

ON THE CATEGORIAL STATUS OF FRENCH *À/DE CE QUE*

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This paper seeks to establish the categorial status of *à/de ce que* (literally ‘to/of this that,’ idiomatically, ‘that’), elements that sometimes introduce tensed clauses in French, as in (1).

- (1) a. Il se plaint *de ce que* personne ne l’aime. b. Je veillerai *à ce que* Paul parte.
he complains of this that nobody him-likes I will-make-sure to this that Paul leave

We will begin by arguing that the *à* ‘to’ and *de* ‘of’ contained in such expressions are neither prepositions (contra Huot (1981)) nor morphological realizations of Case (contra Zaring (1992)). If this is so, then Zaring’s (1992) proposal that *ce* ‘this/that’ is a clausal determiner, the function of which is to merge with a CP to create a DP that can be Case-marked, loses much of its appeal. (The clausal determiner hypothesis has been assumed in the literature as recently as Sportiche (2008).)

The view that *à* and *de* in *à/de ce que* are prepositions/morphological realizations of Case stems from the fact that the verbs that select them usually take nominal objects preceded by the same elements. However, we note that there are verbs that take direct nominal objects (2), or even no nominal objects at all (3), yet allow *à ce que* + finite clause complements:

- (2) Paul a demandé (*à) un emploi/à ce que l’affaire soit classée.

Paul requested (to) a job /to this that the case be closed

- (3) a. *Lise hésite (à) la publication de son article. b. Lise hésite à ce que tout soit publié.

Lise hesitates (to) the publication of her paper Lise hesitates to this that all be published
Conversely, we will show that there are verbs whose nominal objects must be preceded by *de/à* that do not allow their tensed complement to be introduced by *de/à ce que*.

If *à* and *de* are not prepositions, it is tempting to hypothesize that they might be prepositional complementizers of the same type as those that introduce infinitival clauses, in which case Kayne’s (1999) analysis whereby such elements enter the derivation above the VP rather than as sister to the clause they are associated with might be relevant. Although we will show that such an extension is workable, we will argue that it is undesirable because there is a fairly large number of mismatches like (4) that suggest that the *à/de* that sometimes introduces infinitivals is radically different in nature from the *à/de* contained in *à/de ce que*.

- (4) a. Cédric a promis *(de) venir. b. Cédric a promis (*de ce) qu’il viendrait.

Cédric has promised (of) to-come Cédric has promised (of this) that-he would-come
Instead, we will propose a novel analysis of *à/de ce que* whereby such items are to be viewed as single lexical units of the category C that, in fact, belong to the same class of elements as indirect interrogative *si* ‘if’. (No one has ever suggested that the conjunction *parce que* ‘because’ be analyzed as *par* + *ce* + *que*. We are, therefore, suggesting the same for these elements.) Several arguments will be shown to support our contention. First, in cases in which *à ce que* and *si* can be selected by the same verb, neither *à* nor *ce* (nor both) can precede *si*, suggesting that *à ce que* and *si* are on syntactic likes:

- (5) a. As-tu fait attention à ce qu’il reste de l’essence dans ton réservoir?
did you make sure to this that-there was-left of the gas in your tank
b. As-tu fait attention (*à) (*ce) s’il restait de l’essence dans ton réservoir?
did you make sure (to) (this) if-there was-left of the gas in your tank

Second, *à/de ce que*, just like *si*, can only introduce tensed clauses. (See above.)

Finally, neither *si* nor *à/de ce que* can head an adjunct clause (or a sentential subject/topic):

- (6) a. *Ils l’amèneront en croisière, si elle sait nager ou pas.
they her-will-take on a-cruise whether she knows-how to-swim or not
b. Qu’est-ce que tu as, (*à/de ce) que tu me regardes comme ça?
what’s the matter (to/of this) that you me look-at like that

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