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Subjects in the Left Periphery

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Abstract In seminal research, Anna Cardinaletti drew a systematic map of subject positions with special reference to the subject positions occurring in the high part of the IP space, in the sense of Guglielmo Cinque's cartographic analysis of the clausal structure. In this note, we would like to enrich Cardinaletti's typology by reviewing a number of cases in different languages which suggest that an A-position for subjects should be postulated also in the CP space, analyzed along the lines of Luigi Rizzi's cartography of the left periphery and much subsequent work: therefore, A-chains may extend from the thematic positions in vP up to the left periphery of the clause. We will discuss different constructions in Romance and Germanic (Complex Inversion, Verb Second, clefts, relatives) which appear to require a subject position in the left periphery, a position functioning in some cases as the final landing site of movement, and in other cases as a transiting position for subject extraction.

Keywords Subject positions. Cartographic syntax. Left periphery. A-chains. Subject extraction.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 French Complex Inversion. – 3 Subject V2 in Germanic. – 4 Cleft Sentences. – 5 *Que→qui* Phenomena in Extraction Environments. – 6 Conclusions.

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1 Introduction

In a seminal paper, Anna Cardinaletti showed that more than a single subject position occurs in the higher part of the IP space (Cardinaletti 2004), so that the map of the IP, in Cinque's (1999) sense, should be enriched accordingly. In this note, we would like to extend Cardinaletti's typology by reviewing a number of cases in different languages which suggest that an A-position for subjects should be postulated also in the left periphery of the clause, the map of the CP space, in the sense of Rizzi (1997) and much subsequent work: therefore, A-chains may extend from the thematic positions in vP up to the left periphery. We will discuss several constructions in Romance and Germanic (Complex Inversion, Verb Second, clefts, relatives) which appear to require an A position in the left periphery.[1] This position, contrary to left peripheral A' positions, may only be filled by the subject of the adjacent clause for locality reasons. It functions in some cases as the final landing site of subject movement, and in other cases as a transiting position for subject extraction.

2 French Complex Inversion

One possible case in point is French complex inversion (Kayne 1972; Rizzi, Roberts 1989):

(1) Où Jean est-il allé?
Where Jean is-he gone?
'Where has Jean gone?'

Complex inversion is based on subject clitic inversion, plus an additional slot for the lexical subject in between the wh-element and the inverted verb. In a classical paper, Den Besten (1977-83) argued that French subject clitic inversion is a residual manifestation of Verb-Second, whence its root character, a typical property of V2 (among other properties). If one expresses V2 in cartographic terms (e.g., along the lines of Samo 2019 and Wolfe 2018, a.o.), then the inverted verb targets a left-peripheral position, minimally the Fin

1 The dialects of Italy also offer a wealth of cases amenable to the postulation of a position available to subjects in the left periphery of the clause: e.g., the Neapolitan double subject construction, analyzed by Ledgeway (2010), and the subjects in the CP-system observed by Poletto (2000), Paoli (2007) in Piedmontese, Ligurian, and other Romance varieties, also in diachrony. Certain subject clitics in the Northern Italian dialects have also been claimed to occur in the left periphery (Benincà 1983; Poletto 2000). Due to space constraints, we will not address these cases in the present article.

head. This analysis is supported by the complementarity between subject clitic inversion and the presence of complementizer *que* with certain adverbials (Goldsmith 1989):

(2)	a.	Peut-être	qu'il	viendra	
		Maybe	that he	will-come	
		'Maybe he will come'			
	b.	Peut-être	viendra-t-	il	
		Maybe	will-come	He	
	c.	*Peut-être	que	viendra-t-	il
		Maybe	that	will-come	he

If subject clitic inversion involves movement of the inflected verb to Fin, and *que* is generated in Fin (possibly moving to higher positions in certain constructions), the complementarity is immediately explained: the inflected verb could not move to a position already occupied by *que*. Complex inversion shows the same incompatibility with *que*:

(3)	a.	Peut-être	Jean	viendra-t-il	
		Maybe	Jean	will-come-he	
		'Maybe Jean will come'			
	b.	*Peut-être	que	Jean	viendra-t-il
		Maybe	That	Jean	will-come-he
	c.	*Peut-être	Jean	que	viendra-t-il
		Maybe	Jean	that	will-come-he

So, if the incompatibility with *que* is a reliable detector of I to C movement, the inverted verb must be in Fin in (3a), hence the lexical subject preceding it must be located in the left periphery.

Let us slightly update the analysis of Rizzi and Roberts (1989). A key ingredient is a special functional head licensing the subject position in the higher part of the IP system (Subj: Rizzi 2005; Rizzi, Shlonsky 2007).[2] When the inflected verb moves to Fin (in wh-and other constructions), it passes through Subj and carries the Subj head to the C-system, where Subj retains its capacity to license an A-specifier. Whence the double expression of the subject in (1), etc.

The position of the lexical subject must be in the lower part of the left periphery (LP), as it is preceded in (1) by the landing site

2 This line of analysis builds on Cardinaletti (2004), but assumes the Subj head to be an obligatory member of the spine of all clauses, much as T. This move is instrumental for capturing *that*-trace effects through criterial freezing; see below.

of wh-movement (plausibly the Foc position).[3] This left peripheral subject position is clearly distinct from a topic position in that it can be filled by quantificational elements that are not felicitous topics, e.g. *personne* (nobody), as is shown by the contrast (4)-(5):

(4)	Pourquoi	personne	n'a-t-il	critiqué	le président?
	Why	nobody	didn't he	criticize	the president?
(5)	*Pourquoi	personne	ne l'as-tu	contacté ?	(vs OK Pourquoi n'as-tu contacté personne?)
	Why	nobody	did you	contact him?	(vs OK Why did you contact nobody?)

So, the CP-internal subject position can host quantificational and non-quantificational elements, much as the IP-internal subject position. Nevertheless, a salient property distinguishing left peripheral from IP internal subjects is that the high subject position in complex inversion cannot function as a launching site for wh-movement, i.e., the following (7) is impossible (with the subject further moved from the LP position):

(6)	Où	Jean	partira-t-il?
	Where	Jean	will leave he?
(7)	*Qui __		partira-t-il?
	Who		will leave he?

Why is it so? If the moved Subj head retains its status of a criterial head and the lexical subject must satisfy the Subject Criterion, (7) may be excluded as a violation of Criterial Freezing (Rizzi 2005 and much subsequent work).[4]

3 If the adverbial in (3)a is in the Spec of Mod(ifier), the lexical subject position is also lower than Mod. Here we leave open the question of whether the subject position in the LP is the Spec of the Fin node containing Subj (after I to C movement), or the Spec of a projection immediately adjacent to Fin.

4 Criterial Freezing: an element satisfying a criterion is frozen in place.
This constraint has the consequence, among other things, of capturing *that*-trace effects. If there is a subject criterion, much as a topic criterion, a focus criterion, etc., extraction of the subject violates Criterial Freezing:

(i) * Qui crois-tu que __ Subj viendra?
'Who do you think that __ Subj will come?'

See Rizzi 2016 for discussion and the attempt to derive Criterial Freezing from principles of labeling and maximality. See section 4 for further discussion.

Notice that a wh-question on the subject is possible in a simple clause:

(8) Qui partira?
'Who will-leave?'

Why this contrast between the subject in IP and the subject in CP, only the former admitting wh-movement ((8) vs (7))?

In (8) the wh-subject presumably must move to the LP, in order to reach the appropriate scope position in the Spec of Foc (as is the case for other wh elements: Rizzi 1997), and it is able to circumvent Criterial Freezing through one of the techniques discussed in Rizzi and Shlonsky (2007), e.g. because a nominal Fin, acting as an expletive-like element, formally satisfies the subject Criterion, hence the wh-element remains movable from a lower position:

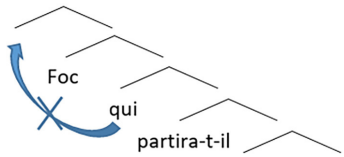
(9) Qui *Foc* Fin_N *Subj* __partira __?

The nominal Fin head postulated by this analysis is not pronounced in Standard French, but it may actually be overtly realized, and pronounced as *qui* in subject questions (alternating with *que* in non-subject questions) in the varieties of French not respecting the doubly filled COMP effect, such as colloquial Québec French:

(10) a. Qui *qui* partira?
'Who *qui* partira?'
b. Qui *que* t'as vu?
Who *que* you saw?'

Why can't (7) be salvaged in the same way? Presumably, in (7) the interrogative pronoun *qui* should be moved to Spec of Foc from the high subject position in the left periphery, a position already higher than Fin, hence not accessible to the salvaging mechanism operative in (8)-(9), which crucially involves the Fin node. The representation, after I-to-C movement (carrying the Subj head to Fin, with Subj licensing the subject position in the LP), would be:

(7')



Therefore, the ill-formedness of (7) follows from Criterial Freezing, in addition to the map of the functional elements (only the relevant part is given here, with $Subj_{CP}$ designating the subject position in the LP, whereas $Subj_{IP}$ designates the canonical subject position in the high part of the IP):

(11) … Foc … $Subj_{CP}$ … Fin … $Subj_{IP}$ …

3 Subject V2 in Germanic

Moving now to Germanic languages showing generalized Verb Second, the initial position in V2 configurations can be filled (among many other types of potential fillers) by a local expletive (quasi-argument) subject in German and other V2 languages (Travis 1984; Cardinaletti 1990):

(12) Es regnet
'It is raining'

If one adopts a uniform analysis of V2, by which all V2 clauses involve movement of the inflected verb to Fin (Vikner 1995: if an asymmetric theory is adopted, à la Zwart 1993, the conclusions would be different), a dedicated left-peripheral position must be postulated for such subjects. Expletives are not topicalizable (as there is no referent meeting the interpretive conditions for topics), nor focalizable (there are no alternative referents in the discourse context to license focalization), so that they cannot be moved to a topic or focus position, nor can they be moved to the Mod(ifier) position, restricted to preposed adverbials. As expected, expletives cannot survive long distance (Taraldsen 1986), contrary to referential strong pronouns (which can be topicalized and focalized):

(13) * Es glaubt Peter regnet
'It believes Peter is raining' (meaning 'Peter believes it is raining')

So, presumably *es* in (12) sits in an A-position, which, under the symmetric approach to V2, must be in the LP. (13) is ruled out because topicalisation and focalization are barred with expletives, and movement to the left-peripheral A-position cannot cross the subject of the main clause (a Relativized Minimality (RM) violation: Rizzi 1990).

The same analysis applies to weak pronominal subjects, which, in spite of being referential, cannot be topicalized or focalized because weak pronominals are legitimate only in a restricted set of environments, including the Spec of a head agreeing in Phi features (Cardinaletti, Starke 1999):

(14) Er kommt
'He is coming'

(15) * Er glaubt Peter kommt
'He believes Peter comes'

(the relevant interpretation of (15) being that *er* is the preposed subject of the embedded clause and *Peter* is the subject of the main clause).

Again, an A-chain terminating in the LP is legitimate in (14), but it involves a locality violation in (15) (in the relevant interpretation), due to the intervention of the main clause subject, another A-position.

4 Cleft Sentences

Another case in point may be represented by the cleft construction, a device to focalize a constituent through movement to the left periphery. The device has the hallmark of A'-configurations, e.g., both subject and object (or more generally non-subject arguments) clefts are possible. Nevertheless, Belletti (2009; 2012; 2015) has argued that subject and non-subject clefts may also have distinct structural and interpretive properties, a distinction that may be particularly visible in some languages characteristically adopting clefts as answering strategies. One such language is French. In French, only subject clefts (possibly reduced) can convey simple new information, e.g. functioning as a felicitous answer to a wh-question on the identification of the subject:

(16) Q: Qui a dit ça?
'Who said that?'
A: C'est Jean (qui a dit ça)
'It is Jean (who said that)'

Object clefts are not felicitous in comparable discourse exchanges (Belletti, Bocci 2024 for recent experimental supporting evidence):

(17) Q: Qu'as-tu acheté?
'What have you bought?'
A: *C'est un livre (que j'ai acheté)
'It is a book (that I have bought)'

Object clefts like (17)A necessarily involve a more complex contrastive/corrective focal interpretation.

This contrast suggests that in subject and non-subject clefts the focalized elements occupy two different positions: as the typical position for new information focus in Romance is the vP peripheral

position, it is argued in the references quoted that in subject clefts the focalized subject can move to the new information focus of the main vP (the projection of the copular verb). Only a subject can move there, first through the LP subject position and from there to the new information focus position in the vP-periphery of the copula, in the matrix clause. This position has the status of a mixed position sharing both A and A' properties (Belletti 2015, a.o.). Crucially, its A-status allows the subject to reach it through the subject position in the LP; an object (more generally a non-subject argument), in contrast, cannot perform the same operation due to locality and the resulting violation of RM caused by the presence of the intervening subject. In contrast, an object can move to the LP focus position, expressing contrastive-corrective focus, but it could not move into the matrix vP-peripheral (new information) Spec/Focus by transiting through the LP (contrastive-corrective) focus position as this would result in an instance of improper movement: from a pure A'-position in the LP to a position which is also an A-position in the vP periphery of the copula. Whence the impossibility of using object clefts to express new information focus, and the sharp interpretive difference of the two types of clefts ((16) vs (17)).

A salient property distinguishing subject vs object (non-subject) clefts in French is found in the form of the complementizer utilized in the two cases: *qui* vs *que*. Given the mechanism at the origin of *qui* in instances of subject extraction outlined in the preceding section as developed in Rizzi and Shlonsky (2007), this distinction is expected: based on the derivation of subject clefts just described, only a subject cleft allows for the presence of a nominal Fin, which is at the source of *qui*, crucially involving the availability of the LP A-subject position.

The observed pattern also holds for another construction, the pseudo-relative. The complement of perception verbs is known to allow for a pseudo-relative in which the subject precedes the low complementizer, as in the Italian example in (18):

(18) Ho visto Maria che salutava Gianni
I-have seen Maria that greeted Gianni
'I have seen Maria greeting Gianni'

(18) can be the answer to a question requiring the identification of the subject (Belletti 2009):

(19) Chi hai visto (che salutava Gianni)?
'whom have you seen (greeting Gianni)?'

So, (18) can be naturally amenable to an analysis along the same lines as the one outlined for subject clefts: the subject of the

embedded clause moves through the LP subject position into the vP-peripheral new information focus position in the matrix clause.[5] The perception verb pseudo-relative construction shares with new information clefts also the fact that only a subject can be involved, a well-known property (Guasti 1988; Cinque 2009; Casalicchio 2016) of the construction clearly illustrating the fact that it cannot be fully assimilated to the relative clause:

(20)	*Ho	visto	Gianni	che	Maria	salutava
	I-have	seen	Gianni	that	Maria	greeted

The object has no access to the LP subject position for locality/RM reasons, and hence also no access to the new information focus position in the vP-periphery of the matrix perception verb. No exchange as in (18)-(19) can thus involve an object.

A sentence like (18) can also be the answer to a general question requiring a whole new answer, as in the exchange in (21):

(21) Q: Cosa è successo/Cosa hai visto?
'What happened/what have you seen?'

A:	Ho	visto	Maria	che	salutava	Gianni
	I-have	seen	Maria	that	greeted	Gianni

'I have seen Maria greeting Gianni'

In this case the entire CP complement of the perception verb expressing the new information fills the relevant (Spec of) new information focus position. The order *...S che...* of this case directly illustrates the presence of the subject position in the LP.

A possible answer to the question in (21) can also be (22), where the new information is a standard CP-complement:

(22) A": Ho visto che Maria salutava Gianni
'I have seen that Mary was greeting Gianni'

In contrast, and consistently with the proposed analysis, (22) could not also be an alternative answer to the question in (19), since in

5 Movement of V yielding the final word order.

this case the new information focus interpretation only concerns the subject (narrow focus), as in the appropriate answer (18).[6]

Finally, it should be noted that, not surprisingly, the form of the complementizer is systematically *qui* in the French pseudo-relative equivalent of the Italian one in (18):

(23) J'ai vu Marie qui saluait Jean

5 *Que→qui* Phenomena in Extraction Environments

The *que* → *qui* rule in French (and analogues in other languages: Perlmutter 1971; Taraldsen 1986; Haegeman 1992) is a device able to license subject extraction. In non-Null Subject Languages like French, it provides a way to escape *that*-trace effects. The rule applies in subject relatives, in pseudo-relatives and in (new information) subject clefts (previous section) and, as a more marked device not uniformly accepted, with subject extraction from an embedded declarative:

(24) J'ai rencontré l'homme qui viendra avec vous
'I met the man qui will come with you

(25) % Voilà l'homme que je crois qui viendra avec vous
'Here is the man who I think qui will come with you'

The line of analysis introduced in Rizzi (1990) had *qui* analyzed as the agreeing form of *que*, i.e. *qui* = *que+Agr*. *Qui* would then properly govern the subject trace, permitting satisfaction of the Empty Category Principle (ECP) of the Government-Binding framework (Chomsky 1981). The Spec of the agreeing complementizer would function as an A-position, a general property of specifiers of agreement in Phi features. This would immediately capture the fact that *qui* is distributionally limited to subject extraction, and disallowed with object extraction (the following examples become grammatical with the ordinary, non-agreeing complementizer *que*):

(26)	* J'ai	rencontré	l'homme	qui	Marie	connait		
	I	met	the man	qui	Marie	knows		
(27)	* Voilà	l'homme	que	je	crois	qui	Marie	a	rencontré
	Here is	the man	that	I	think	qui	Marie	has	met

6 On the subtle interpretive distinction between (21)A and (22), both counting as possible answers to the same question in (21)Q see Rizzi's 2000 distinction between 'direct' vs 'indirect' perception (i.e. through the entire event) of the subject of the complement clause.

If the Spec of *qui* is an A-position, sentences (26)-(27) would involve an A-chain crossing a subject position, a violation of Relativized Minimality. So *qui* is only possible in environments of local subject extraction, as any other extraction would violate locality.

Building on Taraldsen (1986), this analysis has been adapted to a framework not postulating the ECP, but assuming Criterial Freezing as the operative principle (Rizzi 2005; Rizzi, Shlonsky 2007; Berthelot 2017, 2022). Subject extraction with no changes in the C system violates Criterial Freezing, as the subject is extracted from the subject position, a criterial position:

(28)	* J'ai	rencontré	l'homme	que	__Subj	viendra	avec vous
	I	met	the man	que	__Subj	will come	with you

Qui is in fact *que+i*, an expletive-like element akin to *il* (Taraldsen 1986). This is a possible nominal realization of Fin, which, if externally merged with the projection of Subj, formally satisfies the Subject Criterion. So, (24) is fine with a representation like the following[7] (see also the discussion in section 1):

(29) J'ai rencontré l'homme qui_{Fin} Subj __ viendra avec vous

The launching site of the relative head in (24) is a non-criterial position lower than Subj (possibly the AgrSP position, involved in the checking of verbal agreement in the typology of subject positions presented in Cardinaletti 2004; on Subj see the discussion in section 1). Notice that the possible occurrence of qui_{Fin} is contingent upon the local movement of the relativized subject. If there is no movement as in a declarative without extraction, qui_{Fin} is impossible:

(30)	* Je	pense	qui	cet homme	viendra	avec vous
	I	think	qui	this man	will come	with you

Example (30) may be excluded by the assumption that qui_{Fin} has Phi features which must be checked by a nominal in a Spec-head configuration (much as in past participle agreement: see below).

This analysis has in common with Rizzi's (1990) analysis of *que→qui* the hypothesis that *qui* requires an A-position in its Spec, whence the relevance for the present paper.

7 We have seen that que→qui, generally acceptable in the relative C system (24), is variably acceptable in the C-system of embedded declarative (25). See Berthelot 2017; 2022 for an analysis in terms of Case theory of the difference (24)-(25).

Whether the relative head remains in the Spec of qui_{Fin} in (24) or moves further (remaining in the LP of the relative, or moving to a higher nominal projection), depends on the details of the analysis of relative clauses (Kayne 1994; Bianchi 1999; Cinque 2020, and much related work).

In cases of long-distance extraction like (25) (for the speakers who accept this structure), the wh subject licenses *qui* by checking its Phi features in a Spec-head configuration, and moves further:

(31) Voilà l'homme que je crois [__ qui_{Fin} Subj __viendra __avec vous]

Therefore, in terms of the system we are assuming, here the Spec of qui_{Fin} clearly is not a criterial position: it is a transiting position. From this viewpoint, the Spec of *qui* is akin to the Spec position licensing past participle agreement under Kayne's (1989) influential analysis:

(32) Voilà la voiture que Jean a __repeinte __
'Here is the car that Jean has repainted$_{fem, sing}$'

The participial agreement position is a transiting position, necessary to license past participle agreement in a Spec-head configuration (under Kayne's analysis), but not a criterial position, which would permit and require the moved element to stay there, under Criterial Freezing.

A possible problem with this analysis is the following. If Spec qui_{Fin} is an A-position, one would incorrectly expect the possibility of further extending the A-chain, e.g. when the clause is the complement of a raising verb:

(33)	*Jean	semble	[__ qui_{Fin}	__	viendra	__]
	Jean	seems	__qui_{Fin}	__	will come	

One possible way to exclude (33) is to assume that Spec qui_{Fin} is both an A-position (qua specifier of a head agreeing in Phi features) and an A'-position (possibly, this could be a general property of left-peripheral positions). If improper movement blocks a chain link from an A'-position to an A-position, this constraint would naturally extend to a chain with a launching site characterized as both A and A'.[8]

8 No similar problem would arise in new information subject clefts, since in the assumed analysis, also the landing position is a mixed A/A' position.

6 Conclusions

At first sight, the subject position is unique in the clausal structure, in contrast with the possibility of multiple complements (most notably, in double object constructions across languages). But various considerations have led syntacticians to multiply subject positions: the VP internal subject hypothesis implied a distinction between the thematic position and the surface position of subjects, whereas Cardinaletti (2004) motivated finer distinctions in the higher part of the IP structure.

All these positions are IP internal, but a complete cartography of subject positions should also take into account plausible cases with a position hosting the subject in the CP system. We have argued for a number of such cases:

- The position of lexical subjects in French Complex inversion, which precedes the landing site of I to C movement, hence is left peripheral under the assumption that I to C targets Fin.
- The position of expletive subjects (and other weak pronominal subjects) in V2 constructions in Germanic, a position which is neither topical nor focal and respects locality conditions of A-chains.
- The focalized position of certain subject clefts.
- The left-peripheral A-position licensing *que→qui* type phenomena, devices to circumvent freezing effects and permit subject extraction.

All these cases involve an A-position in the C-system. In some cases (e.g., Complex Inversion) the subject position is criterial, hence it is a "halting" position because of Criterial Freezing. In other cases, the A-position in the CP is a "transiting" position: it is still restricted to local subject movement (because of locality), but the position is not criterial, hence the local subject transits through it to reach a higher criterial destination.

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