The discourse marking effect of φ-doubling in French

In French, a topical DP subject (1a) or direct object (1b) may have its φ-features doubled by a non-argumental strong pronoun ("Strong Doubling Pronoun"). This doubling phenomenon is not compulsory for a sentence to be grammatical but has a clear discourse function. In the second sentence of (1a) for example, the presence of the SDP *moi* ('ME') turns the topic DP *je* ('I') into a contrastive topic and sets off the constituent to its right, *un journal* ('a newspaper') as the focus of the sentence.

(1) a. Paul a   acheté un livre. J'ai   acheté, moi, [un journal]$_{FOC}$
       Paul has bought a book. I have bought ME   a newspaper
       'Paul bought a book. As for me, what I bought was a newspaper.'
    b. Le stylo, c'est pour écrire. Tu   utilises le crayon, lui, [pour dessiner]$_{FOC}$
       the pen it is to   write. You use   the pencil IT   to   draw
       'The pen is for writing. As for the pencil, it is for drawing that you use it.'

In this talk, I explore some aspects of the syntax and interpretation of SDPs in French. On the basis of distributional and interpretative facts, I first show that SDPs seem to combine the characteristics of both "wide" and "narrow focus operators" as defined by Wagner (2008, 2009, 2010). I then give an account of this dual nature. I propose that a reciprocal feature valuation (AGREE, Chomsky 2001) is established between the topic DP of a sentence and an SDP: the topic DP values the φ-features of the SDP. In return the SDP, as a wide focus operator, values an "alternative" feature on the topic DP which as a result is interpreted as a contrastive topic. I suggest that this AGREE relation takes place at a distance, which enables the SDP to set off the focus constituent of the sentence and thus to function as a narrow focus operator. Finally I show that postulating the existence of such an AGREE relation enables an account of the fact that strong pronoun doubling of a topic DP can only occur within the boundaries of a phase.