

## Contrast and intervention at the periphery

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### Abstract

The paper investigates the role of contrast in the distribution of some syntactic phenomena and offers an account on the basis of feature intervention. It shows that a large series of distributional facts concerning the distribution of cleft sentences in both English and French and argument preposing in English, as well as the relative position of contrastive topics and foci, are accounted for by adding the feature contrast, ©, to the features Q(quantificational) and δ (d-linking, non-contrastive clitic left-dislocation) which are already used in literature on featural Relativized Minimality. Evidence from scrambling in Dutch and from contrastive focus preposing in Italian shows that the feature © blocks movement of another constituent endowed with the same feature. This feature is also responsible for distributional facts concerning argument preposing in English. In particular, it accounts for the impossibility of a non-contrastive argument to get preposed in a non-assertive clause. Similarly, the feature © is shown to have a blocking effect for an element bearing the feature Q. © 2014 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

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### 1. Introduction

It is well-known that main clause phenomena, such as argument preposing in English, occur in ‘assertive’ contexts (1), i.e. root clauses and a restricted set of embedded clauses with root properties, such as causal adverbial clauses (also called ‘peripheral adverbial clauses’), but not in other types of embedded contexts, such as temporal and conditional adverbial clauses (also called ‘central’ adverbial clauses), clausal complements of nouns, and object clauses of factive predicates, which are considered ‘non-assertive’ contexts<sup>3</sup> (2). These judgments “apply in a neutral, no-contrast context” (Haegeman and Ürögdi, 2010a:129).

- (1) Argument preposing in assertive context<sup>4</sup>
- (John thinks that) this book Mary read.
  - That film, I don’t ever want to see again.

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<sup>3</sup> We use the terms ‘assertive’ and ‘non-assertive’ contexts here as nothing more than a descriptive label to distinguish contexts which allow and do not allow main clause phenomena to occur. See Emonds (1970, 2004), Rutherford (1970), Hooper and Thompson (1973), Andersson (1975), Green (1976, 1996), Maki et al. (1999), Krifka (2001), Heycock and Kroch (2002), Sawada and Larson (2004), Haegeman (2013), De Cat (2012), Heycock (2006), and Verstraete (2002, 2007). On the distinction between ‘peripheral’ and ‘central’ embedded clauses, see Haegeman (2010, 2012) and references cited there.

<sup>4</sup> In the following examples we underline the preposed argument.

- c. While his first film, not many liked, his new one is proving quite popular.
- d. I can assure you that that film, I don't want to ever see again.

(Haegeman and Ürögdi, 2010a:112–113)

(2) Ban on argument preposing in non-assertive context

- a. \*John regrets that this book Mary read.
- b. \*When that film I went to see, I remembered my first trip to Tokyo.
- c. \*If this film you go to see, you will remember our first trip to Tokyo.
- d. \*John regretted that Gone with the wind he never went to see.

(Maki et al., 1999:3)

(Haegeman and Ürögdi, 2010a:112)

Interestingly, it has also been observed (Bianchi and Frascarelli, 2010; Haegeman and Ürögdi, 2010a,b) that argument preposing in English is possible even in non-assertive contexts if the construction involves a contrast, as is the case in (3), where the referent of the preposed constituent is explicitly contrasted with another referent in the discourse context.

(3) Contrastive argument preposing in non-assertive context

- a. His parents resented that the maths exam he had not passed, and the biology exam he had not even taken.
- b. The entire office resented that Bill she had fired, and John she had decided to promote.
- c. John resents that this book Mary read from cover to cover, while the other (his favorite) she didn't even open.

(Haegeman and Ürögdi, 2010a:130–131; on the basis of Bianchi and Frascarelli's (2010) examples)

Here, contrast seems to 'save' argument preposing in contexts where it can otherwise not occur. This of course immediately raises the question whether or not contrast also has a 'saving' or licensing function in other syntactic configurations and how this can be accounted for.

In this article we will show, on the basis of corpus research, that the presence vs. absence of (a particular type of) contrast also plays a role in the distribution of English *it*-clefts and French *c'est*-clefts in temporal and causal adverbial clauses (section 2). We will argue in favor of the existence of a feature © for contrastive elements in the system of featural Relativized Minimality, which, along features such as Q and  $\delta$ , plays a role in intervention effects. We will show that this accounts for the distributional facts concerning clefts in adverbial clauses in French and English (section 3), and we will show that this also explains the relative position of contrastive topics and foci in Dutch and Italian, as well as the distribution of argument preposing in English (section 4). Section 5 is the conclusion.

## 2. Data on the distribution of clefts in adverbial clauses

### 2.1. Introduction

This section presents the results of corpus research on the distribution of *it*-clefts in English and *c'est*-clefts in French in temporal and causal embedded clauses.<sup>5</sup> Temporal clauses are prototypical instances of 'central' clauses, where argument-preposing does not occur in the absence of contrast. Causal clauses are typical cases of 'peripheral' clauses,

<sup>5</sup> Since corpus research, in contrast with native speaker judgments, only provides positive evidence, we present our observation at the end of this section as (at least) a strong tendency, rather than as a real constraint. For the analysis of clefts, we are however convinced that careful (qualitative) corpus research on the basis of *explicit contextual clues* is extremely useful, for the following reasons. First of all, the interpretation of clefts is highly dependent on the specific discourse context they appear in. For other constructions which can have different discourse interpretations depending on the context, it has been shown that native speaker judgments on made-up examples are not clear-cut (see for instance Bianchi and Frascarelli, 2010 on Clitic Left dislocation in Romance, and Gundel, 1974; Rochement and Culicover, 1990; Culicover, 1991; Birner and Ward, 1998; Haegeman, 2012 on argument preposing in English). The problem is that, in a judgment task with made-up examples, it is extremely hard to control whether or not the interpretation intended by the linguist is also the one that is assumed by the native speaker who is performing the task. With respect to clefts specifically, it is easy to construct a discourse context where a cleft can only be interpreted with a narrowly contrastive interpretation, but it is much harder (if not impossible) to construct a discourse context where a cleft cannot be interpreted with a narrowly contrastive focus interpretation, and, hence, with a new information focus interpretation only. In corpus research, as we will show in section 2.3.2, the context of the cleft can be analyzed to determine whether or not it contains a lexicogrammatical indication of the presence of a restrictive set of referents out of which the referent of the cleft is chosen. We thus follow Lambrecht (1994) in that information structure is a linguistic concept, to the extent that only those concepts which are formally indicated in some way or another are to be taken into consideration. We thus only classify as narrowly contrastive focus clefts those clefts where the presence of a restrictive set is, in some way, formally indicated in the context (see section 2.3.2 below for examples). Moreover, what is really at play in information structure is the assumptions the speaker makes about the hearer's state of mind (Lambrecht, 1994); information structure concerns the way in which information is represented by the speaker or writer, less than the actual state of mind of the hearer or reader (who corresponds with the evaluating native in a judgment task). In this sense, and especially when determining the specific discourse context of information structure driven constructions, the analysis of spontaneously uttered language, as in corpus analysis, proves to be very useful.

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