

French Left Dislocation with Silent Pronouns *

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1 Introduction

Dislocation is a widespread phenomenon of spoken French. It consists in placing an element of the sentence at its beginning or at its end. Reducing the sentence core length, often bearing a pronoun coreferring to that element, it is mainly used to put topic on it. It has been shown [Cat07] that this construction is acquired very early by French children. Contrary to other Romance languages, which also share dislocation, French exposes a broader variety of dislocation types, which undergo different constraints.

Section 2 presents some examples of this diversity and the classical analysis due to Cécile de Cat. The method employed is given and used in section 3 to show that some types of dislocations cannot be analysed the same way. Different patterns appear when the pronoun seems to be silent.

2 Classical analysis of French dislocation

2.1 Some data

In French dislocation, an element appearing in the sentence can be placed at the beginning (1-a) or at the end (3-b) of the sentence while leaving a pronoun in its core [TelVal06]. The dislocated element is mostly the subject (1-a), the direct object (1-b) or the the indirect object (3-a). This can lead to multiple dislocations (1-c) where sometimes ambiguity appears (1-d).

- (1) a. Jean, il mange.
Jean, he eats.
Jean eats.
- b. Jeanne, tu l'aimes.
Jeanne, you her.ACC-love.
You love Jeanne.
- c. [Mon frère]_i, [sa_i voiture]_j, elle_j est rouge.
My brother, its.F car.F, it.F is red.
My brother's car is red.
- d. Jean, il le voit, Paul.
Jean, he him.ACC sees, Paul.
Jean sees Paul. or Paul sees Jean.

Other elements can be dislocated, like adjuncts (2-a), attributes (2-b), complementizer phrases or infinitives (2-c). In the latter case, the pronoun in the core is a demonstrative and it gives a generic meaning, like in (2-d).

- (2) a. Ce parc, j'y vais souvent.
This park, I-there go often.
I often go to this park.
- b. Comédien_i, il le_i restera toujours.
Actor, he it remain.FUT always.
He will always be an actor.

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- c. Partir_i, c'_i-est mourir un peu.
To-leave, it-is to-die a bit.
Leaving is a bit dying.
- d. Les enfants, ça pleure tout le temps.
The children, that cries all the time.
Children are always crying.

Dislocated elements may also be embedded in the main sentence. In this case they must be just after the complementizer (3-a). There is also some asymmetry between left and right dislocation. On the right, the preposition is mandatory and infinitives must also be escorted by a preposition (*de* by default). Compare (1-c) to (3-b) and (2-c) to (3-c) respectively.

- (3) a. Je pense que, Paul_i, ça lui_i plairait.
I think that, Paul, that him.DAT please.COND.
I think Paul would like it.
- b. Elle_j est rouge, [sa_i voiture]_j, à [mon frère]_i.
It.F is red, its.F car.F, to my brother.
- c. C'_i-est mourir un peu, de partir_i,
It-is to-die a bit, of to-leave.

2.2 De Cat's analysis

Cécile de Cat [Cat05] argues that, contrary to some former theories, all French dislocations are produced by a unified process, which is not extraction but base-generation. It means that the dislocated element did not move from its original place and left a resumptive pronoun. But the element and its pronoun are externally merged independently. The dislocated element is a TP adjunct and not a distinct Topic Phrase, so just under the Complementizer Phrase, explaining embedded cases (3-a). One main observation is that dislocation is not sensitive to island constraints, as in (4-a). But she acknowledges that this is not a sufficient argument. Therefore, she provides a bunch of phenomena implied by extraction that French dislocation violate: no weak cross-over effect, not licensing parasitic gaps, no relativised minimality effect (especially co-references can be intertwined). Moreover, no reconstruction effect is observed: no binding of a dislocated XP variable by a clause-mate QP, no condition-C effect, wide scope negation and tendency to associate the variables with a referent in the discourse. See [Cat05] for more details and examples.

- (4) a. Ta femme_i, t'-aimes pas les gens [qui la_i fixent].
Your wife, you-like not the people who her stare-at.
You don't like people who stare at your wife.
- b. *Qui_i est-ce que t'-aimes pas les gens [qui fixent t_i].
Who is-it that you-like not the people who stare-at t.

However, de Cat leaves two examples where the pronoun seems to be silent. Other authors [Kal12, TelVal06] come up with more of such examples, showing some interesting variation with the standard Clitic Left Dislocation. Next section uses the island sensitivity test to reveal that de Cat's analysis does not cover every dislocation phenomenon. I try to sort the encountered cases and provide some explanation.

3 Different analyses with silent pronouns

3.1 Topicalisation without corresponding pronoun

In some sentences, the dislocated XP does not have any coreferring pronoun in the sentence core (5). So it is not possible to use de Cat's method. However, following her viewpoint on topicalised sentence construction, this phenomenon is easily explained. Given the dislocated element is externally merged independently from the core sentence, nothing forces the latter to bear a coreferring pronoun. The topicalised XP just allows us to focus on some point of view. Indeed, this kinds of utterances are mostly created with disjunctive (i.e. strong) pronouns or common nouns, like in the examples. In this sense, this XP do not always need to be interpreted as contrastive (XP *and not the others*), but rather like *as far as XP is concerned*. This follows the remark of [Kal12] that, in sentences like *Moi, je...*, the dislocation lost its emphasis effect to get a more casual pragmatic.

Going further, [Aug98] suggests that the subject reduplication could be the sign of a paradigm change in French (especially and more visible in Québec French), possibly leading to polyperonal verb agreement.

- (5) a. Pourquoi Jeanne, ça marche et pas moi ?
Why Jeanne, it works and not me ?

- Why does it work by Jeanne and not by me?*
- b. Alors, ça va, toi ?
Then, it goes, you ?
So, are you doin'?

3.2 Dislocated NP from a PP

One of de Cat's example of apparent silent pronoun with dislocation is when a dislocated NP pronoun is inside a Prepositional Phrase headed by *derrière*. This would also work for *devant*, *pour*, *contre*, *avec* and *sans* (6-a). Prepositional Phrases with *à* or *de* are excluded here because they can transform into a clitic pronoun (*y* and *en* resp.) when the NP is inanimate (6-b). According to [Kay06], when the animate NP is pronominalised, *à* or *de* are deleted (6-c), except if a determiner accompanies them (6-d). On that account, the other prepositions could be analysed the same way (6-e), except that they are always pronounced, even when no determiner follows.

- (6) a. [Ce mur-là]_i, on devrait aider les gens [qui sont embusqués derrière e_i].
That wall-there, one should help the people who are ambushed behind e.
That wall, we should help the people who are ambushed behind it.
- b. J'_y_i répondrai, [à tes questions]_i.
I-(to-it) answer.FUT, to your questions.
I will answer your questions.
- c. Je leur_i répondrai (*à) e_i, aux étudiantes_i.
I them.DAT answer.FUT (to) e, to-the students.
I will answer the students.
- d. Je leur_i répondrai *(à) toutes e_i.
I them.DAT answer.FUT, (to) all e
I will answer all students.
- e. Mes amis_i, elle est partie avec tous e_i.
My friends, she is gone with all e.
She is gone with all of my friends.

Nevertheless, we first remark that this type of construction does not work for all preposition (not for *vers*, *en*, *envers*, *par* and *parmi*) (7-a). Moreover, other prepositions (*dans*, *sur* and *sous*) are only legal in that contexts under their non-clitic pronoun form (*dedans*, *dessus* and *dessous* resp.) (7-b). Even more interestingly, the possibility of using such constructions seems to depend on the employment of these prepositions: purely locational or path-expressing versus abstract meaning (7-c), (7-d). But trying to address that semantic issue would go beyond the scope of this essay.

- (7) a. *L'église_i, je me dirige vers e_i.
The-church, I REFL head towards e.
- b. Le vase_i, j'_i-ai mis les fleurs dedans_i/(**dans* e_i).
The vase, I-have put the flowers in-it/(in e).
I put the flowers in the vase.
- c. ?Le future, j'_i-aimerais bien voir dedans.
The future, I-(would-like) well to-see in-it.
- d. *Ta tante_i, le passé est maintenant derrière e_i.
Your aunt, the past is now behind e.

Contrary to de Cat, I suggest that there is no silent pro-NP but that the considered prepositions are in fact already pronouns which have the same form as their not pronominalised equivalent (8-a). Prepositions like *vers* just don't have a correspondent pro-PP, what would explain why they fail to be used that way, with or without dislocated XP. One argument in favour of this analysis calls on pronominal constructions. With *dans*-like prepositions, it is possible to corefer to the NP with a dative clitic if it is a person. But this does not work with a coreferred silent NP (8-b). As this is also possible with *derrière*-like prepositions, they should be of the same form there, i.e. a pro-PP (8-c).

- (8) a. Même sa femme_i, il n'est pas venu avec_i.
Even his wife, he NEG-is not come with-it.
Even his wife, he didn't come with her.
- b. La voiture lui_i roule dessus_i/(**sur* e_i).
The car him.DAT drives on-it/(on e).
The car runs over him.
- c. La voiture lui_i coupe devant_i.
The car him.DAT cuts in-front-of-it.

The car cuts in on him.

However, this conflicts with the use of *à* and *de*, where they cannot be pro-PP if the contained NP is pronominalised (9-a). Maybe, this is only due to the fact that their pro-PP is a clitic. As for the case with a leftover determiner, it is in fact a pronoun itself. The fact that the *s* of *tous* is pronounced in (6-e) but not in *tous mes amis* is a hint. So (6-e) should re-analysed as (9-b). This is not an isolated phenomenon. It also happens with other determiners (e.g. *chacun(e)* is the pro-Det of *chaque*) (9-c) and adjectives (9-d).

- (9) a. *Je leur_i y_i répondrai.
I them.DAT to-it answer.FUT.
 b. Mes amis_i, elle est partie avec tous_i.
My friends, she is gone with all-of-it
 c. Mes amies_i, elle a parlé avec chacune_i / (*chaque e_i).
My friends, she has talked with each-of-them / (each e).
She talked with each of my friends.
 d. Parmi ces trousse_i, j'aime bien la bleue_i.
Among these pencil-cases, I-like well the blue-one.
Among these pencil cases, I like the blue one.

3.3 Emphasised dislocation

In some cases, the dislocated element is prosodically emphasised, like in (10-a), (10-b) or (10-c). Remark that then, a complementiser can be inserted at the beginning of the core sentence.

- (10) a. Deux_i seulement, de places_i, (qu')il restait e_i !
Two only, of seats, (that-)it remained e !
There were only two seats left!
 b. Vraiment chaque gendarme_i, (que) je crois qu'il a félicité e_i !
Really each police-officer, (that) I believe that-he has congratulated e !
I believe that he congratulated really each police officer!
 c. Géniale_i, (qu')elle est e_i, sa bagnole !
Amazing, (that-)it is e, her car !
Her car is amazing!

Interestingly, the island sensitivity test fails on this constructions (11-a). Therefore, this type of dislocation cannot be formed by base-generation. It must be an extraction instead. The possible presence of *que* is in fact a hint that a cleft is happening, as if it was (11-b), of the same meaning. Another argument in favour of this relies on the agreement of the past participle. It seems to agree with the dislocated element exactly when *que* is present (11-c), (11-d). So this complementiser is the same as the one in clefts.

- (11) a. *Vraiment chaque gendarme_i, (que) la personne [qui a félicité e_i] est ici.
Really each police-officer, (that) the person [who has congratulated e] is here.
 b. C'est vraiment chaque gendarme_i que je crois qu'il a félicité t_i !
It-is really each police-officer, that I believe that-he has congratulated t !
 c. Toutes les chaises_i, il a pris-(*es) t_i !
All the chair.F.PL, he has taken-(F.PL) t !
He took all the chairs!
 d. Toutes les chaises_i, qu'_i-il a pris-es !
All the chair.F.PL, that-he has taken-F.PL !

As extraction is not performed the same way as base-generation, we should expect these two kinds of merging to interact with respect to order of execution. Indeed, there is evidence of that. From the original sentence in (12-a), we can first dislocate the Noun Phrase (12-b), and then extract the Determiner Phrase (12-c) (*deux* being here directly the pronoun, as discussed in the previous subsection). Or we can first internally merge the DP (12-d) and then dislocate the contained NP (10-a). The resulting sentences differ from the presence or not of the *en* clitic. Notice that a *de* is inserted with dislocation and that the created pronoun *en* is a pro-*de*. This is a clue that the deep structure of French numeral DPs contains a silent *de* PP.

- (12) a. Il restait deux places seulement.
 b. Il en_i restait [deux_i seulement], de places_i !
 c. Deux_i seulement, qu'_i'il en_i restait, de places_i !
 d. [Deux places]_i seulement, qu'_i'il restait t_i !

A final remark concerns the possibility not to pronounce simple copula cores, yielding sentences like *Géniale, sa bagnole !*, where again, no corresponding pronoun is to be found.

3.4 Dislocated PP

As [Kal12] observes it, prepositional phrases, being circumstantial complements or indirect objects, can also be entirely put at the beginning of the sentence without pronoun to emphasise them (13-a), (13-b). It is distinguished from simple adjuncts by the raising intonation or light pause at the end of the PP.

- (13) a. [En été]_i, je vois beaucoup de moustiques *e_i*.
In summer, I see a-lot of mosquitoes.
I see a lot of mosquitoes in summer.
- b. [À la comtesse]_i, je crois qu'il a offert un weekend à Florence *e_i*.
To the countess, I think that-he has offered a weekend to Florence e.
I think that he offered a weekend in Florence to the countess.

As well as emphasised dislocation, this constructions fail the island sensitivity test (14-a), (14-b). But unlike them, adding *que* is not licensed and we do not obtain a similar intention with a *c'est...que* cleft. Indeed, the latter really bring a contrastive intuition (14-c), whereas the dislocation only puts focus on the PP.

- (14) a. En été, les gens [qui voient beaucoup de moustiques] ne partent pas en vacances.
In summer, the people who see a lot of mosquitoes don't go on vacation.
#The people who see a lot of mosquitoes in summer don't go on vacation.
- b. *[À la comtesse]_i, le duc [qui a offert un weekend à Florence *e_i*] vit ici.
To the countess, the Duke who has offered a weekend to Florence e lives here.
- c. C'est à la comtesse que je crois qu'il a offert un weekend à Florence.
It is to the countess (and not someone else), that I think that he offered a weekend in Florence.

Therefore, I suggest that this phenomenon is also an extraction. Contrary to base-generation dislocation, it has behaviours similar to moved XPs. It allows parasitic gaps (15-a) and shows condition-C effect (15-b), only possible with reconstruction.

- (15) a. [À la comtesse]_i, je crois qu'il a lu un livre *t_i* puis parlé longuement *t_i*.
To the countess, I believe that-he has read a book t then talked lengthily t.
I believe that he read a book to the countess and then talked with her lengthily.
- b. À la femme de Jean_i, il_{*i} a parlé d'amour.
To the wife of Jean, he has talked of-love.
*He_{*i} talked about love with Jean_i's wife.*

3.5 Implicit object

There exists a dislocation type without pronoun and concerning direct objects that was not mentioned in the consulted literature. On the one hand, it involves appreciation or experience verbs (16-a), widespread in informal speech. On the other hand, very diverse verbs can have their object get implicit (16-b), but this is not so common. The similarity between these two categories is that the same phenomenon of object pronoun silencing can happen if it is salient in the context. This is the case if a discussion topic is clear enough (16-c), or with a situational deictic like showing (16-d). We may underline that (16-b) and (16-d) are not to be understood with a general meaning of *to sell* like: there are things that I sell. Rather, it is really understood that there is a special sold article, and that it is the book in question.

- (16) a. Les réglisses_i, je déteste *e_i*.
The liquorice.PL, I hate e.
I hate liquorice.
- b. Ce livre_i, je vends *e_i* 10€.
This book, I sell e 10€.
I sell this book for 10€.
- c. (talking about liquorice_i) Ah, moi, je déteste *e_i*.
Bah, me, I hate e.
Bah, I hate it.
- d. (showing a book_i) Je vends *e_i(,)* 10€.
I sell e 10€.
I sell it for 10€.

Both categories do not behave the same way. The first enjoys insensitivity to islands (17-a) while the second don't (17-b).

- (17) a. Les réglisses_i, leur_i odeur répugne les personnes [qui détestent *e_i*].
The liquorice.PL, their smell repulses the people who hate e.
The smell of liquorice repulses people who hate it.
- b. *Ce livre_i, j'aperçois la femme [qui vend *e_i*].
This book, I-glimpse the woman who sells e.

This divergence is intriguing. Yet, it seems like the second category is the default, where this construction remains rare. On the contrary, the first categories is only limited to verbs like *aimer* (to like) or *adorer* (to love) where there is a strong personal emotion involved. The famous slogan of French *Dancing with the star*'s coach Jean-Marc Généreux (18-a) falls into that kind. But *acheter* in a concrete meaning would better belong to the second category. This way of expressing judgement is quite usual in colloquial speech. This recalls Facebook *like* button *j'aime*. In this situation, the object is indeed salient in the context: it is the post which the button is attached to. To compare with Italian, dropping the pronoun is illegible (18-b).

- (18) a. Et ça_i, j'achète *e_i* !
An this, I-buy e !
I want this! / I'm lovin' it!
- b. Il cioccolato, *(lo) adoro!
The chocolate, it love.1.SG!
I love chocolate!

I suggest that in both cases, the object is made implicit because it can be retrieved in the context, and that this is a general phenomenon, not especially related to dislocation. The default process would be that islands block the retrieval of discourse variables if the pronoun is silent. This hypothesis is consistent, because the previous subsections were not base-generation with a silent pronoun. But then, we need to understand why appreciation verb objects can transgress island constraints.

4 Conclusion

To sum up, we examined several cases of apparent silent pronouns in French Left Dislocation. Using an island sensitivity test reveals that some types cannot be analysed by a base-generation process suggested by de Cat, and are in fact extraction with a remnant hole. In some case, there were simply no silent pronoun at all, but a pro-PP. Finally, the real case of silent pronoun appeared to be quite complex and rare, except for appreciation verbs. No satisfying explanation was found for the latter phenomenon. This topic deserves more attention to be solved.

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