CHAPTER FIFTEEN

IMPERSONAL CONSTRUCTIONS
IN NORTHERN OCCITAN

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Abstract

In generative grammar, the typology introduced by the null subject or *pro-drop* parameter shows a clear distinction between null subject languages and languages with obligatory subjects. As a consequence, in non-null subject languages the presence of a subject pronoun is always obligatory, even in impersonal constructions, while this is not the case in null subject languages. In this perspective, it seems that the status of a language with respect to the null subject parameter is determined by the presence of expletive pronouns. However, some Romance dialects that are classified *a priori* as null subject languages show apparent subject pronouns with impersonal verbs, especially with meteorological verbs. This is the case for dialects spoken at the border areas of Occitan, in particular in the north of Occitania. On the basis of a corpus we have recently set up, we examine the distribution and the morphosyntactic behaviour of these elements, which challenge the general dichotomy between null subject and non-null subject languages and discuss the ensuing theoretical implications. In particular, we inquire whether these elements are indicators for a change in progress concerning the status of the dialects under investigation with respect to the null subject property.

1. The null subject property

It is a well-known and well-established fact that the languages of the world exhibit a fundamental typological difference with respect to the realisation of their subject pronouns (Perlmutter 1971). Mainly drawing on Romance

languages, generative grammar has formalised this disparity with the binary ±*pro-drop* parameter (Chomsky 1981, 1982; Rizzi 1982). The languages are hence divided into two groups: (i) the null subject or *pro-drop* languages, where the presence of a subject pronoun is not obligatory, and (ii) the non-null subject languages, whose subject pronouns are always realized in the same contexts. The former group includes most Romance languages, as illustrated in (1)-(2) with Spanish and Italian, respectively. In contrast, the latter group includes few languages, and is exemplified in (3)-(4) with (Standard) French and (Swiss) Rhaeto-Romance, respectively.

(1)   (Él)   habla   español.
        he   speaks Spanish
      'He speaks Spanish.'

(2)   (Lui) parla   italiano.
        he   speaks Italian
      'He speaks Italian.'

(3)   *(Il)   parle   français.
         he   speaks French
      'He speaks French.'

(4)   *(El)   tschontscha   romontsch.
         he   speaks   Rhaeto-Romance
      'He speaks Rhaeto-Romance.'

On the one hand, it is important to point out that realized subject pronouns can nevertheless be found in *pro-drop* languages under specific conditions. Indeed, as noted in the referential grammar of the *Real Academia Española*, the pronoun in Spanish is, for instance, used for emphasis or disambiguation:

> [...] el sujeto pronominal se emplea correctamente en español por motivos de énfasis expresivo, o para evitar alguna ambigüedad posible, según las circunstancias particulares de cada caso. Tales circunstancias hacen que el hablante, sintiendo como insuficiente la expresión del sujeto contenido en la forma verbal, necesite determinarlo más.[1]

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[1] "The pronominal subject is correctly used in Spanish for reasons of expressive emphasis or in order to avoid some possible ambiguity, according to the particular circumstances of each case. Such circumstances cause that the speaker, realizing

On the other hand, expletive pronouns, being semantically and referentially empty, cannot be used in emphasis or disambiguation contexts. Consequently, these pronouns are never found in impersonal constructions in *pro-drop* languages. And indeed, Standard Spanish and Standard Italian do not allow for the use of such pronouns, as shown in (5)-(6), respectively. To the contrary and in line with the *pro-drop* dichotomy, impersonal constructions in non-null subject languages are characterized by the obligatory presence of an expletive pronoun, as illustrated in (7)-(8) for (Standard) French and Rhaeto-Romance, respectively:

(5)   (*Él / *Ello) llueve.
          he / it   rains
      'It rains.'

(6)   (*Lui / *Egli) piove.
          he / it   rains
      'It rains.'

(7)   *(Il) pleut.
          it rains
      'It rains.'

(8)   *(Ei) plova.
          it   rains
      'It rains.'

In this perspective, it has been assumed that the status of a language with respect to the initial cluster of properties subsumed under the *pro-drop* parameter is narrowed down to the presence *vs.* the absence of subject pronouns in impersonal constructions. This has also been confirmed in typological studies on null subject and non-null subject languages (Haider 2001).

2. Some (apparent) counterexamples

In the literature, at least two sets of data seem to challenge the binary classification opposing null subject to non-null subject languages. Indeed, several Ibero-romance and Occitan dialects display apparent exceptions to the correlation established between the existence of referential null

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that the expression of the subject that is contained in the verbal form is not sufficient, needs to determine it more." (Real Academia Española 1973: 421)

subjects and the obligatory lack of subject pronouns in impersonal constructions.

2.1. Apparent subject pronouns in impersonal constructions

The first group of apparent exceptions consists of several Ibero-romance dialects that are traditionally classified as full null subject languages, as illustrated in (1)-(2), but that display apparent subject pronouns in impersonal constructions. Dominican Spanish (Henríquez Ureña 1939; Henríquez Ureña 1975: 226, footnote; Jiménez Sabater 1975: 165; Toribio 1996; Silva-Villar 1998; Hinzelin & Kaiser 2007), Colloquial non-standard European Portuguese (Cunha & Cintra 1984: 284; Brito 2001: 223, footnote; Carrilho 2008), and Colloquial (Balearic) Catalan (Hinzelin 2010) present such subject pronouns, as illustrated in (9) for Dominican Spanish (Hinzelin & Kaiser 2007), and in (10) for non-standard European Portuguese (Carrilho 2008). In these examples, apparent subject pronouns (Spanish *ello* 'it' and Portuguese *ele* 'it') appear in impersonal constructions:

Dominican Spanish
(9) a. **Ello** estaba lloviznando un   poco.[2]
         it   was   drizzling   a   little
     b. **Ello** llegan guaguas hasta allá.[3]
         it   arrive buses   until there
         'The buses arrive until there.'

European Portuguese
(10) a. **Ele** choveu   toda   a   noite.[4]
         it   rained   all   the night
         'It (really) rained all night long.
     b. **Ele** veio   aí   um   homem![5]
         it   came there a   man
         'There came a man!'

However, as far as the status of these elements is concerned, there is conclusive evidence that they are *not* to be analysed as expletive pronouns. Although having a pronoun-like shape, they substantially differ from

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[2] Jiménez Sabater (1975: 165).

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] Carrilho (2008: 303).

[5] Brito (2001: 223, footnote).

"true" expletive pronouns as found in typical non-null subject languages. This has been shown, for instance by Henríquez Ureña (1939) for Dominican Spanish (see also Hinzelin & Kaiser 2007) or Carrilho (2008) for non-standard European Portuguese, who provide data illustrating that these elements have a distribution that crucially differs from that of true expletive pronouns. Indeed, and among other facts, these elements (Spanish *ello* 'it' and Portuguese *ele* 'it') do not seem to display any special constraint regarding the type of verb, and do not always show morphological agreement with the finite verb, as shown in (11)-(12):

Dominican Spanish
(11) a. **Ello**   veremos.[6]
        it   will-see$_{1PL}$
        'We will see.'
     b. **Ello**   dicen   que   falta   gente.[7]
        it   say$_{3PL}$ that   lack   people
        'They say that people are missing.'

European Portuguese
(12) a. **Ele** voltamos   lá   todos   a ver.[8]
        it   went.back$_{1PL}$ there   all   to see$_{INF}$
        'We all went back there to see (that).'
     b. … cheguei, **ele**   lá   dormi.[9]
          arrived$_{1SG}$ it   there   slept$_{1SG}$
        '… I arrived (there), I slept there.

Thus, the distribution of *ello* and *ele* crucially differs from the distribution found for expletive pronouns in non-null subject languages like French or German. Their distribution hence strongly suggests that they occur in the left periphery, outside the IP-domain. This analysis is supported by the observation that *ello* and *ele* also occur in sentences where their use seems to have the effect of emphasizing the expressive value. Examples (13) and (14) illustrate this behaviour in Dominican Spanish and in Colloquial European Portuguese, respectively. Indeed, in both examples the use of *ello* and *ele* is related to some emphasis on a specific pragmatic value of the sentence. In particular, it is the directive force of the imperative answer

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[6] Henríquez Ureña (1939: 224).
[7] Henríquez Ureña (1939: 227).
[8] Carrilho (2008: 309).
[9] Carrilho (2008: 306).

to the question that ends up being amplified (Henríquez Ureña 1936: 223; Carrilho 2008: 312).

Dominican Spanish
(13) – ¿Es difícil   llegar?
        is   difficult   arrive$_{INF}$
        'Is it difficult to arrive (there)?'
   – **Ello** es fácil   llegar.[10]
     it   is   easy   arrive$_{INF}$
     'It is easy to arrive (there).'

European Portuguese
(14) – Quer passar por lá   para ver?
       want   go   for   there   to   see$_{INF}$
       'Do you want to go there to see it?'
   – **Ele** vamos   embora![11]
     it   go$_{1PL}$ away
     'Let's go (right now)!'

Given this behaviour, it has convincingly been argued that *ello* and *ele* rather function as a "marcador discursivo" (Hinzelin & Kaiser 2007: 185) or "a sort of pragmatic marker" (Carrilho 2008: 310), which is connected to the left periphery of the sentence. Additional evidence for this assumption of *ello* and *ele* as discursive/pragmatic markers comes from the fact that they mainly occur in clause-initial position and in independent or matrix contexts. Consequently, since these elements are not analysed as true expletive pronouns, these utterances do not represent counterexamples to the null subject *vs.* non-null subject classification.

## 2.2. The case of "partial" null subject languages

The second group of Romance varieties that seems to challenge the *pro-drop* dichotomy consists of many of the well-known Northern Italian dialects (Brandi & Cordin 1989; Poletto 1993, 2000; Goria 2004; Manzini & Savoia 2005), some varieties of Franco-Provençal (Olszyna-Marys 1964; Favre 1993; Heap 2000; Diémoz 2007), and dialects spoken at the boundaries of Occitania (Oliviéri 2010, 2011). Indeed, none of these dialects can be classified as a true null subject language since they display obligatory subject (clitic) pronouns for some persons only. In other words,

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[10] Henríquez Ureña (1939: 223).
[11] Carrilho (2008: 312).

these dialects exhibit a "partial" null subject property. Let us now illustrate this characteristic with some Occitan dialects.

Occitania constitutes the major part of Southern France. Map 15.1 shows the areas under scrutiny in this contribution, which are at the boundaries of Occitania: the Val Roya and Val d'Aosta, in the east, at the border with Italy, and the north of the domain.
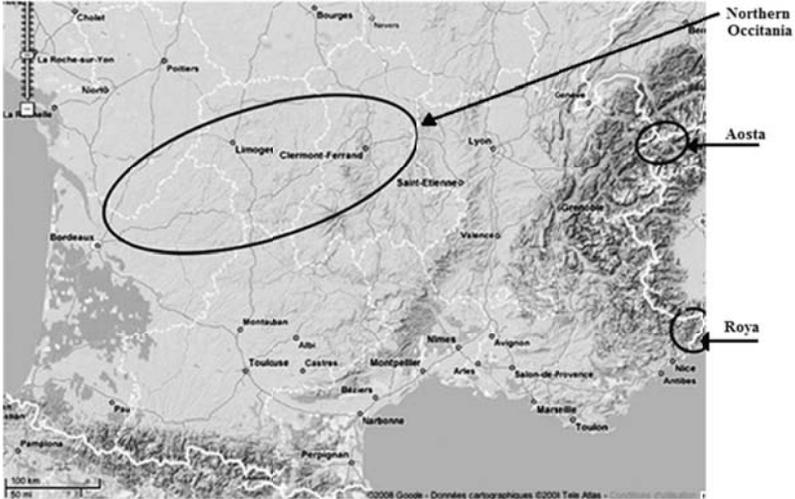
Map 15.1: The boundaries of Occitania.

Table 15.1 exemplifies verbal paradigms from dialects spoken in these areas.

These dialects have in common that they all have obligatory subject (clitic) pronouns for some persons only. But, interestingly, some of these dialects also exhibit subject pronouns in impersonal constructions, as illustrated in (15) and (16) in Verrayes (Val d'Aosta) and Tende (Val Roya).

Verrayes
(15) i   plu
        it   rains

Tende
(16) aɹ tʃˈɔw
      it   rains

	VAL ROYA		NORTH		VAL D'AOSTA
	TENDE	**BREIL**	**EYMOUTIERS**	**COUSSAC-B.**	**VERRAYES**[12]
	to sing	*to leave*	*to be*	*to be*	*to like*
1P	(mi) kˈantu	pˈaʀti	jo sˈe	sˈe	de lâme
2P	ti k'anta	ti pˈaʀte	te sˈe	ty sˈe	te lame
3P	aɹ k'anta	aɹ pˈaart	ˈej	w ˈe	lamèn
4P	kant'amu	paʀt'imᵃ	nu sˈũ	nu ʃˈũ	no lamèn
5P	kant'ai	paʀtˈi	vu sˈe	vu sˈe	vo lamóde
6P	li k'antaᵑ	pˈaʀtu	sˈũ	sˈũ	i lamón

Table 15.1: "Partial" null subject property.

According to the results of studies concerning partial null subject languages,[13] it seems that there are fewer restrictions with respect to the distribution of subject pronouns in impersonal constructions in these languages, contrary to Dominican Spanish or Colloquial Portuguese. Indeed, a preliminary empirical study by Hinzelin and Kaiser (2012) with informants from the Franco-Provençal speaking Val d'Aoste provides evidence for the occurrence of such pronouns in non-initial position of the sentence and in embedded contexts.

In other words, the existence of such dialects challenges the assumption of a (clear) correlation between the non-obligatory presence of referential subject pronouns and the obligatory absence of subject pronouns in impersonal constructions. These results hence seem to contradict the assumption that there is a clear-cut distinction between null subject and non-null subject languages. In order to investigate this question, we will present in what follows a case study on the use of subject pronouns in impersonal constructions in Northern Occitan dialects.

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[12] Unfortunately, no phonetic transcription is available for this paradigm (Diémoz 2007: 353).

[13] See, among others, Manzini and Savoia (2005).

3. The case of Northern Occitan

3.1. Referential subject (clitic) pronouns

Northern Occitania is an area that displays wide variation with regard to subject pronouns since it is an area of transition between two macrosystems, i.e. Occitan to the south, and the so-called *oïl*-dialects spoken in the north of France. In the most part of Occitania, there are no subject clitic pronouns (as it was the case in the source-language, Latin), while the *oïl*-dialects are characterized by the obligatory use of such pronouns. In between, at the boundary, we can see different stages of the progressive change of value of the *pro-drop* parameter (Oliviéri 2010, 2011).[14] Indeed, drawing on data from the ALF and ALAL atlases,[15] Map 15.2 illustrates the progressive emergence of subject pronouns in this area:
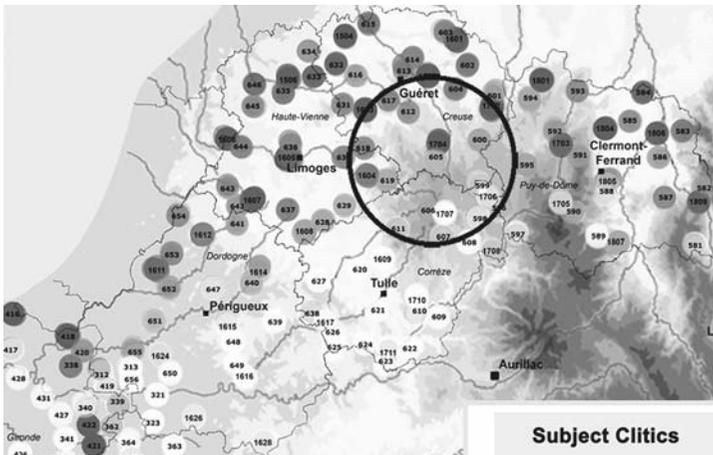
Map 15.2: Referential Subject Clitics in Northern Occitania.[16]

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[14] See also Palasis (2010) for a comparison with first language acquisition.
[15] ALF: *Atlas Linguistique de la France*; ALAL: *Atlas Linguistique et ethnographique de l'Auvergne et du Limousin*.
[16] Here and in the following maps, white indicates a complete absence of subject pronouns, dark grey designates localities where subject pronouns are used throughout, and intermediary shades show different levels of the partial null subject property.

However, the presence of various intermediary shades in Map 15.2 also highlights that these data consist of many different dialects that differ minimally. The detail of the evolution, i.e. the dialectal microvariation, that gradually leads to full non-null subject languages hence still needs to be examined. In order to complement the information provided by the above-mentioned atlases, additional fieldwork was carried out in the area outlined by the black circle on Map 15.2 (Corrèze in 2010 and Creuse in 2011).[17]

As a first result, our data in combination with the data gathered in the atlases allow us to establish a clear isogloss with respect to the use of referential subject clitic pronouns in this area. Indeed, the different shades in Map 15.3 show that subject pronouns are frequently used in the northern part of the area (Creuse), whereas the southern part (Corrèze) displays null-subject systems. The isogloss hence almost corresponds to the frontier between the two departments.[18]
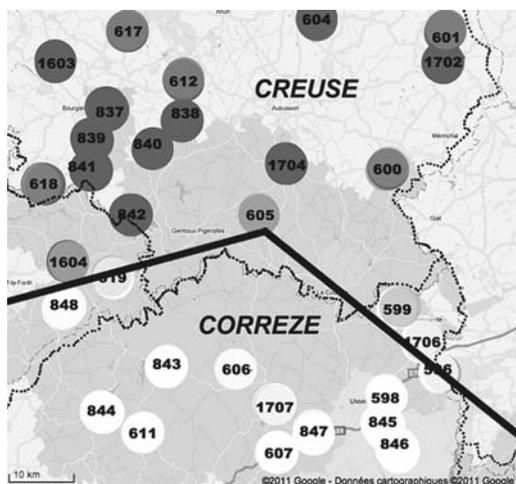
Map 15.3: Referential subject clitic pronouns in Creuse and Corrèze.

Tables 15.2 and 15.3 provide the detail of some verbal paradigms in Corrèze and Creuse.

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[17] Both inquiries were supported by a grant awarded to the PHC / DAAD PROCOPE project n° 22016ZL.
[18] In this map and the following ones, we gathered data from the atlases and our data. The numbers of the localities (here and in the examples below) are those of the database *Thesaurus Occitan* (*Thesoc*) (http://www.unice.fr/bcl/rubrique40).

Table 15.2 illustrates the full null subject property of the dialects in Corrèze, contrary to Creuse, which displays the partial null subject property, as shown in Table 15.3. The dialects in Corrèze being full null-subject systems are thus closer to Latin than the partial null subject dialects in Creuse. It is hence suggested that the dialects in Corrèze compared to the ones in Creuse instantiate an earlier stage of the evolution from Latin to contemporary Occitan.

	844	845	1706	1707
	to go	*to go*	*to have*	*to have*
1P	vˈɔw	vˈɔw	ˈe	ˈae
2P	vˈa	vˈa	ˈa	ˈa
3P	vˈaj	vˈaj	ˈaj	ˈɒ
4P	anˈã	anˈɛ̃	avˈæ̃	avˈæ̃
5P	anˈa	anˈa	avˈe	avˈe
6P	vˈɔ̃	vˈɔ̃	ˈũ	ˈo

Table 15.2: Full Null Subject paradigms in Corrèze.

	604	604	612
	to be	*to have*	*to be*
1P	jo sˈe	ˈe	sˈø
2P	te sˈe	ty ˈa	ty sˈe
3P	ˈej	ˈo	w/l ˈe
4P	nu sˈũ	nuz avˈɛ̰ᵐ	nu sˈũ
5P	vu sˈe	vuz avˈe	vu sˈe
6P	sˈũ	ɛl ˈã	i sˈũ

Table 15.3: Partial Null Subject paradigms in Creuse.

### 3.2. The use of *ko* in impersonal constructions in Corrèze

Interestingly, our fieldwork in Corrèze reveals that the same informants also regularly make use of an apparent subject pronoun in constructions with a meteorological verb. The phonetic form of this element varies only

slightly from one dialect to another ([ka], [kɑ], [kɔ], [ko], etc.), so this element will be referred to as *ko* in this contribution, and can be glossed throughout as the demonstrative pronoun 'that'. Table 15.4 illustrates this phenomenon for two different meteorological verbs:

Question[19]	844	845	1706	Gloss
Il pleut	ka pl'øw	kɔ pl'øj	kɔ pl'øj	'it is raining'
Il grêle	ka gr'ɛlø	kɔ gʁ'ɛlə	kɔ gʁ'ɛlɔ	'it is hailing'

Table 15.4: *ko* with meteorological verbs (Corrèze).

It must be kept in mind that these dialects display no referential subject clitic pronouns. So while we can draw a relatively clear boundary between the north and the south of the area under investigation with respect to the use of referential subject pronouns, no such line can be drawn for the use of *ko* in meteorological constructions. The different localities in grey above and under the black line in Map 15.4 clearly illustrate that the isogloss for referential subject pronouns taken from Map 15.3 does not apply to meteorological verbs in Map 15.4.
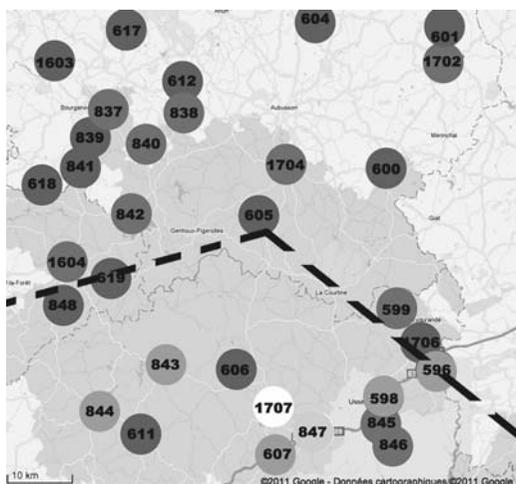
Map 15.4: *ko* with meteorological verbs in Creuse and Corrèze.

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[19] Since all the informants are bilingual (French-Occitan), our questionnaire was in French.

Moreoever, it can be noticed from Map 15.4 that the localities in Corrèze show different shades of grey. This is due to the fact that there are restrictions with respect to the distribution of *ko* with meteorological verbs, and that these restrictions do not apply uniformly throughout the area. Indeed, Table 15.5 shows that *ko* is:

(i)   less frequent in negative contexts;
(ii)   less frequent before an auxiliary;
(iii)   very rare in embedded contexts;
(iv)   very rare with verbs in imperfect tense.

In addition, we do not find any evidence for the use of *ko* in postverbal position, since we never obtained *plow ko?* for the question *pleut-il?* ('is it raining?', lit. rains-it?).

Question	Gloss	Context	%
Il pleut.	'it is raining'	present	**95**
Oui, ça pleut bien.	'yes, it is raining heavily'	present	**90**
Il pleut?	'is it raining?'	interrogative	**90**
*Moi ça me plaît pas **quand il grêle**.*	'I don't like it when it hails'	circumstantial	**67**
*(Il fait froid) **et pleut.***	'(it is cold) and (it) is raining'	present	**50**
Non, il ne pleut pas.	'no, it is not raining'	negative	**28**
Il ne pleut plus.	'it is not raining anymore'	negative	**30**
Il a beaucoup plu hier.	'it rained a lot yesterday'	auxiliary	**33**
Il neigeait tous les ans.	'it used to snow every year'	imperfect	**10**
*J'aimerais qu'**il pleuve**!*	'I would like it to rain'	embedded	**0**
*Il faut qu'**il pleuve**!!!*	'it has to rain'	embedded	**0**
*Tu crois qu'**il pleuvra** demain?*	'do you think it will rain tomorrow?'	embedded + future + interrogative	**0**
*Espérons qu'**il ne pleuve** pas !*	'let's hope it does not rain!'	embedded + negative	**22**
*Il faudrait qu'**il ne pleuve** plus.*	'it would be better if it didn't rain anymore'	embedded + negative	**10**

Table 15.5: Emergence of *ko* with meteorological verbs (Corrèze).

Finally, the data in Corrèze reveal that the use of *ko* is clearly restricted to simple meteorological verbs. Table 15.6 illustrates this restriction with the absence of *ko* in periphrastic weather constructions with the verb *faire* 'be (in this context)' and other impersonal constructions such as *il faut que* 'one must'.

Question	844	845	1706	Gloss
Il fait beau	fɛ bravə tɛ̃	fɛ bɛ tã	faj bo	'it is sunny'
Il fait froid	faj fʁɛ	faj fʁɛ	faj fʁɛ	'it is cold'
Il faut (que…)	sɔu	tsɔu	tsɔu	'one must…'
Il semble (que…)	ʃˈãblə	ʃˈãbl	sˈɛ̃bl	'it seems…'

Table 15.6: Other impersonal constructions (Corrèze).

3.3. The use of *ko* in impersonal constructions in Creuse

Firstly, comparing the results from Corrèze with the data collected in Creuse, we can observe that the informants from Creuse also make use of *ko* with meteorological verbs. This is not surprising as the dialects in Creuse have referential subject pronouns (see Map 15.3), and we have already assumed that they represent later stages of the evolution of the linguistic system (see Section 3.1). Some examples are given in Table 15.7.

Question	839	840	617	Gloss
Il pleut	ka plˈo	kɐ pʎˈo	ka plˈo	'it is raining'
Il neigeait	ka nɛdʒˈavɔ	kɐ nejˈava	ka nɛdʒˈavɔ	'it was snowing'

Table 15.7: *ko* with meteorological verbs (Creuse).

Secondly, it can be observed that the data for *ko*, nevertheless, diverge in both departments as far as frequency of the pronoun is concerned. Indeed, the dark circles in Map 15.4 are overwhelming in Creuse, contrary to Corrèze, and the contexts in which the pronoun is used are less restricted, as shown with the rates between 50 and 100% in Table 15.8.

Question	Gloss	Context	%
Il pleut.	'it is raining'	present	**100**
Oui, ça pleut bien.	'yes, it is raining heavily'	present	**100**
Il pleut?	'is it raining?'	interrogative	**100**
Moi ça me plaît pas quand il grêle.	'I don't like it when it hails'	circumstantial	**100**
Il fait froid et pleut.	'(it is cold) and (it) is raining'	present	**86**
Non, il ne pleut pas.	"no, it is not raining'	negative	**79**
Il ne pleut plus.	'it is not raining anymore'	negative	**100**
Il a beaucoup plu hier.	'it rained a lot yesterday'	auxiliary	**86**
Il neigeait tous les ans.	'it used to snow every year'	imperfect	**100**
J'aimerais qu'il pleuve!	"I would like it to rain'	embedded	**57**
Il faut qu'il pleuve!!!	'it has to rain'	embedded	**79**
Espérons qu'il ne pleuve pas!	'let's hope it does not rain'	embedded + negative	**79**
Il faudrait qu'il ne pleuve plus.	'it would be better if it didn't rain anymore'	embedded + negative	**71**
Tu crois qu'il pleuvra demain?	'do you think it will rain tomorrow?'	embedded + future + interrogative	**50**

**Table 15.8: Emergence of *ko* with meteorological verbs (Creuse).**

Furthermore, on the one hand, a comparison of Tables 15.5 (Corrèze) and 15.8 (Creuse) suggests a progressive emergence of *ko* moving from south to north. In other words, the frequency of this element in meteorological constructions increases as one goes further north. On the other hand, the rates in Table 15.8 also highlight that *ko* can optionally emerge in negative and embedded clauses with no specific constraint. These facts hence suggest a kind of free, internal variation in these contexts.

Finally and contrary to the facts reported in Table 15.6 for Corrèze, the data from Creuse in Table 15.9 illustrate that in the latter *ko* is combined with a wider array of impersonal verbs than in the former since *ko* surfaces in expressions with *faire* 'be (in this context)' as well as other verbs, such as *sembler* 'seem'.
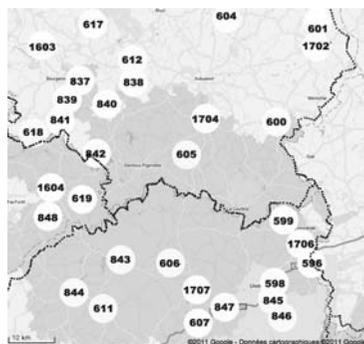
Question	841	842	Gloss
Il fait nuit	ka fɛj ne	kɔ faj nɛ	'it is dark'
Il se peut (que…)	ka se pɔw	kɔ s pɔ	'it is possible (that...)'
Il me semble (que...)		kɔ me semblɔ	'it seems to me (that...)'

Table 15.9: Other impersonal constructions (Creuse).

However, Maps 15.5 and 15.6 additionally illustrate that *ko* is not present with all types of impersonal constructions in Creuse either:
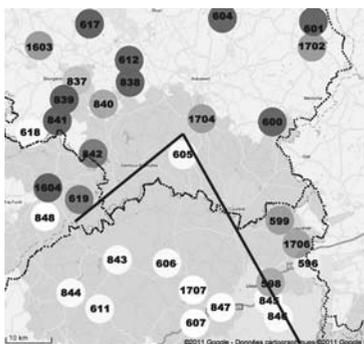
Map 15.5: *ko* in *Il fait beau*.   Map 15.6: *ko* in *Il faut*.

On the one hand, *ko* surfaces in meteorological constructions of the type *il fait beau* 'the weather is nice', as shown in Map 15.5. On the other hand, Map 15.6 illustrates that *ko* does not appear in other impersonal constructions like *il faut* 'one has to'. Consequently, while an isogloss still appears between north and south in Map 15.5 (although slightly southernmost than the isogloss in Map 15.4), the data in Map 15.6 reveal a uniform absence of *ko*.

    The evolution can be described as follows. To the south of the area (in Corrèze), *ko* emerges first with simple meteorological verbs. Then, the phenomenon spreads, first to periphrastic meteorological verbs in Creuse, and then to a limited number of impersonal constructions in some dialects in Creuse. We hence expect to find a subject pronoun in all configurations further north.[20]

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[20] French for instance has reached this stage.

4. A tentative proposal

In order to provide an explanation to the occurrence of a subject pronoun in impersonal constructions in null subject languages, we would like to refer to Chomsky's (1981) seminal work on impersonal pronouns. Chomsky (1981) proposed a threefold distinction for pronominal elements, which is often referred to (e.g. Cabredo Hofherr 2000 or Carrilho 2008). The classification is reported in Table 15.10.

	referential	argumental
argument	yes	yes
quasi-argument	no	yes
non-argument	no	no

Table 15.10: Three types of pronouns (Chomsky 1981: 325).[21]

Illustrating this distinction on the basis of the English pronoun *it*, Chomsky comes to the conclusion that there are three different kinds of pronouns. The first one is a "true argument" with both referential and argumental properties, as illustrated in (17a). The second one is a "quasi-argument" that lacks referential function but has argumental properties, as in (17b). The third one is a "non-argumental" pronoun, with neither referential function nor argumental properties (17c).

(17) a. **It** is on the table.
    b. **It** is raining.
    c. **It** seems that John is here.   (Chomsky 1981: 325)

What is important for us here is that Chomsky (1981: 325) makes a distinction between *it* in (17b) and (17c). His crucial argument for this distinction is based on the observation that the empty subject of an embedded verb can be controlled by the subject of the matrix verb, whether the empty pronoun is truly argumental, as in (18a), or quasi-argumental, as in (18b). The distinction applies in (18c), where the empty, non-argumental pronoun cannot be controlled by the matrix subject.

(18) a. **He**$_i$ tried to [*PRO*$_i$ roll down the hill].
    b. **It**$_i$ sometimes rains after [*PRO*$_i$ snowing].
    c. *****There**$_i$ arrived three girls without [*PRO*$_i$ arriving three boys].

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[21] See also Cabredo Hofherr (2000: 16).

As noted by Cabredo Hofherr (2000: 15), the same distinction can be made in (modern) French:

(19) a. **Il**$_i$ pleut sans   [*PRO*$_i$ neiger].
         it rains without   snow$_{INF}$
     b. ***Il**$_i$ est   arrivé   trois filles sans   [*PRO*$_i$ arriver
          it is   arrived three girls   without   arrive$_{INF}$
         trois   garçons].
         three   boys

Interestingly, the lexical distinction between these two kinds of pronouns can be observed in many languages. This is the case in Danish, for instance. As shown in (20), Danish uses the form *det* as a quasi-argument, i.e. a pronoun in combination with meteorological verbs, while in other impersonal constructions where the pronoun functions as a non-argument the form *der* is used.

(20) a. **Det** regner.
         it   rains
     b. **Der** er   kommet en   dreng.
         there is   arrived a   boy

We propose that the Occitan dialects spoken in Corrèze show a similar behaviour to Danish: in constructions with meteorological verbs they use a lexical form (*ko*) as a quasi-argument, while in other impersonal constructions no overt pronoun is used.

  Additional evidence comes from the observation of other languages. In Ancient Greek, for instance, utterances such as 'Who rains?' or 'Zeus rains' can be found (Ruwet 1986), and French displays meteorological constructions with true-argument subjects in proverbs and in the literature, as exemplified in (21).

French Literature[22]
(21) a. **Avril** pleut aux   hommes, **mai** pleut aux   bêtes.
         April rains to-the men   May rains to-the   animals
     b. **Dieu** pleut sur les Justes   et   sur   les   Injustes.
         God   rains over the Righteous   and   over   the   Unrighteous
     c. **La lune** neige   sa lumière sur la   couronne   gothique.
         the moon snows   its light   on   the   crown   gothic

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[22] Höybye (1966), *Le Grand Larousse* (1978: 6332), Ruwet (1989: 325, fn, 1990: 68).

In constructions requiring true expletives, however, such a replacement by a true-argument subject would be completely excluded. It seems then that meteorological verbs allow for quasi-argument subject pronouns, while other verbs do not. In other words, Chomsky's distinction between quasi-argument and non-argument pronouns serves as a basis for the explanation of the distribution of *ko* in impersonal constructions in the Occitan dialects of Corrèze.

5. Conclusion

Drawing on recently collected data in Northern Occitania (in the French departments of Creuse and Corrèze), this contribution aims at shedding further light on the description and analysis of impersonal constructions in relation with the null or non-null subject status of a language. Although our data from Creuse confirm a high correlation between the regular use of referential subject clitic pronouns and the use of subject pronouns in impersonal constructions, this correlation is not yet completed. Most importantly, we have established that the opposite, namely a correlation between the absence of referential subject pronouns and the (obligatory) absence of subject pronouns in impersonal constructions, does not hold. Indeed, the data collected in Corrèze provide evidence for the existence of a null subject language that requires the use of subject pronouns in (certain) impersonal constructions. Note that, although the use of these pronouns is restricted to specific clause types and positions, there is no evidence to argue for an interpretation of these elements as discourse markers, as in Dominican Spanish or European Portuguese.

We have argued that the quasi-argument *ko* emerges in the dialect of Corrèze as the first subject pronoun that starts to be obligatorily used. Our speculation is that *ko* is the element that initiates the change of this dialect from a null subject language to a non-null subject language. In other words, it triggers the change with respect to the *pro-drop* status of the dialect. In Corrèze, we can see the first step of the change, while in Creuse, the change is more advanced.

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