

Cleft structures in native and non-native discourse: first results from a study on Italian and French



Bianca Maria De Paolis
biancamaria.depaolis@unito.it

Laboratorio di Fonetica Sperimentale Arturo Genre – Università di Torino (Italy)
Laboratoire Structures Formelles du Langage – CNRS/Université Paris 8 (France)



1. Introduction

What's a cleft sentence?

C'est Marie qui achète le journal

- Clefts have two main functions: **identificational** and **corrective** (De Cesare 2017), poles of a continuum of **contrast**.
- Native **French** use clefts **more often** than native **Italians** (De Cesare & Garassino 2018)
- Acquisition of **pragmatic** and **discursive** functions is **challenging for L2 learners** (Dimroth & Narasimhan 2012)

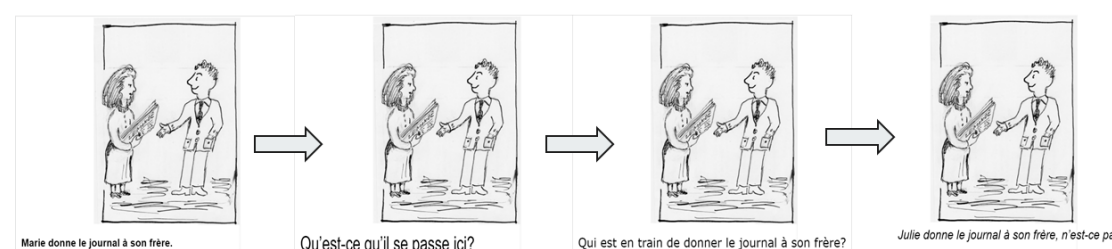
How do pragmatic and discursive parameters interact in the use of clefts in native French and Italian?
Are the same constraints active in L2 speech?

2. Materials & methods

Task-elicited speech of native and non-native speakers of Italian and French.

Group	N. speakers
ITL1	13
FRL1	18
ITL2	14
FRL2	14

3 **focus conditions**: broad focus (bf), narrow identificational focus (id), narrow corrective focus (cf); on the **subject** (sbj) or on the **object** (obj).



Stimuli adapted from Gabriel (2010)

3. Results

Native speakers.

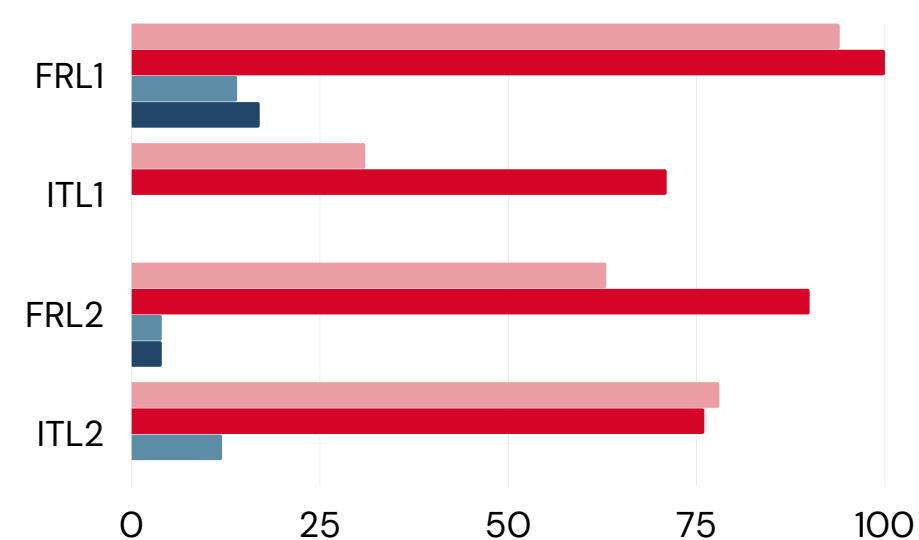
FRL1: focussed **subjects are systematically clefted**, regardless of their function. **Objects can be clefted**, but not systematically; occurrences are balanced for **id** and **cr** contexts.

ITL1: focussed **subjects are more often clefted than objects**, but both subjects and objects are **preferably clefted in corrective-focus** utterances.

L2 speakers.

FRL2: Italian learners **increase use of clefts** for both sbj and obj, but keep the **distinction between identificational and corrective** contexts.

ITL2: French learners **reduce the use of clefted subjects** in all pragmatic contexts: **no distinction between identificational and corrective** focus.



Proportion of cleft sentences produced by each group of speakers in context of id-sbj (pink), cr-sbj (red), id-obj (grey), cr-obj (blue).

4. Conclusions

Native French. Overall **frequency** of clefts is **higher**. **Syntactic role** is the **only relevant parameter** for determining their use.

Native Italian. Overall **frequency** of clefts is **lower**. **Both syntax and function** play a role → Italian sp. **specialize cleft structures for contrastive functions** (availability of other marked word orders).

L2 speakers. Partial **approximation** to target language **in terms of frequency**, but asymmetries adhere to the model of the mother tongue.

Evidence of cross-linguistic influence in the **weighting of syntactic role and pragmatic function**.

References

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Read my previous publications on this subject

