviewer points out that one could consider pre- and post-verbal markers as some form of discontinuous agreement. What would remain unexplained is why the prefixal part of subject agreement markers is omissible in some cases (such as (4)) but not others (such as (5)):

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[3] *On* can denote either third person referents (usually under an arbitrary interpretation), first person plural referents, or second person plural referents.

(4)   a.   Les convoyeurs attendent.
            the carriers   wait-[3 p.pl.]
              'The carriers are waiting.'
    b.   Eux   pourront   t'aider.
            them-STRONG PRON. will-be-able-to-[3 p.pl.] you-to-help
              'THEY will be able to help you.'

(5)   a.   *attendent.
            wait-[3 p.pl.]
    b.   *Moi   pourrai   t'aider.
            me-STRONG PRON. will-be-able-to-[1 p.sg.] you-to-help

An other oddity is that subject clitics would be the only prefixal agreement markers in spoken French: agreement is exclusively marked by suffixes on the other lexical classes affected, such as participials and adjectives.

(6)   a.   elle-est   parti-e.
            [3 p.sg.f.]-is-[3 p.sg] gone-[sg.f.]
    b.   elle-est   joli-e.
            [3 p.sg.f.]-is-[3p.sg.] pretty-[sg.f.]

2.2 *Subject clitics are available for syntactic movement*

The second consequence of the morphological analysis (listed as (1-b) above) is that subject clitics, by virtue of being affixes inserted pre-syntactically, should not be available for syntactic operations independently of their host.

Auger (1994, 67-68) claims that only second person subject clitics ever appear postverbally in Quebec Colloquial French and that subject clitics never appear postverbally in European Colloquial French. I dispute both these claims. In the York and the Cat corpora[4] of spontaneous speech production of speakers from Belgium, Canada and France, the inversion of verbs and subject clitics is clearly productive.

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[4] The York corpus consists in the transcription of 108 half-hour sessions of spontaneous interaction between adult and child speakers of French from Belgium, France and Canada, recorded over a period of 18 months. It was collected under the direction of Bernadette Plunkett, who has kindly allowed me to use it. The Cat corpus (36 half-hour sessions of adult-child interaction) is from Belgian speakers exclusively and was collected for my doctoral research, which was funded by ESRC grant R00429834373. Details on transcription and coding procedures can be found in De Cat (2002).

Table 2 gives an overview of the distribution of subject clitic-verb inversion in matrix clauses in yes/no questions and *wh*-questions across dialects (in the adult speakers from the entire York and Cat corpora). In this table, questions introduced by *est-ce que* (i.e. so-called *locutionary* questions) are treated apart, as their analysis in terms of inversion structure is controversial. Non-root clauses are excluded from the counts as they do not allow inversion. The following *wh*-questions were also excluded as they do not allow subject-verb inversion: questions with a *wh*-element *in situ* and structures with a doubly-filled Complementiser. Questions involving the question particle *ti* (sometimes pronounced *tu*) were excluded as the status of this particle is unclear (see e.g. Vecchiato 2000).[5]

	No inversion		Inversion		Locutionary		Total
***wh*-questions (with *wh*-movement)**							
Belgium	8%	(59)	**40%**	(308)	53%	(408)	775
Canada	27%	(200)	1%	(4)	72%	(536)	740
France	25%	(229)	2%	(18)	73%	(656)	903
Yes/no questions							
Belgium	96%	(1900)	2%	(45)	2%	(38)	1983
Canada	61%	(1616)	**21%**	(567)	17%	(462)	2645
France	98%	(2133)	0%	(0)	2%	(45)	2178

Table 2

Subject(clitic)-verb inversion in root clauses in adult spoken French

This table shows that inversion is attested at least in Belgian and Canadian French and suggests that it is used differently across dialects. It is used productively in *wh*-questions in Belgian French only (in 40% of cases), and in yes/no-questions in Canadian French only (in 21% of cases). Each type of question (inverted, non-inverted, locutionary) appears to have become pragmatically specialised in a different way across dialects, a point I cannot explore here in detail. De Cat (2002) demonstrates that, contrary to what is claimed in Auger (1994), inversion of the subject clitic and the verb *is* productive in Canadian French as it affects not only second person clitics (as claimed by Auger) but also third person clitics as in (7).

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[5] Extracts read from books were excluded as they are in most cases representative of written French. There are no instances of complex inversion (illustrated in (i)) in the York and the Cat corpora.

(i)   Comment les voleurs sont-ils   entrés?
         how   the thieves are-they entered
         'How did the thieves come in?'

(7)   Peut-il avoir une petite bouchée?
       may-he have a   little   mouthful
          'Can he have a bite?'

Auger (1994) derives the orders "second person subject clitic - verb" and "verb
- second person subject clitic" by postulating the existence in the lexicon of two
types of second person subject clitics: one, prefixal, marked [-interrogative],
and the other, suffixal, marked [+interrogative]. This is insufficient to account
for the fact that in Canadian French *tu* (2 p.sg.) can appear preverbally or
postverbally in yes/no questions and that it never appears postverbally in
wh-questions in that dialect. To account for the inversion facts reported above
while maintaining the morphological analysis of subject clitics, one would need
to postulate the existence in the lexicon of a wide range of homomorphous cl-
itics with different feature specifications and different affixation requirements.
What would be required to account for the distribution of second person singu-
lar subject clitics is given in (8) as an illustration. The [?] stands for an extra
feature that would differentiate the exact discourse conditions determining
when *tu* appears postverbally.

(8)   *tu*   [- (yes/no) interrogative]   prefix
       tu   [+ (yes/no) interrogative] [?] suffix
       tu   [+ (yes/no) interrogative] [?] prefix

While something like (8) is theoretically possible, its is highly uneconomical,
and therefore unlikely to provide an adequate model of how language works,
following minimalist assumptions.

2.3   Getting in the way: ne, en, y and object clitics

The third consequence of the morphological analysis (listed as (1-c) above)
concerns preverbal clitics appearing between the subject clitic and the verb.
Such elements include the clitics *en, y*, object clitics and the "negation" par-
ticle *ne* (as bolded in (9)).

(9)   a.   Je   **la lui**   donnerai.
            [1 p.sg.] it to-him will-give
               'I'll give it to him.'
       b.   Je   **ne t'**   **en**   veux pas.
            [1 p.sg.] *ne* to-you of-it want not
               'I don't begrudge you.'

    c.   On   **y**   va?
        [3 p.sg.] there goes
          'Shall we go?'

If subject clitics are verbal agreement morphemes, they must by definition be attached to a (possibly morphologically complex) agreeing verb. One of the criteria proposed by Zwicky and Pullum to distinguish affixes from clitics is that *clitics can attach to material already containing clitics, but affixes cannot* (Zwicky & Pullum, 1983, 503). This means that if French subject "clitics" are in fact agreement morphemes (i.e. affixes), any element intervening between the subject "clitic" and the verb must also be an affix inserted presyntactically. However, as we will see, analysing such elements as affixes poses numerous problems.

2.3.1 Ne is more than an affix.

Auger (1994) avoids having to deal with *ne* by claiming that it is not part of the grammar of spoken French anymore. This claim is however not warranted. The York and the Cat corpora provide clear evidence that the particle *ne* is used in spontaneous speech in Belgium, Canada and France. While this particle is used more frequently by the Belgian speakers, it is attested in the speech of all the speakers of both corpora (a total of 12 adults and 7 children) and in a variety of contexts (i.e. productively) (See also Gadet (2000)). *Ne* can be (and is) omitted most of the time, but in some cases, its presence is obligatory (as in (10)) or strongly preferred (as in (11)).

(10)   a.   Personne *(n')a chanté ni crié.
          nobody   *ne*-has sung   nor shouted
            'Nobody sand nor shouted.'
    b.   Rien   du tout *(n')a été fait.   (Rowlett, 1998, 169)
          nothing of all   *ne*-has been done
          'Nothing at all has been done.'
    c.   Personne d'intéressant *(n')a été invité.   (Rowlett, 1998, 169)
          nobody   of-interesting *ne*-has been invited
          'Nobody of interest has been invited.'

(11)   a.   Aucun des   animaux *?(n')est parti.
          none   of-the animals *ne*-is   gone
    b.   Pas un employé *?(ne) m'a   aidée.
          not one employee *ne*   me-has helped
           'Not a single employee helped me.'
    c.   Les profs   d'aucune école *?(n')ont fait grève.
          the teachers of-no   school *ne*-have done strike

'The teachers of no school have gone on strike.'

A sentence containing *ne* is not forced to be interpreted as negative (Godard, to appear, fn.9):

(12)　Paul n'aime que Mozart, et　Marie [aussi/* non plus].
　　　　Paul *ne*-likes only Mozart and Marie too/　neither
　　　　　'Paul likes only Mozart and so/*neither does Marie.'

On a morphological analysis, this would require listing two *ne* entries in the lexicon (one negative, one restrictive). In addition to these two verbal affixes, the lexicon would also need to contain a non-affixal *ne* to account for the fact that *ne* can directly precede *pas*(Rowlett, 1999):

(13)　C'est pour ne pas tomber.
　　　　it-is　to　*ne* not fall
　　　　　'It's so as not to fall.'

The most intractable problem for a morphological analysis of *ne* is that its distribution is structurally determined, as shown below.

The role of *ne* is to mark the scope of the negation (Kayne, 1984): the negation cannot take scope higher than the clause containing *ne*. In (14-a), only the infinitival clause is interpreted negatively; in (14-b), the whole sentence is interpreted negatively.

(14)　a.　Paul accepte de ne renvoyer personne.
　　　　　　Paul agrees　to *ne* dismiss　anybody
　　　　　　　'Paul agrees not to dismiss anybody.'
　　　　b.　Paul n'accepte de renvoyer personne.
　　　　　　Paul *ne*-agrees to dismiss　anybody
　　　　　　　'Paul doesn't agree to dismiss anybody.'

Examples like (14-b) show that *ne* can appear in a different clause to the negative expression (*personne* 'nobody' in (14-b)). This long-distance relation is only possible under certain, structurally defined, circumstances (as shown by Milner (1979), Rowlett (1998) and Godard (to appear), among others). First, the embedded clause must be non-finite ((15)).

(15)　a.　Paul *n' accepte qu'on　renvoie personne.
　　　　　　Paul *ne* agrees　that-one dismiss nobody

b. Paul n'accepte de renvoyer personne.
   Paul *ne*-agrees to dismiss   nobody
      'Paul doesn't agree do dismiss anybody.'

Second, the relation between *ne* and the negative expression is sensitive to syntactic islands. For instance, such a relation cannot hold across the boundaries of a complex DP (as shown in (16)) or those of a sentential subject (as shown in (17)).

(16) a. *Il **ne** reste   [de   potager   [avec **aucun** arbre fruitier]].
          it *ne* remains some allotments with no   tree   fruit-bearing
      b. Il **ne** reste   [**aucun** potager   [avec des   arbres fruitiers]].
          it *ne* remains no   allotment with some trees   fruit-bearing
             'There is no allotment with fruit trees left.'

(17) a. *[Engager   personne] n'est permis.
          to-appoint nobody   *ne*-is allowed
      b. Il n'est permis [d'engager personne].
          it *ne*-is allowed to-appoint nobody
             'It isn't allowed to appoint anybody.'

If *ne* is a morpheme affixed on the verb pre-syntactically, its distribution is predicted not to be syntactically constrained.

2.3.2 Object clitics as affixes?

If subject clitics are attached to the verb stem pre-syntactically, any clitic intervening between the subject clitic and the verb should also undergo affixation pre-syntactically. Given the absence of look-ahead (i.e. the fact that, at any point in the derivation, only information relating to the structure built so far is available), the choice of which verb stem an object clitic is affixed to should not be allowed to depend on the future structural configuration. Yet, this is what one is forced to assume, under a morphological analysis of French subject clitics. This is illustrated in (18). In these sentences, the object clitic *les* 'them' is an argument of the verb *lire* 'to read'. The clitic can appear either (i) on the infinitival verb of which it is an argument (as in (18-a)), (ii) on a higher infinitival (as in (18-b)), or (iii) on the finite verb (as in (18-c)). The choice is however not free: in any case, only one position is licit (indicated by the absence of * in (18)).

(18) a. Il [*les$_i$] va [les$_i$]   lire 0$_i$.
          he (them) will (them) read

        'He'll read them.'

   b.   Il [*les$_i$] va [les$_i$]   faire [*les$_i$] lire 0$_i$.
       he (them) will (them) have (them) read
        'He'll have them read.'

   c.   Il [les$_i$]   a   [*les$_i$] fait [*les$_i$] lire 0$_i$.
       he (them) has (them) had (them) read
        'He's had them read.'

If object clitics are affixed to verb stems in the lexicon, it is not clear why they should be allowed to appear on a different verb to the one they are an argument of, nor is it clear how the appropriate target verb stem is identified, in the absence of structural information. [6]

2.3.3 En and y as affixes?

The clitics *en* and *y* are generally associated with non-human referents. However, in certain cases, they can take a human antecedent, as illustrated in (19), from Ruwet (1990, 52).

(19)   a.   Jean-Jacques a   présenté   Émile$_i$ à Sophie. Elle en$_i$ est
           Jean-Jacques has introduced Emile to Sophie she of-him is
           tout de suite tombée amoureuse.
           immediately fallen   in-love
             'Jean-Jacques introduced Emile to Sophie. She fell in love with
           him immediately.'

      b.   Elle pensait à Émile$_i$. Elle y$_i$ pensait tous les jours.
          the thought of Emile   she of-him thought all   the days
            'She thought about Emile. She thought about him every day.'

The relevance of this observation to the present discussion lies in the fact that the conditions licensing a human antecedent for *en* and *y* are structurally determined. Observe the difference between (19) and (20) (from Ruwet 1990, 53).

(20)   a.   Émile$_i$ pense que Sophie [*en$_i$]   est amoureuse [de lui].
           Emile thinks that Sophie (of-him) is   in-love   (of him)

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[6] On the syntactic analysis, the object clitic is predicted to surface on the highest verb of the clause containing the verb selecting that object. In (18-a) it is the infinitival clause *PRO les lire*. In (18-b) it is the infinitival clause *PRO les faire lire*, in which the causative verb and its infinitival complement form a verbal complex (Labelle & Hirschbühler, in preparation). In (18-c) it is the whole sentence (with *fait lire* as a verbal complex).

       b.   Émile$_i$ croit   que Sophie [*y$_i$]   pense [à lui].
            Emile believes that Sophie (to-him) thinks (to him)

Lamiroy (1991) argues that *en* and *y* can take a human antecedent as long as they are not bound by a c-commanding DP. This correctly predicts that coreference should be allowed in (21), where Emile does not c-command *en*, given that the *si-* clause is attached at least as high as TP.

(21)   Émile$_i$ serait   très malheureux si Sophie en$_i$ disait du   mal.
            Emile would-be very unhappy   if Sophie of-him said   some evil
               'Emile would be very unhappy if Sophie spoke ill of him.'

These facts are unexplained under an affixal analysis of *en* and *y*.

2.3.4 Concluding remarks.

The evidence presented in x this subsection raises serious problems for a morphological analysis of French subject clitics. Elements intervening between such subject clitics and the verb stem clearly behave like syntactic entities rather than affixes, contrary to expectations.

2.4 Spoken French does not allow subject doubling

The fourth consequence of the morphological analysis (listed as (1-d) above) is that subject doubling is predicted to be possible (i.e. the coocurrence of an XP in [spec, TP] and of an adjacent subject clitic), given that the subject clitic does not have argument status.[7]

The string "XP$_i$ - subject clitic$_i$" is amenable to two analyses. Either the XP is the subject of the sentence (and surfaces in the canonical, [spec,TP] position) as in (22-a), or it is the topic of the sentence (and surfaces in a clause-peripheral position) as in (22-b).[8]

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[7] This is one of the diagnostics most commonly used to support the morphological analysis of (French) subject clitics.
[8] The notion of *topic* will be defined in section 2.4.1.
I am abstracting away from the question of whether CP consists of several layers of projections. As explained in section 2.4.1, the XP in (22-b) will be taken to be adjoined to either TP (possibly as in (i)) or CP (as in (23)).

(i)   Tu crois que les autres$_i$, ils$_i$ aimeraient ça?
         you think that the others   they would-like that

(22)   a.   [$_{CP}$ [$_{TP}$ XP [$_{T'}$ ...]]]   Canonical subject position
       b.   [$_{CP}$ XP ... [$_{TP}$ [$_{T'}$ ...]]]   Topic position

The latter possibility must be acknowledged irrespectively of which analysis of subject clitics one adopts, given that in certain cases an element intervenes between the XP and the clitic. The XP cannot be in [spec,TP] in such cases. Examples include cases like (23-a), where the XP expressing the subject precedes a fronted *wh*-word and cases like (23-b), where the XP expressing the subject of the embedded clause appears in the left-periphery of the matrix clause.

(23)   a.   Et   la   clé$_i$, où   elle$_i$ est?
            and the key where she is
                'And where's the key?'
       b.   La   clé$_i$, je pense qu'   elle$_i$ est restée dehors.
            the key I   think that she is   stayed outside
                'I think the key's stayed outside.'

I will argue on interpretive grounds that, contrary to what is standardly assumed by the proponents of the morphological analysis of subject clitics, structures like (24) are never found in spoken French (or at least not in its most widely spoken varieties across Belgium, France and Quebec).[9]

(24)   [$_{CP}$ [$_{TP}$ XP$_i$ [$_{T'}$ clitic$_i$+T ...]]]

2.4.1   Distributional restrictions.

It is well established that peripheral XPs resumed by an element within the sentence are interpreted as the topic of that sentence (see e.g. Gundel 1975; Larsson 1979; Reinhart 1981; Lambrecht 1981, 1994). The most widely accepted definition of topic (which I will adopt here) is that proposed by Reinhart (1981) as *what the sentence is about* (hence the term *aboutness topic*). I will assume that in French, peripheral XPs expressing the topic are dislocated by base-generated adjunction to a maximal projection with root properties (following De Cat 2004).[10] I will therefore refer to the peripheral XPs that

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'Do you think the others would like that?'

[9] For a discussion of how to define spoken French, see De Cat (2002), where it is also argued that "Advanced French" (whose existence was postulated by Zribi-Hertz 1994) does not correspond to any attestable variety of spoken French.
[10] Note however that the argumentation in this paper is equally compatible with a feature-driven analysis of peripheral topics, e.g. *à la* Rizzi (1997).

concern us here as *dislocated* phrases. The observation above can be rephrased as (25), as has been argued for spoken French in De Cat (2002).

(25)   Only possible topics can be dislocated in spoken French.

A number of researchers (such as Roberge 1990; Auger 1994; Zribi-Hertz 1994) have taken examples like (26) to indicate that, in dialects allowing such a sentence, subject clitics cannot be syntactic entities bearing a θ-role, but rather a kind of agreement morpheme on the verb. This depends on the assumption that indefinites like *un enfant* 'a child' in (26) cannot receive a topic interpretation.

(26)   Un enfant$_i$ il$_i$ arrive pi   il te   pose une question.
         a   child   he arrives then he to-you asks a   question
           'A child arrives and he asks you a question.'   (Auger, 1994)

Their reasoning goes as follows: (i) If subject clitics are syntactic entities, any XP coindexed with one such clitic must appear outside of the canonical subject position (by virtue of the Subcategorisation Principle (Chomsky, 1965)). (ii) Dislocated XPs are obligatorily interpreted as the topic of the sentence. Therefore, if the subject clitic in (26) is a syntactic entity, the coindexed *un enfant* 'a child' must be dislocated. (iii) But indefinites cannot be topics, so a dislocation analysis of *un enfant* 'a child' is impossible. (iv) Therefore the sentence in (26) is representative of a (dialectal) variety of French in which subject clitics are not arguments. (v) The only alternative is that such elements are morphemes in T in that (dialectal) variety.

This reasoning is based on that in Rizzi (1986). However, what is often overlooked by Rizzi's followers is that indefinites *per se* are not banned as topics: it is only under their existential reading that they are incompatible with a topic interpretation. Under a generic reading, indefinites can be topics (Côté, 2001). [11] And the sentence in (26) is precisely one that receives a generic interpretation: this sentence is not about a particular child, but about a behaviour that is typical of children in general. If a specific reading is forced (by using a past tense, as illustrated in (27)), this sentence is no longer acceptable for speakers of the main varieties of spoken French (including speakers of Canadian French, to one of whom the sentence in (26) is attributed).

(27)   *Un enfant$_i$, il$_i$ est arrivé pi   il t'   a   posé une question.
          a   child   he is   arrived then he to-you has asked a   question

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[11] De Cat (2002) even argues that a generic interpretation is only possible when the XP in question is the topic of the sentence (and hence dislocated in spoken French).

In section 2.4.2, I demonstrate that in spoken French, a heavy (i.e. non-weak) element expressing the subject is interpreted as a topic *only if* it is resumed by a subject clitic. The presence of a subject clitic in (26) is therefore not only possible but obligatory (which turns the argument of Auger and others on its head).

2.4.2 The presence of a subject clitic forces the topic interpretation of a coindexed XP.

Three arguments are presented below to demonstrate that in spoken French, the presence of a subject clitic has a direct impact on the information structure of that sentence. In particular, the XP can only receive a focus reading in the absence of a coindexed clitic (first and second arguments) and the XP can only be interpreted as the topic in the presence of a coindexed clitic (third argument).

2.4.2.1   First argument: availability of a focus reading of the XP.
The focus is traditionally understood as the most informative part of a sentence (Rochemont, 1986). It can be restricted to the subject, as in (28) (as a marked option — cf. Cinque 1993 and Reinhart 1996). The focus here is in capitals, indicating stress prominence.

(28)   Q: Who's eaten my porridge?
        A: GOLDILOCKS has.

In (28), only the subject conveys new information (which is also clear from the fact that the VP has been elided).

Dislocated DPs cannot be focused. Hence they cannot convey the answer to a *wh*-question. This is illustrated for dislocated objects in (29).

(29)   Q: Qu'est-ce qu'il a senti?
             'What did he smell?'
        A: [LA CHAIR FRAICHE]$_i$, il (*l'$_i$) a   senti(e).
             the flesh   fresh   he it   has smelled

If an XP coindexed with a(n adjacent) subject clitic allows for a focus interpretation of that XP, it implies that the XP in question is not dislocated, and hence that it occupies the canonical subject position (yielding a structure like (30-b) rather than (30-a)).

(30)　　a.　$[_{\text{CP}}\ \text{XP}_i\ ...\ [_{\text{TP}}\ \text{clitic}_i\ [_{\text{T'}}\ ...\ ]\ ]\ ]$
　　　　b.　$[_{\text{CP}}\qquad ...\ [_{\text{TP}}\ \text{XP}_i\quad [_{\text{T'}}\ \text{clitic}_i{+}\text{T}\ ...\ ]\ ]\ ]$

To test whether such an option is allowed in (certain varieties of) spoken French, a judgement elicitation task was carried out on 14 native speakers from Belgium, Canada and France. The informants were presented with 18 contexts (including 9 distractors), each with three possible follow-ups (pre-recorded on CD, with no transcription provided). The prosody of the sequences "XP_i - subject clitic$_i$" was intended to be as close as humanly possible to that of the corresponding construction without clitic (so as to avoid prompting a dislocation analysis of that XP). Each set of possible follow-ups contained one sentence with an XP subject and no coindexed clitic, one sentence with an XP subject coindexed with an adjacent subject clitic, and one clearly unacceptable distractor (either completely inappropriate in the context in question, or clearly ungrammatical in any variety of spoken French). The contexts all forced a focus interpretation of the subject. In the illustration below, C stands for context and F for follow-up. The distractor has been omitted here.

(31)　　C:　La voiture bleue est foutue.
　　　　　　'The blue car's knackered.'
　　　　F:　(i)　Non, la　voiture ROUGE elle est foutue.
　　　　　　　　　no　　the car　　red　　　she is　knackered
　　　　　　　　　　'No, the RED car's knackered.'
　　　　　　(ii)　Non, la　voiture ROUGE est foutue.　　　　←
　　　　　　　　　no　　the car　　red　　　is　knackered
　　　　　　　　　　'No, the RED car's knackered.'

The option where the XP expressing the subject is resumed by a clitic was accepted only 4.7% of the time (corresponding to 6/126 answers — distractors excluded), randomly across speakers and across dialects. Each speaker accepted at most one instance of "XP_i - subject clitic$_i$" over the whole test (i.e. out of the 9 test conditions). Most speakers rejected all such configurations in the context provided, which forced a focus interpretation of the XP. [12] The 6 answers above can thus be treated as noise in the data.

These results are consistent with a dislocation analysis of the XP coindexed with an adjacent subject clitic: dislocated XPs are topics and topics can by definition not be focused (see e.g. Erteschik-Shir 1997).

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[12] The informants were allowed to choose more than one option, as long as they indicated which option they preferred. Yet in almost all cases they only allowed one option.

2.4.2.2 Second argument: variable binding. Zubizarreta (1998, 11) argues that in several languages (including French, English and Spanish), a QP object *each/every N* may bind a variable contained within the subject if and only if the subject is focused. In spoken French, the binding of a quantifier in the subject position (as in (32)) is only possible in the absence of a resumptive clitic.

(32)   Sa$_i$ mère   (*elle) accompagnera   chaque enfant$_i$.
        his mother   she will-accompany each   child

(33)   Il faut encore décider qui rentrera chaque cheval au box.
        'We still need to decide who till take each horse to its box.'
        a.   Son jockey il ramènera   chaque cheval
              its jockey he will-take-back each   horse
        b.   Son jockey ramènera   chaque cheval.   ←
              its jockey will-take-back each   horse

Not all of my 14 informants allowed the variable in the subject position to be bound by the distributive object QP (some rejected entirely a wide-scope interpretation of the object). Those who did allow such a binding almost categorically rejected sentences where the DP containing the variable was resumed by a(n adjacent) subject clitic. Out of 28 expected responses (i.e. testing two such sentences), 9 were blank (indicating the impossibility of a wide-scope reading of the object) and only 1/19 corresponded to the string "DP$_i$ - subject clitic$_i$". That speaker abstained from providing a judgement for the other test sentence, which suggests that she only allowed marginally for a distributive object QP to bind a variable in subject position.

Again, these results are consistent with a dislocation analysis of XPs resumed with a subject clitic: such XPs cannot be focused because they are topics.

2.4.2.3 Third argument: availability of a topic interpretation of the XP. Not all sentences can take an aboutness topic (as defined in section 2.4.1). Whether this is possible depends on the information structure of the sentence. One of the key factors to that respect is the span of the focus, i.e. how much of the sentence is new information.

In certain contexts, all the information conveyed by the sentence is new. Such sentences are *thetic* as opposed to categorical. Thetic sentences describe a state of affairs and are typically uttered to answer a question like *What happened?*. Contrary to categorical sentences, they do not predicate something about a referent whose existence is presupposed: they cannot have an aboutness topic.

Imagine a situation in which person A sees person B in tears, prompting the following exchange:

(34)   A: Qu'est-ce qui s'est passé?
          'What happened?'
      B: Les voisins$_i$ (#, ils$_i$)   ont mangé mon lapin.
          the neighbours (they) have eaten my rabbit
            'The neighbours have eaten my rabbit.'

In that context, the referent of *les voisins* 'the neighbours' is not established, so that referent is not available as a sentence topic. B's response has to describe a state of affairs; it consists entirely of new information.

What is interesting for our present purpose is that certain predicates can never appear in thetic sentences. Such predicates belong to a (relatively uniform) class defined as *Individual Level Predicates* (Milsark, 1974). These can be defined by the following three properties: (i) they cannot appear in perception reports, (ii) they do not allow an existential reading of their subject and (iii) they tend to express permanent properties.. [13] The subject of ILPs is obligatorily interpreted as the topic of the sentence (Erteschik-Shir, 1997), except when there is a narrow focus on that constituent (De Cat, 2002). This is illustrated in (35), where both A's statement and B's amendment contain an ILP. In B's utterance, there is a narrow (contrastive) focus on the DP expressing the subject. This DP is thus forced to appear in the canonical subject position (where the contrastive focus reading is allowed). Yet the property reading obtains in both utterances. In A's statement, the topic is *ta soeur* 'your sister' and in B's it is a covert aboutness topic corresponding to something like *musical people in the speaker's family*.

(35)   A: Ta soeur, elle est musicienne.
          your sister she is musician
            'Your sister's a musician.'
      B: [MON FRÈRE AUSSI]$_F$ est musicien.
          my   brother too   is musician
            'My brother's a musician too.'

If a topic interpretation is only allowed in the presence of a resumptive clitic in spoken French, one can therefore expect that ILPs will always take a subject clitic, except when there is a narrow focus on the subject. This prediction was confirmed by the analysis of the York and Cat corpora: out of a random sample of 4030 clauses from the York and Cat corpora, ILPs did not appear

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[13] For an in-depth discussion of the properties of ILPs, see Jäger (2001).

without a subject clitic, except in the rare instances requiring a narrow focus reading on the subject. Examples are given in (36).

(36)   a.   La cuisine, **c'** est le lieu où Maman fait à manger.
            the kitchen it is the place where Mum makes to eat
              'The kitchen is the place where Mum cooks.'
     b.   [Luc aussi]$_F$ a les yeux de son père?
            Luc too has the eyes of his dad
              'Luc too has his dad's eyes?'

The quasi-obligatory presence of a subject clitic with ILPs is a direct consequence of fact that the subject of ILPs is interpreted as a topic (except when it is in narrow focus).

2.5   Conclusion.

The evidence discussed so far contradicts claims made by the proponents of the morphological analysis of French subject clitics and raises a number of problems for its implementation. We have seen that subject(clitic)-verb inversion is productive and that XP subjects (in [spec,TP]) are never doubled by a clitic in the most widely spoken varieties of French. As a result, the empirical basis motivating the morphological analysis of French subject clitics is considerably reduced. This takes us to the question of why such an analysis should have been proposed in the first place.

3   French subject clitics: grammatical or anaphoric "agreement"?

The idea that French subject clitics might be agreement markers was inspired originally by comparisons with polysynthetic languages such as Amerindian languages, where verb forms are long and morphologically complex and include morphemes whose features correspond to the argument of the verb (Vendryes, 1920). Givón (1976) proposes that this state of affairs is the result of historical changes leading from the incorporation of pronouns into verbs to their reanalysis as grammatical agreement markers.

In their seminal paper, Bresnan & Mchombo (1987) discuss the motivation for the close relation between incorporated pronouns and grammatical agreement markers and propose a series of well-motivated diagnostics to distinguish them. In their terminology, which I will adopt in the discussion below, *grammatical agreement* corresponds to agreement markers or morphemes and *anaphoric*

agreement corresponds incorporated pronouns or clitics.

On the basis of such diagnostics, Bresnan & Mchombo (1987) demonstrate that in Chicheŵa, a Bantu language spoken in East Central Africa, subject markers are ambiguous between grammatical and anaphoric agreement markers, whereas object markers are unambiguously anaphoric agreement markers. I propose to apply these diagnostics to French subject clitics in order to determine whether a morphological analysis in terms of agreement marker (henceforth *grammatical agreement*) is plausible. Following Bresnan & Mchombo (1987), if the morphological analysis is correct, French subject clitics are expected to behave like grammatical agreement markers.

3.1   Locality

Only grammatical agreement markers require the DP to which they are associated to be local (i.e. to appear in the same clause). Hence in spoken French, at least those cases where the DP is not adjacent to the subject clitic are instances of anaphoric agreement (as already pointed out with respect to examples (23)). In examples like (37), the subject clitic *elle* 'she' can thus not be an agreement marker.

(37)   Salma Hayek$_i$, ça faisait huit ans   [qu'elle$_i$ travaillait sur ce
       Salma Hayek it made eight years that-she worked   on that
       film].
       film
         'It had been eight years that Salma Hayek had been working on
         that film.'

This diagnostic suggests that the possibility of a non-local relation between the DP and the clitic could be used as a diagnostic for anaphoric agreement. If it is possible to separate the DP from the clitic in a clause like (38-a) by placing the DP in a higher clause and leaving the clitic in (what then becomes) the lower clause (as in (38-b)) without altering the information structure interpretation of the DP (i.e. whether is it a topic or not), the clitic in question should be treated as an anaphoric agreement marker (or incorporated pronoun) rather than as a grammatical agreement marker (or morpheme) not only in sentences like (38-b) but also in sentences like (38-a).

(38)   a.   Les autres, ils sont là.
             the others the are there
                'The other ones are there.'

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    b.   Les autres, je pense qu'ils   sont là.
            the others I think that-they are there
              'I think that the other ones are there.'

3.2 Questioning of the related argument

A grammatical agreement marker should be present even when the argument
it is related with is questioned. This is true of Chicheŵa's subject markers
(SM) but not object markers (OM):

(39)   a.   (Kodí) chíyâni chi-ná-ónek-a?
             Q   what-SM-PAST-happen-INDIC
             'What happened?'
      b. ??*(Kodí)* mu-ku-chí-fún-á chíyâni?[14]
             Q   you-PRES-OM-want-INDIC what

The presence of a subject clitic in subject questions is impossible in spoken
French:

(40)   a.   Qui$_i$ (*il$_i$) veut du   gouda ?
             who he   wants some gouda-cheese
      b.   Quels soldats$_i$ (*ils$_i$) sont partis ?
             which soldiers they have left

3.3 Topicalisation of parts of idioms

DPs associated with an anaphoric agreement marker are interpreted as top-
ics, which implies that their reference should be recoverable from the context.
This observation leads Bresnan & Mchombo (1987) to predict that it should
not be possible to associate part of idioms with anaphoric agreement markers,
given that the meaning of idioms is not established compositionally and that
consequently, DPs used in idioms tend not to correspond to discourse refer-
ents (and hence should not be interpretable as topics). On the other hand,
grammatical agreement markers do not entail a topic interpretation of the DP
associated with them and so are predicted to be acceptable in idioms. This is
verified with Chicheŵa's subject marker:

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[14] The relative acceptability of the object question in (39-b) is due to the fact that
it can be interpreted as a reduced cleft, and in Chicheŵa object markers are allowed
to appear as resumptive elements in such constructions (Sam Mchombo, p.c.).

(41)   Bôndo li-ná-nóng'onez-ĕdw-a. [15]
          knee   SM-PAST-whisper.to-PASS-INDIC
            'The knee was whispered to' (i.e. remorse was felt)

The same is not possible in spoken French (while retaining an idiomatic interpretation — in the example below: *the game is up*):

(42)   Les carottes$_i$ elles$_i$ sont cuites.
          the carrots   they are cooked
            'The carrots are cooked.' (Rather than 'the game is up'.)

3.4   *Peripheral vs. core status of the related argument*

A DP associated with a grammatical agreement marker does not have to be peripheral: it should be allowed to occupy its canonical (argument) position in the presence of such a marker. This is not possible with anaphoric agreement markers, given that these are incorporated pronouns. If an anaphoric agreement marker cooccurs with a coreferential argument in the core of the sentence, this yields a violation of the Subcategorisation principle (Chomsky, 1965).

Prosody is a good indicator of whether an XP adjacent to a subject clitic and associated with it occupies the canonical subject position or a peripheral (dislocated) position. Prosodic evidence that the XP is indeed dislocated whenever it is resumed by a subject clitic can be found in Deshaies, Guilbault, & Paradis (1992) and Guilbault (1993) for Quebec French and in De Cat (2002) for a range of varieties of French spoken in Belgium, Canada and France. Contrary to what is often assumed, the decisive criterion in identifying left-dislocation prosody is not the presence of a pause between the XP in question and the rest of the sentence, but a combination of factors of which the most important are the presence of a stress (i.e. increased intensity) on the last syllable of the dislocated element, and pitch (i.e. melodic) prominence on that syllable, as compared with the pitch of what follows the dislocated element. [16]

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[15] ˘ indicates a rising tone; ´ indicates a high tone, ˆ a rising tone, following Bresnan & Mchombo (1987).

[16] Space restrictions prevent me from going into much detail. For a definition of Intonation Group and the importance of this notion for the prosodic analysis of French left-dislocation, see Mertens, Goldmann, Wehrli, & Gaudinat (2001) and De Cat (2002).

In Chicheŵa, subject agreement markers are always present, even when the subject is not interpreted as the topic of the sentence, when it is questioned, or when it is in focus (Sam Mchombo, p.c.). Bresnan & Mchombo (1987) conclude that subject markers in that language have a dual status of anaphoric agreement marker (when a topic interpretation of the subject obtains) and grammatical agreement marker (in all other cases). They argue that anaphoric agreement markers are incorporated pronouns, i.e. that they have argument status in spite of the fact that they are affixed onto the verb.

The diagnostics applied in this section reveal that French subject clitics do not behave as predicted under a morphological analysis: they do not behave like grammatical agreement markers. They are more akin to Chicheŵa's object markers, i.e. to anaphoric agreement markers or incorporated pronouns.

In the next section, I investigate how the anaphoric agreement relation between the subject clitic and the XP can be captured on the syntactic and the morphological analyses of subject clitics.

4   Information structure and syntactic structure

We have seen that in spoken French, an XP coindexed with an adjacent subject clitic is obligatorily interpreted as a topic. For a focus interpretation of the XP to obtain, the subject clitic must be absent.

Under a syntactic analysis of subject clitics, the topic interpretation of the XP follows directly from the syntactic structure of the sentence. That XP is obligatorily dislocated whenever there is a subject clitic because it cannot occupy the canonical subject position (since the latter is occupied by the clitic). The resulting dislocated structure (given in (30-a)) is syntactically transparent to what Erteschik-Shir (1997) calls f(ocus)-structure, the grammatical level where the scope of topic and focus is defined and which mediates between syntax and PF / LF. At f-structure, the topic has to take scope over the rest of the sentence. Under the syntactic analysis, no ad-hoc mechanism is required to account for the information structure contrast between sentences with and without subject clitic.

Under a morphological analysis of subject clitics, the topic interpretation of the XP expressing the subject is purely accidental from a syntactic point of view. Some authors even assume (without demonstration) that the XP cannot possibly be a topic in all cases because the string "XP_i-subject clitic$_i$"

occurs in such a high proportion of sentences in corpora of spontaneous production (e.g. Auger 1994, 116). Yet such a high proportion of subject topics is exactly what should be expected, given that crosslinguistically, the topic strongly tends to coincide with the grammatical subject of the sentence (see e.g. Gundel 1975; Givón 1976; Li & Thompson 1976; Reinhart 1981; Lambrecht 1994). Proponents of the morphological analysis consider that by default, the XP occupies the subject position whenever it is adjacent to the subject clitic, as in (24). Under that analysis, the absence of subject clitic in certain sentences/clauses is unpredicted. This is clearly stated in Auger (1994):

(43)   Subject markers are true agreement markers and are thus expected to show up on every finite verb.   (Auger 1994, 93)

Given (43), the absence of subject clitic is predicted to be random, or speaker-dependent (as suggested by Auger 1994, 13). To account for the facts discussed in section 2.4.2, some stipulation would therefore be necessary to block the realisation of the subject clitic whenever the subject is in focus (i.e. when it is in narrow focus or when the sentence is thetic). In addition to this, the realisation of the clitic has to be made obligatory in cases where there is no coindexed XP adjacent to (and preceding) the finite verb, so as to rule out sentences like (44) but not (45). (44) is correctly ruled out by virtue of (43) but (45) is wrongly predicted to be impossible (or marked) in spoken French on account of the absence of subject clitic.

(44)   *A   pas de sujet,   cette phrase.
        has no   subject this   sentence

(45)   Où   sont les crayons?
        where are   the pencils

One solution to this problem has been proposed by Roberge (1986), who stipulates that the clitic can only absorb Case in the absence of material in the canonical subject position. However, following Baker (1996), the absorption of case features is triggered by some requirement of the agreement morpheme itself, making overt NPs in A-positions impossible. The presence of an NP can thus not block case absorption: it is itself barred as a result of case absorption. This brings us back to the problem raised above of how to specify when the clitic can be realised in the first place.

Another possibility would be to consider subject clitics to be topic markers (e.g. by endowing them with a topic feature) that force a topic interpretation of the (possibly null) subject. This would account for the fact that such clitics are only realised when the subject is interpreted as topic. An interest-

ing consequence would be the blurring of the distinction between topics and pronoun-like elements (at least those associated with the subject): if subject clitics bear a topic feature, any sentence with such a clitic would force a topic interpretation of the subject (i.e. whether *Tim* is uttered or not in (46)). This idea is compatible with the claim that topics can be covert (cf. e.g. Gundel 1975).

(46)   (Tim$_i$,) il$_i$ a   retrouvé ses framboisiers.
          Tim   he has retrieved his raspberry-canes
            'Tim has got his raspberry-canes back.'

It would take me beyond the scope of this paper to discuss whether it is theoretically justified to assume that pronominal clitics always force a topic interpretation of the argument they are associated with.

Note that analysing subject clitics as topic markers would leave certain issues unresolved if the morphological analysis is adopted. One such issue is the fact that whenever the subject clitic is omitted, the subject position has to be filled by overt lexical material (as indicated by the contrast between (47-a) and (47-b)). When the subject clitic is present, the subject position can be left empty on the morphological analysis (as in (47-c)).

(47)   a. *[$_{TP}$ 0   [$_{T'}$ M' aidera]].
                          me will-help
        b. [$_{TP}$ Kester [$_{T'}$ m' aidera]].
              Kester   me will-help
        c. [$_{TP}$ 0   [$_{T'}$ <u>Il</u> m' aidera]].
                        he me will-help
          'He/Kester will help me.'

Another issue that would not be resolved by endowing subject clitics with a topic feature is that in some cases, there is feature mismatch between the putative subject DP and the finite verb, as in (48) where the DP is plural and the verb agreement morphology singular.

(48)   Les banques$_{pl.}$, c' est$_{sg.}$ les banques.
        the banks   it is   the banks
          'Banks will be banks.'

5 The morpheme-like properties of French subject clitics are accidental

By nature, clitics are hybrid elements between the status of pronouns and affixes, so they can be expected to share properties of both. The analysis of such elements therefore depends ultimately on the weight attributed to one or the other set of properties. There is presently no consensus on what should be the decisive criteria for a strictly morphological rather than a syntactic analysis of clitics.

In (49), I list the properties of French subject clitics that are expected under a morphological analysis but not a syntactic analysis and that have not yet been addressed in this paper. [17]

(49)   Subject clitics in spoken French
    a.   cannot be conjoined: *Il et elle viendront ('He and she will-come')
    b.   cannot take wide scope: *Je pleure et dors ('I cry and sleep')
    c.   display (very rare instances of) idiosyncrasy: e.g. je suis ('I am') pronounced "chu" ([ʃy]) only as the copula, not as suivre 'to follow'

The first two properties are ascribable to the phonologically weak nature of subject clitics, as suggested by e.g. Labelle (1985). Whether the cases of alleged idiosyncrasy such as (49-c), are due to a morphological status of subject clitics is controversial. Marie Labelle (p.c.) notes that the pronunciation of je 'I' as "ch" (the unvoiced post-alveolar fricative) results from a phonological rule of

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[17] I do not include complex inversion in this list because this construction (illustrated in (i)) is not productively used in spoken French (and therefore unattested in the York and Cat corpora).

(i)   Les carottes sont-elles cuites ?
    the carrots are-they cooked
    'Are the carrots cooked? / Is the game up?' (literal vs. idiomatic meaning)

Marie Labelle (p.c.) points out that complex inversion follows straightforwardly from a morphological analysis of subject clitics. However, the morphological analysis was proposed to account for *spoken* French and it is explicitly stated that it does not apply to *Standard* French. So the fact that complex inversion, a construction exclusively attested in Standard French, can be accounted for neatly under a morphological analysis of subject clitics cannot be taken as an argument supporting such an analysis. For an account of complex inversion under a syntactic analysis of French subject clitics, the reader is referred to Laenzlinger (1998). An anonymous reviewer also pointed out that the clitic in complex inversion could be analysed as an expletive element, which is compatible with the syntactic analysis.

devoicing in front of an unvoiced consonant (as in *je fais* 'I make'; *je te dis* 'I tell you') and that the omission of "i" in the pronunciation of *suis* is observed independently of whether the first person singular subject clitic *je* is attached to it: the auxiliary *suis* in *je me suis fait mal* 'I hurt myself' is pronounced "su" ([sy]) in Quebec French.

6 Conclusion

When confronted with the empirical facts, the morphological analysis of French subject clitics reveals itself to be more problematic than has been previously realised in the literature. Some of the empirical assumptions on which such an analysis is founded turn out not to be verified. This paper has demonstrated that in the most widely spoken varieties of French, subject clitic-verb inversion and the scope marker *ne* are used productively, and that subject clitics are banned whenever the subject is not the topic of the sentence. This shrinks considerably the empirical basis on which the morphological analysis was proposed. Whenever an XP is associated with a subject clitic in spoken French, that XP is dislocated and interpreted as the topic. French subject clitics are thus more akin to incorporated pronouns (or *anaphoric agreement markers*) than to morphemes (or *grammatical agreement markers*).

It might well be possible to account for these facts under a morphological analysis of French subject clitics, but only at a cost. *Ad hoc* rules or mechanisms need to be postulated to derive the following facts:

(50) a. Subject clitics are only realised when the subject is the topic.
  b. Subject clitics are obligatory when no XP expressing the subject immediately precedes or follows the verb.
  c. There can be feature mismatch between the subject clitic and the coindexed XP.
  d. Subject clitics can appear pre- or post-verbally under certain discourse conditions.

Implementing a morphological analysis of French subject clitics leads to redundancies in the verb agreement paradigm and places a heavy burden on the lexicon (postulating among other things the existence of numerous variants for each clitic). In addition to this, the distribution of elements intervening between a subject clitic and the verb stem is syntactically constrained. This is incompatible with the hypothesis that such elements are affixed to the verb stem in the lexicon.

I conclude that the morphological analysis of French subject clitics is unten-

able, at least in its present form, within a derivational approach to grammar. The limited similarities between the behaviour of French subject clitics and that of morphemes or affixes (as listed in (49)) should thus be treated as "noise" rather than decisive factors.

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