THE INTERPRETATION OF UNUSUAL CASES IN SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION IN THE FRENCH LANGUAGE

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Annotation: *This article discusses usual and unusual cases in sentence construction in the French language.*

Keywords: notion, definition, subject, verb, predicate, sentence order, violation, notion.

Introduction. The notion of subject was first defined according to intuitive criteria: the subject is initially identified as "the being or the thing that does or undergoes the action expressed by the verb". Considering this definition, the subject had to answer the questions: **qui est-ce qui ? qu'est-ce que ?** But this definition has lost its relevance nowadays.

We then tried to identify this notion by a network of properties rather than by a fixed definition. These properties are based on the fragile balance of the canonical sentence: subject / verb / complements, in this strict order, and in a declarative sentence. Hence the following assertions:

- the subject is vital to the grammatical harmony of the sentence;

- the subject is generally placed at the head of the sentence and before the verb;

- the subject is often nominal (proper or common noun, nominalized infinitive, pronoun, etc.)

- it governs the agreement of the verb conjugated in person and in number;

- in the transition from the active voice to the passive voice, the subject becomes the complement of the agent.

The notion of predicate emerges from these analyses: if the subject is "what we are talking about", that is the first part of the proposition, the predicate is the continuation, "the way in which we talk about the subject".

Main part . But these features hardly work except for attributive structures: *La mer est claire*. How about a sentence like: *Il a offert une bague à sa fiancée* or *Il lit un roman d'aventures* ? (An adventure novel has little to do with "the way we talk about it".) The subject/predicate relationship does not always hold water.

We qualify the role of the subject by seeing in it "the fulcrum" of judgment, "its source", "the starting point of thought". The notion of theme then appears to describe the role of the subject. We then move away from a purely syntactic

terminology (syntax coincides with the logical interpretation of the sentence) to identify the static and dynamic elements that constitute the statement.

The theme therefore qualifies the very object of a statement, of an act of enunciation. We call subject (or rheme) the content that is transmitted to us on this theme.

Therefore, we will seek information by asking different questions. Consider the sentence *Jeanne mange un délicieux gâteau*. You can ask questions about: what is Joan doing? (Jeanne is then theme and mange un délicieux gâteau, about the ; but we can also divide the sentence into two grammatical constituents which refer to the subject/predicate analysis: Jeanne is a subject group, mange un délicieux gâteau is the compound predicate of verb + COD). If we now ask ourselves: what does Jeanne eat? the theme is then Jeanne mange, and the predicate a délicieux gâteau. So many questions to elucidate a very complex grammatical relationship…

We notice in the spoken language that these different elements are often marked by particular intonations: the subject tends to be marked with an accent to distinguish itself from the theme, which is rather neutral. These are phenomena of cadence. In the written language, these phenomena are for example very perceptible in poetry.

Still in the case of written language, it is the upheavals in the order of words that should attract our attention:

- *Son délicieux gâteau, Jeanne le mange !* The constituents are here inverted and detached (by the comma), which places the COD element in the canonical sentence as a theme.

- *Délicieux, ce gâteau !* Le **thème** est ici **absent** et on note la transformation en phrase non verbale. Le caractère délicieux du gâteau est accentué, car mis en valeur par le détachement des constituants de la phrase.

- *C'est Jeanne qui mange un délicieux gâteau.* La mise en valeur du propos se fait ici par une tournure dite de focalisation (presentative...pronom relativ) ; le thème est alors réject à la suite du propos.

- *C'est un délicieux gâteau que mange Jeanne.* Highlighting changes the hierarchy of elements since this time, the twist mentioned above extracts a delicious cake. The theme is no longer the same as before.

If we stick to a purely syntactic appreciation of the sentence, we can also analyze the order of the words in a sentence comprising a subject and a predicate. The subject can naturally be postponed for syntactic reasons, as in interrogative sentences (*Viendras-tu ce soir ?*), in certain exclamatory sentences (*Est-il charmant !*), in incised propositions (*Il viendra plus tard, répondit Jeanne*), after certain so-called speech adverbs (*Peut-être préfères-tu l'autre gâteau ?*). The subject can also be postponed for stylistic reasons and this is where you have to pay attention to the intentions of the

author. For example, to preserve the progression of the utterance, one can choose to place at the head of the sentence words recalling elements already mentioned (non-informative elements, therefore not predicative): one then ensures the thematic progression of the text, as is the case in: ***Le village*** *était très animé par la fête.* ***D'un côté, des femmes*** *s'affairaient à préparer des confiseries et des gâteaux.* ***De l'autre couraient*** *des enfants excités par les préparatifs.*

The inversion can also come from an aesthetic and / or expressive will. We decide to highlight, at the head of the sentence, an element that will reject the subject after the verb: *Vienne la nuit, sonne l'heure* (Apollinaire), *Puisse-t-il seulement m'aimer un peu !*

Conclusion. Defining the subject and the predicate goes beyond simple grammar but touches on the meaning, aesthetics and expressiveness of the text. We cannot approach these notions without mentioning the theme/subject relationship. These notions are certainly relatively complex, but should allow you to analyze the use of the constituent elements of an utterance, their choice and their hierarchy in order to identify the effects of meaning.

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