

Zero Marking in French Impersonal Verbs: A Counter Trend to Clitic Morphologization?*

BONNIE B. FONSECA-GREBER
Bowling Green State University

0. Introduction

An ever-expanding body of work on spoken French shows that subject clitics are losing their clitic status and are becoming increasingly bound to the verb as inflectional prefixes (Ashby 1977 (France), Auger 1994 (Quebec), Fonseca-Greber 2000 (Switzerland)). This process of morphologization brings spoken French back in line typologically with other Romance languages as a pro-drop language (Fonseca-Greber 2000). Yet an apparent contradiction appears in the data. At a time when clitic use is on the rise in most linguistic contexts, why do certain impersonal verbs appear *sans* clitic, apparently in flagrant violation of the general trend toward morphologized verbal prefixes? A corpus analysis invokes markedness to provide a functional explanation of what appears to be a new and separate change.

1. Background: Language Change and Spoken French

The traditional account of French presented in reference grammars and much linguistic work alike describes French pronouns as shown in (1), where the disjunctive pronouns, in **bold**, are assumed not to act as subjects, whereas the subject (and object, in *italics*) clitics are still assumed to be the actual subjects (and objects), despite their non-canonical pronominal behavior as clitics (Kayne 1975). Underlined in (1) are the 3rd person subject clitics, which are the focus of this paper. This corpus shows that a classification such as given in (1) is no longer descriptively adequate for spoken French.

(1) Traditional Account of French Pronouns

1Sg. je— <i>me</i> , moi	1Pl. nous— <i>nous</i> , nous
2Sg. tu— <i>te</i> , toi	2Pl. vous— <i>vous</i> , vous
3Sg. <u>il</u> , <u>elle</u> — <i>le</i> , <i>la</i> , <i>lui</i> , <i>se</i> , lui , elle	3Pl. <u>ils</u> , <u>elles</u> — <i>les</i> , <i>leur</i> , eux , elles

* I thank the speakers who consented to have their conversations recorded for the corpus, Linda R. Waugh for her mentoring and stimulating discussions, and the BLS audience for their comments.

This analysis of the change that is resulting in the emergence of zero marking in spoken French is grounded in morphologization, markedness, and functional approaches to language. To assess the degree of morphologization in cases of language change, Schwegler (1990) proposes the following set of tests: prefixes (a) can reduce the morphological bulk of individual forms and of the paradigm as a whole, (b) undergo systematic allomorphy (e.g., devoicing, consonant and/or vowel reduction, liaison), (c) cannot be separated from the verb stem by a pause, (d) do not allow any non-affixal material to be intercalated between prefix and stem (see also Zwicky and Pullum 1983), (e) appear in a fixed order and, as inflectional prefixes, precede the verb, (f) are obligatory, and (g) are repeated with every new tensed verb, even in a sequence of verbs; to this, Fonseca-Greber (2000) adds (h) are reprised together with stems as a single indivisible unit when speakers self-repair.

Markedness constraints, although perhaps not a unified concept (Hume 2004), also influence which forms change and how (Benveniste 1966, Jakobson 1971, Bybee 1985).

(2) Marked and Unmarked Forms

	Unmarked	Marked
Person	3 rd person	1 st and 2 nd person
Number	Sg.	Pl.
Gender	Masc.	Fem.

As the table in (2) shows, the 3M.Sg. is the unmarked form, across all three dimensions of Person, Number, and Gender. Third person, Benveniste's (1966) non-person, can refer to a fixed, objective entity, to an unfixed, non-objective entity, or to no entity at all. Therefore, it has the widest range of possible contextualizations (i.e., contextual meanings), because it does not necessarily involve the speech situation, as do 1st and 2nd person. Within the 3rd person, singular and masculine are unmarked, iconically bearing less complex morphological markers than plural and feminine, which bear more complex morphological marking. The combination of these factors accounts for why 3M.Sg. *il-*, the unmarked form, is used for impersonals and why it has been referred to as a dummy pronoun.

In addition to these language-internal factors, language-external factors such as functional constraints drive language change, such that "...language is structured so as to be suitable for communication" (Waugh and Monville-Burston 1990:14). These functional factors include (a) frequency, (b) least effort for the locutor, and (c) maximal perceptual distinctiveness for the interlocutor.

Language changes that occur as a result of morphologization driven by functional and markedness constraints can lead to the development of a Zero Sign/Zero Morph, as shown in (3).

(3) *Clermont-Ferrand* Preterite (Ronjat 1937:193, in Bybee 1985:55)

1Sg.: canté-te	1Pl.: canté-tem
2Sg.: canté-tes	2Pl.: canté-tetz
3Sg.: canté-#	3Pl.: canté-ton

The symbol -# in the 3Sg. of the *Clermont-Ferrand* preterite is not just a “nothing” but a “significant nothing,” which distinguishes 3Sg. from all the other forms in the paradigm, each with its own distinct morphological expression, instead of being just an inflectionless stem. It is Jakobson’s “zero sign,” “the opposition of something with nothing” (Jakobson 1971:213), and Bybee’s “zero morph,” a non-overt morpheme that serves to distinguish that member from all the other members of the category (Bybee 1985:52).

This study then attempts to provide a principled explanation for the pattern of prefix (non)-use in the impersonal verbs appearing in a corpus of Conversational Swiss French in order to better understand the nature of the morphological changes occurring in the pre-verbal zone. Markedness and functional considerations, in conjunction with morphologization would predict that:

- verbs where a subject NP is missing—or impossible—would be a favorable environment for early clitic morphologization because of (a) their frequency and (b) the lack of any other means of identifying the grammatical person
- verbs where a full subject NP is present would be a favorable environment for late clitic morphologization because of (a) their infrequency in discourse (Lambrecht 1987) and (b) the presence of the full NP that enables the listener to identify the referent easily even in the absence of the prefix (L. Waugh, p.c.)
- clitics occurring with verbs where a subject pronoun is present would morphologize into prefixes sooner than those with a full NP subject but later than those with a null subject, because these light referential subjects provide greater referential content that verb marking alone but not as much as a definite NP
- if, within the new prefixal verb paradigm, a zero morph were to develop—a very common morphological change cross-linguistically because of the unmarked status of the 3Sg.—it would emerge first in the impersonal verbs, which (a) exist only in the 3rd person and (b) cannot take a referential subject, thereby eliminating the possibility of communicative breakdown or misunderstanding between speaker and interlocutor
- inflectional prefixes would follow French preferred syllable structure: CV.

2. **Data and Method: Corpus of Conversational Swiss French (CSF)**

The CSF corpus contains ±117,000 words, 13,666 finite verbs, 8½ hours, 7 of spontaneous, naturally occurring conversations. It was recorded by the researcher or one of the participants among family or friends, in Tucson, Arizona, or French-speaking Switzerland, and transcribed in modified orthography by the researcher.

Participants were 14 educated, middle-class speakers of Standard Swiss

French, engaged in spontaneous, face-to-face everyday conversation, frequently over food. In his *Varieties of Contemporary French*, Offord states, “Indeed it is best to consider the standards of Belgium and Switzerland as the same as standard French, with minor modifications...” (Offord 1990:18). He goes on to state that these modifications are lexical or phonological. Thus it is implied that morphosyntactically there is no difference between the French of Switzerland and the French of France, and that therefore the findings of this corpus should be generalizable to Metropolitan French.

Transcription and coding conventions were as follows: *je-* = hyphen shows prefixal status of former clitic; \emptyset = null subject; (I) = subject overtly expressed in English translation, null in French; (i)-vont = incomplete clitic morphologization (variable use); \equiv = impossibility of referential subject; # = zero morph. Finite verbs were coded and tallied for (non)-presence and position of subject clitics and overt subject pronouns. Discourse markers and clefts were coded but excluded from the total tallies of finite verbs.

3. Results

As the table in (4) shows morphologization of the subject clitic into an inflectional prefix is complete or all but complete throughout the paradigm.

(4) Finite Verb Stems Preceded by a Subject Clitic

Prefixes	Tokens	%	Prefixes	Tokens	%
1Sg.: <i>je-</i>	<i>n</i> = 4,121	100%	1Pl.: <i>on-</i>	<i>n</i> = 1,335	100%
2Sg.: <i>tu-</i>	<i>n</i> = 2,126	100%	2Pl.: <i>vous-</i>	<i>n</i> = 216	100%
3Sg.: <i>il-, elle-, ça-</i>	<i>n</i> = 3,744	91.5%	3Pl.: <i>ils-, elles-</i>	<i>n</i> = 1,288	93.6%

The 1st and 2nd person subject clitics have fully morphologized into inflectional prefixes marking person and number. Overall, morphologization is approaching completion in the 3rd person and is proceeding according to the functional properties of the subject, when one is expressed, spreading from pronouns to NPs to quantifiers. Obligatoriness was the only one of Schwegler’s (1990) tests failed, probably due to functional properties of the subject, combined with prescriptive pressure and the influence of written French on these literate speakers. These factors may be conspiring to make change occur more slowly than it would otherwise. Still, in all environments, prefixation is more advanced than generally assumed. The rest of this paper will focus on an apparent counter trend in the 3rd person data, but for the typological implications of the broader change from clitic to prefix, see Fonseca-Greber (2000) and Fonseca-Greber and Waugh (2003a, 2003b).

3.1. Completed Morphologization in the 3rd Person

3.1.1. 3Sg. Verbs That Disallow a Referential Subject

Morphologization is complete with 3Sg. verbs that disallow a referential subject, as in weather verbs, (5), and impersonal verbs, (6):

- (5) *parce quandt i-pleut ici c'est pas: c'est—c'est—ça va t'vois..m'alors quandt i-pleut là-bas c'est pas souvent non plus mais alors ça-rince alors...(S2, I)*
 [because when ≡ 3M.Sg.-rain-PRES here 3N.Sg.-be-PRES not 3N.Sg.-be-PRES 3N.Sg.-be-PRES 3N.Sg.-go-PRES 2Sg.-see but well when ≡ 3M.Sg.-rain-PRES there 3N.Sg.-be-PRES not often not more but well ≡ 3N.Sg.-rinse-PRES]
 ‘‘cuz when (it) rains here (it)'s no:t (it)'s—(it)'s—(it)'s no big deal (y')know..but there when (it) rains—which isn't very often either—(it) pours...’
- (6) *i-m-semble que c'est Baggins (S1, I)*
 [≡ 3M.Sg.-1Sg.Dat.-seem-PRES that 3N.Sg.-be-PRES Baggins]
 ‘(it) seems to me that (it)'s Baggins’

3.1.2. 3Sg. Verbs that Allow a Referential Subject

Morphologization is also complete with 3Sg. verbs that allow a referential subject under certain conditions such as the null subject condition in (7), and when the overt subject is one of the “new” subject pronouns, *lui*, (8), *elle*, or *ça*.

- (7) *Ø i-pr'nait toute la largeur.. (S1, I)*
 [Ø 3M.Sg.-take-IMPERF all the width]
 ‘(he) took up the whole door..’
- (8) *lui il-achète de la viande (S4, II)*
 [he 3M.Sg.-buy-PRES of the meat]
 ‘he buys meat’

3.1.3. 3Pl. Verbs that Allow a Referential Subject

Morphologization is complete in only one environment of the 3Pl., the null subject condition of verbs allowing referential subjects, (9).

- (9) *Ø c'est les Républicains.. Ø i-font le boulot à moitié (S1, IV)*
 [Ø 3N.Sg.-be-PRES the Republicans Ø 3M.Pl.-do-PRES the job halfway]
 ‘(it)'s the Republicans..(they) do a half-baked job of it’

3.2. Incomplete Morphologization of the 3rd Person

3.2.1. 3Sg. and 3Pl. Verbs with Full NP Subjects

Although over 90%¹ of the 3rd person verbs in the corpus are preceded by an inflectional prefix, there are still two environments where morphologization is not complete, 3Sg. and 3Pl. verbs with full NP subjects, (10) and (11) respectively.

¹ As a point of comparison, in much first and second language acquisition research, a morpheme is considered acquired when it occurs in 90% of its obligatory contexts.

- (10) *la mentalité* -est différente (S1, I)
 [the mentality -be.PRES different]
 ‘(it)s a different mentality’
- (11) *les gens* -m’appréciaient (S1, I)
 [the people -1Sg.Acc.-appreciate-IMPERF]
 ‘the people appreciated me’

Given the heavy referential content of the full NP, functional constraints would predict that this would indeed be the last environment to morphologize because the subject can be successfully identified even in the absence of the prefix.

But this leaves us with a puzzle to ponder: although more environments have morphologized in 3Sg. than in 3Pl., the overall percentage of clitic use is *lower* with 3Sg. than with 3Pl. as shown in (4), counter to markedness predictions.

3.3. The Next Change: Internal Restructuring of the Prefixal Paradigm

In an example of Jakobson’s dynamic synchrony (Waugh and Monville-Burston 1990), as the first change—clitic morphologization, which gives rise to the prefixal verb paradigm—nears completion, having reached it in many but not all environments, a second change is beginning—an internal restructuring of the new prefixal verb paradigm through the development of a 3Sg. zero morph—a common change cross-linguistically but one which for the moment is restricted to a subset of the 3Sg.: impersonal verbs. As such, it is not the counter example to clitic morphologization that it first appears to be; rather than being a lagging environment, it is in fact the leading edge of a new change, in an environment that precludes communicative misinterpretation: the impersonal, which exists only in the 3Sg., 1st and 2nd person prefixes being ungrammatical with it, as in (12) and (13), and which cannot take a referential subject, as in (14) and (15):

- (12) *≡ *je-faut*/*≡ *je-faus*/*≡ *tu-faut*/*≡ *tu-faus*
 [1Sg.-necessary to/2Sg.-necessary to]
 *‘(I) necessary to’/ *‘(you) necessary to...’
- (13) ≡ *(i)-faut*
 [3Sg.-necessaries to]
 ‘it’s necessary to...’
- (14) **Jean (i)-faut*/**Lui (i)-faut*/* \emptyset *(i)-faut* (where \emptyset = *Jean* or *Lui*)
 [Jean (3Sg.)-necessary to/ He (3Sg.)-necessary to/ \emptyset (3Sg.)-necessary to]
 *‘Jean necessities to’/ *‘He necessities to...’/*‘ \emptyset necessities to...’
- (15) ≡ *(i)-faut*
 [(3Sg.)-necessary to]
 ‘it’s necessary to...’

With respect to this new change, three stages of change in progress emerge in the corpus: (a) environments where morphologization is complete, but where zero marking is not yet begun, (16)–(20), discussed in section 3.3.1, (b) variable zero marking, (21)–(28), discussed in section 3.3.2, and (c) categorical zero marking (29)–(32), discussed in section 3.3.3.

3.3.1. Completed Morphologization, Zero Marking Not Yet Begun

This section shows that clitic morphologization, the first change, is complete but that the second change, zero marking, has not yet begun with weather verbs, (16), repeated from (5) above, and a subset of lower-frequency impersonal verbs, *plaire* ‘to please’, (17) and (18), and *sembler* ‘to seem’, (19) and (20).

- (16) *parce quandt i-pleut ici c'est pas: c'est—c'est—ça va t'vois..m'alors quandt i-pleut là-bas c'est pas souvent non plus mais alors ça-rince alors...(S2, I)*
 [because when ≡ 3M.Sg.-rain-PRES here 3N.Sg.-be-PRES not 3N.Sg.-be-PRES 3N.Sg.-be-PRES 3N.Sg.-go-PRES 2Sg.-see but well when ≡ 3M.Sg.-rain-PRES there 3N.Sg.-be-PRES not often not more but well ≡ 3N.Sg.-rinse-PRES]
 ‘‘cuz when (it) rains here (it)'s no:t (it)'s—(it)'s—(it)'s no big deal (y')know..but there when (it) rains—which isn't very often either—(it) pours...’
- (17) *i-me-plaît moins que le Nyew Q... (S8, IV-A)*
 [≡ 3M.Sg.-1Sg.Dat.-please-PRES less than the New Q]
 ‘I don't like it as much as the New Q...’
- (18) *ça-me-plaît le boulot.. (S1, I)*
 [≡ 3N.Sg.-please-PRES the work]
 ‘I like the work..’
- (19) *i-m-semble que c'est Baggins (S1, I) (repeated from (6) above)*
 [≡ 3M.Sg.-1Sg.Dat.-seem-PRES that 3N.Sg.-be-PRES Baggins]
 ‘(it) seems to me that (it)'s Baggins’
- (20) *ça-m-semble que ça-s-voit tout l'année.. (S5, II)*
 [≡ 3N.Sg.-1Sg.Dat.-seem-PRES that 3N.Sg.-REFLEX-see-PRES all the year]
 ‘(it) seems to me that you see it all year’

In the corpus, 100% of weather verbs ($n = 33$) and of *plaire* and *sembler* tokens ($n = 54$) appear with prefix, although in alternation between *il-*, (17) and (19), and *ça-*, (18) and (20). Thus with these impersonal verbs, clitic morphologization is complete but the change to zero marking has not yet begun. The *il-~ça-* prefix

alternation could be due, phonologically, to the preferred CV syllable structure of French and/or, semantically, to a restriction of *il-* to [+animate, +male] and to a concurrent emergence of a neuter prefix, *ça-* (Fonseca-Greber 2000), via a language-internal change or through contact with English.

3.3.2. Variable Zero Marking: *falloir*, *paraître*, *suffire*

Variable zero marking occurs with three impersonal verbs, the high-frequency *falloir* ‘to be necessary’ in (21) and (22), as well as *paraître* ‘to appear’ in (23)–(25) and *suffire* ‘to suffice, be enough’ in (26)–(28).

- (21) *tu-comprendras pourquoi i-faut faire gaffe les distances..* (S1, V)
 [2Sg.-understand-FUT why ≡ 3M.Sg.-necessary-PRES do attention the distances]
 ‘you’ll understand why y’ve gotta pay attention to the distances’
- (22) *#-faut qu’il arrête de fumer..* (S13, V)
 [≡ 3Sg.#-necessary-PRES that 3M.Sg.-stop-PRES to smoke]
 ‘he’s gotta stop smoking’
- (23) *mais i-paraît qu’il-a-tourné comme ça..* (S12, VI)
 [but ≡ 3M.Sg.-appear-PRES that 3M.Sg.-PRET-turn like that]
 ‘but (it) appears (he) turned like that..’
- (24) *something like that ça-paraît pas énorme deux inch m’enfin bon..* (S1, III)
 [something like that ≡ 3N.Sg.-appear-PRES not enormous two inch b’finally well]
 ‘something like that (it) doesn’t seem like a lot two inches but anyway...’
- (25) *#-paraît que c-est formidable..* (S11, V)
 [≡ 3Sg.#-appear-PRES that 3N.Sg.-be-PRES great]
 ‘(it) appears (it)’s great..’
- (26) *i-suffit que t-as des problèmes* (S1, V)
 [≡ 3M.Sg.-suffice-PRES that 2Sg.-have-PRES INDEF.Pl.- problems]
 ‘all it takes is for ya t’run into trouble’
- (27) *apparamment ça-leur-suffit pas...* (S4, II)
 [apparently ≡ 3N.Sg.-3Pl.Dat.-suffice-PRES not]
 ‘apparently (it) wasn’t enough for them...’
- (28) *c-est horrible parce que #-suffit que toi t-es arrivé* (S3, I)
 [3N.Sg.-be-PRES horrible be.cause ≡ 3Sg.#-suffice-PRES that you 2Sg.-PRET-arrive]
 ‘(it)’s awful because all it takes is for you to turn up..’

In the corpus, 56% of *falloir* ($n = 200$) tokens appear with prefix, *i-*; 44% are zero-marked, #- . If this were a case of delayed clitic morphologization, this 56% *i* use would show lower clitic/prefix use than all but the quantifiers, which is the most delayed environment. More likely, however, given the functional considerations discussed earlier, is that with this high-frequency verb, the change to zero marking is well underway with the zero-marked form occurring almost as frequently as the prefixed form; further support for this comes from the next environment: *il y a*, discussed in 3.3.3. Tokens are insufficient for individual analyses of *paraître* ($n = 12$) and *suffire* ($n = 17$), but both appear in three-way alternation: *i- ~ ça- ~ #-*, in contrast with *falloir*, where only *i-* and #- occur.

3.3.3. Completed Zero Marking: *il y a* → *ya*, etc.

Zero marking has gone to completion and is already categorical in a very high-frequency verb construction, the existential *il y a* ‘there is/there are’.

- (29) *ya pas une traduction de ça?* (S6, III)
 [≡ 3Sg.#-exist-PRES not a translation of that?]
 ‘isn’t there a translation for that?’
- (30) *ben ya-eu Teddy..après ya-eu Craig..* (S1, I)
 [well ≡ 3Sg.#-exist-PRET Teddy after ≡ 3Sg.#-exist-PRET Craig..]
 ‘well there was Teddy..then there was Craig..’
- (31) *parce qu’yavait-eu c’tte histoire en: mm..en Irlande* (S4, II)
 [be.cause ≡ 3Sg.#-exist-PPERF that story in mm in Ireland]
 ‘b’cause there’d been that story in: uhm..in Ireland’
- (32) *yenavait plus..* (S10, IV-B)
 [≡ 3Sg.#- PART-exist-IMPERF no.more]
 ‘there weren’t any more of ’m..’

In the corpus, 0% of *il y a* ($n = 510$) tokens appears with the prefix *i-* in the existential construction in various tenses. In other words, zero marking is 100% with *il y a*. Here, the second change, the development of the zero morph, is already complete. Although it has been argued that the *il* of *il y a* was never present historically in spoken French, this would in no way invalidate this analysis but rather serves to further substantiate it, given Jakobson’s (1990) concept of dynamic synchrony on which it is based, wherein multiple changes are in progress concurrently, albeit at various stages, and influenced by various registers and time frames, just as we have seen with the two changes, morphologization and zero marking, discussed in this paper.

The table in (33) summarizes zero marking across the three environments.

(33) Summary of Zero Marking

	Prefixes	%	Zero marking	%
Weather verbs ($n = 33$), <i>plaire, sembler</i> ($n = 54$)	i-, ça-	100%	#-	0%
<i>falloir</i> ($n = 200$), <i>paraître, suffire</i> ($n = 29$)	i-, (ça-)	56%	#-	44%
<i>ya/yena</i> ($n = 510$)	i-	0%	#-	100%

Finally, the emergence of zero marking accounts for why, in the table in (4), “clitic” use appears, counter-intuitively, to be less frequent with 3Sg. than 3Pl.

3.3.4. French Preferred CV Syllable Structure

Examples from French Creole, (34), and child language, (35), show that /i/ is a dispreferred syllable onset.

(34) Reunion Creole

le (<i)l + est) = be PRES. (Green 1988:457)

(35) bébé ours l'est dans sa chambre (L.) (Jakubowicz and Rigaut 1997:75)

Yet the /l/ of the prefix *il-* has already been lost in order to avoid consonant clusters in consonant initial stems, such as *-faut*. From here it is only a small step to losing the overt manifestation of the 3Sg. morpheme entirely. Hence, phonological factors may be conspiring with markedness principles and functional considerations to fuel the development of a zero morph in the impersonals of conversational French.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

This paper shows that two separate but interrelated changes are in progress in the pre-verbal zone of Conversational Swiss French:

- the older and nearly complete morphologization of the subject clitics into inflectional prefixes of person and number, thus transforming French once again into a pro-drop language (see Fonseca-Greber 2000)
- and, as a result of the first change, the internal restructuring of the new prefixal verb paradigm through the emergence of a zero morph, restricted for the present to a communicatively clear subset of the 3Sg.: impersonal verbs.

Thus the functional predictions are borne out as follows:

- verbs where a subject NP is missing, (7)—or impossible, (5) and (6)—*do* constitute a favorable environment for early clitic morphologization, presumably because of (a) their frequency and (b) the lack of any other way to identify the grammatical person
- verbs where a full subject NP, (10) and (11), is present *do* constitute a favorable environment for late clitic morphologization, presumably because of

(a) their infrequency in discourse (Lambrecht 1987) and (b) the presence of the full NP that enables the listener to identify the referent easily even in the absence of the clitic (L. Waugh, p.c.)

- clitics occurring with verbs where a “new” optional subject pronoun, (8), is present *do* morphologize into prefixes sooner than those with a full NP subject but later than those with a null subject, presumably because these light referential subjects provide greater referential content than verb marking alone but not as much as a definite NP
- if, within the new prefixal verb paradigm, a zero morph were to develop—a very common morphological change cross-linguistically because of the unmarked status of the 3Sg.—it does emerge first in the impersonal verbs, (22), (25), (28), (29)–(32), which (a) exist only in the 3rd person and (b) cannot take a referential subject, thereby eliminating the possibility of communicative breakdown or misunderstanding between speaker and interlocutor
- verb stems and/or their prefixes do tend to follow French preferred syllable structure: CV, (18), (20), (22), (24), (25), (27), and (28).

In conclusion, this corpus analysis reveals that the absence of the prefix *i(l)-* with certain impersonal verbs in French (*falloir, paraître, suffire, il y a*) is not a counter example to clitic morphologization. Now that clitic morphologization is complete in all but two environments, a new change is starting: a restructuring within the new prefixally inflected verb paradigm, in the form of the development of a semantically significant zero morph capable of distinguishing the unmarked 3Sg. from each of the other persons. A cross-linguistically frequent change, it is starting in French with impersonal verbs because these verbs exist only in the 3Sg. and cannot take a subject NP, thus they remain uniquely identifiable with or without their prefix and so are not functionally problematic in terms of successful communication. These findings should, of course, be corroborated by a larger corpus as well as with other varieties of spoken French.

References

- Ashby, William J. 1977. *Clitic Inflection in French: An Historical Perspective*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Auger, Julie. 1994. Pronominal clitics in Québec Colloquial French: A morphological analysis. Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania.
- Benveniste, Emile. 1966. *Problèmes de linguistique générale*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Bybee, Joan. 1985. *Morphology: A Study of the Relation between Meaning and Form*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Fonseca-Greber, Bonnie. 2000. The change from pronoun to clitic to prefix and the rise of null subjects in spoken Swiss French. Ph.D. diss., University of Arizona.

- Fonseca-Greber, Bonnie, and Linda R. Waugh. 2003a. On the radical difference between the subject personal pronouns in written and spoken European French. In P. Leistyna and C. Meyer, eds., *Corpus Analysis: Language Structure and Language Use*, 225-240. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi.
- Fonseca-Greber, Bonnie, and Linda R. Waugh. 2003b. The subject clitics of European Conversational French: Morphologization, grammatical change, semantic change, and change in progress. In R. Núñez-Cedeno, L. López, and R. Cameron, eds., *A Romance Perspective on Language Knowledge and Use: Selected Papers from the 31st Linguistic Symposium of Romance Languages (LSRL), Chicago, 19-22 April 2001*, 99-118. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Green, John N. 1988. Spanish. In M. Harris and N. Vincent, eds., *The Romance Languages*, 79-130. New York: Oxford Press.
- Hume, Elizabeth. 2005. Deconstructing markedness: A predictability-based approach. In M. Ettlinger, N. Fleisher, and M. Park-Doob, eds. *Proceedings of the 30th Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*. Berkeley: Berkeley Linguistics Society. [this volume]
- Jakobson, Roman. 1971. Signe zéro. In R. Jakobson, ed., *Selected Writings, II: Word and Language*, 211-219. The Hague: Mouton.
- Jakobson, Roman. 1990. *On Language*. L. R. Waugh and M. Monville-Burston, eds. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Jakubowicz, Celia, and Catherine Rigaut. 1997. L'acquisition des clitiques nominatifs en français. In A. Zribi-Hertz, ed., *Les pronoms: morphologie, syntaxe et typologie*, 57-99. Saint-Denis: Presses Universitaires Vincennes.
- Kayne, Richard. 1975. *French Syntax: The Transformational Cycle*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Lambrecht, Knud. 1987. On the status of SVO sentences in French discourse. In R. Tomlin, ed., *Coherence and Grounding in Discourse*, 217-261. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Offord, Malcom. 1990. *Varieties of Contemporary French*. London: Macmillan.
- Schwegler, Armin. 1990. *Analyticity and Syntheticity: A Diachronic Perspective with Special Reference to Romance Languages*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Waugh, Linda R., and M. Monville-Burston. 1990. The life, work, and influence of Roman Jakobson. In L. R. Waugh and M. Monville-Burston, eds., *R. Jakobson, On Language*, 1-45. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Zwicky, Arnold M., and Geoffrey K. Pullum. 1983. Cliticization vs. inflection: *n't*. *Language* 59:502-513.

Department of Romance Languages
203 Shatzel Hall
Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, OH 43403

bfonsec@bgnet.bgsu.edu