

The Pronominalization of Infinitival Complements in French

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Abstract

In French, the pronominalization of embedded infinite clauses shows notable idiosyncrasies, as the same string of words may be pronominalized as *le, y*, or *en* in different sentences. Jones (1991) and Belasco (1978) proposed an explanation by which the pre-verbal *à* or *de* may be either a P or a C depending on the matrix verb. By combining their evidence with insights from embedded finite clauses and the expletive *ce que* construction, I have developed a new proposal in which the pre-verbal C is always present but the P may be deleted, according to a constraint against adjacent P and C in French.

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I. Introduction

In French (a Romance language of the Indo-European family), many verbs take infinitival complements (i.e. complements in the form of an infinitive verb), henceforth referred to as ICs. These complements can usually be pronominalized. However, the pronominal form is not easy to predict. The same complement will take different pronominal forms when attached to different matrix verbs:

(1) J'exige **de faire ce travail.**

I=demand of do.INF DEM work
'I demand to do this work.'

(2) Je l'exige.

I it=demand
'I demand it.'

(3) Je suis capable **de faire ce travail.**

I am able of do.INF DEM work
'I am capable of doing this work.'

(4) J'**en** suis capable.

I=of.it am able
'I am capable of it.'

In examples (1) to (4), we see how the same sequence of words (*de faire ce travail*) are replaced by the pronouns *le* (shortened to *l'* because the next word begins with a vowel)¹ and *en*, respectively. Belasco (1978) mentions this phenomenon, but falls short of providing an explanation in the framework of generative syntax. In French, the pronominal form of a word is usually determined by its ϕ -features (number, gender, and person).

¹ In French, a constraint against adjacent vowels means that, when a word of the form CV appears before another word starting with a vowel, the V deletes and C cliticizes to the following word. Thus, *l'exige* rather than **le exige*, and *J'en suis* rather than **Je en suis*. This rule is entirely phonological and not relevant to the variation of pronouns I discuss in this paper; *l'* and *le* are the same pronoun, in a grammatical sense, merely appearing in two different forms depending on the environment.

Infinitives have none of those, so the question remains: on what basis does a speaker select a pronoun for an IC? The examples above show that the answer cannot lie in the IC's lexical properties, as *de faire ce travail* surely keeps the same properties in both sentences. I hypothesize that the reason for this difference lies in the syntax, in the relationship between the IC and the matrix verb. In his work on the subject, Belasco (1978) demonstrated that the distinction between direct and indirect objects is key.

II. Background

In French, a verb in infinitive form consists of the verb stem and its infinitive ending, either -er, -ir, -re, or -oir. Infinitival complements are usually, but not always, introduced by a complementizer: either *à* or *de*.

Although *à* and *de* are usually prepositions, the evidence is clear that they act as complementizers when introducing ICs (Cox, 1983; Kayne, 1981). For example, they always appear as the first element of the embedded clause (before negation or pre-verbal objects):

(6) is ungrammatical because the negator appears before *de*.

(5) Je lui ai dit de ne voir personne.²
 I to.him have said COMP NEG see.INF nobody
 'I told him not to see anybody.'

(6) *Je lui ai dit ne de voir personne.
 I to.him have said NEG COMP see.INF nobody

Furthermore, they are incompatible with raising verbs, and other cases where the subject of the infinitive has been extracted to a higher clause. That is to say, (8) is

² Sentences (5-9) are taken from (Kayne, 1981). Glosses are my own.

ungrammatical because the overt complementizer would block the subject (*le garçon*) from leaving the lower clause.

(7) Le garçon que je croyais être arrivé
The boy that I believed be.INF arrived
'The boy that I believed to have arrived...'

(8) *Le garçon que je croyais d'être arrivé
The boy that I believed COMP=be.INF arrived

Kayne (1981) compares this to other cases where the presence of a complementizer blocks an adjacent subject from being extracted:

(9) *Who would you prefer for to leave first?

Finally, we can look at cases where the verb's complement is not an IC. The *de* is present in (10), but not (11), where the verb's complement is a DP. This is consistent with *de* being a complementizer. There is no need for a complementizer in (11), because that sentence has no embedded clause.

(10) J'exige de faire ce travail.
I=demand COMP do.INF this work
'I demand to do this work.'

(11) J'exige une maison à Waikiki.
I=demand a house at Waikiki
'I demand a house in Waikiki.'

Cox argues that the unmarked case is an IC introduced by *de*, and *à* is an aspectual complementizer that marks inchoative verbs (Cox, 1983). Such a distinction will not be relevant for this paper; whether an infinitive takes *à* or *de* is lexically determined, and the two types follow the same patterns of behavior when it comes to pronominalization. ICs

introduced by *à* may pronominalize to *le* or *y*, and those introduced by *de* may pronominalize to *le* or *en*.

The first pronoun, *le*, is a pronoun for third-person direct objects. This form indicates that the referent is singular and masculine. Clauses and verbs have neither number nor gender – only nouns have those – but French defaults to the masculine singular when such features are unspecified. See, for example, the fact that an expletive subject is always the third-person masculine singular *il*. So the use of *le* as a pronoun for ICs is unsurprising.

(12) Il pleut.
It rains
'It's raining.'

Y and *en* are more complicated to explain. Essentially, *y* replaces prepositional phrases introduced by the preposition *à*, and *en* replaces prepositional phrases introduced by the preposition *de*. These are two very versatile and common prepositions, found everywhere in French, so their associated pro-forms are found everywhere as well. Therefore, it is hard to define the use of *y* and *en* any further, at least in a general sense.³ Here, I will focus on their particular use as pro-forms for ICs.

III. Prior Research on Infinitival Complements

The study of pronouns tends to focus on their most obvious use, which is on nouns. Or, as Simon Belasco puts it, “Traditional textbooks and reference grammars make an intensive study of the form and distribution of pronominalized nouns but say very little

³ For the sake of consistency and simplicity, in this paper I will gloss *à* as *to*, *de* as *of*, *le* as *it*, *y* as *to.it*, and *en* as *of.it*, and leave any further nuances for the translation below.

about the functional role of sentential complements.” (Belasco, 1978, p.794) As far as I can tell, this paper was the first to point out the idiosyncrasies of pronominalization in French ICs. It came about from the author’s “attempt to construct pronominalization exercises for a textbook called *Reading College French*” (Belasco, 1978, p.794). He identifies several classes of verbs by the pronominalization patterns of their complements:

Class	Complement preceded by	Pronominal form	Examples
Class I	à, de	le	exiger, enseigner
Class II	à, de	y, en	songer, empêcher
Class III	∅	y	compter, monter, aller
Class IV	∅, à, de	resists pronominalization	savoir, commencer, aider
Class V	∅, à, de	le, but resists pronominalization	espérer, décider, apprendre
Class VI	à, de	y/en, but resists pronominalization	avertir, réussir

Belasco also offers a potential explanation for the difference between Class I and Class II. Class I takes the pronoun *le* because its ICs are direct objects. Class II takes the pronouns *it* does because its ICs are *not* direct objects. This carries with it the corollary that the seemingly-identical instances of *de* in (1) and (3) are actually serving very different purposes. In (1), *de* is a complementizer, introducing an infinitive clause. In (3), *de* is a preposition, introducing a prepositional phrase (Belasco, 1978, pp.798-99). As for the rest, he offers no explanation. Why do Classes IV, V, and VI resist pronominalization? Why does

Class III pronominalize to *y* when there is no *à* to be found? I have had to set such questions aside in favor of focusing on the primary distinction between Class I and Class II.⁴

I will be retaining his terms for use in this paper, especially Class I and Class II, as they are usefully short ways to refer to, respectively, verbs whose ICs take the pronominal form *le* (Class I), and verbs whose ICs take the pronominal form *y* or *en*, depending on whether the IC is introduced by *à* or *de* (Class II).

The text *Foundations of French Syntax* (Jones, 1996) also addresses the problem of infinitival complements. “The puzzle can be solved,” the author writes, “by postulating that *à* and *de* before infinitives can function either as prepositions (indicating an indirect object relation) or as complementisers (the equivalent of *que* in finite clauses).” (Jones, 1996, p.59) Jones also notes that an IC’s status as direct object or indirect object can be checked by substituting a DP, a helpful diagnostic that I make use of in section IV.

IV. Diagnostics for the Pronominal Form

As Jones (1996) noted, one diagnostic for determining the pronominal form of an IC is to replace it with a DP.

(13) J’exige de faire ce travail.
I=demand of do.INF DEM work
'I demand to do this work.'

(14) J’exige un rendez-vous avec Adèle
I=demand a meeting with Adèle
'I demand a meeting with Adèle'

⁴ Belasco himself admits that “the possibility of the relaxation of whatever constraint restricts these verbs to Class IV does exist, and at the present time we can say that we anticipate this possibility,” (Belasco, 1978, p.802). Given the amount of time that has passed since he made his observations, it is worth investigating to see how much they still hold true, especially in the more ambiguous cases he noted. Such an investigation would best involve consulting many different French speakers.

(15) Je l'exige.
I it=demand
'I demand it.'

The complementizer *de* disappears along with the IC in (14). Recall that that *exiger* is a Class I verb, so its IC will pronominalize as *le*. This result is consistent with the hypothesis that Class I ICs represent direct objects. In French, the canonical place for direct objects is directly after the verb, while indirect objects must be introduced by a preposition. That is, if a verb can take complements without any preposition, then those complements are direct objects. Meanwhile, consider a Class II verb that can take DP complements:

(16) Bruno songe à téléphoner à Adèle.
Bruno thinks to call.INF to Adèle
'Bruno thinks about calling Adèle'

(17)?Bruno songe à Adèle.
Bruno thinks to Adèle
'Bruno thinks about Adèle'

(18) Bruno y songe.
Bruno to.it thinks
'Bruno thinks of her/it'

In (17), the *à* remains. So, by comparing (14) and (17), we can confirm this diagnostic: If the IC's complementizer disappears when it is replaced with a DP (13, 14), it will pronominalize as *le* (15). If the complementizer remains (16, 17), then it will pronominalize as *y/en* (18). The complements of *songer* are indirect objects, which must be introduced by a preposition (in this case *à*).

This distinction holds if the IC is instead replaced by a wh-phrase (Liliane Ehrhart, personal communication, July 2022).

(19) Qu'exige-je?
What=demand=I
'I demand what?'

(20) À quoi songe Bruno?
to what thinks Bruno
'Bruno thinks of what?'

(21) De quoi suis-je capable?
Of what am=I able
'I am capable of what?'

In (19), featuring the Class I verb *exiger* from (13), the IC is able to be replaced by a single-morpheme wh-phrase. But for the Class II verbs in (20) and (21), the complementizer that introduces the IC must remain. For example, across the sentences with *songer* (16, 17, 20), the *à* remains, no matter if the complement it introduces is a DP, an IC, or a wh-phrase.

This raises an interesting question: is *à* a preposition or a complementizer here? The fact that it introduces a sentential complement in (16) suggests that it is a complementizer, but it also introduces a DP in (17), and complementizers simply don't take DP complements. As all the semantic and pronominal evidence suggests that the infinitival in (16) and the DP complement in (17) both have the same relationship to the verb (i.e. that of an indirect object) and in French, indirect objects must be introduced with prepositions, it is reasonable to conclude that *à* is a preposition in (16, 17, 20).

But, take a Class I verb that introduces ICs with *à*, for example *apprendre*:

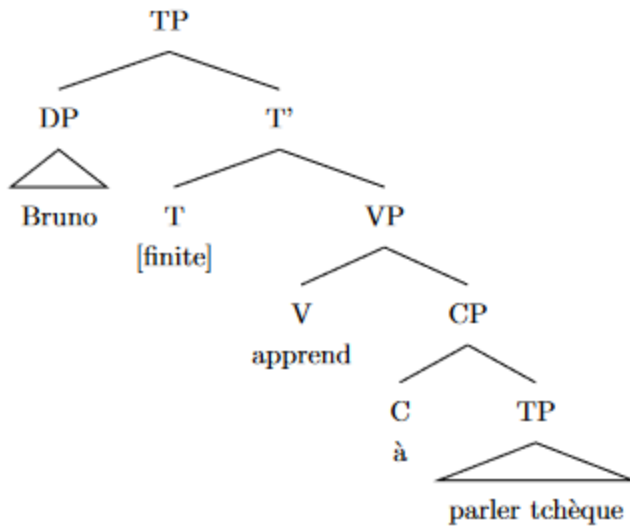
(22) Bruno apprend à parler tchèque.
Bruno learns to speak. INF Czech
'Bruno is learning to speak Czech.'

(23) Adèle apprend à Bruno à parler tchèque.
Adèle teaches to Bruno to speak. INF Czech
'Adèle is teaching Bruno to speak Czech.'

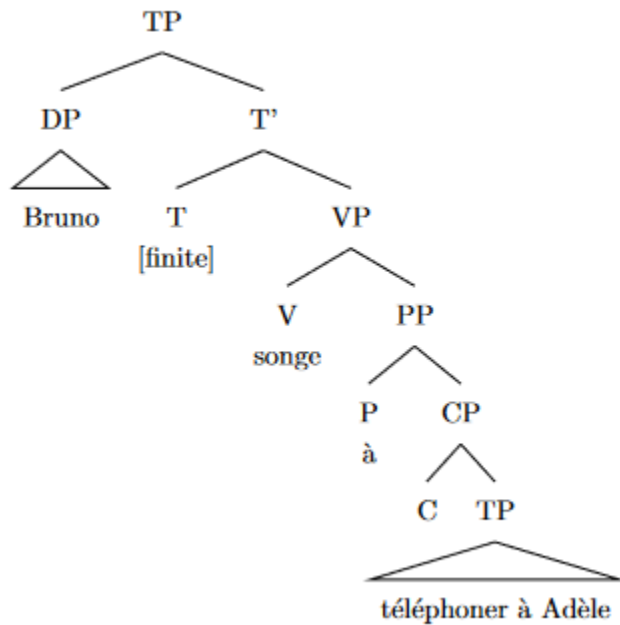
(24) Bruno apprend le tchèque.
Bruno learns the Czech
'Bruno is learning Czech.'

The same word, *à*, introduces both the IC in (22) and the indirect object (Bruno) in (23). The two kinds of *à* can even co-exist in one sentence, as (23) shows. This serves as yet another strong piece of evidence that the ICs of Class I verbs act as direct objects, as they can co-exist with indirect objects. The *à* before *parler* is likely a complementizer, as it does not exist in (24), where the direct object is a DP. That is to say, *à* is a part of the infinitival clausal complement, and not required by the matrix verb *apprendre*.

This leads to a model of infinitival complements where their deep structure depends on their relationship to the matrix verb, although their surface structure remains the same. If the IC is the direct object of the matrix verb, its CP is the complement of V, and C is filled by *à* or *de*. This is the situation in Class I sentences. If the IC is an indirect object of the matrix verb, then its CP is the complement of P in a prepositional phrase, which is a complement to the main verb. *À* or *de* fill P and C is null. This is the situation in Class II sentences.



1 - A model of Class I verbs, using (22)



2 - A model of Class II verbs, using (16)

However, this model, suggested by Jones and Belasco, raises several questions. It is unclear how the embedded clause in (16) is getting along without a complementizer, for

instance. And one must wonder why prepositions and complementizers look identical in this case, and if that fact is causing confusion and leading us astray.

V. Finite Clauses

Happily, finite clausal complements in French use complementizers that look nothing like prepositions, unlike their infinitive counterparts. So it is a natural next step to look at FCs (finite complements) in the same situation, and how they pronominalize, in the hope that their structure will be less ambiguous.

In contrast to ICs, which might get pronominalized as *le* despite being (seemingly) preceded by a preposition, finite clauses can be pronominalized as *y* or *en* when there is no *à* or *de* in sight. *Foundations of French Syntax* (Jones, 1996) notes this pattern between the verbs *annoncer* and *informer*:

(25) Adèle annonce à Carole que Bruno est arrivé.
Adèle announces to Carole that Bruno has arrived
'Adèle announces to Carole that Bruno is here.'

(26) Adèle l'annonce à Carole.
Adèle it=announces to Carole.
'Adèle announces it to Carole.'

(27) Adèle informe Carole que Bruno est arrivé.
Adèle informs Carole that Bruno has arrived
'Adèle informs Carole that Bruno is here.'

(28) Adèle en informe Carole.
Adèle of.it informs Carole
'Adèle informs Carole of it.'

Such a phenomenon fits easily into the explanation from before, based on the distinction between direct and indirect objects. In sentence (25), *Carole* is an indirect

object introduced by a preposition, and the embedded clause is the verb's direct object. We can test this using the replacement diagnostics:

(29) Adèle annonce à Carole le retour de Bruno.
Adèle announces to Carole the return of Bruno
'Adèle announces Bruno's return to Carole.'

(30) Qu'annonce-t-elle, Adèle, à Carole?
What=announces=she Adèle to Carole
'What does Adèle announce to Carole?'

The CP can be replaced by a DP (29) or the *wh*-phrase *que* (30) without any preposition being necessary. Therefore it is a direct object, and it pronominalizes as *le* in (26).

Meanwhile, in (27), *Carole* is the verb's direct object, introduced by no preposition. A verb cannot have more than one direct object, so the embedded clause must be an indirect object, though there is no apparent preposition introducing it. However, if we use the replacement tests, a preposition *de* will appear:

(31) Adèle informe Carole du retour de Bruno.
Adèle informs Carole of.the return of Bruno
'Adèle informs Carole of Bruno's return.'

(32) De quoi Adèle informe-t-elle Carole?
Of what Adèle informs=she Carole
'What does Adèle inform Carole of?'

As it is an indirect object, the embedded CP pronominalizes as *en* (28). This demonstrates that finite embedded clauses follow the same principles as their infinite counterparts, when it comes to pronominalization. But, while Class II sentences with ICs

seem to get along without complementizers, Class II sentences with FCs – such as (27) – seem to get along without prepositions.

Jones proposes that such sentences contain an underlying preposition that has been deleted. In fact, such prepositions do appear in “an alternative construction,” in which *ce* appears before the internal clause (Jones 1996, p.58).

- (33) ?Pierre a informé Marie **de ce que** le Beaujolais nouveau est arrivé.⁵
Pierre has informed Marie of DEM that the Beaujolais new has arrived
'Pierre informed Marie that the Beaujolais nouveau was available.'

Belasco considers *douter* to be another verb which can take this construction, calling sentence (34) “a reduction” of (35) (Belasco, 1978, p.797). It is worth noting that the complements of *douter* pronominalize as *en*, which matches with the *de* that appears in (35).

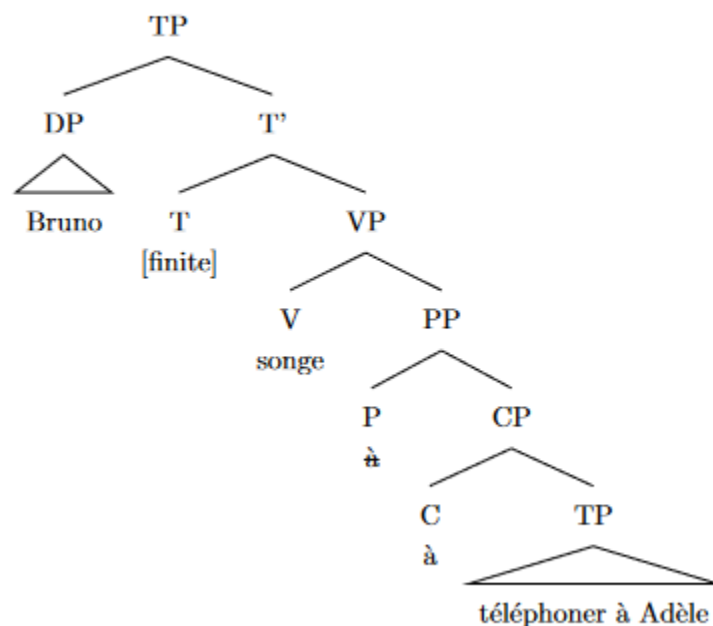
- (34) Je doute que Paul ait tout dit.
I doubt that Paul has.SBJV all said
'I doubt that Paul said everything.'

- (35) Je doute **de ce que** Paul ait tout dit.
I doubt of DEM that Paul has.SBJV all said
'I doubt that Paul said everything.'

Only certain verbs can successfully use this construction, but the existence of sentences pairs such as (34) and (35) has powerful implications. If they are equivalent in meaning and one is just a reduction of the other, that implies the following rule: when a preposition and a complementizer are adjacent, the preposition gets deleted. Sometimes, this can be avoided by inserting an expletive *ce* in between the P and the C, which ‘protects’

⁵ ‘Beaujolais nouveau’ is a type of wine. Example taken from (Jones 1996, p.58). The gloss and translation are my own.

the P. If we further assume that the same rule applies to finite and infinite clauses, the behavior of Class II verbs begins to make sense. They take PP complements, introduced by a preposition *à* or *de*. This P takes a CP complement, which is introduced by a complementizer – *que* in the case of finite complements; *à* or *de* in the case of infinite complements. Because the P and C cannot appear next to each other in the surface order, the P is deleted and only the C remains. This requires a re-working of Tree (2):



3 - A revision of (2); note the deleted P

Now we see that C is not null, but apparent. The assumption that *à* is a P (Belasco, 1978; Jones, 1996) is incorrect, but understandable, given the identical appearance of C and P in this case. Rather, it took insights from finite clauses to untangle their roles.

VI. Is that really an expletive, though?

As I said earlier, the conclusion of Part V is based on the assumption that the *ce* in sentences like (35) is expletive, and thus the structural relationship between P and C in a sentence with *ce* is parallel to the relationship between them in a sentence without *ce*. If *ce* were to influence the sentence's structure, then embedded clauses with and without it would not be comparable, and the conclusions I drew from comparing them would be thrown into doubt.

Thus, it is worrying when my language consultant rejects sentence (35), from (Belasco, 1978), and offers the following 'repaired' version:

(36) Je doute de ce que Paul a dit.
I doubt of DEM that Paul has said
'I doubt that which Paul said.'

The most striking difference is the disappearance of *tout*, but it is also important to note that the verb of the embedded clause has changed from the subjunctive *ait dit* to the indicative *a dit*. These changes all stem from the fact that – for this consultant – a *ce* in this position cannot be expletive. It is taking on its normal role as a demonstrative pronoun, referring to the object of *dit*. That is to say, the consultant understands (35) not as 'I doubt that Paul said everything,' but as '*I doubt that which Paul said everything.' *Ce* and *tout* are two arguments trying to fill a single theta-role, when a theta-role can only be filled by one argument. Therefore, the sentence is ungrammatical. The pattern continues in (37) and (38). When a *ce* is present, the verb of the embedded clause cannot take a complement as it normally can.

(37) Adèle doute que Carole dise la vérité.
Adèle doubts that Carole says.SBJV the truth
'Adèle doubts that Carole is telling the truth.'

(38)*Adèle doute de ce que Carole dise la vérité.
Adèle doubts of DEM that Carole says.SBJV the truth
*'Adèle doubts that which Carole says the truth.'

This non-expletive *ce* can also stand in for the embedded clause's subject, as seen below:

(39) Je doute de ce qui te paraît évident.
I doubt of DEM COMP OBJ.2SG appears obvious
'I doubt what appears obvious to you.'

The verbal mode is also a telling difference. In French, the subjunctive mode appears in finite CPs that complement certain verbs, *douter* being one of them.⁶

(40) Bruno doute de ce que Carole dit.
Bruno doubts of DEM that Carole says
'Bruno doubts what Carole says.'

(41)*Bruno doute de ce que Carole dise.
Bruno doubts of DEM that Carole says.SUBJ

And yet the subjunctive is ungrammatical in a clause following non-expletive *ce que*. This is because, as a pronoun, it is *ce* filling the theme theta-role of *douter* – not the CP. Instead of itself being the object of the main verb, this CP is a relative clause modifying the pronoun which is the object of the main verb. The CP is not a verbal complement; therefore the conditions for using the subjunctive mode are no longer met.

⁶ The restrictions on the subjunctive are heavily semantic: it appears in clauses that express doubt, emotion, desire, subjectivity, and so on.

Thus, I have proved that expletive *ce que* is not always possible, and that not all appearances of *ce que* are of this type. A non-expletive *ce que* also exists. Furthermore, the expletive *ce que* construction seems to be inconsistent among speakers. Example (33) comes from (Jones, 1996, p.58), who admits that it is “marginal.” Meanwhile, Belasco (1978) considers (34) and (35) to be perfectly equivalent, when, as already stated, my main informant rejects (35). Finally, (Zaring, 1991) takes a broad view of the construction, considering it to be obligatory in some sentences and optional in many more.

However, the expletive *ce que* clearly exists, just as the non-expletive *ce que* exists, and I can also use the insights from this section to clearly distinguish between them. The embedded verb following an expletive *ce que* can take a full set of arguments, while the non-expletive *ce* will count as one of the verb’s arguments, as shown in (37, 38, 39). And following an expletive *ce que*, the verb will be conjugated in the subjunctive mode, if it is in the appropriate semantic environment; while a non-expletive *ce que* will block the subjunctive (40, 41).

With these diagnostics, I identified three common instances of expletive *ce que* in French.

(42) Carole s’attend à ce que Bruno soit en retard.
 Carole expects to DEM that Bruno is.SUBJ in delay
 ‘Carole expects Bruno to be late.’

(43)*Carole s’attend que Bruno soit en retard.
 Carole expects that Bruno is.SUBJ in delay

The verb *s’attendre à* (to expect), requires the subjunctive in its finite clausal complements. And the embedded verb, *soit*, has a full complement of complements: its

external argument, the DP Bruno, and its internal argument, the PP *en retard*. Interestingly, this verb seems to require the expletive *ce que*. A sentence without it (43) is ungrammatical.

(44) Adèle tient à ce que Bruno lui rende visite.
Adèle holds to DEM that Bruno 3SG.OBJ renders.SUBJ visit
'Adèle insists that Bruno visit her.'

Similarly, *tenir à* (to insist, to wish dearly for something) requires an expletive *ce* before a finite clausal complement, and its emotional tone requires that clause to be in the subjunctive. The subjunctive clause in (44) also has two arguments, indicating that *ce* is not filling one of its theta-roles.

(45) Adèle mangera la soupe jusqu'à ce que Bruno prenne sa cuillère.
Adèle eats.FUT the soup until=to DEM that Bruno takes.SUBJ POSS spoon
'Adèle will eat soup until Bruno takes her spoon.'

The final example is *jusqu'à ce que* ('until'). Like those I mentioned before, this expression seems to always use the expletive *ce que*.⁷ *Jusque* also requires the subjunctive in its complement clauses. The embedded verb, *prenne*, has both a subject DP and an object DP. So (45) passes both diagnostics for the expletive *ce que*.

Even with the most restrictive view, these are three broadly acceptable examples of expletive *ce que* that appear in major dictionaries ("jusque," 2020; "s'attendre à," 2020; "tenir," 2020). All of them feature an expletive standing in between a preposition *à* and a complementizer *que*. These two words never appear next to each other, despite the

⁷ I suspect one reason for this is that **jusque que*, the hypothetical result of P-deletion, would be hard to pronounce clearly.

apparent fact that clausal complements, finite and infinite, will both pronominalize as indirect objects; and DPs in the same position will require a preposition. Every piece of evidence points to these clausal complements being part of prepositional phrases, except the presence of prepositions. And, in the case of expletive *ce que*, even that falls away as the preposition becomes apparent.

VII. Conclusions

Jones (1991) and Belasco (1978) both described the patterns of pronominalization among infinitival complements and observed that whether the IC counted as a direct or indirect object was key. They both came to the conclusion that the difference between Class I and Class II sentences was in whether the pre-verbal *à* or *de* served as a complementizer or a preposition.

However, insights from FCs show this not to be the case. Whenever an FC serves as an indirect object, the P that ought to be there is not present, only the complementizer *que*. The only exception to this is the expletive *ce que* construction. While its distribution varies among French speakers, I have demonstrated that where it does exist the *ce* is truly expletive and does not serve as the complement to any head in the sentence. The only purpose of this *ce*, then, is to separate a P and the C of an embedded clause.

All this evidence supports the existence of a constraint in French against adjacent P and C. When P and C are adjacent to one another (i.e. when a P has a CP complement) the conflict can be resolved in one of two ways: by deleting the P, or by inserting an expletive *ce* between them, protecting the P. Assuming that the principle holds for both finite and

infinite clauses, I proposed a new model of Class II ICs, in which the *à* or *de* visible in the sentence is a complementizer, and not the since-deleted preposition.

This constraint against adjacent P and C is an intriguing puzzle that raises more questions. Why would such a thing exist? I have not yet found a satisfying answer. I considered that P needs to be adjacent to content words, but if that were so, the expletive *ce* would not be possible, because that only moves P farther away from its complement. Another possibility is that P and C fulfill such similar roles, semantically, that when adjacent they are as two people trying to sit in the same chair. They clash as they try to fill the same cognitive space. If that is so, and the limitation is cognitive, then one would expect to see a similar constraint in other languages.

The expletive *ce que*, aside from serving as excellent evidence of this constraint, brings up questions of its own. When it is impossible, when it is optional, and when it is obligatory show an intriguing pattern. Namely, all examples I have found of obligatory expletive *ce que* involve the preposition *à*, and examples where it is optional, marginal, or ungrammatical involve the preposition *de*. This phenomenon also merits an explanation. It may well be that *à* conveys something that *de* does not, and so is too informative to be safely deleted. I am reminded of the proposal that *à* marks verbs of inchoative aspect while *de* is default and unmarked (Cox, 1983) – although that dealt with *à* and *de* as complementizers of ICs, while the *à* preceding expletive *ce que* is always a preposition. Nevertheless, the subjects discussed in this paper are ripe for further inquiry.

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