French constituent unconditionals relativize a free choice item
Aurore Gonzalez (Harvard University) and Karoliina Lohiniva (NYU/University of Geneva)

Introduction. In this contribution, we argue that the syntax of the adjunct clause of a French constituent unconditional (CU) involves a subjunctive mood relative clause (RC) whose head is a free choice item (FCI). This FCI is licensed via subtrigging, and it may be subject to RC-sluicing. Thus, French CUs have (roughly) the structure shown in (1). Our analysis makes French CUs unlike English CUs, which have been argued to involve interrogative syntax (Rawlins, 2013).

(1) \[ [\text{CU} \uparrow \text{CP} \uparrow \text{DP} \quad \text{Quoi}, (\text{que ce soit } t_i)]_j \quad \text{*qu’ il fasse } t_j \text{ ], Lou sera contente.} \]

What that it is.SBJ that he does.SBJ Lou is.FUT happy

‘Whatever he does, Lou will be happy.’

Previous work. That FCIs and CUs are closely related has been noticed before (Muller, 2006; Vlachou, 2007; Corblin, 2010). To our knowledge, the only explicit syntax given to constructions like (1) is due to Corblin (2010), who takes quoi to be a RC-modified wh-phrase that fronts alone both in (2a), the "long version" of the CU in (1), and in (2b), the "short version" of the CU in (1). Corblin argues that both versions are "syntactically ambiguous", which explains their distribution as CUs and FCIs respectively. We notate this ambiguity with the label CP/DP.

(2) a. \[ [\text{CP/DP quoi } \text{[ que [IP ce soit } t_i [ qu’ [IP il fasse } t_i]]]} \]

What that it is.SBJ that he does.SBJ

b. \[ [\text{CP/DP quoi } \text{[ qu’ [IP il fasse } t_i]]]} \]

What that he does.SBJ

The structures in (2) are problematic for two reasons. First, the FCI quoi que ce soit is a constituent, as it passes constituency tests (e.g. it can be coordinated with another FCI: quoi que ce soit et où que ce soit ‘anything and anywhere’), but it is not a constituent in (2a). Second, it is unclear what the FCI in (2b) is. It can neither be the whole DP (since there is no licensor for it) nor quoi alone (*Si je peux faire quoi... int. ‘If I can do anything...’). To overcome these problems and to capture the relationship between long and short CUs in (2), we argue that the structure in (1) is required.

1 Evidence in favor of the presence of FCIs. The first evidence for the involvement of FCIs in CUs comes from the acceptability of n’importe FCIs (Muller, 2006) in the same position (3).

(3) \[ [\text{CU} \uparrow \text{CP} \uparrow \text{DP} \quad \text{N’importe quoi } \text{[ qu’ il fasse } t_j \text{ ], Lou sera contente.} \]

No matter what that he does.SBJ Lou is.FUT happy

‘Whatever he does, Lou will be happy.’

The second argument concerns the gap illustrated in (4). CUs involving bare quand ‘when’, comment ‘how’, and pourquoi ‘why’ are unacceptable (4a). Interestingly, (4b) shows that the gaps in the paradigms of CUs and qu’ il fasse FCIs coincide, supporting our claim that CUs in which only a wh-phrase is visible in surface syntax in fact involve elided qu’ il fasse FCIs.

(4) a. \{ *Quand/ *comment/ *pourquoi \} qu’ elle parte, ... [CU gap] when how why that she leaves-SBJ ‘Whenever/however/*whenever she leaves,...’

b. \{ *quand/ *comment/ *pourquoi \} que ce soit [FCI gap] when how why that it is-SBJ ‘whenever/whenever/however’

2 Evidence in favor of the presence of RCs. We propose that FCIs are semantically licensed in French CUs due to subtrigging, i.e. the presence of a RC modifier. RCs also license FCIs in
3) **Proposal: FCIs, relativization, and sluicing.** We assume *wh que ce soit* FCIs relativize a *wh*. Under the raising analysis of RCs (Kayne, 1994; Bianchi, 1999), *que* is a relative D° that selects a *wh*. This DP moves to Spec,XP below C°, and the *wh* moves to Spec,CP. A high D° selects the CP.

(7) \[ [PC] [DC] [CFI] D° [CP quoi, C°(E)] [XP [DP que, t_i] j X° [IP ce soit, t_j] ]] \[ FCI \]

Once *wh que ce soit* FCIs are analyzed as in (7), long and short FCIs can be given an analysis in terms of sluicing. Under Merchant’s (2001) analysis, sluicing is licensed by an ellipsis feature [E] on the head whose specifier hosts the remnant *wh* and whose complement is elided. Given that *que* is included in the sluice, we assume that [E] is on C° (7). Crucially, these assumptions allow us to give a unified analysis of the long and short versions of both FCIs and CUs, and the CP/DP ambiguity: CUs relativize a potentially sluiced FCI, but do not themselves involve a high D° (8).

(8) \[ [PC] [DC] [CFI] quoi_i (que ce soit, t_i) j C° [XP [DP qu’, t_j] k X° [IP il fasse, t_k] ]] \[ CU \]

Though sluicing is usually associated with *wh*-questions, it has been shown that RCs may also be sluiced (Lipták and Aboh, 2013). Moreover, it has been shown that sluicing is able to delete copular structures (van Cranenbroeck, 2009). These results support the analyses in (7-8).

**A note on quel.** The unified analysis we pursue in this work predicts that all CUs involve a FCI that is independently attested. However, the *quel-CU* in (9) does not seem to be related to any FCI.

(9) \[ [PC] [DC] [CFI] Quel_i (*que ce soit, t_i) j que soit son rêve, t_j ] ... which that it is, SBJ that is, SBJ her/his/their dream \]

‘Whichever her/his/their dream may be, ...’

We tentatively propose that the above CU involves the FCI *quoi que ce soit* and that the obligatory nature of ellipsis is due to the change *quoi>* *quel*, a change that can also take place in copular *wh*-questions with a full DP subject (*Quel est son rêve? ‘What is her/his dream?’*).

**Conclusion.** In this contribution, we show that the syntax of French CUs involves the relativization of a (sluiced) FCI. A similar process seems to be at work in Spanish (Quer and Vicente, 2009).

**References**

- Corblin (2010). *Une analyse compositionelle de Quoi que ce soit comme universel.*
- Muller (2006). *Polarité négative et free choice dans les indéfinis de type que ce soit et n’importe.*
- Rawlins (2013). *Un(conditionals).*