New paper by Elodie Winckel @abeilleanne @thebarb51 and me
examining subject islands
@cognitionjourn
we compare it-clefts to relative clauses in French and English; Open Access

📝 1/12

https://sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0010027724002361?dgcid=rss_sd_all

In our previous work (Abeillé et al., 2020,) on French and English, we found that subject subextra
lower (interaction effect) for relative clauses (with pied-piping). 🤨 However, it was in wh-questio
2/12tedlab.mit.edu/tedlab_website...

Building on this, we hypothesized that subject extraction should be degraded in wh-questions and
discourse clash: a conflict between focus and background. 📝 3/12

The new paper presents 4 acceptability rating experiments comparing two constructions with diffe
structure statuses: relative clauses vs. clefts, in both French and English. We predicted a contrast l
and clefts. 📝 4/12

The that-clause in an it-cleft is structurally similar to a relative clause. However, clefts are inheren
not relative clauses. This creates a discourse clash in clefts only, since subjects are default topics. 📝

Experiment 1 first showed that the subject of the that-clause in clefts is more backgrounded than t
test to measure this (e.g., It was the train that the teenager boarded → No, it was the old lady). 📝 (

To test subject islands, we varied the syntactic function (subject/direct object) and extraction type
of NP) while including ungrammatical controls. For English, we examined extractions using prepo
pied-piping. 📝 7/12

🔑 Key results: Subject subextraction is rated lower only in clefts (i.e., superadditive). No lower ra
except English preposition stranding. This suggests the issue lies with preposition stranding, not w

We tested several prepositions in English relative clauses (to, over, against) to ensure that, even wh[...] proper extraction was being tested—not hanging topics (cf. Broekhuis 2006; Uriagereka 2006). 📝

The difference found in 2020 between wh-questions and relative clauses could be explained by cyc[...] (Cinque, 1996). 🤷 Such an explanation is not available for the difference between RC & clefts. Inf[...] valid alternative. 📝 10/12

✅ Our results confirm the Focus-Background Conflict Hypothesis, with different outcomes for cl[...] despite their syntactic similarities. This difference, we argue, is due to information structure, not s[...]

For more on the Focus-Background Conflict Hypothesis, check out our earlier work (Abeillé et al., [...]
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doi.org/10.1016/j.cogn...
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FYI Elodie Winckel is GREAT