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ON INVERTED AND CORRELATED CONDITIONALS IN ENGLISH AND FRENCH

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1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to contrast the inverted operator-subject pattern in protases in English with correlated conditionals in French. Subject-operator inversion in the protasis is possible both in French and in English. However, contrastive analysis shows that a one-to-one correspondence between the two languages does not exist.

2. One pattern in English vs. four patterns in French

In English, the inverted pattern is used to express an event that is unlikely to take place or to have taken place. A future-oriented hypothesis can be marked by the modal auxiliary *should* or by *were to*, meaning « in the case of X ». The counterfactual value is associated with the past perfect and can be glossed as « if only », or as « even if » (see Méry 1994). The protasis without *if* necessarily requires subject-operator inversion and a past verb form. The protasis is a non-assertive statement which shares common features with the interrogative pattern. It expresses a fictitious point of view.

In French, the protasis without *si* does not necessarily undergo inversion, but it requires the conditional tense along with that in the apodosis. The apodosis may start with *que*, which is analysed in the literature as a form of correlation or inverted subordination. Four patterns are possible and are generally regarded as expressing concessive values. (Morel 1996 ; Bonnard 1981) :

(1) a **On le menacerait**, Paul ne partirait pas d'ici.
b **On le menacerait que** Paul ne partirait pas d'ici.
c **Le menacerait-on**, Paul ne partirait pas d'ici.
d **Le menacerait-on que** Paul ne partirait pas d'ici. (examples from Morel 1996 : 48-49)

Though there is a superficial formal resemblance between the English structure and the French ones, translation clearly reveals semantic differences. In (2), *si* (*if*) appears along with the *plus-que-parfait* in the protasis and the *conditionnel* in the apodosis :

(2) I would not have pressed him **had I not noticed** that a length of skirting-board had been prised from the wall and lay on the floor, revealing unplastered brickwork. (J.M. Coetzee, *Age of Iron*)
Je n'aurais pas insisté **si je n'avais pas remarqué** que la plinthe avait été arrachée sur une partie de sa longueur et, posée par terre, laissait apparaître les briques nues. (*L'Age de fer*, translated by S. Mayoux)

Conversely, (1) could not be translated using an inverted conditional :

(1') **Even if he was threatened**, Paul would not go away.

?**Were he threatened**, Paul would not go away.

My aim is to try to account for these differences by conjecturing the operations underlying these structures respectively in French and in English.

3. The protasis (henceforth p) poses the conditions of validation for the apodosis (henceforth q)

3.1. P as a constructing locator

The *conditionnel* combines the future-tense marker with the *imparfait* marker thus displacing the validation of the occurrence (see de Vogüé 1993). This displacement may be motivated by any of three factors. Firstly, the enunciator may seek to dissociate himself from asserting the occurrence, in which case the *conditionnel* marks disconnection from the subjective coordinate : *Il serait menacé = he is reported to be threatened*. It may be noted that *would* is not equivalent to the French conditional in this case. Secondly, the occurrence may be deferred temporally, in which case the conditional may be considered to mark disconnection from the temporal coordinate. *Il serait menacé = he knew he would soon be threatened*. Thirdly, the occurrence may be of a purely hypothetical nature, in which case it may be viewed as being disconnected from the situation of utterance both temporally and subjectively as it is located relative to a fictitious locator : *He would be threatened if his bodyguards left him.*

At this point it is worth stressing that unlike *would*, the *conditionnel* alone can function as a fictitious locator and occur in the protasis in place of *si*. In (3) and (4), the protasis poses a fictitious locator that conditions the validation of q. As it provides the locator for an appositive structure, it has to occur sentence-initially :

(3) **Tu lui aurais posé la question**, il t'aurait répondu aussitôt. (Larreya, 1996 :151)
Had you asked him the question, he would have answered you straight away.
(4**) Une guerre arriverait**, nous serions sans défense. (Bonnard, 1981 :316)
Were there to be a war, we would be defenceless.

In (3), the counterfactual value of p provides the conditions of hypothetical existence for the event in q. In (4), the consequence of the fictitious event stated in p is evaluated in q. In both cases, p is interpreted as a sufficient condition for the validation of q and there is a correspondence between the two languages. However, it should be noted that a protasis in the conditional is more likely to appear in direct speech in French :

(5) He knew it was one of his masterpieces ; he knew that **were she to hear it truly**, she would recognise this. But it must fall upon her suddenly. (J. Barnes, *Cross Channel*, « Interference »)
Il savait que c'était un de ses chefs-d'œuvre ; il savait que **si elle l'entendait vraiment**, elle reconnaîtrait ce fait. Mais il fallait que ça lui tombe dessus à l'improviste. (*Outre-Manche, nouvelles*, translated by J.-P. Aoustin)
(6) At thirty-one, he remarks to Louise – a parenthesis to a hypothesis – that if he had ever had a son, he would have taken great pleasure in procuring women for him. (J. Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot*)
A trente et un ans, il dit à Louise – une parenthèse d'hypothèse : « **J'aurais eu un fils**, que j'aurais pris grand plaisir à lui procurer des femmes. » (*Le perroquet de Flaubert*, translated by J. Guiloineau)

In French, the conditional cannot function as a locator when it is embedded. « Il savait qu'elle l'entendrait, elle reconnaîtrait ce fait » would mean « He knew that she would hear it truly, that she would recognize it » : *qu'elle l'entendrait* would refer to a preconstructed event temporally disconnected from the situation of utterance but validated for by the subject *il*. The subjective predicate *savoir* would modify the *conditionnel* and prevent disconnection from the two enunciative coordinates, which explains why in French the conditional cannot function as a fictitious locator in a nominal clause[1]. Only *si + imparfait* can construct an autonomous fictitious locator in a nominal clause. In English, the validation of « she would recognize » is preconstructed and the protasis « were she to hear it truly » is unaffected by the subjective predicate. The inverted pattern combined with a past verb form allows for global disconnection from the situation of utterance. Similarly in (12), the conditional is not possible in the protasis unless there is a shift from indirect speech in English to direct speech in French. This underlines the need for a protasis in the *conditionnel* to be disconnected from any subjective point of view.

3.2. P as a specifying locator

A protasis occurring sentence-finally can specify an occurrence once its existence has been predicated. This locating operation is marked by *si + imparfait* in French :

(7) And yet there were indications there, **had they not been overlaid by other details which concealed their true import**. 'I confess', said he, 'that any theories which I had formed from the newspaper reports were entirely erroneous. (A.C. Doyle, *Sherlock Holmes*, "Silver Blaze")
"Et pourtant, il y avait là des indications, **si elles n'avaient pas été ensevelies sous d'autres détails**, qui masquaient leur véritable importance." (*Sherlock Holmes, nouvelles*, translated by F. Coste)
(8) Second Prize has drunk off a crippling hangover and is having what would have been described a second wind, **had his constant state of inebriation and withdrawal not rendered such a term superfluous.** (I.Welsh, *Trainspotting)*
Deuxième Prix a bu à effacer la gueule de bois qui l'handicapait ; il a retrouvé ce qu'on pourrait appeler un second souffle **si une alternance permanente d'ébriété et de sevrage ne rendait cette expression abusive**. (*Trainspotting*, translated by E. Lindor Fall)

[1] The existence of the event denoted in the complement clause introduced by *que / that* is necessarily preconstructed independently of the subjective predicate *savoir / know* (see Franckel & Lebaud 1990 : 92).

The existence of « indications »in (7) and of the « second wind » in (8) is independent of the protasis ; the non-assertive pattern serves to question the typical properties associated with the event in q without calling its existence into doubt. In the past perfect, the counterfactual value is selected, thus emphasising a discrepancy between the expected value and the actual value. *Had they not been overlaid by other details* implies that they had been overlaid by other details. In (7), the indications cannot be identified as real indications by anyone but the enunciator. In (8), it is the enunciator's knowledge of *Second Prize* that makes him reconsider the notional validity of the term « second wind », because this second wind does not have the typical properties of a second wind. In each case, the occurrence predicated in the apodosis is specified by the enunciator who evaluates the notional properties of q relative to a prototype.

The inverted pattern could be replaced by *if only*, but *if* would be less felicitous, especially in (7). If *if* is substituted for the inverted pattern, it remains unclear whether the indications really exist or not. *If*, unlike *si*, tends to undermine the existence of q because it makes it dependent on the choice of not-p. In French, the inverted pattern with the *conditionnel* cannot occur sentence-finally as a specifying locator. However, there is one verb form comparable with the protasis containing a past form in English - the pluperfect subjunctive, also called « second form conditional. » Morphologically, it is a combination of the subjunctive with the passé simple (see de Vogüé 1993). *N'eussent-elles été ensevelies sous d'autres détails* in (7) and *une alternance permanente d'ébriété et de sevrage n'eût-elle rendu cette expression abusive* in (8) would evince the same underlying locating operations as in the case of the inverted pattern in English. However, this form of the subjunctive is all but extinct in contemporary French, and never used in spoken language. Therefore it is not to be found in Lindor Fall's translation of *Trainspotting* by Welsh, whereas it is recurrent in *Le Rouge et le Noir* by Stendhal.

4. Concession and assumption

The inverted-pattern protasis in English can have another function in relation to q. It can qualify the way in which the event is carried out in q. This is illustrated in (9) and (10), where p, albeit contrary to q, does not affect q :

(9) … indeed, she knew just which trenchers to appoint ; but was told that **even were the slopes to be drained**, the subsoil was inhospitable to vines. (J. Barnes, *Cross Channel*, « Hermitage »)
… en fait, elle savait exactement quels draineurs embaucher ; mais on lui dit que **de toute façon** le sous-sol de ces prairies en pente douce n'était pas propice à la culture de la vigne. (« Ermitage » *Outre-Manche, nouvelles*, translated by J.-P. Aoustin)
(10) We should not have blamed her **had she rung the bell, screamed, or fainted**. But Orlando showed no such signs of perturbation. (V. Woolf, *Orlando*)
Qui aurait pu la blâmer, **dans ces circonstances, de sonner les domestiques, de hurler ou de s'évanouir**. Mais Orlando ne montra aucun de ces signes de confusion. (*Orlando,* translated by C. Pappo-Musard)

P is an « initial condition » (de Vogüé 1999), i.e. a fictitious circumstance under which q is the case in an independent way. The property of the subject in q is not altered by p, which explains why q remains assertive in (9). Similarly in (10), the predicates *ring the bell, scream* and *faint* represent fictitious tokens of excessive behaviour expected to entail not-q. But q is the case anyway, however extreme these circumstances might be. The qualifying function of the protasis is emphasised in the French translation and cannot be rendered by a protasis in the *conditionnel*. The inverted pattern with concessive meaning is recurrent in English and so is the protasis in the *conditionnel* in French. However, it is paradoxical that there is no direct correspondence between the two languages here. Before proceeding with the analysis, I should like to attempt an explanation of this difference. Let us return to (1) and (1'). The inverted pattern is problematic in English translation because the protasis *on le menacerait* does not refer to a possible situation which is different from the situation of utterance. In French, the conditional constructs a fictitious locator that is not entirely severed from the situation of utterance. In fact, the protasis contains a property fictitiously located in the situation of utterance. « Be threatened » is a property fictiously predicated of the subject *he*. This value might be glossed by « suppose he were threatened in the current situation ». The protasis corresponds to an assumption but not to a possible situation different from the situation of utterance (see de Vogüé 1999 on this distinction). By contrast, the event-referring protasis in (4) corresponds to a possible situation which is totally disconnected from the current situation. The validation of p creates a new state of affairs and the utterance aims at evaluating the consequence of the fictitious event.

In English, the protasis with the inverted pattern requires global disconnection and cannot apply to the situation of utterance. It is fictitious per se. Therefore, it can only refer to past or future situations as in (9) or (10), i.e. to possible situations other than the situation of utterance. It cannot correspond to an assumption. As pointed out in de Vogüé (1999), possible situations can be

paraphrased by « if this happens », while assumptions will be paraphrased by « if this is true » or « supposing this is true ». In (11), the property given in the protasis concerns the current situation :

> (11) Quel ensemble! se disait Julien; **ils me donneraient la moitié de tout ce qu'ils volent**, que je ne voudrais pas vivre avec eux. Un beau jour, je me trahirais; je ne pourrais retenir l'expression du dédain qu'ils m'inspirent. (Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le Noir*)
> What a collection of people ! thought Julien. **Even supposing they gave me the half of what they steal**, I wouldn't want to live with them. One fine day I'd betray myself ; I shouldn't be able to keep myself from expressing the disdain they make me feel. (*Scarlet and Black*, translated by M. Shaw)

The utterance may be taken to mean « If the property 'give me the half of what they steal' were true now, I would nonetheless not want to live with them. » This property stands for a type of behaviour expected to entail 'want to live with them'. But the subject's volition in q remains unaffected however favourable the circumstances might be[2]. The assumption can also apply to a future situation as in (12), and yet still construct a property rather than an event :

> (12) Je suis accoutumé à Louise, se disait-il, elle sait toutes mes affaires; **je serais libre de me marier demain** que je ne trouverais pas à la remplacer. Alors, il se complaisait dans l'idée que sa femme était innocente; cette façon de voir ne le mettait pas dans la nécessité de montrer du caractère et l'arrangeait bien mieux. (Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le Noir*)
> I've grown used to Louise, he said to himself. She knows all my concerns. **Even if tomorrow I were free to marry again** I couldn't find anyone to take her place. Then he found satisfaction in the idea that his wife was innocent. Such a way of looking at things did not oblige him to make a firm stand, and suited him much better. (*Scarlet and Black*, M. Shaw)

Here, a fictitious property is predicated of the subject, which might be glossed by « even if the property 'be free' became true tomorrow, the subject's inability in q would not be altered ». The assumption is part of a « way of looking at things », that is, the fictitious property is evaluated by the enunciator. The distinction between event-referring and property-referring protases is highly relevant here for contrastive analysis. The conditional is compatible with both types of protasis in French, whereas the inverted pattern blocks the property reading in English. In (9) and (10), the protases are not asserted as either true or false because they denote fictitious events. It is the result of these fictitious events that is evaluated in the apodosis, as a result of a change of state. The difference between the current situation and the fictitious situation corresponds to this change of state. In (9), the result of the process 'drain' is contrasted with the current state 'full of water'. In (10), all three processes refer to an unreal change of state denoting emotional upheaval which is in contrast with the

[2] The protasis is an « initial condition » (de Vogüé 1999) and does not condition the validation of the apodosis, unlike the protases examined in 3.1. Q is the case in an independent way, which explains why the protasis can also occur sentence-finally provided inversion is displayed : *Je ne voudrais pas vivre avec eux, me donneraient-ils la moitié de tout ce qu'ils volent. Je ne trouverais pas à la remplacer, serais-je libre de me marier demain*.

subject's calmness. The meaning can be captured here by the gloss « in case, even in that case » in (9) and (10), as opposed to « supposing this is true, if this is true » in (11) and (12).

5. P evaluated by q

5.1. The existence of p is evaluated by q

The fact that the French conditional allows reference to assumptions has a direct consequence on the status of the protasis. It implies that p can be evaluated by q, which is impossible in English.

> (13) Vous voyez que notre collègue est un excentrique de premier ordre. Son exactitude en tout est bien connue. Il n'arrive jamais ni trop tard ni trop tôt, et **il apparaîtrait ici à la dernière minute, que je n'en serais pas autrement surpris**. (J. Verne *Le Tour du Monde en quatre-vingts jours*)
> 'Wait; don't let us be too hasty,' replied Samuel Fallentin. 'You know that Mr. Fogg is very eccentric. His punctuality is well known; he never arrives too soon, or too late; and **I should not be surprised if he appeared before us at the last minute**.' (*Around the World in 80 Days*)

In (13), the predicate of the apodosis introduces the enunciator's judgment about the protasis. The enunciator comments on the likelihood of p. As noted by Merle (2001 : 105-107), the protasis does not refer to a fictitious locator in this case, but to a conjecture. My view is that the *conditionnel* in the protasis marks subjective disconnection here - as in journalistic discourse - and not global disconnection, which blocks the setting up of a locator. The enunciator is not the initial asserter of p. The protasis is first disconnected from any kind of subjective origin, then identified with the enunciator's point of view by virtue of the apodosis. The apodosis retroactively commits the enunciator to the truth of p: it is normal / expected that p should be true. The chain of operations is restored in the English translation, in which the protasis is neither disconnected from the subjective origin nor from the situational context.The apodosis starts with *que*, which is usually treated as a case of inverted subordination. This position is questioned by Bonnard (1981 :308) and Le Goffic (1993 : 400 ;532), on the basis that the *que*-clause introduces a comment and is not a complement clause. Therefore, they account for this structure in terms of correlation. From an enunciative point of view, the apodosis also corresponds to the main clause here. Following Culioli (1985 : 72), I shall consider *que* as a connective which identifies p with the enunciator's point of view.

5.2. The qualitative basis of p is evaluated by q

Example (14) aims at evaluating p in a retrospective way (see Merle 2001), because the motivation for p is reevaluated by q :

> (14) Ecoeuré - bien qu'il demeure réservé sur le sujet -, il a démissionné en mars 2000 de son poste de vice-ministre du développement alternatif. Mais **on voudrait chasser les paysans de la région qu'on ne s'y prendrait pas autrement**. (*Le Monde Diplomatique*, février 2001, M. Lemoine.)
> Disgusted though he is, he continues to be reticent on why he resigned his post of vice-minister of alternative development last March. **If the intention was to hound the peasants from the regions, you would not go about it any differently**. (translated by J. Stoker)

The situational occurrence is considered to comply with the qualitative basis provided by the protasis – 'vouloir chasser les paysans'. At the same time, this intention is evaluated as inadequate, which highlights the fact that the situational occurrence conforms with the wrong qualitative basis. There is a discrepancy between the situational outcome and the right motivation. In English, only *if* allows the protasis to be reevaluated qualitatively. In addition, the preterite in the protasis marks temporal location and contributes to restoring the chain of locating operations.

6. Conclusion

The inverted pattern in English is a marker of fictitious location. In French, the status of the *conditionnel* in the protasis is much more ambiguous. It can mark either global disconnection, in which case a fictitious locator is set up, or only subjective disconnection, which triggers subjective evaluating and modalising.

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