

CHAPTER 14

Left dislocation in French: varieties, norm and usage

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14.1 Introduction

In this chapter we discuss those syntactic configurations in French which go by the name of 'split constructions' or dislocation, first described by Bally (1965(1994): 60). These are stretches of discourse such as the following (we give all our examples in the original French, together with an indication of their provenance, and a rough gloss in English):

- (1) a. *Moi, je n'arrive pas à résoudre ce problème.*
Me, I can't manage to solve this problem.
- b. *Ce problème, je n'arrive pas à le résoudre.*
This problem, I can't manage to solve it.
- c. *Résoudre ce problème, je n'y arrive pas.*
To solve this problem, I can't manage.

These constructions are made up of two parts. The first, which is usually a noun phrase or a predicate phrase, has a characteristic non-final or rising intonation. Its prototypical realization is a melodic medium-high rise followed by a clear pause (Wunderli 1987). We mark this type of intonation '/' in the transcriptions in this chapter, whereas '\ ' indicates a final assertive intonation contour and '- ' the intonation typical of an aside. The second part of the construction is more often (but not necessarily) a clause containing a verb phrase; this occurs with all types of final intonation patterns. Bally labels these two components 'A' and 'Z' respectively, a convenient abbreviation which we shall also use here.

A similar ZA type of construction also exists, with the A segment in second position, with a flat 'final aside' intonation:

- (2) *mais ils ont beaucoup évolué\ les signes de ponctuation.* (speech, TV)
but they have developed a lot\ punctuation marks.

The two types of construction are often assumed to be simple variants, but it is not at all clear that this is the case. For this reason we shall limit our account here to left dislocation of the AZ type. It is important to note that the identification of one part of the construction as either A or Z depends upon its prosodic characteristics (rising intonation for A, falling intonation for Z), rather than on its morpho-syntactic form. Thus despite their syntactic resemblance to (1b) examples such as (3) are considered to be of the ZA type because of their intonational contour:

- (3) Le blé d'hiver \ ça s'appelle. (speech < Blanche-Benveniste 1989: 68)
 Winter wheat \ it's called.

We also exclude examples such as (4):

- (4) Chacun il a sa chimère. (< Sandfeld 1965)
 Each one they have their dreams.

Occurrences of this type have an unbroken intonation contour with no internal pauses; the initial noun phrase may be indefinite, as in (4), or it may be an indeterminate quantifier. These characteristics, and many others, distinguish them from dislocations (Berrendonner 1993), and suggest that they should be considered as simple elementary verbal clauses. It seems, in fact, that the basic structure of the verbal clause in French contains both an NP subject position and a nominative 'clitic pronoun' position, with the latter marking person inflection in the verb phrase:

[NP] [[CLIT X]_{INFL} V'] VP

In some 'nonstandard' dialects, and perhaps elsewhere, both the NP and CLIT positions can be filled simultaneously, producing occurrences such as (4). In writing, where there is no prosody that can be relied on, examples such as these are often quasi-homonyms with dislocation such as that illustrated in example (1). We will therefore take great care to exclude any doubtful or ambiguous examples.

14.1.1 *Left dislocation and the norm*

There is a paradox concerning left dislocation: curiously, it evokes contradictory judgements from normativists and prescriptivists. On the one hand, it has a well-established reputation as belonging to a style with low prestige, often termed *le français populaire*, 'the people's French' (Gadet 1992: 76). At times it is even expediently classified as belonging to a pidgin. Queneau compares it to Chinook (see Gadet 1989); others see it as a stereotypical marker of the speech of the 'pied noir' from North Africa.

This negative reputation can sometimes cause purists to deny its occurrence: we once heard a grammarian colleague, undaunted by the

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paradox, say: *les phrases segmentées, moi, j'en fais jamais*, 'segmented constructions, me, I never use them'.

However, alongside such negative evaluations there are also some more positive judgements:

Cet homme, je l'ai vu; ton ami, je lui ai parlé. (This man, I have seen him; your friend, I have spoken to him.) A very vital and expressive turn of phrase, which brings welcome variety to our speech. (Dauzat 1946: 92; our translation)

Furthermore, the last thirty years have seen the majority of school textbooks mentioning left dislocation as an accepted procedure for 'highlighting', on a par with clefting and the stylistically prestigious inversion of noun phrase subjects. Some textbooks, however, advise students that dislocation is 'colloquial' or typical of spoken French. The fact that prescriptivists attribute both positive and negative values to the construction suggests that we can dismiss the possibility of a conflict of norms due to its usage by a particular social group or by a disfavoured minority group in society.

A similar ambivalence is found in the connotations to which the construction gives rise. Left dislocation is used in written texts for contradictory purposes: on the one hand, it serves as a way of creating a spontaneous or colloquial style of language, as in (5); on the other hand, it is used to produce a particularly *recherché* rhetorical effect, as in (6):

- (5) Le médecin, il était en uniforme de médecin, tout blanc, c'était lui qui commandait à tout le monde, les infirmières, ça filait doux, fallait voir. (Cavanna)

The doctor, he was wearing a doctor's coat, all white, it was he who ordered everyone around, the nurses, they kept a low profile, you should have seen them.

- (6) C'est que vous savez, le monde des choses et le monde des idées que nous devons connaître tous les deux, ils sont immenses, et le temps de notre étude, disons de notre existence, il est si borné, si resserré. (M. Bergmann, Opening lecture of a course on foreign literature, Faculty of Arts, Strasbourg, 1852-3)

It is as you know, the world of things and the world of ideas that we should get to know, both of them, they are immense, and the time we have to study them, that is to say of our existence, it is so limited, so narrow.

In this chapter we have set ourselves the task of finding an explanation for the unusual normative status of this construction. In seeking to understand why left dislocation gives rise to these contradictory value judgements, we shall observe some of the mechanisms whereby a normative doctrine is put together, and we shall note that, in matters of variation, as elsewhere, there is a radical discrepancy between the inherent

structure of a language system and the image of the system that is provided by official normative discourse. But first we must analyse the structure of the system.

14.2 Towards a grammar of left dislocation

14.2.1 *Micro-syntax vs macro-syntax*

Almost all descriptions since Bally's analyse dislocated constructions as sentences, without any further discussion. But to adopt a categorization of this type is to unthinkingly operationalize the everyday idea of 'sentence'; whereas there are good reasons, in fact, for considering the sentence as simply an intuitive and inconsistent orthographic approximation of a functional segmentation of language (Berrendonner and Reichler-Béguelin 1989). We will therefore avoid using this term. In its place we shall introduce a theory of syntagmatic or linear units based upon the hypothesis that discourse consists of two irreducible levels of combinations of elements, superposed on each other, which we shall term 'microsyntax' and 'macrosyntax' respectively. Both the hypothesis and terminology are directly inspired by the work of GARS, the *Groupe aixois de recherche en syntaxe* (Blanche-Benveniste *et al.* 1990).

At a microsyntactic level, that is to say at the lowest level of complexity, the relevant units are meaningful elements such as morphemes or syntactic groups. These elements are related to each other by *concatenation* (sequential constraints) and *government* (which implies a unilateral or bilateral co-occurrence of elements reflecting agreement, binding or selection restrictions). The constraints that apply at this level can be expressed in terms of the distribution of elements in a linear stretch, or chain, of discourse. The largest microsyntactic units of this kind will be called MSUs; an MSU is thus any stretch of discourse that is not governed by a larger unit. MSUs can therefore have a diverse range of internal forms, such as that of a noun phrase, a prepositional phrase, an adjectival phrase, a non-finite verbal phrase or a finite verbal phrase.

Beyond the level of the MSU a threshold is crossed, and the nature of the relationships between units changes. The relevant units are no longer segments of a chain, but heterogeneous entities of information. They are in one sense MSUs, but only in that they express a language act focusing on a certain content. They are also momentary states of *shared knowledge*, and can sometimes be, in fact, *gestures* or *perceptions*. The relations which become established between these elements are of a semantic-pragmatic nature; they are relationships of *presupposition* (where an MSU implies that there is some pre-existing shared knowledge or common ground), or of *production* (where some new shared knowledge can be inferred from the MSU). The units constructed by

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these relationships are mini-discourse programs which we call *periods*. The macrosyntactic role played by each constituent MSU is indicated mainly by prosodic features – stress, intonation and the like.

Owing to lack of space, we refer you to Berrendonner (1990) and (1992) for an illustration of these concepts. The main point of importance here is the methods of analysis that follow from this framework. We consider as one and the same MSU any linguistic sequence whose elements appear to be connected microsyntactically, in other words which are linked by a formal relationship of government. We then consider as a series of different MSUs, any sequence whose segments can be related only through the intermediary of shared knowledge. Anaphors can provide important indications of this, since they function as referring expressions presupposing some shared knowledge. Furthermore, as forms linked by an antecedent item, they can indicate the presence or the absence of a boundary between MSUs. Thus, in (7), the associating anaphoric relationship *the family . . . them* presupposes that there has been some intermediate inferential reprocessing of shared knowledge (an inference that the class referred to by *family* consists of a collection of individuals). This type of reference implies, therefore, that *the family* and *their* do not belong to the same MSU or, in other words, that (7) is a two-part period:

- (7) Les rares fois où Paul écrit à sa famille, c'est pour leur demander de l'argent. (Student essay)

On the rare occasions Paul writes to his family, it's to ask them for money.

The fact that left dislocations have been studied most often within the framework of a phrasal grammar has led to the relationship between the two components being seen exclusively from a microsyntactic point of view, with A therefore considered either as an element that has been extracted from Z, or as a peripheral addition that is subordinate to Z. This limiting and distorting view has led to several structurally distinct types of dislocation being confused with each other. It is easy to show, however, that there are at least three kinds of AZ sequences, each with a different construction.

14.2.2 Type I: binary periods

Here several features show that in most cases there is no microsyntactic connection between segments A and Z. On the one hand, A is quite often an autonomous NP, not governed in any way by Z or by any of its constituents. The AZ connection is therefore purely semantic and implicit, resting on the simple fact that Z asserts something about the referent in A (a relationship of *aboutness*):

- (8) Nous allons essayer de faire des pas chassés avec la corde à sauter/
pour ça il faut savoir que *le pas chassé* /^(A) *on tape le talon l'un contre
l'autre* /^(Z) (speech)

We are going to try and do some chassé steps with the skipping
rope/ for that you have to know that *the chassé step* /^(A) *you knock
your heels against each other* /^(Z)

- (9) – Je vais acheter le matelas\
– *Le matelas/ je veux aussi venir* \
– I'm going to buy the mattress\
– *The mattress/ I want to come too* \
(oral)

Newspaper headlines often have a similar structure, except that Z is then a non-propositional clause of an NP type. For example, the following AZ constructions have the same kind of connection, established purely by informational content:

- (10) *Italie: Albanais expulsés*
Italy: Albanians deported
Fiscalité: Danger
Taxation: Danger

Furthermore, Z often contains an anaphor of A. Between A and this anaphor it is possible to observe every variety of anaphoric relation that can exist between one MSU and another: so-called 'faithful' nominal anaphors (as in (11)), anaphors that are hyponyms (as in (12)), recategorizing anaphors (13) and associative anaphors of many kinds (14)–(15). These examples show that the anaphor in this configuration is not bound by A, but is a lexically and inflectionally free referring expression. Thus there is an MSU frontier between A and Z:

- (11) – Est-ce que tu demandes la transition avec ce qu'on vient de
dire ou est-ce que ...
– Non non *la transition* / je cherche pas *la transition* \
(speech, TV)
– Are you asking for change with what has just been said or
are ...
– No not *change* / I'm not looking for *change* \
(12) *La chasse à l'étudiant*, je pense que la police a toujours considéré
cette activité comme un sport très agréable. (speech < CREDIF)
Hunting students, I think that the police have always considered
this activity to be a very pleasant sport.
(13) Ah ben *la Seine* / euh *les quais* les quais maintenant sont canalisés/
vous savez. (speech, radio)

Oh well *the Seine* / eh *the embankments* the embankments are chan-
nelled now you know.

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As might be expected, when the anaphor is a pronoun it does not appear to be subject to strict grammatical agreement with A, which confirms that it is not a bound form with A as its antecedent (Berrendonner and Reichler-Béguelin 1995):

- (14) Le collègue avec qui j'ai fait le spectacle ils [iz] ont adopté deux petits Coréens. (speech)
The colleague with whom I did the show, *they* adopted two little Koreans.

Finally, when the anaphor is an argument of a verb marked for case, A retains the form of a noun phrase but without any case marking (for example, in (15) the noun phrase *La première fille*, 'the first girl', is not preceded by the preposition *à*, 'to'. This absence of case marking shows that A is not an extraposed governed item dependent on the verb in Z. Compare in this respect (15) with (18) below:

- (15) La première fille qu'il rencontre, il lui raconte tout ça. (speech)
The first girl he meets, he tells her all that.

So far, then, everything suggests that some AZ occurrences are a series of two microsyntactically independent MSUs, forming a period. At a formal level, this type of period is marked above all by its prosodic contour [A/ Z\]; by its recursive structure, the Z component being itself able to take the AZ form (16); and by the fact that a gesture can take the place of Z (17):

- (16) Jacqueline/ sa mère/ la bonne/ elle la lui refile/ (oral < Gadet)
Jacqueline/ her mother/ the maid/ her she's palming her off on him.

- (17) C'est le seul que je continue. *Le reste*, < Gesture: hand thrown back over the shoulder >
(Calbris 1985: 69)

It's the only one I'm carrying on with. *The rest*, < Gesture: hand thrown back over the shoulder >

In terms of semantic structure, we shall say that A, the first MSU, has the function of assigning a *field of interpretation* to Z. The notion of field of interpretation comes from the observation that a large number of semantic operations presuppose an awareness of a valid framework or 'mental space' which limits their application. Such is the case for existential constructions, instructions concerning reference, the attribution of truth values, calculations of relevance, implicit inferences and so on. By their nature all these operations only have meaning in relation to a previously defined cognitive field. Our hypothesis is that in an AZ period, the A section explicitly sets out the field of interpretation which holds for all the semantic operations expressed in Z.

It is an established fact that the A position cannot be occupied by a 'specific' indefinite NP (which introduces the object), nor by an indeterminate quantifier (such as *someone* or *no one*), but only by a referential NP (a definite or indefinite generic). This NP therefore indicates a referent already present in the shared knowledge of the speakers. The A segment has the function of marking this referent as the field of interpretation within which Z has its value or, to put it another way, to transform it from the simple object that it was up to that point, into a new 'mental space'. This is why these binary periods act as special tools in the textual routine of changing the *topic*, which involves taking some 'discourse object' (sometimes the one last mentioned by the interlocutor, as in examples (9), (11) and (19)), and transforming it into a field of interpretation for what follows (Sandfeld 1965: 49). This is also why recursive nestings, as in (16), appear to be particularly co-operative procedures, through which the addressee is progressively guided to the correct field of interpretation, by means of the successive closing off of other fields.

In conclusion, in the binary periods of an AZ type, the A section supplies some meta-discourse information with regard to Z which specifies the field within which it should be interpreted. It follows that although A is microsyntactically autonomous, it is not pragmatically autonomous: for obviously any meta-comment presupposes the existence of the clause on which it comments.

14.2.3 Type II: dislocation

Sometimes, however, A is a prepositional phrase where the preposition shows that the grammatical case is dependent on the verb in Z. Since a prepositional phrase with the appropriate case marking is missing from the right of the verb, it is probable that A is nothing more than a fronted segment governed by the verb:

- (18) a. *A Paris, j'allais tous les quinze jours, à Londres, une fois par an.* (< Grevisse)

To Paris, I went every fifteen days, to London, once a year.

- b. *Il vaut mieux donner aux restos du coeur qu'aux impôts, parce qu'aux restos du coeur on donne ce qu'on veut.*
(speech, TV < Sabio 1995)

It's better to give to soup kitchens than to the tax man, because to the soup kitchens you give what you want.

With (18), then, we discover a second type of left dislocation, made up of a single MSU. Its dislocated structure suggests the existence in French microsyntax of an operation which, when applied to a constituent, has the effect of moving it to the beginning of the MSU and isolating it

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prosodically. A characteristic of this fronting operation is that it cannot apply equally to all types of complements. Sabio (1995: 130) demonstrates that it rarely occurs with accusatives and with certain locatives, and that it is preferred with secondary governed items or with circumstantial adverbials.

Semantically, the fronted constituents are marked as contrastive and, in terms of the theme–rheme distinction as non-rhematic. They do not have the usual characteristics of the rheme part of a clause, for they are beyond the reach of negation or interrogation, as well as of restrictive operations; and they are compatible with a cleft Z that already contains an explicit rheme (for example, *A Pierre, c'est un livre qu'on offrira*, 'To Peter it's a book that we shall give'). On the other hand, their fronting has a 'paradigmaticizing' value in the sense of Nølke (1983): it indicates that the referent of A is contrasted with other potential referents within a system which is assumed to be known. The discourse context often makes the contrast explicit, as in (18).

Although in these type II sequences fronting serves essentially as a way of marking rhetorically a referential contrast, in type I periods the A clause does not seem to have an intrinsic contrastive value of this kind. In fact numerous occurrences can be found where it would be difficult to maintain that A contrasts with anything at all, as in (19):

- (19) – Comment est venue l'idée d'édifier ici une réserve, puis un jardin zoologique?
– *Eh bien, cette idée, elle appartient au maire de Villars-les Dombes.* (speech < INA corpus (Institut National de l'Audiovisuel))
– How did the idea come about to build a reserve here, and then a zoological garden?
– *Well, this idea, it belongs to the mayor of Villars-les Dombes.*

When type I constructions do occasionally take on a contrastive value, this value does not stem from the literal meaning of the MSU, but instead from a sort of inferential over-interpretation of it, based upon implicit reasoning such as: 'If the speaker defines a field A, s/he excludes everything exterior to it.' In this kind of secondary contrast the referent of A (its complement in the universe) remains by its nature a vague entity; whereas in the contrasts expressed by type II, the object-terms are often entirely defined or definable individuals. Nevertheless in spoken discourse such over-interpretations make it difficult to distinguish a semantic difference between types I and II.

The notions of *theme*, *topic*, *focus of attention*, and so on, typically used in descriptive grammars with reference to left dislocation, generally confuse the two functions of defining the field of interpretation and identifying a referential contrast. Our data, as we have seen, suggest on the contrary that we are dealing with two distinct and independent

semantic operations which, in standard French at least, are expressed by two different types of syntactic construction (type I versus type II). The traditional vague notion of theme indirectly suggests a psychological approach and is not subtle enough *vis-à-vis* the distinctions inherent in language. It needs to be replaced by a detailed paradigm of logico-semantic operations, and to be clearly defined within a model of shared discourse knowledge within which they function.

14.2.4 Type I/type II: meta-analyses

Some AZ sequences are ambiguous, in particular those in which A can be interpreted as a noun phrase subject. We can interpret them equally as type I or type II:

- (20) Le problème, il était là. (speech < Berthoud 1996)
The problem, it was there.

These stretches of discourse can be analysed in two different ways: either as binary periods, with the subject of the second clause an empty NP (see section 14.1 above), or as single MSUs, with a fronted NP. This can be represented as follows, with the symbol indicating a pause and the subscript 'i' reflecting the microsyntactic binding and agreement of the clitic with the NP subject.

Type I: [[the problem]_{NP}]_{MSU} # [[∅_i]_{NP} [it_i was there]_{VP}]_{MSU}
Type II: [[the problem]_i]_{NP} # [it_i was there]_{VP}]_{MSU}

A similar ambiguity exists in utterances where the initial NP can be taken either as an autonomous clause, or as a fronted governed accusative:

- (21) Le parfum, j'adore! (advertisement)
Perfume, I adore!

In (21), the absence of a governed accusative item to the right of the verb can, in fact, be analysed in two ways; first, as resulting from the fronting of the titular NP, leaving empty the accusative position after the verb (type II) and, second, as due to the presence, in this position, of a zero accusative item as a non-bound specifier (*I adore ∅* substituting for *I adore it*, *I adore woody odours*, etc. (Berrendonner 1995)), hence a type I structure.

As occurrences of the type shown in (20) and (21) are by far the most numerous, the I/II opposition is in fact neutralized in the majority of cases. It is only unequivocally marked if A, or its anaphora, is an indirect object. We then have distinctive pairs such as (15) and (18), of the type *Pierre, I tell him everything* versus *To Pierre, I tell everything*. Some ambiguous stretches can of course lose their ambiguity in the presence of contextual clues.

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Thus, when an AZ sequence acts as a 'subordinate clause' embedded within an MSU, the odds are that it is a type II sequence. Since recursive embedding of clauses is a commonplace microsyntactic phenomenon, it is out of the question that a period, a non-segmental praxeological unit, should be employed as a constituent at a microsyntactic level. Example (22) thus contains a type II structure (since the fronting of the NP subject takes place within an embedded clause after *that*); whereas example (23) is a type I period (the only hypothesis compatible with the fact that the initial NP is outside the clause):

- (22) Il pensait que *le rôle d'un enfant jusqu'à dix ans, c'était de pousser et d'être en bonne santé.* (speech < INA)

He thought that *the role of a child up to the age of ten, it was to grow and to be in good health.*

- (23) Cette petite femme blonde, c'est extraordinaire l'énergie qu'elle a! (oral < Borel)

This little blonde woman, it's extraordinary the energy she has!

The application of this criterion is, however, complicated by the fact that some apparently 'main' clauses are in reality more or less lexicalized and have the status of simple modal operators, so that they are not really embedded into the clause which follows (this is probably the case with *you have to know that* in example (8)).

If left dislocation has a clearly contrastive function, we are more likely to consider it as fitting into the type II category. However, this is merely a supposition:

- (24) a. (...) *moi, j'écrirai des comédies et toi tu écriras tes rêves.* (Flaubert, G. *Correspondance I*, Ed. Pléiade)

(...) *me, I shall write plays and you you will write your dreams.*

- b. *toi t'as eu des problèmes avec le frigo moi avec le robinet je venais dingue je venais dingue.* (speech < Berthoud and Mondada 1991)

you you had problems with the fridge, me with the tap I was going crazy I was going crazy.

In most cases, AZ sequences remain structurally ambiguous and the resulting almost imperceptible semantic differences can hardly be relied upon to help speakers differentiate between type I and type II constructions. The result is a meta-analysis where both types of construction are perceived as competing and equally possible analyses of a single syntactic entity. They are, in other words, reduced to the status of *variants* (see Sankoff 1994: 28).

14.2.5 Type III: hybrid structures

There is a third type of AZ construction which has some analogies with each of the other two. Its A segment is a prepositional phrase, with the preposition showing that it is a governed item. Its Z segment, as is the case for type I examples, contains an anaphor of A (at first glance, always a clitic pronoun). This third type also, therefore, is only distinct with indirect objects:

- (25) a. *Dans cet extrait de texte de Paul Nizan, on y découvre un exposé sur la vie d'un apprenti dans cette société industrielle.* (student essay)
In this extract from a text by Paul Nizan, we there discover an account of the life of an apprentice in this industrial society.
- b. *Sur le sentier pedestre qui conduit les promeneurs du gîte d'Aillères au sommet de la Berra, on y découvre à mi-parcours un banc installé à l'ombre des sapins.* (newspaper)
On the pedestrian footpath which takes walkers from the Aillères inn to the top of the Berra, one discovers there half-way up a bench under the shade of the pine trees.
- c. *Mais de ce grand voyage, il n'en revint jamais.* (student essay)
But from this great journey, he never came back from it.
- d. (Il y a ...) un élément passif, et (...) un premier élément actif ou dynamique. A cet élément dynamique, Guillaumin *lui* propose un rôle déclencheur ou impulseur. (PhD thesis)
 (There is ...) a passive element, and (...) a primary active or dynamic element. *To this dynamic element, Guillaumin proposes for it a triggering or impetus-providing role.*

What is most striking in these examples is that their structure is somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, the preposition marks the A segment as governed by the verb in Z. But on the other hand it cannot be governed by this verb since the relevant position in Z is already filled by an appropriate clitic pronoun. We cannot overcome this difficulty by assuming that the clitic marks an inflected object, as although clitic doubling in French is attested for subjects (see (4) above), it does not generally exist for items that are governed: we rarely find examples such as, **Je le vois quelqu'un*, literally 'I him see someone' or **Je la vois une voiture*, literally 'I it see a car', even in dialects. The pleonasm inherent in the examples in (25) are therefore well and truly structural inconsistencies and need to be explained as such.

We propose that type III cases be seen as hybrid constructions which exist as a result of contamination from types I and II. By this we mean an operation such as:

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[ABCE] + [ACDE] → [ABCDE]

That is to say, they result from the joining of two sequences whose surface structures are at the same time both common and differentiated, on the one condition that their word order be compatible, and without regard for their respective syntactic structures. The resulting hybrid thus consists of an amalgam of the morphosyntactic markers belonging to each one of the mixed sequences, without guaranteeing the structural consistency of the whole string. If we assume that type III dislocations are hybrid forms formed in this way, borrowing the preposition of the A part of type II and the clitic of the Z section of type I, we can explain quite satisfactorily the pleonastic and structurally contradictory character of sequences of this type.

Furthermore, the hybridization explanation that we have offered implies that those speakers who produce type III forms are aware of the rules which allow the generation of types I and II, whereas the reverse is not necessarily the case. This explains why the grammaticality of types I and II is not generally called into question, whereas that of type III structures tends to be disputed: some speakers perceive them as ungrammatical pleonasms (Grevisse-Goosse 1986: 508), while others use them without thinking they are doing anything untoward.

Our hypothesis also explains the semantic output of III, which is sometimes that of type I and at other times that of type II. Compare, for example, (26), where A establishes a field of interpretation and (27), where A sets out a contrastive reference:

(26) Bilinguisme à Burmarima.

Au VIIe siècle avant J.-C., dans la cité mise au jour au nord de la Syrie, on y pratiquait deux langues. (newspaper)

Bilingualism in Burmarina.

In the VIIth century BC, in the city to be found in the north of Syria, two languages were spoken there.

(27) Il parlait très peu de ses souffrances . . . il les racontait à l'oncle de Charpenay, mais à nous il nous disait de bien prier pour lui. (letter, 1915)

He spoke very little of his suffering . . . he told Charpenay's uncle about it, but to us he told us to pray for him.

Finally, the hybridization hypothesis allows us to suggest a pragmatic explanation for the existence of type III constructions, which appear as a consequence of the meta-analysis of I/II. Their main characteristic, in fact, is that in the indirect object examples the remaining visible differences between I and II are neutralized; the meta-analysis generalizes the lack of a distinction between them (or rather between the semantic operations that they express) for all subsequent uses of dislocations. Type III

sequences therefore function as analogical regularizers: a meta-analysis may not differentiate between I and II, where the marking has been neutralized, but these sequences create a differentiation by accumulating markers from both. They appear, therefore, to be the key piece of a grammatical variant within which the I/II opposition is totally abandoned.

The hybridization phenomenon observed here is of crucial importance for a theory of variation envisaged as an internal dynamic of linguistic systems. Similar combinations of a meta-analysis and a pleonasm are found in several unstable areas of French syntax. We are therefore tempted to see this as an important regularity in variation, and to propose (28) as a general rule:

- (28) Any partial meta-analysis of two structures X and Y goes hand in hand with the complementary existence of a hybrid which combines markers from X and Y.

That is to say that if, at a given stage of the grammar of a language, a significant X/Y opposition has little phonetic substance and is often neutralized, a competing grammar appears in which the opposition is reduced to a single architerme, partly apparent in meta-analytical forms, and partly in hybrids of X and Y.

14.2.6 Summary

To summarize, we can say that the substructure of left dislocation in French causes two grammatical variants, G1 and G2, to enter into competition with each other. In the G1 variant, the two semantic operations of firstly limiting the field of interpretation (O_I) and of secondly indicating a contrastive reference (O_{II}) constitute a significant opposition, and are distinctively marked: one at a macrosyntactic level by type I periodic structures; the other at a microsytactic level by fronting (type II dislocated MSUs). However, there is a vast class of occurrences where this distinctive opposition is neutralized. In the competing G2 variant the opposition is reduced to a single syncretic operation (O_{III}), expressed either by neutralized stretches of discourse or by hybrid strings (type III). This can be shown as in Figure 14.1 (overleaf).

14.3 Back to the normative paradox

It is tempting to relate these distinctions to the conflicting norms discussed earlier. A likely hypothesis would be that periodic type I structures, felt to characterize a relatively colloquial usage, are responsible for the negative value judgments, whereas type II dislocations, perceived as an oratory device from a prestigious style of speaking or writing, give rise to positive judgements. This explanation assumes, on the one hand, that there is an objective 'stylistic' correlation at the origin of

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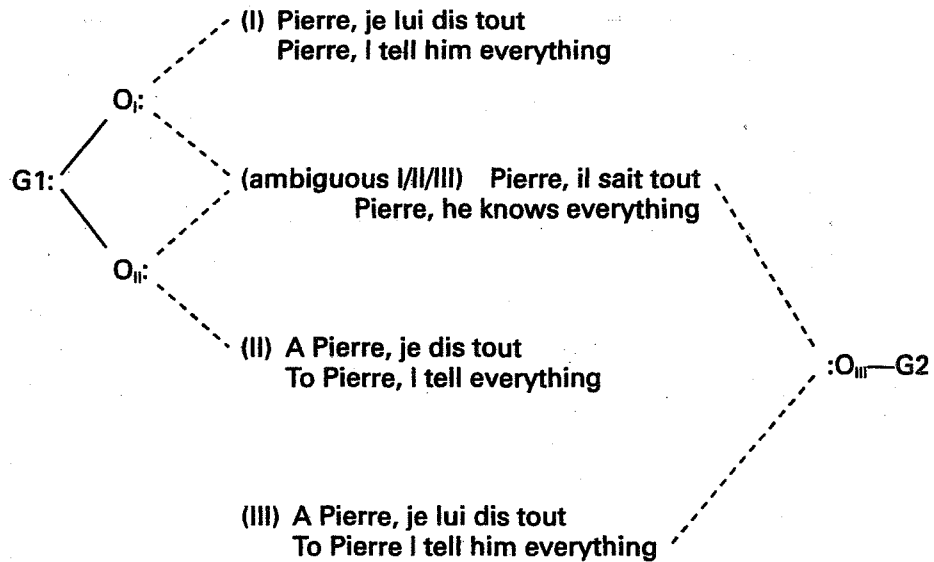


Figure 14.1

normative imagery, which assigns types I and II to two different modes of interaction or to two 'linguistic markets' (Bourdieu 1982) which make unequal demands on speakers. As a result the two types of dislocation acquire different connotations and values. This explanation also implies that the values attached to I and II may accumulate and become mixed together in speakers' conscious awareness. Given that it is often difficult to distinguish the two types formally or semantically, it is not surprising to find mixed feelings of this sort. Nor is it surprising that the structural meta-analysis described in section 14.2.4 is accompanied by a confusion of the styles associated with each structure.

There is some rudimentary quantitative evidence that supports this hypothesis: type I occurrences are relatively abundant in all oral varieties, but almost completely absent in writing (except in the case of the written representation of speech). Type II occurrences, however, are far more rare in general, yet in writing they seem to be relatively well attested. This unequal distribution suggests that behind the confusion of types I and II in speakers' awareness, there lies a separation in their practice, which depends on the nature of the interaction.

Type III constructions, as far as we can tell without having recourse to statistical evidence, appear to be used by lone speakers placed in a discourse situation where they have to keep a strict check on their language: pupils in test situations, journalists, non-literary scientific writers. This leads one to suspect that hypercorrection could be at work in situations of linguistic insecurity such as these. Insecurity in the use of these features can be linked to the fact that contradictory normative judgements are made about the same utterances, making it difficult to be sure about the style to which they belong. Speakers who perceive constructions I and II as variants and who realize that mixed value judgements are made

about them, take a great risk when they have to choose between them since they do not know which is the most appropriate, sociolinguistically, in any given situation. The usual response to this type of uncertainty is to use the two competing variants jointly, that is to say to use a *variational syllepsis*. The syntactic operation of hybridization provides the means for this. This is why syntactic hypercorrections so often take the form of a pleonasm.

14.4 Conclusion: language varieties vs grammatical variants

The first lesson to be drawn from these observations is that the categories instituted by the normative *doxa*, whether they are of a descriptive or a normative nature, reflect neither the variational structure of language nor the reality of sociolinguistic practice except in an extremely misrepresentative way.

One of the main causes of this inadequacy are the grammatical notions current in the dominant meta-discourse. Approximative and more or less arbitrary, they impose a way of seeing language on us which does not necessarily allow us to identify the forms which are actually present. This accounts for the fact that all the official doctrine regarding AZ sequences is presented in terms of the sentence, and as a consequence sees only a single and unique syntactic item, usually referred to as a 'split sentence'. We hope that we have demonstrated, however, that if we arm ourselves with the necessary descriptive tools (i.e. the distinction between micro- and macro-syntax) we can distinguish at least three different syntactic constructions here. It goes without saying that if we confuse these three entities we will be unable to grasp the variational structure of the system of which they belong, and we risk not even suspecting that they exist.

Furthermore, the axiological categories or 'varieties of language' which are used by the *doxa* appear to be eminently opportunist and vague. Overlaps and fuzzy margins are tolerated, and this gives rise to situations where left dislocation is simultaneously classed as 'standard' and 'nonstandard' usage (using labels such as 'colloquial', 'familiar' or 'spoken' French). The range that these pseudo-dialects cover thus escapes any precise definition, for they cannot be mapped out in terms of linguistic variables nor in terms of the sociological variables with which they could be correlated. At most the labels reflect an awareness, albeit confused and necessarily contradictory, of some of the connotations with which they are associated. An entity such as 'standard French' thus appears to be something of a myth: the normative categorizations do not help to define it, and it is difficult to see what other criteria could be invoked in order to fix suitable limits *a priori*.

The notion of 'variety of language' itself is perhaps the most inadequate of all, together with the naïvely extensional concept of variation that it

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implies. Underlying the metaphor is the idea that a language can be divided into several 'treasures' with rival forms, held by different groups or competing with each other for speakers to draw from as they choose. A language would then be no more than a juxtaposition of dialects, and a dialect only a collection of allophones, allomorphs, allo-sentences, and so on. However, in the system that we have been exploring, we find that at the level of syntax the variants that occur are not competing forms or alternative expressions, but rival *grammars* (G1 and G2), i.e. different modes of structuring imposed upon the same area within a given system. What is more, it appears that certain forms can be generated, with a different analysis, from several of these grammars, if not from all of them. It is not possible therefore to consider syntactic variation as a simple collection of dialect drawers, each containing its characteristic forms and put together on the basis of their identical connotations. We should substitute for the notion of *varieties of language*, inherited from a commonsense view of variation, the notion of *grammar variants*. The latter cannot be identified simply by classifying occurrences of different features according to style: instead it is necessary to discover what, in the system of rules and operations that generates them, provides the parameters, i.e. the under-specified, non-fixed and hence not always visible elements (here, this was the process of hybridization, which may or may not be part of the grammar; and the paradigm of semantic operations, which may or may not distinguish O_I from O_{II}).

Finally, if the axiological categories that the normative meta-discourse projects onto the language appear for the most part arbitrary *vis-à-vis* the expression of its internal variation, and if the varieties that it legitimizes are but pseudo-variants, it goes without saying that they cannot be considered as reliable indicators of the structure of language. Any theory of variation which assumes them to be valid *a priori* would not achieve its goal. Through our analysis of left dislocation we hope to have shown that it was not only possible but also advantageous to abandon any division into dialects during the gathering and classification of our data, and instead to deal with the data from a functional perspective only. Doubtless the notion of dialect should be refounded one of these days. But it must be based upon a rational theory, and not upon intuitions that we have unconsciously inherited from the layperson's commonsense ideas about language.

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