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Author(s): Knud Lambrecht

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Topic, French Style
Remarks about a Basic Sentence Type of Modern Non-Standard French

Knud Lambrecht
University of California at Berkeley

1. The Phenomenon

1.1. moi je-mange

It is well known that modern French has two series of personal pronouns, one "strong" or "autonomous" (moi, toi, lui etc.) and one "weak" or "clitic" (je, tu, il etc.). It is also well known that pronouns of both series can occur coreferentially in the same sentence, as in

- (1) Moi je-mange et toi tu-bois ¹
I I eat and you you drink 'I eat and you drink'

The distribution of the two pronoun series has been analyzed in a considerable number of studies and grammars, the best known of which is probably Benveniste's 1965 article 'L'Antonyme et le Pronom en Français Moderne', but the specific cooccurrence phenomenon illustrated in (1) has gone widely unexplained if not unnoticed, although it is strikingly frequent, in particular in the spoken language. When the phenomenon is mentioned at all, the explanation typically given for it is that sentences such as (1) are "redundant" or "emphatic" (cf. e.g. Benveniste 1965, Dubois 1965, Gross 1968, Kiefer 1970, etc.).

The reason why this explanation--which I will argue is wrong or at least misleading--is so often found in the literature may be the following: if it is assumed that the two coreferential elements in (1) are basically the same thing, it seems natural that their cooccurrence should be considered redundant since saying the same thing twice is saying it more often than necessary. It is furthermore typically the case that by saying something more often than strictly necessary we want to stress what we say, therefore it seems equally natural to interpret the consecutive use of two coreferential elements as a sign of emphasis.

The emphasis explanation seems to be confirmed by the fact that only pronouns of the "strong" series can receive contrastive stress, and never clitic pronouns. Thus adding a strong pronoun to a clitic would amount to adding an emphatic element to a non-emphatic one. The difference between strong and weak pronouns with respect to stress is illustrated in (2) (here and in the following examples underlining indicates intonation peaks):

- (2) a. Moi je-mange
b. *Je-mange

However the fact that only moi can be stressed contrastively does

not entail that simultaneous occurrence of moi and je signals emphasis. I would like to demonstrate with the following four arguments that the interpretation of sentences like (1) as emphatic sentences must be rejected:

A-1: If the strong pronouns have the effect of creating emphasis, then it is still unclear why the weak pronouns should necessarily show up together with them. That the strong pronouns cannot usually occur independently of the clitic pronouns is shown in (3), which contrasts with (1), and in (4a), which contrasts with (4b) 2:

- (3) *Moi mange et toi bois
 (4) a. *Je-vois toi 'I see you'
 b. Toi je-te-vois / Je-te-vois, toi

A-2: If the cooccurrence of autonomous and clitic pronouns creates emphasis, we should expect such constructions to occur in typically emphatic contexts, for example when a pronoun is modified by seulement or ne...que ('only') or when a negation signals a focus of contrast. But these are precisely contexts where the two pronouns usually do not cooccur. Compare the following two sets of sentences:

- (5) a. Elle-aime seulement moi / Elle-n'aime que moi
 b. *Elle m'aime seulement moi / *Elle-ne-m'aime que moi
 'She loves only me'
 (6) a. C'est moi qui mange, pas toi
 it is I who eat not you 'I am eating, not you'
 b. ?Moi je-mange, pas toi 3

A-3: Emphasis is necessarily accompanied by an intonation peak. However when a clitic pronoun cooccurs with an autonomous pronoun, this autonomous pronoun does not usually receive primary stress. For example, in one natural pronunciation of sentence (1), primary stress falls on mange and bois, not on moi and toi. In sentence (6a) however, where the (clefted) strong form occurs alone, the intonation peak must be moi.

A-4: It is possible to repeat a pronoun carrying strong contrastive stress but it is not possible to repeat an autonomous pronoun in the cooccurrence structure, whether this pronoun is stressed or not. Compare example (7a) with (7b):

- (7) a. C'est moi qui ai tout fait et c'est moi qui vais avoir la récompense
 b. Moi j'ai tout fait et (*moi) je-vais avoir la récompense
 'I did everything and I am going to get the reward'

From these four arguments it follows that although the cooccurrence of a clitic pronoun with a coreferential strong pronoun can serve to express a simple contrast, as for example in sentence (1), it cannot be used to express emphasis. It is therefore necessary to look for another explanation of the cooccurrence phenome-

non. In section 3 of this paper I will propose an analysis that accounts for the data in (1) through (7). This analysis will be based on the claim that the two pronoun types are fundamentally different linguistic forms. It is the failure to recognize this difference that has led to such misinterpretations as the Emphasis and Redundancy hypotheses. More serious, an important aspect of French sentence structure cannot be properly understood unless this difference is recognized.

1.2. Pierre il-mange

The pattern illustrated in (1) is parallel to the equally widespread pattern where a full NP cooccurs with a coreferential clitic pronoun, as in

- (8) a. Pierre il-mange
 Pierre he eat 'Pierre is eating'
 b. Mes amis ils-boivent
 my friends they drink 'My friends are drinking'

It has been claimed (Benveniste 1965, Kayne 1975) that pronouns of the autonomous series and full NPs are in free variation. I believe this claim cannot be substantiated in such a strong form. That NPs and strong pronouns are not always syntactically interchangeable follows from the contrast between the ungrammatical forms in (3) and (4a) and the grammatical forms in (9), where nouns have been substituted for the strong pronouns:

- (9) a. Pierre mange et Jean boit
 b. Je-vois Pierre

Free variation does hold however for the sentence structure under analysis in this paper, i.e. for all cases where an NP/strong pronoun cooccurs with a coreferential clitic. I will therefore assume that the structures in (1) and (8) are syntactically equivalent and I will hereafter refer to the phenomenon they exhibit as Cooccurrence.

One relevant piece of evidence for the similarity between (1) and (8) is that the restrictions on strong contrastive stress are the same for strong pronouns and full NPs: compare the acceptable and the unacceptable forms in (5), (6) and (7) above with those in (10), (11) and (12):

- (10) a. Elle-aime seulement Pierre / Elle n'aime que Pierre
 b. *Elle-l'aime seulement Pierre / Elle-ne-l'aime que P.
 (11) a. C'est Pierre qui mange, pas Jean
 b. ?Pierre il-mange, pas Jean
 (12) a. C'est Pierre qui a tout fait et c'est Pierre/lui qui va avoir la récompense
 b. Pierre il-a tout fait et (*Pierre/*lui) il-va avoir la récompense

1.3. je-mange, moi

In addition to the Cooccurrence pattern on the one hand and the pattern without a cooccurring clitic illustrated in (9) on the other hand, there exists a third, possibly even more common pattern in modern non-standard French, which is illustrated in (13):

- (13) a. Je-mange, moi
b. Il-mange, Pierre

This sentence type, which bears striking similarities to the phenomenon that Givón (1976) and Chafe (1976) have called the Afterthought and the Antitopic respectively, is formally and functionally clearly distinguishable from the two other types⁴. Given the limitations of this paper, I cannot deal here with this important construction of non-standard French. I will take it for granted for the purposes of my argumentation and I will use Afterthought constructions whenever necessary in the examples that follow.

2. Previous Analyses

Given the existence of these three sentence patterns in modern French, we observe that the propositional content of a simple English sentence like Peter eats apples can be expressed in French in three different ways:

- (14) a. Pierre mange des pommes
b. Pierre il-mange des pommes
c. Il-mange des pommes, Pierre

Faced with this diversity, grammarians of different schools have adopted different strategies to deal with it. These strategies can be roughly divided into four types:

- S-1: among the three structures in (14), (a) is considered the correct way of speaking and (b) and/or (c) are rejected or ignored;
S-2: (a) on the one hand and (b) and (c) on the other hand are analyzed as diachronically different manifestations of a functionally identical structure;
S-3: (a), (b) and (c) are analyzed in terms of distributional classes;
S-4: (a) is taken as basic, (b) and (c) as derived.

These four strategies correspond to the normative, the historical, the structuralist and the transformational approach respectively. What is common to all approaches, except for the historical one, is that Cooccurrence is considered a somehow anomalous construction, a marginal phenomenon, whose existence—if acknowledged at all—is dealt with somewhat reluctantly.

My purpose in this paper is to suggest a new approach to Cooccurrence in which this construction is analyzed as a non-redundant, non-emphatic, non-derived phenomenon that occupies a central place

in French sentence structure ⁵. More specifically, I will try to demonstrate that among the two nominal elements in Cooccurrence, the first is best described as a Topic and the second as a Topic-Agreement Marker. I will sketch this new approach in section 3 of my paper. In the remainder of this section, I will briefly describe and criticize the four strategies listed as S-1 through S-4 above. Limitations of space prevent me from giving a more detailed and perhaps fairer account of those previous approaches. I will therefore just summarize the results of an analysis I have presented elsewhere (Lambrecht 1979).

2.1. The Historical Analysis

Wartburg (1943) analyzes the weak subject pronouns in modern French as full-fledged inflection morphemes in an (almost) regular prefixation paradigm. This new paradigm has replaced the IE suffixal inflection system that survives in Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, etc. The strong pronouns are simple subject pronouns in this new paradigm, so that sentence (1) for example represents the new stage of the language, in which the prefixes je- and tu- etc. function exactly like the old, now functionless suffixes in mang-e and boi-s, whereas moi and toi have taken over the functions of the older subjects je and tu. Similarly, (14b) would be the new form that has replaced (14a) because the erstwhile suffixal morpheme in mange has ceased to be perceived as such.

This analysis seems to account in a very simple and elegant way for the cooccurrence phenomenon in (1) and (14b). However it fails to explain why the presence of the new subject pronouns is optional whereas the former subject pronouns had been obligatory since the 15th century. Evidence against the analysis of Cooccurrence in terms of a simple pattern rearrangement from suffixation to prefixation is also presented by the asymmetry in the following sets of contrasting old and new forms:

- | | | | | |
|------|----|-------------------|-----|-----------------------|
| (15) | a. | je mange | --- | moi je-mange |
| | b. | *mange, je | --- | je-mange, moi |
| (16) | a. | l'éléphant mange | --- | l'éléphant il-mange |
| | b. | un éléphant mange | --- | *un éléphant il-mange |

The lack of parallelism between the old forms on the left and the new forms on the right cannot be accounted for in Wartburg's analysis (cf. section 3.5 for an analysis of (16b)). Finally, the most serious shortcoming of the diachronic pattern-rearrangement analysis is that it cannot explain why the new inflection markers continue to carry important subject functions that have not been taken over by the strong forms and why these new subject pronouns actually present none of the syntactic properties typically attributed to subjects (cf. 3.2 below).

2.2. The Structuralist Analysis

This approach is probably represented in its purest form by Benveniste, whose 1965 article I mentioned above (but cf. also Dubois, 1965, and Heger, 1966, for similar approaches). Although Benveniste promises to give an analysis of the two pronoun series and of their relationship, he says virtually nothing about the function of the strong pronouns (which he calls "antonyms") in Cooccurrence, i.e. about the phenomenon that makes the two series so puzzling. Benveniste's essentially distributional method of analysis yields interesting results regarding the possible combination of morphemes of the same distributional class; it does not explain: a) why the strong pronouns, which are said to be in free variation with (proper) nouns, cannot appear in typical NP positions (cf. 1.2 above); b) why the weak forms, although essentially considered nominal substitution forms, do not syntactically behave like nouns either; c) why they cooccur with coreferential strong pronouns or nouns and what the nature of this cooccurrence is; and d) why they are bound to the verb. Furthermore, the criticism applied to the historical approach in 2.1 regarding the non-subject functions of the strong pronouns/NPs also applies to the distributional method.

2.3. The Normative Approach and the Standard/Non-Standard Distinction

This approach is relevant for this paper in an indirect way. In the standard grammars of French, Cooccurrence, although a common feature of modern French, is usually stigmatized as incorrect if it is not altogether ignored⁶. This fact, I believe, constitutes good evidence for the existence of a new linguistic reality that does not fit the patterns of traditional grammar. Being by definition grammars of the (written) standard language, normative grammars have systematically discarded a whole range of syntactic phenomena of the spoken language which, taken together, point towards a new syntactic typology of modern French. Standard French is on its way to becoming a dead language, kept alive only in writing and through the extremely strong influence of classical usage traditions. Since Cooccurrence is essentially—although not uniquely (cf. section 3.1)—a feature of spoken French, I believe that in order to achieve a clearer description of the phenomenon under analysis it is necessary to establish a theoretical distinction between two languages: Standard French and Non-Standard French (hereafter SF and NSF)⁷.

The feature of NSF that is most relevant to this paper is the development of a complete paradigm for the two complementary pronoun series. The chart in (17) presents the pronoun paradigm of NSF. It is not the purpose of this paper to comment on the details of this chart. Suffice it to say that Cooccurrence consists in the combination of one or more items in the Topic columns with coreferential items in the boxes containing the Topic-Agreement Markers. However I will briefly comment on what is probably the most stri-

(17)

The Pronoun Paradigm of NSF

SINGULAR					PLURAL				
TOPICS	AGREEMENT MARKERS				TOPICS	AGREEMENT MARKERS			
	SU	DO	IO	OBL		SU	DO	IO	OBL
moi	je	me	me	en y	nous	on	nous	nous/y	en y
toi	tu	te	te	" "	vous	vous	vous	vous/y	" "
lui/NP	il	le	lui/y	" "	eux/NP	ils	les	leur/y	" "
elle/NP	elle	la	lui/y	" "	elles/NP	elles	les	leur/y	" "
ça/NP	ça	le/ça	y	" "					

king and important innovation of NSF over SF in this paradigm, namely the appearance of the subject clitic on in the first person plural ⁸, which should not be confused with the impersonal pronoun on in the third person singular, which I have left out in (17). In NSF, the pair nous - on is exactly parallel to the pairs moi - je, toi - tu etc. Example (18) contrasts the standard and the non-standard forms in the first person plural:

(18) nous nous-mangeons (SF) - nous on-mange (NSF) 'we eat'

Prefixed to the uninflected verb stem, on has become the regular, unmarked subject clitic in the 1st person plural, virtually always used in the spoken language and hardly ever used in writing. NSF has thus made one crucial further step away from the IE suffixal inflection system and towards the establishment of a complete system of opposition between autonomous and dependent pronouns ⁹.

Although the various uses of on in modern French have given rise to a great number of explanations by philologists and linguists (cf. the summary of the literature in Grafström, 1965), this functional explanation of the shift from nous V-ons to on-V, motivated by the necessary integration of a morphologically anomalous form into a new complementary paradigm, has, to my knowledge, not yet been put forward in the literature.

On behaves in every respect like the other weak forms, in particular it is phonologically and syntactically bound to the verb. In contrast, nous, being its autonomous counterpart, is similar to the other autonomous pronouns, which are phonologically and syntactically independent. Compare:

- (19) a. mes amis ils-iront : /mezami i(1)zirõ/ - /*mezamizil irõ/ - /*mezami ilirõ/
 b. eux ils-iront : /ø i(1)zirõ/ - /*øzil irõ/ - /*ø ilirõ/
 c. nous on-ira : /nu õnira/ - /*nuzõ ira/ - /*nu õ ira/
- (20) a. Pierre/Lui parfois il-boit du vin
 Pierre sometimes drinks wine/He sometimes drinks wine
 b. *Pierre il parfois boit du vin
 c. Pierre il-me-voit

in which the NP in Topic position corresponds to the object NP of (22a), it has been dealt with in terms of a movement transformation of the so-called dislocation (or detachment) type.

I would like to argue that instead of explaining the difference between (22a) and (22c) and similar phenomena by this ad-hoc rule of clitic-placement that moves object pronouns from postverbal into preverbal position and subject pronouns from daughter-of-S position into a position dominated by V, and instead of analyzing sentences like (23) as marked structures that "dislocate" the "normal" word order, it is simpler and intuitively more satisfying to consider (22a) an example of one basic sentence type and to interpret (22c) and (23) as two aspects of another, derivationally independent, basic pattern.

Transformational Grammar has been accused by its opponents of being a step backward from the descriptive science of structuralism towards a new version of prescriptivism. Although I believe that such accusations are unfair or based on a misunderstanding of the goals of TG, it does not seem entirely unjustified to me to assume that the interpretation of sentences like (23) as resulting from some dislocation of a more normal or basic structure is somehow analogous to the normative attitude that rejects the construction altogether. When you hear "dislocation", you think of the displaced bones of healthy sentence structure. The metaphor is revealing. I think that the main motivation for postulating transformations such as clitic placement and dislocation is that Cooccurrence is a troublesome phenomenon within the reductionist model of language in which the rule $S \rightarrow NP VP$ is the first rule of grammar. The weakness of this model, when applied to Cooccurrence, is that it cannot account for the fundamental formal and functional difference between the Topic and the Agreement Marker. Once this difference is recognized, any analysis in which the two coreferential nominal elements are considered two different surface manifestations of an identical underlying entity, namely NP, becomes difficult to defend.

The commitment to the model in which every sentence originates as an expansion of S into NP and VP makes it difficult to account in a natural way for the following phenomenon: among the three ways of expressing the information Peter eats apples illustrated in (14), the "simplest" one, namely (14a), is also the most unlikely to occur in real language use. Striking though that may be, this important fact is difficult to prove since all three forms can occur and since "likelihood of occurrence" is not an easy criterion to argue with. I believe that the following real world example is particularly compelling. Imagine a situation where someone upon seeing a bridge wants to communicate the feeling that she or he finds that bridge beautiful. Among the three most simple expressions of that feeling

- (24) a. Ce pont est beau!
 b. Ce pont il-est beau!
 c. Il-est beau, ce pont! } 'That bridge is beautiful!'

the first is clearly the most unnatural and inappropriate. If there is any sense in distinguishing the three sentences in terms of stylistic markedness, it is (a) that is the marked member of the set.

Limitations of space and knowledge prevent me from presenting a full account of the pragmatic conditions under which each of the three syntactic patterns is appropriate. I will limit my analysis to the Topic type in (24b) and to the different properties of the two nominal elements (hereafter N-1 and N-2) and I will argue in favor of a basic sentence type in which both the subject-predicate and the topic-comment relationship are formally encoded. As for the term Topic, I will use it as an operational concept whose meaning will hopefully become clearer in the course of my argumentation.

3. Criteria for Topic Status of N-1 in NSF

3.1. Topic is Not a Focus of Contrast

Although Cooccurrence is most common in NSF, examples of it can be found in the standard language too (cf. note 6). But it seems that in SF its use is limited to stylistically marked contrastive contexts, as in this example from Saussure's Cours (in this as in the following examples, N-1 and N-2 will be underlined for ease of recognition; underlining should not be interpreted as a signal of emphasis):

- (25) Les prescriptions d'un code, les rites d'une religion... n'occupent jamais qu'un certain nombre d'individus à la fois...; la langue, au contraire, chacun y participe à tout instant.
'The prescriptions of a code, the rites of a religion... never apply to more than a certain number of individuals at a time...; in the case of language, however, everyone participates at every moment.'

In the language of rhetoric, this example could be qualified as a case of anacoluthon. The shift to the new topic la langue with its clearly contrastive function is accompanied by a kind of syntactic hiatus: what at first seems to be the new subject—parallel to the preceding subjects prescriptions and rites—turns out to be the syntactic object of participe. This effect of surprise gives the construction a stylistically marked status. As in NSF, the clitic (in this case the oblique y) functions as the obligatory syntactic link between the topic and the verb. Although the type of contrastive topic shift construction illustrated in this example is not exactly analogous to similar constructions in English—it would hardly seem appropriate to translate the relevant part of (25) by using a "left dislocation" ('language, however, everyone participates in it at every moment')—I think that Chafe's definition of "Topics, English Style" can appropriately be applied to this French case: "The so-called topic is simply a focus of contrast that has for some reason

been placed in an unusual position at the beginning of the sentence" (Chafe 1976, p.49).

The following example is taken from a formerly very popular comic book series ('Tintin' by Hergé) whose style is predominantly SF with occasional concessions to spoken French. In (26), the occurrence of the definite NP la boîte after previous mention of its referent in indefinite form (une boîte à conserve) cannot be interpreted as contrastive and is thus a more typical example of Topic:

- (26) Le bout de papier provient de l'étiquette d'une boîte à conserve, et la boîte dont il a été arraché, je l'ai eue en main un peu avant de vous rencontrer. (from Le Crabe aux Pinces d'Or)

'The piece of paper comes from the label of a can, and the can it was torn off of, I had it in my hand just before running into you.'

The topic noun la boîte is "given" information and in some simple sense it represents what the rest of the sentence "is about". Although as in (25), the agreement marker is not in the SU case, much less mental reprocessing than in (25) seems to be necessary here to understand the function of la boîte and to "rethink" as a syntactic object what at first appeared to be a subject. I will argue in the next section that Topic in NSF cannot be understood with relational syntactic concepts like 'subject' or 'object' and that it has to be considered relationally independent of the verb.

A very natural example of Topic in NSF is illustrated in this discourse fragment:

- (27) Speaker A: J'ai essayé d'aller à la plage hier, mais il-faisait trop froid.
 Speaker B: La plage il-faut y-aller quand il-fait chaud.
 'I tried to go to the beach yesterday, but it was too cold.'
 'You should go the beach when it's hot.'

Speaker B's utterance takes up an NP newly introduced by Speaker A (à la plage) and uses it as Topic (la plage), followed by the agreement marker y on the verb. Speaker B's reply is a clear case of a topic-comment structure, in which the (caseless) initial NP signals what the utterance is going to be about.

Summarizing this section, I would like to suggest that although Cooccurrence in NSF can also be used in contrastive contexts—as for example in sentence (1)—examples (25), (26), and (27) present evidence for a process of de-marking from strongly contrastive in SF to neutral in NSF 10.

It is important to notice that the syntactically and stylistically neutral character of Cooccurrence in NSF distinguishes it from superficially similar constructions in English in which, at least in the prevailing view, an NP has been moved into initial position for reasons of emphasis. I have already argued in section 2.4 that the interpretation of Cooccurrence as a case of Left-Disloca-

tion is misleading. Similarly, the NSF construction should not be confused with the rule that has been called Topicalization in English. Unlike in English cases like the often cited Beans I like, the appearance of Topic in NSF is due to a typologically relevant new discourse strategy (the marking of an NP as given in context), not to the breaking up of a more basic structure for purposes of contrast focusing. In English, a "topicalized" NP can be interpreted as leaving a syntactic "gap" in the place out of which it has been moved. French Cooccurrence sentences never contain such a gap since the verb is obligatorily preceded by one or several agreement markers which syntactically "replace" the Topic. Expressed differently, a Topic can always be dropped without causing ungrammaticality. Compare sentences (28) (a), (b), and (c):

- (28) a. Ton frère j'y-ai donné un livre 'I gave a book to
 b. J'y-ai donné un livre your brother'
 c. *Ton frère j'ai donné un livre

In (28c), the missing agreement marker causes ungrammaticality. However, if the "fronted" NP is provided with a case marking, the sentence becomes grammatical:

- (29) A ton frère, j'ai donné un livre

Thus, French also has a rule of Topicalization which is very similar to the English rule. I do not know for sure what the status of (29) is with respect to the SF/NSF distinction. I believe that sentences like (29) are unlikely to occur in NSF. In any case, the clear syntactic and stylistic difference between (28a) and (29)—the latter is a marked construction—proves that Cooccurrence and Topicalization are quite distinct phenomena ¹¹.

3.2. Topic is Syntactically Independent

The most striking formal property of Topics in NSF is that they are not marked for case. The role of a Topic with respect to the case frame of the verb is expressed only vicariously through its agreement marker on the verb. This agreement marker, whose case is morphologically determined (cf. the difference between the Topic columns and the columns containing the agreement pronouns in (17)), establishes the necessary syntactic link between the argument structure of the verb and the pragmatically determined Topic. The discourse fragment in (27) above illustrates this difference: in Speaker A's utterance, his attempt to go to the beach is new information, therefore the noun appears integrated into the predicate structure in the oblique form à la plage required by the verb aller (which does not have an agreement marker). In Speaker B's reply, la plage has lost its preposition together with its status as new information and this preposition now reappears, as it were, as the agreement marker y in front of the verb aller.

It follows that Topic is not determined by the verb, or only

indirectly so. Whereas "the semantic role (Agent, Experiencer, etc.) of the referent of a basic subject is predictable from the form of the main verb" (Keenan, 1976, p.321), the semantic role of a Topic is not predictable in this way. Rather, the Topic in NSF presents some of the typical features of topics as defined by Li and Thompson (1976) for topic-prominent languages: "An important property of the topic is that it...need not be an argument of a predicative constituent;...topic selection is independent of the verb" (Li and Thompson, 1976, p.461ff.). For example, given a two-place predicate like s'intéresser à ('to be interested in') and two NPs, one [+animate], the other not, we can predict that only the agreement marker in SU case can agree with the [+animate] (=Agent) noun and that the marker in the OBL case must correspond to the noun with the feature [-animate], but we cannot predict (except possibly from previous discourse) whether the NP with the animate or the one with the inanimate referent will be the Topic. Thus in the following examples, the Topic is either mon frère or les livres or both:

- (30) a. Mon frère il-s'intéresse pas aux livres
 b. Les livres il-s'y-intéresse pas, mon frère
 c. Mon frère, les livres il-s'y-intéresse pas
 'My brother is not interested in books'

In spite of this freedom of Topic selection, it would be inaccurate to say that in these sentences the Topic has no selectional relation at all with the verb, since Topic-agreement is obligatory. However it is possible in certain cases to omit even this agreement link between the Topic and the verb, so that no overt semantic connection is left between the two constituents. A typical example is

- (31) Ton frère c'est pas pareil
 your brother it is not same
 'It's not the same with your brother'

or even (32), which was uttered in a conversation about problems in foreign language learning:

- (32) Tandis que le suisse-allemand il-faut se lever tôt
 whereas the Swiss-German it is-necessary get up early
 'whereas Swiss-German is really tough (to learn)'

Structures like (31) or (32), in which the semantic relationship between the topic and the comment is recoverable only from the context, bear a striking resemblance to certain constructions in topic-prominent languages (Mandarin, Lahu etc.) in which "the topic has no selectional relationship with the verb" (Li and Thompson, op. cit., p. 468; cf. the examples given there).

It may be worthwhile to mention here a construction which has frequently been dealt with in the linguistic literature, with or without reference to the problem of topic. The construction I have

in mind is the so-called "double subject" construction of topic-prominent languages (cf. e.g. Fillmore, 1968, about "inalienable possession" in Japanese; for a list of such constructions in different languages, cf. Li and Thompson, 1976). An apparently similar construction frequently occurring in NSF is illustrated in (33):

- (33) Mon frère sa voiture elle-est complètement foutue
 my brother his car she is completely wrecked
 'My brother's car is a complete wreck'

It is tempting to consider (33) a particularly clear case of a topic-comment construction: only the subject (or the secondary topic) sa voiture seems to be selectionally and syntactically related to the verb; the Topic mon frère seems to have no agreement relation with the verb whatsoever. However a major difference between (33) and the examples cited by Li and Thompson is that in French--as well as in analogous constructions in non-standard English and German (cf. my brother his car, meinem Bruder sein Auto)--the two NPs are obligatorily linked by a possessive marker (cf. sa in (33)). Because of this obligatory link it seems preferable to analyze the NPs as parts of a special kind of genitive construction that constitutes a syntactic unit, so that mon frère sa voiture would essentially function like the parallel standard form la voiture de mon frère. Nevertheless the occurrence of such non-standard genitive constructions, in which the initial NP somehow "feels" more independent syntactically than in the analogous standard forms, is an interesting case of topic use in spoken language.

A further reason why Topic should be considered independent of the verb is that there is no theoretical limit to the distance between it and the verb. In particular an indefinite number of embedded or main clauses can intervene between the Topic and its agreement marker. For example in (34a) one main clause and in (34b) one main and one embedded clause appear between the Topic and the verb:

- (34) a. Pierre il-faut qu'il parte maintenant
 Pierre it is-necessary that he leave now
 'Pierre has to leave now'
- b. Moi c'est simple, si tu-me-trompes, je-te-tue 12
 me it is simple if you me cheat I you kill
 'If you're unfaithful I'll kill you, I'm not kidding'

The distance between the Topic and the verb could easily be further extended with additional intervening clauses, without making the sentence unacceptable.

Subjects, on the other hand, cannot be as freely separated from their predicates. Compare for example (34b) with the sentences in (35), in which the unacceptability increases with the distance between the subject and the verb:

- (35) a. Si tu-le-trompes, Pierre te-tuera
 'If you are unfaithful to him, Pierre will kill you'

- b. ?Pierre, si tu-le-trompes, te-tuera
 c. *Pierre, c'est simple, si tu-le-trompes, te-tuera

3.3. Topic Selection is Free

In section 3.2 I argued that the selection of Topic is independent of the argument structure of the verb. As a consequence, in sentences with more than one Topic or with one Topic and one or more Afterthought NPs, the relative order of the NPs can vary freely according to the necessities of discourse. However, the order in which the agreement markers appear before the verb is fixed¹³. Fixed order of affixes is a highly universal phenomenon, and the rigid order of French clitic pronouns is one of the strongest arguments for their status as morphologically rather than syntactically determined elements.

The following examples represent some of the possible Topic-Afterthought variations on the sentence theme 'I will give the book to your brother':

(36)	Moi	}	je-le-lui-donnerai,	}	le livre, à ton frère
	Moi le livre				à ton frère
	Moi ton frère				le livre
	Ton frère				moi, le livre
	Ton frère moi				le livre
	Ton frère le livre				moi
	Le livre				moi, à ton frère
	Le livre moi				à ton frère

The sharp contrast between the changing order of the NPs and the fixed order of the clitic pronouns follows naturally if the Topic-Agreement analysis is adopted. It is well known that the order of constituents in a sentence is partly determined by their pragmatic status: constituents representing given information tend to occur before constituents whose referents are new. Since Topic by definition represents given information and since the difference between given and new is a matter of context, not of grammar, the topic noun can be selected independently of grammatical constraints¹⁴. The respective position of clitic pronouns, however, does not depend on such pragmatic factors as givenness in context. Since their main function is to serve as a link between the Topic and the syntactic-semantic structure of the predicate, they are contextually presupposed and therefore not subject to pragmatically determined positional variations.

3.4. Initial Position of Topic and Restrictions on Embedding

There is considerable disagreement among linguists about the nature and function of topics, often due, it seems, to differences in terminology. But no matter how the topic is defined, initial position seems to be recognized as a universal principle, at least in non-verb-initial languages (cf. Bickerton and Givón, 1976, for a

modification of this principle for verb-initial languages). That this principle is confirmed in NSF is clear from the initial or near-initial position the Topic occupies in the examples presented so far in this paper. A particularly striking case is (34), where the Topic stays in initial position although it is separated from its comment by intervening material of indefinite length.

As a corollary of the topic-first principle, a Topic in NSF cannot freely appear in embedded clauses, in particular if the main clause also contains a noun in topic position. Compare the following examples:

- (37) a. Pierre Marie lui-a donné le livre hier
'Pierre Marie gave him the book yesterday'
- b. ?Il me semble que Pierre Marie lui-a donné le livre hier
'It seems to me that P. M. gave him the book yesterday'
- c. ?*Le jour où Pierre Marie lui-a donné le livre c'était un lundi
'The day P. M. gave him the book was a Monday'
- d. *Le livre que Pierre Marie lui-a donné hier c'était la Bible
'The book P. M. gave him yesterday was the Bible'

In (37b) the Topic Pierre appears in an embedded clause, but since no preceding NP interferes, the sentence is (more or less) acceptable. In sentence (c) and (d), however, the head nouns of the relative clauses in which Pierre appears as Topic can be interpreted as Topics on a higher level, which may be the reason why these two sentences are unacceptable. I would like to emphasize that the examples in (37) represent an oversimplification of the possibilities of Topic embedding and that much further research is necessary before any conclusions can be drawn in this domain.

3.5. Givenness of Topic

After the property of initial position, the property most frequently associated with topics is definiteness (cf. Li and Thompson, op.cit., p.461). One consequence of the constituent ordering principle I mentioned in 3.3 (i.e. constituents representing given information tend to occur first) is that in subject-initial languages subjects are typically definite. When indefinite subjects occur, they are often placed in non-initial position and preceded by "dummy" subject markers (English there, German da, es, French il (y a) etc). It is nevertheless possible in Standard French (as in English and German) not to resort to such empty subjects and to use indefinite subjects at the beginning of a sentence. In addition to the now literary construction in (38a), which is subject to constraints similar to those on the "existential" there construction in English, we also find (38b):

- (38) a. Il est venu un garçon 'A boy came'
b. Un garçon est venu

However in NSF, a Cooccurrence construction corresponding to the indefinite subject construction in (38b) would be ungrammatical, as would be any sentence with a (referentially) indefinite Topic:

- (39) a. *Un/Le garçon il-est venu 'A/The boy came'
 b. *Un/Le garçon je-le-vois 'I see a/the boy'

The fact that sentence (40)

- (40) Un garçon ça-pleure jamais
 'A boy never cries' = 'Boys never cry'

is grammatical does not constitute counter-evidence against this rule. In (40), un garçon is a generic NP and as such, it can be interpreted as definite: it refers to the class of all boys, not to an individual out of that class.

It is an interesting feature of NSF that it has developed a special agreement marker, ça, for NPs with generic reference. The Topic pronoun corresponding to this marker is the homophonous ça (cf. the chart in (17)), and sentences with ça - ça Cooccurrence are very common (e.g. Ça ça-m'embête 'That annoys me'). The fact that NSF has a different agreement marker for generic and for specific reference makes contrasts like the following possible:

- (41) a. Les légumes c'est où? 15
 b. Les légumes ils-sont où?

Both sentences can be translated as 'Where are the vegetables?' but the conditions under which they are uttered are different. (41a) could be asked for example by a shopper in a large store who does not know where the vegetable section is, whereas (41b) could be uttered later by the same person when he gets home and notices that the vegetables he bought are not in his shopping bag.

In addition to the requirement that topics be definite, the Topic in NSF is subject to a further constraint. The referent of a Topic must not only be assumed by the speaker to be known and identifiable by the hearer, but must also represent given information, i.e. it must either have been mentioned in previous discourse (as for example in (26) and (27) above), or, more rarely, it must be given in the situation of the utterance (as in (24), where ce pont is situationally, not linguistically, given). The following definition of givenness characterizes clearly this property of Topic in NSF: "Given (or old) information is that knowledge which the speaker assumes to be in the consciousness of the addressee at the time of the utterance. So-called new information is what the speaker assumes he is introducing into the addressee's consciousness by what he says" (Chafe, 1976, p.30).

For indefinite NPs in preverbal position as well as for definite NPs that introduce "new information" in Chafe's sense, NSF typically uses the marker il-y-a (standard spelling il y a) followed by the (definite or indefinite) NP and a relative pronoun. For

example, the NSF sentence that corresponds to the SF sentences in (38) is (42):

(42) Il-y-a un garçon qui est venu

This new-information marker is a morphological unit consisting of the two clitics il and y and different forms of the verb avoir. The two clitics are usually fused in NSF, so that il-y-a, il-y-avait, il-y-aura etc. are pronounced as /ja/, /javɛ/, /jora/ etc. The spelling in the following examples is meant to reflect this pronunciation.

The different encoding of given NPs (=Topics) on the one hand and definite NPs representing new information on the other hand is illustrated in the following two sentences (both translatable by 'Your father just called!'):

- (43) a. Y-a ton père qu'a téléphoné tout à l'heure
b. Ton père il-a téléphoné tout à l'heure

The necessarily definite NP ton père is syntactically encoded as new in (43a) and as given in (43b). The pragmatic difference between these two sentences may become clearer if we provide them with a context. For example, (43a) could be an appropriate answer to the question Qu'est-ce qui s'est passé pendant que j'étais loin? ('What happened while I was away?'). But a question to which (43b) could be appropriately replied presupposes an explicit or implicit previous mention of the NP ton père. Such a question might be e.g. Il-a téléphoné, mon père? ('Did my father call?') or Ils-ont téléphoné, mes parents? ('Did my parents call?').

It is possible to combine both of these pragmatic strategies in one sentence:

- (44) Moi y-a un truc que j'aimerais savoir
me there-is one thing that I would-like know
'There's one thing I'd like to know'

The Topic pronoun moi is isolated in initial position, followed by the new-information marker y-a which introduces un truc. The relative pronoun que is part of the structure y-a - NP - que. Finally the agreement marker je establishes the link between the Topic and the verb.

The last example I would like to present is a short narrative fragment that I think is particularly instructive because it exhibits the different pragmatic strategies of NSF I have dealt with in more or less detail in this paper. The example is from the comic book La Fleur au Fusil by Tardi:

- (45) Y-avait une ferme à deux pas. Tout le monde s'est fait la malle. Y-a qu'les poules qui sont restées sur place. - Faut dire qu'les gallinacées, c'est pas leur fort, l'intellect.

'There was a farm right nearby. Everybody got ready to leave. Only the chickens stayed behind. - You gotta admit, poultry are not known for their intelligence.'

The introduction of the new element une ferme in the first sentence by means of the marker y-avait (here without a following relative clause) is very similar to the English strategy that appears in the translation. The second sentence, which expresses the consequence of the discovery of the farm, is entirely new information and therefore contains no Topic and no agreement marker on the verb. This is the no-agreement sentence type illustrated in (14a). In the third sentence, the NP les poules is definite because the chickens are a given part of the whole setting. However, they cannot be assumed "to be in the consciousness of the addressee at the time of the utterance", therefore they are introduced via the structure y-a - NP - qui. The sentence after the hyphen presents a complex interaction of Topic and of Afterthought agreement (literal translation: '(It) is necessary (to) say that the gallinaceans it is not their forte the intellect'). The chickens, having been mentioned in the preceding sentence, can now function as Topic under the variant form les gallinacées. In the comment following this Topic, the agreement marker c' (=ca), which at first glance seems to agree with the generic Topic, actually goes with the Afterthought NP l'intellect. What functions indirectly as an agreement marker for the Topic is the possessive leur modifying the noun fort which is part of the Afterthought construction c'est pas leur fort whose "subject" is l'intellect.

The impossibility of integrating the Topic NP into the syntactic structure of the verb complex becomes obvious if we consider this simplified English (or rather un-English) version of it:

(46) Chickens, thinking is not their forte

It is clear that chickens cannot be the subject since the selection restrictions of the verb complex are only satisfied by the NP thinking. Nor can it bear any other grammatical relation to the rest of the sentence. The only overt relationship between the first and the second part of the sentence is the relationship of identity between chickens and the referent of the possessive their.

4. Summary and Conclusion

In this paper I have presented evidence for a typology of non-standard modern French in which both the subject-predicate and the topic-comment relationship are syntactically encoded. The topic-comment sentence type, which is very common in NSF, is a construction that contains two coreferential nominal elements whose properties are in complementary distribution: the essentially pragmatic function of the first of these two elements (the Topic) contrasts with the essentially syntactic function of the second one (the Topic-

Agreement Marker). More specifically, the Topic is independent of the verb, it has no case marking and it can be selected freely, whereas the Agreement Marker is attached to the verb, it is internally marked for case and its position is fixed. The clear phonological, morphological and syntactic difference between N-1 and N-2 makes it difficult to explain them as derived from a single underlying NP position.

The functional and typological approach to Cooccurrence has the advantage that it allows us to explain the syntactic difference between N-1 and N-2 as a natural consequence of their different functions as a Topic and as a Topic-Agreement Marker respectively. Thus it provides an explanation for the seemingly anomalous Cooccurrence construction in modern French that follows naturally from a general typological principle.

As a conclusion, I would like to integrate the facts of NSF described in this paper into the typological speculation given by Li and Thompson at the end of their 1976 article. In the evolutionary cycle that leads from A (topic-prominent) to B (neither topic-prominent nor subject-prominent) to C (subject-prominent) to D (both topic-prominent and subject-prominent) and back to A, modern non-standard French seems to occupy a position somewhere between D and A: from a language type in which "topic sentences become less marked, more basic", NSF is changing to a type in which the "topic notion (is) integrated into basic sentence structure; topic and subject (are) distinct."

Notes

1. Contrary to the spelling conventions of standard French, in which the clitic pronouns appear as independent words, I will use hyphens to indicate their verb-dependent character.
2. The third person is exceptional in this respect. The autonomous forms lui, eux, elle(s) can be used with or without a cooccurring clitic, cf.:

(i)	lui	mange	elle(s)	mange(nt)	eux	mangent			
(ii)	lui	il-	mange	elle(s)	elle(s)-	mange(nt)	eux	ils-	mangent

The status of (i) and (ii) is controversial. Benveniste (1965) sees in the simultaneous existence of (i) and (ii) evidence for the double status of lui etc. as a pronominal and a nominal form. Kayne (1975), who does not mention (ii), counts the existence of (i) as evidence for free variation between strong pronouns and NPs. A curious contradiction appears between Bally's (1932) and Dubois' (1965) account: Bally, in what I think is the correct analysis, considers the forms in (i) dying out constructions of the written language, whereas Dubois considers them typical of spoken French. It seems possible to me that this contradiction is partly due to a phonological and morphological accident. In non-standard French,

the clitics il and ils are pronounced [i] before a following consonant. Thus the first form in (ii) above is pronounced /lɥi imãʒ/, which in fast speech becomes /lɥimãʒ/, in other words the difference between (i) and (ii) is phonologically neutralized in this case. In the case of elle(s), the difference between (i) and (ii) is often only suprasegmentally realized (the second elle(s) in (ii) cannot be stressed, cf. example (2b) in the text). Confusion can therefore easily arise between the form in (i) (elle(s) mangent) and the form in (ii) when the Topic is not mentioned (elle(s)-mangent). As for the pronoun eux, I believe that the form in (i) only occurs in the written standard language and even then only very rarely.

3. The difference between (6a) and (6b) is not clear-cut. I believe that (6b) is acceptable in a contrastive reading without special stress, but intuitions seem to differ with respect to such sentences.

4. The most striking formal properties of Afterthought NPs are their complete lack of stress and their case marking, which distinguishes them sharply from NPs in Cooccurrence (cf. section 3.2). One of the most well-known French sentences is an Afterthought construction: the famous Ils sont fous, ces Romains ('These Romans are crazy'), muttered by Astérix and Obélix, the two most popular comic-book heroes in France, whenever they knock out a Roman soldier.

5. To my knowledge, Bally (1932) is the first linguist who analyzed the differences between the sentence types illustrated in (14) in terms of universal patterns of sentence formation. Bally also postulates a universal evolution that leads from the "segmented" construction Pierre, il mange to the synthetic form Pierre il-mange. This evolution is very similar to the one postulated by Givón in his theory of the rise of agreement through topic shift constructions (Givón 1976).

6. For example in Grevisse's Le Bon Usage, which is one of the most influential prescriptive grammars of modern French, the pronominal Cooccurrence type illustrated in (1) is not mentioned at all. About the type illustrated in (8), Grevisse (§ 464) only writes: "Les grammairiens condamnent généralement des phrases telles que celles-ci." However he concedes that even respectable authors do use it.

7. For an analysis of some features of NSF that are relevant for the Topic construction, see Lambrecht (1979). For some general but highly stimulating remarks about the problem the SF/NSF distinction presents for the modern writer, see Queneau (1965a and b). Queneau refers to NSF as Néo-Français.

8. The opposition between normative grammars and actual language use is particularly striking in the case of this innovation. Grevisse and Wagner-Pinchon consider the new use of on for nous "vulgarités de langage" and "vulgarisme" to be avoided. For a more detailed analysis of this new pronoun pair nous - on see Lambrecht (1978).

9. The last step would be the elimination of the suffix -ez in the second person plural. This process is complicated by the polite/familiar distinction between the pronouns of address vous and tu and the additional function of the -ez forms as plural imperatives. Linda Coleman (personal communication) has recorded in Louisiana French forms like vous gagne or mixed forms as in (i):

- (i) Et quand vous allez retourner vous peut venir back ici
'And when you return you can come back here'

It seems that the polite/familiar distinction is disappearing in modern French (for example in Québécois French), but I have heard of no evidence for the disappearing of the plural imperative in -ez.

10. The importance of the reanalysis process from marked to neutral syntax for the rise of grammatical agreement has been demonstrated by Givón (1976).

11. Topicalization is more restricted than Cooccurrence. For example, there is no Topicalization construction corresponding to Speaker B's utterance in (27). Compare (27) with (i):

- (i) *A la plage il-faut aller quand il-fait chaud.

12. This sentence is from the comic-book Vive les Femmes by Reiser. Reiser is one of the rare authors who consistently use NSF in their comics.

13. There is a difference in the respective position of DO and IO markers between the 1st and 2nd person on the one hand and the 3rd person on the other hand (compare il-me(IO)-le(DO)-donne with il-le(DO)-lui(IO)-donne). NSF also admits precedence of DO over IO in the second person (e.g. votre femme elle-ne-les(DO)-vous(IO)-montre jamais? - 'doesn't your wife ever show them to you?') and other variations, in particular in the imperative (cf. montre-le-moi or montre-moi-le or even montre-me-le). Such variations contradict the rigorous rules given in Benveniste (1965). But except for this limited fluctuation, the order of agreement markers seems to be fixed in SF as in NSF. In particular, Non-Terms always follow Terms: cf. je-leur-en-donne ('I give them (some) of-it') vs *j'en-leur-donne or je-m'y-intéresse vs *j'y-m'intéresse etc.

14. This statement is somewhat oversimplified. From the fact that Topic-Agreement Markers are obligatory it follows that only NPs in case functions for which the language provides agreement markers can function as Topics. It is clear that the five agreement marker columns in (17) do not cover all possible NP functions. For example for the subject-predicate construction in (i)

- (i) Je-mange à côté de Pierre 'I eat next to Pierre'

there is no corresponding Topic construction (ii):

- (ii) *Pierre je-à-côté-mange

It seems that in the Keenan-Comrie Accessibility Hierarchy NSF can have Topic-Agreement down to OBL and that the split occurs between

more and less prominent oblique functions. However I believe that NSF is evolving in the direction of an increasing freedom of Topic selection (cf Lambrecht 1979 for details about this evolution).

15. Notice that in (41a) the verb agrees in number with the agreement marker ça (c'), not with the Topic les légumes. It might be more accurate to say that there is no number agreement at all in this case since the 3rd person singular can be interpreted as the unmarked form. The verb does not agree in gender either, when the Topic is generic. This lack of gender agreement does not only show up in the agreement marker ça, which is never marked for gender, but also in adjectival predicates. Compare the specific agreement in (i) with the generic agreement in (ii):

- (i) La mer elle-est belle
 the(f) sea she is beautiful(f) 'The sea is beautiful'
 (ii) La mer c'est beau
 (iii)*La mer c'est belle

The adjective in (ii) is masculine, which is also the unmarked gender. This lack of agreement between the Topic and the verb can be interpreted as additional evidence for the syntactic independence of Topics (cf. section 3.2).

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