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# Exceptive constructions: A Dependency-based Analysis

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## Abstract

The goal of this paper is to provide a description of the syntax of exceptive constructions within a dependency framework. These constructions are introduced in English by the markers *except*, *but*, *except for*, *apart from*, *other than*, etc. Examining their syntactic properties across a variety of languages shows that they imply two main types of constructions: The *paradigmatic-EC* and the *hypotactic-EC*. The first type shares many properties with coordination, and it can be integrated into the paradigmatic lists/piles phenomena in which two segments of the utterance pile up on the same syntactic position and whose most famous case is coordination.

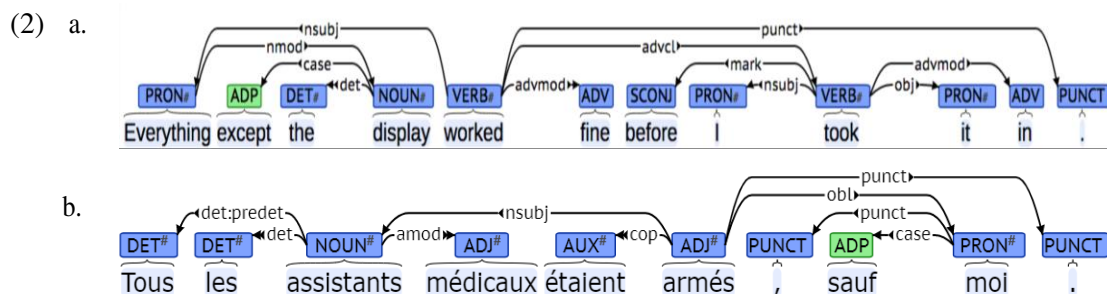
## 1 Introduction

The paper aims to discuss the syntax of the exceptive constructions (henceforth ECs) within a dependency framework and across a variety of languages. These constructions are introduced in English by the markers *except*, *but*, *except for*, *apart from*, *other than*, etc., as exemplified by (1):

- (1) a. I want to clear all variables except one. (mathworks.com)
- b. We talked about everything but mock trial. (nytimes.com)
- c. Netflix operates pretty much everywhere in the world except for China. (shanghai.ist)
- d. No one apart from the man making the threats had been injured. (thelocal.se)

The exception is an understudied phenomenon in syntax. Many studies have been conducted on formal semantics, especially on the theory of Generalized Quantifiers (von Stechow, 1993; Gajewski, 2008; García Álvarez, 2008; Hoeksema, 1987; 1995; Lappin, 1996; Moltmann, 1992; 1995), but quite few on syntax (see Pérez-Jiménez & Marenco-Quibén, 2012, for Spanish; Soltan, 2016, for Egyptian Arabic; and Piot, 2005; Galal & Kahane, 2018 for French).

In many languages, exceptive markers are traditionally analyzed as a preposition in dictionaries and grammars. This is the case of *but* /*except* in English (Eastwood 1994/2002) and *sauf* /*excepté* in French (Grevisse & Goosse 2008). It is also the analysis that is used in the multilingual treebanks annotated corpus Universal Dependencies (hereafter UD): *except* (2a) and *sauf* (2b) are ADP and linked by the relation *case*<sup>1</sup>.



Indeed, the authors consider these analyses problematic. These markers, in their exceptive use, do not have the properties of prepositions but rather those of coordinating conjunctions, since they can be followed, in addition to NPs, by PPs (3a) or AdvPs (3b). Moreover, they commute with a coordinating conjunction like *but* (3c) or a paradigmaticizing adverb (see Nølke, 1983) like *even* (3d).

<sup>1</sup> Available at: [universaldependencies.org](http://universaldependencies.org). (2a) is from UD\_English\_GSD 2.4 and (2b) from UD\_French\_PUD 2.4.

- (3) a. These snakes are found everywhere in Florida except in the Keys. (news-press.com)  
 b. I'm here every day except when it's a holiday and they're closed. (katc.com)  
 c. These snakes are found everywhere in Florida but not in the Keys.  
 d. These snakes are found everywhere in Florida even in the Keys.

Based on a corpus of authentic examples collected from several sources (treebanks, corpora, web, etc.), the authors suggest a binary classification of exceptive constructions. While the first construction is called the *paradigmatic*-ECs<sup>2</sup>, which are syntactically related to coordination, the second is called the *hypotactic*-ECs, which are contrarily related to subordination. The authors tackle the exceptive markers in the paradigmatic use and analyze them as a particular case of paradigmatic lists/piles (Blanche-Benveniste 1990) in which two segments of the utterance pile up on the same syntactic position and whose most famous case is coordination.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the two common classes of ECs observed in English and in other languages, including French, Arabic, and Spanish, and exposes the criteria adopted for the classification of the data. Section 3 is dedicated to the analysis of the paradigmatic-ECs as a particular case of paradigmatic lists/piles; a generic notion that can subsume exception and coordination.

## 2 The two common types of exceptive constructions in English and other languages

In this section, the two common classes of ECs observed in English and other languages are presented. In the literature on exception, a binary classification of ECs in English has been identified since Hoeksema (1987, 1995): *connected exceptives* and *free exceptives*. This classification has been adopted in other languages, e.g. Spanish (Perez-Jiménez & Mareno-Quibén, 2012) and Egyptian Arabic (Soltan, 2016). The two types are canonically illustrated in English in (4).

- (4) a. Every day but/except Sunday it was raining.  
 b. Except for Sunday, it was raining every day. (Hoeksema, 1987, p. 100)

The study adopts the term *exceptive phrase* (hereafter EP) to refer to the group consisting of an exceptive marker and a following XP such as *except Sunday* in the example (4a). Furthermore, the NP that an exception relates to *every day* is called antecedent, while the XP argument of the exceptive marker *Sunday* is referred to as the excepted element.

Many authors, in the literature on exception, postulate that, on the one hand, the EP in the connected exceptives is associated with an NP that must contain a universal quantifier and that, on the other hand, the free exceptives are compatible with non-universal quantifiers such as *most*, *many* and *few*, quasi-universal like *the majority*, as well as generic sentences. Note that, on the basis of attested data, this characterization is rejected in English (cf. García Álvarez, 2008)<sup>3</sup>, in French (cf. Galal & Kahane, 2018)<sup>4</sup> and in Arabic (cf. Galal, 2019)<sup>5</sup>. The universal quantifiers are not the only ones possible in the connected exceptives. Quantifiers such as *most*, *many* and *few* are also possible<sup>6</sup>.

Furthermore, the authors of this paper prefer to use the terms *paradigmatic*-ECs and *hypotactic*-ECs to *connected exceptives* and *free exceptive* because the term *connected* belong to English *but*-phrase that can only occur in contiguous position relative to the antecedent (García Álvarez, 2008, p. 113). On the contrary, the EP introduced by *except* in English, *sauf/excepté* in French and *'illā* in Arabic can occur in noncontiguous positions, as shown below.

<sup>2</sup> *Paradigmatic* vs *syntagmatic* and *hypotactic* vs *paratactic* are generally opposed. As Blanche-Benveniste (1990) has pointed out, paradigmatic constructions are also syntagmatic, since the conjuncts maintain both a paradigmatic relationship (possibility of commuting with each other) and a syntagmatic relationship (they can combine with each other). Moreover, it is not a paratactic construction, since the construction has a clearly identifiable marker (*except*, *sauf*, *'illā*, etc.).

<sup>3</sup> (i) a. Kate is an actress who has played many roles except that of a real woman.  
 b. Karadzic is a moderate man in most things but politics. (García Álvarez, 2008, p.13, 114)

<sup>4</sup> (ii) Le temps [...] sera ensoleillé sur la plupart des régions française, sauf le Sud-Ouest [...] (rtl.fr)  
 Le temps sera ensoleillé in la plupart régions française sauf le Sud-Ouest  
 The weather will be sunny in most regions French except the South-West  
 'The weather will be sunny in most French regions, except the South-West [...]'

<sup>5</sup> (iii) (الإرهاب ضرب معظم الدول إلا بريطانيا) (albawabhnews.com)  
 al-'irhāb ḡaraba mu'ṣam ad-duwal 'illā briṭānyā  
 DEF-terrorism hit.PRES.3SG most DEF-country.PL except Great Britain  
 'Terrorism has hit most countries except Great Britain'

<sup>6</sup> However, this constraint is confirmed in Spanish. According to Pérez-Jiménez & Mareno-Quibén (2012, p. 585), the connected constructions whose main clause does not include an expression of universal quantifiers is ungrammatical.

The classification is based on strictly syntactic criteria: (i) The linear position of the exceptive phrase, (ii) the syntactic category of the excepted element and (iii) the possibility or not to coordinate the EP.

The paradigmatic-ECs are introduced in English by the items *but* and *except*; while the hypotactic-ECs are introduced by the lexical units *except for*, *apart from*, *other than*, etc.

## 2.1 The linear position of the exceptive phrase

The EP in the paradigmatic-ECs allows only two positions. While the first position is adjacent to the antecedent (5a), the second is at the right periphery either adjacent (5b) or nonadjacent to the antecedent (5c).

- (5) a. All children, except one, grow up. (goodreads.com)  
b. The discount applies to everything except fuel [...]. (moneytalksnews.com)  
c. Everything was great, except the weather. (tripadvisor.com)

The EP in the paradigmatic-ECs is not allowed to be before the antecedent and particularly in the fronted position (6a). It does not also accept to be noncontiguous without being at the right periphery (6b).

- (6) a. \*Except the weather, everything was great.  
b. \*Everything was, except the weather, great.

The hypotactic-ECs behave differently. These constructions allow the abovementioned two syntactical positions. They can be adjacent to the antecedent (7a), postposed in a position either contiguous (7b) or noncontiguous (7c). They also, unlike the paradigmatic-ECs, allow the fronted position (7d) and the insertion in the VP (7e).

- (7) a. All data except for Head Start data are from the U.S. Department of Labor [...]. (ed.gov)  
b. Extreme right is gaining ground in all of Europe, except for Wallonia. (brusselstimes.com)  
c. Everything is right except for the Price. (seekingalpha.com)  
d. Except for killings, all crimes drop in Duterte's 1st year. (rappler.com)  
e. No one was, except for the man who played him, Marion Morrison. An actor and man with true grit. (manchesterinklink.com)

## 2.2 The syntactic categories of the excepted element

In this section, the possibilities of the connection between the markers and the different syntactic categories of the excepted element are presented. The examination of naturally occurring data shows that the exceptive markers in the paradigmatic-EC can be combined with constituents of different parts of the speech. They can be combined with NPs, as shown in the example below, but more interestingly is that they can be followed by a PP (8a) or an AdvP (8b).

- (8) a. The prison has closed-circuit cameras in every corner except in her cell. (The New York Times)  
b. Lorraine Bower is just a regular graduate student, except when she's in her Army uniform. (The Daily Orange)<sup>7</sup>

On the contrary, the exceptive markers in the hypotactic-ECs can only be combined with an NP (9a vs b).

- (9) a. I agree with everybody except with John.  
b. \*I agree with everybody except for with John.

## 2.3 The possibility or not to coordinate the sequence introduced by the markers

In the corpus, the authors have not found occurrences introduced by *but/except* in English, by *sauf/excepté* in French and by *'illā* in Arabic where the EP presents the possibility to coordinate, like in the constructed example (10a). On the contrary, the exceptive markers in the hypotactic-ECs allow the repetition before each coordinated phrase (10b).

- (10) a. \*I will be there every day but/except Monday and but/except Tuesday.  
b. The incidence of cancer (except for cervical cancer, and except for the north-eastern state of Mizoram) is

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<sup>7</sup> Note that the EC, in this example, is realized without the explicit presence of the antecedent. The example can, therefore, be interpreted, as follows: *Lorraine Bower is just a regular graduate student (on all times), except when she's in her Army uniform*. This case is discussed in more detail in the following section.

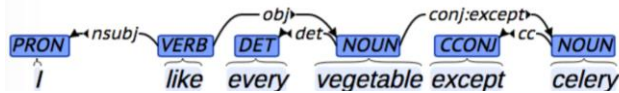
much lower than that in countries that can be said to be in a similar epidemiological transition as India [...] (thelancet.com).

### 3 The analysis of the paradigmatic-ECs as a case of paradigmatic lists/piles constructions

The syntactic behavior of the paradigmatic-ECs testifies that these constructions behave very similarly as coordination. The fact that exception is not coordination necessarily leads the authors to introduce a notion that subsumes exception and coordination. This notion is the paradigmatic lists/piles, constructions in which two segments of the utterance pile up on the same syntactic position and whose most famous case is coordination along with other phenomena like reformulation (Blanche-Benveniste, 1990; Gerdes & Kahane, 2009; Nølke, 1983). Exception can be, therefore, analyzed in the same way as coordination.

In the UD annotation scheme, the coordination is encoded by the relation *conj* between the two conjuncts and a relation *cc* from the second conjunct to the coordinating conjunction (CCONJ). The study uses the relation *conj* for all paradigmatic relations and indicates that it is a coordination or an exception by an extension to the label: *conj:coord* for coordination and *conj:except* for exception<sup>8</sup>.

(11)



In this construction, the EP forms a phrase with its antecedent because the EP must always be after the antecedent, but it is not necessarily contiguous to it. It must be noted that this also arises with coordination, such as the French example (12) in which the second conjunct is placed in a postponed position of the statement, without being adjacent to the first conjunct, even if it is much more common and grammaticalized with paradigmatic-ECs. This is a special case of extraposed complement (Botalla, 2019).

(12) Cela vient de l'école, ici, on est puni si on coupe la parole à un camarade. Et d'une tradition rurale encore très forte. (Est Républicain journal)

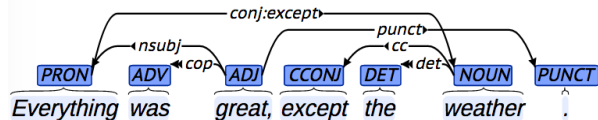
Cela vient de l'école, ici, on est puni si on coupe la parole  
 this comes from school here we are punished if we cut the word

à un camarade. Et d'une tradition rurale encore très forte  
 to a comrade And from a tradition rural still very strong

*'This comes from school, here, we are punished if we cut a comrade word. And from a rural tradition still very strong'*

When a coordination phrase is discontinuous, the second conjunct is systematically rejected at the right periphery, forming a new illocutionary unit. In other words, the discontinuity of ECs, as illustrated by (13), does not invalidate their analysis as paradigmatic constructions.

(13)



The ECs can occur without the explicit presence of the antecedent, especially in the case where the excepted element fulfills the function of an adverbial clause, such as in example (8) above. This property does not distinguish between

<sup>8</sup> There are other types of paradigmatic relations that should be considered as particular cases of *conj*. This concerns apposition such as *John, one of my friend*, which is annotated with the relation *appos* in UD, but could be annotated better *conj:appos*. For reformulation, UD proposes the relation *reparandum*, which goes from the second to the first conjunct. In some sense, paradigmatic relations are not as directed as pure dependency relations between a governor and subordinated element. In the case of a reparation, the second conjunct replaces the first and it can make sense to allocate the relation coming from the governor. Another solution would be to use a sub-type of *conj*. As shown by Blanche-Benveniste (1990), there are many cases where a reformulation is not a reparation and cannot easily be differentiated from a coordination (*she is a good linguist, a computational linguist*).

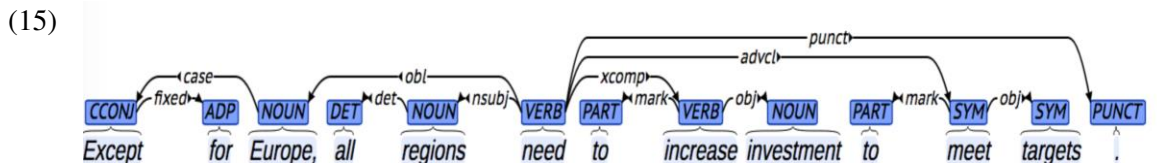
paradigmatic-EC and coordination. The absence of a first conjunct also occurs with coordination. The coordination with *and* and *but* also may have no antecedent (Gerdes & Kahane, 2009):

- (14) a. He speaks French and well.  
 b. He speaks English, but badly.

In these examples, there is a coordination with two illocutionary units (Gerdes & Kahane, 2015, p. 109). In (14a), the speaker makes two assertions: *'he speaks French'* and *'he speaks French well'*.

Note that the analysis of the exceptive markers as coordinating conjunctions in this paper is supported by argumentations similar to the ones made in English by Harris (1982), Reinhart (1991), and García Álvarez (2008), in Spanish by Perez-Jiménez & Mareno-Quibén (2012), and in Egyptian Arabic by Soltan (2016). Nevertheless, none of them introduce the concept of paradigmatic construction and properly explain the link between exception and coordination.

For the hypotactic-ECs, the EP has a much freer order and is not necessarily contiguous to the antecedent. Thus, it is no longer possible to consider that it forms a phrase with its antecedent. We consider that the EP is a PP modifying the main verb. The marker *except for* is analyzed as an idiomatic adposition (marked with the link *fixed* in UD, *except* and *for* keep their POS, the POS of the idiom does not appear, but the relation *case* indicates that it is analyzed as an adposition)<sup>9</sup>.



### 3.1 The third type of exceptive constructions in Arabic: Paratactic-ECs

In Modern Standard Arabic, there is a problem concerning the analysis of the EC introduced by *'illā* + ACC as a paradigmatic list construction. According to the grammatical system of Arabic, the NP that follows *'illā* in affirmative ECs systematically takes the accusative case whatever the case of its antecedent. In negative ECs, either it takes the accusative case, or it takes the same case as the one assigned to its antecedent. This accusative case goes against the analysis of this construction as a paradigmatic construction and of *'illā* as a coordinating conjunction, since in a coordinating construction the two conjuncts usually carry the same grammatical case. It also goes against the analysis of *'illā* as a preposition because, in Arabic, prepositions are always followed by the genitive, while the accusative is used for direct objects of verbs.

In fact, the identification of the governor of this accusative case in the NP followed by *'illā* in the affirmative construction has been the subject of vivid debates between Arabic grammarians since the eighth century. Eight different analyses have been suggested by the ancient Arab grammarians. One of them is proposed by the grammarians of the Koufa School in the ninth century (Al-Anbary, XII<sup>e</sup> [1961, p. 261]) considering that the particle *'illā* itself which imposes the accusative case on its complement. According to this analysis, *'illā* replaces an ellipsed verb meaning *'astaṭnī* (أستنتني 'I except/I make the exception') (16). This analysis, therefore, considers the EC as a binary construction formed of two juxtaposed clauses.

- (16) a. (حضر الوزراء إلا وزيرَ البترول)  
 ḥaḍara al-wūzarā' 'illā wazīr-a al-bitrūl  
 come.PAST.3SG DEF-minister.PL except minister-ACC DEF-petroleum  
 'The Ministers came except the Minister of Petroleum'
- b. (حضر الوزراء، أستنتني وزيرَ البترول)  
 ḥaḍara al-wūzarā' 'astaṭnī wazīr-a al-bitrūl  
 come.PAST.3SG DEF-minister.PL except.PRES.1SG minister-ACC DEF-petroleum  
 '[The Ministers came], [I except the Minister of Petroleum]'

<sup>9</sup> It could be possible to introduce a sub-relation *case:except* in order to have a common feature *except* for every exceptive constructions.

The authors argue that the construction *'illā* + ACC is a paratactic construction that is common in Arabic, where two clauses are juxtaposed and form a unique illocutionary unit (17).

- (17) (رأى عليّ الأولادَ يلعبون)  
 ra'a 'aliyy-u-n al-'awlād-a yal'ab-ūna  
 see.PAST.3SG Ali-NOM-INDEF DEF.children.PL-ACC play.PRES.3PL  
*Lit. Ali saw the children they play*  
*Ali saw the children playing'*

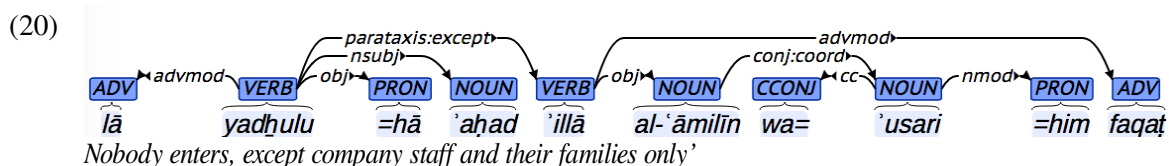
In the *'illā* + ACC construction, the EP must be at the right periphery (which is the canonical position of paratactic clause). It does not allow either the fronted position (18) or the position contiguous to its antecedent but in fronted position relative to the verb (19a vs b).

- (18) \* (إلا واحداً هذه قطتي مات جميع أولادها)  
 \*'illā wāḥid-a-n haḍihi qiṭa=tī māta ḡamī' awlāda=hā  
 except one-ACC-INDEF DEM cat=PRO die.PAST.3SG all children.PL=PRO  
*Lit. that is my cat, have been dead, except one, all his children'*

- (19) a. (كل أبطال المشهد رحلوا إلا واحداً) (elwatannews.com)  
 kull 'abṭāl al-mašhad raḥalū 'illā wāḥid-a-n  
 all star.PL DEF-scene die.PAST.3PL except one-ACC-INDEF  
*'All the stars of the scene are dead, except one'*

- b. \* (كل أبطال المشهد إلا واحداً رحلوا)  
 \*kull 'abṭāl al-mašhad 'illā wāḥid-a-n raḥalū  
 all star.PL DEF-scene except one-ACC-INDEF die.PAST.3PL  
*Lit. All the stars of the scene, except one, are dead.*

The authors agree with the traditional Arabic grammar considering that *'illā* in this construction has a verbal form. According to this analysis, *'illā* + ACC is a binary construction formed of two juxtaposed clauses. In the UD analysis (20), *'illā* will be categorized as a verb and will be linked with the relation *parataxis:except* for the paratactic-EC.



## 4 Conclusion

In this paper, a syntactic description of exceptive constructions (ECs) within a dependency framework was proposed. Based on the distributional properties of the exceptive phrase, on the combinatorial possibilities of the exceptive markers with different parts of speech and on their (in)ability to coordinate, the authors suggested a binary classification of exceptive constructions observed in a many languages: the *paradigmatic*-ECs and the *hypotactic*-ECs (eventually a tripartite classification in Arabic with *paratactic*-ECs). The study considers, moreover, that the markers in the paradigmatic-ECs are coordinating conjunctions and can be integrated into the paradigmatic lists/piles constructions, a generic notion that can subsume both coordination and exception, and in which two segments of the utterance pile up on the same syntactic position.

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