

## Focusing Subjects in Québec French

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Since Lambrecht (1994), it is generally assumed that French does not allow focused constituents in subject position, such that one must resort to clefting and other means to avoid a mapping between focus and a preverbal subject (e.g., Lambrecht 2010, Féry 2013, Hamlaoui 2009). Hence, if answer focus cannot be mapped onto a preverbal subject, the canonical SVO sentence in (1a) should make an infelicitous answer to the question *Qui est parti?* while (1b), which involves the clefting of the answer focus constituent, should be felicitous.

- (1) a. Jean est parti.  
      ‘Jean left.’  
      b. C’est Jean qui est parti.  
          It’s John who left.

We argue that in Québec French (QF), both (1a) and (1b) are felicitous answers to the question *Qui est parti?*, and that the main difference between canonical SVO constructions and cleft constructions lie in whether they are inherently exhaustive or not. Consequently, in QF, the requirement on clefting answer focus constituents is driven by the pragmatics of the answer rather than by a general ban on the mapping between answer focus and the preverbal subject position.

Inherently exhaustive constructions cannot be followed with clauses of the type *and x does too* (Büring and Kriz 2013, Littell 2016). As shown in (2), SVO declaratives support a continuation of that sort (*pis Marie aussi*) while cleft constructions do not, suggesting that the distinction between the two kinds of construction lies in whether they are exhaustive or not.

- (2) a. Jean est parti pis Marie aussi (est partie).  
      ‘Jean left and Marie did too (left too).’  
      b. #C’est Jean qui est parti pis Marie aussi.  
          ‘It’s John who left and Marie did too.’

As such, answers intended to be exhaustive may involve clefting of the focused constituent, while partial answers are conveyed with canonical SVO declaratives. Thus, the sentence in (3a) constitutes an infelicitous answer to the question *Qui est parti en premier?*, while (3b) is felicitous in that context.

- (3) a. #Jean est parti en premier.  
      ‘Jean left first.’  
      b. C’est Jean qui est parti en premier.  
          ‘It’s John who left first.’

We note also that beyond answer focus, QF allows preverbal subjects to be mapped onto corrective focus as in the conversational sequence in (4), contrastive focus, as in (5), and associative focus in (6).

- (4) A: Jean est parti le premier.  
      ‘John left first.’  
      B: Non, LOUIS est parti le premier.  
          ‘No, LOUIS left first.’

- (5) Marie est seulement allée à Paris parce que LOUIS est allé (à Paris).  
      ‘Marie only went to Paris because LOUIS went (to Paris).’

- (6) Même LOUIS est allé à Paris.  
      ‘Even LOUIS went to Paris.’

We conclude that focus can be mapped to preverbal subjects in Québec French. We also suggest that corrective, contrastive and associative foci are marked prosodically although we remain agnostic as to their precise acoustic and analytical correlate (e.g. as prominence (van der Klok et al. 2017) or as alignment (Féry 2013)). This is left for future research.

## References

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