Adjustments and readjustements:
operations and markers

Graham RANGER
Université d'Avignon et des Pays de Vaucluse

INTRODUCTION

The following article will be divided into two main sections. The first part will deal with a theoretical discussion of the concept of adjustment as I understand this term to be used in the Theory of Enunciative Operations elaborated by Antoine Culioli and associated researchers over the last forty years or so. The second part will make a detailed study of two cases of explicit readjustment in English which we might term corrective and preemptive adjustment. These are illustrated by a brief analysis of the use of postposed WH- EVER clauses and quotative use of LIKE, respectively.

1. THE CONCEPT OF ADJUSTMENT

The model of language activity defended by the Theory of Enunciative Operations eschews the Saussurian model of communication as a process whereby preconstituted blocks of meaning are transmitted between individuals in what Saussure calls a "circuit" (Saussure 1972: 27-28 [1915]). Such cases of transmission do exist – notably in situations where speakers function with limited codes in order to avoid any possible misunderstanding. Examples might be communication between air-traffic controllers and pilots, between ships at sea – in Seaspeak (Crystal 2010: 59), or set expressions in game situations such as "How's that?" in a cricket match. Such cases are not,

however, from any point of view, typical uses of language. In natural language, meaning is not given but, on the contrary, continuously constructed and re-constructed by speakers as they engage in the activity of speech.

The process by which speakers use language to create meaning is characterised by an interpretative loop which Culioli describes succinctly in the following passage (my translation): "Linguistic activity is meaningful insofar as a speaker produces forms in order that they might be recognised by a cospeaker as having being produced to be recognised as interpretable" (Culioli 1990: 39).[1]

And so the aim of the speaker is to move from a start point to an end point, from a desire to signify p to the perception of p effectively signified. There is however no guarantee that the cospeaker will recognise, reconstruct and retrace the path leading from the intention to the result in the way the speaker intended. Linguistic forms[2] are notoriously ambiguous. They are constitutively underdetermined and only acquire specific values through a complex interaction with contextual and situational parameters. Consequently, the (re)construction of meaning opens the way to ironies, double-entendres, misunderstandings, ambiguities or sheer obscurity. Such misfires are inevitably part and parcel of natural language activity[3] and may, to some degree, be corrected by intersubjective adjustment.

We consider adjustment as a movement whereby a speaker / cospeaker seeks to resolve the form-value equation and to match the effectively perceived path towards meaning with an intended or anticipated path towards meaning, whether by adjusting values to forms or forms to values. It is perhaps worth pointing out that the path metaphor is contained in the English term "meaning" which nicely refers both to an endpoint (in which case it denotes an objective – or transindividual – "signification") and to an intentional movement (in which case it corresponds to a subjective "vouloir-dire").

Etymologically, the term of "adjustment" suggests a movement towards a value which is both quantitatively sufficient (cf. "just" in

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1. "L'activité de langage est signifiante dans la mesure où un énonciateur produit des formes pour qu'elle soient reconnues par un co-énonciateur comme étant produite pour être reconnues comme interprétables" (1991: 39). This is actually very close to Grice's non-natural meaning: "we may say that 'A meantNN something by x' is roughly equivalent to 'A uttered x with the intention of inducing a belief by means of the recognition of this intention' " (Grice 1957: 384).

2. The term "forms" includes lexemes, morphemes, constructions, prosodic features and extends, I would argue, to rhetorical or generic forms.

3. *Cf.* Culioli (1999 : 47-48) for example.

the sense of "only" or French *la juste mesure*) and qualitatively appropriate (cf. "just" in the sense of "right" or French *le mot juste*). I have opted to retain the term of "adjustment" to render the French "ajustement", for several reasons. Firstly, it is an obvious cognate and hence easily indexed to uses of *ajustement* in texts written in French. Secondly, it does not appear to betray the use made of *ajustement* in the theory avoiding, on the contrary, the implication of high-precision adjustment[4] which related terms such as *ajusteur* or *ajuster* can entail in French. Thirdly, Culioli himself chooses to use the term when writing in English.[5]

From the point of view of reception, adjustment involves the movement – not necessarily definitive – to reconstruct a stable meaning from intrinsically unstable linguistic forms. There is no reason for this activity, which corresponds to the normal use of natural language, to receive any explicit markings in an utterance. Adjustment is in most cases implicit. It is often this form of regular adjustment which the linguist seeks to reproduce through a form of metalinguistic reasoning.

In certain cases, however, when the match between the perceived meaning and the intended or expected meaning is problematical, we find markers used explicitly – epilinguistically – for the speaker to comment in various ways upon the appropriateness or otherwise of the form-meaning relationship. In the following paragraphs I will focus upon two different forms of explicit [re]adjustment. In the first case, a speaker signals that an initial representation does not correspond to an intended representation in some respect and is being rectified, *post hoc*, accordingly. In the second case, a speaker pre-emptively signals a potentially problematical match between the linguistic representation and the projected cognitive representation, telling the cospeaker that the utterance in question will require some adjustment.

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4. Culioli has regretted the use of the term to refer to a sort of precision adjustment : "people perceived adjustment as if it were a question of adjusting a machine, to the closest micron. Whereas in fact adjustment can be broad, close, rigid or approximate" (Culioli 2002: 232, my translation).
5. For example : " [we] cannot take for granted inter-subjects adjustment or consider that shapes are rigid representatives of stable, presegmented representations" (Culioli 1990: 180).

2. EXAMPLES OF EXPLICIT ADJUSTMENT

2.1. Corrective adjustment: rectifying *wh-ever*

The first case I would like to look at is that of rectifying WH-EVER subordinate clauses of the type illustrated below:

(1) Grimma's forehead wrinkled as she tried to read the smaller words on the back. "It says, 'They Take A Bite, But They Don't Come Back For More!' " she said. "And apparently it contains Polydichloromethylinlon-4, *whatever that is.*"[6]

(2) "She wants to move to the country. To Far Flatley, *wherever that is.*"

(3) The Scrapbook is also variously supported by Association Française d'Action Artistique, the Ministry of Culture, Copenhagen […] and also by the furtively named Friends of the Situationist International, *whoever they are*!

For the sake of clarity I will exclude from the analysis WH- EVER relative clauses, i.e.:

(4) *Whoever's running the course* needs to fill in this particular form.[S]

Subordinate clauses like (1-3) possess the remarkable quality of rectifying or adjusting a representation initially constructed by means of the preceding main clause. In the next paragraphs I will try, firstly to show how it is possible to derive the value in question – and others – from a complex interaction between the operations represented by the linguistic markers and, secondly, to explain precisely how the subordinate clause contributes to adjusting the referential values of the main clause.[7]

Let us consider that examples (1-3) possess the general form Prop1 [WH- EVER Prop2].

The WH- EVER element marks a scanning operation (EVER) over the elements of the abstract class represented by the WH- element (the class of human animates – WHO; of places – WHERE; of entities – WHAT etc.).

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6. All the examples in this article are taken, unless otherwise indicated, from the British National Corpus, via the excellent interface at http://corpus.byu.edu/bnc/.

7. This section builds on arguments presented in, for example, Ranger (1998) or (2000).

Additionally, WH- EVER signals the subordinate status of Prop2, i.e. the values constructed by the [WH- EVER Prop2] segment contribute to determining Prop1, the main clause. Prop1, the locatum, is determined (or located) by [WH- EVER Prop2], the locator.

From this general schema it is possible to derive a number of different values or (implicit) adjustments, depending on clear contextual parameters. Below I will first show how we might derive three values for the formal configuration in question before moving on to the rectifying use we are specifically interested in.

2.1.1. *Case 1: generalising clauses*

(5) The most conspicuous feature of life on land is the plants: trees, *wherever it is moist and warm enough*; grasslands, where it is too dry or too cold for trees […]

(6) I think they're quite abrupt and rude *whenever* I've phoned them up. [S]

(7) This is true of all computers, *whatever* make, size or cost and irrespective of the programs you run on your machine.

In this first case, the WH- EVER clause determines the main clause quantitatively relative to an indifferentiated class of occurrences. These can normally be paraphrased with universal quantifying expressions:

(5a) …*wherever it is moist and warm enough* → *in all / any places that are moist and warm enough*

(6a) …*whenever I've phoned them up* → *on all occasions when I've phoned them up*

(7a) …*whatever make, size or cost* → *of all makes, sizes or costs*

This generalising interpretation can be explained by considering that the scanning operation marked by WH- EVER bears on a non-centred domain, that is, a domain in which no circumstance is, a priori, more or less likely to determine the main clause. This value is particularly frequent with the markers of time and place WHENEVER and WHEREVER, since no time or place is, in itself, a better representative of the domain than another. The fact that the target domain is non-centred is what distinguishes generalising interpretations from the next type.

2.1.2. *Case 2: concessive clauses*

> (8) *However* attractive the idea of a director general sounds, it could create more problems than it would solve.
> (9) The coach, from London, costs under £40 but the trains, actually taking longer, weight [sic] in at a hefty £68. Hotels, *whatever* people say, are rarely a problem. Even in July or August it is possible not only to find accommodation but to pay very little for it.

Here, the WH- EVER clause determines the main clause qualitatively relative to a graduated domain. These examples can be paraphrased with a concessive expression:

> (8a) *although the idea of a director general sounds attractive…*
> (9a) *although people claim hotels are a problem…*

In this case the scanning operation marked by WH- EVER bears on a graduated domain, that is, a domain including those central occurrences maximally detrimental to the validation of the main clause. In 8 for example, the scanning operation bears on all degrees of the proposition *the idea of a director general sounds attractive*, a proposition which would not normally imply *a director general could create more problems than it would solve* and yet which still serves to locate the main clause, even when expressed to its highest degree. The resulting interpretation is the concessive, of course: the validation of the subordinate clause – to whatever degree – is presented as irrelevant to the validation of the main clause.

Similar arguments can explain the concessive status of the WH-EVER clause in 9, too. One might imagine that there exist some arguments among the class of potential complements *x*, in *people say x* which are counter-oriented to the validation of the main clause *hotels… are rarely a problem*. In locating the main clause relative to any counter-argument, including potentially the most detrimental, the speaker effectively disqualifies the relevance of any counter-arguments, thereby reinforcing the validation of the main clause in what is a typical concessive strategy.

2.1.3. *Case 3: clauses of ignorance*

> (10) It's possible that the man who stands on the winner's podium on the Champs Elysées on the afternoon of Sunday 26 July will

have come to the fore in the last two days. But *whoever* it is, waving to the exultant crowds, he will have become a legend.

(11) *Whatever* influence television news has on voters, it would be likely to affect all, or nearly all voters. It would not affect different audiences in different ways.

(12) E's getting' too big fer'is boots, demandin' this an' that every time'e enters the'ouse. I only'ope'e finds time ter marry this'un, *whoever* she is.

In this category of WH- EVER clause, we again have a scanning operation bearing on a term in the subordinate clause. The difference here is that the scanning operation is due neither to the constitutive indifferentiation of occurrences (case 1) nor to the forced indifferentiation between extreme cases (case 2) but to what we might term subjective indifferentiation. With the scanning operation marked by WH- EVER the speaker indicates his or her incapacity to assign a specific referential value to one of the terms in the main clause but also indicates, in situating the main clause relative to the WH- EVER clause, that this suspended reference does not affect the validation of the predication. And so in (10), for example, the precise identification of the winner of the Tour de France is immaterial relative to the predication *he will have become a legend*. In (11) and (12) the degree of influence and the name of the woman in question are unknown to the speaker and irrelevant to the predication of the main clause. Such clauses share with concessives the property of affirming the irrelevance of the subordinate clause to the validation of the main clause, but unlike concessives, the scanning operation does not bear on a centred domain and does not include occurrences potentially deleterious to the validation of the main clause.

This derivation depends upon the anaphoric correlation between the WH- EVER term in the subordinate clause and a complement of the main clause (respectively *whoever / he, whatever influence / it, this'un / whoever* in examples (10-12) *supra*).

So far, then, we have seen three possible adjustments, three paths to deriving values from a globally similar formal configuration of a WH- EVER subordinate clause. The adjustments in question have been shown to be partially predictable. In generalising uses, the determining factor is the non-centred nature of the domain concerned by the scanning operation. In concessive uses, the domain is centred and extreme values are potentially counter-oriented to the validation of the main clause. In "clauses of ignorance", as I have termed them,

the determining factor is the correlation between the WH- EVER term and a complement of the main clause.[8]

Note that the process of adjustment is not entirely deterministic; it remains possible to imagine borderline cases, cases where a domain may be construed either as centred or non-centred, where the scanning operation may be attributed either to subjective indifferentiation or concessive strategies. Such ambiguities do not generally hinder communication and presumably they form the sorts of cases Culioli has in mind when he speaks of "approximate adjustment" ("ajustement […] mou" Culioli 2002: 232).

2.1.4. *Case 4: WH- EVER rectifying clauses*

We are now ready to move on to the fourth case, illustrated in examples 1-3, which I repeat again below, for ease of reference.

>   (1) Grimma's forehead wrinkled as she tried to read the smaller words on the back. "It says, 'They Take A Bite, But They Don't Come Back For More!' " she said. "And apparently it contains Polydichloromethylinlon-4, *whatever that is*."
>   (2) "She wants to move to the country. To Far Flatley, *wherever that is*." He threw back his head and laughed, very heartily.
>   (3) The Scrapbook is also variously supported by Association Française d'Action Artistique, the Ministry of Culture, Copen-hagen […] and also by the furtively named Friends of the Situationist International, *whoever they are*!

Such cases present similarities with Case 3 in that, in both types, WH- EVER refers anaphorically to a main-clause complement, the speaker being unable to provide a stable reference. Importantly, however, whereas in Case 3 this suspension in reference assignation was irrelevant to the validation of the main clause, in Case 4 it retroactively jeopardises main-clause validation. Why is this so?

Three important differences in the configuration of (1-3) compared with (10-12) allow us to explain the change in value. In utterances of the type represented in (1-3) :

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8. As we would expect, such clauses are often assimilable to indefinite relatives, cf. *whoever it is will have become a legend* alongside 10. *… whoever he is, he will have become a legend*, etc.
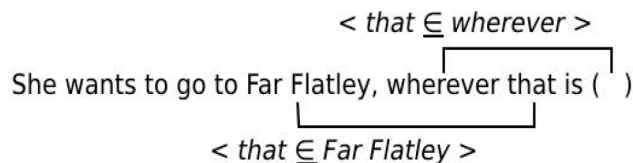
- the WH- EVER clause is necessarily postposed;
- the pronominal subject complement in the WH- EVER clause receives contrastive stress;
- the antecedent to the pronominal subject complement in the WH- EVER clause is an unambiguous referring expression (generally a proper noun).[9]

Let us look at these features in turn. The postposition of the WH- EVER clause is naturally necessary, for it to receive a rectifying value, since rectification implies the modification of a previous utterance. We might invert the clauses, with accompanying changes, but the result, even when acceptable, will be interpreted as a Case 3 "clause of ignorance":

> (1a) "And, *whatever Polydichloromethylinlon-4 is*, it apparently contains it."

The second feature (rise-fall contrastive stress ↘ on the pronominal subject complement) is a common feature of such utterances. In Cases 1 and 3 above, the subordinate either receives no particular characteristic stress or, in Case 2 (concessive values), it is the EVER element that receives contrastive stress.

The third feature is especially important. The use of a proper noun generally implies that the speaker is able to designate the referent associated with the proper noun. This implication is however upset by the WH- EVER clause in which the pronominal subject, indexed to a proper noun antecedent, is simultaneously destabilised by being located relative to a WH- EVER attribute. Schematically we might represent things as follows, where ⊆ is read *is located* or *is determined by* :

$$< that \subseteq wherever >$$

She wants to go to Far Flatley, wherever that is ( )

$$< that \subseteq Far\ Flatley >$$

Through this particular configuration, we have constructed a sort of Moore's paradox, where a speaker first uses a proper noun (implying the meaningfulness of the proper noun), then determines the same

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9. Such expressions appear to correspond closely to Kripke's "rigid designators" (Kripke 1972: 48).

term relative to any member of its class (apparently revoking the first implication of meaningfulness).

Since the WH- EVER subordinate clause locates the main clause, the destabilisation of the pronominal subject in the WH- EVER clause will provoke an accompanying adjustment in the value initally constructed for the main clause. Such WH- EVER rectifying clauses entail a *post hoc* subjective disengagement or disavowal of the main clause, which is retroactively attributed to another speaker. In short, the implied paradox in the postposed rectifying WH- EVER clause forces us to dissociate the subjective endorsement of the same term (here *Far Flatley*) in the two propositions, and the main clause is hence recast as a form of indirect speech.

I hope here to have shown how, on the one hand, the same basic formal configuration of a main clause and a WH- EVER subordinate clause can produce at least four different values. These values can be seen as adjustments brought about by various, non-deterministic, contextual pressures. We have also seen how the last case, rectifying WH- EVER clauses, provides a means for a speaker explicitly to provoke an adjustment – or readjustment – of a value initially constructed for the main clause, by retroactively reallocating enunciative responsibility for the main clause to another speaker.
This type of explicit adjustment by the speaker is interesting in that it shows how the speaker, at any given moment, is monitoring his or her discourse, assessing the appropriateness or otherwise of form-value relations from the point of view of a cospeaker, and (re-)adjusting accordingly.

2.2. Preemptive adjustment : quotative *like*

The rectifying WH- EVER clauses studied above correspond to a form of *post hoc* adjustment made as a speaker seeks to correct retroactively an utterance the form of which does not correspond to an intended value. A speaker may, alternatively, acknowledge that the form-value relations are problematical in some way and explicitly instruct the cospeaker to operate the appropriate adjustment. The first type of explicit adjustment corresponds to what discourse analysis calls repairs. The second type of explicit adjustment corresponds to what Lakoff (1972) has dubbed hedges.

I would like briefly to comment upon one interesting form of preemptive adjustment: the contemporary use of quotative LIKE in such contexts as the following:

(13) With Joan Armatrading, we did 2–3000 seaters, and that just worked fantastically, especially as I like to communicate with the audience, and people these days aren't used to that. It's *like* "Wow, he did all that and he didn't even have a band!"

(14) Anyway, as soon as they saw me they scampered over and said, "We know you, you're that Derrick May aren't you?' I'm *like*, "What?' And they're saying, "Yes, we know who you are. We've got that techno album of yours and we play it all the time. We think it's wonderful!"

(15) And it's funny, that's never left me. I still kind of always go into studios and I'm *like* wow, I mean this is what I do and people let me, so. COCA [S][10]

Originally considered to be a feature of Valspeak, a sociolect of teenage girls in California, this use of LIKE is now present in many other varieties of English, generally among younger speakers. In the context of the current paper I do not propose to analyse its use in depth but to show how, with this use of LIKE, speakers may i) signal to cospeakers that the following utterance will require adjustment ii) adjust their own discourse in a form of interlocutionary accommodation.

Let us consider that in an utterance of the general type x LIKE *y*, the locatum *x* is located, or determined, relative to the locator *y* in virtue of a property *z*, a property which is not necessarily made explicit. This characterisation allows us to account for the important but paradoxical nature of LIKE which expresses both identification (property *z* in *x* is identified with property *z* in *y*) and differentiation (*x* is different from *y*). This might be represented schematically as follows:

$$< x \in z = z \supseteq y >$$ (x located relative to z identified with z which locates y)

In (16), the property *z* – which is not immediately obvious – is made explicit, for both occurrences of LIKE:

(16) Young Donald – his eyes [x] were clear black-brown [z], *like* a lochan stained with peat [y], his hair [x] was curly [z] *like* a bull's poll [y].

More often than not, however, the common property *z* remains implicit.

> (17) The thought was *like* a knife thrust.

It is, I would argue, the presence of an often implicit third term which helps to explain the subjective quality of LIKE. The construction of referential values for an utterance like (17) implies an adjustment by the cospeaker who must attempt to reconstruct the common property *z* with what he or she knows of *x*, of *y*, of the speaker, the situation, etc.[11]

The following example, which I cannot resist quoting, shows how the adjustment involving the reconstruction of an implicit common property is humorously exploited.

> (18) Your Majesty [*x*] is *like* a stream of bat's piss [*y*]. […] I, um, I, ah, I merely meant, Your Majesty, that, ah, you shine out *like* a shaft of gold when all around is dark [*z*]. ["Oscar Wilde" from *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, third season, first shown 18.01.1973].

It remains to show how this schema may lend itself to the quotative uses of (13-15). Quotative LIKE have been the object of a number of excellent studies which demonstrate, among other things, that the BE LIKE construction is not strictly equivalent to other quotative markers such as *say / think that*. Lange and Romaine affirm that "[t]he speaker uses *like* to convey the expressive content of his imagination rather than his precise words" (1991: 237). The same authors quote Tannen, for whom "If the literal meaning functions at all, it is to suggest that the dialogue is not being quoted but simply represents the kind of thing that character [sic] was saying or thinking" (Tannen 1986: 321). Following this, it appears that in an utterance like 15, the segment *I'm like wow* does not necessarily signify *I say / think*, *"Wow"* but rather provides *wow* as an example of what the speaker might have said / thought, given the situation. Examples like (13-15), where BE LIKE is followed by an interjection (*Wow*) or interrogative interjection (*What?*) are actually fairly emblematic of the BE LIKE construction. As Ferrara and Bell put it: "Like [Goffman's] response cries, the prototypical case of *be + like* is a theatrical, highly conventionalized

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11. LIKE is more subjective and linked to speaker perception, than AS, as Lab (1999) has noted in an insightful study of the two markers.

utterance which makes the inner state transparent to the audience"
(1995: 283).[12]

Linking these remarks on BE LIKE as an independent and
innovative quotative marker with our characterisation of LIKE, it
appears that, in an utterance of the general form "S be like 'Prop' "
(where S represents the subject and Prop the "quoted utterance", for
want of a better term), S is located relative to a situation which is
identifiable with a fictive situation that might locate the quoted
utterance 'Prop'. The common property z is to be found both in the
situation of S and in the situation in which a speaker might utter
'Prop'. Schematically, in "S be like 'Prop' ":

$$< S \subseteq Sit = Sitz \supseteq \text{'Prop'} >^{13}$$

One fascinating thing about this type of utterance is that, for it to
function effectively, that is, for the intended reconstruction of z to
operate, the speakers must possess a stereotypical view of the
relationship between utterances and situations as a virtual utterance
(*Wow*, etc.) is used as a token of a certain type of situation. In using
such a construction a speaker requires the cospeaker to draw on his or
her knowledge of typical relationships between utterances and
situations (*Cf.* Ferrara and Bell's remarks above) and to operate the
according adjustments.

We might mention a second type of illocutionary adjustment
evinced in BE LIKE quotative constructions. Drawing upon a shared
knowledge of typical utterance-situation relationships as they do,
these utterances rely upon a certain complicity in the reconstruction of
an implicit shared property z. In using the form, the speaker is
indicating their belief that the cospeaker shares sufficiently similar
frames of reference to reconstruct the intended value. Correlatively, in
reconstructing the intended value, the cospeaker is displaying their
solidarity with the frames of reference of the speaker. Hence, in
parallel with referential meaning, the use of BE LIKE additionally
implies adjustments bearing on social and interactive meaning.[14]

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12. Ferrara and Bell do nonetheless note that BE LIKE appears increasingly to be
    used for more standard cases of reported speech, not just for what they call "first-
    person internal dialogue" as in our emblematic cases (1995: 285).
13. One might continue the discussion to show that approximative uses of LIKE (*the
    rounds were like twenty five quid a time* [S]) correspond to the same schematic
    form.
14. *Cf.* the various connections between the use of BE LIKE and Valspeak, young
    speakers, female speakers, etc.

3. CONCLUSION

In the course of the above pages we began by seeing that adjustment, defined as a movement whereby a speaker / cospeaker seeks to resolve the form-value equation, is an ever-present but not necessarily explicit feature of natural language activity. We then went on to look at examples of two types of explicit readjustment. In the first type, involving postposed WH- EVER clauses, a speaker retroactively adjusts a previous utterance, effectively evading enunciative responsibility. This value is derived from a number of features, and in particular from the paradoxical *post hoc* desta-bilisation of a proper noun reference. In the second type, involving quotative BE LIKE constructions, a speaker preemptively requires the cospeaker to adjust the appropriate referential values by reconstructing a situation-type from an emblematic token utterance. In cases like this, where a marker is associated with a particular group of speakers, the adjustment bears, unsurprisingly enough when one considers the multi-dimensional nature of language activity, not only on referen-tiation but also on social and interactive meanings.

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Synthèse de l'article

INTRODUCTION

L'article est divisé en deux grandes parties. Dans la première, nous considérons le concept d'ajustement du point de vue théorique, tel que nous l'entendons. La deuxième est consacrée à une étude portant sur deux cas de (ré-) ajustement explicite : rétroactif et préemptif (ou anticipatif), illustrés respectivement par certains emplois de subordonnées en WH- EVER en anglais, et par certains emplois citationnels de LIKE, en anglais contemporain non standard.

1. LE CONCEPT D'AJUSTEMENT

La Théorie des Opérations Enonciatives rejette le modèle saussurien selon lequel la communication linguistique est présentée comme une sorte de transmission, apparemment sans perte, de blocs sémantiques préconstitués (Saussure parle d'un « circuit » dans

Saussure 1972 : 27-28 [1915]). De tels cas existent, certes, lorsque des locuteurs se servent de codes limités afin d'éviter tout malentendu (navigation, aiguillage, règles de jeux…), mais il s'agit d'emplois langagiers atypiques. Dans les langues naturelles, le sens n'est pas donné mais est constamment construit, et re-construit, par des énonciateurs, dans l'activité de langage.

Ce processus se caractérise par une boucle interprétative décrite, par Culioli, dans les termes suivants : « L'activité de langage est signifiante dans la mesure où un énonciateur produit des formes pour qu'elles soient reconnues par un co-énonciateur comme étant produites pour être reconnues comme interprétables » (1991 : 39).

Un énonciateur cherche ainsi à passer d'un point de départ – le désir de signifier *p* – à un point d'arrivée – la perception de *p* – effectivement signifié. Il n'est cependant pas certain que le co-énonciateur puisse reconnaître, reconstruire et retracer, comme l'énonciateur le souhaite, le chemin menant du *vouloir-dire* au *dit*. Les formes linguistiques sont notoirement ambiguës. Elles sont constitutivement sous-déterminées et n'acquièrent de valeur spécifique qu'au travers d'une interaction complexe avec les configurations contextuelles et situationnelles. La (re-)construction du sens ouvre la voie à l'ironie, au double-entendre, au malentendu, à l'ambiguïté ou simplement à l'obscurité. De tels ratés font partie intégrante de l'activité de langage et peuvent, dans une certaine mesure, être anticipés ou compensés par l'ajustement intersubjectif.

Par ajustement, nous entendons le mouvement selon lequel un énonciateur ou co-énonciateur cherche à stabiliser le rapport formes-valeurs.

Le terme d'*ajustement* est rendu, dans cet article, par le terme anglais d'*adjustment*, pour des raisons qui sont précisées dans le texte anglais.

Du point de vue de la réception, l'ajustement implique un mouvement vers la reconstruction – pas nécessairement définitive – d'une signification stable à partir de formes linguistiques intrinsèquement instables. Ce mouvement n'est pas a priori marqué linguistiquement. C'est habituellement cette forme d'ajustement régulier que le linguiste cherche à reproduire par un raisonnement métalinguistique.

Parfois, cependant, lorsque la correspondance entre la signification perçue et la signification voulue (du côté de la production) ou anticipée (du côté de la réception) s'avère problématique, on trouve des marqueurs utilisés de façon explicite, par l'énonciateur, qui

commentent ainsi l'adéquation ou non du rapport formes-valeurs. Nous étudions deux cas de ce (ré-) ajustement explicite. Dans le premier cas, un énonciateur signale qu'une première représentation ne correspond pas à la représentation voulue, et la rectifie, *post hoc*. Dans le deuxième cas, un énonciateur signale d'avance une correspondance potentiellement problématique entre la représentation linguistique et la représentation cognitive projetée, enjoignant ainsi son co-énonciateur à collaborer dans la construction du sens et à opérer, lui-même, un certain ajustement.

2. L'AJUSTEMENT EXPLICITE

2.1 L'ajustement correctif : le WH- EVER de rectification

Le premier cas porte sur les propositions en WH- EVER du type illustré par l'énoncé suivant (exemple 2 dans le texte anglais) :

> (2) "She wants to move to the country. To Far Flatley, *wherever that is*."

Ce type de subordonnée, de la forme générale WH- EVER S V, possède la propriété remarquable de revenir, à des fins de rectification, sur une première représentation portée par la principale. Le même schéma en anglais est susceptible de recevoir diverses interprétations, autant d'ajustements qui dérivent différentes valeurs à partir d'une même forme complexe. Le français ne possède pas de forme équivalente, et devra choisir la traduction la plus appropriée, en fonction des valeurs construites.

L'énoncé (2) pourra se gloser en français, assez littéralement :

> (2a) ?? Elle veut déménager à la campagne. A Far Flatley, *où que ce soit*.

Une traduction plus dans l'esprit du texte pourrait être :

> (2b) Elle veut habiter la campagne. A Far Flatley, *tu imagines un peu !*

Nous considérons que la forme générale WH- EVER renvoie à une opération de parcours (EVER) sur les éléments d'une classe abstraite représentée par le terme en WH- (les animés humains : WHO, les

lieux : WHERE etc.). De plus, WH- EVER signale le statut de subordonnée de la proposition, c'est-à-dire que les valeurs construites pour la subordonnée (Prop2, le repère) contribuent à déterminer la principale (Prop1, le repéré), d'une manière ou d'une autre.

A partir de cette forme schématique, l'on peut tirer quatre valeurs différentes, autant d'ajustements implicites, en fonction de configurations contextuelles clairement définies.

2.1.1. *Premier cas : généralisation*

La proposition en WH-EVER détermine la principale quantitativement, en référence à une classe d'occurrences indifférenciées.

> (6) I think they're quite abrupt and rude *whenever* I've phoned them up [corpus oral]
> (6a) Je les ai trouvés assez abrupts et grossiers *à chaque fois que* je leur ai téléphoné.

La valeur généralisante, qu'on traduira souvent en français par *à chaque fois que, toujours*, etc. s'explique par la nature du domaine sur lequel porte l'opération de parcours. Il s'agit ici d'un domaine non centré, c'est-à-dire d'un domaine de circonstances *a priori* indifférenciées en tant que repère pour la proposition principale. Cette valeur est particulièrement présente s'agissant de WHENEVER ou de WHEREVER, soit les domaines du temps et de l'espace, lesquels sont, de par leur nature, non centrés.

2.1.2. *Deuxième cas : concession*

> (8) *However* attractive the idea of a director general sounds, it could create more problems than it would solve
> (8a) *Quel que soit* l'intérêt d'un poste de directeur général en théorie, il pourrait dans la pratique créer plus de problèmes que de solutions.

Dans ce deuxième cas, la proposition en WH- EVER détermine la principale qualitativement, en référence à un domaine gradué, c'est-à-dire, un domaine qui comprend des degrés maximalement opposés à la validation de la principale. Ici, par exemple, l'opération de parcours marquée par EVER porte essentiellement sur tous les degrés d'*attractive*, y compris les plus élevés, et pourtant, la proposition sert toujours de repère pour la principale, qui est argumentativement

contre-orientée (puisque l'orientation positive de l'attractivité s'oppose à la multiplication des problèmes). De tels exemples se laissent couramment reformuler par des concessives :

> (8b) *Although* the idea of a director general sounds attractive, it could create more problems than it would solve.
>
> (8c) *Bien que* l'idée d'un directeur général paraisse intéressante, elle pourrait créer plus de problèmes que de solutions.

Ce sont, à nouveau, les propriétés du domaine parcouru qui permettent la stabilisation des rapports formes-valeurs, l'ajustement qui détermine la valeur concessive pour un même schéma général.

2.1.3. *Troisième cas : ignorance de l'énonciateur*

> (11) *Whatever* influence television news has on voters, it would be likely to affect all, or nearly all voters. It would not affect different audiences in different ways.
>
> (11a) *Quelle que soit* l'influence des actualités télévisées sur les électeurs, il est probable que leur impact soit le même sur tous les électeurs, ou presque. Il ne variera vraisemblablement pas selon les diverses catégories de téléspectateurs.

L'opération de parcours marquée par WH- EVER, dans ce cas, ne porte ni sur un ensemble d'occurrences indifférenciées (premier cas) ni sur un domaine centré (deuxième cas) mais sur ce qu'on peut appeler l'indifférenciation subjective. Par l'opération de parcours l'énonciateur marque ici son incapacité à assigner une valeur référentielle spécifique à l'un des termes de la principale, tout en maintenant sa validation. Comme dans le cas des concessives, la validation de la principale se fait indépendamment de la subordonnée. Ici, cependant, le parcours ne porte pas sur un domaine centré et, surtout, ne comprend pas d'occurrences potentiellement délétères à la validation de la principale.

La dérivation se déduit dans ce cas-ci du rapport anaphorique entre le terme en WH- EVER dans la subordonnée (ici, *Whatever influence*), et un des compléments de la principale (ici, *it*).

Nous venons d'étudier trois ajustements possibles. Trois façons de dériver une valeur à partir d'une même forme schématique. Il s'agit d'ajustements calculables, en fonction des configurations contextuelles, mais non déterministes, au sens où on peut imaginer des cas limite, où l'on hésiterait entre différentes dérivations. De telles

ambiguïtés n'entravent généralement pas la communication ordinaire. On peut supposer qu'elles correspondent à ce que Culioli a appelé « l'ajustement mou » (2001 : 232). Noter qu'il s'agit pour l'instant d'ajustements implicites, de la reconstruction d'une valeur stabilisée à partir de formes par définition instables.).

Quatrième cas: rectification

> (2) "She wants to move to the country. To Far Flatley, *wherever that is*." He threw back his head and laughed, very heartily.

Ce cas de figure est superficiellement similaire au troisième type. A nouveau, le terme en WH- EVER renvoie à un complément de la principale, pour lequel l'énonciateur ne saurait assigner de référent fixe. Dans le cas des subordonnées d'ignorance, cependant, cette impossibilité n'affectait pas la validation de la principale, alors qu'ici sa validation est rétroactivement remise en cause. Trois différences importantes entre les configurations permettent d'expliquer la spécificité du cas présent.

- la proposition en WH- EVER est toujours postposée ;
- le complément sujet (C_0) pronominal de la subordonnée reçoit un accent contrastif ;
- l'antécédent du complément sujet pronominal constitue une désignation référentielle non ambiguë, généralement un nom propre.

La troisième propriété, un antécédent nom propre, est particu-lièrement importante. L'emploi d'un nom propre implique que l'énonciateur est à même de désigner le référent associé à la désignation. Cette implication est cependant déconstruite par la proposition en WH- EVER où le sujet pronominal, coréférentiel avec un nom propre antécédent, est simultanément déstabilisé par sa localisation relativement à un attribut en WH- EVER. Schéma-tiquement, en suivant les conventions habituellement employées dans la théorie des opérations énonciatives :
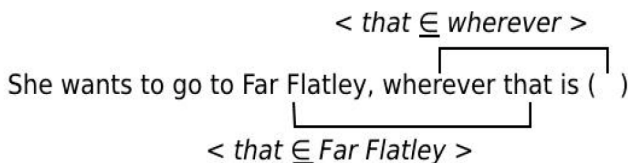
Ce désengagement subjectif de l'énonciateur *post hoc* a pour effet de réattribuer la prise en charge d'un terme (ici, le nom de lieu *Far Flatley*) à un autre énonciateur (ici, *she*), dans un mouvement qui nous rapproche du discours indirect.

Le type d'ajustement explicite décrit ici met en scène un énonciateur qui surveille à tout moment son discours, qui considère l'adéquation des relations formes-valeurs du point de vue d'un co-énonciateur, réel et / ou fictif, et qui opère les (ré-) ajustements explicitement en fonction de son évaluation.

2.2. L'ajustement anticipatif : LIKE citationnel

Nous considérons une autre forme d'ajustement explicite : celle de l'ajustement qu'opère un énonciateur qui reconnaît, au moment de l'énonciation, une certaine inadéquation dans les rapports formes-valeurs, et demande à son co-énonciateur d'opérer lui-même les ajustements forme-valeur qui s'imposent. Ce type d'ajustement peut s'illustrer par l'emploi fait en anglais contemporain non standard d'un LIKE citationnel :

> (15) And it's funny, that's never left me. I still kind of always go into studios and I'm *like* wow, I mean this is what I do and people let me, so. COCA [S]
>
> (15a) Et c'est bizarre, ça ne m'a jamais quitté. Toujours, quand j'entre dans un studio, *je me dis* « waouh ! » je veux dire, c'est ce que je fais et on me laisse faire, tu vois.

(Noter à nouveau les difficultés de traduction : le français passe par le discours direct *je me dis*, alors que cet emploi de LIKE n'est justement pas assimilable au discours direct. Il serait plus proche de certains emplois non standards de GENRE, en français contemporain, par exemple : *mon mari* […] *me regarde, genre, ma pauvre t'es en train de péter un cable*[15]. Le français canadien calque directement depuis l'anglais, en revanche, avec *être comme…*).

Cet emploi, d'abord supposé caractéristique du sociolecte des adolescentes californiennes, est désormais présent dans beaucoup d'autres variétés d'anglais, généralement parmi des groupes de locuteurs plutôt jeunes. Il permet, d'une part, de signaler au co-énonciateur le caractère problématique du rapport forme-valeur dans

_____

15. http://forum.aufeminin.com/forum/couple1/__f527080_couple1-Je-pete-un-cable-twisted.html, consulté le 2 novembre 2012.

l'énoncé associé, et, d'autre part, d'impliquer le partage des valeurs communes et l'appartenance sociale.

Admettons que, dans un énoncé de la forme générale x LIKE y, x est repéré par rapport à y en raison d'une propriété z qui n'est pas nécessairement rendue explicite. Cette caractérisation rend compte du paradoxe de LIKE qui exprime à la fois l'identification (z en x est identifié à z en y) et la différenciation (x est différent d'y). En schéma :

> $< x \subseteq z = z \supseteq y >$ soit « x est repéré par propriété z identifiée à propriété z repère pour y »

La propriété commune z peut être explicite (16) ou implicite (17) :

(16) Young Donald – his eyes [x] were clear black-brown [z], *like* a lochan stained with peat [y], his hair [x] was curly [z] *like* a bull's poll [y].

(16a) […] ses cheveux étaient frisés *comme* la tête d'un taureau.

(17) The thought was *like* a knife thrust.

(17a) L'idée lui parvint *comme* un coup de couteau.

Reste à démontrer comment le schéma donné ci-dessus peut expliquer l'emploi citationnel de LIKE. Il existe de nombreuses études excellentes sur LIKE, dans d'autres optiques que la nôtre, qui montrent que la construction en BE LIKE n'est pas l'équivalent exact de celle opérée par des marqueurs de discours tels que SAY / THINK THAT etc. Ferrara et Bell, par exemple, affirment que « l'emploi prototypique de *be + like* est un énoncé hautement conventionnel, théâtral, qui rend visible les états d'âme aux spectateurs » (1995 : 283, ma traduction). Ainsi, dans (15), le segment *I'm like wow* ne signifie pas *Je (me) dis « waouh! »*, mais plutôt propose *waouh !* comme un exemple de ce que l'énonciateur aurait pu dire ou penser, étant donné la situation où il se trouve.

Il apparaît donc que, dans un énoncé de la forme générale « S BE LIKE 'Prop' », où S représente le sujet et où Prop représente l'énoncé cité, S est repéré par rapport à une situation z identifiable avec une situation fictive z où l'on pourrait dire 'Prop'. La propriété z, est commune à la situation de S et à la situation où un énonciateur pourrait dire 'Prop' : $< S \subseteq Sit_z = Sit_z \supseteq 'Prop' >$.

Pour que le coénonciateur puisse récupérer avec succès la propriété commune z, les deux locuteurs doivent posséder la même idée du rapport stéréotypique entre des énoncés et les situations où ces énoncés peuvent se proférer. L'énonciateur compte ainsi sur son

coénonciateur, qui doit arrêter sa propre interprétation, selon son idée des rapports entre énoncés et situations. Cette connivence imposée confère à BE+LIKE un fonctionnement d'ajustement parallèle, sur le plan social et interactif, qui fait aussi partie de sa signification.

3. CONCLUSION

En résumé, nous avons montré, tout d'abord, que l'ajustement, défini comme un mouvement selon lequel un énonciateur cherche à stabiliser la relation entre formes et valeurs, est toujours présent dans l'activité de langage, même s'il n'est pas nécessairement explicite. Nous avons ensuite étudié deux exemples d'ajustement explicite. Dans le premier type, celui des subordonnées rectificatives en WH-EVER, un énonciateur déstabilise rétroactivement la valeur référentielle d'un énoncé précédent, dont il renvoie la responsabilité à une autre instance énonciative. Dans le deuxième type, celui de BE+LIKE citationnel, un énonciateur demande au coénonciateur d'opérer les ajustements nécessaires, en reconstruisant une situation-type à partir d'un énoncé emblématique de telles situations. L'ajustement concerne, dans ce cas sociolinguistiquement marqué, non seulement les valeurs référentielles, mais aussi les significations sociales et interactives de l'énoncé.