

Some Questions (and Answers) about Cleft Sentences

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Overview & Main Claim

Goal of this study: to correlate various assumptions about *est-ce que/qui* questions in French with various assumptions about cleft sentences.

Main Claim: two competing syntactic strategies for cleft constructions

- First strategy: the (partial) movement strategy
- Second strategy: the 'relative' strategy

Related claims and/or issues:

- (Contrastive?) Focus and accentuation
- Syntactic strategies in other languages
- Pseudo-relatives and *que/qui* alternation
- Reconstruction (& Resumption)

1. How it all started...

-Induced production of embedded questions from French native children (see (1) from Oiry (2011a/b)), and a highly productive strategy for adults too (see (2)):

(1) *Tu crois *(que c'est) quoi qui est caché dans le sac ?*
You think (that it is) what that is hidden in the bag
"What do you think is hidden in the bag?"

(2) *(Tu crois que) c'est qui que Jean a vu ?*
You think that it is who that John has seen
(Lit.) "(You think that) it's who that John saw?"

-What it could be...¹

- A partial movement construction (correlated with full *wh-* movement)
- A 'cleft-relative' strategy: *in-situ* question (correlated with a relative clause)

-What linguists intuitively tend to think about it: the *in-situ* strategy

-Why? Maybe because of the following data...

(3) *(Je crois que) c'est [Marie / qui] que Jean a vue.*
I think that it is Mary who that John has seen

-Our main claim: the two independent strategies co-exist, and they just correlate with the syntactic ambiguity of cleft constructions and *est-ce que/qui* questions (see Munaro & Pollock (2005)).

Ambiguity of clefts: the syntactic position of the clefted constituent...is it really *in-situ*?

Ambiguity of 'est-ce que/qui': as a question marker (C°) or decomposed (*est*_{AUX.}-*ce*_{SUBJ.})?

2. Two morphosyntactic strategies: arguments for the claim

Evidence for the co-existence of the two independent syntactic/cognitive strategies...

- The form of the complementizer
- Structures with *donc* 'then' in full *wh-* movement

2.1. Complementizer/Relative Pronoun

The 2 strategies clearly show up when extracting (out of) Prepositional Phrases (PPs) in French:

- Partial movement strategy (displacement of the *wh-* constituent)
 - ⇒ some form of pied-piping (the whole PP)
 - ⇒ see examples in (4)a and (5)a

¹ Two strategies are discussed here. A third one could be posited, namely coordination of two questions, but whose effect is pretty similar to the second strategy introduced here. See Dayal (2000) for discussion.

- ‘Relative’ strategy (presence of a relative clause)
 - ⇒ specific relative pronouns such as *dont* (“of whom”), *à qui* (“to whom”), *avec lequel* (“with which”)
 - ⇒ see examples in (4)b and (5)b

(4) a. *C’est de quoi que tu as parlé ?*

It is of what that you have talked

b. *C’est quoi dont tu as parlé ?*

It is what *Rel* you have talked

“What is it that you talked about?”

(5) a. *C’est avec quel couteau que tu as coupé le gâteau ?*

It is with which knife that you have cut the cake

b. *C’est quel couteau avec lequel tu as coupé le gâteau ?*

It is which knife with which you have cut the cake

“Which knife is it that you cut the cake with?”

2.2. Structures with *donc* (“then”)

The 2 strategies show up with full *wh*-movement too: presence versus absence of the adverb *donc* (“then”):

(6) *De quoi/qui est-ce que tu parles ?*

of what/whom is it that you talk

(7) *Qu’ / Qui est-ce donc dont tu parles ?*

what/who is it then *Rel* you talk

⇒ *dont* relative clause available in presence of the adverb *donc* (see (7))

3. Two morphosyntactic strategies: analyses

3.1. The (‘partial’) movement strategy

Properties of the strategy (related to expletive analyses of clefts, as in Chomsky (1977)):

- (Partial) movement of the *wh*-constituent from the *in-situ* position
- Focus Particle *c’est (que)*
- one intonation phrase (INTP) associated to the ‘cleft’, with contrastive focus on the displaced constituent, licensed by the Foc. Particle *c’est (que)*²

(8) *(Tu crois que) [[Foc“ c’est DE QUOI que il a parlé de quoi]] INTP*
 You think that Foc. of what that he has talked

- What triggers movement...
 - ⇒ Partial movement of the *wh*-constituent? YES
 - ⇒ Interrogative Movement? Maybe NOT, related to Focus
 - ⇒ Main argument: pied-piping occurs in answers too (see (9))

(9) *(Je crois que) c’est de son travail qu’il a parlé.*
 I think that Foc. of his job that-he has talked

- Partial Movement in other languages: Simple Partial Movement always related to a Focus particle (see Fanselow (2006), and Saddy (1991))

(10) a. *Bill tahu Tom men-cintai siapa?*

Bill knows Tom *Trans*-loves who

b. *Bill tahu siapa yang Tom cintai?*

Bill knows who Foc. Tom loves

“Who does Bill know that Tom loves?”

(Bahasa Indonesian)

² Focus, when contrastive, does not have to coincide with the right-edge of the intonation phrase (see Erteschik-Shir (1997)).

(11) *Buku-buku yang saya cium.*
 books Foc. I love
 "I love BOOKS."

- How the 'partial' movement strategy correlates with full *wh-* movement: Foc. particle *c'est que* (Foc°) and Quest. Particle *est-ce que* (C°) in a complementary distribution.
 ⇒ The focus position is not present anymore (no presupposition)

(12) [*c' De quoi [c' est-ce que] (tu crois qu') il a parlé de-quoi]]*
 of what Quest.Prt. you think that he has talked

3.2. The 'relative' strategy

Properties of the strategy (related to extraposition analyses of clefts, as in Den Dikken (2006)):

- Copular/identificational construction (*être* 'be' as I°) and *wh-* constituent *in-situ*
- extraposed relative clause, analysed here as a multidominance structure (see Bachrach & Katzir (2008))
- two intonation phrases (INTP) associated to the 'cleft', with (non-)contrastive focus on the *wh-* constituent at the right-edge of the first INTP³

(13) (*Tu crois que*) [[*I' [D' [D° ce]] est [D' [D° QUOI]]]] INTP
 you think that it is what
 C"
 [*dont il a parlé*] INTP
 Rel he has talked*

- Why multidominance? Constraints on the relative pronouns and on the interpretation of the relative clause: between restrictive and appositive...

³ An element at the right-edge of the INTP in French can be assigned non-contrastive focus (see Hamlaoui (2007)).

- How the 'relative' strategy correlates with full *wh-* movement: gives rise to regular subject (*ce*)-auxiliary (*est*) inversion
 ⇒ The focus position is still present in the *in-situ* position (presupposition)

(14) [*c' Qu' est [I' [D' [D° ce]] est [D' [D° QU']]]] INTP
 what is it is what
 C"
 [*dont il a parlé*] INTP
 Rel he has talked*

First potential problem: the output is not always grammatical in French...

(15) **Qu' est-ce dont tu parles ?*
 what is it Rel you talk

Solution: related to the constraint on the non-contrastive focus at the right-edge of INTP forces the presence of an item like *donc* (to fill the right-edge)...

(16) [*Qu' est-ce donc*] INTP *dont tu parles ?*
 what is it then Rel you talk

Second potential problem: it seems better sometimes...

(17) *Qui est-ce dont tu parles ?*
 who is it Rel you talk

Solution: might be related to Focus again, as *Qui* [animate] (in (17)) is a strong/tonic form whereas *Qu'* [inanimate] (in (15)) is a weak/clitic form

(18) [*Qui est-ce QUI*] INTP *dont tu parles ?*
 what is it then Rel you talk

⇒ *Qui* satisfies the focus constraint at the right-edge in the 'reconstructed' position

4. Further arguments for the analyses

Three major distinctions between the two strategies:

- One or two intonation phrases for the ‘cleft’ construction
- Absence or presence of a relative clause
- The *in-situ* position in the embedded clause or as an argument of the copula

Diagnostics: presence of specific relative pronouns and/or the adverb *donc*

⇒ 2nd strategy with 2 intonation phrases + a relative clause

4.1. On Focus ‘holders’...

Second strategy (‘relative’ strategy) associated with:

- Two intonation phrases [cleft]_{INTP} - [relative clause]_{INTP}
- A (non-)contrastive focus at the right-edge of the first INTP

Natural predictions:

- There needs to be an item to fill the right-edge

(19) ??*Quel étudiant est-ce dont tu parles ?*
 which student is-it *Rel* you talk

- Several items could in principle fill the right-edge

(20) *Quel étudiant est-ce donc / d'antre / exactement dont tu parles ?*
 which student is-it then / good heavens /precisely *Rel* you talk

Correlation: full *wh-* movement related to the first (partial movement) strategy gets rid of the focus position (Foc.Prt → Quest.Prt.)...presence of an adverb should be odd.

(21) ??*De quel étudiant est-ce donc/d'antre /exactement que tu parles ?*
 of which student is-it then/good heavens/precisely that you talk

4.2. Stranding *c'est (que/qui)*...

The status of *c'est (que/qui)* :

- A Focus Particle in the first strategy, which disappears with full *wh-* movement
- A copular sentence in the second strategy, with a requirement to fill the right-edge of the first INTP

Predictions: stranding *c'est (que/qui)* should be...

- impossible with the 1st strategy (no Foc.Prt. anymore)

(22) **De quoi penses-tu que c'est que Jean a parlé ?*
 of what think-you that *Foc.* that John has talked

- highly constrained with the 2nd strategy (only when the right-edge can be filled)

(23) ??*Que penses-tu que c'est dont Jean a parlé ?*
 what think-you that it-is *Rel* John has talked

(24) *Qui crois-tu que c'est ~~qui~~ dont Jean a parlé ?*
 who think-you that it-is *Rel* John has talked

4.3. Clefts and Relative clauses...

The status of the embedded clause (CP):

- A subordinate clause for the first strategy⁴
- A clear relative clause for the second strategy

Natural prediction: presence of a (further) relative clause (RC) should be possible with the first strategy only

⁴ The status of the embedded clause for the this strategy is highly controversial: a subordinate clause, (part of) a small clause, a free relative,...

The ambiguous case (both strategies available):

- (25) a. *Qui est-ce que Paul a invité [RC que Marie aime] ?* Full wh- movement
 who *Quest.Prt.* Paul has invited that Mary loves
- b. *C'est qui que Paul a invité [RC que Marie aime] ?* (Partial) focus movement
Foc. who that Paul has invited that Mary loves ?
- c. *Paul a invité qui [RC que Marie aime] ?* In-situ
 Paul has invited who that Mary loves
 "Who did Paul invite that Mary loves?"

Forcing 1st strategy (pied-piping + complementizer)

- (26) a. *De qui est-ce que Paul a parlé [RC que Marie aime] ?* Full wh- movement
 of who *Quest.Prt.* Paul has talked that Mary loves
- b. *C'est de qui que Paul a parlé [RC que Marie aime] ?* (Partial) focus movement
Foc. of who that Paul has talked that Mary loves
- c. *Paul a parlé de qui [RC que Marie aime] ?* In-situ
 Paul has talked of who that Mary loves
 "Who did Paul talked about that Mary loves?"

Forcing 2nd strategy ('dont' relative pronoun, and the adverb 'donc')

- (27) a. *??Qui est-ce donc dont Paul a parlé [RC que Marie aime] ?* Full wh-movement
 who is-it then *Rel* Paul has talked that Mary loves
- b. *??C'est qui donc dont Paul a parlé [RC que Marie aime] ?* In-situ
 it-is who then *Rel* Paul has talked that Mary loves
 ??"Who is it then that Paul talked about that Mary loves?"

⇒ Need for an item to coordinate the two relative clause

- (28) a. *Qui est-ce (donc) [dont Paul a parlé] ET [que Marie aime] ?*
- b. *C'est qui (donc) [dont Paul a parlé] ET [que Marie aime] ?*

4.4. Reconstruction

Reconstruction phenomenon: the fact that fronted items may (have to) be 'reconstructed' within the movement chain for interpretation matters

The *in-situ* position relative to the two strategies:

- within the 'embedded' clause for the 1st strategy
- the argument of the copula for the 2nd strategy

Natural prediction: reconstruction data should differ with respect to the clefting strategy

- (29) **Quelle photo de Paul_i est-ce qu'il_i a déchirée ?*
 which picture of Paul *Quest.Prt.* he has torn

- (30) *Quelle photo de Paul_i est-ce donc qu' il_i a déchirée ?*
 Which picture of Paul is-it then that he has torn

-Explanation for the contrast (following Erteschik-Shir (1997)):

1. Fronted *wh-* items have to be reconstructed to 'locate' the variable associated with them
2. Reconstructed positions are limited to the ones that allow for non-contrastive focus, at the right-edge of INTP

- (31) **Quelle photo de Paul_i est-ce qu'il_i a déchirée ~~x_i photo de Paul_i~~ ?*
 which picture of Paul *Quest.Prt.* he has torn

- (32) *[Quelle photo de Paul_i est-ce donc ~~x_i photo de Paul_i~~]_{INTP} qu' il_i a déchirée ?*
 which picture of Paul is-it then that he has torn

-And the same phenomenon appears with embedded contexts:

- (33) *[Quelle photo de Paul_i est-ce que tu crois ~~x_i photo de Paul_i~~]_{INTP} qu'il_i a déchirée ?*
 which picture of Paul *Quest.Prt.* you think that he has torn

Conclusion

-Main claim: two independent strategies for clefting

- The (partial) movement strategy with a Focus Particle, one INTP and correlated with a Question Particle in case of full *wh*-movement
- The 'relative' strategy with a copular construction, two INTPs and correlated with regular inversion in case of full *wh*-movement.

-Main arguments:

- Pied-piping versus *dont* relative clauses
- Focus 'holders' with the 2nd strategy
- Presence versus absence of a (further) relative clause
- Distinct reconstruction data

-Further issues:

- On the semantics of the two constructions...

The partial movement strategy: contrastive focus forces alternatives to be contextually given (the alternatives are presupposed)

The 'relative' strategy: focus can be non-contrastive, hence alternatives need not be specified by the context (existential presupposition only, brought by the identificational *c'est*)

Prediction: we should be able to find contexts where one strategy would prevail over the other

-Context 1: I'm not sure whether you talked about Mary or Paul, so...

-Context 2: I know that you talked about somebody, but I want to know who, so...

- On the status of the embedded clause and the link with a subject-object asymmetry

Building on Koopman & Sportiche (2009): the embedded clause as a small clause only when the subject is extracted (not the object)

Building on Hamlaoui (2007): clefted answers to non-clefted questions limited to subjects too (not with objects)...

- On the (un)availability of resumption in clefts

When resumption becomes available in clefts...with embedded contexts (see Kizu (2005))

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