

Nothing But Ellipsis: The Syntax and Semantics of *ne...que* Exceptives in French

Teresa Fredericks-O'Neill
CUNY Graduate Center

The French *ne...que* exceptive construction, which can be paraphrased by English *only*, presents a puzzle for a theory of syntax that is concerned with representational economy and the interface with compositional semantics. The relationship between the two discontinuous elements *ne* and *que*, their syntactic status, and their semantic contribution have been extensively debated (Baciu 1978, Barbaud 1985, Azoulay-Vicente 1985; 1988, Dekydtspotter 1993, Gaatone 1999, von Stechow & Iatridou 2007), but no analysis has emerged from this literature that is both empirically and theoretically adequate.

Particularly mysterious is the syntactic status of the [*que* XP] sequence. The XP introduces an exception and may be any type of phrase other than a finite IP, as shown in (1)-(8). If this *que* is the garden-variety complementizer of French, this distribution is precisely the opposite of what we expect. A complementizer typically introduces a finite clause, but here we see it followed by every type of XP except a finite clause. Some previous accounts propose that this fact motivates granting special status to the *que* that appears in this construction, suggesting that it is a preposition (Azoulay-Vicente 1985, 1988) or an adverb (Gaatone 1999). Baciu (1978) identifies this *que* as the same element that appears in comparatives.

In this paper, I demonstrate that each of these proposals fails to account for some of the facts. For example, the mono-clausal analysis of Baciu (1978) predicts the wrong word order when the exception phrase is prepositional, and that of Azoulay-Vicente (1985) cannot accommodate sentences where the exception phrase is a verbal past participle. Special movement must be stipulated for both of these cases. This paper offers an alternative, which, although similar to the approach taken by Baciu (1978), captures all of the data without requiring any lexical or derivational stipulations.

To avoid the proliferation of homophonous forms in the lexicon, this paper treats *que* as a complementizer selecting an elliptical finite clause, such that these exception constructions are bi-clausal. I propose that the structure of these sentences is as follows: a quantificational operator with the semantics of exhaustive identification (EI) merges in the specifier of the exception XP (Horvath 2007). The EI operator is attracted to a position in the functional domain above the embedded IP, pied-piping the exception XP. The remnant IP is elided under identity with the matrix IP. In the spirit of Baciu (1978) and Azoulay-Vicente (1985; 1988), I suggest that the matrix clause contains a quantified noun phrase that introduces a set of alternatives to which the predicate could apply. This noun, which is usually covert, heads the relative clause introduced by *que*. The full representation of (1), given in (9), illustrates this.

The approach I offer here accounts for all of the word order facts observed in *ne...que* constructions. It avoids the stipulations required by Baciu (1978) or Azoulay-Vicente (1985). If an embedded IP is present, the word order becomes straightforward. The fact that the *que*-phrase cannot be fronted follows tidily from locality constraints on adjunct-extraction.

The analysis adopted here for French can be extended to similar constructions in other languages such as Greek, where case-connectivity effects on DP exceptions provide cross-linguistic evidence for an elided embedded IP. The advantage of this approach is that it requires no new formal machinery and grants no special status to either *ne* or *que*. It also provides for the interpretation of *ne...que* exceptives to be derived compositionally from the syntax with the aid of the EI operator, providing for a straightforward interface between syntax and semantics.

Examples

- (1) Je n' ai vu que le professeur
I NE have see.PP QUE the professor
I have only seen the professor / I have not seen anyone but the professor
- (2) Il n' est venu que Jean
it NE is come.PP QUE Jean
Only Jean came / No one but Jean came
- (3) Tu n' as prêté le livre qu' à Marie
you NE have lend.PP the book QUE to Marie
You lent the book only to Marie / You lent the book to no one but Marie
- (4) Le bébé ne fait que pleurer
the baby NE do.3SG QUE cry.INF
The baby only cries / The baby does nothing but cry
- (5) On n' a que commencé à l'expliquer
one NE has QUE begin.PP to it=explain.INF
We have only begun to explain it
- (6) Elle ne danse que gracieusement
she NE dance.3SG QUE gracefully
She only dances gracefully / She dances in no other way but gracefully
- (7) Je ne t' ai demandé que si tu voulais venir
I NE you=have ask.PP QUE if you want.IPFV come.INF
I only asked you if you wanted to come
- (8) *Je n' ai vu que le professeur est dans son bureau
I NE have see.PP QUE the professor is in his office
(I saw only the professor is in his office)
- (9) [IP je [Neg n'ai]] [VP vu [QP [QP \exists PERSONNE D'AUTRE] [CP [C que] [EIP [DPi [Opj]
[DP le professeur]] [EIP [EI] [IP je n'ai vu t_i]]]]]]]]]

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