Hypercomplex Inversion and the Status of Expletive Pronouns*

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1.
    Standard French interrogatives (and certain other affective contexts) allow subject clitic inversion (henceforth SCLI):
  (1) Est-il là? ('is-he/it there?')
in a way that is partially similar to English subject-aux inversion, in particular in being limited to root contexts. (English and French differ in that French SCLI doesn't generalize to lexical subjects.) Standard French also allows sentences like (1) that contain a preverbal non-dislocated lexical subject:
  (2) Cela est-il vrai? ('that is-it true?')
Let us call sentences like (2) instances of complex inversion (CI). In CI, the preverbal lexical subject is doubled by a postverbal subject clitic (SCL).
    French CI is compatible with the presence of an object clitic (OCL):
  (3) Cela la gêne-t-il? ('that her bothers-it' = 'does it bother her?')
As noted by Morin (1985), many speakers accept, alongside (3), and with the same interpretation as (3):
  (4) Cela la gêne-t-elle?
in which the postverbal SCL agrees in gender (and number) with the preverbal OCL.
Let us call (4) an instance of hypercomplex inversion (HCI).
    The agreement seen in HCI has something in common with French (and Italian) past participle agreement, in that the SCL cannot agree with a postverbal object. That is, alongside the well-formed CI example:
  (5) Cela gêne-t-il Marie?
there is no parallel well-formed HCI:
  (6) *Cela gêne-t-elle Marie?
The contrast between (4) and (6) recalls the contrast between the following two past participle agreement sentences in French:
  (7) Ils les ont repeintes. ('they them(fem.) have repainted(fem.)')
  (8) *Ils ont repeintes les tables. ('they have repainted(fem.) the tables')
    More central to the present talk, though, is a further restriction on HCI having to do with the fact that there is no HCI counterpart to SCLI. Put another way, although (4) is the HCI counterpart of the CI example in (3), an instance of SCLI that contains an OCL, as in:
  (9) La voit-il? ('her sees-he' = 'does he see her?')
has no HCI counterpart at all:
  (10) (*)La voit-elle? ('her sees-she' = 'does she see her?')
More carefully put, (10) is acceptable, but not with the interpretation of (9), whereas valid HCI sentences like (4) do have the interpretation of their CI counterparts (in this case, of (3)).

The reason for this discrepancy between (4) and (10) is the following:[1] In (4), we can take the SCL *elle* to be a double of the OCL *la*, in which case we can associate the object theta role of *bother* with a complex constituent *la-elle*.[2] Then we can take the subject theta role of *bother* in (4) to be associated with the preverbal lexical subject *cela*.

Doing the same for (10), however, we run into a problem. We can, as in (4), associate a complex constituent *la-elle* with the object theta role, here that of *see*. But that leaves us with no phrase available for the subject theta role, insofar as there is in (10) no preverbal lexical subject. Thus, as an instance of HCI, (10) is impossible.

One might object by thinking that (10) could contain a preverbal subject little pro,[3] to which the subject theta role of *see* might be associated. Here, though, it becomes essential to remember that French is a non-pro-drop language, in the specific sense that sentences with neither a subject clitic nor a lexical subject are not possible:

(11) *La voit. ('her sees')

The impossibility of (11) means that even if French did allow subject little pro in place of a lexical subject, that little pro would have to be licensed by the presence of an SCL, as might be the case in one or another of the following:

(12) Il/Elle/On la voit. ('he/she/one her sees')

We conclude that if French allows little pro in subject position in (10), that pro would have to be licensed by the SCL *elle*, in which case pro would be interpreted as fem.sg., which would still not give us the interpretation of (9).

In essence, (10) is prohibited, as an instance of HCI, by a combination of factors. On the one hand, (10) lacks a lexical subject that could take on the subject theta role in the way that *cela* does in (4); on the other hand, any subject pro in French would have to be licensed by a cooccurring SCL, which would be possible in (9), where the SCL *il* is not a double of the OCL *la*, but not in (10), whose SCL *elle* is a double of *la* and therefore cannot play the required role, i.e. cannot be taken to bear a theta role independent of that of *la*.

2.

That the non-pro-drop character of French is part of why (10) cannot be an instance of HCI is supported, I think, by consideration of the North Italian dialect of Carmignano di Brenta (close to the dialect of Padua[4]) that has been studied by Penello (2007). (Following her, I will henceforth refer to this dialect as Carm.) This is a dialect that, like North Italian dialects in general and like French, has SCLs. But unlike French, Carm.

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[1]The text proposal, taken over from Kayne and Pollock (2012, sect. 2) is in the spirit of Morin (1985, 796).

[2]Cf. Kayne (1972) on SCL-doubling in CI and Uriagereka (1995) on Spanish OCL-doubling. How much pronominal doubling has in common with adposition doubling and/or Case percolation remains to be determined and/or other instances of doubling.

[3]In a way not relevant to the text discussion, pro, when available, may be limited to third person; for discussion, see Kayne (2001a).

[4]On Paduan, see several of the papers collected in Benincà (1994); also the review in Kayne (2001b).

allows, in root interrogatives, a variant of SCLI in which the postverbal SCL found in French, as in:

(13) Y vont-ils? (Fr. 'there go-they?')

cooccurs with an identical preverbal SCL:

(14) I ghe va-i? (Carm. 'they there go-they?' = 'are they going there?')

This would not be possible in French:

(15) *Ils y vont-ils?

We are now in a position to return to the pair (9) and (10), repeated here:

(16) La voit-il? ('her sees-he' = 'does he see her')

(17) (*)La voit-elle? ('her sees-she' = 'does she see her')

Example (16) is a banal case of French SCLI. Example (17) is likewise a banal case of French SCLI, if interpreted as indicated in the gloss. But as noted earlier, (17) cannot be interpreted as an instance of HCI, i.e. (17) cannot be given the interpretation of (16).

In this respect, (17) contrasts sharply with the HCI example (4), also repeated here:

(18) Cela la gêne-t-elle? ('that her bothers-she' = 'does that bother her?')

insofar as (18) can be (and must be) interpreted as if the SCL *elle* were irrelevant to interpretation. (From the perspective of our analysis, it is more precisely the feminine gender of *elle* that is ignored for the purposes of interpretation in (18) by virtue of *elle* being a double of the OCL *la*.) In contrast to the *elle* of (18), the *elle* of (17) must have its feminine gender taken interpretively into account and cannot be taken to be a double of *la*.

Our account of this contrast between (17) and (18) has rested on the idea that French can 'get away with' interpretively ignoring the feminine gender of *elle* and taking *elle* to just be a double of *la* in (18) since the subject theta role of *gêner* ('bother') can be associated with the preverbal subject *cela*. Whereas in (17), since there is no preverbal subject, a similar taking of *elle* to just be a double of *la* would leave the subject theta role unassociated.

It is therefore of note that Carm. allows some sentences like (17) with a valid interpretation of the HCI type:[5]

(19) E compre-e, e scarpe, (to sorea)? ('them buys-they, the shoes, your sister? = 'is your sister buying shoes?')

The first *e* in (19) is a feminine plural OCL (that in French would be *les*). The second *e* in (19) is to my eye a feminine plural SCL (that in French would be *elles*) that is doubling the OCL. (There is no visible clitic in (19) that corresponds to the true subject *to sorea*.)

Penello's (2007) analysis is somewhat different. She takes the second *e* in (19) to be an OCL rather than an SCL (and to be a double of the initial OCL *e*). Penello's doubling intuition is surely correct, but there are reasons to believe that the postverbal *e* in (19) is not an OCL, but rather an SCL.

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[5]The optionality of the dislocated subject *to sorea* is clearly indicated in Penello (2003, chap. 3, (26a)).

Roberts (1993) has an interesting discussion of various Franco-Provençal dialects that sometimes allow two (non-identical) SCLs, in a way that does not link to HCI, as far as I can see.

Let us note in passing that Carm. differs from French in not distinguishing the form of SCLs and OCLs in the third person plural. In French, the 3pl. SCLs are masc. *ils* and fem. *elles*, while the 3pl. OCL is *les* for both genders. In Carm., on the other hand, 3pl. masc. is *i* both as an SCL and as an OCL, and similarly for 3pl. fem. *e*. It is this identity in form that made it possible for Penello to take the postverbal *e* in (19) to be an OCL. Whereas for French the difference in form between third person SCLs and third person OCLs leaves no possible hesitation; in (18), the postverbal *elle* must be taken to be an SCL, since the third person fem.sg. OCL would be *la*.

3.

The reasons for thinking that the postverbal *e* in (19) in Carm. is an SCL (compatibly with the identity in form just discussed) and therefore that (19) is an instance of HCI in Carm. are as follows. First, sentences like (19) are possible in Carm. only in root sentences. This is a property familiar from French SCLI, CI and HCI (and from English subject-aux inversion).[6] It is immediately expected if (19) is also an instance of HCI.

It would not, however, be expected if (19) were an instance of object clitic doubling, since, as far as I know, there is no other instance of OCL-doubling (i.e. with two identical occurrences of an OCL corresponding to one argument) that is limited to root sentences.[7]

Second, taking (19) to have a postverbal OCL would make (19) exceptional in having an OCL suffixed to a finite verb, in a way that as far as I can see is not otherwise the case in Carm.[8]

Third, Penello (2007, 204, 206) points out that sentences like (19) (and (14)) are possible only in the third person, a property that also holds of French HCI, as seen in the contrast between (18) and the following:[9]

  (20) *Cela te gêne(s)-tu? ('that you(OCL) bothers you(SCL)')

Fourth, Penello (2007, 212) points out that (in her terms) "enclitic object clitic[s] and enclitic subject clitics cannot co-occur",[10] a fact that from her perspective is unexpected. Whereas if what she calls 'enclitic object clitics' are actually enclitic SCLs (in the manner of HCI), then the restriction she observes reduces to a restriction against having two adjacent enclitic SCLs, which is exceptionless in Romance, as far as I know.[11]

As a pre-final consideration, let us take into account Carm. sentences like the following, from Penello (2007, 207):

  (21) I e ga-e tolte? ('they(masc.) them(fem.) have-they(fem.) taken?' = 'have they taken them?')
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[6]For relevant discussion, cf. Poletto (1993; 2000).
[7]For examples of OCL-doubling in Romance, see Cattaneo (2009).
[8]As opposed to the North Italian dialect studied by Tortora (2015), in which OCLs typically follow finite verbs (and in which an OCL can be separated from the preceding finite V by certain elements).
[9]For discussion, see Kayne and Pollock (2012, sect. 8) and Kayne (2018, sect. 12).
[10]Cf. also Penello (2003, 117; 2007, 209).
[11]Penello (2003, 145) observes that an enclitic 2sg. SCL can in Carm. root interrogatives be followed by a non-SCL enclitic *i* conveying something like 'impatience'.

This example differs from (19) in having an 'extra' pre-V SCL *i* ('they(masc.)') corresponding to the subject argument of *tolte* ('taken'). The first *e* is a banal OCL; the second *e* is, if I'm on the right track, an SCL that doubles the OCL.

Of interest here is the fact that French HCI does not allow this. Alongside the ordinary:

(22) Il la voit. ('he her sees')

there is no HCI interrogative:

(23) *Il la voit-elle?

If we now ask why French and Carm. should differ in this way, the answer that comes to mind is that it is related to Carm. allowing sentences like (14), repeated here:

(24) I ghe va-i? (Carm. 'they there go-they?' = 'are they going there?')

Example (24) involves SCL-doubling, with two instances of *i* corresponding to a single (subject) argument. French disallows this:

(25) *Ils y vont-ils? ('they there go-they')

If we compare (23) and (25), we see a generalization to the effect that French never allows two SCLs in the same simple sentence, whether the post-V SCL doubles an OCL, as in (23), or another SCL, as in (25).

The key point, now, is that the French pair (23)/(25) contrasts (but only if the second *e* in (21) is an SCL) in a uniform way with the Carm. pair (21)/(24). French disallows having 2 SCLs in both examples; Carm. allows having 2 SCLs in both examples.

Finally, we can note that, to judge by Penello (2003; 2007), Carm., despite having SCLI, as in:

(26) Va-i anca lori? ('go-they also them' = 'are they going, too?')

lacks CI of the French sort seen in:[12]

(27) Cela est-il vrai? ('that is-it true' = 'is that true?')

in which the finite verb is preceded by a non-dislocated lexical DP. But, as far as I can see, it also looks as if Carm. disallows HCI examples in which, instead of a pre-V SCL as in (21), there would again be a pre-V lexical DP, as seen in French in (4), repeated here:

(28) Cela la gêne-t-elle?

The French pair (27)/(28) is characterized by having a post-V SCL. The fact that Carm. lacks both halves of this pair is a single fact if Carm. examples like (21) also contain a post-V SCL, as they do from the HCI perspective being pursued here.

4.

We are now in a position to return to the contrast between French and Carm. concerning the possibility of HCI in the absence of any pre-V subject. As noted earlier at (17), repeated here:

(29) (*)La voit-elle? ('her/it sees-she' = 'does she see her/it?')

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[12]This appears to be a more general property of North Italian dialects of the sort studied by Poletto (1993), as she notes on p. 208. There may be a link to the fact that these dialects all seem to have to at least some extent 'free subject inversion' of the Italian sort in a way that French does not. (On what French does have, see Kayne and Pollock (2001).)

this sort of sentence, though perfectly acceptable with two distinct fem.sg. arguments, is not possible as an instance of HCI (in which the subject argument would be understood, say, as masc.sg.). Yet Carm. allows (19), also repeated:

   (30) E compre-e, e scarpe, (to sorea)? ('them buys-they, the shoes, your sister? = 'is your sister buying shoes?')

In (30), both preverbal OCL *e* and postverbal SCL *e* are fem.pl. Yet the (legitimate) understood subject is fem.sg., contrasting sharply with French (29).

    If we now ask why French and Carm. should differ in this way, a possibility that comes to mind is that it has to do with the fact that Carm. interrogatives allow there to be two identical SCLs, one pre-V and one post-V, as seen in (24). That in turn suggests that we might take (30) to actually be a subcase of (24), in the sense that we might take (30) to contain a silent pre-V SCL, in addition to the pre-V OCL (and post-V SCL).

    If we then strengthen this view and say that sentences like (30) are possible in Romance languages (or others) only if there's an 'extra' preverbal silent SCL in addition to the visible postverbal one, we can reduce the impossibility of French (29) (in the HCI reading) to the impossibility in French of (25), which is an example showing that French does not allow two identical SCLs to cooccur in the way that they can in Carm.[13]

    The idea that Carm. allows (30) via recourse to an additional silent SCL (which French cannot do) may receive support from another observation of Penello's (2007, 207), namely that in sentences like (21) the initial SCL must not be identical in form to the following OCL. Thus (21), repeated here:

   (31) I e ga-e tolte? ('they(masc.) them(fem.) have-them(fem.) taken?' = 'have they taken them?')

contrasts with the minimally different:

   (32) *I i ga-i tolti? ('they(masc.) them(masc.) have-they(masc.) taken' = 'have they taken them?')

(That the deviance of (32) involves the first *i* is shown by (30).)
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[13]Why Carm. and French differ in this way remains to be elucidated. For relevant discussion, see Roberts (1993) and Poletto (1993; 2000). Also of possible relevance is the *-t-* seen in French SCLI, CI and HCI, e.g.:

   i) A-t-il la réponse? ('has *t* he the answer')

vs. the corresponding sentence with no inversion:

   ii) Il a la réponse.

On this *-t-* (which Carm. appears to lack), see Kayne and Pollock (2014, sect. 4). Also of possible relevance is the fact that Carm. post-V SCLs are more numerous than Carm. pre-V SCLs; on that, see Poletto (2000, 54) and Penello (2007, 203). (How close to all this the *-ti* of popular French mentioned by Morin (1985, 794) is remains to be seen, as does whether or not *-ti* is bimorphemic, and whether or not there is a link to the *-i* of Carm. mentioned in footnote 11.)

We can think of (32) in terms of an obligatory deletion under identity of the initial SCL.[14] Such deletion would yield a sentence like (30). On the assumption that that is the only derivational route to (30), it follows that French lacks (30) by virtue of lacking (31).

5.

We are now ready to move on to the question of expletive pronouns. From previous sections, what is of prime importance to the expletive pronoun question is the proposal that the deviance (under the HCI reading) of French sentences like (29), repeated again:[15]

(33) (*)La voit-elle? ('her sees-she' = 'does she see her?')

is due to a problem with assigning the subject theta role. Under the HCI reading, *elle* in (33) is a double of *la*. The object theta role is assigned to a complex constituent of the form 'elle - la'. French does not allow null subjects of a finite verb. Therefore, there is no way to properly assign the subject theta role.

That this is the correct way to think about (33) is supported by the fact that, as seen earlier, Carm. allows such sentences in the HCI reading, as a function of Carm. allowing a silent subject (clitic), as part of the much more general fact that North Italian dialects are (partial) pro-drop languages in a way that French is not.

All the examples of HCI so far discussed, both in French and in Carm., have had their post-V SCL doubling a pre-V OCL. Now French also has cases of HCI in which the post-V SCL doubles a wh-phrase, e.g.:[16]

(34) Quelle personne cela gêne-t-elle? ('what/which person that bothers *t* she' = 'what/which person is that bothering?')

(35) Combien de personnes cela gêne-t-elles? ('how-many of persons that bothers *t* they(fem.)' = 'how many people is that bothering?')

In the first of these, *elle* is doubling object *quelle personne*; in the second *elles* is doubling object *combien de personnes*.

Consider now a simpler SCLI example:

(36) Combien d'erreurs fait-il? ('how-many of errors makes-he' = 'how many errors does he make?')

In contrast to (34) and (35), this SCLI example has no well-formed HCI counterpart at all:

(37) *Combien d'erreurs fait-elles? ('how-many of errors makes they(fem.)')

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[14]It remains to be understood what triggers this obligatory deletion. Well-formed sequences of identical clitics are well-known from French examples like:

i) Vous vous aimez. ('you you love' = 'you love yourself/each other')

A sequence of two identical OCLs (two instances of *en*) is given by Pollock (1998, note 5) as fairly possible. One also finds sentences with *se se* in some Romance; cf. Cinque (1995, chap. 5, note 2).

And then there are the Kikamba sentences with three identical applicative morphemes in a row discussed by Kioko (1994, 299-305).

[15]On *voilà* ('see-there') and HCI, cf. Kayne and Pollock (2012, note 15).

[16]Penello (2003; 2007) doesn't give any such examples for Carm. that I could see. If Carm. doesn't allow the wh-subtype of HCI, one would need to ask why.

The reason, I think, is the same as for (33). The post-V SCL *elles* is doubling *combien d'erreurs*, the object of the verb *faire* ('to make/do'). Consequently there is no pronounced phrase in (37) to associate with the subject theta role of *faire*. And since French does not allow null subjects,[17] the subject theta role is left unassociated, whence the deviance of (37) and other such examples.

6.
   Ordinary English existential sentences like:
   (38) There are books on the table.
contain so-called expletive *there* in subject position. Burzio (1986, 148) noted that the Italian *ci* of ordinary Italian existential sentences like:
   (39) Ci sono libri sulla tavola. ('there are books on-the table')
is a good match for *there* despite the fact that *ci* is not in subject position, but rather in an object clitic position (as can be seen from its following negative *non* and from its following certain other object clitics, e.g. with *mi ci*). Parallel French existentials contain an object clitic *y* that, in Burzio's proposal, can be taken to closely match *there*, too:[18]
   (40) Il y a des livres sur la table. ('*il* there have of-the books on the table')
We can see from (40) that French existentials contain, in addition to the expletive *y* that matches *there*, another element *il* that again lends itself to being called 'expletive'. This *il* is clearly a subject clitic, as shown by SCLI sentences like:
   (41) Y a-t-il des livres sur la table?
   Of special interest in the context of the present paper is the question of the interaction between this *il* and HCI. A relevant background sentence is:[19]
   (42) Combien de personnes y a-t-il dans la salle? ('how-many of persons there have *il* in the room' = 'how many people are there in the room?')
which shares with (35) the property that *combien de personnes* has in both been fronted from a postverbal position. Despite this common property, (42) is incompatible with HCI:
   (43) *Combien de personnes y a-t-elles dans la salle?
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[17]There are very limited exceptions to this statement, e.g. in colloquial French:
   i) Faudrait qu'ils partent. ('would-be-necessary that they leave')
But since this is a (very limited) case of a null SCL (corresponding to *il*), it is not relevant to (37), given that French never allows two SCLs in a simple sentence. For discussion of rather different, only apparent cases of null SCLs in French, see Kayne and Pollock (2001, sect. 10).
[18]On where *there, ci, y* are externally merged, and why they are not expletive in the standard sense of the term, see Kayne (2019b).
[19]Although one cannot see accusative Case on lexical objects in French, *combien de personnes* here is object-like in allowing *en* to replace *de personnes*:
   i) Combien y en a-t-il dans la salle? ('how-many there of-them have *t il* in the room' = 'how many of them are there in the room?')
   In German, existential *es gibt* clearly licenses accusative Case, e.g. (from Curme (1970 (1922), 335)):
   ii) Es gibt hier einen jungen Menschen, der...

What I think underlies the unacceptability of (43) is exactly what underlies that of (33) and (37), as follows. In (43), the SCL *elles* is a double of *combien de personnes*. French is not a pro-drop language. Therefore the subject theta role associated with *il* in (42) cannot be associated with a silent pro in (43), nor is there any pronounced element or phrase to associate it with, whence the deviance of (43).

This unified account of (33), (37) and (43) depends on the hypothesis that the SCL *il* of (40)-(42) in fact requires and receives some kind of theta role, i.e. that this *il* is not an expletive pronoun in the strongest sense of that term. Put another way, for this unified account to be possible, it must be the case that the *il* of *il y a* makes some theta contribution to interpretation.

This conclusion converges with an earlier proposal of mine that rested in part on the question of the verb *a* of the *il y a* of (40)-(42).[20] This *a* is an ordinary present tense form of the French verb *avoir*, which corresponds closely to English *have*. We can immediately wonder why French existential sentences like (40)-(42) should contain that verb. (Existential sentences in Catalan, Spanish and Portuguese also contain a verb corresponding to *have*.)

And we can more acutely wonder why German allows existential sentences in which the verb is *geben*, a close counterpart of English *give*. An example is:

(44) Es gibt keine Lösung. ('it gives no solution' = 'there is no solution')

Why would (a counterpart of) *give*, normally a causative verb, be possible in such German sentences?[21] A possible answer is that (44) does have causative content, and by extension, so do existential sentences in French and English (and other languages). This causative content can be understood by thinking of a sentence like:

(45) There's no solution.

as being more similar than one might have thought to the following:

(46) Something has caused there to be no solution.

If so, then the *es* of (44) could be taken to be a quasi-argument causer and again by extension so could the *il* of (40)-(42).[22] In which case, the unified account suggested for (33), (37) and (43) goes through, with quasi-argument *il* now taken to be associated with a (quasi-) theta role.

Note in passing that taking (45) to be assimilable to (46) amounts to claiming that (45) (and the same for other languages) contains a silent verb closely corresponding to

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[20]See Kayne (2008, sects. 12, 13).

[21]The same question arguably arises for English idiomatic *What gives?*. For both German and English I take the anti-homophony principle/heuristic of Johns (1992, 84), Embick (2003, 156) and Kayne (2019) to exclude recourse to any 'accidental homophony' between *give* and *give*.

Andrea Moro (p.c.) notes that literary Italian has existential:

i) Si danno due soluzioni. ('refl. give two solutions')

with a reflexive clitic and the verb *give*. Cf. Moro (1997, 160ff.).

[22]On 'quasi-argument', cf. Chomsky (1981, 325). (On weather expressions, note Levin and Krejci (2019).)

cause, as well as a silent causer closely corresponding to *something,* and in so doing establishes a link between (45) and sentences like:[23]

(47) The flowers are in the kitchen on purpose.

(48) There are flowers in the kitchen on purpose.

French has many instances of a SCL *il* that one might call 'expletive'. We can now ask to what extent these other instances of *il* have the same quasi-argument status of the *il* of (40)-(42). Consider first:

(49) Combien de lettres est-il arrivé ce matin? ('how-many of letters is *il* arrived this morning?')

HCI is not possible:

(50) *Combien de lettres est-elles arrivé ce matin?

suggesting that the *il* of (49) should also be considered a quasi-argument. Since (49) is very much like:

(51) How many letters have there arrived this morning?

the conclusion will be that such English sentences and their non-interrogative counterparts (even without *there*), e.g.:

(52) Many letters have arrived this morning.

may well have a structure akin to that of:

(53) Something has caused many letters to arrive this morning.

Note, however, that this does not imply that English *there* in (51), or in (45) or (46), is a quasi-argument exactly parallel to French *il*. English *there* corresponds rather to French OCL *y*, as in the discussion of (40). It is likely, then, that English (45), (46) and (51) contain a quasi-argument that is silent.

Morin (1985, 797) noted that almost all speakers reject HCI with the impersonal verb *falloir* ('to be necessary'). Thus alongside:

(54) La (lui) faut-il absolument? ('it/her to-him/her is-necessary *il* really?' = 'does he/she really need it?')

it is not possible to have the HCI variant:

(55) *La (lui) faut-elle absolument?

This recalls (33), as he in effect notes, and suggests that the impersonal subject *il* of *falloir* is, again, a quasi-argument rather than an interpretively completely inert expletive.

If by 'expletive pronoun' we mean a pronoun that on the interpretive side is completely inert/invisible, then the preceding discussion suggests the following:[24]

(56) There are no true expletive pronouns, in any language.

In choosing the term 'completely inert/invisible', I have in mind in part Eggeling's (1961, 139) characterization of the *es* of German *es gibt* (as in (44)): "*es* is here, in fact,

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[23]Guglielmo Cinque (p.c.) notes that Italian existential sentences also allow control by a silent agent, as in:

i) C'erano dozzine di fiori solo per impressionare gli ospiti.

whose (pretty much well-formed) English counterpart is:

ii) There were dozens of flowers (there/at the party) just to impress the guests.

[24]An interesting challenge comes from those instances of German *es* that are limited to the pre-finite-verb position of root sentences. Relevant is the fact that the accusative counterpart of French quasi-argument *il* is always silent in French, for reasons yet to be determined.

a non-committal term for the hidden power which regulates the laws of nature...", the idea being that even this much interpretive contribution counts as 'not inert/not invisible' and therefore qualifies this German *es* as 'non-expletive'.[25]

7. Conclusion

The comparative study of Hypercomplex Inversion (HCI) in French and in the North Italian dialect of Carmignano di Brenta, in addition to being of interest in its own right, provides evidence suggesting that there are no expletive pronouns (in any language) in the strict sense of the term.

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[25]Cf. in part Collins et al.'s (2008, 62) 'masks' and in particular their saying that "even though the mask does not contribute to the truth conditions of the sentence, it may be associated with specific implicatures", which I would take to indicate that 'masks' are not likely to be interpretively invisible.

Nor are 'idiom chunks', if the approach to idioms taken by Nunberg, Sag and Wasow (1994), Marantz (1997), McGinnis (2002) and (the papers in the volume edited by) Corver et al. (2019) are on the right track. (The varieties of *it* studied by Postal and Pullum (1988) may fall under (an extension of) that approach.)

Also relevant here is the proposal in Kayne (2010) to the effect that ordinary sentential embedding involves a relative clause structure (with the side effect that 'extraposed' embedded sentences are akin to 'extraposed' relatives (on which, cf. Kayne (1994, sect. 9.1)), leading to the (near-)assimilaton of Rosenbaum's (1967) sometimes deleted *it* to Kiparsky and Kiparsky's (1970) sometimes deleted *fact*, with *it* then not being 'invisible' to interpretation.

The question of the possible interpretive 'invisibility' of pronouns also arises with clitic doubles of the sort found in Spanish dative (and, in some Spanish, accusative) clitic doubling, as well as in French SCLI, CI and HCI, as discussed in the present paper. Although it seems unlikely that the question of the status of pronominal doubles is very close to that of classical 'expletive pronouns', it's worth noting that, in a way that I take to have been in the (future) spirit of (55), Uriagereka (2000) "explores the conjecture that clitic doubling in languages like Spanish shares some fundamental aspects of the semantics of inalienable possession". (Whether or not something similar can be said of resumptive pronouns of the sort discussed by Boeckx (2003) remains to be determined.)

If Kayne (2002) is taken to mean that all pronouns without exception have syntactically represented antecedents, then the burden of (55) will be shifted over to those antecedents.

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