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ARGUMENTATIVE VALUES OF CAUSALITY IN FRENCH CONSTRUCTIONS LIKE *S'IL ÉCHOUE, C'EST QU'IL N'APPREND PAS SES LEÇONS*

Our paper focuses on the expression of causality, in particular its argumentative values in French constructions like *s'il échoue, c'est qu'il n'apprend pas ses leçons*. It should be noted that this type of constructions *if P, Q*, is observable when *if P* is factual, i.e. when the proposition P does not necessarily express a hypothesis as is generally the case, but an event that has happened or is going to happen. Thus, we find concessional, adversarial, additive and emphatic *if P, Q* systems. However, in the context of our paper, we will only devote ourselves to causative *if*-constructions. Our work will be structured in three parts. First, we will highlight the functioning of causality in factual *if*-constructions, then the enunciative postures generated by causality and finally the self-presentation of the speaker in French causative non hypothetical constructions.

0. Introduction

French constructions like *si P, Q*, is observable when *si P* is factual, otherwise when the proposition P does not necessarily express a hypothesis as is generally the case, but an event that has occurred or will happen. Thus, there are concessive, adversative, additive and emphatic *si P, Q* systems. Let's give some examples:

– If Paul is not loved by his stepfather, he received his support for his candidacy for the presidential election. (concessive *if*)

- If the State must allow private partners, more able than it in digital matters, it must set clear rules. (additive *if*)
- If Turkey has an opportunity to prove its usefulness in Europe, it is now! (emphatic *if*)
- If Saudi monarchy has financial reserves, Iran and Russia have the most to lose from a rapid and substained drop in the price of crude oil. (adversative *if*)

However, in this paper, we will only devote ourselves to causative *si P* constructions. In this case, as Corminbœuf indicates (2013: 44), “the protasis exposes a fact whose validity is presupposed and the apodosis – introduced by *it* and incorporating the focus – consists in the explanation of this fact” [our translation] In this perspective, Q is the cause of P, the proposition Q explains the fact presented in P. Consider the following example:

(1) S’il a accepté, c’était pour ne pas te causer de peine.

(‘If he accepted, it was so as not to cause you pain.’)

In the above statement, the proposition Q (*it was so as not to cause you pain*), explains the protasis.

It should be noted that causality in factual *if* constructions in French has already been the subject of the study of several linguists, notably in a little more depth in Stage (1991), Monte (2009) and to a lesser extent in Corminbœuf (2013). Monte and Stage, above all, demonstrate that causative *if*-constructions should not be considered as being hypothetical, while Corminbœuf emphasizes the fact that there always remains an ambiguity, a hypothetical meaning in the French causative system *if P, Q*. However, the analysis that we propose is different insofar as the cited authors mainly try to show why a system *if P, Q* should be considered as a factual proposition. We will not enter this debate within the framework of this paper, but we will try to see more explicitly how causality is expressed in a concrete way in this type of construction. This is why we ask ourselves the following questions: How does causality work in causative non hypothetical *if*-constructions? What are the enunciative postures generated by this *if P, Q* system? What is the speaker’s self-presentation in this causative system? And what are the argumentative values generated by this presentation of oneself? We will use the approach of Alain Rabatel (2004, 2007, 2012) and Maingueneau (1987, 1999, 2002, 2014) to provide answers to all these questions. Our work will be

structured in three parts: First, we will highlight the functioning of causality in factual if-constructions, then the enunciative postures generated by causality and finally the self-presentation of the speaker in French causative non hypothetical constructions. We would like to point out that our examples are not taken from a corpus.

1. The functioning of causality in causative non hypothetical *if*-constructions

We have noticed that, in French, the causative *if P, Q* system can be formed in three ways: thus apodosis is often introduced by *it's that / it's because / it's for*.

(2) Si je ne vais pas au cinéma, c'est parce que je n'ai pas d'argent.

(‘If I don’t go to the cinema, it’s because I don’t have money.’)

(3) S’il revient nous parler, c’est pour mieux nous humilier.

(‘If he comes back to talk with us, it’s to humiliate us.’)

(4) Si Marco est moins dépensier, c'est qu'il n'est plus aussi riche qu'avant.

(‘If Marco is less a spendthrift, it’s that / it’s because he isn’t as rich as before.’)

Causative factual *if Ps*, in general, are anteposed, whereas in the case of hypothetical propositions, we mainly have the order *Q, if P*. This state of affairs, according to Stage (1991: 169), is due to *the thematizing function of if* [our translation].

From this perspective, P is considered as the theme of the utterance. According to Corminbœuf and Jahn (2020: 208), “we put a frame and then put something inside”; [our translation] if P makes it possible to delimit the context in which the utterance is inscribed. The protasis has a cadrative function in this case.

Regarding verbal tenses, we find practically the same verbal tense in P and Q (about 90% of the time, if not more); and very often it’s the present indicative. However, there is great liberty in the combinations of verbal tenses in if-constructions, in general.

2. The enunciative posture generated by causality: the coenunciation

The coenunciation (Rabatel 2007) sets out a speaker who resumes the previous point of view issued by an enunciator. In this case, an enunciator E2 presents a fact in the protase, this fact is validated in apodose by the E1 enunciator which is also the speaker (L / E1). E1, according to Rabatel (2012: 27) refers to the “main” enunciator. Thus, “among all the enunciators who leave the statements and speeches, it is one that is more important than the others, the first enunciator, the one who is united with” the speaker. It is in “syncretism” with the speaker.

When it is a causative if, the speaker L justifies the point of view conveyed by the enunciator E2.

On the argumentative level, this helps to give more weight to the words set out in the protasis. The validation of the point of view of the E2 enunciator by the speaker aims to better persuade the reader. Let’s look at the following examples:

(5) Si nous avons cette grande culture générale, c’est uniquement parce que nos parents y ont veillé depuis notre tendre enfance.

(‘If we have a great general culture, it is only because our parents have taken care of it since our childhood.’)

(6) Si les étudiants avaient fait la grève de la faim, c’était pour soutenir leur camarade injustement accusé de vol.

(‘If the students had gone on hunger strike, it was to support their classmate unfairly accused of theft.’)

In these examples, the information supported by E2 is the possession of knowledge, this information is also supported by the speaker who comes to give it even more scope by providing details.

The argumentative value generated by the coenunciation results from the fact that the speaker will give more force to the point of view contained in the protasis by providing justifying elements.

3. The speaker's self-presentation

Self-presentation refers to the image that the speaker conveys of himself through his speech with the aim of convincing or persuading an audience.

The term is inherited from sociologist Erving Goffman. He talks about it above all in his book *La Mise en scène de la vie quotidienne. La Présentation de soi* (1956). According to Goffman, life is theater and interaction is performance. According to the author (Goffman: 23), by representation is understood “the totality of the activity of a given person on a given occasion, to influence in some way one of the participants” [our translation].

The human being is brought to play several roles according to the situations with which he is confronted, while respecting precise rules.

Every human being presents himself to others in order to make a good impression, and that depends on his presentation of himself. Everyone should try to “keep face” during the interaction. Goffman maintains that any interactional relationship is codified according to the image each interlocutor wants to convey.

The term *self-presentation* was later taken over by sociology and social psychology. In rhetoric, it is best known as *ethos*.

Several authors have written on the subject. We can cite among others Ducrot (1984), Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1990), Amossy (1999, 2010), Rabatel (2020), Maingueneau (1987, 1999, 2002, 2014). The latter was one of the first to introduce the notion of *ethos* in the analysis of the speech.

Maingueneau (2002: 58) states:

“[...] the question of *ethos* is linked to that of the construction of identity. Each speaking involves both taking into account the representations that the partners have of each other, but also the speaking strategy of a speaker who directs the discourse in such a way as to shape itself through it certain identity.” [our translation]

Through his way of expressing himself the speaker tries to build an identity.

As we can see, self-presentation is especially evoked in the context of face-to-face interactions.

However, this is not the case in this study since in the texts on which we are working the interlocutors are not face-to-face.

It is a question of analyzing how the speaker's self-presentation has an argumentative function in causative non-hypothetical *if P, Q*.

3.1. The presuppositions

In *if P, Q* non-hypothetical systems, the speaker presents information in the protasis that he excludes from debate. This then becomes akin to a *doxa*, a presupposition that is part of the universe of belief of the speaker and the reader.

Ducrot (1969: 35–36) rightly insists on the fact that the presupposition

“is presented as obvious, as an indisputable framework in which the conversation must necessarily be inscribed as an element of the universe of discourse. By introducing an idea in the form of a presupposition, I act as if my interlocutor and I cannot help but accept it.” [our translation]

The presupposition is information that is meant to be shared by the speaker and the reader.

Except that in the case of factual *if P*, the reader is an accomplice in spite of himself. However, it turns out that presuppositions play an important role in the construction of a speaker's self-presentation. The latter is based, in part, on this to encourage the reader to subscribe to his point of view.

From this perspective, factual *if Ps* have a strong argumentative value insofar as they forge an essential bond between speaker and reader, the latter sharing a point of view despite himself.

The reader is supposed to recognize these presuppositions, and can, under these conditions, easily follow the argumentative progression of the speaker's words.

(7) Si elle n'est plus aussi belle, c'est parce qu'elle a abusé de la chirurgie esthétique.

(‘If she is no longer as beautiful, it is because she has abused cosmetic surgery.’)

(8) S'il a participé à ce fameux concours, c'est pour mieux préparer sa carrière de musicien.

(‘If he took part in this famous competition, it was to better prepare his career as a musician.’)

The two aforementioned statements present presuppositions. For example in (7), “If she is no longer as beautiful”, the speaker presents information as acquired.

The fact that the information contained in the protasis cannot be denied by the reader is therefore a definite asset for the speaker on the argumentative level, because he can then unfold his argument, and the reader can only follow it since they both agree on the very basis of his point.

3.2. A conciliatory speaker

Through the use of the conjunction *if*, the speaker tries to construct an image that is not very controversial. This is possible insofar as *if* plays a modifying role in factual *if*Ps.

So, using the conjunction *if*, the speaker will act as if he did not question the point of view contained in the protasis, however this consideration is accompanied by a weakening of its public validity; the object is not questioned, but placed in a fictitious domain.

It is in this perspective that Corminbœuf (2013: 54–55) affirms:

“To say *if-P* is to introduce into public knowledge, mutually manifest, a fact accompanied by its validation key: what results from this coupling, it is the instruction to install a fictitious space. *Si* relates to saying and fulfills the function of modulating the modal domain of a fact (it renegotiates the validation key).” [our translation]

Thus, it is a question of admitting the validity of a fact, while assigning it to a particular domain of validation of discursive memory.

In other words, the conjunction *if* allows the speaker to spare the susceptibility of the speaker whose point of view he takes. Because in fact, it is not a point of view that he really takes on his own, but this aspect is softened by the use of *if*.

We could summarize the phenomenon as follows:

Faculties of *if*:

- admit the validity of a fact P
- validation key (modal comment on this fact).

These two parameters install P in a fictitious space:

(9) S'il a frôlé la mort, c'est parce qu'il ne respecte jamais la vitesse lorsqu'il conduit.

(‘If he came close to death, it’s because he never respects speed when driving.’)

In the above statement, the speaker, using the conjunction *if*, on the one hand admits the validity of the fact P, and on the other hand makes a modal comment on this fact. Therefore, the speaker’s distance from P is minimized. It is undoubtedly a wish of the speaker to be conciliatory. Because, from a point of view, he behaves as if he takes it on his own, all thanks to *if*.

3.3. A competent speaker

We were also able to detect the speaker’s desire to present himself as a teacher, a competent person, in particular through the use of the *if* causative.

The speaker often uses it to support the point of view of an E2 enunciator by giving justifications that may influence the reader.

(10) S'il se vante autant, c'est qu'il est très admiré par toutes les femmes.

(‘If he boasts so much, it is because he is greatly admired by all women.’)

The speaker validates the point of view contained in the protasis by explaining the reasons which justify such a point of view.

The *if P, Q* causative system allows the speaker to assume the image of a competent person, which can only help him in his endeavor to persuade the reader. His speech appears more credible, and therefore more apt to elicit support from the reader.

4. Conclusion

In this article, the aim was to analyze the argumentative values of causality in non-hypothetical *if*-constructions. We see it in particular through the phenomenon of coenunciation and the speaker's self-presentation. Thus beyond expressing the reason for the realization of a fact or a phenomenon, causality in non-hypothetical *if*-constructions is a weapon for the speaker in order to lead him to adhere to his reasoning.

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Argumentativna vrijednost uzročnosti u francuskim konstrukcijama kao *s'il échoue, c'est qu'il n'apprend pas ses leçons*

Sažetak

Tema je našega rada izraživanje uzročnosti, navlastito njezina argumentativna vrijednost u konstrukcijama kao *s'il échoue, c'est qu'il n'apprend pas ses leçons*. Valja napomenuti da je vrsta konstrukcija *ako P, Q* opaziva kada je *ako P* činjenična, tj. kada propozicija *P* ne izražava nužno hipotezu, kao što je to općenito slučaj, nego činjenicu koja se je dogodila ili će se dogoditi. Tako nalazimo dopusne, suprotne, dopunske i emfatične sustave *ako P, Q*, ali u kontekstu našeg rada posvetit ćemo se samo uzročnim *ako*-konstrukcijama. Naš je rad strukturiran u tri dijela: prvo ističemo funkcioniranje uzročnosti u činjeničnim *ako*-konstrukcijama, zatim enuncijativno držanje generirano uzročnošću *i*, na kraju, samoprikazivanje govornika u francuskim uzročnim nehipotetičkim konstrukcijama.

Keywords: causality, conjunction *if*, argumentation, not hypothetical, speaker, self-presentation

Ključne riječi: uzročnost, veznik *ako*, argumentacija, nehipotetičan, govornik, samoprikazivanje