

French *il y a* clefts and *c'est* clefts

a corpus-based analysis of
their Information Structure

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0. INTRODUCTION

- In linguistic literature on French clefts, most attention has been given to *c'est* clefts
- 3 articulations
 - focus-background* (argument focus)
 - topic-comment* (predicate focus)
 - all-focus* (sentence focus, Lambrecht 1994)
- *il y a* clefts

C'est clefts: focus-background

- **C'est** cleft = prototypically Focus-Background

(1) A:- *Qui danse?* 'Who's dancing?'

B:- *C'est mon fiancé qui danse.*

'It's my fiancé who is dancing.'

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(1) A:- *Qui danse?* 'Who's dancing?'

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“cleft relative clause”

- Cleft relative clause = discourse-given + variable (*x is dancing*)

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“clefted element”

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Extensive literature:

Doetjes et al. 2004; Dufter 2006/2008/2009; Belletti 2008/2009/2012; Rialland et al. 2002; Smits 1989; Roggia 2008; Hobæk Haff 2006; Bouchard et al. 2007; Destruel 2013, Katz 2000, Clech-Darbon et al 1999; Rialland et al 2002; Doetjes et al 2004; Léard 1992; Lambrecht 2001; Lahousse, Laenzlinger & Soare 2014; Lahousse & Borremans 2014

Topic-comment *c'est* clefts: aboutness topic

(2) *Le Cécom est le distributeur de cette vidéo.*

*C'est à **lui** qu'il faut s'adresser pour se la procurer.*

The Cécom is the distributor of this video.

It's **them** you need to address in order to buy it.

(Doetjes et al. 2004:535)

- Clefted element *lui* 'him/them' = discourse-**given**
- Cleft relative clause = discourse-**new** information

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- Cleft relative clause = discourse-**new** information
- *Lui* 'him/them' = **aboutness-topic**

[in the same context as (2)]

Je dis à propos du Cécom que c'est à lui qu'il faut s'adresser...

I say about the Cécom that **it's them you need to address...**

(Topic test: Reinhart 1982)

Topic-comment *c'est* clefts: spatio-temporal topic

(3) (...) *C'est également dans le Kurdistan irakien que se présente pour l'Union européenne l'occasion exceptionnelle d'apporter une contribution substantielle à la tâche urgente de reconstruire la Mésopotamie.*

Iraq is thus fortunately much more than simply the rather depressing arena for incessant and appalling terror attacks. **It is also in Iraqi Kurdistan** that the European Union is being presented with an outstanding opportunity to make a substantial contribution to the urgent task of reconstructing Mesopotamia.

(Dufter 2009:102)

- “in Iraqi Kurdistan” ≠ *aboutness* topic but **spatio-temporal topic** →

Topic-comment *c'est* clefts: spatio-temporal topic

- **'Scene-setting adverbial'** (Prince 1978, Kuno 1975) / **frame** topic:

*“the topic sets a **spatial, temporal or individual framework** within which the main predication holds”*

(Chafe 1976: 50)

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*“the topic sets a **spatial, temporal or individual framework** within which the main predication holds”*

(Chafe 1976: 50)

- With respect to *c'est* clefts such as (3) (*it's also in Kurdistan that...*)

*“[the clefted element] provides a **spatiotemporal setting** for the proposition expressed by the cleft, in this case repeating, and thereby reinstating, a previously established **frame topic**”*

(Dufter 2009:102, about *c'est* clefts of this type)

French: Doetjes et al 2004; Blanche-Benveniste 2006; Clech-Darbon, Rebuschi & Rialland 1999; Dufter 2006, 2008; Lahousse, Laenzlinger & Soare 2014.

English: e.g. Prince 1978; Hedberg 1990; Delin & Oberlander 2005; Den Dikken 2013; Declerck 1988, Prince 1978...

All-focus c'est cleft

(4) *Sous le sommet en surplomb d'une falaise de la côte sud de l'Angleterre, (...), un peintre amateur attend, rêvant de pouvoir dessiner un corbeau d'une espèce rare. Mais soudain c'est une jeune femme qui tombe dans le vide sous ses yeux.*

'Under the top of a cliff on the south coast of England, an amateur painter waits, dreaming of being able to draw a rare raven. But suddenly it's a young woman that falls into the depths under his eyes.'

- Existence of a *young woman* and the fact that she will fall down the cliff ≠ discourse-given, whole event is new in the discourse

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'Under the top of a cliff on the south coast of England, an amateur painter waits, dreaming of being able to draw a rare raven. But suddenly it's a young woman that falls into the depths under his eyes.'

- Existence of *a young woman* and the fact that she will fall down the cliff ≠ discourse-given, whole event is new in the discourse
- ≠ topic comment (*a young woman* ≠ aboutness topic)
 - # *Je dis à propos d'une jeune femme qu'elle tombe dans le vide.*
 - # I say about a young woman that she falls into the depths.

This talk: *il y a* clefts

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- *Il y a* cleft = usually ‘presentational’ / ‘all-new’ / ‘all-focus’
(But not always! Cf. below)

(5) A:- What’s happening?

B:- *(il) y a Louise qui arrive!*
(EXPL) there has Louise who is.coming
‘Louise is coming!’

- Typical of spoken French
- Underresearched w.r.t. *c’est* cleft
[but see elements in Ashby 1995/1999; Cappeau & Deulofeu 2001; Choi-Jonin & Lagae 2005; Lambrecht 1988/1994/2000/2001/2002; Léard 1992; Willems & Meulleman 2010; Giry-Schneider 1988; Secova 2010; Jullien 2007; Hamann & Tuller 2015ab, Giry-Schneider 1988]

This talk: structure

1. Corpus analysis of *il y a* clefts

The same three information structure articulations as *c'est* clefts:

all-focus

focus-background

topic-comment

2. Comparison with *c'est* clefts:

Differences between *c'est* clefts and *il y a* clefts

3. Conclusion

1. *IL YA* CLEFTS: CORPUS ANALYSIS

Used corpora

1. *Le Monde* 1998

- Journalistic texts: **formal written** French
- 25.7 million words

2. *Yahoo Questions and Answers* 2006-2009

- Internet discussion forum: **informal written** French
- French part: 6.1 million words
- (20.000 questions, 140.000 answers)

3. *Discours sur la Ville / CFPP* 2000

- Transcriptions of **spoken** interviews
- 550.000 words (38,9 hours)

Corpus data: frequency

	Le Monde (formal written)	Yahoo (informal written)	CFPP2000 (spoken)
<i>il y a</i> cleft occurrences	71	262	235
Word count in corpus	27 million	6.1 million	550.000
Frequency (occurrences/ words in corpus)	2,63 / million	43,61 / million	427,27 / million

- *il y a* clefts indeed much more frequent in spoken corpus
- Total of **568** *il y a* clefts in the three corpora

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- Total of **568** *il y a* clefts in the three corpora
- + **233** *il n'y a que x qui* 'there is only' clefts
(quantitative analysis of information structure ongoing)

Up next:

il y a clefts can express three articulations

1. All-focus
(= *sentence-focus*)
2. Focus-background
(= *argument-focus*)
3. Topic-comment
(= *predicate-focus*)

Type 1: all-focus *il y a* clefts

(6) *tu connais l'histoire de Paf le chien? non?!? ben c'est un chien qui traverse la rue. ya une voiture qui passe et..... Paf le chien!*

'Do you know the story about Bam the dog? no?!? well it's a dog that crosses the street. A car passes by and.... Bam! the dog!'

(Yahoo 1397)

- Neither 'a car' nor the fact that it passes by are discourse-given: the whole event is new in the discourse (= sentence-focus)
- ≠ topic-comment: **the sentence is not *about* a car:**

[in the same context]

Je dis à propos d'une voiture qu'elle passe.

'I say about a car that it passes by.'

Type 2: focus-background *il y a* clefts

- (7) A: *Je recherche des modèles de voiture à acheter neuve moins de 10 000 euros, ou aller!?*
- B: *bonjours. il y a la citroen c1 qui est a moins de 10 000 euros.*
- A: 'I'm looking for new car models that cost less than €10.000, where should I go?'
- B: 'Hello. There's the Citroën C1 that costs less than €10.000.'
- (Yahoo 1307)

- Cleft relative clause = **discourse-given, backgrounded + variable**
- Clefted element *la Citroën c1* = new information **focus + value**
(= argument focus)

On English focus-background there clefts:

Davidse 1999/2000/2014; Collins 1992; Piotrowski 2009

Type 2: focus-background *il y a* clefts

- **NOT topic-comment:**

(8) A: *Je recherche des modèles de voiture à acheter neuve moins de 10 000 euros, ou aller!?*

B: *bonjours. # Je dis à propos de la citroen c1 qu'elle est à moins de 10 000 euros.*

A: 'I'm looking for new car models that cost less than €10.000, where should I go?'

B: 'Hello. # I say about **the Citroën C1** that it costs less than €10.000.'

Type 2: focus-background *il y a* clefts

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A: 'I'm looking for new car models that cost less than €10.000, where should I go?'

B: 'Hello. # I say about **the Citroën C1** that it costs less than €10.000.'

But rather:

'I say about **topic** **cars that cost less than €10.000** that **the Citroen c1** is such a car.'

focus

Cf. Lambrecht 1988/2001; Furukawa 1996; Hedberg 2013

Type 3: topic-comment *il y a* clefts

(9) [context: newspaper article about Turkey] (Le Monde 25)

*Mais l'essentiel de la marque qu'Atatürk a imposée à son pays semble indélébile. Personne d'ailleurs n'y parle sérieusement de remettre son œuvre en question. Et **il n'y a qu'en Turquie que** le dirigeant du parti intégriste a pu faire alliance, sans que personne parmi ses partisans s'en choque, avec une femme aussi visiblement occidentalisée que Tansu Çiller, économiste made in in USA.*

'But the most important part of Atatürk's influence on his country seems inerascable. And anyway nobody there seriously speaks of questioning his work. And **it's only in Turkey that** the leader of the integrist party could have made an alliance, without any of its partisans being shocked, with a woman who is so visibly occidentalized as Tansu Çiller, economist made in the USA.'

Type 3: topic-comment *il y a* clefts

- Clefted element *in Turkey*
 - **Discourse-given:** mentioned in previous context
 - **Spatio-temporal / frame topic**

- Relative clause *that the leader could have made an alliance...*
= **discourse-new** information

Articulations: distribution in the corpora

<i>Articulation</i>		<i>il y a... qui</i>	<i>il n'y a que .. qui</i>
ALL-FOCUS		74% (n= 421)	not found
FOCUS	BACKGROUND	24% (n=134)	many tokens
TOPIC	COMMENT	0%	a few tokens
Ambiguous		2% (n=13)	many tokens

3.



c'est cleft

vs.



il y a cleft

SOME DIFFERENCES

All-focus: GENRE DIFFERENCE?

- Both all-focus *c'est* and *il y a* clefts exist
- *C'est* and *il y a* interchangeable: no clear change in meaning

(10)

C'est / il y a une jeune femme qui tombe dans le vide sous ses yeux.

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- But: possibly variation per **genre**
 - all-focus *c'est* clefts more appropriate at beginning of jokes
 - perhaps more frequent in speech of children (*to be verified*)
- All-focus *c'est* clefts not often mentioned in literature:
functional niche already occupied by *il y a* cleft?

Focus-background: IMPLIED EXHAUSTIVITY

- Both focus-background *c'est* and *il y a* clefts exist
- BUT: not interchangeable with *c'est* cleft: +/- implied **exhaustivity**
(Cf. Lambrecht 2001; Léard 1992, Dufter 2009)

(11) A: *Qui travaille?* 'Who's working?'

B: *C'est **Pierre** qui travaille, # et Paul aussi.*
'It's **Pierre** who's working, # and Paul too.'

vs.

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(12) A: 'What's your favorite TV show right now?'

B: "How we Met Your Mother" *c'est génial*, **y'a aussi**

"Lost" qui est bien.

B: "'How I Met Your Mother" is great, **there's also**

"Lost" that is good.'

(Yahoo 3587)

// y a clefts: SYNTACTIC CONSTRAINT

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(13) * Il y a **à ce moment-là** / **là-bas** / **ainsi** que...
* There is **then** / **there** / **that way** that...

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* There is **then** / **there** / **that way** that...

- ... unless *ne que* is added:

(14) Il **n'y** a **qu'à** ce moment-là / là-bas / ainsi que...
'There's only then / there / that way that...'

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- ... unless *ne que* is added:

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'There's only then / there / that way that...'

- **C'est cleft** → extensive % of clefted elements = non-nominals

Carter-Thomas (2008): **50%**, Katz (2000): **35%**, Dufter (2008):
almost **30%** (*mostly topic-comment!*) + on the rise

3. CONCLUSION

Conclusion

Corpus analysis of IS articulations of *il y a* clefts:

- ① Much more frequent in **spoken** than in written French
- ② **Same articulations** as *c'est* clefts, but with different specializations

Conclusion

Same articulations:

<i>il y a</i> cleft	ALL-FOCUS	
	FOCUS	BACKGROUND
	TOPIC	COMMENT

<i>c'est</i> cleft	ALL-FOCUS	
	FOCUS	BACKGROUND
	TOPIC	COMMENT

Conclusion

Same articulations:

Different distributions:

<i>il y a</i> cleft	ALL-FOCUS	
	FOCUS	BACKGROUND
	TOPIC	COMMENT

most frequent

<i>c'est</i> cleft	ALL-FOCUS	
	FOCUS	BACKGROUND
	TOPIC	COMMENT

most frequent

(Dufter 2008/2009)

Conclusion

Same articulations:

Different distributions:

<i>il y a</i> cleft	ALL-FOCUS		most frequent
	FOCUS	BACKGROUND	
	TOPIC	COMMENT	only few
<i>c'est</i> cleft	ALL-FOCUS		only few
	FOCUS	BACKGROUND	most frequent (Dufter 2008/2009)
	TOPIC	COMMENT	

Conclusion

In most contexts *c'est* & *il y a* are NOT interchangeable

- influence of **genre** (?) (all-focus)
- +/- implied **exhaustivity** (focus-background)
- **syntactic ban** against non-nominals in *il y a* clefts
(especially topic-comment)

to be continued...

Thank you!

Dankuwel!

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Focus-background clefts: exhaustivity

- Conversational **implicature** of exhaustivity, because the effect is cancellable (Duffer 2009; De Cesare & Garassino 2015; Horn 1981):
 - Possibility of using **additive** expression

This was the party that ran on a commitment to restoring the Constitution. – It's also the President who promised to do the same when he was a candidate.
(De Cesare & Garassino 2015:22)

- Using **only** is not superfluous

*It is **only** on that basis that a balanced approach can be found.* (Duffer 2008)

- **Non-exhaustivity** in *il y a* clefts can be cancelled

*Il **n'y a que** Pierre qui travaille.*

Only Pierre is working.

All-focus *il y a* cleft with definite clefted element

A: *Le paradis est-il un fait de l'homme ou un fait de dieu?*

B: *Je ne crois pas en Dieu et pourtant je crois au paradis. Le paradis est pour moi, l'instant de notre mort, où l'on repense à notre vie et/ou(ou pas) **il y a ce fameux flash-back de notre vie qui défile devant nos yeux.*** (...) (Yahoo)

A: Is paradise a fact of man or a fact of god?

B: I don't believe in God and yet I believe in paradise. For me, paradise is the moment of our death, when we look back at our life and/or (or not) **there is this famous flash-back of our life that flashes before our eyes.**

[in same context]

Je dis à propos de ce fameux flash-back qu'il défile devant nos yeux.

I say about this famous flashback that it flashes before our eyes.

Ambiguous cleft vs. non-cleft

Pourquoi y'a plein de gens qui posent des questions débiles au lieu de chercher sur Google??
(Yahoo 32)

Cleft reading:

'Why do so many people ask stupid questions instead of looking it up on Google??'

= event

Restrictive relative clause reading:

'Why are there so many [people who ask stupid questions instead of looking it up on Google??]'

= existence of a subtype of people

Clefts with ambiguous articulation

*Le monde est de pire en pire. **Il n'y a pas un jour qui passe sans qu'il ne soit pire que le jour d'avant.** (Yahoo 4208)*

*The world is getting worse and worse. **There's not a day that goes by** without it being worse than the day before.*

A: TOUTES les alternatives au capitalisme ont-t-elles donc été essayées en vain? TOUTES? Vraiment?

B: Oui. Le problème est simple. L'homme est presque toujours RATIONNEL mais presque jamais VERTUEUX au sens kantien du terme.

*C: C'est l'application du principe que tu décris qui a amené à la crise actuelle. (...) Par ailleurs, **il y'a des expériences en Amérique latine qui sont en cours**, et qui pour l'instant fonctionne plutôt bien. (Yahoo 4640)*

(Focus-background or all-focus event?)