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Apparent expletive negation, silent comparatives, and domain widening in Quebec French superlative and universal constructions

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In Quebec French, embedded clauses introduced by a universal quantifier or by a superlative may contain a negative morpheme *pas* that has been analyzed as a type of expletive negation, although it does not have the distribution of the known cases of expletive negation. It is argued that, in the constructions containing that apparently expletive negation, *pas* is not a new type of expletive, but it is a standard negation operating in syntax and negating a silent comparative. The analysis accounts for the domain widening effect of the apparently expletive *pas*, and it has the welcome advantage of limiting the proliferation of theoretical constructs. In this analysis, an item that gives every sign of being expletive upon a superficial examination turns out to be not expletive at all once silent categories are taken into account.

1. The apparently expletive *pas*

To my knowledge, the existence in Quebec French of examples like (1) was first discussed by La Follette & Valin (1961). As shown by the translation, the negative morpheme *pas* in the embedded clause apparently carries no negative force. I will gloss this apparently expletive *pas* as 'neg$_x$' and refer to it as *pas$_x$*, the 'x' subscript being a convenient label to identify the item whose status is on the table.

(1) C'est le plus beau blé qu' il y a **pas** sur le marché. (La Follette & Valin 1961)
     it.is the most beautiful wheat that there.is neg$_x$ on the market
     'It's the most beautiful wheat that there is on the market.'

Kemp (1982) and Gonzalez & Royer (2022) consider that, in (1), *pas$_x$* is expletive. However, the context is not one in which expletive negation is generally found, as we will see in section 2. There are therefore two possibilities: either *pas$_x$* is a type of expletive negation having properties distinct from the known cases of expletive negation, or it is not expletive. While Gonzalez & Royer (2022), to be discussed below, opt for the first possibility, the aim of the present paper is to argue that *pas$_x$* is not expletive.

A number of recent analyses treat the negative morpheme found in expletive negation contexts as being, not an expletive item, but a negative operator playing a role at a level distinct from that of the standard morpheme of predicate negation; this level could be the level of implicated meanings (Delfitto 2020) or a position within the left periphery of the clause (Greco 2020; Tsiakmakis & Espinal 2022). Instead of following these approaches, I will argue that *pas$_x$* in (1) is the standard morpheme of predicate negation, operating in syntax at the TP level. The translation in (1) is an approximate paraphrase of the meaning of the sentence, but it does not reflect its underlying structure and its full meaning. In (1), the embedded clause is negative, and the implicit complement of the verb is a comparative: *there is no <more beautiful wheat> on the market*. *Pas$_x$* is, simply, the negative operator *pas* scoping over a comparative, and there is no need to consider distinct levels of syntax or of meaning to account for it.

Pas$_x$ is found exclusively in the complement of a superlative (1)-(2), in the restrictor of a universal quantifier (3), and in the constructions in (4) whose relevant properties, I will argue, make them behave, from the point of view of accounting for *pas$_x$*, like superlative constructions in the case of the ordinal antecedent in (4a) and the partitive antecedent in (4b), and like universals in the case of the free relative in (4c).

(2) a. Pour un pompier, c'est le pire incendie que tu peux **pas** avoir.
         for a fire.fighter, it's the worst fire that you can neg$_x$ have
         'For a fire fighter, it's the worst fire that you can have.'

b. C'est le meilleur show que j'ai **pas** vu. (Kemp ex. 55)
it.is the best show that I.have neg_x seen
'It is the best show that I have (ever) seen.'

(3) a. J'ai fait tout ce que je pouvais **pas** faire pour le retrouver. (Kemp ex. 113)
I.have done everything that I could neg_x do to him.find
'I did all I could to find him.'

b. Il a invité tous les musiciens qu' il y a **pas** dans la région.
he has invited all the musicians that there.is neg_x in the area
'He invited all the musicians there are in the area.'

c. Il se tape tout ce qu' il peut **pas** trouver comme livre sur le sujet.
he put.up.with everything that he can neg_x find as book on the topic
'He reads every book he can find on the topic.'

(4) a. C'était le premier anglais qu' il y a **pas** eu dans le quartier. (Kemp ex. 21)
it.was the first Englishman that there.is neg_x had in the neighborhood
'He was the first Englishman that there was in the neighborhood.'

b. Richard, c'était un des bons joueurs qu' on a **pas** eu au Canada. (Kemp ex. 23)
Richard, it.was one of.the good players that we had neg_x had in Canada
'Richard, he was one of the good players that we had in Canada.'

c. C'est incroyable qu'est-ce qu' il a **pas** pu faire pour le retrouver!
it's incredible what he has neg_x could do to him.find
'It's incredible what he could do to find him!'

I will defend the view that, in every case, pas_x is a negative operator scoping over an implicit, hence silent, comparative.[1]

Kemp (1982), to be discussed below, observed that the presence of pas_x is domain widening, in the sense that, when pas_x is present in the complement of a superlative or of a universal quantifier, the comparison class or the restrictor set is enlarged. I will show how this interpretative effect follows from the analysis.

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1 Julie Auger pointed out to me that *pas* looks expletive in the following sentence: *Ça fait longtemps qu'on s'est (pas) vus*. 'It's been a while since we have (not) seen each other.' That optional *pas* exists throughout the French-speaking world, contrary to (1)–(4). I think that when *pas* is absent, the clause states that the time at which we last met was a long time ago *'It's been a while since we last saw each other'*. When *pas* is present, the clause states that the interval during which we didn't meet (since the last time) was long *'We haven't seen each other for a while.'* This case will not concern us here.

The main message that I would like to put across in this paper, is that an item that looks expletive at first sight may turn out to be, upon careful scrutiny, not expletive at all, that is, non-distinct, syntactically and semantically, from the clearly non-expletive use of the same item, once silent categories are taken into account.

The general structure of the paper is as follows. After a critical review of the literature, I will turn to the analysis of the superlative construction; then I will focus on the universal one.

2. Pas_x is not a standard expletive negation

The superlative and universal contexts in which pas_x is observed are not the typical expletive negation contexts. In general, expletive negation is found in complements of non-veridical predicates expressing notions like fear, doubt, denial, or in clauses introduced by words like *before, unless, without* (e.g. Espinal 1992; Espinal 2000; Espinal 2007; Delfitto 2020). For example, in (5), from Catalan, *no* within the complement of a fear predicate does not reverse the polarity of the embedded clause. In standard French, expletive *ne* appears in this context (6a), provided it is not accompanied by the predicate negator *pas* (6b). In Quebec French, (6c), *pas* has the same negative interpretation as in (6b): the negation is polarity reversing, and not expletive. The same could be shown with a *before* clause.

(5)   Tinc   por que *no* es mengin el   pastís. (Catalan)
        I.have fear that neg cl eat.SUBJ the cake
        'I'm afraid that they might/will eat the cake.' (Tsiakmakis & Espinal 2022 ex. 24)

(6)   a.   J'ai   peur qu' ils   *ne* mangent le   gâteau. (SF)
             I.have fear that they *ne* eat   the cake
             'I'm afraid that they might/will eat the cake.'

        b.   J'ai   peur qu' ils   *ne* mangent pas le gâteau. (SF)

        c.   J'ai   peur qu' ils   mangent pas le gâteau. (QF)
             I.have fear that they (*ne*) eat   not the cake
             'I'm afraid that they will not eat the cake.'

The third type of context in which expletive negation is typically found is the complement of comparatives of inequality. Expletive negation is, however, not licensed in the complement of superlatives. That is illustrated in (7), from standard French; Catalan expletive *no* has the same distribution (M.T. Espinal, p.c.). The contexts in which pas_x is licit in Quebec French are exactly the opposite. Pas_x is found in the complement of superlatives, but not in the complement of a comparative of inequality (8). (8b is Gonzalez & Royer's 2022 example 17; the left-dislocated subject makes it more colloquial, but it has no bearing on the presence of pas_x.)

(7) a. La Russie est plus grande que *ne* l' est la France. (SF)
         the Russia is more large   than *ne* 3s is the France
         'Russia is more large than France.'

     b. *La Russie est le plus grand pays   qu' il *n'y* a.   (SF)
         the Russia is the most large country that *ne*.there.is
         'Russia is the largest country there is.'

(8) a. *La Russie est plus grande que la France est **pas**.
         the Russia is more large   than the France is neg_x
         'Russia is more large than France.'

     b. La Russie c'est le plus grand pays   qu' il y a   **pas**. (G&R ex. 17)
         the Russia it.is the most big   country that there.is neg_x
         'Russia is the biggest country there is.'

Thus, the distribution of pas_x is quite different from that of standard expletive negation. If pas_x is expletive, it requires a specific analysis.

3. Kemp (1982) and domain widening

Kemp (1982) observed that when pas_x is present in a clause, the assertion is strengthened. Both (9a) and (9b) are grammatical in Quebec French, but in (9a), the superlative may be interpreted as limited (unfortunately, it it the best you can have; it is the best one that is available here). That is not the case in (9b), where the superlative is maximal (there is no better one; you cannot find a better one.)

(9) a. C'est le mieux que tu peux   avoir. (Kemp ex. 108)
     b. C'est le mieux que tu peux **pas** avoir. (Kemp ex. 108)
         it.is the best   that you can   (neg_x) have
         'It is the best that you can have.'

The presence of pas_x seems to widen the domain in which the superlative is interpreted. This raises a number of questions: why would pas_x have this effect? how does it achieve it? and why does it surface in these particular constructions?

    Kemp (1982: 277–281) establishes a parallelism between the negated modal in (10) and the adjective *impossible* in (11):

(10) J'ai   fait tout ce   que je **pouvais pas** faire pour le retrouver. (= 3a)
      I.have done everything that I could neg_x do   to him.find
      'I have done everything that I could to find him.'

(11) J'ai   fait   l'   **impossible** pour le retrouver. (Kemp ex. 111)
      I.have done the impossible   to   him.find
      'I have done the impossible to find him.'

In (11), *impossible* is not interpreted literally, otherwise the sentence would be contradictory (it would assert that I did something impossible to do). It means something like: *everything I could do, even unlikely things that could be considered impossible*. According to Kemp, that is what the negated modal does in (10). The parallelism is interesting and relevant, but it is not sufficiently precise to constitute an analysis of the construction.

4. The NPI analysis of Gonzalez & Royer (2022)

Gonzalez & Royer (2022) develop an analysis in which pas_x is a hitherto undiscovered type of expletive item, namely one that forms a complex negative polarity item (NPI) in association with an existential predicate. Neither pas_x nor the existential predicate are NPIs by themselves. Therefore, the authors also claim to have discovered a new type of NPI, one that is built out of two syntactic parts. Their analysis, involving the activation of subset alternatives exhaustified by an operator, is based on the one proposed for the NPI *any* by Chierchia (2013).

Gonzalez & Royer (2022) define as follows the environments where pas_x (ExN for them) appears:

(12) ExN *pas* appears inside relative clauses, iff
      i.   the head of the relative clause contains a universal quantifier, quantifying either over individuals or sets of degrees, and
      ii. the relative clause contains an expression conveying existential quantification, either via an ability modal, plain existential, possessive *have* or *exister* 'exist'.
      (G&R 2022: 4 ex. 7)

The sentences containing pas_x would involve an exhaustification operator EXH at the head of the sentence, a universal quantifier in the antecedent, and an existential quantifier in the relative clause:

(13) EXH $\forall$ [...$\exists$ pas...] [...]   (G&R 2022 ex. 25)

The authors propose that, when *pas* is adjacent to one of the four predicates conveying existential quantification listed in (12ii), it may form a complex NPI with it. In that case, *pas* has no negative force. Its sole contribution is to force the existential expression it co-occurs with to activate a set ALT of subset alternatives of the relevant quantificational domain (G&R 2022: 10). EXH is defined as in (14):

(14) $[\![EXH]\!]^{g,w}(\phi) = \phi_w \land \forall p \in ALT(\phi) [p_w \to \phi \subseteq p]$. (where $\subseteq$ = 'entail') (G&R 2022: 10 ex. 20)

"Given a sentence ϕ and a set of alternatives (ALT) to ϕ, EXH(ϕ) asserts ϕ and negates the alternatives that are not entailed by the assertion" (G&R 2022: 10). The sentence is grammatical if the EXH operator gives rise to a semantically coherent meaning.

The analysis crucially relies on the idea that a universal quantifier is downward-entailing in its first argument, which means that it licenses inferences from sets to subsets (*Every boy that ate pizza got sick* = > *Every boy that ate pizza with anchovies got sick*). In the configuration in (13), every subset alternative activated by the association of *pas* with the existential operator in the restrictor of *tout* is entailed by the assertion. Therefore, in that configuration, "exhaustification is vacuous and simply returns the assertion" (G&R 2022: 11–12), as should be expected since pas_x is considered expletive. Sentence (15) is analyzed as in (16). It has the LF in (16a) and asserts (16b). The set of alternatives triggered by the association of *pas* with the modal involves subsets of alternative worlds (16c). Since every subset alternative is entailed by the assertion, exhaustification returns the assertion (16d).

(15)   J'ai   fait   tout ce   que je pouvais **pas** faire. (G&R 2022: 11 ex. 22)
          I.have done everything that I   could neg_x do
          'I did all I could.'

(16)   a.   EXH [tout [λx [je pouvais pas faire x]][λy [j'ai fait y]]]

        b.   Assertion: EXH $\forall x$ [$\exists w \in W$ [I have done x at w] $\rightarrow$ I have done x at w_0]
            with $W =$ the set of worlds epistemically accessible from w_0

        c.   ALT:{$\forall x$ [$\exists w' \in W'$ [I have done x at w']$\rightarrow$I have done x at w_0], $W' \subseteq W$}

        d.   After exhautification:
            $\forall x$ [$\exists w \in W$[I have done x at w] $\rightarrow$ I have done x at w_0]
            (G&R 2022: 11 ex. 23)

For a criticism of Chierchia's approach to NPIs, see Giannakidou (2018). Here, I will concentrate on the application of the account to pas_x. The analysis faces a number of theoretical and empirical problems.

The authors admit that they cannot explain why the NPI created by pas_x would be licensed only in universal contexts, and not in the other contexts licensing NPIs (e.g. negative, interrogative and conditional contexts). More generally, the fact that no relationship is established between the negative morpheme, its purported role in the construction, and the limitation to universal contexts makes us suspicious of the analysis. Why would a dialect of French select the negative operator to function as an expletive triggering the activation of subset alternatives, and that, only in universal clauses?

Consider the antecedent of the embedded clause. According to (12)–(13), it can only be a universal quantifier, superlatives being considered as universally quantifying. While most of the

embedded clauses where one finds pas_x are introduced either by a universal or by a superlative, there are examples that do not conform to the model, and that show that the double implicature in (12) is incorrect. In (4b), for instance, the antecedent *one of the good players* is neither a universal quantifier nor a superlative:

(17) Richard, c'était *un des bons joueurs* qu' on a **pas** eu au Canada. (= 4b)
Richard, it.was one of.the good players that we have neg$_x$ had in Canada
'Richard, he was one of the good players that we had in Canada.'

In (4c), repeated below, pas_x is in a free relative, introduced by the WH expression *qu'est-ce que* 'what' functioning as a unit (Munaro & Pollock 2005; Abeillé & Godard 2021: 1524). The adjective *incroyable* has a superlative flavor, but it does not count as a universal antecedent: the free relative is anaphoric to the subject in a right dislocation type of structure. (C_i*'est incroyable ça$_i$!* 'It's incredible that!').

(18) C_i 'est incroyable [qu'est-ce qu' il a **pas** pu faire pour le retrouver]$_i$! (= 4c)
It's incredible what he has neg$_x$ could do to him.find
'It's incredible what he could do to find him!'

Hence, the requirement that all antecedents be universal quantifiers or superlatives is too strong. Moreover, the authors assume in (12i) that superlatives are universal quantifiers over sets of degrees, but they do not provide a definition of superlatives, referring the reader to Heim (1999). However, in that paper, superlatives are *existential* quantifiers over degrees.[2] The authors do not provide a precise account of how superlatives fit into their model, and, *a fortiori*, they do not discuss the problem of Strawson downward-entailment. Contrary to universal quantifiers, superlatives do not directly license inferences from sets to subsets. (19a) does not entail (19b), since Max could live and play in San Francisco.

(19) a. Max, c'est le meilleur joueur qu' il y a **pas** en Californie.
Max it.is the best player that there.is neg$_x$ in California
'Max is the best player that there is in California.'

b. $\neq>$ Max, c'est le meilleur joueur qu'il y a **pas** à Los Angeles.
'Max is the best player that there is in Los Angeles.'

Assuming that the EXH operator negates every alternative like (19b) yields a contradiction: Max is the best player in California, but Max is not the best player in Los Angeles, nor in San Francisco, nor in Sacramento, and so on for every subset of California. Because that is incoherent, (19a) should be ungrammatical, contrary to fact. The problem arises because superlatives are Strawson downward-entailing: the downward-entailment follows only if we factor in a presupposition (von

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2 Cf.:
(i) tallest(x) $<=>$ $\exists d$ (tall(x,d) & $\forall y$ [$y \neq x \rightarrow \neg$ tall(y,d)]) (Heim 1999 ex. 5).

The universal quantifier embedded in the formula does not quantify over degrees, nor over the entity to whom applies the superlative adjective, but over the other members of the comparison class.

Fintel 1999 section 4.2; Gajewski 2010). If *Max is the best player in California* **and if *Max plays in Los Angeles***, then it follows that *Max is the best player in Los Angeles*. In sum, it is far from clear how the analysis is supposed to carry over to superlatives. If it does not, at least half of the examples containing pas_x are unaccounted for.

Conversely, not every universal quantifier licenses pas_x. Free-choice *tout* does not, even though that is a downward-entailing, NPI licensing context (e.g. the indefinite *un* could be felicitously replaced by the NPI *quelque…que ce soit* 'any'—Tovena et al. 2004).

(20) Toute personne qui a (***pas**) eu un poste de responsabilité sait ce que ça
      every person   who has (*neg$_x$) had a position of responsibility knows what   that
      implique en fait   de stress.
      implies   in terms of stress
      'Any person who has had an executive position knows what that implies in terms of stress.'

Chaque 'each' does not license pas_x either: (21a) is ambiguous, but (21b) only has a reading with a regular negation.

(21) a. Il a   lu   tous les livres qu' y a   **pas** à la bibliothèque.
          he has read all   the books that there.is neg$_{(x)}$ in the library
          'He has read every book that there is in the library.' (Without stress on *pas*)
          'He has read every book that is not in the library.' (With stress on *pas*)

      b. Il a   lu   chaque livre qu' y a   **pas** à la bibliothèque.
          he has read each   book that there.is not in the library
          'He has read each book that is not in the library.'

Turning to the embedded predicate, it is claimed that it can only be one of the four predicates of the language assumed to convey existential quantification, those listed in (12ii). While many of the examples contain one of these predicates, it is not difficult to find examples where the embedded predicate is not a member of the list in (12ii), and does not convey existential quantification. There is, as far as I can see, no restriction on the type of predicate allowed in the embedded clause: it may denote a transitive event (22a *voir* 'see', 22b *vendre* 'sell', 22e *réaliser* 'realize', 22h *donner* 'give'), an unaccusative event taking the *être* auxiliary (22c *sortir* 'go-out'), an intransitive event constructed with the *avoir* auxiliary (22d *éclater* 'burst'), or a state (22g *souffrir* 'suffer'); it can also be a complex predicate, as in (22f) (*rêvé de faire* 'dream of doing'), where the constituent quantified by *tout* is not an object of the negative verb, denoting an activity, but of an infinitival complement of that verb. (Examples b and c are adapted from examples collected by Kemp 1982, ex. 99 and 62):[3]

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3 Gonzalez & Royer (2022: 3 fn3) reject the following sentence, suggested to them by a reviewer:

(i) *C'est la plus belle affaire   que j'ai pas vue de ma vie*
     'It's the most beautiful thing that I have neg$_x$ seen in my life'.

That sentence is similar to (22a), an attested example quoted by Kemp (1982). As a native speaker of Quebec French, I side with the reviewer and find both sentences grammatical and (i) perfectly natural and colloquial.

(22) a. C'est le meilleur show que j'ai   **pas** vu. (Kemp ex. 55)
it.is the best   show that I have neg$_x$ seen
'It is the best show that I have seen.'

b. Ça, c'est le plus beau   cheval que t'as   **pas** vendu depuis longtemps.
that, it's the most beautiful horse that you.have neg$_x$ sold   since long.time
'It's the most beautiful horse that you have sold in a long time.'

c. Cent   dix billots, c'est le plus gros voyage qui est **pas** sorti   du
hundred ten logs,   it.is the most big trip   that is neg$_x$ come.out of.the
chantier.
site
'110 logs, it's the biggest load that came out of the site.'

d. Il enquête   sur le plus gros scandale qui a   **pas** éclaté dans l' histoire
he investigates on the most big scandal that has neg$_x$ burst in   the history
du   football.
of.the football
'He is investigating the biggest scandal that broke in the history of football.'

e. J'adore Almodovar. Ça   c'est le meilleur film qu' il a   **pas** réalisé!
I.adore Almodovar. That, it's the best   movie that he has neg$_x$ realized
'I adore Almodovar. That's the best movie that he has realized!'

f. C'est tout ce   que j'ai   **pas** rêvé   de faire.
it's   everything that I.have neg$_x$ dreamed of doing
'It's everything that I dreamed of doing.'

g. Il a   tellement souffert. Tout ce   qu' il a   **pas** souffert comme mauvais
he has so.much   suffered. Everything that he has neg$_x$ suffered as   ill
traitements, celui-là, tu peux pas   imaginer.
treatments, that one, you can not   imagine.
'He suffered so much. Everything that he has suffered in terms of abuse, you cannot
imagine.'

h. Tout ce   qu' il m' a   **pas** donné comme soucis, celui-là, je te dis   pas.
everything that he me.has neg$_x$ given as   worries this.one I you.tell not
'Everything that he gave me in terms of worries, this one, I can't tell you.'

We conclude that the contexts in (12) do not constitute necessary and sufficient conditions for *pas$_x$* to be licensed. This puts in question the analysis, crucially based on the presence of a universal quantifier in the antecedent and on the association of *pas$_x$* with an existential predicate in the embedded clause.

Gonzalez & Royer (2022) argue that pas_x has no negative force. One of their arguments is that the expression *du tout* 'at all' (also *pantoute* 'at all'), which must figure under the scope of negation (23), is not licensed by *pas* in (24b).

(23)   J'aime *(**pas**) **du tout** ce   livre-là.   (G&R ex. 8a)
        I.like   *(not) at all   that book.DEM
        'I don't like that book at all.'

(24)   a.   C'est le   pire   livre que tu peux **pas** lire.
            it.is the worst book that you can neg_x read.
            'It's the worst book that you can read.'

        b. *C'est le   pire   livre que tu peux **pas du tout** lire. (G&R ex. 8b)
            it is   the worst book that you can neg_x at all   read

The conclusion that pas_x has no negative force is contradicted by (25b) and (26b). (25b) is a variant of (25a) obtained by adding *encore* to pas_x. The 'yet' meaning of *encore* is licensed by the negation: *pas encore* = 'not yet'. If *pas* is removed, the clause is rejected (25c). (In positive contexts, *encore* has other meanings—*still, again, more*—, but none of them is compatible with 25c). Similarly, in (26b), *même* added to pas_x yields the negative expression *même pas* 'not even' containing the negative operator *pas*; if *pas* is deleted, the clause is rejected (26c). The translations in parentheses correspond to the analysis that will be developed in section 5.

(25)   a.   C'est la plus belle   veillée que j'ai   **pas** connue.
            it's   the most beautiful evening that I.have neg_x known
            'It's the most beautiful evening that I have known.'
            (It's the most beautiful evening s.t. I haven't known a more beautiful one)

        b.   C'est la   plus belle   veillée que j'ai   **pas encore** connue. (Kemp ex. 53)
            it's   the most beautiful evening that I.have neg_x yet   known
            (It's the most beautiful evening s.t. I have not yet known a more beautiful one)

        c. *C'est la plus belle veillée que j'ai **encore** connue.
            it's the most beautiful evening that I have yet known.

(26)   a.   Sept générations de petits nés dans les pires conditions que tu   peux **pas**
            seven generations of kids born in   the worst conditions that you can neg_x
            imaginer
            imagine
            'Seven generations of kids born in the worst conditions that you can imagine'
            (Seven generations of kids born in the worst conditions s.t. you can't imagine worse conditions)

b. Sept générations de petits nés dans les pires conditions que tu peux **même**
seven generations of kids born in the worst conditions that you can even
pas imaginer.
neg$_x$ imagine
(Seven generations of kids born in the worst conditions s.t. you can't even imagine worse conditions)

c. *… les pires conditions que tu peux **même** imaginer
the worst conditions that you can even imagine

Since, in (25) and (26), the presence of *pas$_x$* is required to give rise to the 'not yet, 'not even' readings, we are led to conclude that *pas$_x$* has negative force. In consequence, the infelicitousness of (24b) must have another explanation.[4] We will come back to (25b) in section 5.

Another issue is that Gonzalez & Royer do not account for the domain widening effect of *pas$_x$* illustrated in section 3. Gonzalez & Royer (2022: 14 fn 11) assume that NPIs do not need to yield widened domains, and that eventual domain widening effects are tied to the activation of sub-domain alternatives, but they do not spell-out how the effect emerges in context in the case of *pas$_x$*. Notice, that, contrary to what is the case with *any,* the domain widening effect illustrated in (9b) and (10) is not associated with focus or stress on *pas$_x$*. *Pas$_x$* is unstressed in these examples (cf. also 21a). Because there is no attempt to explain the domain widening effect of *pas$_x$,* we are left to wonder why a speaker would go to the trouble of producing the complex but vacuous operation of exhaustifying a set of alternatives activated by a syntactically constructed NPI, an operation that simply returns the assertion, given that there is a simpler construction without *pas$_x$* that asserts exactly the same thing.

In conclusion, there are reasons to be skeptical of Gonzalez & Royer's (2022) NPI analysis. In the following sections, I endeavor to defend the idea that *pas$_x$* is a true negative operator. If that is correct, there is no need to postulate a new type of expletive negation or a new type of NPI to account for examples like (1). That is a welcome conclusion since it avoids the proliferation of theoretical constructs.

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4 It is unclear to me what the intended interpretation of (24b) is. I interpret the sentence as meaning *It's the worst book that you can't read at all*, with a plain negation licensing *du tout* 'at all'. That sentence is not ungrammatical, but it is odd: if there is a set of books that you can't read at all, it doesn't seem to make sense to rank them in terms of the goodness of their contents.
The authors also bring the fact that *pas$_x$* cooccurs with the "positive polarity item" *quelqu'un* in (ia) in support of the expletive nature of pas$_x$, but the negative sentence in (ib) has the same degree of acceptability as (ia):

(i) a. C'est le pire livre que tu peux pas donner à quelqu'un (G&R 2022: 5 ex. 9b)
it's the worst book that you can negx give to someone
'It's the worst book that you can give to someone'

b. Tu peux pas donner un pire livre à quelqu'un.
you can not give a worst book to someone
'You can't give a worst book to someone.'

5. Superlatives and comparative NP movement

Superlatives constitute the majority of the examples containing an apparently expletive pas_x, and they are, I think, the clue to understanding the other examples. A superlative identifies the unique member of a comparison class C that has a higher degree of the quality considered than all the other elements of C (Heim 1999; Farkas & Kiss 2000). *The biggest book* denotes the unique book that is *bigger* than all the other ones in a given comparison class:

(27)   Assuming a contextually determined comparison class C,
biggest book $= \iota x (book(x) \wedge \forall y [(book(y) \wedge y \neq x) \rightarrow x >_{big} y])$
(where ι is a uniqueness operator, and $>$ indicates a higher position on the scale associated with the gradable adjective, here a scale of 'bigness', notated $>_{big}$) (cf. Farkas & Kiss 2000: 436)

Thus, a superlative involves a comprehensive set of comparisons. In French, the relation between a superlative and the comparatives that it subsumes is explicit. A superlative is composed of a comparative preceded by a definite determiner introducing a uniqueness interpretation. When the adjective or adverb has no morphologically distinct comparative, the comparative morpheme is *plus* 'more'.[5]

(28)		**Adj./Adv.**	**Comparative**	**Superlative**	
	a.	bon	meilleur	le meilleur	(good–better–the best)
	b.	prudent	plus prudent	le plus prudent	(careful–more careful–the most careful)
	c.	vite	plus vite	le plus vite	(fast–faster–the fastest)

With this in mind, let us come back to the contrast between a sentence without pas_x and one that contains it, and ask ourselves what is the structure of these constructions.

(29)   a. C'est le   meilleur livre qu' il y a _.
          b. C'est le   meilleur livre qu' il y a   **pas** _.
             it.is the best   book that there.is (neg$_x$)
             'It is the best book there is.'

Both sentences are movement constructions: they contain a gap in the complement position of the embedded verb; this gap results from a movement to the head of the embedded clause. I would like to argue that *pas* looks expletive in (29b) because the construction is implicitly assumed to have the same structure and interpretation as (29a), but, in fact, distinct constructions are at play.

    Two different structures are assumed to be possible for relative clauses: the raising structure and the matching structure (e.g. Kayne 1994; Bhatt 2002; Hulsey & Sauerland 2006; Harris 2008; Cinque 2015). The structures vary from author to author. I will follow Hulsey & Sauerland's

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(2006) structures illustrated below. Assuming the copy theory of movement, the raising structure of relative clauses is as in (30). The head NP moves to the specifier of the complementizer, and it is interpreted only in the embedded clause. In the matching structure (31), the head NP is interpreted outside of the relative clause, and there is an elided NP inside the relative structure. In (31), the moved element is striked-through and the elided one is respresented with a subscripted Ø. The matching NP must be similar enough to the head NP to license ellipsis.

(30) a. $[_{DP}$ the $[_{CP}$ $[_{NP}$ book] $[_{C'}$ that John read $[_{NP}$ ~~book~~]]]]
      b. the x s.t. John read book(x)

(31) a. $[_{DP}$ the $[_{NP}$ book] $[_{CP}$ $[_{NP}$ Ø$_{book}$] $[_{C'}$ that John read $[_{NP}$ ~~book~~]]]]
      b. the book x s.t. John read book(x)

Bhatt (2002) and Hulsey & Sauerland (2006) argue that both structures are available for English relative clauses and superlatives.

Coming back to French, for superlatives without pas_x, like (29a), I will assume that both the raising structure in (32a) and the matching structure in (32b) are possible. In both structures, the comparative adjective is generated within the matrix DP, and the complement of the embedded verb is the noun *livre*.[6] In these constructions, the embedded clause defines the comparison class of the superlative. These constructions are grammatical both in standard French and in Quebec French.

(32) a. C'est $[_{DP}$ le meilleur $[_{CP}$ $[_{NP}$ livre] $[_{C'}$ qu'il y a $[_{NP}$ ~~livre~~].]]]
          'This is the best among the books that there are.'

      b. C'est $[_{DP}$ le meilleur $[_{NP}$ livre] $[_{CP}$ $[_{NP}$ Ø$_{livre}$] $[_{C'}$ qu'il y a $[_{NP}$ ~~livre~~].]]]
          'This is the best book among the books that there are.'

For the construction in (29b), specific to Quebec French, I would like to defend the hypothesis that it is interpreted as in (33a), and that it has the matching structure in (33b):

(33) a. C'est le meilleur livre [qu'il y a **pas** <meilleur livre>].
          'This is the best book such that there is no better book.'
      b. C'est $[_{DP}$ le $[_{NP}$ meilleur livre] $[_{CP}$ $[_{NP}$ Ø$_{meilleur\ livre}$] $[_{C'}$ qu'il y a **pas** $[_{NP}$ ~~meilleur livre~~].]]]

Here, the complement of the embedded verb is the comparative NP *meilleur livre* 'better book', which is moved to the head of the clause, and elided under phonological identity with the comparative NP *meilleur livre* that complements the determiner as part of the matrix superlative.

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6 The derivation proposed by Loccioni (2020), while more complex, involves a matching structure that ends up similar to (32b): the order of merge is [DP le [Sup Ø [(relative clause) [Cl [AP meilleur] [NP livre]]]]]; the Cl constituent containing *meilleur livre*, generated outside of the relative clause, is attracted to the null superlative head, and it moves to the left of the relative clause.

Within the embedded clause, the elided comparative NP is phonologically silent, and it is interpreted at LF (like the elided NPs in 31 and 32b).[7]

Under the negation, comparatives may be bare NPs in French, as shown in (34), which is the source of the embedded clause in (33) above.

(34)   Il y a pas meilleur livre *<que x>*.
        There is no better book *<than x>*.

Pas$_x$ in (33) is exactly the same entity as *pas* in (34). It is the regular morpheme of predicate negation scoping over a comparative. In (33), if the negation is deleted, the interpretation becomes incoherent, since, without *pas*, the sentence would mean: *it's the best book such that there is a better book*. Thus*, pas$_x$* is not expletive in that construction and it is not optional. Comparing (29a) with (29b), one has the impression that *pas$_x$* is optional, but that is incorrect. Distinct constructions are involved: in (29a), without negation, the comparative adjective belongs to the antecedent (32), but in (29b), it is part of the moved NP, within the embedded clause, which is necessarily negative (33b).

It can be seen in (34) that the comparative NP has an implicit complement corresponding to the standard of comparison. The standard of comparison is also implicit in (33), and the embedded clause means *there is no better book <than x>*, with a variable corresponding to the standard of comparison:

(35) $\lambda x \neg \exists y\ [\text{book}(y) \wedge y >_{\text{good}} x]$

When a comparative NP is displaced, it pied-pipes the standard of comparison:

(36)   [Meilleur livre *que   celui-là*], je pense pas que tu   pourras trouver _.
        better   book than that.one I   think not that you can.fut find
        'A better book than that one, I don't think that you will be able to find.'

Therefore, I assume that, in (33), the implicit standard of comparison is pied-piped to CP with the comparative NP, and that the CP of the embedded clause contains a variable.

(37)   C'est [$_{DP}$ le [$_{NP}$ meilleur livre] [$_{CP}$ [$_{NP}$ Ø$_{\text{meilleur livre} <que\ x>}$] [$_{C'}$ qu'il y a **pas** [$_{NP}$ ~~meilleur livre~~ ~~<que x>~~].]]]

That allows the embedded clause to combine with the superlative antecedent, yielding (38), where the x variable of the embedded CP is bound by the uniqueness operator of the superlative.

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7 The facts discussed in the text support a matching structure for adjectival superlatives, but I would not reject *a priori* the possibility of a raising structure in which *pas$_x$* scopes over a comparative. A raising structure would seem to nicely account for the adverbial superlative in *C'est le plus vite qu'il a pas couru.* 'It's the fastest that he has neg$_x$ run.': C'est le [$_{CP}$ [plus vite] qu'il pas couru [~~plus vite~~]]. I will leave the question open for future research, and will limit myself to discussing the matching structure.

(38) ιx (book(x) $\wedge$ $\forall$y [(book(y) $\wedge$ y $\neq$ x) $\rightarrow$ x $>_{good}$ y] $\wedge$ $\neg\exists$z [book(z) $\wedge$ (z $>_{good}$ x)])
'the unique book x s.t. x is better than all the other ones, and s.t. there is no better book than x'

I will come back in the next section to the apparent redundancy of (38), and will argue that the pragmatic role of the embedded clause is to enlarge the comparison class, but before getting there, I wish to provide arguments supporting (33b). In the syntactic representations below, I will not show the null standard of comparison forming part of the elided comparative NP, as it would only complexify the representations without contributing to the argumentation.

To start with, note that (33) applies, not only to clauses where the embedded predicate is a member of the four predicates in (12ii), but also to clauses headed by a different verb, like *voir* in (22a).

(39) C'est [$_{DP}$ le [$_{NP}$ meilleur show] [$_{CP}$ [$_{NP}$ $\varnothing_{meilleur\ show}$] [$_{C'}$ que j'ai **pas** vu [$_{NP}$ ~~meilleur show~~]]]]
'It's the best show s.t. I haven't seen a better show.'

Sentence (25b), repeated below, where the 'yet' meaning of *encore* is licensed by the negation, is accounted for by (41).

(40) C'est la plus belle   veillée que j'ai   **pas encore** connue _. (Kemp ex. 53)
      It's   the most beautiful evening that I.have neg$_x$ yet   known
      'It's the most beautiful evening s.t. I have not yet known (a) more beautiful (one)'

(41) [$_{DP}$ la [$_{NP}$ plus belle   veillée] [$_{CP}$ [$_{NP}$ $\varnothing_{plus\ belle\ veillée}$] [que   j'ai **pas** encore connue
      the   most beautiful evening   that I.have neg$_x$ yet known
      [$_{NP}$ ~~plus belle veillée~~]]]]

The meaning of (40) requires the implicit complement of the verb to be a comparative NP. That is because the focus of *pas* is the comparative adjective: the clause presupposes that I have known some evenings before, and states that none was *more beautiful* than this one. If, instead of (41), we assumed one of the structures in (32) with the comparative adjective generated in the antecedent, e.g. *la plus belle [veillée que j'ai pas encore connu ~~veillée~~]*, the comparison class would be a set of future evenings: *the most beautiful among the evenings that I have not yet known*. That would not reflect the meaning of (40).

We can see in (42) that the definite determiner forming the superlative is generated in the main clause and the embedded clause contains an indefinite complement. *Y avoir* is the infinitive of the existential expression *il y a* (lit.: it.loc.has), meaning 'there is', which, like its English equivalent, is constructed with an indefinite complement. The indefinite complement of *il y a* is the bare comparative NP *plus beau carosse* (42b).

(42) a. Il prend le plus beau   carosse qu' il pouvait **pas** y avoir _. (Kemp ex. 12)
          he takes the most beautiful carriage that it could   neg$_x$ loc.have

b. Il prend [$_{DP}$ le [$_{NP}$ plus beau carosse] [$_{CP}$ [$_{NP}$ Ø$_{plus\ beau\ carosse}$] [$_{C'}$ qu' il pouvait **pas** y avoir [$_{NP}$ ~~plus beau carosse~~]]]]
'He takes the most beautiful carriage s.t. there could not be a more beautiful carriage.'

The following example is interpreted with the comparative NP below the belief: *that is the biggest stupidity such that he thinks that I haven't done a bigger stupidity than that.* That follows from (44), with successive cyclic movement of the comparative NP.[8]

(43) C'est la plus grosse bêtise   [qu' i' pense   [que j'ai **pas** faite _.]]
it's   the most big   stupid.thing that he believes that I.have neg$_x$ done
'It's the biggest stupidity that he believes that I did.'

(44) [$_{DP}$ la plus grosse bêtise [$_{CP}$ [Ø$_{plus\ grosse\ bêtise}$] qu'i'pense [$_{CP}$ [~~plus grosse bêtise~~] que j'ai **pas** faite [~~plus grosse bêtise~~.]]]
'the biggest stupidity s.t. he thinks that I did not do a bigger stupidity.'

An argument for the matching structure is the possibility of extraposing the relative clause past a temporal adverb (Hulsey & Sauerland 2006):

(45) J'ai   vu [$_{DP}$ la [$_{NP}$ plus belle   parade]] hier   [$_{CP}$ [Ø$_{plus\ belle\ parade}$] qu'
I.have seen   the   most beautiful parade yesterday   that
il y a   **pas** eu [~~plus belle parade~~] à Montréal   depuis 10 ans].
there.is neg$_x$ had   in Montreal   since 10 years
'I have seen the most beautiful parade yesterday s.t. there has not been a more beautiful parade in Montreal in the last 10 years.'

Also supporting the matching structure is the following example, quoted by Kemp (1982 ex. 103), where an it-cleft intervenes between the antecedent and *pas$_x$*. Extraction out of an it-cleft is also possible in relative clauses (47).[9]

(46) C'est la plus belle   des   fêtes   [qu' il y en a   ben   [qui passent **pas**_]].
it's   the most beautiful of.the parties that there.is.GEN many that spend   neg$_x$
'It's the most beautiful party s.t. there are many that don't spend a more beautiful one.'

(47) C'est un garçon$_i$ [qu' il y en a   ben   [qui aiment pas _]].
it's   a boy$_i$ that there.is.GEN many that like   neg x$_i$
'It's a boy that there are many that don't like (him)'

The interpretation of (46) follows from (48), where only the initial and final copies of the comparative NP are represented.

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8 That example, as well as (46) below, shows that there is no locality condition blocking the relation between the antecedent and pas$_x$, contrary to what is claimed by Gonzalez & Royer (2022: 13) to support their NPI analysis.

9 Cf. Lindahl (2014) for a discussion of the syntax of extraction out of relative clauses in such contexts in Swedish.

(48) C'est [$_{DP}$ la [$_{NP}$ plus belle des fêtes] [$_{CP}$ [$_{NP}$ Ø$_{plus belle fête}$] [$_{C'}$ qu'il y en a ben [$_{CP}$ [$_{C'}$ qui passent **pas** [$_{NP}$ ~~plus belle fête~~]]]].
'It's the most beautiful of the parties s.t. there are many that don't spend a more beautiful party.'

The fact that the elided constituent is not identical to the antecedent, but is similar enough for ellipsis to be licensed, provides support for the matching structure. *Pas* in (48) is the same as *pas$_x$* in (33): a negative operator scoping over an implicit comparative NP. The sentence has no equivalent without *pas*; the structure in (32b) would not have the correct interpretation: *the most beautiful of the parties among the parties that many spend.*

   To summarize, a number of facts support the matching structure in (33), in which *pas$_x$* is the regular negative operator, and the gap in the embedded clause corresponds to a moved and elided comparative NP. The focus of *pas$_x$* is the comparative adjective forming part of the silent complement of the verb. *Pas$_x$* is not expletive, and there is not always a sentence without it that has a similar interpretation.

6. The domain widening effect of superlatives containing *pas$_x$*

I argued that the superlative in (49a) has the matching structure in (b), with the interpretation in (c).

(49) a. C'est le meilleur livre qu'il y a pas _.
      b. C'est [$_{DP}$ le [$_{NP}$ meilleur livre] [$_{CP}$ [$_{NP}$ Ø$_{meilleur livre <que x>}$] [$_{C'}$ qu' il y a **pas** [$_{NP}$ ~~meilleur livre <que x>~~].]]]
      c. ιx (book(x) ∧ ∀y [(book(y) ∧ y ≠ x) → x >$_{good}$ y] ∧ ¬∃z [book(z) ∧ (z >$_{good}$ x)])
          'It's the best book s.t. there is no better book than it'

In a matching structure like (49b), the superlative is interpreted in the main clause, and the comparative in the embedded clause. Recall that a superlative is interpreted with respect to a contextual comparison class C. If (49c) means: *this is the best book in the comparison class C such that there is no better book than it in C,* it is redundant, and the embedded clause is uninformative. However, we saw, in section 3, that the presence of *pas$_x$* widens the domain in the sense that, while the comparison class of a superlative without *pas$_x$* may be limited, when *pas$_x$* is present, the context is maximal. I would like to propose that the pragmatic strengthening effect of the presence of *pas$_x$* comes from the fact that it negates a comparative. *There is no better book* invites us to consider the largest possible domain. While the superlative in the antecedent is interpreted with respect to a contextual comparison class C, the embedded clause tells us that we will not find in a larger domain C' an element that is higher than the one in the antecedent on the scale denoted by the adjective. If my interpretation is correct, the sentence is not redundant. The embedded clause containing *pas$_x$* yields a stronger statement by forcing us to go for a larger domain. This domain-widening effect results from combining the negation with a comparative.

Consider (50), integrating the comparison classes into (49c). The main clause superlative is interpreted with respect to a contextual comparison class C, and the embedded clause tells us that there is no better book in a C' larger than C:

(50) $\iota x \in C$ (book(x) $\wedge$ $\forall y \in C$ [(book(y) $\wedge$ y $\neq$ x) $\rightarrow$ x $>_{good}$ y] $\wedge$ $\neg \exists z \in C'$ [book(z) $\wedge$ (z $>_{good}$ x)] : C' $\supseteq$ C)
'x is the best book in a contextual comparison class C, s.t. there is no book in C' $\supseteq$ C that is better than x.'

The embedded negated comparative activates larger sets. The interpretation is absolute because, for any C' $\supseteq$ C that we may pick, there is no better book than x in C'. Therefore, x is the best book in the set of all books.

We can compare that to the sentence without *pas*$_x$, where the embedded clause does not contain a negated comparative:

(51)   C'est le meilleur [$_{CP}$ [livre] [qu'il y a [~~livre~~]]] (= 32a)
'This is the best among the books that there are'

In that construction, we are free to interpret as we wish the domain in which *qu'il y a* 'that there is' is valid: …*qu'il y a sur la table* 'on this table' / *dans ce magasin* 'in this store / *dans cette ville* 'in this town'…. The interpretation may be restricted to a limited contextual domain.

When the embedded clause contains a specification of a comparison class, that comparison class is the one over which the comparative is claimed to be valid. Take (52), for instance. The contextual comparison class C of the main clause superlative could be limited to the wheat varieties on a particular market stand, but if the owner of the stand utters (52), he places emphasis on the fact that there is no better wheat on the whole trading market.[10]

(52)   a. C'est le plus beau   blé   qu' il y a   **pas** _ sur le marché. (= 1)
            it.is   the most beautiful wheat that there.is neg$_x$ on the market

        b. C'est [$_{DP}$ le [$_{NP}$ plus beau blé] [$_{CP}$ [$_{NP}$ Ø$_{plus beau blé}$] [$_{C'}$ qu'il y a **pas** [$_{NP}$ ~~plus beau blé~~] sur le marché]]].

        c. $\iota x \in C$ (wheat(x) $\wedge$ $\forall y \in C$ [(wheat(y) $\wedge$ y $\neq$ x) $\rightarrow$ x $>_{beautiful}$ y] $\wedge$ $\neg \exists z \in C'$ [wheat(z) $\wedge$ z $>_{beautiful}$ x]: C'($\supseteq$ C) = the trading market)
            'x is the most beautiful wheat in a comparison class C, s.t. there is no wheat more beautiful than x on the market (= C').'

The comparison class is therefore enlarged from C to C', defined as being the trading market, and the negated comparative states that no wheat is better than this one in this enlarged domain. From that, we conclude that the superlative holds in the enlarged domain. The focus of the

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10 The phrase *sur le marché* could also refer to the wheat sold 'in this market', e.g. an open market of cereals, in which case C' is this whole market.

negation is the comparative adjective. The embedded clause presupposes that *there is wheat on the market* and *pas$_x$*, associating with the comparative, states that none is *better* than this one. A reviewer observes that while in (49) the noun was a count noun, the analysis is applied here to a mass noun; true, but distinct, thus countable, varieties of wheat are compared.

In the equivalent sentence without *pas$_x$*, *sur le marché* 'on the market' defines C, and the sentence does not have the domain widening effect of the embedded clause containing a negated comparative:

(53)   C'est le plus beau [$_{CP}$ [blé] [qu' il y a [~~blé~~] sur le marché]]]
        'This is the most beautiful among the wheat that is on the market.'

The following sentence illustrates the domain widening effect of the negated comparative with a set-denoting NP. Here the comparison class is enlarged to all the players that we had.

(54)   a. C'est les trois meilleurs joueurs qu' on a   **pas** eus _.
            it.is the three best   players that we have neg$_x$ had

        b. C'est [$_{DP}$ les [$_{NP}$ trois meilleurs joueurs] [$_{CP}$ [$_{NP}$ Ø$_{trois meilleurs joueurs}$] qu' [on a **pas** eu [$_{NP}$ ~~trois meilleurs joueurs~~]]]].
            'They are the three best players s.t. we didn't have three better players.'

        c. X is the set composed of the three best players in a comparison class C, s.t. we did not have three better players than the members of X among all the players that we ever had. (For any set C' of players that we had, there were no better players in C'.)

In (55), the main clause speaks of the conditions in which this child was raised, and the embedded clause enlarges the comparison class to the conditions that you can imagine.

(55)   a. Il a   été   élevé dans les pires conditions que tu   peux **pas** imaginer _.
            he has been raised in   the worst conditions that you can   neg$_x$ imagine

        b. Il a été élevé dans [$_{DP}$ les [$_{NP}$ pires conditions]$_i$ [$_{CP}$ [$_{NP}$ Ø$_{pires conditions}$] [$_{C'}$ que tu peux pas imaginer [$_{NP}$ ~~pires conditions~~]]]].
            'He was raised in the worst conditions s.t. you cannot imagine worse conditions.'

        c. He was raised in the worst set X among the comparison class C of conditions in which children are raised, s.t. there is no set Y of conditions that are worse than those in X among the set of conditions that you can imagine = C'.

In (56), the contextual enlargement of C is defined by what you can possibly have (which is pragmatically larger than the present contextual domain).

(56)   a. C'est [$_{DP}$ le [$_{NP}$ meilleur blé]   [$_{CP}$ [$_{NP}$ Ø$_{meilleur blé}$] [$_{C'}$ que tu peux pas avoir [$_{Np}$ ~~meilleur blé~~]]]].
            it.is   the   wheat   that you can neg$_x$ have
            'It's the best wheat s.t. you can not have better wheat.'

  b. x is the best wheat in a contextually relevant class C, s.t. there is no better wheat than x among the wheat that you can possibly have = C'.

We can summarize the present hypothesis as follows:

(57) i. The superlative in the main clause states that x (or the set X) is the ADJ-est in a contextually determined comparison class C.
      ii. The embedded clause states that there is no y (or no set Y) that is ADJ-er than x in C' $\supseteq$ C.
      iii. From that, we conclude that x is the ADJ-est in C'.

The embedded clause strengthens the assertion by stating that no entity is ADJ-er than the antecedent in a set larger than the present contextual domain.

Gonzalez & Royer (2022: 5 ex. 10b) claim that the inability of pas_x to cooccur with the negative coordination *ni…non plus* (literally 'nor…neither') in (58a) proves that pas_x is expletive. However, we see in (58b), that a continuation with *ni…d'ailleurs* 'nor…for that matter' is perfectly acceptable.

(58) a. *C'est le   meilleur restaurant qu' on a   **pas** à Québec,   ni   à Montréal
        it's   the best   restaurant that we have neg_x in Quebec City, nor in Montreal
        non plus.
        (neither)

      b. C'est le   meilleur restaurant qu' on a   **pas** à Québec,   ni   au Canada
        'It's the best   restaurant that we have neg_x in Quebec City, nor in Canada
        d'ailleurs.
        for that matter.'

The fact that a conjunct introduced by *ni* 'nor' is possible confirms that pas_x in the embedded clause has negative force. The problem with (58a) is that *non plus* 'neither' following the locative PP *à Montréal* implies that the focus of the negation in the first conjunct is the locative PP *à Québec*, but that is incorrect: as we saw, the focus of the negation is the silent comparative adjective within the elided complement; the location defines C'. In (58b), the conjunct *ni au Canada d'ailleurs* strengthens the assertion by enlarging C' from Quebec City to an even more encompassing set (Canada $\supset$ Quebec City): we won't even find a better restaurant in the whole country.

7. Other silent comparatives

I would like to argue that the role of pas_x that we just saw for superlatives is also the one that is at play in (4a) and (4b), where the antecedent does not overtly contain a comparative.

Consider the case where the antecedent contains the ordinal *premier* 'first' in (4a), repeated below. The implicit complement of the embedded verb cannot be *premier anglais*: (59b) is contradictory (see 33a):

(59)   a.   C'était   le   premier anglais   qu'   il y a   **pas**   eu   _   dans le   quartier.
               that.was the first   Englishman that there.is neg_x had   in   the neighborhood
               'He was the first Englishman that there was in the neighborhood.'

        b.   *C'était le premier anglais qu'il y a pas eu < premier anglais > dans le quartier.
               He was the first Englishman s.t. there was no < first Englishman > in the neighborhood.

In standard superlatives, the determiner is followed by an adjectival comparative identical to the elided comparative in the embedded clause, but the ordinal *premier* 'first' is not a comparative, but a superlative; that is why it cannot occupy the gap position. If individuals are ranked on an ordinal scale ⟨first,last⟩ defined by the order of arrival in the neighborhood (where first > next > last), *le premier* designates the individual occupying the highest position on the scale, and it entails an exhaustive list of comparisons: *Joe came first in the neighborhood* entails *Joe came first with respect to Tom*, and *Joe came first with respect to Sam*, and *Joe came first with respect to Bob*, etc. The presence of pas_x in (59a) is accounted for if we assume that the implicit object of the embedded verb is a silent comparative NP corresponding to a *y that is higher than x on the ordinal scale* (60a). After raising the implicit comparative to the specifier of CP (60b), the structure of the embedded clause is that of (33).

(60)   a.   C'était le premier anglais (x) [$_{CP}$ qu'il y a **pas** eu < [y > $_{⟨first,last⟩}$x] >] dans le quartier.
            'He was the first Englishman in the neighborhood s.t. there has been no y that came first with respect to him.'

        b.   C'était le premier anglais (x) [$_{CP}$ Ø$_{[y > ⟨first,last⟩x]}$ qu'il y a **pas** eu < [~~y >~~ $_{⟨first,last⟩}$~~x~~] >]
            dans le quartier.

Assume that we are talking of Joe. The sentence is interpreted as in (61a), schematized in (b):

(61)   a.   Joe is the highest among a set E of Englishmen on the ordinal scale defined by the order of arrival in the neighborhood, s.t. [there has been no y belonging to some E' ⊇ E where y is higher than Joe on that ordinal scale.]

        b.   Joe∈E ∧ ∀x∈E [x ≠ Joe→Joe > $_{⟨first,last⟩}$x] ∧ [¬∃y∈E' [y > $_{⟨first,last⟩}$Joe]: E' ⊇ E]
            (where E and E' are sets of Englishmen, and > $_{⟨first,last⟩}$ = 'higher on the scale of order of arrival in the neighborhood'.)

The interpretation is parallel to that of standard superlatives: for any larger set of Englishmen that we may activate, no Englishman came first in the neighborhood with respect to Joe. Like the other superlatives, (59a) is Strawson downward-entailing: *He was the first Englishman that came to the neighborhood* does not entail that he was the first left-handed Englishman that came to the neighborhood, unless we presuppose that he was left-handed. The difference between superlatives and ordinals is that, with ordinals, the meaning of the embedded clause cannot be spelled out with an overt comparative adjective: *x was the first Englishman s.t. there was no y *first-er than x*. But since, in the matching structure, the comparative NP is elided, therefore

interpreted at LF, it is not a problem that, here, the embedded comparative has no phonological realization, as long as it is interpreted at LF in the same way as the elided comparative NP is interpreted in superlatives: the implicit comparative in (61b) has the same ordinal scale as the antecedent, and its second argument is bound by the antecedent.

In (62), heard on the radio, the partitive antecedent *un des meilleurs joueurs* 'one of the best players' contains a superlative, and the example may be derived as in the preceding sections. That is shown in (62b), where the portmanteau partitive *des* of (62a) is separated into its components *de les* 'of the'.

(62)   a.   Carey Price, c'est un   des   meilleurs joueurs qu' il y a   **pas** _.
            Carey Price, it's   one of.the best   players that there.is neg$_x$
            'Carey Price, he is one of the best players that there is.'

       b.   Carey Price, c'est un de [$_{DP}$ les [$_{NP}$ meilleurs joueurs] [$_{CP}$ [$_{NP}$ Ø$_{meilleurs\ joueurs}$] qu'
            il y a **pas** [$_{NP}$ ~~meilleurs joueurs~~]]]].
            'Carey Price, he is one of the best players s.t. there aren't better players.'

But in (4b), repeated below, the expression *un des bons joueurs* 'one of the good players' does not contain a superlative, and the embedded clause could not possibly mean that we did not have good players in Canada.

(63)   a.   Richard, c'était un   des   bons joueurs qu' on a   **pas** eu _ au Canada.
            Richard, it.was one of.the good players that we have neg$_x$ had   in Canada
            'Richard, he was one of the good players that we had in Canada.'

       b.   *Richard, c'était un des bons joueurs [qu'on a pas eu <bons joueurs> au Canada].
            Richard, he was one of the good players s.t. we did not have <good players> in
            Canada

Rather, the embedded clause is interpreted with a comparative *plus* in the implicit object of the embedded verb.

(64)   Richard, c'était un des bons joueurs [qu'on a **pas** eu <plus bons joueurs> au Canada].
       'Richard, he was one of the good players s.t. we did not have better players in Canada.'

Since *plus bon* 'more good' = *meilleur* 'better', it turns out that the embedded clause is (64) is interpreted like that of (62b) having a superlative in the antecedent.[11]

(65)   Richard, c'était un de [$_{DP}$ les [$_{NP}$ bons joueurs] [$_{CP}$ [$_{NP}$ Ø$_{plus\ bons\ joueurs}$] qu' on a **pas** eu [$_{NP}$ ~~plus~~
       ~~bons joueurs~~] au Canada]]].

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11 Indeed, (63a) is Strawson downward-entailing, like the sentences containing a superlative antecedent: the sentence does not entail that Richard is one of the good left wing players that we had in Canada, unless we presuppose that he was a left wing player.

That may seem surprising until one realizes that the interpretation of *one of the good* is exactly the same as that of *one of the best,* except for the size of the set considered. Both *one of the good* and *one of the best* entail a ranking of players along a scale of goodness and refer to the top set containing the best players. But the set of 'good' players is larger than the set of 'best' players. Let us arbitrarily suppose that, to be considered *one of the best players,* one must belong to the set composed of the five players at the top of the scale of goodness, but to be considered *one of the good players*, one must belong to the set composed of the twenty best players. Under that assumption, (65) is interpreted as in (66). Because of the partitive, the standard of comparison is the individual identified in the antecedent as being a member of the set of good players.

(66)   Richard is a member of the set A composed of the twenty best players in a comparison class C of Canadian hockey players, s.t. [we did not have a set A' of the twenty best players in the comparison class C' of all the hockey players that ever played in Canada, such that the members of A' are better than Richard]

(64) behaves like a superlative because the set referred to in the antecedent contains the individuals at the top of the scale of goodness (i.e. the 20 best players). Like with superlatives, pas_x scopes over a silent comparative whose scale is that of the antecedent (a scale of goodness), and it negates the existence in an enlarged context of a set of entities higher than the standard of comparison on that scale. I think that this explains why pas_x is found in (63). If, in (66) we replace 'twenty' by 'five' we get the interpretation of 'one of the best', and, *mutatis mutandis,* (66) reflects how the partitive in (62), with a superlative in the antecedent, is interpreted.

The interesting aspect of (59) and (63) is that, to account for the interpretation, it is essential to postulate that the embedded complement contains a silent comparative that has no overt match in the antecedent.

8. Universal antecedents

Let us finally turn to the case where the relative clause is headed by a universal quantifier.

(67)   Il   a   invité   tous les musiciens qu' il y a   **pas** dans la   région. (=3b)
       he has invited all   the musicians that there.is neg_x in   the area
       'He invited all the musicians there are in the area.'

(67) is interpreted as saying that he invited each and every one of the musicians in the area. Like the redundant expression 'each and every one', the presence of pas_x has a strengthening effect on the interpretation. It stresses the fact that every relevant entity is included in the set quantified over by the universal: no entity is overlooked. In that sense, its role is similar to the role of pas_x in superlatives: it maximizes the set over which the universal quantifies.

We saw in the preceding section that the interpretation of sentences containing pas_x requires us to postulate, in some constructions, an implicit comparative not overtly present in

the antecedent. With universal antecedents, the pragmatic strengthening effect of *pas$_x$* in (67) may similarly be accounted for if we hypothesize that the focus of *pas$_x$* is a silent comparative <plus> within the relative clause: *there aren't <more> musicians in the area*. <Plus> is the comparative morpheme, and as such it requires a scale. With count nouns like *musicians*, the comparative scale is defined in terms of numbers (Bale & Barner 2009): if I didn't eat more bananas, I didn't eat a larger number of bananas, i.e. the set of bananas that I ate is not larger that this set, 'this set' being the standard of comparison. In (68), which is the matching structure for relative clauses, the embedded clause states that there aren't more musicians <than that> in the area.[12] The relativized NP *musiciens* moves to the head of the embedded clause where it is elided under identity with the head *musiciens* in the antecedent. The embedded clause is negative, and it contains a silent comparative <plus> 'more' over which *pas* scopes, as well as its associated standard of comparison <que ça> 'than that'.[13] Supporting the matching structure is the fact that extraposition past a temporal adverb is possible (69) (Hulsey & Sauerland 2006).

(68)   Il a invité [$_{DP}$ tous [$_{DP}$ les [$_{NP}$ musiciens] [$_{CP}$ [$_{NP}$ Ø$_{musiciens}$] qu' il y a pas <plus que ça> [$_{NP}$ ~~musiciens~~] dans la région]]]
        'He invited all the musicians s.t. there aren't <more than that> musicians in the area.'

(69)   Il a   invité [tous les musiciens] hier   [$_{CP}$ qu' il y a **pas** dans la   région.]
        he has invited all   the musicians   yesterday   that there.is neg$_x$ in   the area

Let us assume that the relative clause in (68) is interpreted as in (70): *pas$_x$<plus>* activates larger sets and states that there is no relevant entity outside of the set X forming the standard of comparison.

(70) $\lambda x \lambda X.$ [$\forall X'. X' >_{large} X$ [(musician(x) $\wedge$ in-the-area(x) $\wedge$ x$\in$X') $\rightarrow$ x$\in$X]]
        (Where $X' >_{large} X$ is true if X is strictly included in X'.)

Suppose that the definite DP *les musiciens* 'the musicians' in the antecedent introduces a unique set A of musicians into the interpretation:

(71) $\lambda x \iota A.$ musician(x) $\wedge$ x$\in$A

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12 A reviewer asks about mass nouns. All my examples with a universal antecedent are with count nouns. Mass nouns would involve a comparison along a different measurement dimension, like weight or volume. I leave that possibility aside here.

13 A reviewer asks why the comparative adverb doesn't move with the relativized noun in (68). It is also left behind in the standard French relative in (i), and with the fronted indefinite in (ii).

   (i)   Il a invité tous les musiciens, [dont il n'y a pas plus que ça dans la région]
         he has invited all the musiciens, [of-which there is not more than that (number) in the area]
   (ii) De films qui ont comme sujet le confinement, il n'y a pas plus que ça/ce nombre-là.
         'Movies about confinement, there aren't more than that/that number.'
   The comparative quantifier is not part of an adjectival modifier here, contrary to what is the case with the superlative construction.

By combining the relative clause with the antecedent, we end up with (72), where the set variable in (70) is bound by the uniqueness operator in the antecedent. The restrictor set quantified over by the universal quantifier is a set of musicians that are members of the unique set A such that there are no musicians in the area that do not belong to A.

(72) $\lambda x \, \iota A.$ musician$(x) \wedge x \in A \wedge [\forall A'. A' >_{large} A [($musician$(x) \wedge$ in-the-area$(x) \wedge x \in A') \rightarrow x \in A]]$

Under that analysis, the negative morpheme *pas*$_x$ in (68) has nothing peculiar. It is simply the negative operator scoping over a comparative. Within the relative, the affirmative predicate is presupposed (*there are musicians in the area*), and the focus of *pas*$_x$ is the silent comparative <plus>. The peculiar aspect of (68) is the silent <plus> that is postulated. That hypothesis accounts for the strengthening effect of *pas*$_x$: *pas*$_x$ scoping over <plus> forces us to postulate the restrictor set A that satisfies (72), that is, the largest possible one containing all the musicians in the area. Like with superlatives, the strengthening effect comes from the fact that the negation scopes over a comparative. The hypothesis that *pas*$_x$ is a negative operator scoping over a comparative provides a unified account covering both superlative and universal constructions. In both cases, *pas*$_x$ appears in a movement construction, and its focus is a silent comparative. In both cases, the standard of comparison is bound by a uniqueness operator in the antecedent. In both cases, the strengthening effect of negating a comparative is to widen the domain considered (the comparison set or the restrictor set). We understand why *pas*$_x$ surfaces in these particular constructions, because they involve a set that may be pragmatically widened. In every case, *pas*$_x$ appears to be expletive and optional because the constituent over which it scopes is implicit, and because there exists a distinct construction without *pas* that has a similar meaning, but no domain-widening effect. I conjecture that the silent <plus> in (68) is an extension to universal clauses of the silent comparative at play in superlative constructions containing *pas*$_x$. That is, seeing, in superlatives, an apparently expletive *pas*$_x$ scoping over an implicit comparative and having a domain widening effet, speakers of Quebec French extended to universal constructions the use of *pas*$_x$ plus a silent comparative to express domain widening.[14] The hypothesis that there is a silent <plus> in the construction, if it is correct, gives support to Kayne's (2016) claim that there are more silent heads in syntax than what is usually thought.

The research on NPIs has shown that, in downward-entailing contexts, set enlargement typically consists in adding to the set more peripheral members, items that are pragmatically less probable than what would normally be assumed (e.g. Kadmon & Landman 1993; Chierchia 2006). I do not think that that is at play in (67), but we can observe it in (3a), repeated below, which, if my hypothesis is correct, would contain an implicit <plus> in the embedded clause

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14 That would be coherent with the fact that one of my informants told me that she produces the superlative construction, but not the universal one (while recognizing that the construction exists).

(74a), and would be interpreted as in (74b). We may assume that, in this context, the D head 'ce' introduces a definite set into the interpretation,[15] and that the restrictor set of *tout* is as in (74c).

(73) J'ai   fait tout ce   [que je pouvais **pas** faire _] pour le retrouver. (=3a)
      I.have done everything [that I could   neg$_x$do]   to   him.find

(74) a. J'ai fait tout ce$_x$ [x que je pouvais **pas** faire <plus que ça> x̶] pour le retrouver.
      b. Let A be the set of things that I could do in the context, such that I could not do <more> things <than that>. A is included in the set of things that I did to find him.
      c. λx ιA. [∀A'. A' >$_{large}$ A [(x∈A' ∧ I could do x)→ x∈A]]

There are no necessary and sufficient conditions for something to count as an *x such that I could do x* in a particular context. If I did everything I could to find him, did I go to Madeira? It depends on the context. The things that I could do may be ordered on a scale based on relevance or pragmatic probability in the context. Normally, when we hear *everything that I could do,* we assume in the restrictor set all the things at the top of the relevance scale up to a certain point where the actions may be deemed less probable. *Pas$_x$*, associated with a silent comparative, tells us to pragmatically enlarge the set to include actions figuring lower on the scale (up to a point where the action is deemed definitely irrelevant). That is in line with Kemp's (1982) idea that, when *pas$_x$* is present, the interpretation is similar to 'I did the impossible'.

Similar to (73) in meaning is the exclamative sentence discussed in (18), where *pas$_x$* is within a free relative:

(75) C'est incroyable qu'est-ce qu' il   a   **pas** pu   faire pour le retrouver! (=4c, 18)
      it's   incredible what   he has neg$_x$ could do   to   him.find
      'It's incredible what he could do to find him!'

The fact that a free relative denotes a set explains why it may accept *pas$_x$* with the same strengthening effect as with a universal antecedent: the set of x such that x is a thing he could do to find him is the pragmatically largest one there is. The acceptability of *pas$_x$* in an exclamative construction like (75) is closely related to the existence in French of negative exclamatives like the following ones:

(76) a. Que   n'a-t-il   pas fait pour le retrouver!
          what didn't.he   do to   him.find
          'What didn't he do to find him!'

      b. Qu'est-ce qu' on ne peut pas faire avec un citron!
          What   one *ne* can not do   with a lemon!
          'What can't one do with a lemon!'

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15 Cf. *[Ce que tu as fait pour le retrouver] mérite une médaille.* 'The set of things that you did to find him merits a medal.' Because *ce* is a clitic, it cannot be separated from the relative clause, which cannot be extraposed.

Exclamatives are presuppositional and scalar (Michaelis 2001), like the other constructions discussed here. Formally, the exclamations in (76) are negative WH interrogatives whose expected answer is 'close to nothing'. For instance, (76a) comments on the fact that there is almost nothing that he didn't do to find him. Thus, he did everything he could to find him. Here again, the set of x such that x is a thing he could do to find him is maximal.[16]

The association of pas_x with a silent comparative activates larger sets and states that the restrictor set is the largest possible one. That requires a domain with an indeterminate number of items. In (67), the restrictor set is defined intensionally, and one does not necessarily know how many musicians there are in the area; some elements could easily be overlooked. In (73), the set of items that would normally be considered in the context is not precisely defined, and it may be pragmatically enlarged by including more marginal members. As observed by Kemp (1982), it is infelicitous to use pas_x when the domain contains a limited and easily quantifiable number of items:

(77) *J'ai   tout mangé qu'est-ce qu' il y avait **pas** sur mon assiette. (Kemp ex. 109)
      I.have all   eaten   what   there.was neg_x on my   plate
      'I ate everything there was on my plate'

The present approach suggests an answer to why *tout* 'all, every' licenses pas_x, but *chaque* 'each' does not, as we saw above in (21). We assume that *tout DP*, found in *tous les N* 'all the N' and in *tout ce que* 'everything that', is defined in terms of relations between sets but *chaque N* 'each N' is defined in terms of individuals and their properties (Beghelli & Stowell 1997; Knowlton et al. 2022). (78a) is true if the set A of children that participate is included in the set B of people who get a reward; (78b) is true if each individual that is a child and participates is also an individual that gets a reward.[17]

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16 Not every negative exclamative lends itself to the negative analysis in the text. The following ones do not:

(i) Qu'est-ce qu'il ne faut   pas entendre! (Larousse dictionary online, entry *entendre*)
     What   it   need neg hear = 'The things that you have to hear!'

(ii) Que n'est-il pas plus   intelligent!
      Excl is he   neg more intelligent! = 'I wish he would be more intelligent!'

(iii) Qu'est-ce qu'il a   pas grandi!
      Excl   he has neg grown = How much he has grown! (non-standard, Anne Zribi-Hertz, p.c.)

The presence of *pas* in these constructions shows that they do not involve the type of expletive negation discussed in section 2. For discussions and analyses of negative exclamatives, cf. Portner & Zanuttini (2000); Delfitto & Fiorin (2014); Delfitto (2020); Greco (2020).

17 A reviewer asks whether the distinction comes down to the difference between a collective and a distributive reading. The short answer is 'no'. In (78a), as well as in (78b), the rewards are distributed among the children.

(78)   a.   Tous les enfants qui participent reçoivent une récompense.
'All   the children who participate get   a   reward'

       b.   Chaque enfant qui participe   reçoit une récompense.
'Each   child who participates gets a   reward'

Assuming that, with universal antecedents, $pas_x <plus>$ tells us that the restrictor set is the pragmatically largest relevant set there is, then it is expected to be possible (given the right context) with *tous les N*, which refers to sets, but not with *chaque N*, where the relative is construed in individual terms. An individual construal could also be invoked to explain the ungrammaticality of pas_x with free choice *tout N* in (20).

To summarize, in the present section, I proposed that, when pas_x is present in the universal construction, it scopes over a silent comparative $<plus>$ 'more', forcing the restrictor set to be the largest relevant one. If we accept the hypothesis that there is a silent comparative negated by pas_x, the domain-widening interpretation follows. Moreover, that hypothesis provides a unified account of pas_x in both superlative and universal constructions.

9. Conclusion

In Quebec French, an apparently expletive negative morpheme *pas* may be found in superlative and universal constructions. The contexts in which this *pas* is licensed are not the ones licensing the usual cases of expletive negation. It was argued that *pas* is not expletive in these constructions. The characteristics of the constructions fall into place under the hypothesis that *pas* is a regular morpheme of predicate negation scoping over a comparative. If that is correct, there is no need to postulate a special type of expletive negation to account for it. Superlative and universal constructions require respectively a comparison set and a restrictor set. When the apparently expletive *pas* is present within the embedded clause in these constructions, it has a domain-widening effect on the comparison or restrictor set. The hypothesis that *pas* negates a comparative accounts for this domain widening effect.

In order to account for the interpretation of the constructions, it was necessary to postulate an implicit comparative. Whenever the apparently expletive *pas* surfaces in an embedded clause, the comparative over which it scopes is silent, and interpreted at LF. The negative morpheme appears to be expletive because its focus is silent, and because there exist parallel constructions without it that have a related meaning but no domain widening effect.

The main conclusion of the present paper is that a detailed analysis of an item that appears to be expletive at a superficial level may reveal that it is not expletive after all, and that it may be explained if silent categories are taken into account.

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Competing interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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