

French Dislocation

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This thesis provides a comprehensive analysis of dislocation in spoken French in terms of syntax and 'pragmatics' and its acquisition by children. In dislocated constructions, an element appears in the periphery of the sentence and is usually resumed by another element inside the sentence. Most dislocated elements are topics. Topics usually encode what the sentence is about.

- (1) Tintin_i, il_i est connu.
Tintin he is famous
'Tintin is famous.'

The foundations of this research lie in the establishment of solid diagnostics for dislocated constructions and a detailed description of the distribution of dislocated elements in a corpus of spontaneous speech (including varieties spoken in Belgium, Canada and France). This required resolving two controversial issues in the study of spoken French: (a) subject clitics are argued to be arguments in the most common varieties of spoken French (against the claim that such elements are agreement morphemes, e.g. Auger 1994); and (b) prosodic diagnostics traditionally used in syntactic analyses to identify left-dislocated elements are shown to be partly unfounded. In particular, the possible insertion of a pause between the dislocated element and the rest of the sentence is shown *not* to be a decisive criterion.

The field of enquiry is wider than one might assume, following traditional assumptions in the literature. Subject dislocation (as in (1)) and object dislocation (as in (2)) are treated here on a par and the presence of a resumptive a clitic is shown to be obligatory only to the extent that that clitic would be obligatory in the absence of dislocated element (all other things being equal) (3).

- (2) Tintin_i, je le_i connais.
Tintin I him know
'I know Tintin.'

- (3) a. Les frites, j' Ø adore. (Generic interpretation)
the chips I adore
'I love chips.'
b. J'adore. (Generic interpretation)
I adore
'I love chips.' (recoverable from the context)

All dislocated elements in spoken French are argued to instantiate a single phenomenon, whether they appear in the left- or the right-periphery of the sentence (4), whether they are resumed by an element inside the sentence 'nucleus' or not, and whether or not that resumptive element is pronominal (as in (4)) or not (as in the so-called Hanging Topic Left Dislocation construction, illustrated in (5)).

- (4) Je le_i connais, Tintin_i.
 I him know Tintin
 'I know Tintin.'
- (5) Plastic Bertrand_i, j'ai connu ce farfelu_i dans les années 80.
 Plastic Bertrand I-have known that weirdo in the years 80
 'I knew that weirdo Plastic Bertrand in the 80's.'

The central part of the thesis develops a theoretical, modular account of dislocated constructions in spoken French in terms of syntax and pragmatics.

Evidence is presented (on the basis of a judgement task involving native speakers from Belgium, Canada and France) to the effect that dislocated constructions are not sensitive to islands in spoken French. An appropriate context was provided each time to trigger the necessary topic interpretation of the dislocated element. Because of the observed insensitivity to islands, the relation between the dislocated element and its resumptive cannot be captured in terms of syntactic movement (whether it be covert movement of an operator, as in e.g. Anagnostopoulou 1997 or Rizzi 1997 or overt movement of the dislocated phrase, as in e.g. Iatridou 1990).

A base-generation account is proposed, whereby dislocated elements are adjoined to a 'performative' maximal projection. This is inspired (with a slight twist) by the idea that a 'rule of predication' is involved in dislocated structures, as proposed by Gundel (1975); Chomsky (1977), and more recently Iatridou (1990); Erteschik-Shir (1997); Barbosa (2000).

In spoken French, the performative phrase corresponds in most cases to CP (as in (6-a)) or TP (as in (6-b)), but in certain circumstances it can consist of a smaller projection such as PP, as in (6-c). Such instances of dislocated verbless utterances are argued *not* to be amenable to an analysis in terms of ellipsis along the lines of e.g. Lobeck (1995); Merchant (forthcoming). Rather, *what you see is what you get*: the root projection is the small projection itself, i.e. PP in (6-c).

- (6) a. Moi_i, que je_i tire Crocro par la queue?
 me that I pull Crocro by the tail
 '(You want) me to pull Crocro by the tail?'
- b. Je savais pas que les cochons_i, ils_i avaient des salles de
 I knew not that the pigs they have INDEF rooms of
 bain, moi.
 bath me
 'I didn't know that pigs had bathrooms.'
- c. Avec un bec bleu, lui.
 with a beak blue him
 'That's one with a blue beak.'

The restrictions on the distribution of dislocated elements are argued to derive from the conditions in (7) and the inherent properties associated with left- and right-peripheral elements summarised in (8).

- (7) French dislocated elements
- a. can only be adjoined to an XP endowed with a performative function
 - b. must take scope over the predication (in the sense of Erteschik-Shir 1997) in overt syntax
- (8)
- a. Left-peripheral elements are prosodically salient (in terms of stress, pitch and intensity); right-peripheral elements are prosodically non-salient (in terms of stress, pitch and intensity).
 - b. Left-peripheral elements are processed first (as a result of linear order).

The (a) sentences below are correctly predicted to be ruled in by virtue of (7) and (8), while the (b) sentences are correctly predicted to be ruled out.

- (9)
- a. Les autres_i, je vais attendre [avant de les_i relire].
the other-ones I will wait before to them re-read
'I'll wait before reading the other ones again.'
 - b. #Je vais attendre, les autres_i, avant de les_i relire.
I will wait the other-ones before to them re-read
- (10)
- a. Le grand frère, c' est Lucas. L'autre, c' est Matéo.
the big brother it is Lucas the-other-one it is Mateo
 - b. C' est Lucas, le grand frère. # C' est Matéo, l'autre.
it is Lucas the big brother it is Mateo the-other-one

From an interpretive point of view, French dislocated elements are shown to express the topic of the sentence. Topics are defined as the frame within which the predication holds true (in line with Strawson 1964; Reinhart 1981; Erteschik-Shir 1997). Two types of topics need to be distinguished: *aboutness* topics (which, as their name indicates, express what the sentence is about) and *stage* topics (as in (11)). The latter provide the spatio-temporal frame with respect to which the predication is to be evaluated. By default, stage topics correspond to the *here and now* of discourse.

- (11) Demain, on rase pour rien.
tomorrow one shaves for nothing
'Tomorrow we shave for free.'

All sentences are argued to have (at least) one topic, but the topic(s) need not be overt if salient enough in the context.

The difference between *aboutness* topics and *stage* topics is most relevant with respect to the *thetic* vs. *categorical* distinction (Kuroda 1972). Thetic predications express states of affairs and are typically uttered in out-of-the-blue contexts or after questions like *what happened?*. In such cases, the main topic of the sentence has to be a stage topic. A sentence with e.g. a dislocated subject (such as (12)) cannot be interpreted as thetic. It is obligatorily categorical: it is a predication *about* something.

- (12) Sa soeur_i, elle_i l'a frappé.
 his sister she him-has hit
 'His sister hit him.'

Individual Level Predicates (Milsark 1974) provide a good test-case for the claim that topics are obligatorily dislocated in spoken French (a claim which does not apply to standard/written French). The main topic of Individual Level Predicates is obligatorily an *aboutness* topic: such predicates obligatorily convey a categorical judgement about their subject. The latter must therefore be dislocated in spoken French:

- (13) Le nucléaire #(_i c') est effrayant.
 the nuclear it is frightening
 'Nuclear power is frightening.'

Restrictions on what can be dislocated are derived from the requirement that dislocated elements be topics. Hence indefinites can only appear in peripheral positions in the French sentence if they are interpreted generically (as in (14-a)) or if they refer to a set defined in the context (as in (14-b)).

- (14) a. Un robinet à piles, je n'ai jamais vu ça.
 a tap with batteries I NEG-have never seen that
 'I've never seen a battery-powered tap.'
 b. Tous les animaux, ils sont là.
 all the animals they are there
 'All the animals are here.'

On this account, narrow syntax can be freed from the burden of Information Structure. There is no need for topic features to be visible to the syntactic component, *contra* Rizzi (1997). In fact, there might be no need for topic features at all. Further work will be required to determine whether Information Structure phenomena can be entirely accounted for in terms of interface phenomena or whether a dedicated level of representation or component should be added to the architecture of grammar.

The picture is completed by in-depth investigations into the acquisition of dislocated structures in child French. These investigations demonstrate among other things that (a) what have been claimed to be target-deviant non-nominative subjects (Schütze 1997) are in fact target-compliant dislocated subjects with a missing resumptive clitic; (b) the presence of dislocated topics expressing the subject has no effect on the realisation of subjects during the null subject stage; (c) the 'pragmatic' knowledge required to encode XP topics is available from the outset of word combinations, hence children display signs of pragmatic competence earlier than previously assumed (*contra* Wexler 1998).

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