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On the Categorical Status of French à/de ce que

On the Categorial Status of French *à/de ce que*

J.-Marc Authier and Lisa A. Reed

1 Background: Case Resistance and Clausal Determiners

As illustrated in (1) and (2), English tensed clausal complements differ from nominal arguments in that they cannot appear after a preposition.

- (1) a. *I am ashamed of [that I neglected you].
b. I am ashamed of [(my) having neglected you].
- (2) a. *I'll see to [that they will be punished].
b. I'll see to [their being punished].

In the Government-Binding days, such paradigms were captured via Stowell's (1981) Case Resistance Principle, a principle which prohibited Case-assigning heads from being themselves assigned Case. This principle excluded tensed CPs from occupying argument positions on the assumption that the feature [+tense] resides in C and carries Case assigning properties. The same principle forced tensed CP complements to verbs to extrapose to VP, thereby escaping direct Case assignment. The ungrammaticality of (1a) and (2a) was then taken to indicate that no such extraposition strategy was available for clausal complements to prepositions. With this background in mind, observe now what happens in the French syntactic correlates to (1a) and (2a), given in (3).

- (3) a. J'ai honte de ce que ma mère vous a fait faire la vaisselle.
I-have shame of this that my mother you-DAT has made to-do the dishes
'I am ashamed my mother made you do the dishes.'
- b. Je veillerais à ce que les coupables soient punis.
I will-make-sure to this that the culprits be-SUBJ punished
'I'll see to it that the culprits are punished.'

The sentential complements in the examples in (3) appear to be selected by a preposition but are obligatorily separated from it by the element *ce* 'this/that'. To account for such sentences, Zaring (1992) first assumes that the Case Resistance Principle prohibits direct Case-assignment to tensed clausal complements and that Case-assignment is best conceived as an optional process. She then takes *de* 'of' and *à* 'to' in (3) to not be true prepositions but rather, the morphological manifestation of Case-assignment and further takes *ce* to be a clausal determiner. Given these assumptions, she accounts for the facts in (3) as follows: When *ce*, a D, is merged with a CP, the resulting DP can be Case-marked. In other words, clausal determiners like *ce* enable tensed clausal arguments to occupy Case-marked positions. Her approach has the advantage of being able to handle paradigms like that in (4).

- (4) a. Il se plaint que personne ne lui parle.
he complains that nobody NEG him-DAT talks
- b. Il se plaint de ce que personne ne lui parle.
he complains of this that nobody NEG him-DAT talks
- c. *Il se plaint de que personne ne lui parle.
he complains of that nobody NEG him-DAT talks
'He complains that nobody talks to him.'

In (4a) no Case is assigned to the embedded CP, Case-assignment being optional; in (4b) the determiner *ce* merges with the embedded CP and the resulting DP receives genitive Case (morphologically encoded by *de*); while in (4c) the presence of *de* indicates that the embedded CP received genitive Case directly in violation of the Case Resistance Principle, a situation reminiscent of the English examples in (1a) and (2a).

2 Some Problems with the Clausal Determiner Analysis

Appealing as it may first appear, Zaring's approach, which has been assumed to be correct as recently as Sportiche (2008), is not without problems. First, if *ce* is a clausal determiner, we must explain why it is unable to merge with French infinitival clauses. As (5a) and (5b) illustrates, infinitivals cannot be introduced by *ce* but instead appear to be directly Case-marked in Zaring's sense as they can be preceded by *de* and *à*. Of course, one could argue that infinitivals do not have a Case-assigning head and therefore do not obey the Case Resistance Principle, hence *ce*, being unnecessary in this case, is prohibited by economy conditions. If economy conditions are invoked, however, then one has to wonder why (4b) is possible at all since (4a) exists as an alternative requiring fewer steps in the derivation. Moreover, this explanation cannot be extended to English, a language in which infinitives cannot be preceded by a preposition as shown in (5c).

- (5) a. J'ai honte de (*ce) vous avoir menti.
I-have shame of (*this) you-DAT to-have lied
'I am ashamed of having lied to you.'
- b. Il s'habitue à (*ce) travailler la nuit.
he gets-used to (*this) to-work the night
'He's getting used to working at night.'
- c. I am ashamed (*of) to have to leave without saying goodbye.

A second issue that arises if one assumes that *ce* is a clausal determiner, is that something special needs to be said about the fact that *ce* can only appear with clausal arguments marked by *à* and *de*. So, for example, one must explain why (6), which completes the paradigm in (4), does not allow *ce* to precede the tensed clausal complement.

- (6) Je ne crois pas (*ce) qu'elle soit partie.
I NEG believe not (*this) that-she be-SUBJ gone
'I don't think she left.'

To rule out this possibility, Zaring stipulates that the merger of *ce* with a CP to form a DP is contingent upon the latter bearing morphologically overt Case. Thus *ce* in (6) is, according to her, impossible because there is no overt morphological correlate for accusative Case in French. Why such a constraint should exist at all remains unclear, however. We cannot think of another case in which a merger operation is constrained by overt morphological marking. Finally, as illustrated in (7), some verbs that clearly assign genitive Case to their nominal complements do not allow clausal objects in *de ce que*.

- (7) a. J'ai besoin *(de) ton aide.
I-have need (of) your help
'I need your help.'
- b. J'ai besoin (*de ce) que tu m'aides.
I-have need (of this) that you me-ACC-help-SUBJ
'I need you to help me.'

Such cases are wrongly predicted by Zaring's theory to be impossible because if *avoir besoin* 'to need' can assign genitive Case, as seems to be the case given (7a), then it should at least optionally allow clausal complements in *de ce que*. The fact that it does not then poses a serious challenge to Zaring's account.

Given these problems, we turn to another possibility, which consists in extending Kayne's (1999) analysis of *à* and *de* + infinitive to *de ce que* and *à ce que* + tensed clauses.

3 *De/à* + Infinitive Versus *de ce que/à ce que* + Finite Clause

Kayne (1999) points out that the presence of the prepositional elements *à* and *de*, which sometimes occur before French infinitives, must be attributed to a factor other than Case. The main reason for this is that, as illustrated in (8), various verbs that occur with direct nominal objects nonetheless require such prepositional elements when their internal argument is an infinitive.

- (8) a. Céline a oublié (*de) ses gants.
Céline has forgotten (of) her gloves
'Céline forgot her gloves.'
- b. Céline a oublié *(de) mettre ses gants.
Céline has forgotten (of) to-put-on her gloves
'Céline forgot to put on her gloves.'
- c. Annie a demandé (*à) une augmentation de salaire.
Annie has asked (to) an increase of salary
'Annie asked for a salary increase.'
- d. Annie a demandé *(à) effectuer cette mission.
Annie has asked (to) to-perform this mission
'Annie has asked to be allowed to carry out this mission.'

Further, because bare infinitives cannot be the object of a subcategorized preposition other than *à* and *de*, as shown in (9), Kayne argues that the exceptional status of *à* and *de* in those cases is consistent with the view that they are complementizers rather than prepositions.

- (9) a. Je compte sur votre coopération.
I count on your cooperation
- b. Je compte (*sur) être sélectionné pour la finale.
I count (on) to-be selected for the final
'I expect to be selected for the finals.'

Based on these considerations, he goes on to propose a theory of prepositional complementizers like *à* and *de* whereby such elements enter the derivation above the VP and not as sister to the infinitival IP they are associated with. He assumes that French infinitivals have nominal properties but cannot occur in ordinary DP positions. Having them move to the specifier position of the *de/à* complementizer is one way of licensing them (on the assumption that all matching requirements must be expressed by Attract and feature checking rather than via pure merger). As can be seen in (10b), the rest of the derivation then consists of subsequent raising of the complementizer to a head W, followed by VP-movement to the specifier of W, yielding the observed word order.

- (10) a. Paul a promis de venir.
Paul has promised of to-come
'Paul promised he would come.'
- b. ... promis venir --> merger of *de*
... de promis venir --> attraction of infinitival IP by *de*
... venir_i de promis t_i --> merger of W and attraction of *de* by W
... de_j + W venir_i t_j promis t_i --> attraction of VP to Spec,W
... [promis t_i]_k de_j + W venir_i t_j t_k

Rather than discussing the merits of Kayne's proposal, we will focus instead on the possibility that it could be extended to cover the *à/de ce que* + tensed clause cases under consideration. One way of doing this would be to assume that the function of *ce* is to endow whatever category dominates the tensed clause with a nominal feature. The derivation for a sentence like (11a) would then proceed as in (11b).

- (11) a. Paul veillera à ce que Pierre vienne.
 Paul will-make-sure to this that Pierre come
 ‘Paul will see to it that Pierre comes.’
 b. veillera ce que Pierre vienne --> merger of *à*
 ... à veillera ce que Pierre vienne --> attraction of (nominal) tensed clause by *à*
 ... [ce que Pierre vienne]_i; à veillera t_i --> merge of W and attraction of *à* by W
 ... à_j + W [ce que Pierre vienne]_i; t_j veillera t_i --> Attraction of VP to Spec,W
 ... [veillera t_i]_k à_j + W [ce que Pierre vienne]_i; t_j t_k

A number of facts, however, militate against extending Kayne’s analysis to tensed clauses as we have done in (11). First, this hypothesis would seem to predict that if a verb can merge with a VP headed by a verb like *promettre* ‘to promise’, as it does in (10), then the rest of the derivation should lead to a grammatical output regardless of whether the complement to *promettre* is an infinitival or a tensed clause as long as the latter has nominal features (i.e. is headed by *ce*). This, however, is not the case, as shown by the contrast between (10a) and (12).

- (12) Paul a promis (*de ce) qu’il viendrait.
 Paul has promised (of this) that-he would-come
 ‘Paul promised he would come.’

Besides such cases of complementation, other syntactic contexts reveal that the distribution of the *de/à* that precede infinitivals and that of the *de/à* that precede *ce que* + tensed clauses are radically different. For example, Huot (1981) uses a number of constructions, illustrated in (13), to show that the *de* that appears before an infinitive cannot, at least in those contexts, be considered to be a preposition and is therefore likely to be a complementizer. Interestingly, none of those constructions allow a *de ce que* + tensed clause counterpart to the *de* + infinitive they contain, as shown in (14).

- (13) a. D’avoir le métro à proximité leur changera la vie.
 of-to-have the subway at proximity them-DAT will-change the life
 ‘Living close to the subway will change their lives.’
 b. C’est ridicule de se conduire comme ça.
 it-is ridiculous of self to-behave like that
 ‘This kind of behavior is unacceptable.’
 (14) a. (*De ce) qu’ils aient le métro à proximité leur changera la vie.
 (of this) that-they have the subway at proximity them-DAT will-change the life
 ‘That they live close to the subway will change their lives.’
 b. C’est ridicule (*de ce) qu’il se conduise comme ça.
 it-is ridiculous (of this) that-he self to-behave like that
 ‘That he behaves in such a manner is ridiculous.’

Mismatches of this type involving *à* are admittedly more difficult to find but do exist nonetheless, as illustrated in (15) vs. (16). The construction in question is one that involves two independent clauses, the first of which is a question, while the second one denotes the event or state that motivated the speaker’s question.

- (15) a. Qu’est-ce qu’ils veulent, à rester là plantés devant notre porte?
 what-is-it that-they want to to-stay there standing in-front-of our door
 ‘What do they hope to achieve by standing in front of our door?’
 b. Qu’est-ce que tu as, à me regarder comme ça?
 what-is-it that you have to me-ACC to-look-at like that
 ‘Why are you looking at me like that?’
 (16) a. Qu’est-ce qu’ils veulent, (*à ce) qu’ils restent là plantés
 what-is-it that-they want (to this) that-they stay there standing

- devant notre porte?
 in-front-of our door
 ‘What do they hope to achieve by standing in front of our door?’
- b. Qu’est-ce que tu as, (*à ce) que tu me regardes comme ça?
 what-is-it that you have (to this) that you me-ACC look-at like that
 ‘Why are you looking at me like that?’

4 Our Proposal: *de ce que* and *à ce que* as Complementizers

The items *à* in *à ce que* and *de* in *de ce que* have been consistently assumed in the literature to be prepositions because the verbs that select them usually take nominal objects preceded by the same elements. This is illustrated in (17).

- (17) a. Astrid se réjouit *(de) cette réussite.
 Astrid self rejoices (of) this success
 ‘Astrid is thrilled about this successful outcome.’
- b. Astrid se réjouit (de ce) que tout se soit bien passé.
 Astrid self rejoices (of this) that all be well happened
 ‘Astrid is thrilled that all went well.’
- c. Astrid a renoncé *(à) ses ambitions.
 Astrid has renounced (to) her ambitions
 ‘Astrid has renounced her ambitions.’
- d. Astrid a renoncé à ce que son manuscrit soit publié.
 Astrid has renounced to this that her manuscript be published
 ‘Astrid has given up trying to publish her paper.’

On closer inspection, however, it turns out that this correlation is only partial. Indeed, there are verbs, like those in (18) and (19), that take direct nominal objects or do not take nominal objects at all yet allow *à ce que* + finite clause complements.

- (18) a. Gaston cherche (*à) un emploi.
 Gaston seeks (to) a job
 ‘Gaston is looking for a job.’
- b. Gaston cherche à ce que tout se fasse à l’amiable.
 Gaston seeks to this that all be-settled to-the-amiableness
 ‘Gaston tries to settle everything out of court.’
- c. Gaston a demandé (*à) une semaine de congé.
 Gaston has asked (to) one week of vacation
 ‘Gaston has requested a one-week vacation.’
- d. Gaston a demandé à ce que l’affaire soit classée.
 Gaston has asked to this that the-case be filed
 ‘Gaston asked that the case be closed.’
- (19) a. *Claire hésite (à) la publication de cet article.
 Claire hesitates (to) the publication of this paper
 ‘Claire is reluctant to publish this article.’
- b. Claire hésite à ce que cet article soit publié.
 Claire hesitates to this that this article be published
 ‘Claire is reluctant to let this article be published.’
- c. *Tu as intérêt au/le bon comportement de tes enfants.
 you have interest to-the/the good behavior of your kids
 ‘It would be a good thing if your kids behaved.’
- (19) d. Tu as intérêt à ce que tes enfants se comportent bien.
 you have interest to this that your kids self behave well
 ‘You’d better make sure your kids behave.’

And conversely, as illustrated in (20), there are verbs whose nominal objects must be preceded by *de/à* that do not allow their tensed clausal complements to be introduced by *de/à ce que*.

- (20) a. Je me souviens *(de) votre tante.
I remember (of) your aunt
'I remember your aunt.'
- b. Je me souviens (*de ce) que votre tante était venue.
I remember (of this) that your aunt was come
'I remember your aunt came.'
- c. Julie croit *(à) l'existence des vampires.
Julie believes (to) the-existence of-the vampires
'Julie believes in the existence of vampires.'
- d. Julie croit (*à ce) que les vampires existent.
Julie believes (to this) that the vampires exist
'Julie believes vampires exist.'

Taken together, the data in (18) through (20) cast some serious doubt on the commonly held view that the *à* and *de* in *à ce que/de ce que* and the *à* and *de* that appear in front of nominal arguments are syntactically one and the same.

This view has additionally been exploited to explain certain semantic properties of the clauses introduced by *à ce que*, and, to a lesser extent, *de ce que*. Indeed, as can be seen in (21), complement clauses introduced by *à ce que* must be in the subjunctive mood, and further, be in a subjunctive tense that denotes an unrealized event.

- (21) a. Laure tient beaucoup à ce que sa fille devienne ministre.
Laure is-anxious a lot to this that her daughter become-SUBJ minister
'Laure is very anxious that her daughter should become a minister.'
- b. *Laure tient beaucoup à ce que sa fille soit devenue ministre.
Laure is-anxious a lot to this that her daughter be-SUBJ become minister

The contrast in (21) comes from the fact that (21a), unlike (21b), expresses a modality: in every future world consistent with Laure's wishes, the proposition corresponding to "Laure's daughter is a minister" is true, or, to put it slightly differently, it greatly matters to Laure that this proposition be true in every future world. But where does this modality come from? Both Huot (1981) and Shyldkrot (2008) argue that the preposition *à* plays a crucial role in this respect. Huot argues that *à* is linked to the notion of "non-limitation" while Shyldkrot states that *à* is, from a cognitive viewpoint, "prospective", that is, implies expectation of a particular event of definite interest or concern. This hypothesis, it seems to us, is directly contradicted by the grammaticality and the semantics of (22), which is to be contrasted with (21b).

- (22) Laure tient beaucoup au fait que sa fille soit devenue ministre.
Laure is-anxious a lot to-the fact that her daughter be-SUBJ become minister
'Laure cares a lot about the fact that her daughter became a minister.'

The sentence in (22) also contains the verb *tenir* 'to be anxious/to care about' and the preposition *à*, yet the clause embedded under *fait* 'fact' denotes something already accomplished that simply matters to Laure. This leads us to conclude that the irrealis interpretation of the clausal complement in (21a) cannot be attributed to the semantics of the preposition *à*. If, on the other hand, *à ce que* is assumed to be one lexical item of the category C, the absence of an irrealis requirement on the clausal complement in (22) follows from the fact that the complementizer is *que* rather than *à ce que* in this case. We thus have a situation reminiscent of what happens in pairs like that in (23), where *que* 'that' following *ne pas savoir* 'to not know' introduces a clause whose denotation is taken to be true, while *si* 'if' in the same context introduces a clause whose denotation (as true or false) is undetermined.

- (23) a. Maurice ne sait pas que son fils est violoniste.
 Maurice NEG knows not that his son is violinist
 ‘Maurice doesn’t know that his son is a violinist.’
 b. Maurice ne sait pas si son fils est violoniste.
 Maurice NEG knows not if his son is violinist
 ‘Maurice doesn’t know if his son is a violinist.’

Our analysis of *à ce que* is therefore that we are dealing here with a single lexical item of the category C, selected by verbs like *veiller* ‘to make sure’, *s’opposer* ‘to be against’, *hésiter* ‘to hesitate’, etc., the meaning of which is argued by Muller (2004) to be homogeneous in that their subjects prospectively evaluate the proposition denoted by the embedded clause. This is no different, on our view, than having verbs like *demander* ‘to ask’, *se demander* ‘to wonder’, etc. select a CP that denotes a question and can therefore be headed by interrogative *si* ‘if’. In fact, there is at least one case, illustrated in (24), in which *à ce que* and *si* can be selected by the same verb and, as expected on our assumptions, neither *à* nor *ce* (nor both) can precede *si*, suggesting once again that *à ce que* and *si* are on a par.

- (24) a. As-tu fait attention à ce qu’il reste de l’essence
 have-you made attention to this that-there remains some the-gas
 dans ton réservoir?
 in your tank
 ‘Did you make sure you still have some gas left in your tank?’
 b. As-tu fait attention (*à) (*ce) s’il restait de l’essence
 have-you made attention (to) (this) if-there remained some the-gas
 dans ton réservoir?
 in your tank
 ‘Did you check to see if there was any gas left in your tank?’

Now, if *à ce que* is a complementizer, it is highly likely, given the evidence previously discussed, that *de ce que* is a complementizer as well. The data in (25), which mirror the paradigm in (24), certainly point in this direction.

- (25) a. Paul ne se soucie pas de ce que ses étudiants ne l’aient pas.
 Paul NEG worries not of this that his students NEG him-ACC-like not
 ‘Paul doesn’t bother whether he’s liked by his students or not.’
 b. Paul ne s’est jamais soucie (*de) (*ce) s’il restait
 Paul NEG is never worried (of) (this) if-there remained
 de l’argent à la fin du mois.
 some the-money at the end of-the month
 ‘Paul never cared about whether or not there was any money left at the end of the month.’

Determining what the class of elements that select *de ce que* have in common semantically is admittedly less straightforward than it is for those that select *à ce que*. Still, there are some definite indications that semantic factors restrict the distribution of *de ce que*. For example, Huot (1981) notes that in a large number of cases, *de ce que* seems to be restricted to introducing a CP that denotes the cause of what is denoted by the verb, adjective or noun that selects it. Thus in (26), *de ce que* is allowed because what is denoted by the CP it introduces, namely Marie’s election, is the cause of Martine’s pride/jealousy/worry. No such causal relation is present in (27), however, and this seems to be what precludes *de ce que* from being selected by the noun.

- (26) a. Martine est fière/jalouse/inquiète de ce que Marie ait été élue.
 Martine is proud/jealous/worried of this that Marie have-SUBJ been elected
 ‘Martine is proud of/jealous of/troubled by the fact that Marie was elected.’

- b. Sa fierté/jalousie/inquiétude de ce que Marie avait été élue était évidente.
her pride/jealousy/anxiety of this that Marie had been elected was obvious
'Her pride in/jealousy about/anxiety over the fact that Marie had been elected was obvious.'
- (27) a. Vois-tu un moyen que/*de ce que cette affaire se règle vite?
see-you a means that/of this that this matter self settle fast
'Do you see a way to settle this matter quickly?'
- b. Les risques que/*de ce que cette maison s'écroule sont minimales.
the risks that/of this that this house collapses are minimal
'The chance that this house will collapse is very small.'

How do we then explain those cases where *de ce que* alternates with *que*? If we are correct in assuming that those elements are both complementizers, we would expect that such alternations correspond to differences in meaning. Shyldkrot (2008) discusses examples like (28), which indicate that this is indeed the case.

- (28) a. Il se désole **que** chez nous la poussée du français a rendu la littérature régionaliste plus rare.
he is-upset that at home the upsurge of-the French has rendered the literature regionalistic more rare
- b. Il se désole **de ce que** chez nous la poussée du français a rendu la littérature régionaliste plus rare.
he is-upset of this that at home the upsurge of-the French has rendered the literature regionalistic more rare
'He is upset that in our country, the upsurge of the French language has been detrimental to regionalistic literature.'

As she points out, despite having the same tense, the embedded clause in (28a) expresses a state of affairs that is presupposed by the speaker to be true, while in (28b) it is not.

Even though the semantic notions of causality and presupposition do not exhaustively delimit the class of expressions that command *de ce que*, the evidence reviewed here suggests that there are good reasons to believe that lexical semantic properties play a role in determining the class of items that may or must take a clausal complement headed by this particular complementizer.

We are now in a position to address the syntactic distribution of *à/de ce que*. Our contention is that these are complementizers, but obviously not of the same type as *que*. We have already established an intriguing parallel between *à/de ce que* and indirect interrogative *si*. We will now argue that their syntactic distribution is exactly parallel, strengthening our thesis further.

The term complementizer is generally taken in the literature to name a category that is associated with clause-introducing items such as *that/for/if* in English, the function of which is to head specific types of tensed or infinitival clauses. French indirect interrogative *si* is assumed to be a complementizer because it serves the function of introducing embedded tensed clauses with an indeterminate truth-value. Thus *si*, just like *que*, is incompatible with infinitivals. As shown in (29), this property also holds of *à/de ce que*, a fact consistent with the view that all three belong to the same syntactic category.

- (29) a. Je me demande si je devrais détruire ce document.
I wonder if I should destroy this document.'
- b. Il s'attend à ce qu'on l'embauche.
he expects to this that-one him-ACC hire
'He expects to be hired.'
- c. *Je me demande si détruire ce document.
I wonder if to-destroy this document
- d. *Il s'attend à ce (que) être embauché.
he expects to this (that) to-be hired

Unlike *que*, however, *si* cannot head a sentential subject as shown in (30a). Instead, *que...ou pas* ‘that ... or not’ combined with the subjunctive must be used in this environment as shown in (30b). An this property of *si* is shared with *à/de ce que*, as can be seen in (30c).

- (30) a. *Si Georges a bu (ou pas) ne l’empêche pas de jouer
if Georges has drunk (or not) NEG him-ACC-prevent not of to-play
au poker comme un dieu.
at-the poker like a god
- b. **Que** Georges ait bu **ou pas** ne l’empêche pas de jouer
that Georges has drunk or not NEG him-ACC-prevent not of to-play
au poker comme un dieu.
at-the poker like a god
‘Whether Georges is intoxicated or not, that doesn’t prevent him from playing poker like a god.’
- c. (*A/de ce) que Georges ait bu ennue sa petite amie.
(to/of this) that Georges has drunk bothers his little friend
‘That Georges is intoxicated bothers his girlfriend.’

A similar situation arises with respect to adjuncts. Here again *si* and *à/de ce que* pattern the same and are unlike *que* in this respect, as illustrated in (31).

- (31) a. *Ils l’amèneront en croisière, si elle sait nager (ou pas).
they her-ACC-will-take on cruise whether she knows to-swim (or not)
(Note: * on the interrogative reading of *si*)
- b. Ils l’amèneront en croisière, qu’elle sache nager ou pas.
they her-ACC-will-take on cruise that-she knows to-swim or not
‘They will take her on a cruise, whether she can swim or not.’
- c. Qu’est-ce que tu as, (*à/de ce) que tu me regardes comme ça?
what-is-it that you have (to/of this) that you me-ACC look-at like that
‘What’s the matter? Why are you looking at me like that?’

Thus, as illustrated in (32), both interrogative *si* and *à/de ce que* are complementizers that must be selected by a restricted set of verbs to be licit.

- (32) a. Je ne sais/*pense pas si on devrait l’embaucher.
I NEG know/think not if one should him-ACC-hire
‘I don’t know/*think if we should hire him.’
- b. Je m’attends/*pense à ce qu’on l’embauche.
I expect/think to this that-one him-ACC-hire
‘I expect/think that they’ll hire him.’

And, as shown in (33), the parallel in fact extends to non-verbal selection as both *si* and *à/de ce que* can appear after a restricted set of adjectives.

- (33) a. Incertaine si elle le connaissait, elle ne l’avait pas salué.
unsure if she him-ACC knew she NEG him-ACC-had not greeted
‘Unsure as to whether she knew him, she didn’t greet him.’
- b. Indifférent à ce que ses clients le paient, il vivait dans la misère.
indifferent to this that his clients him-ACC pay he lived in the misery
‘Not caring about whether or not his customers paid him, he lived in poverty.’
- c. Dédaigneux de ce que son salaire avait diminué, il n’avait rien changé à son train de vie.
disdainful of this that his salary had decreased he NEG-had
nothing changed to his way of life

‘Refusing to accept the fact that his salary had decreased, he had changed nothing to his standard of living.’

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, we have examined in some detail the syntactic distribution and semantic properties of French tensed clausal complements introduced by *à/de ce que*. We have argued that the clausal determiner analysis put forth in Zaring (1992) is inadequate for explaining their distribution. We also showed that an extension of Kayne’s (1999) treatment of *à* and *de* + infinitive to *à/de ce que* is unlikely to yield the right results, since a number of contexts reveal that the distribution of so-called prepositional complementizers in infinitives and that of *à/de ce que* only partially overlap. We have proposed instead that *à/de ce que* are complementizers restricted to tensed clauses that head clausal complements to verbs, nouns and adjectives that form a homogeneous semantic class. This type of selection and distribution was shown to be strongly reminiscent of that of indirect interrogative *si*, which in turn suggests that *à/de ce que* and *si* occupy the same syntactic position.

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