

## Is focus a root phenomenon?<sup>1</sup>

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This article argues that some types of syntactically marked focus are root (main clause) phenomena in French. We show that *c'est* ‘it is’ clefts which explicitly mark narrow new information focus are root phenomena, in contrast with *il y a* ‘there is’ clefts marking broad new information focus and contrastive focus *c'est* ‘it is’ clefts. Nominal inversion in French behaves in the opposite way and is argued to be an ‘inverse root phenomenon’. These observations are explained by Krifka’s (2017) notion of a ‘judge’, its relation with epistemic modality and the distinction between assertive embedded clauses (in which root phenomena occur) and non-assertive embedded clauses (in which root phenomena do not occur).

### 1. Introduction

*Root phenomena* (henceforth RP, also called *main clause phenomena*) are linguistic phenomena (specific constructions, adverbs, etc.) with a specific discourse import, which occur in matrix clauses and a restricted set of embedded clauses (Emonds 1970; Heycock 2006). For instance, argument preposing in English, which conveys some kind of emphasis to the preposed constituent (Ward 1988), is one of the best-known instances of RP: it *cannot* occur in a temporal adverbial clause (1a), but *does* occur in a causal adverbial clause (1b). Note that the judgments in these examples “apply in a neutral, no-contrast context” (Haegeman & Ürögdi 2010a: 129).

- (1) a. Temporal adverbial clause  
\* *While* this book Mary was writing this time last year, her children were staying with her mother.  
(Haegeman 2006: 33)
- b. Causal adverbial clause  
I think we have more or less solved the problem for donkeys here, *because* those we haven’t got, we know about.  
(*Guardian*, 8.02.2003, Haegeman 2007)

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Moreover, the appearance of an adverb such as *probably* is problematic in a temporal clause (2a) but felicitous in a causal clause (2b):

- (2) a. Temporal adverbial clause  
?? John works best while his children are *probably* /  
*might be* asleep.  
(Haegeman 2004b: 71)
- b. Causal adverbial clause  
'Of course, Gabriel had a stoic reaction to her demand because he is *probably* a serial killer.'<sup>2</sup>

It is now widely accepted that these phenomena occur in some types of adverbial clauses (e.g. causal, adversative, concessive adverbial clauses), complement clauses of non-factive verbs (e.g. *verba dicendi* and *cogitandi* *to say*, *to think*) and non-restrictive clauses. They normally do *not* show up in other types of ('non-assertive', see section 2.1. below) embedded clauses (such as temporal, conditional, and purpose adverbial clauses), complement clauses of factive or volitional verbs (such as *to regret* and *to want*), restrictive relatives and embedded interrogatives.<sup>3</sup>

Root phenomena are interesting because they are discourse-driven phenomena banned from a specific set of embedded clauses, which could be an effect of either the syntactic or the discourse-semantic properties of these embedded clauses. Hence, root phenomena have received a lot of attention in both syntactic and discourse-oriented linguistic analyses, to the extent that they seem to be an ideal testing ground to study the interface between syntax and discourse (De Cat 2012).

In the extensive literature on RP (see Aelbrecht, Haegeman & Nye 2012; Heycock 2006 and Haegeman 2012 for an overview), most attention has been given to the distribution of specific constructions, such as argument preposing, verb second, etc., in different types of clauses (see Emonds 1970 and Hooper & Thompson's 1973 initial list of structural root phenomena). In addition, following Green (1976), quite some attention has also been given to the distribution of linguistic phenomena with a specific semantico-pragmatic function, mostly involving speaker attitude, such as tags and markers of

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<sup>2</sup> <<http://www.bustle.com>> (12 April 2021)

<sup>3</sup> Authier & Haegeman (2012: 80) show that restrictive relative clauses and embedded interrogatives behave in the same way with respect to root phenomena as 'central' adverbial clauses such as temporals, which are non-assertive. From a terminological point of view, the distinction between 'central' and 'peripheral' adverbial clauses is a syntactic distinction, which is the reflex of the semantico-pragmatic 'non-assertive' vs 'assertive' distinction. Since this paper is about the semantico-pragmatic properties of root phenomena and the clauses they appear in, rather than their syntactic properties, we will use the terminology '(non-)assertive adverbial clause' throughout this paper.

epistemic modality (see, for instance, Haegeman 2004a, 2004b and subsequent work; Verstraete 2007).

Recently, the influence of information-structural notions such as topic, focus and contrast on the distribution of RP has also been investigated. For instance, it has been observed that argument preposing in English is possible in all types of embedded clauses if the preposed constituent is explicitly contrasted with another referent in the discourse context, as in (3) (e.g. Bianchi & Frascarelli 2010; Haegeman & Ürögdi 2010a/2010b; Lahousse, Laenzlinger & Soare 2014 for an overview). Hence, contrastive argument preposing is not a RP.

- (3) Contrastive argument preposing in complement of a factive verb
- 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 & Ürögdi 2010a: 130-131, on the basis of Bianchi & Frascarelli's 2010 examples)

Moreover, Bianchi & Frascarelli (2010) and Frey & Meinunger (2019) show that different (semantico-pragmatic) types of topical constituents have a different distribution: some are root phenomena, others are not. With respect to linguistic phenomena expressing *focus*, it has been argued that prosodically marked new information focus and contrastive focus indicated by clefting is *not* a RP, in contrast with focus marking by fronting (a.o. Cruschina 2012, Emonds 1976; Frey & Meinunger 2019; Haegeman, Meinunger & Vercauteren, Hooper & Thompson 1973; Larrivé this volume).

In this article we concentrate on three constructions in French, which can convey focus (defined as the new or the most relevant information that is updated in the common ground), but which have not been associated with root phenomena: cleft sentences introduced by *c'est* 'it is' (4a) (Doetjes, Rebuschi & Rialland 2004; Dufter 2008, 2009; Lahousse & Borremans 2014) or by *il y a* 'there is' (4b) (Choi-Jonin & Lagae 2005; Karssenber 2018; Karssenber & Lahousse 2018; Lagae & Rouget 1998; Lambrecht 1986), and verb – NP subject (VS) word order (Fournier 1997; Lahousse 2011, Le Querler 1997) (4c).

- (4) a. [Context: Who will Mathilde vote for?]  
C'est pour Tournier qu'elle va voter.  
'It's for Tournier that she will vote.'  
(Doetjes, Rebuschi & Rialland 2004: 543)

- b. [Out-of-the-blue]  
Y'a le téléphone qui sonne !  
'There's the telephone that is ringing!'  
(Lambrecht 1988: 137)
- c. Je dois partir quand arrivent les enfants  
I have to-leave when arrive the children  
'I will leave when the children arrive.'  
(Lahousse 2010: 305)

We show that clefts instantiating narrow information focus are RP, in contrast with clefts instantiating contrastive focus and broad information focus. We will also demonstrate that, interestingly, VS word order in French displays a distribution that is opposite to that of root phenomena, and, hence, can be considered an 'inverse' RP.

We will argue that Krifka's (2017) concept of a 'judge' can capture these observations, rather than the notion of 'assertion', which has typically been used to account for the difference between contexts that can host RP and those that cannot. We will also show that our data provide independent confirmation for Bianchi & Frascarelli (2010)'s and Frey & Meinunger (2019)'s account of (some types of) topics as root phenomena.

The structure of the article is as follows. We will first (section 2) provide some background information on the traditional link between RP, assertion and epistemic modality (2.1.) and present Frey & Meinunger's (2019) alternative view, which is based on Krifka's (2017) concept of a judge (2.2.). We will then provide more information about the link between different types of topics and RP (2.3.) and argue that this makes interesting predictions for the distribution of constructions conveying different types of focus (2.4.). We will then test these hypotheses on the basis of evidence in French with respect to *c'est* clefts (section 3), *il y a* clefts (section 4) and VS word order (section 5).

## 2. Background

### 2.1. Assertion and epistemic modality

Embedded clauses which can host RP have been argued to be *non-assertive* (see, among many others, Aelbrecht, Haegeman & Nye 2012, De Cat 2012, Emonds 1970, Haegeman 2009, 2010, 2012, Heycock 2006, Hooper & Thompson 1973, Miyagawa 2012, Verstraete 2007).

The distinction between assertive and non-assertive embedded clauses is confirmed by their different behaviour with respect to the distribution of a large number of independent (formal and other) properties. In our view, one of the most important properties distinguishing them is, as we mentioned above, the fact that only assertive embedded clauses may host markers of

epistemic modality (see, for instance, Haegeman 2004a, b and subsequent work; Verstraete 2007). In Lahousse (2011), we show that this also holds for French:<sup>4</sup>

- (5) Non-assertive embedded clauses
- a. Temporal adverbial clause  
Quand Marie a *probablement* / *peut-être* téléphoné,  
Pierre était sur le point de partir.  
'??? When Marie has probably / maybe telephoned  
Pierre was on the point to leave.'  
(Lahousse 2011: 239)
  - b. Complement of a volitional verb  
??? Marie veut que Pierre soit *probablement* / *peut-être*  
présent à sa soutenance de thèse.  
'??? Marie wants that Pierre is probably / maybe  
present at her defense of thesis.'  
(Lahousse 2011: 245)
  - c. Embedded interrogative  
\* Jean demande quand Marie arrivera *probablement* /  
*peut-être*.  
'Jean asks when Marie will probably / maybe arrive.'  
(Lahousse 2011: 259)

Things are a bit more complicated for restrictive relative clauses, which can host adverbs of epistemic modality, although they normally do not host RP:

- (6) Restrictive relative clause (non-assertive)  
L'homme que Pierre a *probablement* / *peut-être* invité attend  
dans le couloir.  
'The man that Pierre has probably / maybe invited is waiting  
in the hallway.'  
(Lahousse 2011: 259)

However, in these cases, as we argue in Lahousse (2011: 260), the modal adverb is only allowed if the relative clause is echoic and repeats propositional content given in the preceding context, i.e. if the utterance 'Peter probably invited a man' is given in the preceding context. In this case, the epistemic modal adverb in (6) does not qualify the epistemic stance of the speaker. Matic' et al. (2014: 17) too argue that "restrictive relative clauses do not normally constitute a syntactic domain in which assertions can be meaningfully encoded".

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<sup>4</sup> These examples have all been built on the basis of attested examples, to have a naturalistic context.

Hence, non-assertive embedded clauses cannot host epistemic modal markers (unless these have an echoic interpretation). This is unsurprising, as it would be a contradiction to present a proposition at the same time as presupposed – by integrating it in a non-assertive clause – and to express doubt on its validity – by the presence of an epistemic modal marker.<sup>5</sup>

In assertive embedded clauses, however, as in (7), epistemic modal markers do occur:

- (7) Assertive embedded clauses
- a. Concessive adverbial clause  
 La fermeté de la consommation permettra à l'économie de progresser bien que l'activité se soit *probablement / peut-être* ralentie.  
 'The firmness of the consumption will allow the economy to progress although the activity is probably /maybe slowed down.'  
 (Lahousse 2011: 247)
  - b. Complement clause of *verba dicendi*  
 Jean dit / pense / croit que Marie sera *peut-être / probablement* là.  
 'John says / thinks / believes that Mary will perhaps / probably be there.'  
 (Lahousse 2011: 250)

The distinction between clauses which cannot host RP and those who can, has often been stated in terms of illocutionary force and assertion. Assertion, then, has often been linked with epistemic modality, for instance by Kuroda (1992: 66), who argues that “assertion is simply an expression of epistemic commitment”. Haegeman (2004) too (and also Hooper & Thompson 1973) establishes an explicit link between the ‘central’ and ‘peripheral’ status of an embedded clause and assertion. According to her, peripheral embedded clauses (such as causal, concessive and oppositive clauses), which host RPs, are propositions asserted by and anchored to the speaker, which is why they can host markers of epistemic modality. Central adverbial clauses (e.g. temporals), which do not host RPs, on the other hand, are anchored in the main proposition, do not have their own assertion, and cannot host markers of EM.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> As Davide Garassino (p.c.) states: “One could reason that since the content of a central (i.e. assertive, KL) adverbial clause is already presupposed (non-asserted), it would be incoherent to doubt it, i.e. to present it at the same time as presupposed (= as already part of the Common Ground) AND under question (= not part of the CG yet)”.

<sup>6</sup> As Davide Garassino (p.c.) notes: “If something is presupposed, it is already ‘taken for granted’ and is in the CG (and thus cannot be modified by markers of epistemic

## 2.2. *The concept of a judge*

Frey & Meinunger (2019: 118), however, argue that, if peripheral adverbial clauses have their own assertion, it is hard to explain why some types of root phenomena, such as German tags (8), which are strong root phenomena in their view, *cannot* occur in them.

- (8) ???\*[Obwohl Max das zweite Examen hat,  
although Max the second exam has  
*nicht wahr*], hat er sich noch nicht  
not true has he himself still not  
beworben.  
applied  
'Although Max had the second exam, isn't it true?, he  
still didn't apply.'  
(Frey & Meinunger 2019: 105, our translation)

In order to explain the contrast between this 'strong' RP, and the 'weak' RPs such as argument preposing (1) and epistemic modal adverbs (2), they apply Krifka's (2017) – in our view crucial – distinction between *assertion* and *judgment*.<sup>7</sup> In Krifka's view (Frey & Meinunger 2019: 100), assertion is *the expression of commitment*, a public act, the goal of which is to introduce a proposition in the common ground. Assertion is a speech act and is related with illocution. *Judgment*, on the other hand, is a private act, by which the speaker indicates who is the judge of the truth of the thought, and what is the degree of the truth commitment. Judgment can be indicated explicitly by the presence of a subjective epistemic or an evidential (see also Frey & Meinunger 2019 and Cornillie 2009 on the link between epistemic modality and evidentiality). By asserting a proposition, this information about the judge and the degree of the truth also enters the common ground. Hence, according to Krifka (2017), epistemic commitment is crucially related with judgment, not with assertion.

Frey & Meinunger (2019: 101) then argue that clauses which can host strongly root-sensitive expressions encode a speech act (...). Embedded clauses which may host weakly, but not strongly, root-sensitive expressions are assumed to encode a judgment and a judge (...) but not to encode a speech act. They apply this to different types of topic-marking constructions.

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(un)certainly). If not, it still has to enter the CG and can thus be accompanied by the speaker's epistemic evaluations".

<sup>7</sup> This distinction between assertion and judgment reminds similar distinctions made by Ducrot (1984), Nølke (1994, 2006) and Bres & Nowakowska (2005), albeit with a different terminology.

### 2.3. Topics as root phenomena

#### 2.3.1. Different types of topics

Frey & Meinunger (2019) analyze different types of topic-marking constructions in German, and argue that some, but not all of them, are root phenomena.<sup>8</sup> They relate this distinction to the specific type of topic instantiated by each topic construction and its impact on the common ground. For instance, aboutness-topic marking by *German Left Dislocation* (GLD) is a weak root phenomenon: it can occur in the complement clause of a verb like *to think* (9b), but not in the complement clause of a factive verb like *to regret* (9a):<sup>9</sup>

- (9) A: Haben Sie auch Otto eingeladen?  
have you also Otto invited  
'Did you also invite Otto?'<sup>10</sup>
- a. B: \*Nein, weil jeder bedauern  
no because everybody regret  
würde, *der Otto*, dass *der* dabei ist  
would the Otto, that ResP thereby is  
'No, because everybody would regret, Otto, that he is there.'
- b. B: Ja, weil jeder denkt, der  
yes because everybody thinks the  
*Otto*, dass *der* dabei sein sollte.  
Otto that ResP<sup>11</sup> thereby be should.  
'Yes, because everybody thinks, Otto, that he should be there.'
- (Frey & Meinunger 2019: 109, our translation)

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<sup>8</sup> For reasons of space, I simplify their proposal and concentrate on weak RP only. In addition to the topic constructions presented here, Frey & Meinunger (2019) also present German Hanging Topic (GHT), which is a strong RP: it only occurs in main clauses, and not in embedded clauses, independently of their (non-)assertive character. Whether French also has strong root phenomena, remains to be determined.

<sup>9</sup> Note that GLD cannot occur in assertive adverbial clauses. Frey & Meinunger (2019: 110) argue that this is a syntactic constraint, which is related with the "different statuses of complementisers of adverbial clauses on the one hand (...) and mere indicators of subordination (...) on the other".

<sup>10</sup> Frey & Meinunger only provide word-by-word translations, which we reproduce here. Since they do not provide English translations, the (literal) English translations in these examples are ours. Note however that these are not always felicitous or fully natural in English, probably for the same reasons which explain their unacceptable nature in German.

<sup>11</sup> *ResP* = resumptive pronoun.



The authors argue that this topic-marking construction does not have an effect on the structuring of the discourse

but have a rather local interpretive effect. They establish the aboutness-topic of the clause they occur in. In addition, GLD demands that the topic it establishes be already given by the context. Topic marking expresses that a judge considers a property as being associated especially with a specific object. In addition it becomes part of the CG that the judge establishes this association. Topic marking[s] (...) have an effect on CG-management (Frey & Meinunger 2019: 129).

Hence, the explicit marking of an aboutness-topic by German Left Dislocation is taken to indicate that a judge has attributed a property to that aboutness-topic. It is because of this judgment that GLD can only occur in clauses where epistemic modal markers (which also indicate the presence of a judgment) can occur.

In contrast, Frey & Meinunger (2019) show that right dislocation in German can appear in any type of clause, including the complement clause of a factive verb (9'a) and a temporal adverbial clause (9'b), and, hence, is *not* a root phenomenon.

- (9') a. Max hat verneint, dass sie  
 Max has denied that she  
 vorbeigekommenist, die Chefin.  
 by.passed is the boss.FEM  
 'Max denied that she came by, the boss.'
- b. Max war beschäftigt, als sie  
 Max was busy when she  
 hereinkam, die Chefin.  
 in.came the boss.FEM  
 'Max was busy when she came in, the boss.'
- (Frey & Meinunger 2019: 113)

They explain this by the fact that German right dislocation, just as other types of non-root-phenomena, such as focal constituents, diminutives, etc.

are not sensitive to the (...) estimation by a judge. (...) they are not concerned with (...) the way information is assessed by a thinking mind. They just facilitate the communication between speaker and hearer by marking what is new or given at a certain point in the communication, help to clarify the reference of an expression or make clear the emotional attitude of the speaker towards a referent (Frey & Meinunger 2019: 129).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> As Davide Garassino (p.c.) notes, this could be related to the fact that clitic right dislocation in many languages (especially in Romance) “usually conveys a continuing/familiar topic, i.e. a topical constituent which has already been

Similarly, it is well-known that Italian Clitic Left Dislocation (CILD) seems insensitive to the distinction between assertive and non-assertive contexts, and, hence, can occur in all types of clauses, including temporals (10). Hence, CILD is not a root phenomenon.

- (10) A: Devo guardare anche la torta?  
 must.1SG watch also the cake  
 ‘Should I watch the cake too?’  
 B: Sì, te l’ho detto: resta  
 yes to-you.CL it.CL have.1SG said stay.IMP  
 in cucina finché *la torta* non *la* vedi  
 in kitchen until the cake not it.CL see.2SG  
 pronta da sfornare.  
 ready to take out.  
 ‘Yes, I told you: stay in the kitchen until you see the cake is ready.’ (80%, 7/9)  
 (Bianchi & Frascarelli 2010: 65)

Bianchi & Frascarelli (2010) argue that Italian Clitic Left Dislocation (CILD) can instantiate aboutness-shift-topics, contrastive topics<sup>13</sup> and given-topics, and can appear in the context in (10) precisely because the given-topic interpretation is available.<sup>14</sup> Given-topics, according to Bianchi & Frascarelli (2010), “simply involve the retrieval of information already present in the CG content and (...) do not affect CG management”, and, hence, are no root phenomena. Hence, according to these authors, CILD in Italian can behave as right dislocation in German.

In contrast, constructions indicating the aboutness-shift-topic (A-topic) provide instructions “on how to update the propositional CG insofar as it identifies the entity under which the proposition expressed in the clause should be stored in the CG content; hence, the A-Topic pertains to CG management” (Bianchi & Frascarelli 2010: 55). In other words, their main function is “to signal a shift in the direction of the conversation, and hence the necessity to access a different file card in the propositional CG” (Bianchi & Frascarelli 2010: 78). The authors show that, in their corpus, they only found three cases (out of the 76) of Italian CILD with an A-topic

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established as aboutness topic in the previous context”. Hence, sentences with clitic right dislocation do not imply a judgment (concerning the establishment of a topic), but rather remind that the discourse referent had previously been established as a topic.

<sup>13</sup> For the sake of simplicity, and because this has no further impact on our analysis, we do not go deeper into contrastive topics here, but we refer the interested reader to Bianchi & Frascarelli’s (2010) account.

<sup>14</sup> For a different view on clitic left dislocation in Italian, we refer to Brunetti (2009).

interpretation, which all precede the complementizer, and, hence, are not *inside* the embedded clause. On the basis of examples of English argument preposing, then, the authors argue that constructions conveying A-topics are root phenomena (Bianchi & Frascarelli 2010: 82).<sup>15</sup> Table 1 summarizes the various cases discussed in this section:

Construction	Weak RP?	Function	Impact on CG?
German Left Dislocation (Frey & Meinunger 2019)	Yes	aboutness-topic marking	yes
German right dislocation (Frey & Meinunger 2019)	No	facilitating communication (e.g. by marking what is new or given at a certain point in the communication)	no
Italian Clitic Left Dislocation (Bianchi & Frascarelli 2010)	no (if given-topic interpretation is available)	“simply involving the retrieval of information already present in the CG content”	no
English argument preposing (Bianchi & Frascarelli 2010)	Yes	aboutness-topic marking	yes

Table 1. Relation between various topic-constructions and common ground management

### 2.3.2. *Predictions for focus*

In sum, it seems that there are at least two types of topics:

a. Aboutness-topics indicating that a judge considers that the clausal content should be stored in the common ground under this entity (that is newly proposed or reintroduced in the discourse, i.e. Reinhart’s 1981 aboutness topic). Constructions conveying these topics, which have an impact on CG management and are dependent on the presence of a judgment, are root phenomena.

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<sup>15</sup> As far as we can tell, the authors did not test native speaker judgments on examples of Italian CLD with a clear A-topic interpretation occurring in non-assertive adverbial clauses. If these were rejected, this would be a clear argument in favor of Bianchi & Frascarelli’s (2010) account. However, it might be very hard to construct examples of CLD with an A-topic interpretation in which the given-topic interpretation is not available. See Brunetti (2009) for an interesting account on left and right dislocation in Italian.

b. Topics which only indicate the givenness of the referent, to facilitate communication. These topics do *not* have an impact on CG management, and the constructions conveying them are no root phenomena.

This makes interesting predictions for the distribution of focus-marking constructions. For instance, it could indeed be expected that the explicit marking of *new information focus* (defined in Lambrecht's 1994 relational dimension: i.e. the new information with respect to the other information conveyed by the utterance) is a root phenomenon: it indicates that a piece of information has to be stored in the common ground, with respect to the topic in topic-comment structures, with respect to the background in focus-background constructions and with respect to a (potentially implicit) spatio-temporal topic in all focus constructions.

#### 2.4. *Focus as a root phenomenon: previous research and goal of this paper*

The interaction between the status of a construction as a (non-)root phenomenon and the specific type of focus it conveys, has been considered in detail for focus fronting in Italian (Bianchi 2013, 2015, Bianchi & Bocci 2012, Bianchi, Bocci & Cruschina 2015, 2016, Cruschina 2012). However, these constructions are hard to find in corpora of authentic speech (which are not often tagged for syntactic functions). In experiments, they seem hard to elicit in embedded clauses and speakers (of Sicilian and Italian) always front the focus to the left periphery of the matrix clause, even when the focus constituent was from the embedded clause (Cruschina, p.c.). Nevertheless, Cruschina's (2012) data suggest that focus fronting with a corrective or contrastive focus interpretation is *not* a root phenomenon, in contrast with focus fronting in which the preposed element conveys new information focus or mirative focus. Focus fronting in French is also considered a RP (see Larrivé 2020, this volume, for an overview, as well as Lahousse 2014 on focus fronting with *ainsi* 'in this way'). However, since we do not concentrate on focus fronting in this article, we do not dwell on this.

With respect to focus marking by clefts, it has already been argued by Hooper & Thompson (1973) and Emonds (1976), that English *it*-clefting, unlike 'regular' focus fronting, is not a root phenomenon. Haegeman et al. (2014) also show that *it*-clefting in which the clefted element is a contrastive focus is not a RP in English, and Larrivé (this volume) argues the same for French *c'est* clefts. Note however that the authors only consider clear cases of contrastive focus *it*-clefts, and do not consider other information-structural types of *it*-clefts, which have been identified for English, French, and other languages (a.o. Blanche-Benveniste 2006; Clech-Darbon, Rebuschi & Rialland 1999; Collins 1991; Davidse & Kimps 2016; De Cesare 2014, 2016, 2017; Declerck 1988; Delin & Oberlander 1995; Dufter 2008; Garassino 2014, this volume; Hedberg 2000; Katz 2000; Lahousse & Borremans 2014; Mertens 2011; Prince 1978; Roggia 2008).

Besides focus fronting, French has several constructions which have been argued to convey focus: *c'est* clefts (which occur in all registers), *il y a* clefts<sup>16</sup> (in colloquial French) and VS word order (typical of formal French). In what follows, we will show that the type of focus conveyed by clefts (information focus vs. contrastive focus) determines their distribution (sections 3 and 4) and that VS word order in French seems to be an inverse RP (section 5).

### 3. The distribution of three information-structural types of *c'est*-clefts in French

In Lahousse & Borremans (2014) and Lahousse, Laenzlinger & Soare (2014) we present the results of corpus research on the distribution of three information-structural types of *c'est*-clefts in adverbial clauses in French.<sup>17</sup>

#### 3.1. Three information-structural types of clefts

In line with previous literature (see Garassino 2016, this volume, for an overview), we distinguish three types of clefts: clefts in which the clefted element is a contrastive focus, i.e. *NarConFoc-Background clefts* (11), a new information focus, i.e. *NewInfoFoc-Background clefts* (12) and a topic, i.e. *Top-NewInfoFoc clefts* (13).<sup>18</sup>

- (11) NarConFoc-Background cleft  
 [Previous context: the main character is telling that she wants to write novels, which her mother disapproves, and that she will leave the house earlier than her brothers.]  
 Le proviseur lui dit: votre fille, madame, est la première en français. Ma mère ne dit rien, rien, pas contente parce que *c'est pas ses fils qui sont les premiers en français*.  
 'The head-master said to her: your daughter, Madam, is the top of her class in French. My mother didn't say anything, she was not happy because it is not her sons who are top of their classes in French.'  
 (*Frantext*, Lahousse et al. 2014)

<sup>16</sup> See section 4.2. below on the information structure of *il y a* clefts and the type of focus they convey.

<sup>17</sup> We also examined the distribution of *it*-clefts in English, which pattern in exactly the same way as *c'est*-clefts in French. For reasons of space, we do not present the English data here, but we refer the interested reader to the works mentioned above. Of course, the fact that English *it*-clefts display exactly the same distributional constraints as French, is evidence in favour of the relevance of our results.

<sup>18</sup> On such clefts, we refer to Jacob (2015); Lahousse & Lamiroy (2017); Garassino (this volume); De Cesare & Garassino (2018). On the distinction between the concepts given/new and topic/focus in clefts, see Lombardi Vallauri (this volume).

- (12) NewInfoFoc-Background cleft  
 A: - Pourquoi la France<sup>19</sup> ne rend pas la Corse indépendante ?  
 ‘A: - Why doesn’t France let Corsica go independent?’  
 B: - Parce que la République est une et indivisible. Parce que la Corse n’a jamais été indépendante. Parce que *ce n’est pas à cause d’un petit nombre de terroristes qu’il faudrait céder*.  
 ‘B: - Because the Republic is a single and indivisible body. Because Corsica has never been independent. Because it is Not because of a small number of terrorists that one should have to give in.’  
 (corpus De Smet, Lahousse et al. 2014)
- (13) Top-NewInfoFoc cleft  
 C’est le désir qui mène à l’amour. Mais si on ne peut plus se passer de la satisfaction de ce désir sans entrer dans un état dépressif, c’est que ce désir est devenu besoin. On le voit constamment parce que *c’est ainsi que se construit tout l’être humain*. L’être humain est mû par un désir de parler alors qu’avant il ne savait pas (...)  
 ‘It’s desire that leads to love. But if one can’t do without the fulfilment of that desire, unless getting into a depression, that means that the desire has become a need. A person feels it all the time, because it is in this way that every human being is built. The human being is moved by a desire to speak, whereas before, he was not aware...’  
 (Frantext, Lahousse & Borremans 2014)

These three types of clefts have the following internal distribution of topic, focus and background.<sup>20</sup> In line with Büring (2012), we define *narrow focus* as all types of focus that does not scope over the whole sentence, and can scope for instance over one word, a constituent (e.g. an argument, a VP), etc.

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<sup>19</sup> The corpus De Smet contains very informal French written on an on-line discussion forum. In the examples reproduced here, we do not correct spelling errors.

<sup>20</sup> *C’est*-clefts in French can also, in very specific registers, e.g. at the beginning of news articles and in jokes (Karsenberg & Lahousse 2018 and Karsenberg 2018) instantiate sentence focus (i.e. broad new information focus) (Destruel & De Veugh-Geiss 2018). These clefts are called *broad focus clefts* by Doetjes, Rebuschi & Riolland (2004). However, we did not find examples of these clefts in our corpus research on the distribution of clefts in adverbial clauses.

	<b>Clefted element</b>	<b>Cleft relative clause</b>
<b>NewInfoFoc-Background cleft (12)</b>	<i>(narrow) new information focus</i> (new information with respect to the background)	<i>Background</i> (given or predictable information in the discourse context)
<b>NarConFoc-Background cleft (11)</b>	<i>contrastive focus</i> (restricted set of alternatives lexicogrammatically indicated in the context)	
<b>Top-NewInfoFoc cleft (13)</b>	<i>Topic</i> (anaphoric element the sentence is about)	<i>(narrow) new information focus</i>

Table 2. Information structural properties of three types of *c'est* clefts<sup>21</sup>

In both NarConFoc-Background clefts and NewInfoFoc-Background clefts, the content of the pseudo-relative clause is given in or predictable from the context; it is the background of the utterance. In (11), the preceding context is about who is top of the class for French, and in (12), about France letting Corsica be independent. The content of the pseudo-relative clauses in these examples refers to this information, and, hence, constitutes the background of the utterance. This is not the case in Top-NewInfoFoc clefts, where the pseudo-relative clause provides the new information in the discourse with respect to the topic. Hence, in (13), the content of the pseudo-relative clause (the fact that every human is built in a specific way) is new information with respect to the previous discourse, which is resumed by the clefted element, the anaphor *ainsi* ‘in this way’.

NarConFoc-Background clefts differ from NewInfoFoc-Background clefts with respect to the type of focus that is involved: the discourse context of a NarConFoc-Background cleft involves a given or implied *restricted* set of alternatives out of which the referent of the CE is presented as being chosen (see also Krifka’s 2007 notion of *closed focus*).<sup>22</sup> In NewInfoFoc-Background clefts, the referent of the clefted element is *not* presented as being part of a contextually given restricted set of referents. In these clefts, there is also some sense of contrast, but the referent of the focus is not part of a context-dependent *restricted* set of alternatives, but is presented as the result of a

<sup>21</sup> This typology of cleft sentences is compatible with previous typologies proposed for Romance, by, among others, Dufter (2009) and Garassino (2014). The latter also includes referential givenness in his typology.

<sup>22</sup> See Riester & Baumann (2013) on the identification of contrastive foci in corpus research.

choice between the all values that could have been chosen instead (as in Krifka’s 2007 open focus).

In this sense, example (11) is an instance of a NarConFoc-Background cleft, because the referent of the clefted element *ses fils* ‘her sons’ is in explicit contrast with *votre fille* ‘your daughter’, who is mentioned in the previous context. Importantly, in our corpus research, we only considered clefts as a NarConFoc-Background cleft, when the discourse context provides an explicit lexicogrammatical indication of the contrastive set (we refer to Lahousse & Borremans 2014 and Lahousse et al. 2014 for details on the coding criteria). On the contrary, in (12), the contrast set is not given in the discourse context: the other important reasons for which Corsica could potentially become independent (besides the referent of the clefted element, *un petit nombre de terroristes* ‘a small number of terrorists’), are not formally indicated in the context of the cleft. Hence, the contrast sets of (11’) and (12’) are as follows:

- (11’) *ses fils* ‘her sons’ >< *votre fille* ‘your daughter’ (closed contrast, hence contrastive focus)  
 (12’) *because of a small number of terrorists* >< other potential reasons (open contrast, hence new information focus)

Note also that the Top-NewInfoFoc clefts are quite frequent in French (Scappini 2014, see also Larrivéé this volume).

### 3.2. Distribution of c’est-clefts in adverbial clauses

The results of the corpus research by Lahousse & Borremans (2014) are given in Tables 3 and 4.<sup>23</sup> These results show that, in assertive adverbial clauses (Table 3), all three types of clefts show up, whereas, in non-assertive adverbial clauses (Table 4), only NarConFoc-Background clefts appear.

Adverbial clause introduced by	NarConFoc-Background	NewInfoFoc-Background clefts	Top-NewInfoFoc Clefts	Total number of clefts
<i>parce que</i> ‘because’	17	12	36	65
<i>quand</i> ‘when’ (oppositive)	4	0	0	4

Table 3. Distribution of clefts in assertive adverbial clauses (Lahousse & Borremans 2014)

<sup>23</sup> Note that, of course, given that corpus research only provides positive evidence, this leads to the formulation of a tendency rather than a real constraint.



Adverbial clause introduced by	NarConFoc-Background	NewInfoFoc-Background clefts	Top-NewInfoFoc Clefts	Total number of clefts
<i>quand</i> ‘when’ (temporal)	29	0	0	29
<i>lorsque</i> ‘when’ (temporal)	3	0	0	3
<i>jusqu’à ce que</i> ‘until’	0	0	0	0
<i>après que</i> ‘after’	0	0	0	0
<i>pendant que</i> ‘while’ (temporal)	0	0	0	0
<i>depuis que</i> ‘since’ (temporal)	0	0	0	0
<i>avant que</i> ‘before’	0	0	0	0

Table 4. Distribution of clefts in non-assertive adverbial clauses (Lahousse & Borremans 2014)

Our data show that NarConFoc-Background clefts are not a root phenomenon: they occur in both assertive (11) (Table 3) and non-assertive adverbial clauses (14 below) (Table 4). Example (14), which is attested at an on-line discussion forum illustrates the occurrence of a cleft in a preposed temporal clause. Since the content of the pseudo-relative clause is literally given in the discourse context and, hence, backgrounded, and the clefted element *moi* ‘me’ is in a closed contrast with the male person referred to by *il* ‘he’ in the previous context, this is a NarConFoc-Background cleft.

- (14) NarConFoc-Background cleft  
Comment savoir s’il m’aime? notre relation dure depuis 3ans et je dois toujours le supplié avant de le voir. il m’appelle rarement et *quand c’est moi qui appel* [sic], il a du mal a décroché [sic].  
‘How can I know if he loves me? We have a relationship since 3 years and I always have to beg before seeing him. He rarely calls me up, and when it is me who calls him up, he has difficulty to take up the phone.’  
(corpus De Smet, Lahousse & Borremans 2014)

NewInfoFoc-Background and Top-NewInfoFoc clefts, however, are weak root phenomena: they occur in assertive (12-13) (Table 3), but not in non-assertive adverbial clauses (Table 4).

### 3.3. Discussion: contrastive focus and the concept of a judge

These data prompt two questions:

- a. Why can NarConFoc-Background clefts show up in all types of adverbial clauses?
- b. What do NewInfoFoc-Background and Top-NewInfoFoc clefts have in common, and why does this prevent them from occurring in non-assertive adverbial clauses?

With respect to question a., as is shown by examples (3) above, it is well known that contrast can save a construction in a hostile context (Leonetti 2013: 99; Haegeman & Ürögdi 2010; Karssenbergh 2018: 164; Matic' et al. 2014). However, there is no consensus why this is the case.

In line with many authors, we defined contrast as being part of a contextually given restricted set of referents (see Krifka's 2007 notion of *closed focus*). For instance, Cruschina (2015: 45) argues that "contrastive focus is strongly dependent on the previous discourse insofar as it requires an antecedent with respect to which an explicit contrast is set by the speaker" (Bianchi 2013; Bianchi & Bocci 2012; Cruschina 2012). Similarly, according to Matic' et al. (2014: 2), "contrast implies that there is a limited number of specific alternatives for the expressed topics or foci available in the context". The same holds for Rosemeyer et al. (this volume), who provide an interesting analysis of the complex way in which contrastive interpretations arise in discourse. Hence, in all these definitions, contrast is dependent on the discourse context and does not depend on the presence of a judge, i.e. on "the assessment of a proposition by a judge" (Frey & Meinunger 2019: 128). This becomes clear when a contrastive focus is challenged, as in (15):

- (15) – Who came, John, Boris or Peter?  
– It's Peter who came.  
– That's not true... It's not Peter who came, but Boris or John.

What is challenged in (15) is the application of the predicate *came* to Peter, but definitely not the existence of the contrast set {John, Boris, Peter} itself, out of which Peter has been selected. Hence, the crucial part of the meaning of a contrastive focus (as we defined it here) is not encoded in the proposition itself, and is not subject to a judgment. Hence, one essential part of the meaning of contrastive focus is inferred from the context in which the utterance appears,<sup>24</sup> and is not affected by the estimation made by a judge. In

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<sup>24</sup> Contrast is the result of *inferences from* the discourse context: "the impression of contrastiveness (...) arises from particular inferences which we draw on the basis of given conversational contexts" (Lambrech 1994: 290-291) and Ertshik-Shir (1997: 123) holds that the sets that are involved in the interpretation of contrastive focus "cannot be derived directly from context. Inferences must be made as to which type of set is involved".

our view, this explains why *c'est*-clefts instantiating contrastive focus are not restricted to embedded clauses which encode a judge (i.e. assertive adverbial clauses), but also appear in non-assertive adverbial clauses, which do not encode a judge (as can be seen from the fact that they do not host epistemic modal markers, see section 2.1. above).

Let's now turn to question (b) above, which we repeat here: What do NewInfoFoc-Background clefts (12) and Top-NewInfoFoc clefts (13) have in common, and why does this prevent them from occurring in non-assertive adverbial clauses?

First note that both NewInfoFoc-Background and Top-Background clefts convey new information focus, albeit in different parts of the construction: the clefted element in NewInfoFoc-Background clefts, and the pseudo-relative clause in Top-Background clefts (Table 2).<sup>25</sup> Hence, the data above seem to suggest that it is (the syntactic indication of) new information focus that is a root phenomenon. This was predicted (section 2.3.2.): to the extent that the explicit indication of new information focus concerns the proposition that has to be entered in the common ground, new information focus has to do with common ground management, and, hence, requires the presence of a judge in Krifka's (2017) account.

However, in the next section, we will show that the hypothesis that syntactically marked new information focus is a root phenomenon has to be nuanced. On the basis of new evidence with respect to *il y a* 'there is' clefts in French, we show that syntactically marked *broad* (new information) focus, is definitely *not* a root phenomenon, in contrast with (syntactically marked) *narrow* new information focus.

#### 4. The distribution of *il y a* 'there is' clefts in embedded clauses

##### 4.1. Introduction

Besides *c'est*-clefts, French also has *il y a* 'there is' clefts, which are known to be typical of colloquial French (Choi-Jonin & Lagae 2005; Jullien 2007; Karssenbergh 2016,2018; Karssenbergh & Lahousse 2017,2018; Lambrecht 1986,2001; Lagae & Rouget 1998; Léard 1992; Verwimp & Lahousse 2017).

- (16) Y'a le téléphone qui sonne !  
'There's the telephone that is ringing!'  
~ Le téléphone sonne !  
'The telephone is ringing!'  
(Lambrecht 1988: 137)

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<sup>25</sup> According to Masia (this volume), topic and focus are in fact evidential markers. It remains to be seen if and how this could also account for the distributional facts we show in this article.

Karssenber (2018: 137) offers a detailed analysis of the distribution of *il y a* clefts in three corpora of written French: *Le Monde* (1998), spoken French (*CFPP*) and written informal French in the *Yahoo-based Contrastive Corpus of Questions and Answers (YCCQA)*.<sup>26</sup> Her dataset contains 576 *il y a* clefts, as shown in Table 5:

	Le Monde	YCCQA	CFPP	Total
Corpus size in words	25,700,000	6,100,000	550,000	32,350,000
Total number of <i>il y a</i> clefts	81	285	210	576
Number of <i>il y a</i> clefts per 500,000 words	2	23	191	9

Table 5- Distribution of *il y a* clefts in three corpora (Karssenber 2018: 96)

Karssenber’s (2018) data confirm that *il y a* ‘there is’ clefts are typical of spoken French, since they are 95.5 times more frequent in her corpus of spoken French than in her corpus of written French. Moreover, 67 of the 81 instances of clefts in the *Le Monde* corpus occur inside reported speech.

#### 4.2. Information-structural types of *il y a* clefts

As is well-known, *il y a* clefts predominantly (78% of the 576 instances of *il y a* clefts in Karssenber’s 2018 corpora) have a broad focus articulation, i.e. a new information focus that extends to the whole cleft construction (see also Bentley & Cruschina 2018). Hence, in the next examples, the information encoded by both the clefted element and the pseudo-relative clause is new in the context:

- (17) Ceci dit, au moindre doute, je passe un coup de fil, et *il y a trois personnes qui descendent dans la seconde*.  
 ‘With that said, if there is any doubt I make a call, and three people come down within a second.’  
 (*Le Monde*, Karssenber 2018: 155)

In 11% of the 576 instances of *il y a* clefts in Karssenber’s (2018) corpora, the cleft has a clear (non-contrastive) focus-background articulation.<sup>27</sup> In the

<sup>26</sup> The *YCCQA* corpus consists in interactions on an on-line discussion forum. The data contain lots of spelling errors, which we did not correct in the examples we present here.

<sup>27</sup> The specific information structure of the remaining 11% of the corpus examples is ambiguous (Karssenber 2018: 155). Since all the *il y a* clefts inside adverbial

next examples, the clefted element conveys non-contrastive new information focus, and the pseudo-relative clause provides the background, i.e. the information that is given in or inferable from the discourse context.

- (18) A: Je recherche des modèles de voiture à acheter neuve moins de 10000 euros, ou aller!?  
 ‘I’m looking for new car models that cost less than €10,000, where should I go?’  
 B: bonjours. *il y a la citroen c1 qui est a moins de 10000 euros.*  
 ‘Hello. There’s the Citroën C1 that costs less than €10,000.’  
 (YCCQA, Karssenbergr 2018: 158-159)

#### 4.3. All-focus *il y a* clefts inside embedded clauses: new data

Karssenbergr (2018) does not analyze the distribution of *il y a* clefts in embedded clauses, and, as far as we can tell, this has also not been done by other linguists. Tables 6, 7 and 8, however, provide a description of the embedded contexts *il y a* clefts appear in, on the basis of Karssenbergr’s (2018) dataset.<sup>28</sup> In the ‘others’ class, we mention those embedded clauses in which *il y a* clefts occur in the corpora, but whose (non-) assertive status is not entirely clear. We mention them here for completeness’ sake, but leave this for further research.

<b>Non-assertive embedded clauses</b>	
Conditional clause	5
Temporal clause	5
Restrictive relative clause	5
Embedded interrogative	2
<b>Assertive embedded clauses</b>	
Causal clause	8
Complement clause (all non-factive verbs)	20
<b>Others</b>	
<i>Heureusement que</i> + clause	2
<i>Peut-être que</i> + clause	2
<b>Total</b>	
	49/285 (= 17%)

Table 6. Distribution of *il y a* clefts in embedded clauses in the De Smet corpus

clauses (section 4.3.) are all-focus clefts, we do not dwell on these instances of *il y a* clefts with an ambiguous information structure articulation.

<sup>28</sup> We are very grateful to Lena Karssenbergr for granting us access to her dataset.

<b>Non-assertive embedded clauses</b>	
Conditional clause	5
Temporal clause	6
Restrictive relative clause	1
Embedded clause introduced by <i>sans que</i>	
Embedded interrogative	1
<b>Assertive embedded clauses</b>	
Causal clause	8
Adversative clause	1
Complement clause (all non-factive verbs)	18
<b>Others</b>	
Explicative <i>c'est que</i> clause	1
<b>Total</b>	
	41/210 (19.5 %)

Table 7. Distribution of *il y a* clefts in embedded clauses in the *CFPP* corpus

<b>Non-assertive embedded clauses</b>	
Conditional clause	5
Temporal clause	4
Embedded interrogative	1
<b>Assertive embedded clauses</b>	
Complement clause (all non-factive verbs)	17
Causal clause	1
<b>Others</b>	
Embedded clause introduced by <i>si fort que</i> 'so strong that'	1
<b>Total</b>	
	29/81 (35.8 %)

Table 8. Distribution of *il y a* clefts in embedded clauses in the *Le Monde* corpus

Tables 6, 7 and 8 show that, in the three corpora, *il y a* clefts occur in embedded clauses, including in temporal (19) and conditional (20) adverbial clauses; these are non-assertive adverbial clauses, where root phenomena do not occur. In addition, *il y a* clefts also show up in restrictive relative clauses (21), embedded clauses introduced by *sans que* 'without' and embedded interrogatives, which are also non-assertive.

- (19) *Il y a* cleft in a temporal  
Bah si j'passe à côté d'eux dans la rue oui j'entends qu'ils  
parlent pas français hein d'accord + donc en allant te

promener euh voilà ou pff (mm mm) quand j'vais dans la rue  
ou oui oui (mmmm) ça c'est sûr + ou *quand y a Marta qui vient  
avec son mari* elle parle roumain ça je l'entends aussi

(CFPP corpus)

'Well if I pass by them in the street yes I hear they don't speak  
French well all right + so while walking around well here it is  
or pff (mm mm) when I walk in the street or yes yes (mm mm)  
that's for sure or + when there is Marta who's coming in  
*with her husband* she speaks Roumanian that I hear that too'

- (20) *Il y a* cleft in a conditional  
est-ce que t'as l'impression que (...) ton quartier est touché  
par des problèmes économiques? (...) pff j'pense pas plus que  
ça hein parce que finalement c'est des bureaux alors *si y a une  
entreprise qui s'en va* (mm) les bureaux ils sont à louer pour  
une autre entreprise hein

(CFPP corpus)

'Do you think that (...) your neighbourhood is affected by  
economic problems? (...) oh well not really you see because  
at the end of the day it's offices so if there is a company that  
leaves (mm) the offices are there to be rented to another  
company you see'

- (21) *Il y a* cleft in a restrictive relative clause  
<question> Quelle est ta pub télévisée préférée ?  
'<question> What is your favorite TV commercial?'  
<réponse> la pub ou *il y a le herisson qui se frotte contre  
leponge* et il en tombe amoureux c'est pas mimi ça;  
'<answer> the commercial where there is a hedgehog that is  
rubbing against a sponge and it falls in love with the sponge,  
isn't that cute!'  
(corpus De Smet)

In all these cases, the *il y a* cleft conveys broad new information focus: the whole construction instantiates new information. Hence, these data show that broad new information focus clefts are *not* a root phenomenon.<sup>29</sup>

#### 4.4. *Broad vs narrow new information focus and the concept of a judge*

The data on the distribution of *il y a* clefts (section 4) and *c'est* clefts (section 3) in embedded clauses show that syntactically marked narrow – but not broad – new information focus is a root phenomenon. Why would that be the case?

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<sup>29</sup> The corpus does not contain occurrences of focus-background *il y a* clefts in adverbial clauses.

In other words, why can *il y a* clefts conveying broad information focus occur in clauses which do not involve a judgment in Krifka's (2017) sense, in contrast with *c'est* clefts conveying narrow new information focus?

In our view, this has to do with the fact that broad information focus indicates that the whole propositional content is new in the discourse context, and does *not* involve an informational partition between a part of the proposition that belongs to the common ground and a part of the proposition that is *not yet* part of the common ground. Hence, in statements involving broad information focus, the judgment of the relevance of a piece of information for the common ground does not take place *inside* the proposition, but rather *between* the whole proposition and the discourse context. This could also be linked to the fact that constructions conveying broad new information focus typically instantiate athetic judgment, which consists in nothing more than the "recognition or rejection of material of a judgment" (Kuroda 1972: 154).<sup>30</sup> This contrasts with a judgment in Krifka's (2017) sense (section 2.2.), which is a private act by which the speaker indicates who is the judge of the truth of the thought, and what is the degree of the truth commitment.

In constructions with narrow information focus, on the contrary, the relevance – for the common ground – of the piece of information denoted by the focus, is evaluated in the first place with respect to clause-internal material: the topic instantiated by the clefted element in Top-NewInfoFoc *c'est* clefts, and the background information conveyed by the pseudo-relative in NewInfoFoc-background *c'est* clefts. Hence, these constructions involve a judgment on the relative relevance of parts of the propositional content for the common ground. They reflect a categorical judgment, which "consist of two separate acts, one the act of recognition of that which is to be made the subject, and the other, the act of affirming or denying what is expressed by the predicate about the subject" (Kuroda 1972: 154). In our view, this "act of affirming or denying what is expressed by the predicate about the subject", implies a judgment in Krifka's (2017) sense.

In the next section, we turn to another construction that has been argued to convey broad information focus, VS word order in French, and show that it is sensitive to the distinction between assertive and non-assertive adverbial clauses, but in the opposite way as root phenomena.

## 5. Verb-subject word order in French: an inverse root phenomenon

### 5.1. Introduction

Nominal inversion (VS) in French typically occurs in formal and / or written French:

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<sup>30</sup> Belligh (2020a, 2020b, 2021) provides an interesting overview of the differences and similarities between broad new information focus and theticity.



- (22) [title of an article in a magazine]  
 Ces amitiés qui changent quand  
 Those friendships which change when  
*arrivent les enfants*  
 arrive the children.  
 ‘Those friendships which change when children arrive.’<sup>31</sup>

The function of VS is *not* to indicate the (referential) newness of the referent of the postverbal subject in the discourse (Lahousse 2011). For instance, in the authentic example (23), the referent of the postverbal subject *mon petit mousses* ‘my small (chocolate) mousses’ has been literally mentioned in the previous sentence:

- (23) Votre plus ancien souvenir gustatif ?  
 ‘Your oldest gustatory memory?’  
 Des petits mousses. En maternelle, j’attendais l’heure du  
 goûter toute la journée et quand *arrivait enfin mon petit mousses* (...), j’étais au paradis !  
 ‘Small chocolate mousses. In kindergarten, I would be  
 waiting for the snack time the whole day and when my small  
 mousses was finally there, I would be in seventh heaven!’<sup>32</sup>

Most authors studying VS agree that the postverbal subject is (a) either the narrow (new information or contrastive) focus of the clause, or part of a broad new information focus, (b) and accept, more or less explicitly, that the subject is *not* the aboutness-topic of the clause (cf. Fournier 1997; Lahousse 2003, 2006a, 2006b, 2011; Legendre 2001; Le Querler 1997; Tasmowski & Willems 1987).<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> <<https://cheekmagazine.fr/societe/parents-enfants-amitieslate/>> (13 April 2021)

<sup>32</sup> <[https://www.lexpress.fr/styles/saveurs/aissa-maiga-trois-continents-dans-l-assiette\\_1267005.html](https://www.lexpress.fr/styles/saveurs/aissa-maiga-trois-continents-dans-l-assiette_1267005.html)> (13 April 2021)

<sup>33</sup> Independent evidence in favor of the qualification (b) rather than (a) comes from the fact that the VS-sequence can function as the background in a sentence with focus-background articulation, as (i) below. In this example (more examples can be found in Lahousse 2011, 2015), the whole propositional content is given and the function of preposed *ainsi* ‘in that way’ seems to be to re-assert that the event took place in the specific way specified in the discourse context. In this context, the VS-sequence is part of the background: the postverbal subject is not the topic, but also not part of a focused constituent. Hence, although the qualifications ‘not being the aboutness-topic’ (b) and ‘being (part of) the (contrastive or new information) focus’ (a) can both be applied to *most* contexts in which VS occurs, only the qualification (b) accounts for the fact that VS occurs in sentences with a focus-background articulation.

The qualifications (a) and (b) are often considered to be equivalent informational statuses. However, in the light of what we have seen before, they prompt quite different predictions with respect to the distribution of VS: (a') If the primary function of VS were to indicate that the postverbal subject is a narrow contrastive focus or part of a broad information focus, then VS would be expected to have the same distribution as other constructions conveying narrow (contrastive) focus and wide focus, such as, respectively, NarConFoc-Background *c'est* clefts (section 3) and *il y a* clefts (section 4). Since we have seen that these constructions are no root phenomena, VS would *not* be expected to be sensitive to the difference between assertive and non-assertive adverbial clauses, and, hence, appear in both types of adverbial clauses. (b') If the primary function of VS were to indicate that the postverbal subject is *not* the aboutness-topic, VS would be expected to be sensitive to the difference between assertive and non-assertive adverbial clauses. In what follows, we will show that prediction (b') is borne out, and we will argue that this can also be explained by the concept of a judge.

## 5.2. The distribution of VS in embedded clauses

In Lahousse (2010, 2011) we show that the appearance of VS in causal and concessive embedded clauses (assertive adverbial clauses) is more restricted than in temporal, comparative, purpose clauses and clauses beginning with *sans que* 'without ...-ing' (non-assertive adverbial clauses):

(24) Assertive adverbial clauses

a. Causal clause

??? Je dois partir puisque sont arrivés  
 I have to leave since have arrived  
 les enfants.  
 the children

- 
- (i) *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.*

'He [Alexander] wrote with a kind of concentrated distraction, like when you doodle on a phone notepad: you listen less and less and it's the drawing which takes over.'

<i>ainsi</i>	<i>écrivait</i>	<i>Alexandre, ...</i>
in that way	wrote	Alexandre, ...

'That's how Alexander wrote, ...'

*se réfugiant dans les pleins et les déliés de cette écriture sage, de ce crayonnement appliqué.*

'taking refuge in the loops and lines of sober penmanship, of assiduous doodling.'

(Pennac, *Frantext*, Lahousse 2015: 211)

- ‘I have to leave since the children arrived.’
- b. Causal clause  
 ??? Je dois partir parce que *sont arrivés*  
 I have to leave because have arrived  
*les enfants.*  
 the children  
 ‘I have to leave because the children arrived.’
- c. Concessive clause  
 ??? Je dois partir bien que *soient arrivés*  
 I have to leave although have arrived  
*les enfants.*  
 the children  
 ‘I have to leave although the children arrived.’  
 (Lahousse 2010: 304)
- (25) Non-assertive adverbial clauses
- a. Temporal clause  
 Je dois partir quand *arrivent*  
 I have to leave when arrive  
*les enfants.*  
 the children  
 ‘I will leave when the children arrive.’
- b. Comparative clause  
 Il pleurerait comme *le*  
 he wept in-the-same-way-as it  
*font les enfants.*  
 do the children  
 ‘He wept as children do.’
- c. Purpose clause  
 Il fait tout pour que *viennent*  
 he does everything so that come  
*ses enfants.*  
 his children  
 ‘He does everything so his children would come.’
- d. Clause introduced by *sans que* ‘without ... -ing’  
 Il va partir sans que *soient arrivés*  
 he will leave without being arrived  
*les enfants.*  
 the children  
 ‘He will leave without the children having arrived.’  
 (Lahousse 2010: 305)

This contrast shows that, all things being equal, VS is very marginal in assertive adverbial clauses (24), but felicitous in non-assertive adverbial

clauses (25), and, hence, displays the opposite behavior as root phenomena.<sup>34</sup> Hence, VS is sensitive to the opposition between non-assertive and assertive adverbial clauses, as predicted by (b') in section 5.1. Moreover, VS can be considered an *inverse* root phenomenon, to the extent that it has the *opposite* behavior as that of typical root phenomena, such as German Left Dislocation (section 2.3.1.) and *c'est* clefts marking narrow new information focus (section 3.3.).

### 5.3. *VS and the concept of a judge*

Recall from section 2.3.1. that, according to Frey & Meinunger (2019: 128), “topic marking expresses that a judge considers a property as being associated especially with a specific object. In addition it becomes part of the CG that the judge establishes this association”. Similarly, Bianchi & Frascarelli (2010: 55) argue that constructions indicating the aboutness-shift-topic (A-topic) provide instructions “on how to update the propositional CG insofar as it identifies the entity under which the proposition expressed in the clause should be stored in the CG content; hence, the A-Topic pertains to CG management”.

Hence, if the marking of a constituent as the topic or the narrow new information focus of a sentence is a judgment in Krifka’s (2017) sense, the marking of a constituent as *not* being the topic of the sentence, in fact indicates that there *can be no judgment* with respect to the referent of this constituent. What is marked is the fact that the utterance contains no property associated with that referent that needs to be added to the common ground. It is this fundamental property of VS in French – the absence of a judgment considering the referent of the postverbal subject to be the entity under which the proposition should be stored in the common ground – that explains why VS cannot show up in assertive adverbial clauses. In these clauses, a judgment typically does take place, as shown by the fact that they can host markers of epistemic modality (section 2).

If the function of VS is to explicitly indicate that the postverbal subject cannot be the topic of the sentence, with respect to which the common ground is updated, VS is expected (a) to be sensitive to the opposition between assertive and non-assertive contexts, (b) to have an opposite distribution as aboutness-topic-marking constructions, such as German Left Dislocation (section 2.3.1.) and English argument preposing, as shown in example (1). In other words, the distribution of VS in French confirms Frey & Meinunger’s (2019) and

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<sup>34</sup> Corpus research in *Frantext* (literary French) by Lahousse (2011) has provided authentic examples of VS in assertive adverbial clauses. These occurrences however contrast with the made-up examples in (24) in that VS is favored – in *all* of them – by one or several explicit indications of the focal nature of the subject. For reasons of space, we cannot develop this here, but we refer the reader to Lahousse (2010, 2011) for an account, which is compatible with our proposal here.

Bianchi & Frascarelli's (2010) claim that aboutness-topics are root phenomena.

## 6. Conclusion

In this article, we examined the distribution of a series of constructions which have been argued to convey different types of focus, in order to determine whether or not they are root phenomena (cf. Table 9 for an overview).

Construction	RP?	Function = explicit marking of ...	Judgment?
NewInfoFoc-Background <i>c'est</i> cleft	RP	narrow new information focus	yes (new information focus = content to be added in the common ground)
Top-NewInfoFoc <i>c'est</i> cleft	RP	narrow new information focus	yes (new information focus = content to be added in the common ground)
NarConFoc-Background <i>c'est</i> cleft	No RP	contrastive focus	no judgment inside the proposition
<i>Il y a</i> clefts	No RP	broad new information focus	no judgment inside the proposition
VS word order	inverse RP	absence of aboutness-topic	absence of judgment

Table 9. Clefts and postverbal subjects in French and the presence of a judgment<sup>35</sup>

We have shown that *c'est* clefts conveying narrow new information focus (be it in the clefted element or in the pseudo-relative clause) are root phenomena, in contrast with *c'est* clefts with a contrastively focused clefted element. We explained this in line with Frey & Meinunger's (2019) account of topics as root phenomena, which hinges on Krifka's (2017) concept of a judge: in their view, contexts which host (weak) root phenomena, are contexts involving a judgment. We have argued that new information focus plays a role in common ground management, and, hence, is the result of a judgment.

<sup>35</sup> Note that these data are challenging for a left-peripheral account of root phenomena. In Lahousse et al. (2014), we put forward an account based on featural relativized minimality that could explain at least part of the data.

Contrastive focus, however, is not the result of a judgment about the proposition, but of the relation between the proposition and the presence of a contrast set in the discourse.

We then showed that, in contrast with narrow new information focus, the explicit marking of broad new information focus is not a root phenomenon: broad focus *il y a* clefts in French occur in all types of embedded clauses. We also explained this by the fact that these clefts involve an assessment of the propositional content with respect to the discourse, but not a judgment inside the proposition.

We used VS word order in French to test predictions made by the data with respect to clefts. We have shown that VS word order in French occurs in non-assertive, but not in assertive contexts, and, hence, displays the opposite distribution as root phenomena: it seems to be an *inverse root phenomenon*. We have argued that this shows that VS indicates the non-topical (rather than the focal) status of the postverbal subject, and we have argued that this confirms Frey & Meinunger's (2019) and Bianchi & Frascarelli's (2010) account of aboutness-topics as being relevant to common ground management, and, hence, as involving a judgment. Thus, if constructions which explicitly mark the aboutness-topic are root phenomena, then constructions which mark a constituent as *not* being the aboutness-topics are also sensitive to the distinction between assertive and non-assertive clauses, but exhibit the opposite distribution, and, hence, are inverse root phenomena. It remains to be determined whether other languages have similar constructions indicating the non-topical status of a constituent and, if so, whether these constructions have the same distribution as VS in French.

In sum, we have shown (a) that constructions which syntactically mark narrow information focus are root phenomena, (b) that syntactic constructions which signal broad focus and narrow contrastive focus are not root phenomena, and (c) that constructions which mark a constituent as not being the aboutness-topic are inverse root phenomena.

We have shown that all these observations can be accounted for by Krifka's (2017) notion of a judge and constitute evidence in favor of Bianchi & Frascarelli's (2010) and Frey & Meinunger's (2019) account of aboutness-topics as root phenomena.

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