

Some Constraints on Anaphoric Reference to Events in French

André Bittar, Université Paris 7, Lattice

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1. The questions and the objective

- Questions

*Marie est tombée en sortant du labo. Ceci est arrivé hier soir.
Marie fell over while leaving the lab. This happened last night.*

- What indicates anaphoric reference to an event?
- What constraints exist on the anaphoric relation?

- Objective

- Answer these questions by...
 - ...adopting established linguistic theory
 - ...making observations from the judgments of native speakers

1. Background theoretical notions

1.1 Anaphora : individual vs. abstract

- Individual anaphora

- 3rd person pronoun with nominal (NP) antecedent
- Preference (“salience”) for an antecedent based on
 - morphology (gender, number)
 - syntax (GB)
 - grammatical function
 - “recency”

1) *John_i can't come to Jane's party. He_i has a cold.*

- Abstract anaphora

- Demonstrative pronoun with sentential (S, CP) antecedent
- Very limited morphological indicators (neuter pronoun)
- Antecedents often don't have a grammatical function
- When interphrastic, outside the domain of syntax
- Antecedent may be arbitrarily distant from an anaphor
- So, entities which are not salient in the same respect

2) *[John can't come to Jane's party]_i. This_i disappoints him.*

1. Background theoretical notions

1.2 Abstract anaphora in French

- Neuter demonstrative pronouns

- *ça, cela, ce (that), ceci (this)* : when used anaphorically, almost exclusively have sentential antecedents

- rarely used to refer to individual (NP) antecedents, although there are some exceptions, e.g. Generic, especially in informal speech :

- 3) *Un enfant, ça grandit.*

- A child, NeutDemPro grows up.*

- 4) *Picasso, c'était un artiste.*

- Picasso, NeutDemPro was an artist.*

- - 3rd person subject pronouns *il, elle (he, she)* never used to refer to sentential antecedents, although direct object pronoun “*le*” or indirect “*en*” or “*y*” (*it*) can be :

- 5) *Jean croit que [Marie est tombé]_i. Pierre l'_ia vu_i.*
Jean thinks that [Marie fell over]_i. Pierre saw it_i.

- 6) *Jean croit que [Marie est tombé]_i. Pierre en_i est certain.*
Jean thinks that [Marie fell over]_i. Pierre is sure of it_i.

1. Background theoretical notions

1.3. Events & containers

- 1.3.1. Events : Donald Davidson (1967)
 - have spatio-temporal properties
 - causal properties = imply a change
 - existentially quantified variable in logical form
 - sound theoretical basis for treating events as individuals available for anaphoric reference
 - important : distinguish *event verbs* from *stative verbs* (no change, no distinct start or finish)
- In language

Event

Max **eats** the apple

Max **goes skiing**

Max **climbed** Everest

State

Max **knows** the apple is rotten

Max **enjoys** skiing

Max **has** some good hiking boots

1. Background theoretical notions

1.3. Events & containers

- 1.3.2. Containers : Z. Vendler (1957), N. Asher (1993)
- predicative context which requires the presence of a certain type of entity (proposition, fact, event, situation, state etc.)

Propositional

to believe that X
to think that X
to imagine that X
X to be false

Factual

to know that X
to be true that X
X to be true
X to be a fact

Event

X to happen
X to take place
X to occur
to witness X

1. Background theoretical notions

1.4. Event containers in French

- Subject event containers

- subcategorize an event subject, in nominal or pronominal form
- *arriver, se passer, se produire* = to happen/occur
- avoir lieu* = to take place

7) [*La chute du mur de Berlin*] a eu lieu en 1989.
[*The fall of the Berlin Wall*] took place in 1989.

8) [*Le mur de Berlin est tombé*], **Ça**, a eu lieu en 1989.
[*The Berlin Wall fell*], **That**, took place in 1989.

- Object event containers

- subcategorize an event object or oblique object
- *rater, manquer* = to miss
- assister à* = to be (present) at, to attend
- être témoin de* = to witness

9) *Paul a assisté à* [*la chute du mur de Berlin*].
Paul was present at [*the fall of the Berlin Wall*].

10) [*Le mur de Berlin est tombé en 1989*], *Paul a assisté à* **ça**,
[*The Berlin Wall fell in 1989*], *Paul was present at* **that**.

2. Linguistic data

- How to interpret my examples

event verb

John eats an apple

stative verb

John knows Mary

event container

The fight took place this morning

anaphoric demonstrative

Cela,
That,

[*antecedent*];

[*John eats an apple*];

- Method

- create a situation which enforces anaphoric reference to an event and test...

...judgment of naturalness

...which antecedent is preferred for the demonstrative

2. Linguistic data

- 2.1 Counterfactual conditionals

- “*Si*” (if) followed by imperfect & conditional.
- Logical antecedent and consequent are false or hypothetical

11) *Si la France gagnait, on irait danser dans la rue.*
If France won we'd go and dance in the street.

- Anaphoric Reference

12) *Si [la France gagnait, on irait danser dans la rue], **C'** est arrivé en '98.*
*If [France won, we'd go and dance in the street], **That**, happened in '98.*

- in 12) logical antecedent (event) and consequent (event) are indissociable, anaphoric reference possible, but demonstrative **c'** must refer to both
- causal relationship

2. Linguistic data

• 2.1 Counterfactual conditionals

13) Si Max **savait** lire, [Léa lui **offrirait** un livre],. Pourtant **C'**, est arrivé alors qu'il est analphabète.

If Max **knew** how to read, [Léa would **give** him a book],. **That**, happened nonetheless even though he's illiterate.

- in 13) logical antecedent contains a state “**savait** lire” (“**knew** how to read”)
- the second sentence denies the logical antecedent

14) Si [Léa lui **rendait visite**], Max **serait** content. **C'**, est arrivé hier et il était ravi.

If [Léa **came to visit** him], Max would **be** happy. **That**, happened yesterday and he was delighted.

- in 14) logical consequent contains a state “**serait** content” (“**would be** happy”)
- the second sentence affirms the consequent
- anaphoric reference to the event is possible

2. Linguistic data

- 2.2 Coordination

- et, mais, virgule... (and, but, comma...)

15) *Les manifestants se sont rassemblés, le syndicat a appelé à la grève et le patron a fait un discours.*

The protesters met up, the union called for a strike and the boss made a speech.

- Anaphoric Reference

16) [*Les manifestants se sont rassemblés, le syndicat a appelé à la grève et le patron a fait un discours*]_i. Jean a assisté à ça_i.

[*The protesters met up, the union called for a strike and the boss made a speech*]_i. John was present at that_i.

- coordinated events form a single antecedent

2. Linguistic data

- 2.3 Subordinate complementizer phrases

- Introduced by complementizer “que” (that)

- subject : *Que Kennedy ait été assassiné a choqué tout le monde.*
That Kennedy was assassinated shocked everyone.

- direct object : *Paul sait que Pierre arrivera en retard.*
Paul knows (that) Pierre will come late.

- oblique object : *Le peuple s'attendait à ce que le mur tombe.*
The people expected the wall to come down.

- Anaphoric Reference

17) *Que [Kennedy **ait été assassiné**]_i, **était un gros choc**. Max a raté ça_i.*
*That [Kennedy **was assassinated**]_i, **was a big shock**. Max missed that_i.*

18) *Paul **sait** que [Pierre **arrivera** en retard]_i, **Cela**_i arrive souvent.*
*Paul **knows** that [Pierre **will come** late]_i, **That**_i often happens.*

19) *Le peuple **s'attendait à** ce que [le mur **tombe**]_i, On a tous été témoin de
cela_i.*
*The people **expected** [the wall **to come down**]_i, We all witnessed **that**_i.*

2. Linguistic data

- 2.4 Relative clauses

- introduced by relative pronoun *que, qui, où* (*which, who, where...*)
- may contain event descriptions

L'homme_i qui [t_i a tué Kennedy]...

The man_i who [t_i killed Kennedy]...

- Anaphoric Reference

20) # *L'homme_i qui [t_i a tué Kennedy]_j aime la bière. C'_jest arrivé en 1963.*
The man_i who [t_i killed Kennedy]_j likes beer. That_j happened in 1963.

- barrier for anaphoric reference in subject relative

21) *Paul connaît l'homme_i qui [t_i a tué Kennedy]_j. C'_jest arrivé en 1963.*
Paul knows the man_i who [t_i killed Kennedy]_j. That_j happened in 1963.

- no barrier for object relative

2. Linguistic data

- Subordinates & Relatives

- Pronoun nested in relative or subordinate clause cannot refer to matrix event

22) # [Max *est allé* à l'endroit où c_i *est arrivé*]_i.
[Max *went* to the place where ***that***_i happened]_i.

23) # [Max *a dit* que Marie *a été témoin de cela*]_i.
[Max *said* that Mary witnessed ***that***_i]_i.

- Are there other constraints similar to this obvious one?
- Difficult to find examples of event anaphora which are intraphrastic
- Carried out tests on other types of abstract entities...
 - C-command from Reinhart (1983)
- Results not conclusive...
 - Often same structural conditions for acceptable anaphoric reference and unacceptable

3. Conclusion

- *What indicates anaphoric reference to an event?*
 - Event verb
 - Neuter demonstrative pronoun = sentential antecedent in FR
 - Event containers, which constrain reference of anaphoric demonstrative pronouns
- *What constraints exist on the anaphoric relation?*
 - Some constructions impose a collective reading of an event antecedent (counterfactuals & coordination)
 - These constructions present few constraints or barriers to *interphrastic* anaphoric reference to events (subject relative)
 - Impossibility of *intraphrastic* event anaphora (subordinate, relative)
- Future leads :
 - tense, quantification, negation, modality
 - complement this data with information on discourse structure
 - adopt a discourse formalism designed to cope with abstract antecedents (e.g. SDRT (Asher 1993)), BUT is this “implementable”?
 - theory of salience for neuter demonstratives