“Remind-me” presuppositions with iterated Speech Acts[1]

Adèle Hénot-Mortier (Queen Mary University of London)

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[1]This project started during the Spring 2025 MIT “treetops” seminar taught by Danny Fox, Sabine Iatridou and Kai von Fintel, all of whom I thank. It was recently brought to my attention that Jeanne Lecavelier (Potsdam) and Alexander Wimmer (Stuttgart) have independently produced cool work based on similar French data, and more. This work constitutes a very valuable complement to my own contribution. I thank Jeanne for bringing it up.

Introduction

“Remind-me” presuppositions (Sauerland, 2009; Sauerland & Yatsushiro, 2017)

- Consider the following scenario inspired by Sauerland and Yatsushiro (2017)–henceforth **SY17**:

Jo and Al are introduced to each other at a party and tell each other their names. As the conversation goes by, ***Jo realizes they forgot Al’s name****. Jo asks Al:*

(1) What’s your name #(again)?

- In this scenario, the addressee’s name was contributed to the Common Ground earlier by the addressee.
- (1) then appears to presuppose that the speaker knew the name of the addressee before.
- This presupposition was dubbed **“Remind-Me” Presupposition** (**RMP**). It seems to be triggered by the particle ***again*** in English.

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Narrowing down the content of the RMP

- Consider now this slightly different scenario, inspired again by SY17:

At the beginning of a reception, the names of all the participants are announced. Jo doesn't know anybody but ***makes no effort to listen to the announcement****. Later, Jo encounters Al, and asks them:*

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- In this scenario, the speaker never knew the name of the addressee, but the addressee's name was contributed to the Common Ground in the past by the announcer.
- The RMP seems to imply that **the answer to the question was made Common Ground before**.[2]
- **How does the RMP arise, and is it attested in other languages?**

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The cross-linguistic picture

The RMP in German and Japanese

- Japanese (2) and German (3) questions can feature RMP-triggering particles (Sauerland, 2009; Sauerland & Yatsushiro, 2017).

(2) Namae-wa nan-da-**kke**?
Name-TOP what-COP-**kke**
'What's your name again? ' (RMP ✓)

(3) Wie ist **noch mal** Ihr Name?
How is **again** your name
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- Lecavelier and Wimmer (2025a, 2025b) point out **the RMP arises in many other languages**, including Akan, Scandinavian languages, Greek and Slovenian. **Other strategies** can be recruited (*now*,[3] epistemic past...see Appendix).
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- There is evidence that the particle is **syntactically high** (SY17).
- This particle thus lends itself to a **straightforward analysis**: one can assign it the RMP.

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The RMP with German *noch mal*

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How is **again** your name
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- In German, just like in English, the RMP-triggering particle normally means *again*.
- This suggests that **something about the standard meaning of *again* may trigger the RMP.**

Why *again* then?

- In declarative contexts, *again* has a repetitive meaning: it is assertorically vacuous and presupposes its prejacent was true before (see (4)).

(4) $[\![\text{again}]\!] = [\![\text{noch mal}]\!] = \lambda\langle p, e\rangle : \underline{\exists e' < e.\ p(e')}.\ p(e)$

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Past account of the RMP with *again*

SY17: key Speech Act operators

- The RMP is derived from the interaction between *again* and two Speech Act operators, an **injunction to the addressee** IMP2[4] (6) and a **Common Ground** operator CG (5).

(5) $[\![\text{CG}]\!]^{\text{spk}} = \lambda\langle Q, e\rangle$. 1 iff the speaker spk partakes in e, and the full answer to Q is CG in e

(6) $[\![\text{IMP2}]\!]^{\text{spk,addr}} =$
λp. it's an oligation that $\exists e$. addr causes e and $p(e)$

[4] For clarity and brevity we omit the further decomposition of this operator into IMP+2.SG+DO, where IMP is a universal modal, 2.SG the addressee and DO a causation predicate.

SY17: asking questions

- Let's first review simple questions without *again*.
- Asking a question *Q* corresponds to **an injunction to the addressee (IMP2) to make the answer Common Ground (CG[Q])**.[5]

(7) $[\![\text{IMP2 [CG[Q]]}]\!]^{spk,addr}$ = it's an oligation that $\exists e$. addr causes *e* spk partakes in *e*, and the full answer to *Q* is CG in *e*

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SY17: the *again*-sandwich

- The trick is then for *again* to scope between IMP2 and CG.

(4) $[\![\text{again}]\!] = \lambda\langle p, e\rangle : \underline{\exists e' < e.\ p(e')}.\ p(e)$

- This yields **the right at-issue meaning** (equal to IMP2 [CG[Q]]).
- Additionally, *again*'s presupposition that the answer to Q was Common Ground *before*, can **project across IMP2** to yield the RMP.

(8) $[\![\text{IMP2 [again[CG[Q]]]}]\!]^{\text{spk,addr}} =$
$\underline{\exists e' < e.\ \text{spk partakes in } e', \text{ and the full answer to } Q \text{ is CG in } e'.}$
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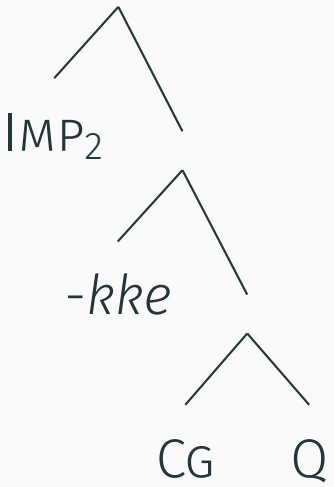
- The same recipe works for the Japanese particle *-kke*.



- Why *-kke* and not a repetitive particle otherwise available in the language (e.g. *mata* or *mou ichido*)?
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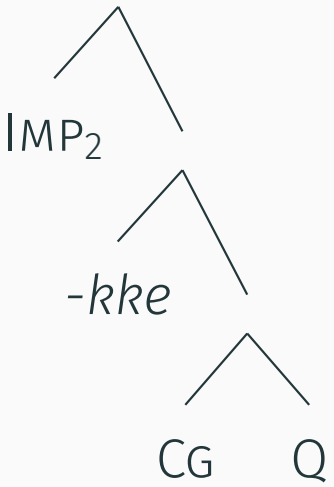

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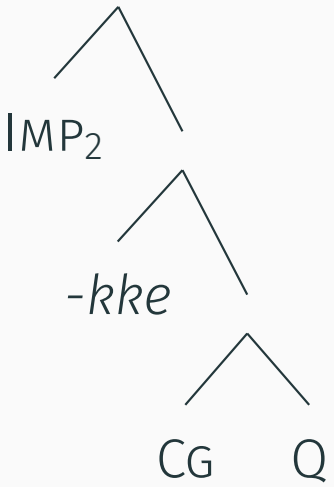

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Next steps

- We'll now see that RMPs arise in French questions; but the particle (*déjà*) is **neither "dedicated" nor of the *again* type**...
- We'll then propose an analysis of the phenomenon, recycling the particle's usual semantics and proposing that it interacts with IMP2 and CG **in tricky yet predictable ways.**
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French “Remind-me” questions

Déjà in declaratives: medial position

- In French, the adverb *déjà*, normally means ***already*** or ***ever/at least once*** (also noted by Lecavelier and Wimmer, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c, henceforth **LW25**).

(9) Tu as **déjà** lu Tolstoi?
You have DÉJÀ read Tolstoi?
'Have you **ever**/**already** read Tolstoi?' (ever more salient)

(10) Ed a **déjà** déclaré ses impôts.
Ed has DÉJÀ filed his taxes.
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Déjà is a RMP trigger in *wh*-questions

- In questions, sentence-final *déjà* **preferentially triggers the RMP**, (as opposed to an already-reading) regardless of *wh*-movement:[6]

(13) (Qui) tu as vu (qui) **déjà**?
Who you have seen who DÉJÀ?
'Who did you see again? ' (RMP ✓)

- Sentence-medial *déjà* **necessarily triggers the RMP** (no *already*/*ever* reading) **after *ex situ wh*-words**; see (14).

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When *déjà* does not trigger the RMP

- Unlike German *noch mal*, *déjà* cannot trigger the RMP when within VP, regardless of *wh*-movement.
- In (15), *déjà* preferentially receives an *already* interpretation.[7]

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- Like German but unlike Japanese, *déjà* cannot trigger the RMP in polar questions, regardless of its position.[8]

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(15) (Qui) tu as **déjà** vu (qui)?
(Who) you have DÉJÀ see (who)?
'Who have you already seen?' (RMP ✗)

- Like German but unlike Japanese, *déjà* cannot trigger the RMP in polar questions, regardless of its position.[8]

(16) Tu as (**déjà**) vu Jo (**déjà**)?
You have DÉJÀ see Jo DÉJÀ?
'Have you already/ever seen Jo?' (RMP ✗)

[7] In other sentences/contexts, the *ever*-reading may arise as well.
[8] And regardless of how the polar question is formed (inversion, clefting...).

The puzzle

- Which core meaning of *déjà* is better suited to derive the RMP?
- Recall the RMP is a **presupposition** that the answer to the question was made Common Ground **before**.
- Under the *already*-reading, *déjà* at most presupposes that the prejacent was *expected* to occur... **it's a presupposition, but definitely not the right kind!**
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Deriving the RMP in French

Core assumptions

- We take that ***déja*** **is presuppositionless and asserts *again*'s presupposition**:

(17) $[\![\text{déjà}]\!] = \lambda\langle p, e\rangle.\ \exists e' < e.\ p(e') = 1$

- And we assume *déjà* is generated in VP.
- This allows us to capture the *ever* reading of *déjà* in declaratives (9-12),[13] and questions (13-16).
- (18) shows how, if applied to CG[Q] ***déjà asserts*** **the RMP.**

(18) $[\![\text{déjà CG Q}]\!]^{\text{spk}} =$
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The recipe

- The goal is now to derive a LF which effectively **backgrounds the assertion derived in (18)**. Here is our recipe.

1. Overt movement of *déjà* right below Spec-CP$_{[+wh]}$.
2. (C)overt movement above CG.
3. Insertion of a second CG operator.
4. Movement of the lower CG[Q] constituent.
5. Escaping IMP2 by extraposition.

- Not a simple sandwich! More like a deconstructed club sandwich.

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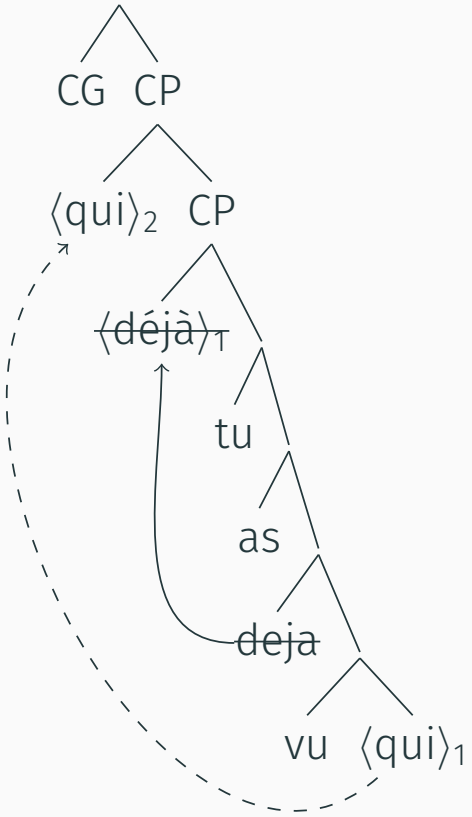
- RMP-*déjà* **moves *overtly* to a Spec-CP position**, below CG and the Spec-CP hosting *wh*-phrases (see solid arrow in tree below).



- This overt step is in line with the word orders licensing the RMP:[14]

(14) High *déjà*, RMP ✓

Qui **déjà** tu as vu (⋯qui)?
Who DÉJÀ you have seen DÉJÀ?

'Who did you see again? '

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- This is unlike German *noch mal*.

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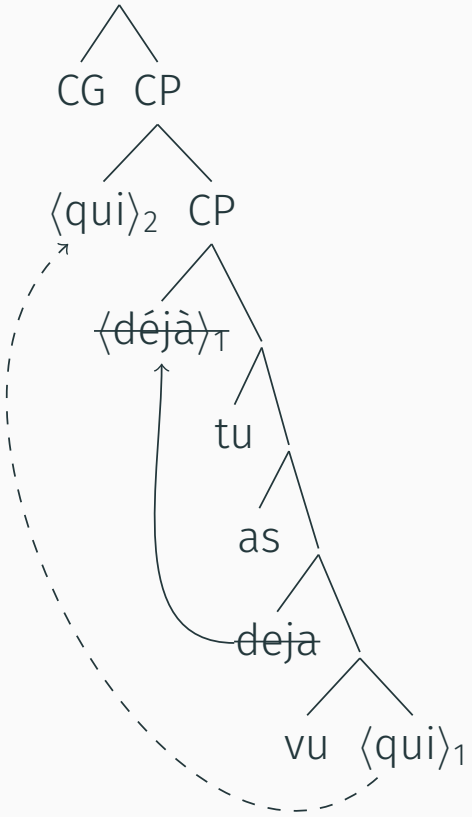

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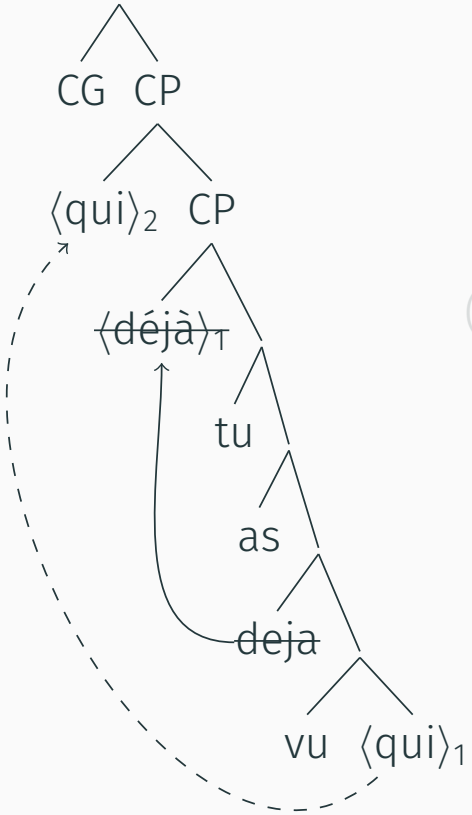

- This movement step is also supported by the **absence of intervention effects** between *déjà* and negation:[15]

(19) a. Qui déjà tu **n'**as **pas** vu?
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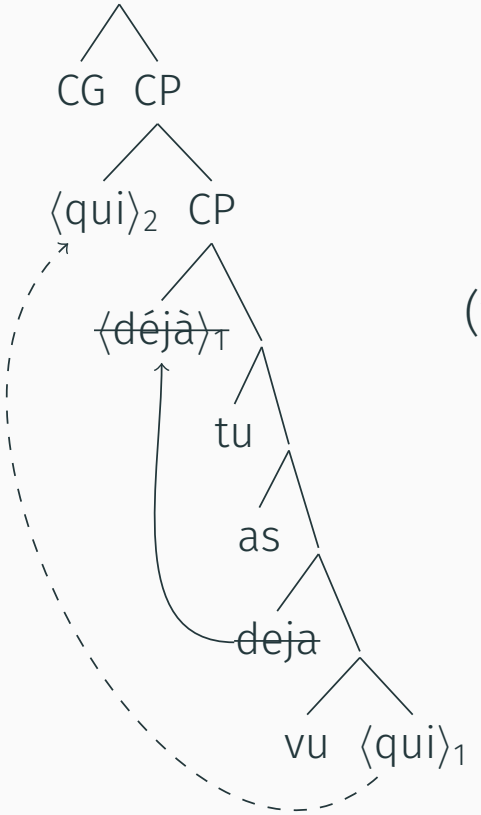

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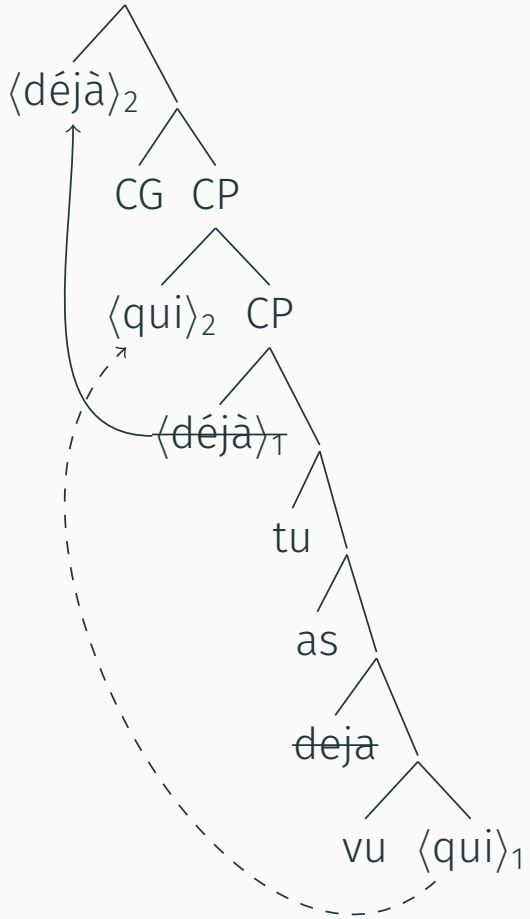

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- If this step is covert, *wh*-movement (dashed arrow) must be *overt*, granted *déjà* needs to attach to a host *wh*-word in Spec-CP.[16]
- This condition allows forms like *Déjà qui tu as vu?* and bans **Déjà tu as vu qui?*[17]
- In any case, we take that **only the highest copy of *déjà*** (⟨*déjà*⟩2) **gets interpreted**.

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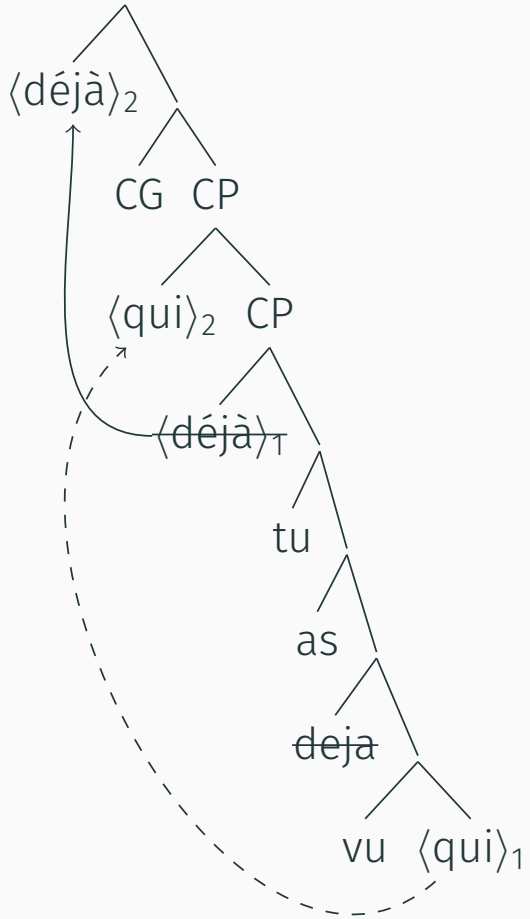

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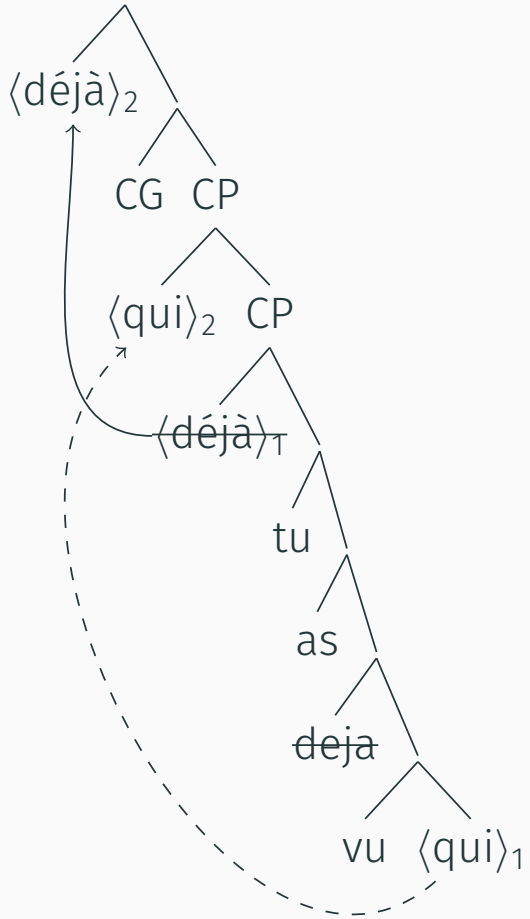

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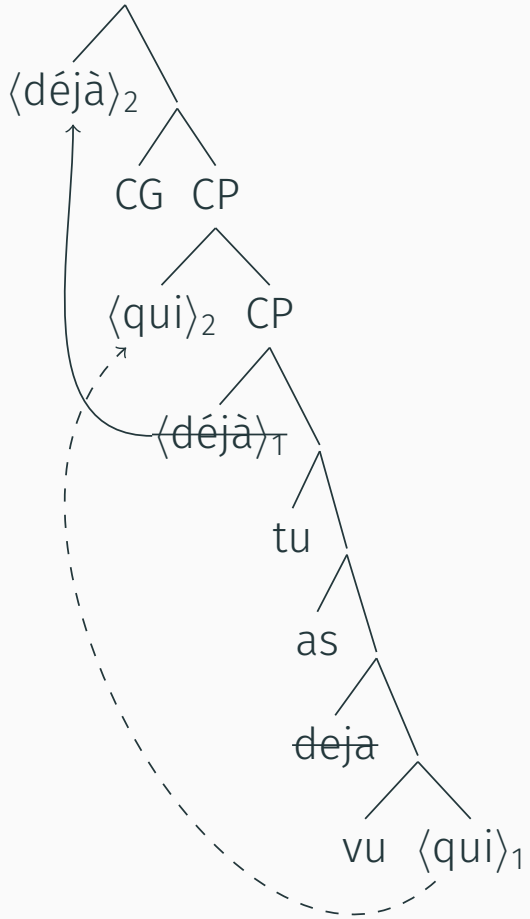

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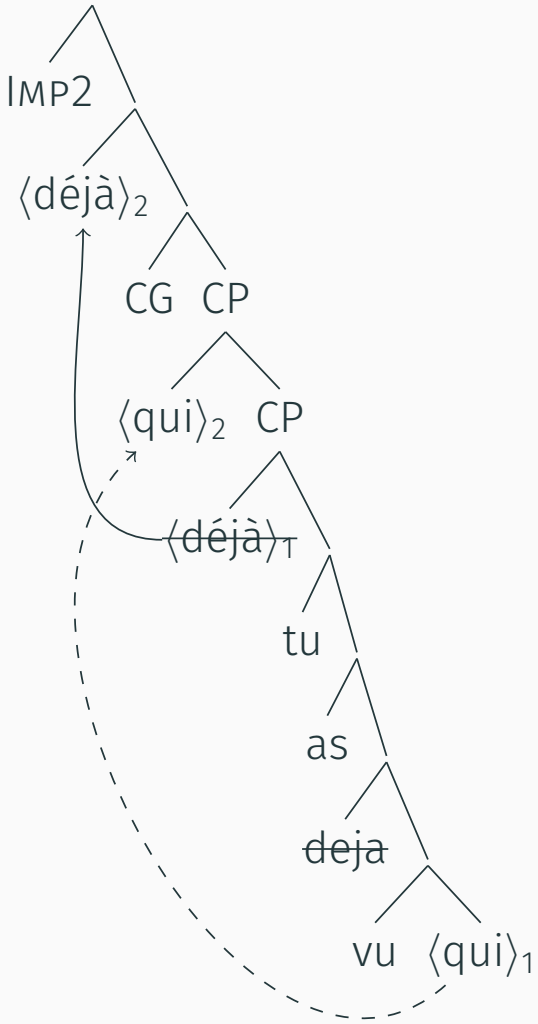

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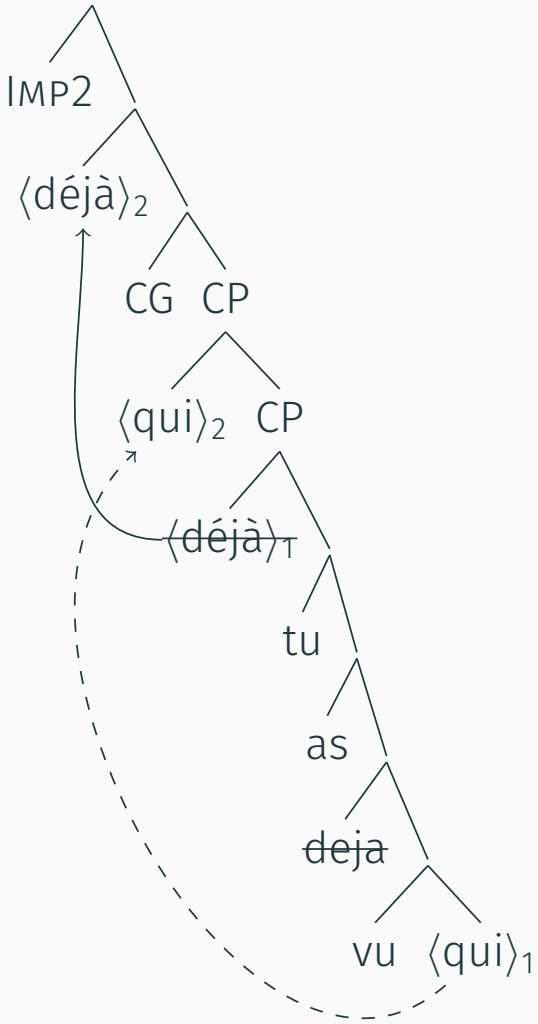

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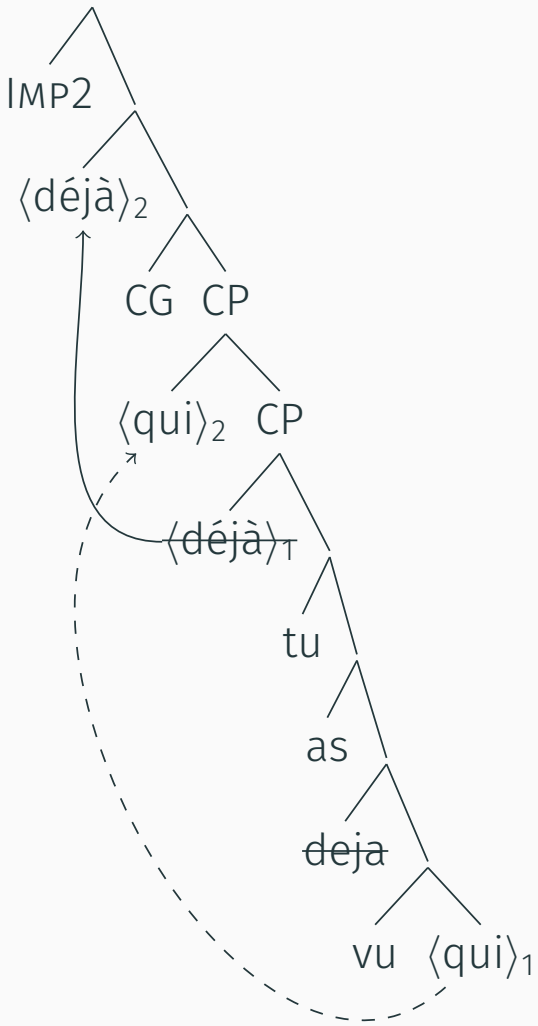
- Suppose IMP2 were directly inserted at the top of the current tree.



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(18) $[\![\text{déjà CG Q}]\!]^{spk}$ =
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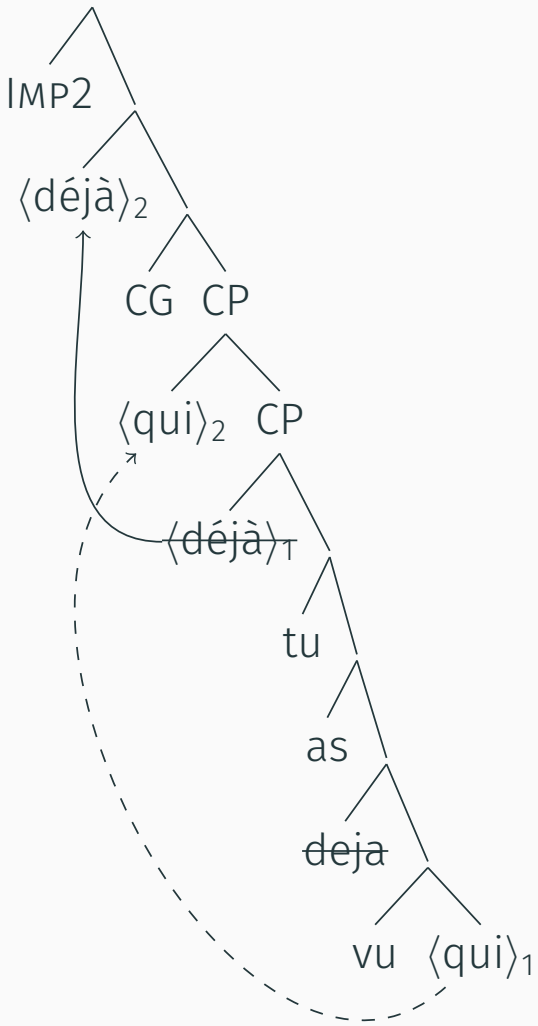

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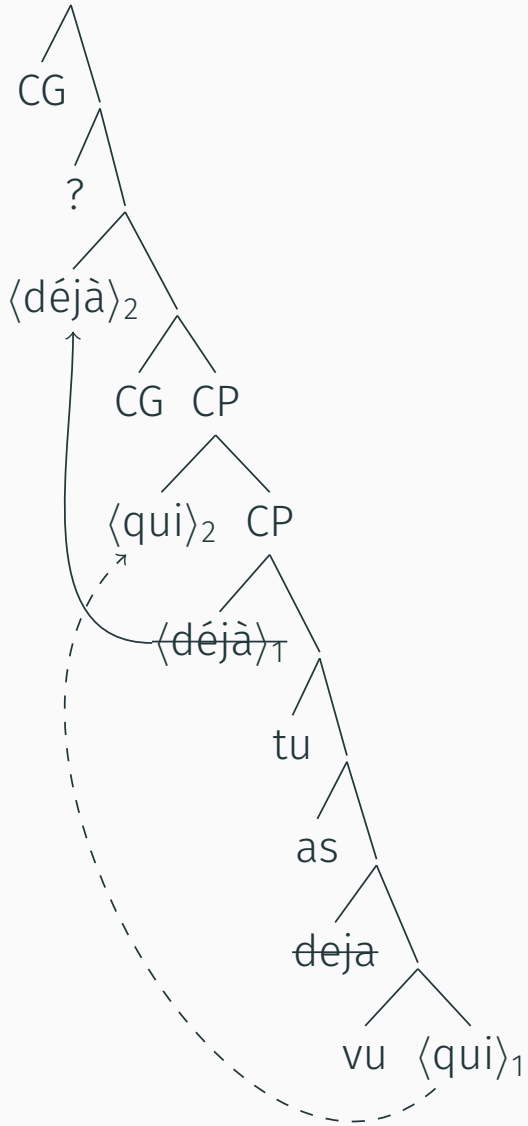

- We assume that **a second CG operator gets merged** (the extra ?-operator below it just lifts the prejacent p into the question $\{p\}$).
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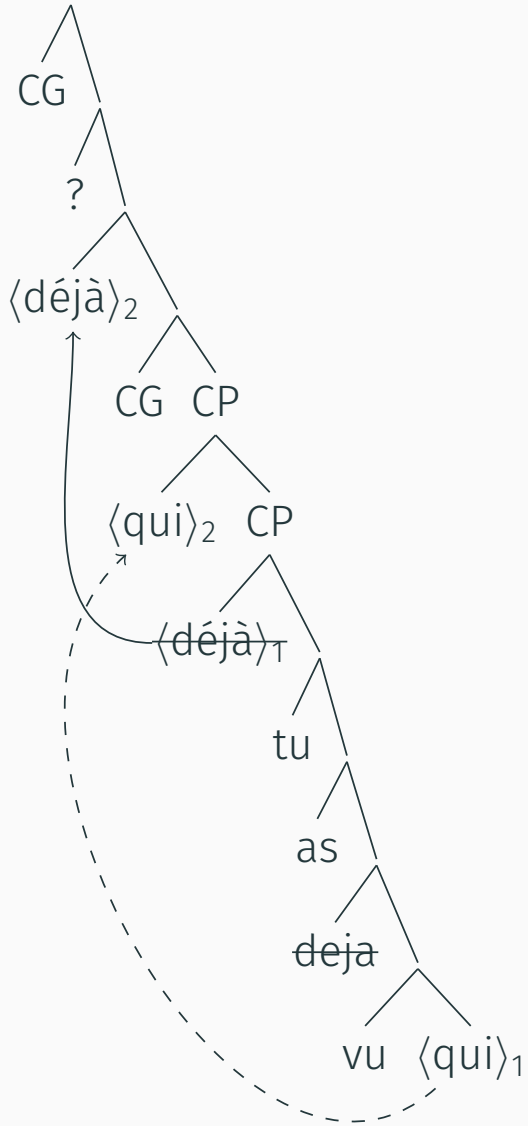

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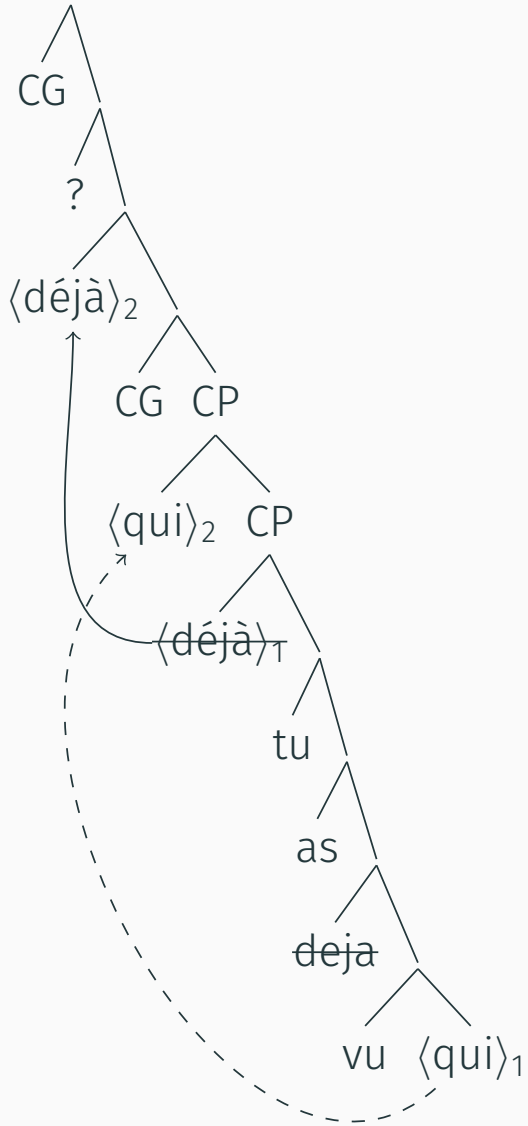

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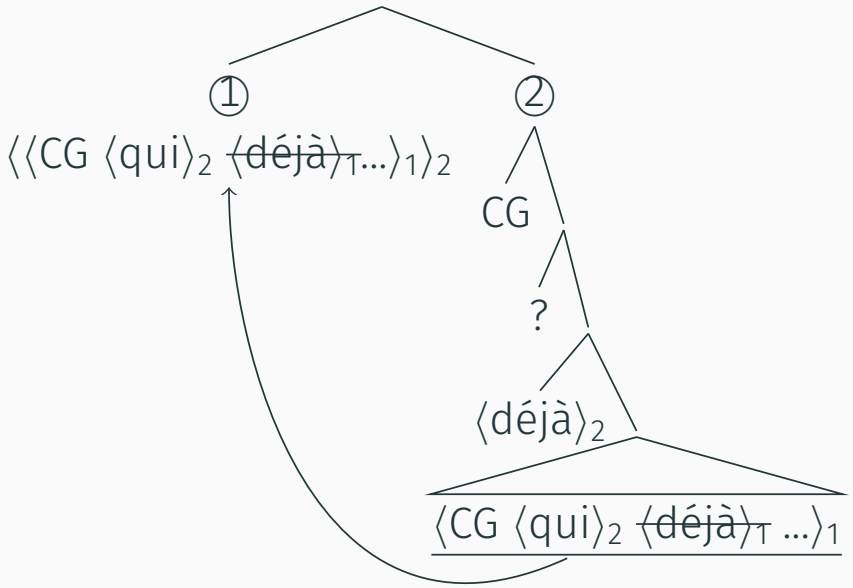

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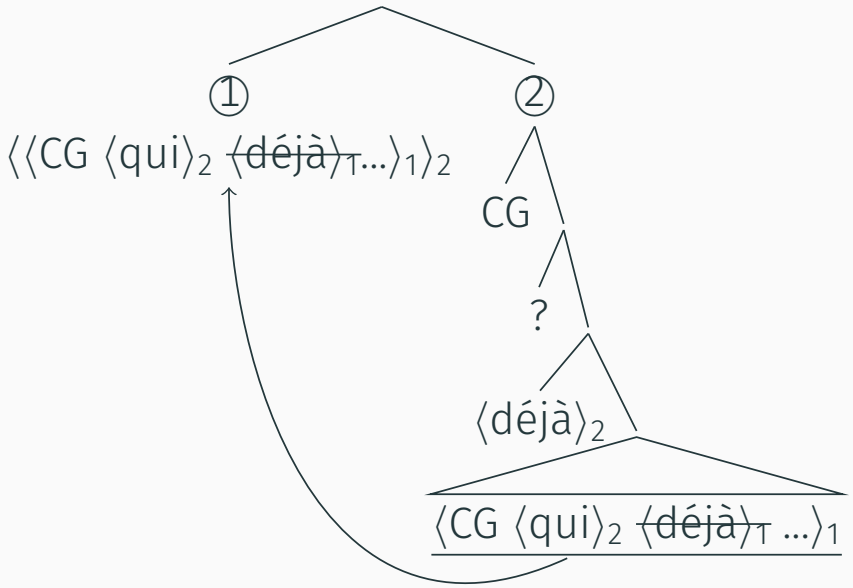

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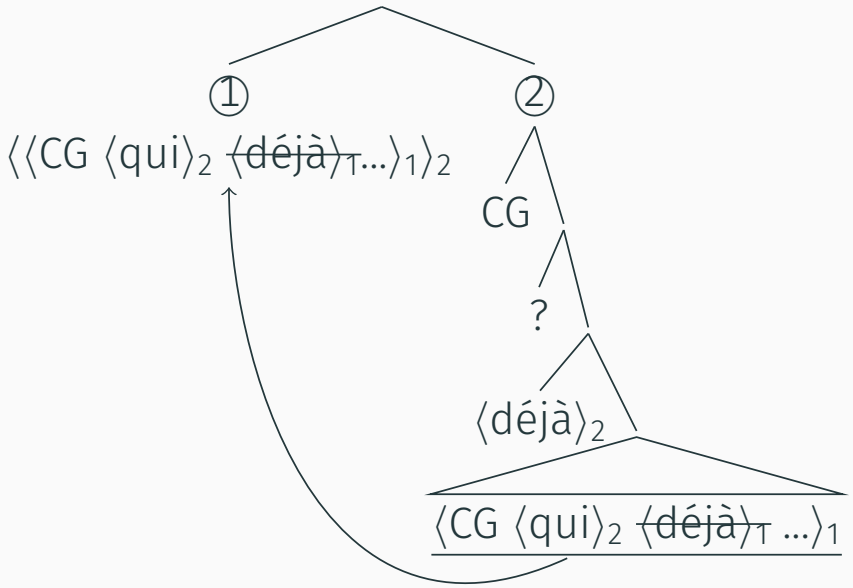

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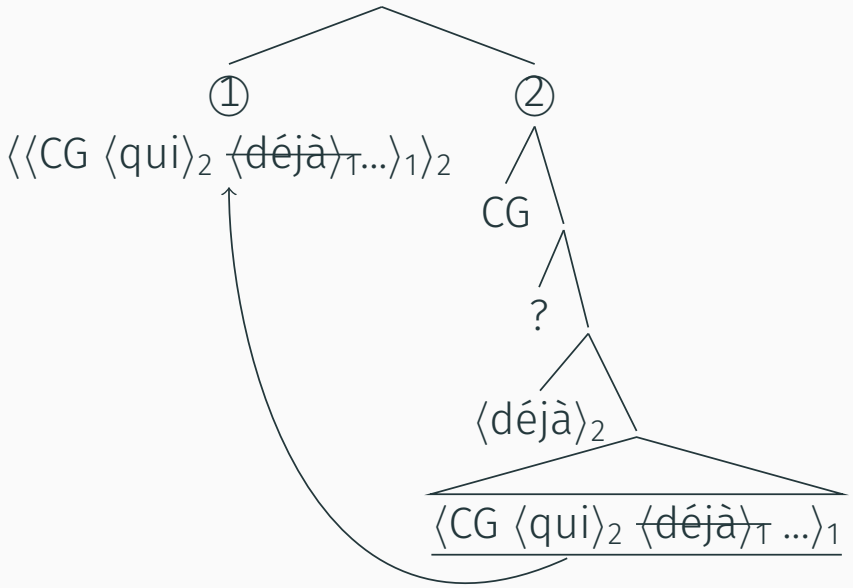

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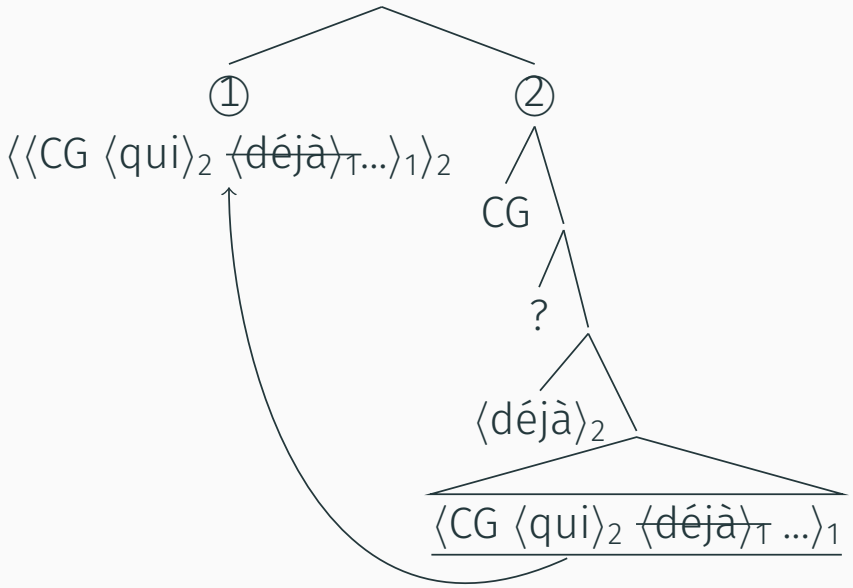

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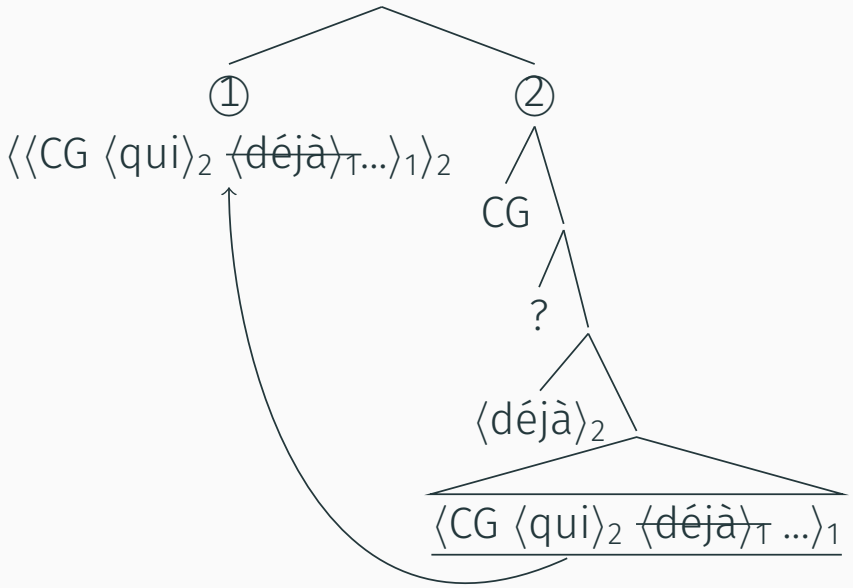

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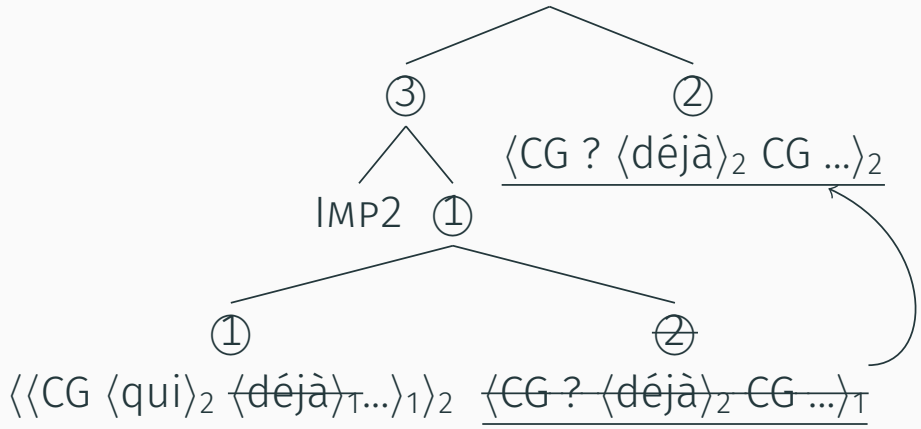

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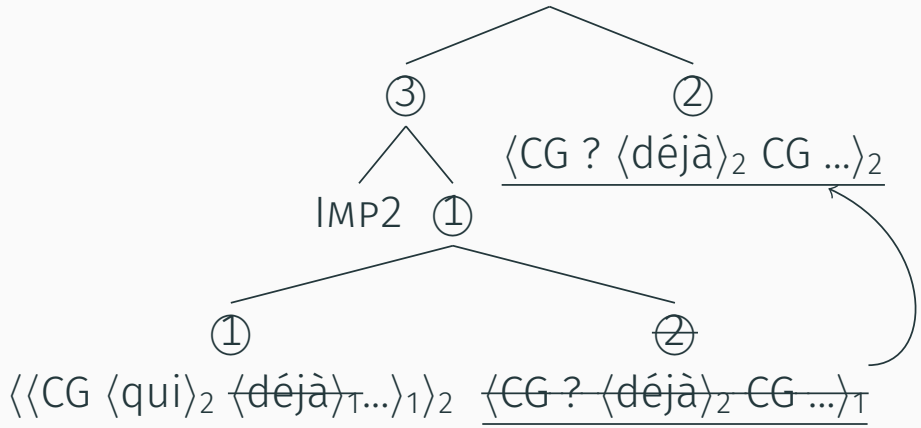

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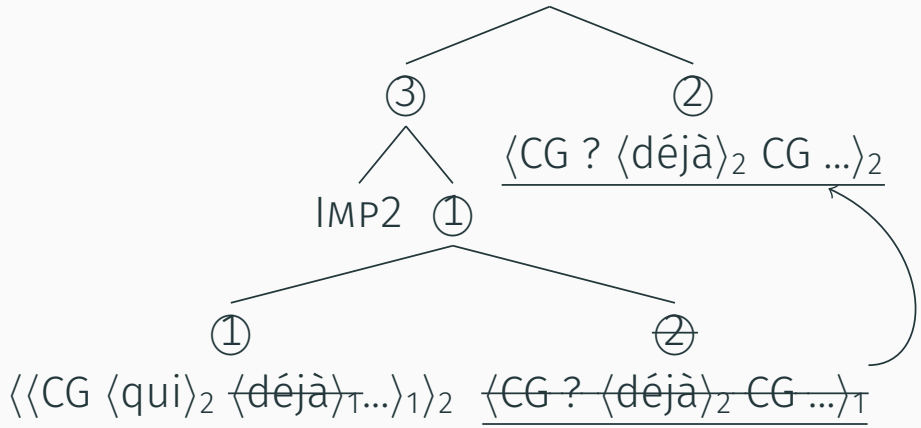

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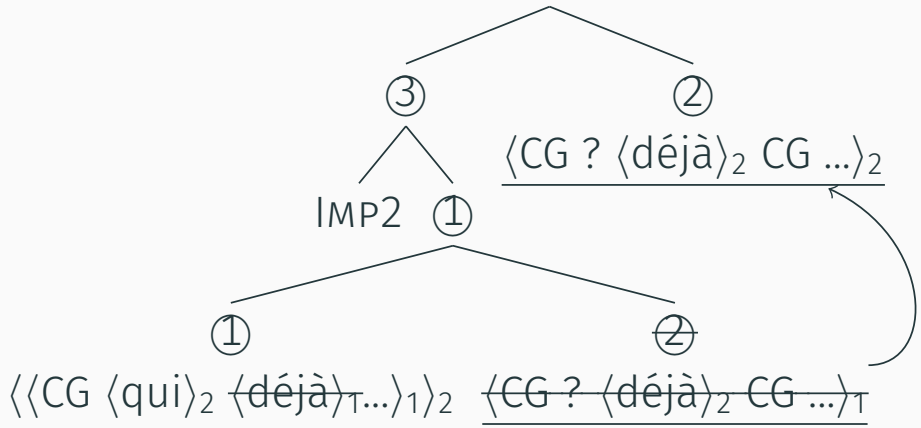

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- The French RMP was derived assuming ***déjà* retains a unified meaning** asserting what *again* presupposes, and **undergoes several operations in the treetops** forcing this assertion into the CG.
- In that sense, RMP *déjà* is similar to English *again* and German *noch mal*, but requires a **heavier syntactic/LF machinery**, which (roughly) **emulates presupposition projection**.
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Further discussions

More on word order

- *Déjà* is always **interpreted high** to yield the RMP, but can surface either after the *ex situ wh* (if its lower copy is realized), or sentence-finally (if its higher copy is realized).
- The former option forces the RMP, which makes sense assuming that as soon as *déjà* moves out from VP, it ends up LF-climbing to the treetops.
- Yet, **the latter option does not force the RMP**, even though *déjà* is out of VP. We think this is unproblematic, considering that *déjà can* in fact occur sentence-finally with its regular meaning in assertions; see e.g. (12). In such cases, *déjà* is probably extraposed, but still below Speech Act operators.

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(20) **Déjà** tu as vu qui? (**RMP ✗**)

- (20) can in fact receive a reading along the lines of *First off, who did you see?*[18] This reading is not available for other positions of *déjà* and *qui* (the *wh*-item).
- This has a **Speech-Act-y flavor**: (20) means that the first Speech Act that the speaker wants to produce is an injunction to the addressee to make the answer to *who you saw* Common Ground.

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- This corresponds to a reading of *déjà* that we overlooked so far!

(21) Je vais **déjà** enlever mes chaussures.
I will **DÉJÀ** put-off my shoes.
‘I will first take out my shoes.’ (⇝I have a list of things to do)

(22) Peut-être que je vais **déjà** enlever mes chaussures.
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Why not the “direct” route?

- French does have a locution, *de/à nouveau*, akin to *again*/*noch mal*. Its standard projection signature is exemplified below.

(23) Lu n’a pas de/à nouveau fermé la porte.
Lu NEG-has NEG again closed the door.
‘Lu has not closed the door again. (she did before)’

(24) Peut-être que Lu de/à nouveau fermé la porte.
Maybe that Lu has again closed the door.
‘Maybe Lu has closed the door again. (she did before)’

(25) Est-ce que Lu de/à nouveau fermé la porte?
Is-it that Lu has again closed the door
‘Has Lu closed the door again? (she did before)’

- But this locution feels weird and forced in RMP settings.[19] Why?

[19] If anything, the *à*-variant is slightly better.

Why not the “direct” route?

- The problem of French is a bit similar to Japanese–which “came up” with a special treetops particle to convey RMPs.
- But the French strategy–if on the right tracks–is arguably way more complicated that the Japanese strategy.
- To understand why French went this way, one may consider the fact that *déjà*, unlike *again*, *noch mal*, and *-kke*, comes with a variety of meanings: *already*, *ever*, and *first off*.
- Maybe this is where the advantage of *déjà* lies: **getting it to work at the treetops is not a walk in the park, but when done, one can derive a variety of Speech Act-level presuppositions.**[20]

[20] The question is then why we don’t get Speech Act-level *already* in French...

Future directions

Limiting the scope of the account

- The mechanism we proposed for the French RMP triggered by *déjà* **emulates backgrounding within the LF**.
- It's a complex but powerful machinery that may overgenerate with other particles carrying only asserted content.
- Identifying which operators/particles can climb up to the treetops in this way, and why they can do so is crucial to meaningfully limit the scope of this account.

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- *wh+donc* questions, where *donc* normally indicates consequence (like English *then*) may presuppose the question was previously **left unresolved** or is very topical yet hard to address.
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- *wh+donc* questions, where *donc* normally indicates consequence (like English *then*) may presuppose the question was previously **left unresolved** or is very topical yet hard to address.
- *wh+au juste* (‘*wh*+exactly’) questions may presuppose that the question was **non-maximally resolved**.
- In English, *then* and *too* may also be of interest.

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Other kinds of questions

- In this talk, I focused on *wh*-questions and the RMP.
- Regarding polar questions: if French indeed allows *overt* movement past CG, the question is **why the language does not allow the RMP in polar questions**, like Japanese does by means of the high particle *-kke*.
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Thank you!

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The RMP with *now* (Lecavelier & Wimmer, 2025a, 2025b)

(26) a. Danish

Hvad hedder han **nu**?
what be.called.prs he **now**

'What is his name again?'

b. Finnish

Mikä sun nimi **nyt** oli?
what gen.2sg name **now** was

'What was your name again?'

c. Estonian

Mis su nimi **nüüd** oli(-gi)?
what your name **now** was-clit

'What was your name again?'

- LW25 propose the RMP arises as an implicature: the speaker asks **only now**, suggesting they did not need to ask before (because they knew the answer).

Beck effects in French (Beck, 2006)

- French allows wh-in-situ normally (27a), but not after an intervener like negation (27b).

(27) From Beck (2006), citing Pesetsky (2000) who cites Chang (1997) and Bošković (2000)

a. Ils ont rencontré qui?
they have met who
'Whom did they meet?'

b. # Il n'a pas rencontré qui?
he NEG has NEG met who
'Whom did he not meet?' (only as echo question)

No projection with *ever-déjà*

(28) C'est pas vrai que Jo a déjà vu Al.
It-is NEG true that Jo has DÉJÀ seen Al

'Jo has never seen Al.' ($\not\rightarrow$ Jo has seen Al before)

(29) Peut-être que Jo a déjà vu Al.
Maybe that Jo has DÉJÀ seen Al

'Maybe Jo has seen Al before.' ($\not\rightarrow$ Jo has seen Al before)