French subjects are interveners – Ramona Wallner (University of Konstanz)

Spoken Continental French (SCF) can have information-seeking wh-in-situ interrogatives (WiQs) as well as fronted interrogatives optionally. WiQs are prone to intervention effects. Besides the typical class of interveners (focus sensitive operators, see Beck 2006 for an overview) I argue that there is another type of intervener that prevents French WiQs from being well-formed: full phrased subjects. This paper formulates a theory that models French full phrased subjects as interveners in WiQs, more precisely as focused constituent interveners, schematized here:

**Intervention effect:** *[Q₁ [ ... [ full phrased subject [ ... wh-phrase₁ ... ]]]]

**The Data:** French WiQs follow specific surface structures. I present new data in an acceptability judgment task, showing that WiQs with overtly expressed subjects (full-DPs) were judged significantly less natural (1a¹) than versions with a dislocated subject (1b,c), even when the subject could not be recovered from the context and was discourse-new.

(1) a. *Marie habite où?* Marie live where ‘Where does Marie live?’
   b. Elle habite où, Marie? she live where Marie ‘Where does Marie live?’
   c. Marie, elle habite où? Marie she live where ‘Where does Marie live?’

No theory for French WiQs currently on the market can explain why spelled-out DPs are not possible in plain information-seeking questions. I argue that taking into account the prosody of French is crucial to arrive at an answer.

**The Prosody of French and focus:** French does not exhibit lexical stress but uses prosodic phrasing to mark constituents with boundary tones by their position at the edge of prosodic phrases (PP) in bigger intonational phrases (IP). **Phrasing pattern:** [[low tone...high tone]PP [low...high]PP [low...high]PP...%]IP. Féry (2001) points out that prefocal phrases remain stable in size even in different focus contexts, i.e. no prefocal compression. So there is not much leeway in altering phrasing to achieve focus marking through different phrasing patterns but rather through information structure. Crucially, full phrased subjects never seem to not get phrased separately if they are part of the canonical sentence, i.e. not dislocated. Since they are phrased separately, the phrase boundary to the right will be marked with an obligatory high rise. Therefore, SCF default prosody has no means to circumvent focus marking on full subjects, if they are expressed in the root sentence. The default non-focus-marked, hence back-grounded, variant is clitic or clitic+dislocation. If the subject of the canonical sentence is not a clitic, it is in focus. This can be seen with the question-answer pairing in (2) (from Féry 2001, ex.26) when the subject is not replaced by a clitic. Even though subject DP ’the cook’ is already named (and the focus falls on ’caramelized’), it is still phrased in one PP; this results in ’the cook’ receiving a high boundary tone, that is, in fact, even higher than the focused constituent and focus-placement is obstructed (see Féry & Destruel subm.).

(2) a. Q: Que fait le marmiton avec les navets? what does the chef with the turnips
   'What does the cook do with the turnips?’

¹ in an information-seeking context, however, this question could receive an echo interpretation.
   the cook caramelize the turnips
   'The cook caramelizes the turnips.'

As an interim summary, we can now assume that if a subject is not expressed by a clitic (+/- dislocation) it would always be marked with a particular prosodic pattern. This "marking" is focus marking. Subjects that are non-pronominalized are always marked as focus constituents. And as focus constituents, full-DP subjects are interveners. Evidence that this is on the right track can be seen by the ungrammaticality of the examples in (3) (focus is indicated by capital letters). When focusing an element before the wh-word using prosody, the result is ungrammatical. The difference between these cases and cases with full-DPs is that full DPs are always focused, i.e. focus in full-DPs is not optional.

(3) a. *T'as trouvé CA-LA où?
   you have found this where
   'Where did you find THIS?'

b. *T'as rencontré JULIEN où (et pas Marco)?
   you have met Julien where and not Marco
   'Where did you meet JULIEN (and not Marco)'

Focus as intervener: The idea of focus as an intervener isn’t new and has been brought forward in different approaches, see e.g. Kim (2002, 2008), Richards (2016), Tomioka (2007). All of them share the importance of the unobstructed communication between Q and wh and the different approaches can explain this data. Kim’s proposal assumes the "realm" between Q and wh to host long-distance AGREE between the probe Q and the goal wh. Focus, as another probe, disrupts this relationship in syntax. It also leads to uninterpretability in semantics as Kim does not assume ordinary semantic values for wh-phrases which crashes the derivation at LF as focus probe cannot interpret any constituent containing wh because a reset to the ordinary value is not possible. Richards interfaces syntax and prosody, claiming that Q and wh have to sit in one prosodic phrase as a universal constraint. Richards’ prosodic constraint may also be observed here, as focus closes a prosodic phrase and creates a phrase boundary. For Tomioka, the intervention is not syntactic nor semantic, but information-structural. The "realm" cannot be occupied by non-given material which renders the utterance information-structural odd. **Outlook:** Korean (Kim 2002), Hindi, Turkish, Malayalam (Beck 2006) and Japanese (Tomioka 2007) will pair with French in having focus interveners. In contrast, e.g. German or English do not exhibit focus phrases as interveners. Intervention effects might be specific to certain language groups. However, focus interveners are targeting specifically wh-in-situ interrogatives, but neither fronted nor multiple wh-questions. We can stipulate that one agreement between Q and wh will be enough to mark an utterance as interrogative.