

LOW SENTENCE STRUCTURE IN FRENCH
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0. Intro. In this talk we will provide a new ‘low’ analysis for verb - nominal subject (VS) word order in French (1). We will argue against Kayne and Pollock’s (2001) (K&P) ‘high’ analysis, in which the postverbal S is in a high left-peripheral position, and IP is moved past it through remnant movement.

(1) *L’homme à qui a téléphoné ton ami*

lit. The man to who have telephoned your friend (K&P 2001: 107)

1. The postverbal S is not in Rizzi’s (1997) left periphery. 1.1. From the fact that indefinites as *quelqu’un* appear neither in a left-dislocated (2a) nor in postverbal S position (2b), K&P conclude that postverbal Ss are in the same left-peripheral position as left-dislocated constituents.

(2) a. * *Quelqu’un, il mangera ce gâteau.* lit. Someone, he will eat that cake.

b. * *Quel gâteau a mangé quelqu’un?* lit. Which cake has eaten someone?

We will show that the ungrammaticality of (2b) does not reduce to that of (2a), but is due to an independent constraint on postverbal Ss in interrogatives. This is corroborated by the fact that such indefinites are attested in other contexts for VS, e.g. relatives (3), and that some types of constituents occur in postverbal S position (4), but not in a left-dislocated position (5).

(3) *L’air que fredonnait quelqu’un m’a soudain rappelé mon enfance.*

lit. The tune that was humming a passer-by reminded me of my youth. (Kampers-Manhe 2004)

(4) ... *quand s’affrontaient différentes milices, il n’y avait plus de loi ni d’ordre.*

lit. ... when clashed different militias, there not was no longer law nor order. (*Le Monde*)

(5) * *Différentes milices, elles s’affrontaient...* lit. Different militias, they clashed ...

1.2. Since standard cases of VS (1a,3,4) do not have the contrastive/corrective intonation and interpretation typically associated with the left-peripheral Focus position (Rizzi 1997, Kiss 1998, Belletti 2004), there is no reason to assume that VS involves a left-peripheral Focus position. **2. The verb phrase does not undergo remnant movement.** The fact that the postverbal S in SI can be followed by other complements (6), is a further indication that no remnant movement of TP took place (see Belletti 2004 for similar arguments for Italian VS), together with the fact that quantifiers do not float in VS (see §3.3.).

(6) a. *le livre que veut conseiller mon professeur aux étudiants* (Marandin 2001)

lit. the book that wants to recommend my professor to the students

b. *Que dira Pierre à Micheline?* lit. What will say Peter to Micheline? (Korzen 1983)

3. Proposal. We will argue that the postverbal S in French VS is low in the sentence structure: it is not in its original VP-internal position (which would also be incompatible with a cartographic approach), and not in the preverbal subject position, but in an IP-internal Focus or Topic position (Cecchetto 1999, Belletti 2004). The fact that verbal elements such as participles precede the postverbal subject, will be accounted for by a smuggling approach similar to what is advocated for in Collins (2005).

Arguments: 3.1. Just as in Italian (Belletti 2001/2004, Cardinaletti 2001), the postverbal S follows low adverbs (Cinque 1999) (7), which is an indication of its IP-internal position:

(7) *la tâche qu’ont bien fait les étudiants *bien* [ex. to be read with neutral intonation]

lit. the task that have well done the students well

3.2. The postverbal S did not move through one of the preverbal subject positions advocated for in Cardinaletti (2004) (SpecSubjP -SpecEPPP - SpecAgrSP*). The fact that VS in French can never be constructed as the answer (A) to a question (Q) as in (8), shows that the “subject-of-predicate feature” has not been checked in preverbal S position (SpecSubj):

(8) Q: # *Que sais-tu à propos des grosses araignées?*
‘What do you know about big spiders?’

A: *En septembre apparaissent les grosses araignées.* (Simon, *Frantext* corpus)

lit. In September appear the big spiders.

Moreover, if postverbal Ss moved through the preverbal S position, then the checking of phi-features (presumably in SpecAgrP) should be the same as in SV. However, the S in VS can only be 3rd (but not 2nd) person singular or plural (9a), in contrast with the S in SV word order (9b):

- (9) a. VS * *L'aventure que vivez Marie et toi fait scandale.*
lit. The adventure that live_{2p} Mary and you_{2p} is scandalous.
b. SV *L'aventure que Marie et toi vivez fait scandale.*

This is naturally accounted for if the subject stays in a low position (and did not move through the preverbal position), checks its phi-features against those of AgrS via covert movement (Chomsky 1995) or long-distance Agree (Chomsky 2000, 2001) (cf. Ledgeway 2010: 270) and AgrSP is the place where number features are checked (whereas person-features are checked in SubjP), see Shlonsky (2000).

3.3. It is well known that the quantifier *tous* can float in SV (10a), but not in VS (10b) (Sportiche 1988, Déprez 1988/1990, Koopman & Sportiche 1991).

- (10) a. *L'homme à qui les linguistes ont tous parlé, c'est Jean.*
lit. The man to whom the linguists have all spoken, it is John.
b. * *L'homme à qui ont tous parlé les linguistes, c'est Jean* (Hulk & Pollock 2001: 8)
lit. the man to whom have all spoken the linguists, it is John
c. * [_{CP} à qui [_{I°} ont [_{AdvP} tous [_{parlé} [_{SpecFocP} les linguistes [_{SpecVP} t]]]]]]

We will argue in favor of Doetjes' (1992) analysis, according to which these elements are in an adverbial position and bind a trace in argument position. Given this, and assuming standard Relativized Minimality, the ungrammaticality of (10b) is predicted: in (10c), the binding relation between *tous* in AdvP and the trace in SpecVP is blocked by the intervening *les linguistes*, which is in a low IP-internal Foc-position.

3.4. The interpretation of the postverbal S and the distribution of VS in main clauses. **3.4.1.** It is well-known that VS in French, except in cases of 'elaborative VS' (Marandin 2001), must be licensed by the presence of some type of preverbal element. We will first show that this element must either be (i) a spatio-temporal topic, as in locative inversion (8A), or a (ii) wh-element (11a) or preposed contrastive focus (12a). The distinction between these two sets of contexts is independently confirmed by the fact that VS alternates with SV in the contexts in (i), but *not* in the contexts in (ii), as shown in (11b) and (12b).

- (11) a. *Quand sont venus Pierre et Paul?* lit. When came Peter and Paul?
b. * *Quand Pierre et Paul sont venus?* lit. When Peter and Paul came?
(12) a. *Il [Alexandre] écrivait avec une sorte de distraction concentrée, comme on crayonne sur le bloc du téléphone: on écoute de moins en moins et c'est le dessin qui s'impose. AINSI écrivait Alexandre (...)* (Pennac, *Frantext* corpus)
b. [same context] ... * *AINSI Alexandre écrivait.*

3.4.2. On the basis of question-answer tests, we will show that the postverbal S in the (i)-contexts has a (non-contrastive) focus interpretation (13), whereas the postverbal S in the (ii)-contexts is not the focus of the sentence (14b) but part of the background of the sentence-initial focus (14a).

- (13) Q :- *Qu'est-ce qui apparaît en septembre ?* lit. What appears in September?
A: - *En septembre apparaissent les grosses araignées.* (Simon, *Frantext* corpus)
lit. In September appear the big spiders.
(14) [Question to be asked in the context in (12)]
a. Q :- *Comment écrivait Alexandre?* lit. How did Alexander write?
A: - *AINSI écrivait Alexandre.* lit. SO/IN THIS WAY wrote Alexander.
b. Q: - *Qui écrivait ainsi?* lit. Who wrote in this way?
A: - # *AINSI écrivait Alexandre.* lit. SO/IN THIS WAY wrote Alexander.

3.4.3. We will conclude from this that postverbal Ss in the (i)-contexts are in an IP-internal Focus position, whereas those in the (ii)-contexts are in an IP-internal Topic position.

Selected references. Belletti, A. 2004. "Aspects of the low IP area". In L. Rizzi, 2004, 16-51. / Chomsky, N. 1995 *The Minimalist Program*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. / Chomsky, N. 2000. *Minimalist inquiries: The framework*. In R. Martin et al. (eds.), *Step by step: Essays on minimalist syntax in honor of Howard Lasnik*. MIT Press. / Collins, C. 2005. A smuggling approach to the passive in English. *Syntax* 8:2, 81-120. / Doetjes, J. 1992. Rightward floating quantifiers float to the left. *Linguistic Review* 9: 313-332. / Kayne, R. & Pollock, J.-Y. 2001. New thoughts on stylistic inversion. In A. Hulk & J.-Y. Pollock, eds. *Subject inversion in Romance and the theory of Universal Grammar*. OUP. 107-161. / Rizzi, L. 1997. The fine structure of the left periphery. In L. Haegeman, ed. *Elements of grammar*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.