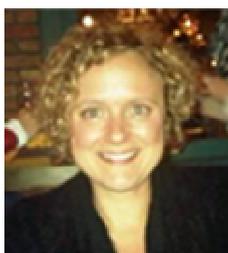


# A case of focal adverb preposing in French\*

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*“Dear Adriana, thanks for your cartographic ideas about subject inversion and the structure of clefts, which profoundly inspired my recent research. Thanks also for your warm welcome when I came to Siena for a visiting stay in Spring 2012. I wish you a lot of happiness, both inside and outside linguistics!”*

In linguistic literature a lot of attention has been given to so-called main clause phenomena (see Haegeman 2012 for an overview). It has been noted that similar constructions, which involve NP, PP or VP preposing, also exist in French (see Authier & Haegeman 2014a/2014b for an overview). In this article I discuss preposing of focal *ainsi* ‘in this way’ (1), which occurs in written French, and which, as far as I can tell, has not yet been identified as a main clause phenomenon:

- (1) *Il [Alexandre] écrivait avec une sorte de distraction concentrée, comme on crayonne sur le bloc du téléphone: on écoute de moins en moins et c'est le dessin qui s'impose.*

‘He [Alexander] wrote with a kind of concentrated distraction, like when you doodle on a phone notepad: you listen less and less and it’s the drawing which takes over.’

... *Ainsi*                      écrivait    Alexandre, ...  
... in this way              wrote      Alexandre,  
‘That’s how Alexander wrote, (...)’  
(Pennac, Frantext)

Preposing of focal *ainsi* occurs in contexts where the whole sentence summarizes the preceding discourse: the whole propositional content is given, and the function of proposed *ainsi* is to re-assert that it is in that specific way that the event took place.

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\* The related article will be part of Di Domenico, E., C. Hamann and S. Matteini (eds.) (to appear) *Structures, Strategies and Beyond. Studies in Honour of Adriana Belletti*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, Benjamins Publishing Company.

This construction displays specific properties. First, in spite of its anaphoric nature, preposed *ainsi* is clearly focal, as is shown by the fact that (1) can function as answer to (2a) but not (2b). Moreover, just as other instances of focus preposing, for instance in Italian (Belletti 2008/2009/2011/2012/2013), preposed focal *ainsi* triggers subject inversion, of the nominal (1) and the pronominal subject (3):

- (2) a. *Comment écrivait Alexandre?*  
 ‘How did Alexander write?’  
 b. *Que sais-tu à propos d’Alexandre?*  
 ‘What do you know about Alexander?’
- (3) [Same context as (1)]           ... *Ainsi écrivait-il.*  
 ... in this way wrote-he

Note that the surface string [*ainsi* – S – V] is grammatical. In this case, however, *ainsi* does no longer mean ‘in this way’, but functions as a sentence adverb with meanings similar to ‘by consequence, thus, hence, for instance’ (Molinier 2013).

The sentence-initial position of focal *ainsi* is clearly the result of focus movement, since it creates unbounded dependencies (4a-b) and is sensitive to strong islands (4c-4d). Moreover, the fact that *ainsi* in the main clause can license NP subject inversion in the embedded clause (4a) is a sign of successive cyclic movement (Kayne & Pollock 1978). As expected, preposing of focal *ainsi* is incompatible with *wh*-movement (5).

- (4) [same context as (1)]
- a. *Ainsi je vous dis [qu’ écrivait Alexandre].*  
 in this way I to-you say that wrote Alexander
- b. *Ainsi je vous dis [qu’Alexandre écrivait].*  
 in this way I to-you say that Alexander wrote
- c. \**Ainsi, il n’y en a pas beaucoup [qui écrivent].*  
 in this way there are not a lot who write
- d. \**Ainsi, je ne sais pas [qui d’autre écrit].*  
 in this way I don’t know who else writes
- (5) \**Quand ainsi écrivait Alexandre?*  
 when in this way wrote Alexander  
 ‘When was it in this way that Alexander wrote?’

I argue that preposed *ainsi* moves to Rizzi’s (1997) left peripheral Foc position. An important piece of evidence in favor of this is attested examples such as (6), which show that *ainsi* can move out of the focus of a cleft (see Haegeman et al. 2013 for similar examples in English). If the latter occupies a low IP-internal focus position (Belletti 2008/2009/2011/2012/2013), then *ainsi* must occupy a higher focus position.

- (6) *Bon sang mais comment elle fait ?! (...)*

‘Dammit but how does she do it?’

... *ainsi était-ce* \_\_ *que commentait Kumiko sur ce qu’elle avait vu.*

... in this way was it that commented Kumiko on that what she had seen

‘It was in this way that Kumiko commented on what she had seen.’

(<http://dragonball-evolution.forumactif.com>)

We thus argue that [focal *ainsi* – V – S] is derived as in (8a-b), with the postverbal subject being in the vP peripheral topic position advocated for by Belletti (2004). If then, in terms of featural Relativized Minimality, *ainsi* carries a feature Q (by virtue of the operator-variable relation created by its preposing, see above), then this correctly predicts that this adverb cannot be crossed by the movement of other operators, which are present in central adverbial clauses and complement clauses of factive verbs (Haegeman 2012) (7c) and, hence, that [focal *ainsi* – V – S] is a main clause phenomenon (7d):

- (7) a. [<sub>SpecTP</sub> pronominal S [<sub>T°</sub> verb [<sub>SpecMannerP</sub> *ainsi* [<sub>Manner°</sub> [<sub>SpecvP</sub> nominal S [<sub>v°</sub> t<sub>verb</sub>]]]]]]]
- b. [<sub>SpecFocP</sub> *AINSI*<sub>Q</sub> [<sub>Foc°</sub> verb [<sub>SpecTP</sub> pronominal S [<sub>T°</sub> t<sub>verb</sub> [<sub>SpecMannerP</sub> t<sub>ainsi</sub> [<sub>Manner°</sub> [<sub>SpecTopP</sub> nominal S [<sub>SpecvP</sub> t<sub>nominal S</sub> [<sub>v°</sub> t<sub>verb</sub>]]]]]]]]]]]]]
- c. \* [<sub>CP</sub> *quand/si* *OP*<sub>Q</sub> [<sub>SpecFocP</sub> *AINSI*<sub>Q</sub> [<sub>Foc°</sub> verb [<sub>SpecTP</sub> pronominal S [<sub>T°</sub> t<sub>verb</sub> [<sub>SpecMannerP</sub> t<sub>ainsi</sub> [<sub>Manner°</sub> [<sub>SpecTopP</sub> nominal S [<sub>SpecvP</sub> t<sub>nominal S</sub> [<sub>v°</sub> t<sub>verb</sub>]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]
- d. \* *Quand* *ainsi* *écrivait Alexandre, il oubliait tout.*  
when in this way wrote Alexander he forgot everything

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