

Towards an interface definition of main clause phenomena

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Since Emonds (1970), many have attempted to capture MCP in terms of a syntactic property of clauses. Root-like clauses are generally assumed to be essentially finite embedded clauses selected by verbs of assertion (Hooper & Thompson 1973; Emonds 2004), although some adjunct clauses have also been found to allow MCP (see e.g. Haegeman 2010).

One of the key puzzles posed by MCP is their gradient nature: their acceptability can be much degraded depending on a host of semantic properties (e.g. the presence of negation).

- (1) a. John says that he'll win it, and I think that win it he will. (Green 1976: 35a)
b. *John says that he'll win it, but I don't think that win it he will. (Green 1976: 35b)

The first part of this paper discusses interpretive properties of root-like clauses, combining insights from Hooper & Thompson (1973); Green (1976, 1996); Lahousse (2010) and Haegeman (2010). It is proposed that assertoric root-like clauses are inherently quantified epistemically and that epistemic quantification is inextricably linked with information structure, the level at which the truth of propositions is evaluated with respect to their topic — following e.g. Reinhart (1981). I argue that embedded clauses that do not allow MCP are obliquely thematic (i.e. all-focus, which rules out aboutness topics, as in (2-a)), and that only root-like clauses can have a topic-focus articulation, as in (2-b). The possibility of hosting a dislocated topic can therefore be used as a reliable diagnostic for the root properties of clauses — in languages that rely on that configuration for the identification of topics, e.g. spoken French, but not English. The root(-like) property of clauses is therefore essentially an information structure phenomenon, with syntactic manifestations (which does **not** imply that all the syntactic reflexes of MCP have in information structural import).

- (2) a. *J'ai envie de les chicons_i, en_i manger tous les jours.¹
I-have desire to the witloof PART. eat all the days
b. Les chicons_i, j'ai envie d' en_i manger tous les jours.
the witloof I-have desire to PART. eat all the days
'I want to eat witloof every day.'

The second part of the paper brings to light two sets of data that seem to elude syntactic accounts of MCP: stand-alone non-finite clauses with a dislocated topic (as in (3)) and *complex fragments* (as in (4)). Neither are predicted to allow MCP, either because they are non-finite or because they are (apparently) non-clausal.

- (3) Les manger crus, les chicons ? Avec plaisir.
them to-eat:-FIN raw the chicory with pleasure
(lit: To eat chicory raw? With pleasure.)
(4) a. Toujours, moi.
always me
'Me, (I am) always (hungry).' (recovered from context)
b. Deux pattes, le canard?
two legs the duck
'The duck (has) two legs?' (recovered from context)

Fragments (also known as non-sentential assertion (Stainton 2004) or Bare Argument Ellipsis (Culicover & Jackendoff 2005)) are verbless utterances interpreted as full propositions with

¹The same grammaticality judgement obtains if the dislocated topic appears to the left of the complementiser.

assertoric force. Their ability to host ‘dislocated’ topics (underlined in (4)) has hitherto remained unnoticed in the literature, and is demonstrated here using prosodic and interpretive diagnostics. Fragments are shown to involve a minimum amount of syntactic structure (following Culicover & Jackendoff 2005, *pace* Merchant 2004), consisting in some cases of just a DP. Complex fragments (4) are analysed as adjoined structures, following De Cat’s (2007) account of dislocated topics in spoken French.

It is argued that stand-alone non-finite clauses and fragments are truncated structures with root properties, in a (radical) extension of Rizzi’s account of grammatically determined ellipsis, according to which different languages can truncate CP at different levels to *admit different kinds of root categories in addition to the universally available Force* (Rizzi 2005: 533).

Tying in the two parts of the talk, I propose that an interface account of root-like status is the most economical (following the principle of Occam’s Razor): the root property of syntactic entities is determined in the information structure component on interpretive grounds, and it doesn’t need to be embodied in a dedicated functional projection at the periphery of the clause. This is argued to best capture the gradient nature of MCP, which tends to elude strictly syntactic analyses.

The talk ends with a to-do list, in pursue of the ultimate goal identified at the outset.

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