8. Null objects

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I. The form-meaning mismatch

➤ **Null objects in Latin: definite (1) and indefinite (2)**

(1) convocatis suis clientibus$_i$ facile incendit ϕ_i
call.together-PPP-INS.PL own-INS.PL dependent-INS.PL easily excite-PERF-3SG
'[Vercingetorix] summoned together his dependents, and easily excited them.'
(Caesar, *De bello Gallico* 7.4.1, cf. Luraghi 2004:242)

(2) Si ϕ_i in ius ϕ_k vocat, ϕ_k ito.
if in law-ACC call-PRS-3SG GO-IPV.3SG
'If someone summons someone else to court, the latter shall come.' (*Ius* XII tab. I,1)

■ Null objects: an emblematic case of a 0:1 form-meaning mismatch.

■ There is evidence that null objects in Indo European (IE) languages are 'real' syntactic objects.

i. Thus, "under what conditions can the mismatch between meaning and form be tolerated?" (Rizzi 1986:501)

ii. How is the unexpressed piece of information retrieved?

> **Question → What are the conditions licensing null objects? How and why do they change over time?**

II. Motivation

■ The diachrony of null objects has rarely been examined in depth.

■ They compete with overt object pronouns, probably in a non-arbitrary way.

■ Recoverability depends on accessibility hierarchies.

■ It is usually held that in later stages of IE, null objects became more and more restricted (but see our hypotheses in IV)

i. We expect changes in a linguistic system to influence the distribution of null objects;

ii. we expect such changes to give rise to new configurations in which null objects are licensed.

III. Research questions

■ How is the usage of null objects affected by language change?

■ Given several language stages, what are the structural and discourse conditions for each language stage under examination?

■ How do these conditions interact with the grammatical system of each language stage?

■ Does the loss of a certain type/function of null objects correlate with other grammatical changes?

■ Similarly: under which conditions do new types of null objects arise?

■ Are there shifts within the types of null objects?

IV. Hypotheses and method

> **Hypotheses → Changes in the distribution of null objects depend on (1) developments in the pronoun system, (2) changes in the syntactic system, (3) competition between different accessibility hierarchies. Thus, the availability of null objects can be reduced but also enhanced over time.**

■ In-depth study of the development from Late Latin to Early Romance (corpus-based)

i. the frequency of null objects vs. overt objects over time;

ii. the distribution of null objects vs. clitic and other pronouns;

iii. the syntactic and discourse-structural conditions governing this distribution.

➤ **Some types of null objects in Old French**

Coordination

(3) il [...] prent [s' amie]$_i$ devant lui, baisant ϕ_i et acolant ϕ_i
he takes his-F friend-F in.front him kissing and hugging
'he [...] took his beloved in front of him, kissing and hugging her' (*Aucassin et Nicolette* 26.20, Troberg 2004:152)

(4) Einsi le$_i$ pans et cuit ϕ_i et croi ϕ_i
thus it= think.PRS.1SG and believe.PRS.1SG and believe.PRS.1SG
'Thus I think and believe it. (*Perceval* 1044, cf. Donaldson 2012:70)

Adjunct clauses

(5) Il les$_i$ conquiest sanz ocirre ϕ_i
he them= conquered-3SG without kill.INF
'He conquered them without killing them.' (*Queste del Saint Graal* §54, cf. Jensen 1990:74, Donaldson 2012:74)

Écrasement*: Clitic sequences *la/le/les + li/lor → li/lor

(6) que l' an li aport [ses armes]$_i$, et an li aporte ϕ_i
that the one him= bring-SBJV.3SG his weapons and one him= brings
'that someone bring him his weapon, and one brought it to him' (*Perceval* 2138–39, cf. Donaldson 2012: 69)

Topic-comment structures

(7) [Cest nostre rei]$_i$, por coi lessas ϕ_i cunfundre?
this our king] for what let-PERF.2SG flounder-INF
'This king of ours, why did you let him flounder?' (*Roland* 1.2583, cf. Arteaga 1997:2, Troberg 2004:137)

V. Connections to other research projects

■ Type of form-meaning mismatch: **7,9** (0:1 form-meaning mismatch)

■ Empirical domain: **2,5,11** (language change)

■ Content: **2** (discourse conditions), **5** (non-canonical arguments)

■ Methods: **most projects** (corpus study), in part. **11**

VI. Possible follow-up studies

1. Null objects from Old French to Middle French

2. Null objects in languages with similar time-depth, as e.g. Greek and Indo-Aryan

3. Null objects in modern Romance languages: A comparative approach