

Constructional clusters
French *cela*, *ça* and *c'* from 1100-1800

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This paper investigates the distribution of *cela*, *ça*, and *c'*, three derived forms of the French demonstrative *ce* 'this' (Moignet 1973, Wilmet 1997), between 1100-1800 in the 1036 texts made available by the ARTFL project database.

The examples in (1)-(3) reveal some overlap between the three forms (the year of publication follows the author's name in all the examples):

- (1) **Si *cela* est *vray***, Ysabeau, Vous ne mengineastes jamais lievre (Marot 1526)
 'If this is true Ysabeau, you never ate hare'
- (2) ***C'est* *vray***, et pour *cela* n'est-elle à mespriser (Charron 1601)
 'It is true, and for this she shouldn't be despised'
- (3) **car *ça* est *vrai***, et tu n'iras pas là contre (Marivaux 1728)
 'because it is true, and you will not go against it'

Despite this overlap, this paper argues that the three forms under investigation tend to cluster around specific constructions, and that these constructions determine their diachronic evolution. One single example is presented here.

In modern French, both *c'* and *ça* are attested with adjectives followed by an infinitival or finite complement (*c'est / ça reste impossible* 'it is /it remains possible'). The development of these two constructions, however, takes different diachronic paths. While *c'* is attested in this role with nouns and adjectives alike as early as the 11th century, *ça* only occurs as a locational adverb (Moignet 1973) until the 15th century. The first contact between the two forms can be observed within the context of one single construction, namely the copula + noun + complement construction, even though they initially remain separate. While *c'* is found with *être* 'be' in the present as illustrated in (4), *ça* is exclusively attested with the past form *esté*, as in (5):

- (4) a. ***C'est* bien raison** que l'en le garde (Mézières 1395)
 'It is reason that we keep him'
- b. ***C'est* couvoitise** de regner (Christine, de Pisan. 1402)
 'To govern is to desire'
- (5) a. et je sçay que ***ça* esté** vostre grand regret (Yver, 1557)
 'and I say it was your great regret'
- b. j'ose dire que ***ça* esté** manifestement un coup du ciel (Peiresc 1625)
 'I dare say it was clearly divine intervention'

Ça only begins to expand to other tenses and grammatical categories, and hence cover the whole domain previously reserved to *c'* once the two forms have cohabited for some time in the copular construction. This is illustrated in (6) where *ça* occurs with a present form and an adjective:

- (6) ***Ça* n'est pas bian** de battre les gens (Molière 1665)
 'It is not right to beat people up'

From its modest copular beginnings, *ça* kept expanding, to the point that it has by now largely replaced *cela* in spoken French, and *c'* in all contexts which do not involve a vowel initial form of *être* 'be'.

This example is representative of the crucial role specific constructions played in the development of *c'* and *ça*. Other similar cases discussed in the presentation include the rise of impersonal *c'* and the restriction of the semantic domain covered by *cela*.

References:

- Moignet, Gérard. 1973. *Grammaire de l'Ancien Français*. Paris: Klincksieck.
Wilmet, Marc. 1997. *Grammaire Critique de Français*. Paris: Duculot.