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,’ 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’s the most beautiful wheat that there is neg 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 have’
b. C’est le meilleur show que j’ai pas vu. (Kemp ex. 55)
'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 did all I could to find him.'

b. Il a invité tous les musiciens qu’il y a pas dans la région.
‘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 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)
‘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, 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 could do to find him!’

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

Kemp (1982), to be discussed below, observed that the presence of pas is domain widening, in the sense that, when pas 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.

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. \textit{Pas}_x \text{ is not a standard expletive negation}

The superlative and universal contexts in which \textit{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 \textit{before, unless, without} (e.g. Espinal 1992; Espinal 2000; Espinal 2007; Delfitto 2020). For example, in (5), from Catalan, \textit{no} within the complement of a fear predicate does not reverse the polarity of the embedded clause. In standard French, expletive \textit{ne} appears in this context (6a), provided it is not accompanied by the predicate negator \textit{pas} (6b). In Quebec French, (6c), \textit{pas} has the same negative interpretation as in (6b): the negation is polarity reversing, and not expletive. The same could be shown with a \textit{before} clause.

\begin{enumerate}
\item [(5)] \textit{Tinc por que \textit{no} es mengin el pastís.} (Catalan)
\begin{itemize}
\item I have fear that neg cl eatSUBJ the cake
\item 'I'm afraid that they might/will eat the cake.' (Tsiakmakis & Espinal 2022 ex. 24)
\end{itemize}
\item [(6)] a. \textit{J'ai peur qu' ils \textit{ne} mangent le gâteau.} (SF)
\begin{itemize}
\item I have fear that they \textit{ne} eat the cake
\item 'I'm afraid that they might/will eat the cake.'
\end{itemize}
\item [(6)] b. \textit{J'ai peur qu' ils \textit{ne} mangent pas le gâteau.} (SF)
\item [(6)] c. \textit{J'ai peur qu' ils mangent pas le gâteau.} (QF)
\begin{itemize}
\item I have fear that they \textit{(ne)} eat not the cake
\item 'I'm afraid that they will not eat the cake.'
\end{itemize}
\end{enumerate}

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 \textit{no} has the same distribution (M.T. Espinal, p.c.). The contexts in which \textit{pas}_x is licit in Quebec French are exactly the opposite. \textit{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 \textit{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
    ‘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
    ‘Russia is the biggest country there is.’

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

3. Kemp (1982) and domain widening

Kemp (1982) observed that when pas, 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)
    it.is the best that you can have
    ‘It is the best that you can have.’
  
    b. C’est le mieux que tu peux pas avoir. (Kemp ex. 108)
    it.is the best that you can (neg) have
    ‘It is the best that you can have.’

The presence of pas, seems to widen the domain in which the superlative is interpreted. This raises a number of questions: why would pas, 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 do to him.find
    ‘I have done everything that I could to find him.’
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 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 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 (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 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 ∀ […]∃ 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]w(ψ) = \phi_w \land \forall p \in ALT(\phi) [p_w \rightarrow \phi \subseteq p]. (where \subseteq = ‘entail’) (G&R 2022: 10 ex. 20)
“Given a sentence $\phi$ and a set of alternatives (ALT) to $\phi$, EXH($\phi$) asserts $\phi$ 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 (\textit{Every boy that ate pizza got sick} $\Rightarrow$ \textit{Every boy that ate pizza with anchovies got sick}). In the configuration in (13), every subset alternative activated by the association of \textit{pas} with the existential operator in the restrictor of \textit{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 \textit{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 \textit{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)

\begin{itemize}
\item I have done everything that I could
\item ‘I did all I could.’
\end{itemize}

(16) \begin{align*}
\text{a. } & \text{EXH } [\text{tout } [\lambda x [\text{je pouvais pas faire } x]]][\lambda y [j’ai fait y]]] \\
\text{b. } & \text{Assertion: } \text{EXH } \forall x [\exists w \in W [\text{I have done } x \text{ at } w] \rightarrow \text{I have done } x \text{ at } w_0] \\
& \text{with } W = \text{the set of worlds epistemically accessible from } w_0 \\
\text{c. } & \text{ALT: } \{\forall x [\exists w' \in W' [\text{I have done } x \text{ at } w'] \rightarrow \text{I have done } x \text{ at } w_0], W' \subseteq W}\} \\
\text{d. } & \text{After exhaustification: } \\
& \forall x [\exists w \in W [\text{I have done } x \text{ at } w] \rightarrow \text{I have done } x \text{ at } w_0] \\
& (G&R 2022: 11 ex. 23)
\end{align*}

For a criticism of Chierchia’s approach to NPIs, see Giannakidou (2018). Here, I will concentrate on the application of the account to \textit{pas}_x. The analysis faces a number of theoretical and empirical problems.

The authors admit that they cannot explain why the NPI created by \textit{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 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 had in Canada

‘Richard, he was one of the good players that we had in Canada.’

In (4c), repeated below, pas 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’est incroyable ça! ‘It’s incredible that!’).

(18) C’est incroyable [qu’est-ce qu’il a pas pu faire pour le retrouver]! (=4c)

‘It’s incredible what he has done 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. 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 in California

‘Max is the best player that there is in California.’

b. 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

2 Cf.:
(i) tallest(x) <=> ∃d ( tall(x,d) & ∀y [ y ≠ x → ¬ 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.
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 are unaccounted for.

Conversely, not every universal quantifier licenses pas. 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 implique en fait de stress.

‘Any person who has had an executive position knows what that implies in terms of stress.’

Chaque ‘each’ does not license pas 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 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

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 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.
We conclude that the contexts in (12) do not constitute necessary and sufficient conditions for \textit{pas} 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 \textit{pas} with an existential predicate in the embedded clause.
Gonzalez & Royer (2022) argue that *pas* 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 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 at all read

The conclusion that *pas*, has no negative force is contradicted by (25b) and (26b). (25b) is a variant of (25a) obtained by adding *encore to pas*. 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* 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 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 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 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 pas imaginer.
(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\textsubscript{x} is required to give rise to the ‘not yet, ‘not even’ readings, we are led to conclude that pas\textsubscript{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\textsubscript{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\textsubscript{x}. Notice, that, contrary to what is the case with \textit{any}, the domain widening effect illustrated in (9b) and (10) is not associated with focus or stress on pas\textsubscript{x}. Pas\textsubscript{x} is unstressed in these examples (cf. also 21a). Because there is no attempt to explain the domain widening effect of pas\textsubscript{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\textsubscript{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\textsubscript{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.

\(^4\) It is unclear to me what the intended interpretation of (24b) is. I interpret the sentence as meaning \textit{It’s the worst book that you can’t read at all}, with a plain negation licensing \textit{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\textsubscript{x} cooccurs with the “positive polarity item” quelqu’un in (ia) in support of the expletive nature of pas\textsubscript{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*, 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:

\( \text{biggest book} = \iota x \ (x(x) \land \forall y (y(y) \land y \neq x) \rightarrow x >_\text{big} y) \)  

(27) Assuming a contextually determined comparison class C,  

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’*.  

(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*, 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 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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5 For analyses, see Coppock & Strand (2019) and Dobrovie-Sorin (2021); for a review of comparatives and superlatives in Romance see Van Peteghem (2021).
(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 represented with a subscripted $\emptyset$. The matching NP must be similar enough to the head NP to license ellipsis.

(30)  
  a. $[_{\text{DP}} \text{x s.t. John read } [_{\text{NP}} \text{book}]]$
  b. $[_{\text{CP}} [_{\text{NP}} \text{that John read } [_{\text{NP}} \text{book}]]]$

(31)  
  a. $[_{\text{DP}} \text{the } [_{\text{NP}} \text{book}]]$
  b. $[_{\text{CP}} [_{\text{NP}} \emptyset \text{book}]]$

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 $\text{pas}$, 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 $\text{livre}$. 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. $\text{C'est }[_{\text{DP}} \text{le meilleur } [_{\text{CP}} \text{qu'il y a } [_{\text{NP}} \text{livre}]]]$
      ‘This is the best among the books that there are.’
  b. $\text{C'est }[_{\text{DP}} \text{le meilleur } [_{\text{NP}} \text{livre}]]$
      ‘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. $\text{C'est le meilleur livre } [\text{qu'il y a pas } <\text{meilleur livre}>]$
      ‘This is the best book such that there is no better book.’
  b. $\text{C'est }[_{\text{DP}} \text{le meilleur livre} [_{\text{CP}} [_{\text{NP}} \emptyset \text{meilleur livre}]] [_{\text{C}} \text{qu'il y a pas } [_{\text{NP}} \text{meilleur livre}]]]$

Here, the complement of the embedded verb is the comparative NP $\text{meilleur livre}$ ‘better book’, which is moved to the head of the clause, and elided under phonological identity with the comparative NP $\text{meilleur livre}$ 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 $[\text{DP le Sup } [\text{relative clause} [\text{Cl AP meilleur } [\text{NP livre}]]]]$; the Cl constituent containing $\text{meilleur livre}$, 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).\footnote{The facts discussed in the text support a matching structure for adjectival superlatives, but I would not reject \textit{a priori} the possibility of a raising structure in which \textit{pas} scopes over a comparative. A raising structure would seem to nicely account for the adverbial superlative in \textit{C'est le plus vite qu'il a pas couru}. ‘It’s the fastest that he has \textit{not} run.’: C'est le \textit{le plus vite} qu'il pas couru \textit{[plus vite]}. I will leave the question open for future research, and will limit myself to discussing the matching structure.}

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 $<\text{que } x>$.  
There is no better book $<\text{than } x>$.  

\(\text{Pas}_x\) in (33) is exactly the same entity as \(\text{pas}\) 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 \textit{pas}, the sentence would mean: \textit{it’s the best book such that there is a better book}. Thus, \textit{pas} is not expletive in that construction and it is not optional. Comparing (29a) with (29b), one has the impression that \textit{pas} 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 \textit{there is no better book $<\text{than } x>$}, with a variable corresponding to the standard of comparison:

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

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

(36)  [\text{Meilleur livre que celui-là}, je pense pas que tu pourras trouver _.
      better book than that one I think not that you can 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 \([\text{le meilleur livre}] [CP [\text{Ø meilleur livre } <\text{que } x> ] [\text{C'} qu'il y a \text{pas } [\text{meilleur livre } <\text{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.
(38) \[\text{\textit{x}} (\text{book}(x) \land \forall y [(\text{book}(y) \land y \neq x) \rightarrow x >_{\text{good}} y] \land \neg \exists z [\text{book}(z) \land (z >_{\text{good}} x)]\]  

‘the unique book \textit{x} s.t. \textit{x} is better than all the other ones, and s.t. there is no better book than \textit{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 \textit{voir} in (22a).

(39) \[\text{C'est } [\text{DP la}] [\text{NP meilleur show}] [\text{CP [NP } \emptyset_{\text{meilleur show}} \text{]} [\text{C que j'ai pas vu [NP meilleur show]]}]\]  

‘It’s the best show s.t. I haven’t seen a better show.’

Sentence (25b), repeated below, where the ‘yet’ meaning of \textit{encore} is licensed by the negation, is accounted for by (41).

(40) \[\text{C'est la plus belle veillée que j'ai pas encore connue }_. \quad \text{(Kemp ex. 53)}\]  

‘It’s the most beautiful evening s.t. I have not yet known (a) more beautiful (one)’

(41) \[\text{[CP la [NP plus belle veillée] [CP [NP } \emptyset_{\text{plus belle veillée}} \text{]} [\text{C que j'ai pas encore connue [NP plus belle veillée]]}]\]  

The meaning of (40) requires the implicit complement of the verb to be a comparative NP. That is because the focus of \textit{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. \textit{la plus belle [veillée que j'ai pas encore connu veillée]}, the comparison class would be a set of future evenings: \textit{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. \textit{Y avoir} is the infinitive of the existential expression \textit{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 \textit{il y a} is the bare comparative NP \textit{plus beau carosse} (42b).

(42) a. \[\text{Il prend le plus beau carosse qu’il pouvait pas y avoir }_. \quad \text{(Kemp ex. 12)}\]  

‘he takes the most beautiful carriage that it could loc.have'}
b. Il prend \[\text{DP le [NP plus beau carrosse]} [\text{CP [Ø plus beau carrosse]} [\text{C qu’ il pouvait pas y avoir [NP plus beau carrosse]]}]]

‘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 negx done

‘It’s the biggest stupidity that he believes that I did.’

(44) [\text{DP la plus grosse bêtise} [\text{CP [Ø plus grosse bêtise]} qu’i’ pense [\text{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 [\text{DP la [NP plus belle parade]} hier [\text{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 negx 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 pasx. 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 negx

‘It’s the most beautiful party s.t. there are many that don’t spend a more beautiful one.’

(47) C’est un garçon, [qu’ il y en a ben [qui aiment pas _]].

it’s a boy that there.is.gen many that like neg x

‘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 pasx, 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.
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 [$_{np}$ le [$_{np}$ meilleur livre] [$_{cp}$ [$_{np}$ meilleur livre <que x>] [$_{cp}$ qu’ il y a pas [$_{np}$ meilleur livre <que x>].]]

c. $\forall x \left( \text{book}(x) \wedge \forall y \left( \left( \text{book}(y) \wedge y \neq x \right) \rightarrow x \succ_{\text{good}} y \right) \wedge \exists z \left( \text{book}(z) \wedge (z \succ_{\text{good}} x) \right) \right)$

‘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 \( C \):

\[
\begin{align*}
\forall x \in C \ (\text{book}(x) \land \forall y \in C \ ((\text{book}(y) \land y \neq x) \rightarrow x > \text{good} y) \land \neg \exists z \in C' \ (\text{book}(z) \land (z > \text{good} x)) : C' \supseteq C)
\end{align*}
\]

‘\( x \) 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 \( \text{pas}_x \), where the embedded clause does not contain a negated comparative:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{C'est le meilleur } & [\_C \ [\text{livre}] \ [\text{qu'il y a } [\text{livre}]]] = 32a
\end{align*}
\]

‘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 \( \text{qu'il y a } \) ‘that there is’ is valid: …\( \text{qu'il y a sur la table } \) ‘on this table’ / \( \text{dans ce magasin} \) ‘in this store’ / \( \text{dans cette ville} \) ‘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.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{a. C'est le plus beau blé qu'il y a pas } & \text{ sur le marché. } (= 1)
\end{align*}
\]

‘it.is the most beautiful wheat that there.is neg x on the market

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{b. C'est } & [\_C \ [\text{NP plus beau blé}] [\_C \ [\text{NP Ø plus beau blé}] [\_C \ [\text{qu'il y a pas } [\_C \ [\text{plus beau blé}] \ [\text{sur le marché}]]]]].
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{c. } & \forall x \in C \ (\text{wheat}(x) \land \forall y \in C \ ((\text{wheat}(y) \land y \neq x) \rightarrow x > \text{beautiful} y) \land \neg \exists z \in C' \ (\text{wheat}(z) \land (z > \text{beautiful} x)) : C' \supseteq C)
\end{align*}
\]

‘\( x \) 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 \( \text{sur le marché} \) 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,*, 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,*, *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:

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

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.

\[
\text{(54) a. C'est les trois meilleurs joueurs qu' on a } \text{pas eus}. \\
\text{it.is the three best players that we have neg had}
\]

\[
\text{b. C'est [sp les [NP trois meilleurs joueurs] [CP [NP Ø trois meilleurs joueurs] qu' on a pas eu [NP trois meilleurs joueurs]]].} \\
\text{‘They are the three best players s.t. we didn’t have three better players.’}
\]

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

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.

\[
\text{(55) a. Il a été élevé dans les pires conditions que tu peux pas imaginer}. \\
\text{he has been raised in the worst conditions that you can neg imagine}
\]

\[
\text{b. Il a été élevé dans [sp les [NP pires conditions] [CP [NP Ø pires conditions] [C que tu peux pas imaginer [NP pires conditions]]].} \\
\text{‘He was raised in the worst conditions s.t. you cannot imagine worse conditions.’}
\]

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

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

\[
\text{(56) a. C'est [CP le [NP meilleur blé] [CP [NP Ø meilleur blé] [C que tu peux pas avoir [NP meilleur blé]]]].} \\
\text{it.is the best wheat that you can neg have}
\]

\[
\text{‘It’s the best wheat s.t. you can not have better wheat.’}
\]
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, 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, 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 ⊃ 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):
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 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).

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

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, he is one of the best players that there aren’t better players.’

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]]] au Canada.
   ‘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, he was one of the good players that we did not have 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]].

---

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 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* in (67) may similarly be accounted for if we hypothesize that the focus of *pas* 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 than 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. The relativized NP *musiciens* moves to the head of the embedded clause where it 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’. Supporting the matching structure is the fact that extraposition past a temporal adverb is possible (69) (Hulsey & Sauerland 2006).

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).

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 musicians, [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.

\[(72) \quad \lambda x \in A. \text{musician}(x) \land x \in A \land [\forall A'. A' > \text{large } A [(\text{musician}(x) \land \text{in-the-area}(x) \land x \in A') \rightarrow x \in A]]\]

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 effect, speakers of Quebec French extended to universal constructions the use of pas\_x plus a silent comparative to express domain widening. 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 do] to him.find

(74) a. J’ai fait tout ce\(x\) [que je pouvais pas faire <plus que ça > \(x\)] 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. \(\lambda x \; \forall A'. A' >_{\text{large}} A \; [(x \in A' \land \text{I could do } x) \rightarrow x \in A]\)

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’

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’

b. Qu’est-ce qu’on ne peut pas faire avec un citron!

‘What one ne can not 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.\footnote{Not every negative exclamative lends itself to the negative analysis in the text. The following ones do not:}

\begin{enumerate}
\item (i) Qu’est-ce qu’il ne faut pas entendre! (Larousse dictionary online, entry entendre) 
\text{What it need neg hear = ‘The things that you have to hear!’}
\item (ii) Que n’est-il pas plus intelligent! 
\text{Excl is he neg more intelligent! = ‘I wish he would be more intelligent!’}
\item (iii) Qu’est-ce qu’il a pas grandi! 
\text{Excl he has neg grown = How much he has grown! (non-standard, Anne Zribi-Hertz, p.c.)}
\end{enumerate}

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).

\footnote{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, \textit{pas} <\textit{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 \textit{tous} \textit{les} \textit{N}, which refers to sets, but not with \textit{chaque} \textit{N}, where the relative is construed in individual terms. An individual construal could also be invoked to explain the ungrammaticality of \textit{pas} with free choice \textit{tout} \textit{N} in (20).

To summarize, in the present section, I proposed that, when \textit{pas} is present in the universal construction, it scopes over a silent comparative <\textit{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 \textit{pas}, the domain-widening interpretation follows. Moreover, that hypothesis provides a unified account of \textit{pas} in both superlative and universal constructions.

9. Conclusion

In Quebec French, an apparently expletive negative morpheme \textit{pas} may be found in superlative and universal constructions. The contexts in which this \textit{pas} is licensed are not the ones licensing the usual cases of expletive negation. It was argued that \textit{pas} is not expletive in these constructions. The characteristics of the constructions fall into place under the hypothesis that \textit{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 \textit{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 \textit{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 \textit{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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