PREVERBAL MODAL PARTICLES
IN GASCONY OCCITAN

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Abstract
Occitan as spoken in Gascony (Southwestern France) has a peculiar paradigm of
preverbal markers called "enunciatives". This paper examines their role as connective
and modal particles. It shows how they mark different degrees of assertiveness, and
provides evidence for their functioning as evidentials when used in quotes and
reported speech contexts. A proposal for a diachronic reconstruction of the genesis of
the paradigm is made, with a cleft construction being claimed as source for the core
enunciative particle que.

0. Introduction

The preverbal particles presented in this contribution are a characteristic
morpho-syntactic feature of the Occitan dialects spoken in Southwestern
France. Occitan is a Romance language assigned to the Gallo-Romance
subgroup, whose traditional territory of use covers most of the Southern half of
France and adjacent valleys in Northern Italy (cf. Wheeler 1988). It is now a
dying language, all of its speakers being bi- or multilingual, and is restricted to
informal oral use. However, Occitan is comparatively well preserved in
Gascony, a historical region in the French Southwest which corresponds
roughly to the current administrative region of Aquitaine, and in a small part of
Spanish Catalonia. The enunciative particles are found in most, but not all
dialects of Occitan in Gascony and particularly in those varieties that are
spoken along the French Pyrenees.

Gascony Occitan is unique among Romance languages in having
developed such an elaborate system of highly recurrent preverbal particles.
Although some recent contributions have opted for a syntactic approach,
interpreting these particles as polarity or sentence type markers (Campos 1992;
Joseph 1992), most scholars who have dealt with the subject consider these
particles to be pragmatic devices that are used to underscore different modal
values or to enhance discourse coherence (Field 1985; Wüest 1985; Pilawa 1990). This pragmatic interpretation gave rise the term “enunciatives” by which these particles are now normally designated.\textsuperscript{1}

This paper is divided into four sections: in section 1, I will sketch the regularities of use of the enunciative particles as observed in current Gascony Occitan. In section 2, I suggest cleft-like constructions as the diachronic source of these markers. After discussing briefly their status as discourse particles and their connective function in narrative discourse in section 3, I will describe them in section 4 as markers of epistemic modality and evidentiality.

1. Distributional patterns of the enunciative particles

The enunciative particles always occur preverbally, but follow grammatical subjects, whether they be expressed lexically or by pronouns. The latter case does not occur frequently, as Occitan is a pro-drop language. The enunciative particles are organized in a paradigm of three basic elements: preverbal que, preverbal e and a functional zero morpheme, representing the pragmatically significant absence of an enunciative particle in surface structure. This latter case has to be distinguished from other cases where the particles are omitted due to syntactic restrictions imposed by topological constraints or sentence phonetics.

The most frequent element of the enunciative paradigm is preverbal que that surfaces in most affirmative main clauses. This is exemplified by the following examples (1) and (2), taken from oral discourse:\textsuperscript{2}

(1) l’ arrasim que madura plan
    ART bunch_of_grapes ENC ripens well
    the grapes ripen well

(2) era que ditz buos e nos que disem bueus
    she ENC says bullocks and we ENC say:PRS.1P bullocks
    she says “buos” and we say “bueus”

Preverbal enunciative que is highly recurrent in contemporary Gascony Occitan and seems to become more and more grammaticalized in main clauses.\textsuperscript{3} Preverbal enunciative e, the second element of the paradigm, is encountered less often in spoken discourse, mainly because of sentence-phonetic constraints. It is found in interrogative sentences and in subordinate clauses; see examples (3) and (4).

(3) e voletz voletz vos asseitar aquí?
    ENC want:PRS.2P REFLEX sit down:INF here
    do you want to sit down here?
Enunciativé particles do not surface in imperatives, as observable in example (5). I would argue for this to be an instance of the zero morpheme as third element of the paradigm.

(5) $\emptyset$ tien-te là dreta que no càdia pas lo veire
ENC hold.IMPY.2S-REFL there right COMP not fall.SUBJ.3SNEG ART.M glass
keep yourself upright so that the glass won't fall down

This general distributional pattern has to be supplemented by a short remark on ongoing developments in current usage of these particles: in my data, the preverbal $e$ is replaced quite often by que in interrogative sentences, as in (6). Furthermore, que also drives out $e$ in an increasing number of subordinate clauses, a tendency first described by Hetzron (1977) and illustrated by example (7):

(6) *que* as pesat quant hè aquò?
ENC have(2S) weighted how.much makes this
have you checked how much it weighs

(7) que soi segur que cada primtemps que n’ i
ENC am sure COMP every spring ENC of.them there
rodilhavan tres o quate
stroll around.IMP.3P three or four
I am sure that every spring three or four of them strolled around

The latter tendency concerns complement and adverbial clauses, but not relative clauses. Generally speaking, the preverbal particle que extends its array of occurrences at the expense of preverbal $e$ but does not really affect the cases where the enunciativé element is expected to surface as zero.

2. Diachronic source of the preverbal enunciativé que

The genesis of the enunciativé particles’ paradigm is impossible to explicate on strictly empirical grounds due to poor evidence from historical texts. One has to bear in mind that the use of enunciativé particles is and probably always has been considered as a typically oral feature and therefore was banned from
written texts. However, diachronic research on Occitan (morpho-)syntax allows at least for a conjectural reconstruction of the particles’ origins.

It seems plausible to consider preverbal *que*, today’s core enunciative particle, as the starting point from which the paradigm evolved. *Que* is known to be the pan-Romance complementizer morpheme, which developed out of different, but closely related Latin pronouns and conjunctions, such as *quod*, *quem* or *quia* (cf. Woolsey 1953, among others). Forms of *que* occur in all modern Romance languages, predominantly as linking morphemes introducing subordinate clauses. It is rather obvious, then, that preverbal enunciative *que* must have some constructional origin involving subordination. However, in order to account for the sequence of constituents and for the preverbal position of the enunciative *que*, some specific kind of intra-sentential subordination must be taken into consideration. In such cases, the morphosyntactic devices of subordination are brought into action not to link different propositions but to make explicit the internal structure of a simple proposition, because the speaker considers appropriate to do so for pragmatic reasons or for reasons due to information structure. Hence I argue for some form of clefting as the source of nowadays’ preverbal enunciative *que* in Gascony Occitan.

Clefting is generally known as a discourse-pragmatic device used to accommodate word order to either some contextually preferred theme-theme structure or to highlight a constituent that the speaker considers the most relevant in a given context and wants to focus on for reasons of expressivity (cf. e.g. Lambrecht 1994, Smits 1989). Although focus is the most common motivation for cleft sentences to be produced, it is worth noting that this is but one of its uses and that theme-theme reordering is equally important (cf. Krötisch / Sabban 1990; Clech-Darbon / Rebuschi / Rialland 1999).

As mentioned before, historical evidence for preverbal enunciative *que* is poor; the same holds for the prototypical cleft sentence, as far as historical Occitan texts are concerned. Nevertheless, there are two cleft-like constructions that are well documented in late-Medieval and early-Modern Occitan (cf. Jensen 1986) and which can be considered as the source constructions out of which the preverbal enunciative *que* arose. The first of these constructions is what French scholars – namely Lafont (1967) – have called the “*que de rattrapage*,” literally the “catch-up *que*”, as shown in (8) and (9), while the second one is the proleptic subordination pattern (cf. Sauzet 1989) as exemplified in (10) to (12).

(8) c’ nos *que* n’ em en doptie *(14th c.; Lafont 1967: 351)*
and we _are(_1P) in doubt
and we _have doubts about it

(9) Paris jou *que* nou souy ny lou traidou Jason
*I am neither Paris nor the traitor Jason* *(early 17th c.; Lafont 1967: 350)*
While the “*que de rattrapage*” is no longer distinguishable in Modern Gascon Occitan from the enunciative *que*, the proleptic subordination pattern, akin to what is known as the “pseudo-relative clause” or “predicative relative clause” in many Romance languages, is still widely used, as shown in the following example from oral speech:

(13) *que pensi lo teatre qu’ei ua lectura publica*

I think that theater is a public lecture

3. The particle status of the enunciative elements

If the hypotheses mentioned summarily in paragraph 2 are right, then preverbal enunciative *que* originated as a complementizer morpheme, whereas I claim sentence-phonetics to be at the origin of preverbal *e*. Before proceeding, it might be necessary to discuss briefly the particle-like status of these preverbal markers. What allows us to consider them, at least on a synchronic level, as discourse particles?

This is not the place to revert to the controversial question of how to define and to delimitate what is a particle (cf. Hansen 1998). Obviously, the mere fact of enunciative morphemes being uninflected elements is not sufficient to attribute particle status to them. But, in addition, Gascon enunciative elements share some more properties with ‘classic’ discourse particles, properties among which are the following:

- they do not have semantic weight derived from their lexical meaning. As a matter of fact, enunciative particles totally lack any lexical meaning;
- they do not contribute to the content meaning of the utterance they appear in. Therefore, they are non-truth-conditional and non-propositional, but rather instructional or procedural in nature;
- they are not totally obligatory and therefore still pragmatically available. However, on-going grammaticalization tends to reduce the pragmatic value of the enunciative elements, and some quantitative analysis of my
data has shown that at least preverbal “que” is much more grammaticalized than discourse particles in Romance languages use to be. This leads up to some characteristics by which enunciative elements in Gascony Occitan differ from ‘classic’ discourse particles:

- apart from being more grammaticalized, they may not be shifted within the utterance but occupy a fixed preverbal slot and may be separated from the finite verb only by clitic pronouns;
- enunciative particles may not cluster in this preverbal slot; unlike discourse particles in many, though not all languages, they are mutually exclusive and may not co-occur with other particle-like elements, as will be shortly demonstrated.

Despite the restrictive structural features by which enunciative markers differ from prototypical discourse particles, these elements seem to fulfill, in a synchronic perspective, two core functions associated with discourse particles:

- to structure the discourse according to theme-rheme-oriented criteria, thus serving as connectives and enhancing discourse coherence (Hansen 1998); and
- to modalize the utterance by increasing or reducing assertive strength and by adding epistemic meaning.

The discourse-structuring value has been claimed in linguistic literature exclusively for preverbal enunciative que. To be brief, according to this analysis, insertion of preverbal que signals theme-rheme continuity (for which one might prefer the term topic-continuity), whereas the zero morpheme in main clauses indicates theme-rheme discontinuity; see example (14), taken from a novel, where a shift of central figures in a narrative unit is marked by zero:

(14) La dauna qu’ avè portat cadièras e los mossurs ∅
    ART.F lady ENC had(3S) carried chairs and ART.MP sirs ENC
    s’ assedon a l’ entorn de la taula (apud Pilawa 1990: 59)
    REFL sit.PAST.3F to ART vicinity of ART.F table
    the lady had brought some chairs and the men sat around the table

This function of preverbal que fits perfectly with the suggested origin of this particle, namely a cleft construction operating on the information-structural level of the utterance. It also fits nicely with the general distributional pattern: que surfaces in main clauses, but is absent from most subordinate clauses, which contain backgrounded information and therefore are not integrated into the theme-rheme structure of the overall discourse. This discourse-organizing purpose covers many uses of que and of the zero morpheme, but does not explain why the enunciative paradigm contains in current usage at least three elements, the third one, as mentioned before, being preverbal e. Another, rather methodological problem is that this discourse-organizing function seems to be
confined to narrative discourse – written texts like the one quoted in (14) more then oral ones – and fails to be convincingly confirmed by spontaneous oral dialogues or interviews.

4. Enunciative particles as markers of assertiveness and evidentiality

In order to fully account for the synchronic variation of preverbal *que*, preverbal *e* and zero, an analysis of these particles as markers of epistemic modality is more promising. Epistemic modality is known to be a core type of modality, but also a rather vague modal category, embracing a large array of different semantic or pragmatic features (Palmer 1986, 1999). A common denominator of these features is that the speaker, in using epistemic modal devices, expresses judgment or subjective knowledge about the states of affairs verbalized in the proposition (s)he puts forward. Modal expressions and elements do not state facts, but comment on facts. In this chapter, I will examine two modal features that relate to the judgment or knowledge about facts conveyed by the utterance, and apply them to the preverbal particles of Gascony Occitan. The features in question are assertiveness, on the one hand, and evidentiality, on the other.

Assertion, though being a widely used notion, is not a very clear modal feature. Generally speaking, assertion is related to the speaker’s commitment towards the truthfulness or veracity of the proposition (s)he utters. Assertion, in linguistic terms, is often associated with the realis/irreales distinction, as only what is factual and real may be asserted. Therefore, at least as far as Romance languages are concerned, assertion and non-assertion are predominantly expressed by verbal inflectional devices, i.e. the use of indicative vs subjunctive mood, subjunctive being the signal of non-assertion or – to put it in a more careful way – of reduced assertiveness (cf. e.g. Raible 1992; Lunn 1995). With the subjunctive getting more and more grammaticalized, the expression of different assertive values by verbal mood is no longer pragmatically available in various Romance languages, namely French. This also holds for Occitan, which follows the French pattern in this respect. However, there are other means of stressing the truthfulness of a proposition, namely adverbs and particles. It is interesting to note that preverbal enunciative particles in Gascony Occitan may alternate with adverbs used precisely in this sense, which is a strong argument in favor of an assertion-marking function of the enunciative particles on the synchronic level; cf. the following examples (15) to (17):

(15) *b’ ei aquò*

\[ \text{ADV} \text{ is this} \]

\[ \text{indeed, that’s it} \]
(16) e après bon be demandam de subvencions
    and after good ADV ask for PRS.1P of grant P
    and then we certainly ask for grants

(17) ja èra un pesacide quan mème
    ADV was(3S) one when self
    it really was a tool to measure acids

These examples contain the evaluative adverb be, from Latin bene, and the originally temporal, but highly desemantized adverb ja, from Latin iam. They are both used to underscore the assertive strength of the proposition put forward; they block, in some cases, the occurrence of the enunciative particle, because they occupy the preverbal slot; see example (18a) and its made-up counterparts (18b-c).

(18a) ja m’ at pagaràs un dia
    ADV me(OBJ) it pay.FUT.2S one day
    I certainly will pay you back one day

(18b) que m’ at pagaràs un dia ja

(18c) * que ja m’ at pagaràs un dia

This has lead some linguists and grammarians to consider be and ja as members of the enunciative paradigm, together with que, e and zero. In my opinion, such an analysis has to be rejected as inadequate, as these elements, though being semantically altered or weakened through pragmaticization, are clearly of adverbial nature and may be shifted to different positions within the utterance (as exemplified by [18b]) while enunciatives may only appear in their preverbal slot. But the alternation and exclusiveness of these assertion-stressing adverbs and the enunciative particles confirm the attitudinal value of these particles, which may express the assertive strength that the speaker wants to attribute to the proposition.

Assertiveness as a modal category marked by the speaker for pragmatic reasons, is a scale rather than a binary distinction. In the light of such an interpretation, it comes as no surprise, then, that the enunciative paradigm has more than two elements. Preverbal que signals unrestricted assumption of the communicative responsibility by the speaker, equaling a high degree of assertiveness. Preverbal e expresses reduced assertiveness, whereas zero indicates that a proposition is unasserted or unworthy of assertion because of being unrealized, dubious, presupposed or backgrounded. But contrary to subjunctive vs indicative mood in Occitan, French and some other Romance languages, the choice between these assertion-marking particles is open, at least as far as subordinate clauses are concerned. In order to mark her or his attitude towards the assertiveness of a syntactically subordinate proposition, the speaker of Modern Gascony Occitan has at his or her disposal the entire range
of preverbal particles, que, e, and zero. It is therefore not surprising to find that enunciative que, described as main clause particle by grammarians, frequently occurs in complement clauses. Complement clauses may have an assertive value comparable or equal to that of main clauses (cf. Hooper 1975; Huddleston 1999), especially when they depend on such main-clause verbs which, according to Blanche-Benveniste (1989), are weakly assertive (“verbes recteurs faibles”). These weakly assertive verbs are chiefly verbs of saying, knowing and believing which may also appear parenthetically, as in examples (19) and (20) taken, again, from oral discourse:

(19) que pensi que aquera idea que`t deu vier
ENC think.PRS.1S COMP this.F idea ENC you(OBJ.2S) must(3S) come.INF
I think this idea must come to your mind

(20) que sabi que jo que i `ei pensat mei d’ un c`op
ENC know(1S) COMP.I ENC there have(1S) think.PCP more of one blow
I know that I have thought more than once on it

It is therefore not astonishing to find in my data many cases where complement clauses depending on such parenthetical or weakly assertive verbs contain que and are thereby marked as asserted, whereas a number of main clauses with these parenthetical verbs do not have the particle que, although it would be expected in such a syntactic environment; see examples (21) and (22):

(21) lo sec qu’a pres Ø sabetz lo sec qu’a pres
ART.M dry ENC has taken ENC know.PRS.2P ENC
the dry (wine) has increased you know the dry has increased

(22) Ø pensi que lo moviment occitan qu’a crotzat
ENC think.PRS.1S COMP ART.M movement occitan ENC has crossed
la mea revolta
ART.M my.F revolt
I think that the Occitan movement came across my revolutionary period of life

It has just been pointed out that assertion is related to the speaker’s commitment towards the truthfulness of what (s)he utters. In other words, assertion-marking is the encoding of a very subjective attitude that the speakers takes towards the utterance and to the degree of communicative responsibility (s)he is willing to assume. The second modal feature that I would like to comment on, is evidentiality. Evidentiality, defined as the expression of the source of knowledge on which a proposition is based, is a pragmatic category that is closely related to but not identical with assertion, or rather assertiveness. I skip, for the sake of brevity, the current discussion whether evidentiality is a distinct modal category of its own right or if it should be subsumed, together with semantically close phenomena, under some wider cover term, such as
“mediativity” (cf. Lazard 1999). Suffice it to say that, in languages with a well-developed evidential system, a distinction is made between direct sensuous observation or indirect sources of information, which can be inferential, hearsay etc. Evidentiality, if linguistically marked, encodes the objective conditions or bases of the speaker’s knowledge, and hereby differs from assertion-marking which is the speaker’s subjective evaluation of her or his knowledge, but evidentiality may provide the fundamental reason for such a subjective evaluation.

Romance languages are known to encode the source of knowledge predominantly by lexical means. Morphological marking of evidentiality is almost totally absent and found at best in the modal values that certain tense forms may exhibit in direct quote and different types of reported speech (cf. Haßler 1998). It is in these contexts of direct quote and reported speech that the enunciative particles in Gascony Occitan show some interesting behavior. Information known by hearsay uses to be less reliable than knowledge acquired through personal observation. Therefore, one may expect that quotations – be they direct or reported – were to be marked by the enunciative particle e, emphasizing the fact that the proposition comes from someone else and that the speaker, in quoting or reporting it, should not be taken as communicatively responsible. This seems to be borne out by my data; but this property of mediated knowledge is not marked on the proposition that is quoted, but on the quotative clause containing the verb of speaking or a similar verb that marks the quotation, relegating this clause to background status. Cf. examples (23) and (24), taken from narratives, for illustration:

(23) ‘Voletz-ve carar!’ e responò la mainada
\(\text{want.IMPV.2P-REFL be_silent.INF ENCLanswer.PAST.3S ART.F girl}\)
\(\text{(apud Joly 1976: 417)}\)

(24) ‘No t’ en anis’ e hasè lo pair
\(\text{not REFL from_there go.SUBJ.2S ENCLmake.IMP.3S ART.M father}\)
\(\text{(apud Joly 1976: 418)}\)

However, the marking of quotative clauses by enunciative e is restricted to cases where the quotative clause follows the quoted utterance. With the quotative clause preceding and introducing the quote, que is used; see example (25), from spoken discourse, and (26), an instance of meta-linguistic pseudo-reported speech.6

(25) lo public adulte que’t ditz: ‘Mes qu’ei possible
\(\text{ART.M audience adult ENCLyou(OBJ.2S) says but ENCL is possible}\)
de hér aquò en gascon?'
\(\text{from do.INF that in Gascon}\)
\(\text{the adult audience says to you: ‘But (how) is it possible to do that in Gascon?’}\)
(26) \textit{jo que' vs disi uei qu' aquestas lengas mespresadas}
\begin{itemize}
\item ENCP you(OBJ.2P) say.PRS.1S today COMP these.F languages despised.FP
\item qu'an la dignitat de lengas de França
\item ENCP have(PRS.3P) ART.F dignity of languages of France
\item I say to you today that these despised languages have the dignity (to be considered) languages of France
\end{itemize}

To conclude, the preverbal enunciative particles in Gascony Occitan are one of a kind within Romance languages, as far as the frequency of use is concerned. Diachronically, the paradigm seems to have evolved out of some constructions affecting primarily the theme-rheme structure; synchronically the modalizing function prevails. The enunciative particles are used as markers of epistemic modality, the central domain of application being the modal feature of assertiveness. Obviously, the successful epistemic use of the different enunciative elements narrows down with the particle \textit{que} getting more grammaticalized and driving out \textit{e} in many contexts. This ongoing process reduces significantly the pragmatic availability of the whole paradigm.

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Notes

1 This term was coined by Ronjat (1913). Cf. Pusch (2001a: 21-58) for an exhaustive review of the linguistic literature on the subject.

2 All examples that are not otherwise referenced are taken from my corpus of spontaneous and semi-spontaneous oral speech; cf. Pusch (2001a: 64-79) for details. – Abbreviations used in the morphemic glosses: ADV = adverb; ART = article; COMP = complementizer; COND = conditional mood; ENC = enunciative particle; F = feminine; FUT = future tense; IMP = imperfect (tense); IMPV = imperative; INF = infinitive; M = masculine; NEG = negation marker; OBJ = object pronoun; PL = plural; PAST = past tense; PCP = participle; PRS = present tense; REFL = reflexive pronoun; REL = relative particle; SUBJ = subjunctive mood.

3 In my corpus data, preverbal \textit{que} surfaces in 88 per cent of all affirmative main clauses; cf. Pusch (2000) and Pusch (2001a: 83-166) for details on this quantitative analysis.

4 Due to considerations of space, I cannot go into details. Suffice it to say that, in my view, enunciative \textit{e} came into being as an epenthetic vowel in front of preverbal enclitic pronouns. Note that in Gascony Occitan the existence of preverbal \textit{que} in main clauses has favored the maintenance of enclitic object pronouns where most Romance languages have shifted to proclitics. From an epenthetic vowel, \textit{e} evolved towards an independent morpheme, functionally opposed to \textit{que}, through a process of secondary morphologicalization. Cf. Pusch (2001b) for a more thorough account.

5 I prefer the term “assertiveness” to describe the speaker’s ostensive marking of assertion, the latter being a general property of predicative propositions.
This behavior is not entirely unexpected; it is known from other languages that quoting and reporting clauses differ syntactically and morpho-syntactically according to their position in relation to the quote or the reported speech, respectively; cf. Volkmann 1999.

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