The Norwegian learners’ difficulties by using French markers of discursive relations / Reconhecimento das dificuldades dos aprendentes noruegueses na utilização de marcadores de relações discursivas em francês

Nelly Foucher Stenkløv

ABSTRACT
A Corpus-based Analysis of Difficulties relating to the Use of Connectives by Norwegian Students of French as a Second Language. This paper will adopt a psycholinguistic approach to the use of connectives by French as a second language for Norwegian speakers. It will aim to systematize the didactics of French connectives, based on an analysis of learners’ ability to structure texts. From this theoretical vantage point, we will identify the use of these connectives in a small-scale corpus of texts. We will then analyse the difficulties which emerge, whether they relate to text coherence, to syntactical challenges, or to the semantics or pragmatics of the target language.

Keywords: connectives, textual architecture, corpora, difficulties

RESUMO
A fim de sistematizar o tratamento didático dos marcadores das relações discursivas, proporemos aqui um exame do emprego de tais marcadores, sob o prisma de uma abordagem psicolinguística, a partir de um olhar sobre a capacidade que tem o aprendente para estruturar seus textos. A partir deste ponto de partida teórico, identificaremos os empregos dos marcadores em um pequeno corpus de produções escritas e analisamos as dificuldades que deles decorrem, considerando que eles sustentam a coerência dos texto, ou que eles revelam desafios específicos para a sintaxe, semântica e pragmática da língua alvo, o francês, para o aprendente norueguês.

Palavras-chave: Marcadores de relações, estruturação textual, corpus, dificuldades

1. Introduction

This study aims to analyze the use of markers of discourse relations, hereby named by textual coherence generators. It is a part of a framework reflection on the optimization of the French writing teaching process as well as a contribution to the work of the FANOR group, composed of scholars from the University of Trondheim, whose project is articulated around two axes, such as: a) a series of studies about the acquisition of linguistic elements conducted on the basis of a corpus of written productions by French students (learners of Norwegian) and vice-versa, throughout the academic years of 2015-2016 (in France) and 2017-2018 (in Norway); b) the presentation of the results of the analysis in the explanations and in the sets of exercises from an online course for Norwegian students. What these two pendulums have in

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* Universidade de Trondheim, Noruega, nelly.stenklov@ntnu.no.
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common is, certainly, the fundamental contrastive dimension (French/Norwegian) which will be widely considered in our observations.

2. Didactic objectives

In which aspects do the markers of discourse relations deserve to have new studies dedicated to them? Moreover, specialists in cognitive psychology (KARMILOFF-SMITH, 1985), in psycholinguistics (HICKMANN, 2001) or in discourse analysis (ADAM, 1992) have focused on this issue for some time. More recently, Nome (2013) dealt with the translation markers.

Being the cornerstone of textual architecture, the domain of the use of relation markers occupies a central role in the evaluation of foreign language skills. Therefore, it is one of the featured skills on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

C2: One can produce a coherent sustained discourse, utilizing in a complete and appropriate manner the varied organizational structures, as well as a wide range of linking words and other articulations.

B2: One can use a limited number of articulators to connect sentences in a clear and coherent discourse.

A2: One can link groups of words with simple connectors, such as "and", "but" and "because."

Although the CEFR underlines the correlation between the use, as well as the frequency of markers of attachment and levels of competence of learners, those markers are not suitable for systematic teaching. Actually, they are barely discussed on French course books in Norway. In 2017, twelve out of fifteen students from an annual French training in Caen say they heard about linking words in high school. It is certainly because of their teachers, but the same students may confirm that the teaching of linking words would rarely include more than the distribution of translated lists. Products, par excellence, an imbroglio of contextual influences — thus, one may think about the recurrence of "suddenly" or "finally" in oral French on the past ten years — markers of textual relations which probably suffer from a lack of didactic systematization that become symptoms of the complexity of learning French as a foreign language.
This work demands a more effective and more systematic learning of textual construction in the target language and outlines an articulation of the process of the textual architecture acquisition, in order to make it look less complex than it seems. Therefore this work has two goals, such as establishing a typology of mistakes from the use of relation markers for Norwegian students, and analyzing how this typology should contribute to enhance teaching of relation markers.

3. The cognitive process of textual structuring

Our research is an ongoing investigation both on the theoretical and analytical levels. With regard to the corpus, an initial identification of the difficulties associated with the use of linking words was done based on four texts produced in four distributed moments on the academic years of 2015-2016.

As for a theoretical orientation, this is outlined in our typological purpose. Parallel to the classifications, sometimes syntactic (coordinating and subordinating conjunctions), sometimes semantic (linking word, relation markers), there is a word or a group of words whose function in the discourse is to establish logical, spatial or temporal relations between phrases (Montreal University's help center). Thus, this study prioritizes psycholinguistic classification through the observation of learner's ability to structure texts. As for native children, the acquisition of linking words in French is carried out according to three types of operations related to the faculty of structuring texts (SCHNEUWLY et al, 1989). Each stage reveals specific types of errors concerning linking words. The difficulties identified by teachers will be more efficiently if treated through a learning scheme starting from the cognitive stage of textual structuring.

Such theoretical starting point enables the identification of mistakes that, as for native speakers, keep the cognitive representation associated with the text: “coherence, in other words, allows a text to be perceived as a text, namely a present utterance set” (JAUBERT, 2005, p. 8). During the composition of a text, could the learner anticipate the sequence and conceive its composition as a coherent whole? At this stage, one can say that the teaching process implies that one has to consider the practices of each learner in terms of textual composition.

According to Scheneuwly (1989, apud FAVART, 2005, p. 311) the three cognitive operations intervene in the structuring of texts:
● The glueing operation: local level; it is a matter of ensuring the linking of the textual segments (and, but then, etc.).
● The packaging operation: it reflects the willingness of planning. The packaging known as “integrative” translates the principle of taking into account the general structure of the text "(in addition, however, etc.).
● The beaconing operation: it marks the textual hierarchy likewise the markings ensured by the punctuation, and it also witnesses the anticipating faculty in texts.

The last two operations, namely packaging and beaconing, are ensured by markers of \textit{linear integration} whose function is to ensure the text linearity, organizing it in a succession of complementing fragments that facilitate the interpretative treatment (MAINGUENEAU, 2003, p. 187). The cognitive approach (FAVART, 2005) has the advantage of outlining the stages of a didactic process. Thus, the compositions from the Norwegian group will be analyzed through the cognitive perspective, as to argue, for example, that the recurrence of the ‘e’ arquiconector could more simply be interrupted by a punctual correction of French through a global management of textual planning - both in Norwegian and French.

\section*{4. Presentation of the analysis}

Table 1 (attached) is a structured representation of the use of written markers of discourse relations in a small sample of five students out of ten from the Norwegian teacher training group in French as a foreign language at the University of Cohen, 2015-2016. Then we will perform a qualitative analysis of the entries in the table.

Based on the conversational analysis of the theorist Schegloff (1993, p. 102), we assume the importance of the interpretative dimension in discursive research so as to emphasize the singularities of the linguistic paths. Our selection of research participants and the restriction of their number to five, as well as the intention of examining different acquisition paths in a deeper way, due to the starting point of each, certainly, but also for their student profiles on the course of the year”. Thus, five key moments were chosen to establish this mini corpus: August, for the placement test, then September, December, March, and June, all the explanatory types were written in those months.
The eLAO assessment test to which each student was submitted in August does not accurately account for the use of linking words among its criteria. Considering these assessments, we selected two among the evaluated parameters, taking into account their impact on the future ability to produce coherent texts.

The connectors classification has its basis on Paolacci and Favart’s (2010, p. 119). In a study concerning the use of markers of textual relations by French children in the sixth year, they define this list now called the M list - as the one that presents the most used connectors in the narrative in order to describe the most common discursive relations, such as the succession (and then, then), the temporality (then, when, suddenly,), the cause (why, because) and the consequence (then, therefore). The referred list covers only textual relations resulting from cognitive binding or packaging operations.

We will highlight the following elements:

- The presence of the list markers M in the four productions of the five participants of our research.
- The presence of other markers (list M) in the four productions of the five participants of our research.
- The incorrect use of some markers in the four productions of the five participants of the research.

Three hypotheses will guide our analysis. Firstly, we will verify if learners master the same list of base (M) through this schematization, as in Paolacci and Favart’s studies (2010), the second step is to analyze if the other markers (M) highlight more ambitious structuring operations, such as wrapping or even marking. Finally, as in a corollary of these postulates, the specific errors of the uses of M should contain local particularities - negative semantic transfers from Norwegian to French and spelling mistakes - whereas errors in the use of M markers would highlight difficulties more fundamentally fixed to the French domain and its syntactic structures, for example.

The following analysis is based on the results provided in the annex. We shall make some general comments which shall be followed by specific analysis of each participant from our research. The participants are respectively named A, B, C, D, and E. The catalogued markers of textual connection are taken from the occurrences listed in the annex.

5. General comments
- The use of markers of textual connection - all categories and all participants amalgamated — becomes more usual considering the rhythm of written compositions. There are nine uses in September compared to 23 in December, 38 in March and 18 in June. For the latter case, it should be emphasized that it was, exceptionally, a table-top examination situation. It is possible that the students simply used the markers of which they were perfectly safe.

- The use of markers of textual connection from category M’ is intensified with the rhythm of written productions. Although this analysis cannot be really quantitative, it is interesting to note that the frequency of the resource in the M' list is 54% before Christmas and 77% for subsequent compositions.

- In Spring, there is a clear emergency of the M’ markers which are capable of guaranteeing the beaconing operation. Whilst there are only three uses of this type before Christmas (consequently, finally and beyond), the panoply of the students in March and June has expanded widely. We cite then, the uses - in corrected orthographic versions - on the one hand, in the first place, initially, to conclude, globally, in addition, in the end, in short, etc.

- The incorrect uses of usual markers (list M) are relatively frequent (35%) and the errors are diverse in nature. We will comment on the analysis of the work of each participant.

6. Specific comments from each participant

**Participant A**

The level test results of participant A provide a good starting point for general understanding, mastering 58% of passive vocabulary. However, the syntactic performance was evaluated at 34% at the beginning of the training, the weak point of the candidate. This is confirmed in the first written compositions. In fact, there is no real risk in textual terms at the beginning of the year, and we can presume that the student primarily focused on the correction of the overall syntax. This should be one of the strengths of the first few months of teaching. It is quickly observed the error in the use of *therefore* at the beginning of the sentence, unfortunately transferred from a probable *siden* in Norwegian. The participant visibly
appropriates the nuances of textual architecture and reaches the cognitive stage of the packaging or even the textual beaconing. At the same time, this new ability leads him to accumulate the specific difficulties of the orthographic order that appear, on the other hand, first and at the same time. At this point, it is possible to talk about a true textual competence and move to a local level of correction, focusing on the syntactic and semantic implications on the use of the conjunction therefore, for example.

**Participant B**

Participant B shows an average starting point on his level test with 46% vocabulary scores and 48% syntax scores. The progress registered along the year reveals a growing cognitive capacity of textual structure on the produced texts, very clearly illustrated by the abundance of markers of textual relations, particularly of the M type. This capacity is refined during the year. As for the correction of detailed points, the student passes from the recurrent beyond that, but proper oral — consequently indexed as incorrect use — to the in fact best suitable for writing. In the same line of thinking, the participant uses the adverb otherwise, thus reserving a family register in this context. From the month of March on, we have noticed that the student masters all the cognitive stages of textual construction and needs only a local help, sometimes semantic-pragmatic and sometimes orthographic, for the correction of expressions such as in the end.

**Participant C**

Participant C’s starting point is very low in all items evaluated. We can note here a score of 15% in syntax and 13% in vocabulary. The table reveals, on the one hand, that the markers of the list M only intervene in the third written production. On the other hand, the use of markers seems to be followed by linguistic risks because of the errors found in four of the used markers — therefore, because of against and in fact — of which the first two mentioned are part of list M. The errors recorded in the use of therefore occur due to a misunderstanding — or lack of knowledge — of the semantics conveyed by the term. While therefore could introduce the conclusion of a strict syllogism (of the type A + B = C, therefore, C - B = A) that leaves space for implicit arguments in the following two occurrences: 1. and 2.
1. The adjective qualifies the nominal group, therefore the qualifying adjectives [L'adjectif épithète qualifie le group nominal, adc les adjectifs qualificatifs].

2. It agrees with the group of the name that is in the plural, therefore there’s a "s" at the end [Il s'accorde avec du nom qui est pluriel, donc le "s" à la finale].

As derfor in Norwegian, by which is probably translated by the student as therefore, is erroneously considered easy to use and master key in establishing cause and effect relationships. Another aspect of the subtle complexity of car will be commented on the passage related to participant D. In addition, we can presume that the use of contra is even more directly originated from a negative transference, from an incorrect translation of kontra instead of while or so, than to express opposition. Finally, at a very local and orthographic level, the locution because (parce que) should be reduced to parce qu’ before the vowel i.

Faced with the overall grammaticality of the sentences produced from September to June, the use of markers of relations seems to reflect the progress of the student whose use of therefore becomes semantically appropriate in the last composition. It is steadily seen in the use of M 'markers such as on the other side and to conclude that the student begins to conceive the text as a whole, no more sentence by sentence.

**Participant D**

Participant D's assessment test reveals a good level of vocabulary, with a score of 53%, but with syntactic failures that scored only 30%. These difficulties arise when the student endeavors to enrich his expression to structure his text. Although cognitive understanding reaches a level of packaging, syntactic and semantic errors are numerous and there is a slow progress in textual structuring. Let's look at these two sentences taken from the production in March:

3. While I followed a teacher, I just observed and took notes [Tandis que j'ai suivi un professeur j'ai seulement observé et fait des notes].

4. While teachers in Norway do their best to finish the preparations before leaving home [Tandis que les professeurs en Norvège font l’impossible pour terminer les préparations avant de partir chez eux].

It may be imagined that they reveal linguistic calques still poorly managed. In this way, the use of the conjunctive locution while to translate sometimes, perhaps, mens, phrase of
simultaneity (3.), and *imens*, adverb which also expresses simultaneity, as the adverbial phrase *during that time* (4.). The hypothesis of negative transference suggests that participant D is not aware of this syntactic dichotomy also in Norwegian.

**Participant E**

Participant E shows a relatively high skill, especially regarding vocabulary level. In this section, he scored 59%, but only 40% in syntax. This suggests a lexical fluency that has widely materialized in texts punctuated by markers of rather varied relations. Participant E is systematically aware of the importance of textual architecture and of the different cognitive stages of structuring, the student takes risks. However, he makes semantic-pragmatic mistakes (*in addition: en plus* instead of *but, plus*) and punctual language errors (*A l'autre côté, Au même temps*). The continuous mistake of the use of *therefore* is also relevant, as translations may produce inappropriate uses of this conjunction and semantic-discursive simplification. In the June text, *therefore* is mistakenly used as a specific completion instrument for the process of textual beaconing. This observation reinforces the idea that *therefore* should give way to specific explanations in order to make it clear that this conjunction serves primarily for interphase relations.

**Conclusion**

This study attests the importance of psycho-cognitive skills of textual structuring in the teaching process of relation markers and makes an overview of how such a method allows differentiating the nature of the mistakes in writing. We then keep the following three points:

1. The linguistic progress of the students apparent in the correction of the use of markers of textual relations, seems to go hand in hand with the faculty of structuring written productions. It is clearly seen in the most frequent use of M 'markers in the second half of the academic year.

2. Taking into account the cognitive operations of textual structure in the study of the acquisition of markers of discursive relations makes it possible to classify the difficulties according to their contrasts or not.
3. The difficulties of contrastive nature (semantic-pragmatic and syntactic errors) occur when students start to become aware of the need of textual architecture: their inherent attempts at cognitive mastery engender errors which in turn can be syntactically analyzed (the order of words in the sentence) or punctually treated, setting contexts that reveal the nuances of meaning.

Our review of markers of textual relations and identification of the difficulties that affect their use in the corpus of our study allowed us to classify students' difficulties according to the cognitive stages of textual, syntactic, semantic planning that were situated, revealing occasional errors of the usual French.

From this exercise, whose main merit is the simplification of the didactic approach of the key elements of French discursive construction, we clearly emphasize that purely textual difficulties do not necessarily follow from the fact that French is a foreign language. Contrary to the last three types of difficulties mentioned.

Thanks to the identification of learners’ difficulties, the corrections will be adapted in order to improve the writing level of each student, as well as to provide them with pedagogical possibilities to be further explored when they become teachers.

References


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Annex

Sample of occurrences

Participant A

• December 2015:
Il y a différents déterminants, mais ils se placent devant le nom... En français, le déterminant se place devant le nom qu’il détermine, mais en norvégien le déterminant se place derrière le nom. Le verbe se construire avec la préposition à et s’emploie pour des personnes seulement. L’imparfait est utilisé parce que on ne sait pas pour combien du temps il avait cinq ans L’emploi du passé composé est utilisé parce que le verbe mettre marque une transition

• March 2016:
D’une part les impressions sont bonnes et d’un autre part mauvais. C’est donc pourquoi en première lieu, je discuterai ... , puis je parlerai de la salle des professeurs pour enfin donner mes opinions... Car j’etais dans d’autres classes au lycée et les élèves etaient beaucoup moins interessés... il n’a pas été échangé un seul mot en anglais...

• June 2016:
Même si notre pays soit occupé... les francais se battaient. En même temp c’est la guerre de hiver en Finlande. Le héros Phillippe Pétain est chef de gouvernement et puis il est voté chef de l’État.
Participant B:

• September 2015

En conséquence, on peut voir plusieurs styles architecturaux différents. Néanmoins, il y avait aussi des marques au fil du temps. Autrement la construction a été rénovée plusieurs fois.

• December 2015:

D’ailleurs, ils peuvent avoir plusieurs fonctions syntaxiques... On a d’ailleurs l’élision. Et ils peuvent donc avoir tous les fonctions grammaticales du nom. En plus, cela serva à distinguer l’adjectif de son contraire. En plus, on peut dire que c’est aussi un cas d’un adjectif épithète de nature. En plus, c’est quelque chose qui n’est pas déjà introduit dans le texte.

• March 2016:

En plus, cela peut être difficile pour les formules de politesse. Tout d’abord, la France est un pays un peu isolé du monde anglophone... Pour conclure, j’ai observé des méthodes bien intéressantes. Globalement, j’ai l’impression qu’on fait des tentatives pour améliorer la motivation... En fin du compte, j’ai vu le système éducatif de la France à travers l’exemple d’un lycée professionnel. Ensuite, je pense aussi que les discussions seraient avantageuses... En outre, c’est quelque chose qui peut toucher plusieurs domaines. La communication était donc possible, bien qu’il y ait eu des défis linguistiques.

• June 2016:

Montesquieu... développe l’idée de la séparation des pouvoirs tandis que Diderot dirige le développement de l’Encyclopédie. Pourtant cette guerre fait partie des raisons des caisses vides... qui favorise l’éclatement de la Révolution en 1789. De plus, ils rencontrent des défis. Néanmoins, il a toujours des opposants dans le royaume.

Participant C:

• December 2015:

Il y a plusieurs types des adjectifs, mais ici on regardera l’adjectif épithète. L’adjectif épithète qualifie le groupe nominal, donc les adjectifs qualificatifs. L’adjectif est antéposé parce que il est dans le groupe "courts et fréquents". Il s’accorde avec du nom qui est pluriel, donc le "s" à la finale. La plupart des adjectifs sont postposés du nom, contre en norvégien où l’adjectif est toujours antéposé du nom. On utilise épithète pour indiquer que quelque chose est ajouté et pour le distinguer des autres types des adjectifs.

• March 2016:
Mais c’est un point de vue subjectif par moi. Toutes les formations ont des cours d’anglais, mais j’ai remarqué qu’il y a une grande différence... D’un autre côté, ce lycée a beaucoup plus de matières... J’ai été étonné que plusieurs élèves ne savaient rien en anglais, en fait qu’ils ne pouvaient pas dire leur nom... La première chose qu’on a faite dans ce lycée, était une visite guidée. La deuxième chose que j’ai faite, était observer un conseil de classe. Puis dans ce dossier, j’écrirai... Pour finir je pense qu’il y a une grande similarité entre les deux pays

• June 2016:
La pièce est avant tout une pièce tragique. On verra donc comment c’est utilisé...

Participant D:

• September 2015:
Le Mont St Michel est une abbaye mais il a été aussi une église. Il est sur une île et cette se trouve entre deux régions. Enfin, le Monte Saint Michel est aussi connu pour d’être le troisième site ...

• December 2015:
On peut aussi dit que l’adjectif décrit un enfant qui manque de force, et dans le texte l’adjectif donne une qualité ... Il y a certains adjectifs longs qui sont par analogie avec les adjectif court, et ils sont en antéposition Dans cette phrase on emploie l’article défini "les" parce qu’il désigne un nom connu Il y a plusieurs types des pronoms et on emploie les pronom... Dans cette phrase on a utilisé l’imparfait parc qu’il exprime une action inacheve

• March 2016:
Tout d’abord je voudrais écrire C’est à dire que nous devions nous adapter... mais toutefois c’était un peu provocant... Tandis que j’ai suivi un professeur j’ai seulement observé et fait des notes Tandis que les professeurs en Norvège font l’impossible pour terminer les préparations avant de partir chez eux. Donc la plupart du temps j’observais. Mais une raison pour laquelle ces élèves ont un bas niveau peut être que le système a commencé plus tard... D’autre part, j’avais eu l’expérience... Somme toute,... j’ai constaté que plusieurs choses sont différentes...

• June 2016:
On lui reproche car il se concentrait surtout sur les questions sociales. Comme les francais trouve comme une defaite qui déclenchait les conséquences terribles... Les conséquences sont que l’Europe face une montée du totalitarisme.
Participant E:

• September 2015:
   Si j’étais une princesse, j’habiterais là. En fait, c’est une abbaye. Il y a aussi beaucoup de vêtements

• December 2015:
   Pourtant, l’adjectif s’accorde avec le nom.

• March 2016:
   Pourtant, cela n’est probablement pas juste. Cependant, ce que l’on a fait s’agissait plutôt des choses pertinentes... Néanmoins, évidemment il faut pratiquer oralement... A l’autre côté, suivre le programme ... n’est pas une mauvaise idée. Pour conclure, il y a des objectifs similaires... Donc, il fallait que les élèves fassent une feuille... En plus, cet exercice est meilleure En fait, le niveau d’anglais de la prof m’a surprise.

• June 2016:
   Pourtant, on ne sait pas si cela est la vérité. Donc, c’était important pour eux de ne pas perdre le contrôle des églises. Quand l’Allemagne finalement ont lancé leur attaque, la France ne pouvait pas résister longtemps. En plus, la France devait payer des impôts... En plus, pendant la guerre, la collaboration entre la France et l’Allemagne a été forte. Au même temps, Charles de Gaulle voulait continuer lutter...