

The Quebec French interrogative particle *tu*: Why did a clitic cross the road?

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1. Background

The particle *tu* ([tɥ]) is phonologically identical to the second person singular pronoun in Quebec French, *tu* (disregarding stress).

As observed by Vinet (2001), among others, the Quebec French particle *tu*:

- must follow the finite verb (1a-b);
- is restricted to main clauses (1c);
- is restricted to yes/no questions, i.e. cannot co-occur with *wh*-elements (1d-e);
- is incompatible with negation (1f).

- (1) a. Ta soeur a *-tu* accouché?
your sister has *tu* given.birth
'Has your sister given birth?'
- b. On va *-tu* au cinéma?
we go *tu* to.the movies
'Shall we go to the movies?'
- c. *Je me demande [si Stéphane va *-tu* m' appeler].
I me ask if Stéphane will *tu* me call
'I wonder if Stéphane will call me.'
- d. *Qui a *-tu* téléphoné?
who has *tu* phoned
'Who called?'
- e. *Qui Marie a *-tu* appelé hier?
who Marie has *tu* phoned yesterday
'Who did Marie call yesterday?'
- f. *Ta mère t' a *tu* pas parlé?
your mother you has *tu* not talked
'Didn't your mother talk to you?'

2. A definiteness effect? *specificity effect*

The particle *tu* is also incompatible with indefinite and quantified subjects.

- (2) a. ?*Un autobus est *-tu* passé?
a bus is *tu* passed
'Did a bus come?'

- b. ?*Des étudiants sont *-tu* arrivés en retard au cours?
several students are *tu* arrived late to.the lecture
'Were several students late for the lecture?'
- c. *Plusieurs filles ont *-tu* répondu?
several girls have *tu* responded
'Did several girls reply?'

Between (3a) and (3b), speakers clearly prefer (3b), while they express no preference for (3c) or (3d).

- (3) a. ?*Quelqu'un a *-tu* appelé?
someone has *tu* called
'Did someone call?'
- b. Il y a *-tu* quelqu'un qui a appelé?
it there has *tu* someone who has called
'Is there someone who called?'
- c. Quelqu'un a appelé.
someone has called
'Someone called.'
- d. Il y a quelqu'un qui a appelé.
it there has someone who has called
'There is someone who called.'

Y a personne qui a appelé

Personne i a appelé

Clitic doubling seems to show the same definiteness restriction:

Seems parallel to clitic doubling

- (4) a. Ta soeur_i elle_i a accouché.
your sister she has given.birth
'Your sister gave birth.'
- b. *Qui_i il_i a téléphoné?
who he has phoned
'Who called?'
- c. *Un autobus_i il_i est passé.
a bus it is passed
'A bus came.'
- d. *Des étudiants_i ils_i sont arrivés en retard au cours.
several students they are arrived late to.the lecture
'Several students were late for the lecture.'
- e. *Plusieurs filles_i elles_i ont répondu.
several girls they have responded
'Several girls replied.'

However, *tu* does allow generic indefinite subjects as in (5a), but then these subjects can be clitic-doubled by *ça* (5b), as noted by Auger (1994).

- (5) a. Un chien peut *-tu* parler anglais?
a dog can *tu* speak English
'Can a dog (generic) speak English?'
b. Un chien_i ça_i peut *-tu* parler anglais?
a dog that can *tu* speak English
'Can a dog (generic) speak English?'

But there are some differences:

- clitic doubling can occur in embedded clauses (6a);
- clitic doubling can co-occur with negation (6b).

- (6) a. Je me demande [si Stéphane_i il_i va m' appeler].
I me ask if Stéphane he will me call
'I wonder if Stéphane will call me.'
b. Ta mère_i elle_i t' a pas parlé?
your mother she you has not talked
'Didn't your mother talk to you?'

3. Little history of *tu*

The particle *tu* originates in the French inversion (Picard 1992).

- (7) a. Vient -il? (inversion) (Picard 1992)
comes he
'Is he coming.'
b. Vien t-il? (re-syllabification, 12th century) (id.)
c. Jean vien t- il? (complex inversion, 14th century, according to Bourciez 1967) (id.)
Jean comes he
'Is Jean coming?'
d. Vien t-i? (/I/ deletion, 17th century) (id.)
e. I vien-ti? (by analogy to complex inversion) (id.)
f. I viennent-ti? (loss of ϕ -features) (id.)
g. I viennent-tu? (20th century, according to Picard 1992)

Would change from i to u as
any precedent?

3

4. Pronominal clitic or question particle?

There seems to be some kind of confusion in certain speakers between the pronominal clitic *tu* and the question particle *tu*. The spelling mistake in (8a) is not uncommon, and many speakers are uncomfortable with a question like (8b).

- (8) a. Ça se peut *-tu*? (Dugas & Soucy 1991)
it REFL can *tu*
Can this be?
b. ?Vous avez *-tu* entendu ça?
you have *tu* heard that
Did you(PL) hear that?

5. The intuition

- the distributional similarities are not a coincidence;
- pronominal clitics and the particle *tu* have some properties in common.

According to Roberge (1990), (9) is ungrammatical. This means that the subject NP can never be extracted from its position. This rules out both quantifier raising and *wh*-extraction.

- (9) *NP_i [_{IP} t_i cl_i + V ...] (Roberge 1990)

But Roberge's analysis cannot explain the behaviour of the particle *tu*, since *tu* is not a subject clitic.

6. Analysis

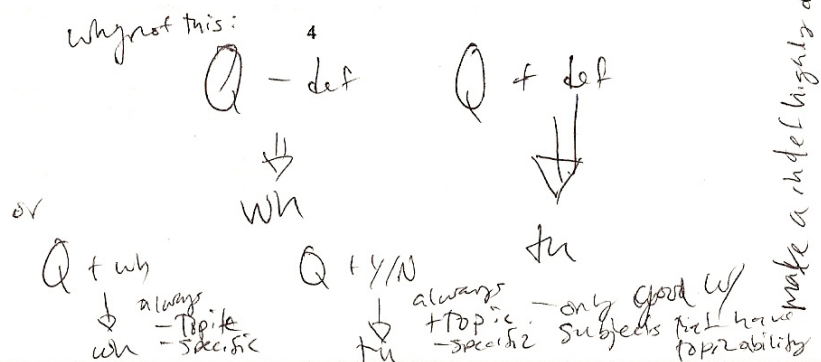
6.1 The definiteness effect

I assume that *tu*, like other clause type particles, is located in the left periphery, following Rizzi 1997, Poletto 2000 and Vinet 2001, among others, and that the clitic is base-adjoined to I^o, following Roberge (1990) and LeBel (1998).

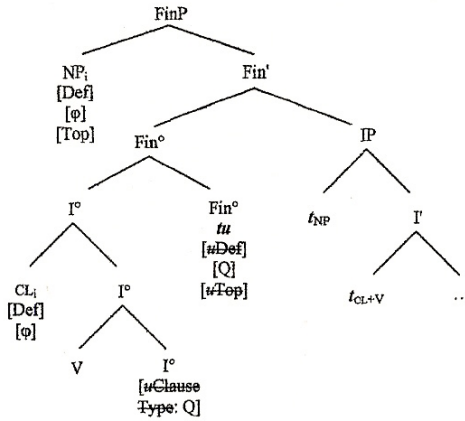
Since *tu* is post-verbal, the verb must raise to its left, with the subject clitic. And since the subject is preverbal, it must raise too.

Proposal:

- The interrogative particle *tu*, while having lost its ϕ -features, has kept a [Definite] feature, but that feature has become uninterpretable.
- *Tu* bears a strong [Q] feature, which forces movement of I^o to Fin^o for checking and valuing the uninterpretable [Clause type] feature on I^o. (This is in line with Adger's 2003 analysis of English.)
- The subject is topicalized in the Spec of Fin.
- The [Definite] feature gets checked by the clitic.



(10)



To account for the definiteness effect of clitic doubling:

- pronominal clitics bear a [Definite] feature that must agree with a [Definite] feature on the subject NP;
- the clitic and the doubled NP must remain in a Spec-head relationship at LF, according to Sportiche's *Clitic Criterion*.

(11) *Clitic Criterion*

(Sportiche 1998)

1. A clitic must be in a Spec/head relationship with a [+F] XP at LF.
2. A [+F] XP must be in a Spec/head relationship with a clitic at LF.

I am assuming that there is always a clitic position, with clitic features, also when the subject is indefinite, in which case the clitic is phonologically null.

To sum up:

- Both pronominal clitics and the particle *tu* have a [Definite] feature.
- A [Definite] feature on the clitic rules out indefinite and quantified clitic-doubled subjects.
- An uninterpretable [Definite] feature on *tu* requires a definite subject in interrogative clauses with *tu*.

6.2 Incompatibility of *tu* with *wh*-elements

Cheng (1997):

- Languages with yes/no particles often have silent corresponding *wh*-particles.
- Interrogative clause typing is done either by the particle or by *wh*-movement, not both.
- *Wh*-questions are identified by a [+*wh*] feature on C°.

I assume that *tu* is associated with a [-*wh*] feature and therefore cannot be selected by a head with a [+*wh*] feature.

6.3 Restriction to main clauses

I assume that:

- *tu* is associated with a strong Clause type feature, which triggers verb movement;
- only a weak Clause type feature can be selected.

This is also the case in Standard French and in English:

- (12) a. *Je me demande [si Jean va -t -il venir].
I me ask if Jean will -t he come

no verb movement in embedded questions

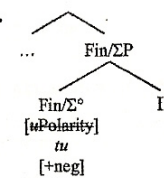
- b. *I wonder if [will John come].

6.4 Incompatibility of *tu* with negation

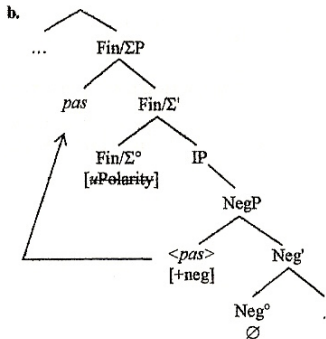
Previous proposal:

- Both the interrogative and the negative marker check the Polarity feature on $\text{Fin}/\Sigma^{\circ}$.
- The interrogative particle *tu* merges in that position, whereas the negative marker *pas* raises to Spec, $\text{Fin}/\Sigma\text{P}$.

(13) a.

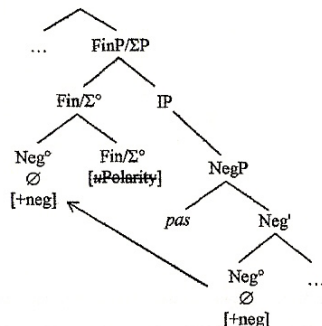


b.



Other possibility: the phonologically empty Neg head moves to Fin/ Σ^0 :

(14)



6.5 A little digression on Gascon

Gascon, like Quebec French, has an interrogative particle, *e*, and like Quebec French *tu*, *e* is incompatible with negation.

It was proposed in Morin 2006 that both particles check the Polarity feature on Fin/ Σ .

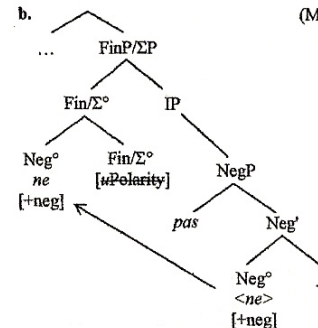
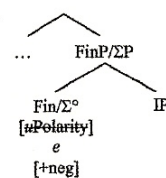
(15) a. E vien? (Gascon)
Q comes
'Is he coming?'

b. Ne vien pas?
neg comes neg
'He isn't coming?'

c. *E ne vien pas?
Q neg comes neg
'Isn't he coming?'

E is preverbal

(16) a. (Morin 2006)



The proposal:

- The interrogative particle *e* is merged in Fin/ Σ^0 ;
- The negative marker *ne*, by raising to Fin/ Σ^0 , prevents the interrogative particle from merging in that position (assuming Move over Merge, following Richards 2002).
- The interrogative particle being preverbal, the verb does not move to Fin.

7. Definiteness again

The facts in (5) point toward Milsark's "strong" vs. "weak" distinction...

(17) Strong determiners: (Milsark 1977)

- "definites"
- *the*
- demonstratives
- pronouns
- possessive DET's
- universals
- *all*
- *every*
- *each*
- *any* when not polarity item of *some*
- null DET in universal reading

un chien
her "definites"

un chien dogs do my book like that

Weak determiners:

- *a*
- *sm*
- number determiners
- bare plural and mass determiner in nonuniversal reading

... then NPs like "tous/toutes", "chaque" or "n'importe qu'" could be ruled out because they cannot be topicalized.

- (18) a. ?*Tous les pays d' Europe, elle les a visités.
all the countries of Europe she them has visited
'All the countries of Europe, she visited them.'
- b. *Chaque étudiant, le professeur l' a rencontré.
each student the professor him/her has met
'Each student, the professor has met him/her.'
- c. *N'importe quel instrument, Geneviève peut en jouer.
any instrument, Geneviève can of.it play
'Any instrument, Geneviève can play it.'

The [Definite] feature would in fact refer to "Strong NPs" in Milsark's terms.

Specificity?

8. Next on my agenda

Northern Italian dialects, ex. Paduan. Paduan has a series of interrogative subject clitics, which are post-verbal and morphologically different from non-interrogative clitics, which are pre-verbal. Like *tu*, these interrogative subject clitics are incompatible with negation, while non-interrogative subject clitics can appear in negative questions.

- (19) a. Te magni. (Zanutini 1997)
's.cl eat
'You(sg) eat.'
- b. Cosa magni -to?
what eat -s.cl (id)
'What do you eat?'
- c. *No ve -to via?
neg go -s.cl away (id)
'Aren't you going away?'
- d. No te ve via?
neg -s.cl go away (id)
'Aren't you going away?'

neg y use ho nonnegat
subject cl. for

Zanutini puts forth the hypothesis that these two sets of subject clitics are not the same type of elements. Maybe the Paduan interrogative subject clitics share something with Quebec French *tu*?

Conclusion

I have shown that the Quebec French interrogative particle *tu* is incompatible with indefinite and quantified subjects, and proposed that:

- The distributional similarities of *tu* and clitic doubling in Quebec French is not a coincidence.
- The particle *tu* has an uninterpretable [Definite] feature.

- Pronominal clitics have an interpretable [Definite] feature that checks the uninterpretable [Definite] feature on *tu*.
- There is always a clitic position, even if a clitic is not phonologically realized.
- The subject of yes/no questions is topicalized in the head of Fin.

To account for the definiteness effect of clitic doubling, I proposed that:

- The [Definite] feature on the pronominal clitic must agree with a [Definite] feature on the subject NP.
- The clitic and the doubled NP must remain in a Spec-head relationship at LF, according to Sportiche's *Clitic Criterion*.

I also suggested, to explain the fact that *tu* does not occur in negative contexts, that the empty Neg° raises to Fin/Σ°, preventing *tu* from merging in Fin°.

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