

Alternation between marking strategies for contrastive subjects: A corpus-based analysis in formal and informal written French

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Contrastive subjects



***Le Médoc** est réputé pour ses vins puissants.*

The Médoc is renowned for its powerful wines.'

***Le Saint-Émilion** produit des vins veloutés.*

The Saint-Émilion produces velvety wines.'

Contrastive subjects



~ contrastive topics (e.g. Buring 2003, 2016)
that function as grammatical subject



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Marking strategies for contrastive subjects

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'The Saint-Émilion **on the other hand** produces velvety wines.'

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Previous studies

(e.g. Caddéo 2004, 2006;
Cappeau 1999; Nølke 1997)

no quantitative analysis &
no account of the conditions
underlying the alternation

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Research question & goal of this talk

Which factors influence the alternation between the 4 marking strategies?

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1. Register (formal vs. informal)
2. Semantico-pragmatic properties of the subject
3. Formal complexity of the subject

Methodology

Quantitative analysis of **5944 occurrences** (323 C-Advs, 3119 E-Pros, 1479 *quant à* E-Pros, and 1023 Poss-Phrases) in **two written corpora**:



(De Smet 2009)

informal

discussion platform

6.1 million words



(Gaiffe et al. 2018)

formal

regional newspaper

74 million words

1. Register

How does the level of formality influence the alternation?

Frequency per register

Distribution of markers differs significantly by register

($\chi^2 = 169.75$, $N = 5944$, $df = 3$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.17$)

	FORMAL	INFORMAL
C-Adv	5% (276)	12% (47)
E-Pro	51% (2819)	76% (300)
<i>Quant</i> à E-Pro	26% (1446)	8% (33)
Poss-Phrase	18% (1009)	4% (14)
Total	100% (5550)	100% (394)

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Influence of register

- More formal register → higher chance of *Quant à* E-Pro or Poss-Phrase (more 'lexical material')
- Less formal register → higher chance of E-Pro or C-Adv (less 'lexical material')

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~ **More complex registers favor more complex variants** (e.g. Szmrecsanyi & Engel 2023)

2. Semantico- pragmatic properties of the subject

How do properties such as definiteness and animacy of the subject influence the alternation?

Definiteness of subject

DEFINITE

- (1) *Frédéric Berranger a reçu une lettre de félicitations de la fédération française de basket. Pascal Mengin, **pour sa part**, s'est vu remettre la médaille de bronze de la FFBB.* (ER)

'Frédéric Berranger received a letter of congratulations from the French Basketball Federation. Pascal Mengin, **for his part**, was awarded the bronze medal of the FFBB.'

INDEFINITE

- (2) *Les travaux qui se déroulent actuellement en haut de la grande rue, place Victor-Hugo ne font pas que des malheureux ou des mécontents. Certains jeunes, **au contraire**, y voient une bonne occasion d'y trouver le soir un terrain de jeux improvisé.* (ER)

'The roadworks currently taking place at the top of the main street, on Place Victor-Hugo, are not making everyone unhappy. Some young people, **on the contrary**, see them as a good opportunity to find in the evening an improvised playground.'

Definiteness of subject

NOTE: EXAMPLES WITH RELATIVE PRONOUN SUBJECT EXCLUDED

- (3) *c'est pas lui qui te manque, mais l'effet que ça te faisait quand ça allait bien avec lui. Et cet effet, un jour tu pourras le revivre avec un autre mec, qui **lui** t'aimera au lieu de te rejeter. (YCC)*

'it's not him you miss, but the effect it had on you when things were going well with him. And this effect, one day you will be able to relive it with another guy, who **him** will love you instead of rejecting you.'

Definiteness of subject

C-AdvS combine significantly more often with indefinite subjects

($\chi^2 = 253.59$, $N = 5426$, $df = 3$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.22$)

	C-ADV	E-PRO	QUANT À E-PRO	POSS-PHRASE
Definite	84% (238)	98% (2651)	99% (1439)	98% (967)
Indefinite	16% (47)	2% (44)	1% (21)	2% (19)
Total	100% (285)	100% (2695)	100% (1460)	100% (986)

Animacy of subject

HUMAN

- (4) *Chantal Vaxelaire dressait le bilan de l'association des Fossettes à qui il sera demandé un bilan trimestriel. Guy Perrin **pour sa part** informait l'assemblée de la réparation du camion des services techniques.* (ER)
'Chantal Vaxelaire presented the report of the Fossettes association, which will be required to provide a quarterly report. Guy Perrin, **for his part**, informed the assembly about the repair of the technical services' truck.'

ANIMATE

- (5) *Si la guêpe germanique préfère les endroits confinés, le frelon asiatique, **lui**, est adepte des nids aériens.* (ER)
'If the German wasp prefers confined places, the Asian hornet, **him**, is a fan of aerial nests.'

INANIMATE

- (6) *La faiblesse est quelque chose d'intérieur, qu'on ressent en soi, par exemple on se sent faible quand on est malade. [...] La fragilité **au contraire** est une caractéristique appliquée à quelqu'un après une évaluation faite de l'extérieur.* (YCC)
'Weakness is something inside, that we feel in ourselves, for example we feel weak when we are sick. [...] Fragility, **on the contrary**, is a characteristic applied to someone after an evaluation made from the outside.'

Animacy of subject

C-AdvS combine significantly more often with inanimate subjects,
whereas Poss-Phrases combine significantly less often with inanimate subjects
($\chi^2 = 319.92$, $N = 5373$, $df = 6$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.17$)

	C-ADV	E-PRO	QUANT À E-PRO	POSS-PHRASE
Human	46% (103)	69% (1859)	68% (985)	70% (690)
Animate	7% (15)	15% (401)	15% (220)	26% (257)
Inanimate	48% (108)	16% (435)	18% (255)	5% (45)
Total	100% (285)	100% (2695)	100% (1460)	100% (986)

Influence of semantico-pragmatic properties of subject

- Indefinite subject → higher chance of C-Adv
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= 'bad' or 'suboptimal' preverbal subject in French (e.g. Cappeau & Deulofeu 2001, 2006)

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~ **Contrast as a 'survival' strategy: contrastive reading facilitates the use of a 'bad' preverbal subject** (e.g. Leonetti 2013, Karssenbergh 2017, Lahousse 2003)

3. Formal complexity of the subject

How does post-modification of the subject influence the alternation between E-Pros and *quant à* E-Pros?

Post-modification of lexical NP subject

NO POST-MODIFICATION

- (7) *Par exemple, les Vosges ont perdu 20 000 habitants de 1975 à 2007. Les Alsaciens, **eux**, ont gagné 100 000 habitants en 10 ans.* (ER)

'For example, the Vosges lost 20 000 inhabitants between 1975 and 2007. The Alsatians, **them**, gained 100 000 inhabitants in 10 years.'

POST-MODIFICATION

- (8) *Sourire aux lèvres, M. Sarkozy a ostensiblement serré longuement la main du Premier ministre sortant à son départ de l'Elysée peu après 19 h 30. [...] Le numéro deux du gouvernement, Jean-Louis Borloo, qui convoitait Matignon, a été reçu **quant à lui** vers 17 h 30 par le président.* (ER)

'With a smile on his lips, Mr. Sarkozy ostensibly shook hands with the outgoing Prime Minister for a long time at his departure from the Elysee Palace shortly after 7:30 p.m. [...] The number two of the government, Jean-Louis Borloo, who coveted Matignon, was received **as for him** around 5:30 p.m. by the president.'

Post-modification of lexical NP subject

Quant à E-Pros combine significantly more often with post-modified lexical NP subjects
($\chi^2 = 101.52$, $N = 4143$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.16$)

	E-PRO	QUANT À E-PRO
Post-modification	29% (772)	44% (645)
No post-modification	71% (1916)	56% (810)
Total	100% (2688)	100% (1455)

Influence of post-modification of lexical NP subject

Post-modified subject → higher chance of *quant à* E-Pro

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~ **Complexity Principle** (e.g. Rohdenburg 2020)

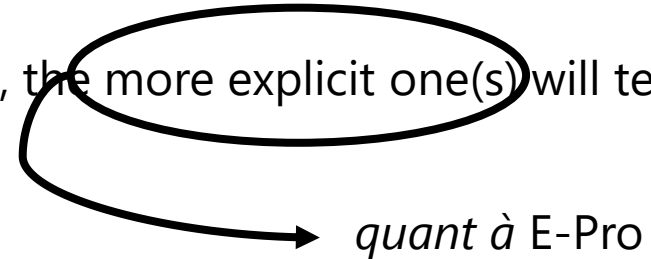
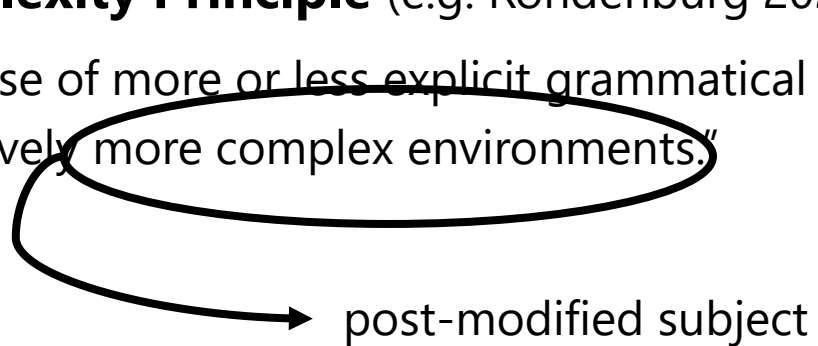
“In the case of more or less explicit grammatical options, the more explicit one(s) will tend to be preferred in cognitively more complex environments.”

Influence of post-modification of lexical NP subject

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2. Semantico-pragmatic properties of subject:
Higher chance of C-Adv with suboptimal (= indefinite, inanimate) subject
~ **Contrast as a 'survival' strategy**

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Higher chance of *quant à* E-Pro and Poss-Phrase in formal French
~ **More complex registers favor more complex variants**
2. Semantico-pragmatic properties of subject:
Higher chance of C-Adv with suboptimal (= indefinite, inanimate) subject
~ **Contrast as a 'survival' strategy**
3. Formal complexity of subject:
Higher chance of *quant à* E-Pro with post-modified subject
~ **Complexity Principle**

Cette présentation touche à sa fin.

'This talk has come to an end.'

THANK YOU!

*Le vin [**par contre / lui / quant à lui / pour sa part**] vous attend encore.*

'The wine [**on the other hand / him / as for him / for his part**] is still waiting for you.'