

'Something funny' in French

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0. Introduction

Whereas in the English *something funny* the adjective directly follows the pronoun, in the French equivalent of this construction the adjective following the indefinite or interrogative pronoun is preceded by *de*:

- (1) j'ai lu quelque chose d'intéressant
I have read something of interesting
- (2) qui d'intelligent as-tu vu?
who of intelligent have you seen?

However, *de AP* may also follow a regular NP as in the fully productive construction exemplified by (3):

- (3) il y a une place de libre
there is one place of empty

Since (2) and (3) do not seem to have the same syntactic properties, the two constructions are often considered to have an essentially different structure. What they have in common is their semantics: globally speaking, the indefinite (or interrogative) pronoun, respectively the NP denotes a subdomain within the domain denoted by *de AP* (e.g. 'a place' within the domain of 'empty things').

In this paper we will argue that the occurrence of *de AP* is restricted to contexts where it can be linked to a variable created at LF. Although this situation obtains in different structural configurations, these will be shown not to coincide completely with the indefinite pronoun/NP-distinction as exemplified by (2) and (3).

The paper is organized as follows: section 1 contains a survey of the different syntactic properties associated with the two constructions presented above; section 2 is concerned with the possibility of a small-clause analysis for (3); in section 3 we present evidence for a more unified treatment of (2) and (3). In section 4 we argue that *de AP* is dependent on the creation of a variable. A provisional structural analysis for *de AP* is proposed in section 5. Section 6 contains some conclusions.

1. Syntactic properties

In the following we will refer to the *indefinite pronoun de AP*-construction as construction-type A, to the *NP de AP*-construction as construction-type B.

- B is only possible with verbs denoting a state (*rester, se trouver*), possession ((*y avoir*) or perception (*voir, connaître*), that is, with verbs allowing for an existential interpretation, while A can appear with all sorts of predicates:

- (4) il n'a pas vu/trouvé/publié grand'chose d'intéressant
he not has seen/found/published great thing of interesting
- (5) il a vu/trouvé/*publié un article de sérieux dans cette revue
he has seen/found/*published an article of serious in that review

- in both cases non-predicative adjectives such as *présidentiel, policiers* are not allowed; furthermore, in B, but not in A only stage-level adjectives may appear, to the exclusion of individual-level adjectives:

- (6) je ne connais personne de malade/de intelligent/*de présidentiel
I not know anyone of sick/of intelligent/*of presidential
- (7) elle a trois romans de terminés/*d'épais/*de policiers
she has three novels of ready/*of thick/*of detective

- in construction-type A the pronoun is inherently indefinite; in B, only indefinite NPs are possible, to witness (8):

- (8) il y a un étudiant/*l'étudiant de malade
there is a student/*the student of sick

- B does not have the same distribution as A: whereas there are no restrictions on the positions open to A (construction-type A can be subject, (in)direct object etc.). B can only be the direct object¹ of verbs of the existential class (see above). This is shown in (9)-(13):

¹ As we will see later on, this rather is the subject position of an existential small clause.

- (9) quelqu'un de compétent a obtenu ce poste
 someone of competent has obtained that post
- (10) nous avons discuté de quelque chose d'intéressant
 we have discussed of something of interesting
- (11) il y a eu cent hommes de tués dans cette bataille
 there has been hundred men of killed in that battle
- (12) *deux enfants de malades sont partis en vacances
 two children of sick have left on holidays
- (13) *j'ai parlé à un homme d'intéressant
 I have spoken to a man of interesting

This last distributional difference shows in particular that construction A, with an indefinite (or interrogative) pronoun preceding *de AP*, behaves as one nominal constituent, in contrast with construction B.

Since, on one hand, the pronouns in question are themselves maximal projections, and, on the other hand, APs are not preceded by *de* when inside an NP, compare *un homme compétent* (a competent man) with the ungrammatical **quelqu'un/qui compétent* (somebody/who competent), we adopt the following -still rather global - structure for such A-type constituents, where the categorial status of *de AP* is left unspecified for the moment:

- (14) $NP[NP[quelqu'un]_{XP}[de\ comp\acute{e}tent]]$

The above-mentioned restrictions on the *NP de AP*-construction (verbs of appearance, stage-level adjectives, definiteness effect, object position only) are reminiscent of restrictions imposed on existential sentences, for which a small clause-analysis is quite generally proposed.

2. Small Clause Constructions

The best known SCs in French are the predicationals (or *être*-type) ones, where a property is predicated of an individual. Here, however, *de AP* may not show up:

- (15) Jean est (*de) malade/intelligent
 John is (*of) sick/intelligent
- (16) je croyais Jean/un homme (*de) malade
 I believed John/a man (*of) sick

Another type of small clause is the existential (Guéron 1986) or situational (Hoekstra and Mulder 1990) one (the *avoir*-type SC), exemplified by:

- (17) il y a un problème
there is a problem
- (18) j'ai un frère
I have a brother
- (19) there occurred a catastrophe

Both (17) and (18) are analyzed by Guéron as consisting of an existential verb not selecting an external argument, but taking a special sort of small clause, denoting a state. This small clause is supposed to contain two constituents, both without a Θ -role, of which the second one can be construed as a variable within the scope of an existential quantifier. In (17) locative *y*, in (18) benefactive *je* acts as such. Hoekstra and Mulder's analysis is different in that *there* in (19) is supposed to be the predicative part of the situational small clause at D-structure, moved to [Spec,IP] at S-structure. In this type of SC *de AP* may show up.

Now, there exist more complex existential sentences, such as the French (20) or the Dutch (21), with a PP respectively an AP following the postverbal NP:

- (20) il y a quelques hommes dans le jardin
there are some men in the garden
- (21) er zijn twee leerlingen ziek
there are two pupils ill

Although Guéron's and Hoekstra and Mulder's analyses for these constructions are not the same, they both assume that the postverbal NP and PP/AP form together a state-denoting small clause², and they both observe that the construction in question is submitted to the following restrictions: only verbs of appearance are allowed; the postverbal NP must be indefinite; the adjectival predicate must be of the stage-level type. Since we found the same restrictions for the *NP de AP*-construction, we may conclude that in the French (3), repeated here as (22), we have to do with the same sort of existential or situational small clause:

- (22) il y a _{SC}[une place de libre]

An additional argument for this view comes from (23), a special type of absolute construction in French, analyzed by Ruwet (1978) as containing, after the preposition *avec*, an *avoir*-type small clause:

² In fact, in Hoekstra and Mulder's view *er* is the real predicate of the SC entertaining a doubling relation with the adjunct AP (or PP).

- (23) avec _{SC}[un enfant de malade], je n'ai pas pu venir
with a child of sick I have not been able to come

So, whereas construction-type A has been argued to be a single nominal constituent, displaying an adjunction structure, construction-type B has been assimilated to a state-denoting small clause with the structure given in (24), again with XP for *de AP*:

- (24) _{SC}[_{NP}[une place] _{XP}[de libre]]

Since indefinite pronouns such as *quelqu'un* are obvious candidates for the NP-position in (24), (25) is structurally ambiguous between a small clause reading for *quelqu'un de malade* and a reading where this sequence is analysed as one constituent, occupying the position of *un problème* in (17):

- (25) il y a quelqu'un de malade
there is a sick somebody

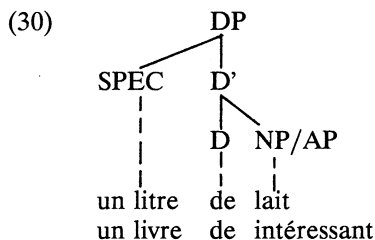
3. *NP de AP as one constituent*

However, the restrictions we have observed above concerning the *NP de AP* construction and which we have related to its Existential Small Clause structure, apparently may be overruled in a restricted set of contexts, namely in the context of *ne...que*, *en* and contrastive stress. This is illustrated by the following examples:

- (26) je n'ai publié qu'un article de sérieux dans cette revue
I ne have published only one article of serious in this magazine
(27) il n'y a que cet étudiant d'intelligent
there ne is only this student of intelligent
(28) elle en a lu trois d'intéressants
she of it has read three of interesting
(29) j'ai lu DEUX revues d'intéressantes
I have read TWO magazines of interesting

In the examples (26), (28), (29) *NP de AP* occupies the object position of verbs that do not select an existential small clause. Moreover, in (27) the adjective is not of the stage-level type. Finally, in (27) the NP is preceded by a definite article. In a way the *NP de AP* construction in the above examples appears to have properties very similar to the ones of the type B *indef. pron. de AP* construction: it seems to behave as a regular NP and not as an existential small clause.

Let us consider the possibility that *NP de AP* here is one constituent, an NP. What could be the internal structure of such an NP? In that respect one might think of the internal structure of other French NPs of the type *NP de XP*, such as for example, *un litre de lait*. Let us suppose for the moment that *NP de AP* indeed has a similar internal structure, such as the recently suggested DP-structure in (30) (see, for example, Corver (1990:186)) :



At first sight this seems a plausible option. However, there are a number of serious difficulties with this structure. First, whereas in the case of *un litre de lait* the NP in the Specifier position may be replaced by a QP of the type *beaucoup*, this is excluded in the *NP de AP* construction:

- (31) beaucoup de lait
 much of milk
 (32) *beaucoup d'intéressant
 much of interesting

Second, the NP in *de NP de AP* construction may be modified, a possibility which is excluded for the NP *un litre* in *un litre de lait*:

- (33) cent soldats courageux de tués
 hunderd soldiers courageous of dead
 (34) *un litre impressionnant de lait
 a litre impressing of milk

A third problem for the structure in (30) concerns quantative *en*: in contrast with *litre* in *un litre de lait*, the head of the NP in the *NP de AP* construction can be pronominalized by *en*:

- (35) j'en ai lu un d'intéressant
 I of it have read one of interesting
 (36) *j'en ai bu un de lait
 I of it have drunk one of milk

All these differences strongly suggest that the NP of the *NP de AP* construction does not occupy the specifier position, as does *un litre*. On the contrary, the NP in *NP de AP* behaves as the maximal projection of the head of the construction: This head may be pronominalized by *en* (35) or modified by an adjective (33). Let us suppose the NP is indeed the maximal projection. How then is *de AP* related to the NP?

In principle there are two possibilities:

- 1) *de AP* could be generated inside the NP, in the same way as a relative clause for example
- 2) *de AP* could be (Chomsky-)adjoined to NP, just as in the type B *indef. pron. de AP* construction

There are convincing arguments in favor of the idea that both structures do indeed exist. Consider the following sentence:

(37) je n'ai mangé qu'un gâteau de chaud

This sentence has two possible interpretations:

- it could be the case that all the other "gateaux" were cold and that I ate the only hot one
- it could also be the case that all other eatable things available were cold and that the only thing hot was a "gâteau", which I ate.

Only under the first reading the *de AP* may be replaced by a (restrictive) relative clause modifying the head noun:

(38) je n'ai mangé qu'un gâteau qui était chaud
I ne have eaten only one gâteau that was hot
(the other gateaux were cold)

Only under the second reading ("as for warm things I only ate a gâteau") the *de AP* may occur "on its own" in another position of the sentence:

(39) je n'ai mangé de chaud qu'un gâteau
(40) de chaud, je n'ai mangé qu'un gâteau

These differences can easily be explained if one assumes that *NP de AP* here may have the two different structures suggested above.

Summarizing, we showed in this paragraph that the *NP de AP* construction may have the structure of a regular NP with N as its head and with *de AP* either attached inside it (just as a relative clause) or adjoined to it (just as in the case of the type B *indef. pron. de AP* construction). This may seem to suggest that *NP de AP* has in fact the same distribution as the type B *indef. pron. de AP* construction. As we have shown in section 1, however, this

is definitely not the case. The restrictions on the distribution of *NP de AP* are very clearly related to the characteristics of the linguistic context in which they appear. In the next section we'll try to find out what these characteristics are.

4. Creation of a variable

Let us return to the contexts that allowed the *NP de AP* construction in the position of a regular NP. We still have to explain why in these contexts the restrictions concerning the verb, the adjective and the article, observed above, do not hold anymore. What characterizes these contexts? In what way are they similar to the contexts requiring an existential small clause?

All three contexts (*ne...que*, contrastive accent, and quantitative *en*) are related to the phenomenon of FOCUS. In all three an element in the scope of the "focalizer" is focalized. In principle, that can be an entire NP, but it can also be the specifier of an NP. Consider the following sentence with *ne...que* which allows both focalizations:

- (41) je n'ai mangé que deux pizzas
 I ate only two pizzas (and nothing else)
 I ate only two pizzas (and not three)

In the first reading, the entire NP *deux pizzas* is focalized. In the second reading, only the specifier *deux* is focalized. In a similar way, the contrastive accent may be placed both on the specifier and on the entire NP, as shown in the following examples:

- (42) j'ai lu DEUX LIVRES
 (43) j'ai lu DEUX livres
 I have read two books

In the first sentence the presupposition is that I read something and the new information (the focus) is *deux livres*. In the second sentence the presupposition includes the fact that I read books, and it is the number of books (*deux*) which constitutes the focus.

In the case of quantitative *en* it is always the specifier that is focalized:

- (44) j'en ai lu deux
 I of it have read two

It is generally assumed that focalization involves the creation of a variable at LF, similar to QR movement for example. Chomsky (1981:196) gives the following LF representation of a sentence with focal stress:

- (45) his mother loves JOHN
for x = John, his mother loves x

We follow Azoulay-Vicente (1985) in assuming that either the entire NP or the specifier can be turned into a variable at LF in the focalization contexts mentioned above. Consequently (41) can have the two following LF representations:

- (46) for x = two pizzas, I only ate x
for x = two, I only ate x pizzas

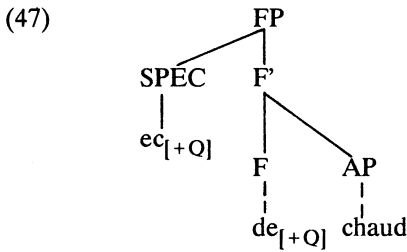
In sum, what characterizes the contexts in which *NP de AP* appears to behave as a regular NP is that the NP (or its specifier) is focalized. At LF a variable is created which - semantically - expresses a subdomain of the domain represented by *de AP*. Here we see the correspondence with the appearance of *NP de AP* in the scope of an existential predicate: these predicates select a small clause introduced by an existential operator binding a variable. In that context too, the variable expresses the subdomain of the domain represented by *de AP*. Finally, this brings us to the type B *indef. pron. de AP* construction. At LF *indef. pronouns* such as *quelqu'un*, *quelque chose*, *rien* etc. undergo QR and a variable is created. Since these construction do not have to be in the scope of some other element in order to undergo QR, because it is an inherent property of the *indef. pronouns* regardless of the context they appear in, we find these construction also in subject position, contrary to what we saw for the *NP de AP* construction which must always appear inside VP, in the scope of a variable creating operator.

Summarizing, we have seen that what characterizes the distribution of *de AP* is that it appears in relation with an NP or with a pronoun in constructions where a variable is created. On the one hand, this variable is created because the entire NP undergoes wh-movement or QR since it is inherently [+Q]. On the other hand, the variable is created in the scope of a focal or existential operator. *NP de AP* has the internal structure either of a small clause or of an NP, depending on the subcategorisation of the predicate by which it is selected.

In the next paragraph, we will consider very briefly the internal structure of *de AP* itself.

5. The internal structure of *de AP*

In the literature there is not very much agreement on the categorial status of *de* in *de AP*. While some argue in favor of *de* as a copula-like element (cf. Milner 1978), or a Comp (cf. Huot 1981), others (cf. Azoulay-Vicente 1985) assume that *de* is a regular preposition in this construction. We do not want to enter into this discussion here. We'll simply suggest that *de* in *de AP* is the same *de* found in NPs of the type *beaucoup de livres* and that this *de* is characterized by an inherent feature [+Q] and by the property of selecting a domain denoting [+N] as its argument. By virtue of Spec-Head^{*} agreement the Specifier of *de* will also have the feature [+Q]. For the time being we'll consider *de* as a functional head *F* and assume that the *de AP* construction has the following structure:



This FP is involved in two syntactic phenomena: predication and quantification at a distance (QAD). We have seen above that *de AP* enters into a predication relation with an NP. The suggested FP structure has the necessary qualifications to function as a predicate.³ However, the structure in (47) is also very similar to the one of *de NP* found in QAD-sentences such as the following:

- (48) Jean n'a pas *beaucoup lu de livres*
 John neg has not much read of books

Obenauer (1983) and Kayne (1981), among others, have shown that *de NP* in QAD-sentences contains an empty QP in Specifier position that is subject to the ECP: it must be governed by V and bound by a (local) [+Q] antecedent. The same appears to hold for the empty [+Q] Specifier in our construction: as we have seen above *de AP* is possible only in relation to an NP which contains a variable. This variable could be considered as the antecedent of

³ See e.g. the definition of predicate given by Mulder & den Dikken (1991): "the minimal XP containing an unbound empty operator functions as a predicate".

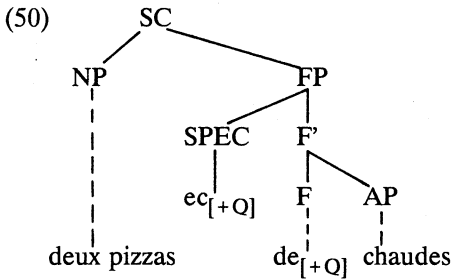
the empty [+Q] Specifier. This structure allows us to explain that *de AP* is involved in two operations: predication and QAD.

6. Conclusion

We have shown that it is not correct to structurally oppose the type A *NP de AP* construction and the type B *indef. pron. de AP* construction. Our examination of the data revealed that *de AP* can be structurally related to either an NP or an indefinite pronoun in several ways, depending on the syntactic context:

- in a (Existential) Small Clause structure, in sentences such as the following, where the verb is subcategorized for such a SC

(49) il y a deux pizzas de chaudes
there are two pizzas of hot

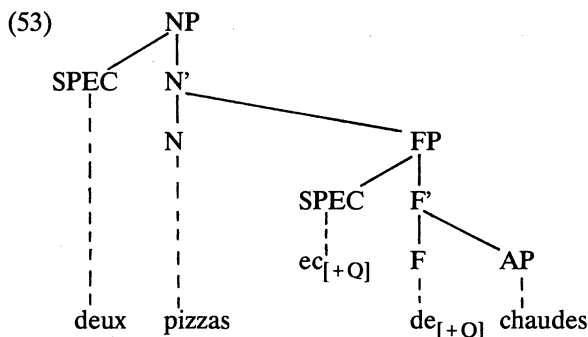


In the scope of the existential operator the NP *deux pizzas* is turned into a variable at LF. The construction is interpreted as follows:

(51) x [deux pizzas], x part of the set defined by the property *CHAUD*,
IL Y A x.

- adjoined to N', just as a relative clause, if the NP is in the scope of a focalizing element, such as *ne...que*, contrastive stress or quantitative *en*

(52) je n'ai mangé que deux pizzas de chaudes
I ne have eaten only two pizzas of chaudes



In this structure the specifier *deux* can be focalized and turned into a variable at LF⁴, leading to the following interpretation:

- (54) I ONLY ATE x , x = the cardinal of the intersection of P and S, where P = the set of the pizzas eaten and S = the set of everything that is warm

It could never be the whole NP *deux pizzas de chaudes* that is focalized by *ne...que* in (53), because the created variable would then include the FP. Consequently, there would be no antecedent for the empty [+Q] Specifier of FP.

This also explains the ungrammaticality of the following sentences⁵:

- (55) a *Paul n'achète que des fraises de bonnes
 Paul ne has bought only des strawberries of tasteful
 b *J'ai lu DES REVUES D'INTERESSANTES
 I have read des magazines of interesting

⁴ It could also be the case that the specifier is wh-moved in syntax, as in the following sentence:

combien as-tu mangé de pizzas de chaudes?
 how many have you eaten of pizzas of warm

⁵ As opposed to the following sentences which are grammatical:

(i) Paul n'achète que des fraises de bon
 (ii) J'ai lu DES REVUES d'intéressant

Here the NP *des fraises/des revues* is focalized. We suppose that *de AP* is adjoined to NP and not to N' in these sentences (see below). Crucially, there is no agreement on the adjective here, while there is agreement in (58). This is probably related to the structural configuration. However, the question of how to account for the agreement on the adjective in *de AP* is left outside the scope of this article.

In (55a) *des*, in contrast with *deux*, does not have the required properties to be focalized and consequently the sentence is out. In (55b) the whole NP cannot be stressed for the same reasons that excluded focalization by *ne...que* in (53).

- adjoined to NP, where the lowest NP is turned into a variable either by syntactic wh-movement (as in (56)) or at LF by QR (as in (57)) or by focalization (as in (58))

(56) qu'as-tu mangé de chaud?

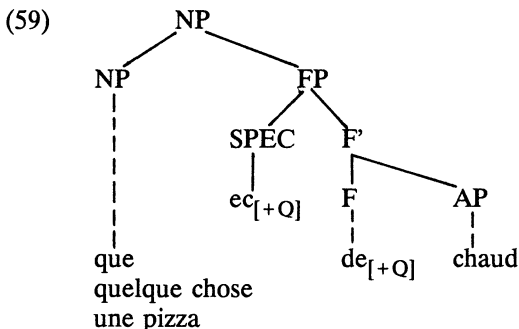
what have you eaten of warm

(57) as-tu mangé quelque chose de chaud?

have you eaten something of warm

(58) je n'ai mangé qu'une pizza de chaud

I ne have eaten only a pizza of warm



Sentences (56)-(58) can be interpreted as follows:

- (60) as for warm things, what have you eaten/have you eaten something/I have eaten only a pizza

Finally, as expected, the proposed structures may be combined, to a certain extent at least. NPs such as (53) or (59) can be found in the subject position of an existential small clause, as shown by the following examples:

(61) avec [quelqu'un de malade][d'absent],...

with someone of ill of absent

(62) avec [DEUX pizzas de chaudes][pour tout repas],...

with two pizzas of warm for all meal

(63) il y en a [beaucoup de récents] [de délaissés par les éditeurs]

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