Mapping Parameters of Meaning

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Edited by

Martine Sekali and Anne Trévise

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CHAPTER ONE

MAPPING FILTERS AND PARAMETERS OF MEANING: ISSUES AND TOOLS FOR INTERFACE ANALYSES OF MEANING CONSTRUCTION

MARTINE SEKALI AND ANNE TRÉVISE

Introduction

Lexical and grammatical polysemy are well know phenomena in natural languages, and very few morphemes, if any at all, can be considered univocal, *i.e.* relating to a single, stable referential value, and non context-dependent. That the meaning of utterances should be construed in context seems an obvious fact, but even smaller units such as grammatical inflections, prepositions, conjunctions or even a simple noun such as *table*, take on different semantic values according to their context of use. The conjunctions *since*, *for*, *as*, for instance, may instruct a causal or a temporal interpretation depending on their interaction with a number of other linguistic markers such as, in particular, tense and aspects on the verbs in the combined clauses (Sekali 1992). A description of linguistic signs which would merely make a list of all the meanings that can be construed by the use of these signs can thus never give access to the actual process of meaning construction to which each sign specifically contributes.

In France, cognitive-based research in formal linguistics, and in particular Culioli's *Théorie des Opérations Prédicatives et Énonciatives* (Culioli 1991 and 1995) have yielded rather powerful tools for the description of the *core operations* of linguistic markers, *i.e.* the specific, abstract and invariable contribution of each marker to the process of meaning construction. Since the sixties, a large number of studies have been carried out on a variety of lexical and grammatical markers in many

languages to try and trace the core operations marked by those linguistic signs through all the referential values they can potentially endorse.

Yet from these abstract core operations, the process of meaning construction, or semantic representation, can only be analysed in the context of its actual production. It is the nature of this link between core operations and actual meaning through variable contexts which remains to be formalised and defined. Saying that the meaning of linguistic signs is context dependent is one thing, but is it possible to formalize this dependence? What exactly do we mean by "context"? Which specific items of language (or filters) interact with the markers' core operations (in the way that variables interact with functions) to create interpretable meaning? What is the nature of this cooperation between linguistic signs in the process of meaning construction? Which levels (or dimensions) of language (the lexicon, syntax, grammar, prosody, discourse, etc.) are to be taken into account in an attempt to map parameters of meaning? How autonomous are these levels anyway? These questions are at the core of the debate about the linguistic analysis of meaning construction and interpretation.

Mapping parameters of meaning construction is a twofold process. It involves an analysis of the filters of meaning in various contexts, and a formalization of the constant parameters which, within each specific linguistic marker, instruct the targeting of these filters.

I. Filtering meaning

The first aspect of such an approach thus implies investigating how meaning is gradually elaborated in the dynamic interaction of linguistic markers in real corpora. Meaning is to be understood here as a set of referential values, a kind of semantic precipitate, resulting from the synergetic co-operation of these markers. Mapping filters of meaning therefore implies examining the various contextual or situational filters through which linguistic operators are processed. The distinction between context and situation is important here. By *context* we mean the immediate linguistic context (or co-text) of a particular marker, taking the utterance (or a larger discourse unit) as a basis. Context thus pertains to what is shaped within and by language. Conversely, by *situation* we mean what is given in the extra-linguistic circumstances of discourse. As Franckel (2006) puts it, "meaning occurs at the intersection of the two spheres of language and the real world"[1].

[1] Our translation.

This contextual filtering process can be exemplified in the way the two occurrences of the verb *run* construe different semantic representations in the following short excerpt:

> I *ran into him* late one morning as he bought a paper from the stall outside the Prince of Wales on the corner of Cold Harbour Lane. A couple of years ago the man *who ran this stall* had handed Freddie his paper with the words: […]. (Geoff Dyer, 1989. *The Colour of Memory*, pp. 175-176)

In both occurrences the syntactic subject refers to a human being (*I; the man*) and the value of the preterit is understood as defining temporal disconnection rather than modal disconnection, due to the absence of any contextual filters marking unreality such as for instance *If I ran, suppose I ran, imagine I ran* (Trévise 1994).

However the syntactic constructions and the context establish different types of telicity (Trévise 1996) for the event: *run into* + object, without any temporal marker of repetition in its vicinity, is understood as referring to a unique event, and the prepositional phrase *into him* constructs the end boundary of the process, the end of the event. The translation into French would thus give a *passé simple.* The event, in Vendler's terms (1957), is thus construed as a non recurring "achievement" and not as an unbounded activity.

As for the second occurrence of *run*, it introduces the noun phrase *this stall* as a direct object. In our shared knowledge of the world, *run a stall* is seen as an activity. No temporal determination gives any end-boundary to the event. With *who ran this stall,* reference is made to a property of the man in question. A paradigmatic opposition can thus be made with the imperfective form *who was running this stall* which would add a transitory—and more agentive—value to the activity as opposed to the perfective one. In French the *imparfait* would then be used.

This example implies that a core value of the preterit is established (disconnection—either temporal or modal), which triggers temporal or modal referential values depending on context, but also that the lexeme *run* includes in its core meaning the possibility of being a noun or a verb, and of being used in different constructions with different referential values. Defining such a core value is not easy since it has to allow for the different values filtered in the different syntactic or semantic contexts. This is what is called *a schematic form* in Culiolian terms, although "operating schema" would probably be a more appropriate term since the given schema gives orders as to how the filters should apply in a given syntactic and semantic context. The semantic characteristics implied are

abstract, and need to be specified further in very complex ways. For instance the abstract definition of *run* should allow for the two referential values exemplified here, among all the other values it can have as a noun or as a verb (de Vogüé et Paillard 1997).

Remarkably, the analysis of the semantic filtering process, which is necessarily context-dependent, also shows regularity across corpora and contexts, so that the dependence of linguistic forms on context is reciprocal. Not only do specific contexts select specific forms, but specific forms also select specific contexts, and context—which itself is a combination of linguistic forms—is therefore both external to the linguistic markers and an integral part of their core operations. Trévise (this volume) thus shows for example that the adverbial constructions *now and then* and *every now and then* regularly appear in different contexts because their respective core operations target the construction of different types of referential values.

II. From filters to parameters of meaning

Within a particular language system, the possibility for a linguistic marker's core operation to be filtered through a specific set of other markers is not an entirely open phenomenon. Each marker can be considered as the trace of a core (invariant) operation, but also as containing its own system of variance, *i.e.* a closed paradigm of other operations it can interact with in order to construe specific representations (see de Vogüé et Paillard 1997 and de Vogüé (in press) on the 'integrative capacity' of linguistic operations). This paradigm is what we call *parameters* here. To map parameters of meaning is to include in the description of a marker's stable properties a definition of its variation potential.

This approach to linguistics, which goes from the observation of contextual and situational *filters* to the formalization of *parameters,* and from non context-dependent *core operations* to *schematic forms* incorporating the meaning potentiality of linguistic signs, raises important methodological issues and requires new tools for researchers to study linguistic interfaces.

III. Meaning as a dynamic and multi-dimensional construct: towards a study of linguistic interfaces

Meaning is considered here as a linguistic construct resulting from a dynamic process of elaboration in discourse. The difficulty for linguists is

to study it in its moving and multi-dimensional aspect, and to be able to grasp it in the contact zones of its emergence.

The first contact zone pertains to the necessary interaction of linguistic signs—and their schematic forms—in utterances and discourse. It is possible to describe, for example, the constant inter-mobilization of nominal and verbal determination to convey a specific or generic value to a noun, or the incidence of verbs' lexical aspects on their grammatical determination and vice-versa. Meaning thus emerges at the interface between linguistic operations.

But meaning also emerges at the interface between several levels (or dimensions) of language. Syntax, grammar, prosody, discourse organization, subjective and situational filters are not autonomous systems; on the contrary, they systematically converge in the process of meaning construction. Conjunctions of subordination and coordination, for example, are not classified in the same way when considered at the levels of syntax or semantics, so that the very same conjunction *and* can be analyzed as marking syntactic coordination but semantic subordination in utterances such as *Another step and I fire!* (pseudo-conditional values) or *He fell ill and died* (cause and temporal sequence). As shown by Sekali (2011), mapping the parameters of relational meaning in complex sentences is thus better analyzed at the interface between the syntactic, semantic and discursive dimensions.

Taking into account this multi-dimensional aspect of meaning construction is a challenge; it requires multi-dimensional tools for its analysis, as well as theoretical frameworks which do not set the various dimensions of language in any hierarchy. In linguistic theory, the Culiolian model described above—especially the most recent trend and the study of schematic forms—is rather powerful in the analysis of multidimensional interface zones. Other related theories should also be of great interest to the parameter-mapping approach. In particular, cognitive grammar and construction grammar (*e.g.* Goldberg 1995), which does not separate lexical from grammatical units, also offers interesting tools at that interface between the lexicon, grammar and syntax. Recent theories of instructional grammar (Victorri et Fuchs 1996, Col et Victorri 2007) are also attempts at formalizing the inscription of variability in the description of linguistic markers, through a process of convocation / evocation. In addition to those frameworks, discourse analysis and pragmatics (see in particular Polanyi 1988, Asher and Vieu 2005) can also be of significant help in providing tools for the analysis of contextual and situational filters of meaning. The organization of linguistic units in larger discourse units at the intersection with the extra-linguistic world also affects the semantic

potential of micro-linguistic units, and, as such, should in some way be included among the parameters of their schematic form. In particular, inter-subjective relations and subjective endorsement of discourse, marked by a variety of linguistic operators, play an important part in the construction of referential values.

Clearly, because meaning is the result of a dynamic and multi-dimensional process, linguistic analysis of meaning construction should also be dynamic and multi-dimensional, *i.e.* cross-theoretical and equipped with interface tools for description. Such interface meta-linguistic tools are still to be found, and this challenge is at the heart of modern debate on linguistic theory. In any case, collective work is called for, and definitely worthwhile, in this attempt to map parameters of meaning, provided that we agree that the viewpoint taken to consider an object—here meaning—does not transform the object, but that the conjunction of different viewpoints makes it more visible in relief, in the manner of a semantic hologram.

In France, the GReG (*Groupe de Réflexion sur les Grammaires*) is a linguistics research team based at the University of Paris Ouest Nanterre, which aims at such collective interface work on meaning construction.

All chapters in the present volume originate from presentations given at the second GReG P.L.S. (*Paramétrer Le Sens*) Conference in 2010 entitled "Mapping parameters of meaning: filters, filtering process and meaning construction".

Organization of the book

The book is organized in three parts, corresponding to some of the major fields in language research today: (I) core operations and contextual parameters, (II) semantics and cognition and (III) language contacts and meaning construction.

The contributions encompass very different data analyzed with the purpose of studying the construction of meaning in context. They do not stem from a single theoretical frame but present different viewpoints on this complex subject.

I. Core operations and contextual parameters

In the first part of the book, four chapters tackle the construction of meaning in context, with an attempt at defining stable properties of linguistic signs in English (core operations) and the contextual parameters they interact with to build particular semantic values. All chapters

demonstrate that linguistic systems are necessarily permeated with subjective and inter-subjective representations. The English language is shown as systematic, yet even though most markers (prepositions for instance) can yield many different semantic values, the authors also show that markers have some invariant core meanings and that syntax, semantics and pragmatics cannot be viewed separately in their analysis. A linguistic system is thus necessarily an open system, since meaning occurs at the very intersection of language and the "real" extra-linguistic world, and originates in the subjects' viewpoints.

In Chapter two, Anne Trévise raises the question of qualitative filters in the construction of meaning in English texts, using the theoretical tools of Culioli's *Théorie des Opérations Prédicatives et Énonciatives*. Two sets of linguistic markers are analyzed showing two kinds of what the author calls "linguistic violence" at play in the construction of subjective nuances: (i) the violence of the linguistic system itself, which imposes specific forms to speakers (for instance *now and then vs. every now and then*) depending on the factual or neutral, quantitative *vs.* valuation-oriented, qualitative contexts, without the speakers being aware of such 'rules'; (ii) the violence which is sometimes imposed by the speaker on the linguistic system and distorts it. Trévise studies the latter through an analysis of the aspect-temporal system—in particular the use of the present perfect—with examples of utterances where the speaker's subjectivity directs a representation of the moment of utterance as still belonging to past time. The uncommon, yet authentic use of the present perfect with *ago* is also shown to construe specific meanings, implying that qualitative subjective properties cannot but violate some of the linguistic rules of a system which has no means of expressing such subjective representations otherwise.

In Chapter three, Lionel Dufaye analyzes the two different aspectual values of *away*: (i) telic, as in *The bruises went away within a couple of days*—where the grammatical subject refers to the patient of the process and (ii) atelic, as in *I typed away for eight hours at a stretch*—where the subject argument refers to the agent. He then draws a parallel between the thematic roles of the arguments and the spatial values of *away*, the agent being the starting point of the process and the patient its end-point. It is the context which selects either the closed / patient boundary (telic value) or the open / agent boundary (atelic value). The author thus suggests that the seemingly unrelated values, and apparent polysemy, of *away,* are to be re-considered: both aspectual uses of *away* can be derived from its core spatial configuration.

Valérie Bourdier also deals with the semantics of prepositions in their context of use. In Chapter four, her examples illustrate cases of use *vs.* non-use of a preposition in front of the complementizer *whether* following noun- or verb- complements, as in *they pondered whether… vs. on / over / about whether …* or in *the doubts over whether… vs. the doubts whether.…* The two different constructions can be explained by paying attention to contextual parameters. The nature of the context in which the form appears—beginning of an article introducing an issue *vs.* backward summary for instance— proves to be highly relevant to the occurrence of one or the other of the two forms. In addition to that, Bourdier argues that the different prepositions used (*over*, *on* and *about*) do not lead to the same meanings, and that there are close affinities between the semantics of the head-noun, the use or non-use of a preposition, the *wh-* word and the intended meaning purpose of the speaker.

Macrostructures, or rather larger contextual parameters, are also at stake in Fiona Rossette's study in Chapter five. The author addresses the use of the conjunction *and* in sentence-initial position, which she claims to be perfectly acceptable when it highlights the macro-structure of a text. She also shows that the conjunction plays an important part in inter-personal positioning—or inter-subjectivity—specifically when *and* occurs at the beginning of turns in conversation, in which case it construes a qualification of the following clause as obvious for the speaker.

All these studies are thus concerned with the identification of the contextual filters and parameters involved in meaning construction. Observing a variety of contexts for a specific form, the authors try to determine which other markers or forms in the preceding or following contexts must be taken into account to explain the different values which are filtered by the forms under scrutiny. All the chapters emphasize the importance of subjectivity and inter-subjectivity, and the evaluative nuances that are systematically brought about by the different forms which combine to create meaning. The linguistic system allows for such subjective representations, even though the speakers are far from being aware of them. Speakers do not actually "choose" one marker or construction as opposed to another. It is the system which imposes these markers with their core operations and potential semantic values. Only through the study of corpora can light be shed on the functioning of a given system. In this first part of the book, the issue is thus raised of how a rule-constrained linguistic system is systematically interwoven with the speaker's subjectivity, and this without the speaker having any conscious awareness of such a process.

II. Semantics and cognition

The second part of the book gathers two studies relating to the difficult problem of how the mind retrieves meaning through limited, and sometimes restricted, means. Restriction can be claimed explicitly, as is the case in short text-messages sent through cellular phones. Yet isn't restriction always the case in symbolic representation? Are the cognitive processes at work in semantic recognition the same when one compares the linearity of linguistic representation to the two-dimensional nature of figurative paintings, both systems setting about to represent the "real world", whatever the type of inter-subjectivity implied or the arbitrariness of the signs used?

In Chapter six, Greta Komur-Thilloy explores the phenomenon of ellipsis in the writing and understanding of text-messages (Short Message Service (SMS)), a type of rhetorical discourse which is halfway between the epistolary genre and oral conversation. The interpersonal exchanges imply complicity and thus a large amount of shared knowledge. No context is needed for the communication to be thought successful. The chapter examines the various types of ellipses used in text messaging, both at the morphemic and syntactic levels. The author then studies the cognitive processes at work in this particular type of written communication, which is achieved—or thought to be achieved—with fewer markers than those found in "normal" conversation.

Cognition, and more precisely the representation of the "real world" through symbolic systems, is also tackled in Chapter seven —at a more general level of perception and inter-subjectivity—by Séverine Letalleur. The author compares the construction of spatio-temporal meaning in linear strings of words to that construed in two-dimensional figurative paintings. The study resorts to phenomenology, semiotics, philosophy, art history and linguistics to cross-examine words and Renaissance paintings in their building of perspective and of spatio-temporal properties through two different types of inter-subjectivity.

III. Language contact and meaning construction

Finally, the third part of the book gathers studies which consider the emergence of meaning at the interface between different language systems. Language contact is envisaged here as a theoretical tool and as a practical fact. On the one hand, contrastive approaches to language-specific means of expressing the same semantic notions can be thought to throw some light on cross-linguistic semantic mapping processes. On the

other hand, contact zones observed in code-switching by bilinguals or diglossic writings can also offer a magnifying glass for linguists who are interested in the complex and multi-dimensional process of meaning construction. Such a wide range of phenomena—which could also have included second language acquisition—cannot but raise the question of the possibility of translation, and the nature of the dynamic and reciprocal links between language and thought. Can different languages encode exactly the same "meaning", or are there expressive differences (Jackendoff 1996), or specific expressions of the "real world", along the lines of a Sapir-Whorf hypothesis? What happens when subjects are bilingual? How do bilingual writers manage to transpose one linguistic representation of the world to another?

In other words is the process of meaning construction language specific or cross-linguistic? Are there invariant cross-linguistic processes in the way languages organize grammatical categories to express supposedly universal cognitive notions such as for instance time and aspect, modality or determination?

In Chapter eight, Agnès Leroux compares the ways English and French can both encode cause with the time subordinator *après* and *after*. The logical links between time sequence and cause can be seen as a cross-linguistic cognitive process, and it seems only natural that time conjunctions should be used to express cause to effect relations. But corpora of translated and non translated newspaper articles show that English and French linguistic systems do not express it in the same manner: while causal *after* remains close to time sequence, causal *après* endorses more subjective values.

In Chapter nine, Charles Brasart investigates authentic inter-subjective code-switching in conversations by perfectly bilingual French-English and German-English speakers and studies the reasons for the switches in the production of "efficient" meaning. The author gives a detailed account of how, in bilingual discourse, the two languages seem to be organized in cognitive, semantic or lexical networks which often overrule language-specific syntactic constraints in order to better serve the intended meaning. Both means of representing the "real world" seem to contribute to meaning, and syntax is then somewhat distorted resulting in "mixed" morpho-syntactic constructions.

Diglossic literature in English reveals yet another type of bilingualism which also exhibits phenomena of conflicting adjustments, especially when English is represented as a foreign language. In the final chapter of the book, Flore Coulouma and Agnès Muller consider cases of diglossia to demonstrate the extent to which meaning can be stretched along different

directions. It can be destabilized, or subverted; it can drift or even altogether switch from one meaning to another, imposing a very dynamic and reflexive reading. Their analysis is based on the study of two novels: (i) *Things Fall Apart*, by Chinua Achebe, is set in pre-colonial Nigeria, a non-English speaking world described in English but "haunted" by the paradoxically absent Ibo language; (ii) Michael Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union,* offers another case of ambiguous diglossia where the narrative is written in English but aims at representing reality as the Yiddish language does.

This final study, which gives a very vivid account of the way literary diglossia can voluntarily "unsettle" the semantic mapping process, actually presents a reflexive recapitulation of the multi-leveled parameters and filters involved in producing and interpreting meaning.

Conclusion

The purpose of this introductory chapter was to provide a context for, and an overview of the contents of the present volume. It was also meant to raise a certain number of central issues. One of them is the constant play between the invariant core operations which are marked by linguistic forms and the variability of the semantic values they can potentially represent. Despite the apparent polysemy of linguistic forms, ambiguities are usually avoided thanks to contextual and situational filters. The difficulty is then to define and incorporate semantic variability in the description of linguistic forms, at the interface between syntax, semantics and pragmatics.

Mapping parameters of meaning is thus an attempt at formalizing this highly adjustable, dynamic, and multidimensional aspect of meaning construction in natural languages.

Another issue raised in this volume is the question of how the linguistic and extra-linguistic spheres intersect. Since the extra-linguistic sphere of the "real world" also includes subjective and inter-subjective positioning, how do linguistic systems integrate these subjective components to elaborate and modify meaning? The malleability of linguistic systems is an interesting phenomenon, which requires, if one is to try and understand the processes of meaning construction and re-construction, very close observation of its gradual elaboration, adjustments and drifts, in real corpora.

Logically, this also leads to a reflection on the cognitive mechanisms at work in language production and interpretation, and their relation to cognitive processes involved in perception.

The linguist's task is far more difficult than the speaker's: the latter does all this practically without being aware of what the former finds so difficult to understand, let alone to describe…

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PART I

CORE OPERATIONS AND CONTEXTUAL PARAMETERS

CHAPTER TWO

SOME QUALITATIVE FILTERS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING

ANNE TRÉVISE

Introduction[1]

Linguistic systems are necessarily open systems because they are symbolic representations at the intersection of the "real" extra-linguistic world and of individual subjectivities. How can this intersection of systematic rules and subjectivity be appraised?

This chapter will deal with linguistic phenomena where the relative weights of the English system and of subjectivity can be approached. First I will study examples that illustrate how the system imposes different markers for different evaluative contexts. Indeed, language "speaks by itself" (*die Sprache spricht*, in Heidegger's terms): the paradigmatic oppositions of the system apply, expressing evaluative nuances, most of the time without any awareness on the part of the subject. Subjectivity and omnipresent valuations are revealed by the markers that are used systematically. These markers betray the subjects' representation of the world or of events in the dynamic construction of meaning.

But subjectivity can go further in this balance of powers: sometimes, when a given system—English for instance—lacks the means to express certain fine subjective nuances or distinctions, it can be distorted or even violated. It thus seems that constraints can go both ways. The complex relations between a system and its use by subjects are admittedly the crux of literature or psychoanalysis, in which subjective viewpoints are essential. But these relations are always at play in any construction of meaning.

[1] I wish to thank Agnès Muller for her careful reading of an earlier version of this chapter.

A linguistic description should take into account this interplay between a system and subjectivities and try to find the theoretical tools to describe it. Culioli's *Théorie des Opérations Prédicatives et Énonciatives* (Culioli 1999) provides rather powerful tools to describe such phenomena because it allows descriptions to combine quantitative *vs.* qualitative location components. A speaker's utterances are anchored in a situation and they are described as displaying two components: one is quantitative, temporal, relative to the location of represented events in time, and one is qualitative, pertaining to subjective, inter-subjective and valuating parameters. Utterances can thus "simply" refer to events located and validated in time, but most of the time they necessarily include viewpoints and subjective valuations, denote inter-subjectivity, or attribute qualitative properties. Language clearly does refer to the extra-linguistic world, but it does so *via* a subject whose personal representation of the world and of him / herself unavoidably characterizes and valuates events according to social and personal viewpoints. Thus any linguistic system is constrained by its powerful shared code and systematic rules, but also by subjectivities at play in inter-subjectivity.

Moreover, in actual interaction, subjects have a representation—more or less correct—of how their interlocutors will receive what they are saying according to their own subjectivities. They keep adjusting their intended meaning to this inter-personal process, thus often avoiding misunderstandings or ambiguities which are part and parcel of the referential power of language.

Some of these constraints in the construction of meaning, at the intersection of the two spheres of language and (inter-) subjectivity are precisely what will be dealt with here. Since speakers are mostly unaware of all these constraints, it would be a mistake to refer to their "choices" of markers or syntax when they speak: corpora are needed to analyze the actual uses of passives *vs.* active forms for instance, of a present perfect *vs.* a preterite, of *be* + *-ing,* of an article *vs*. no article or of expressions like *now and then vs. every now and then*, not to mention the cohesive linear ordering of discourse. The reason why corpora need to be analyzed to have access to these phenomena is that subjects are not aware of the way their subjectivity permeates the way they speak. They are not aware either of the linguistic rules at play, whether respected or distorted and, when asked about forms, they regularly state normative and consequently very often false meta-linguistic representations, even though reflexivity and meta-linguistic activity are part of language activity.

I will exemplify two types of constraints, or violence: (i) the violence of the linguistic system itself, which imposes specific forms to speakers

(here *now and then vs. every now and then*), (ii) the violence which is sometimes imposed by the speaker onto the aspect-temporal system of English. The latter will be exemplified by two sets of utterances: one where the speaker's subjectivity gives a representation of the moment of utterance as still belonging to past time. It is then necessary to refer to the context to lift the ambiguities or even the contradictions raised by the use of the present perfect with or without prepositional phrases introduced by *for*. The other set of examples will show how the uncommon yet authentic use of the present perfect with a determination in *ago* construes specific qualitative meanings which could not be expressed otherwise. These examples will show that subjective properties sometimes cannot but violate some of the linguistic rules of a system if they are to express subjective nuances that the system cannot express.

I. The violence of the system: how evaluative filters trigger *now and then* or *every now and then*

Now and then and *every now and then* are generally described in dictionaries as synonymous. However their respective use in context seems to be totally constrained by the English system which deals with the evaluative filters brought about by different contexts (Trévise 2006). The following examples are all taken from the *British National Corpus*.

When the context is simply quantitative, *i.e.* when "normal", expected, factual periodicity is expressed, *now and then* is generally used:

(1) Science has been accused, **now and then**, of leaving no space for religion. (ABE 2751) [2]

(2) We do well to remember that, after all the violence that humans had created on the earth, God surveyed the debris and said 'he was sorry he made man' (Gen.6:7). It is a point of view for which **now and then** I have some sympathy. (B04 887)

Now and then is used here in descriptions or factual considerations: science is opposed to religion and recurrent feelings in front of violence are expressed.

In the two following examples *now and then* and *every now and then* are used to determine the same expression *stop to look in shop windows* but the contexts reveal clear differences:

[2] In all examples I have underlined the elements of the context that contribute to a quantitative *vs.* a qualitative meaning construction.

(3) Alnwick had a relaxed air this evening that was a complete contrast to the bustle that prevailed during the day. Couples of all ages strolled leisurely along, stopping **now and then** to look in shop windows. (E12)

(4) A man in a doorway across the road caught her eye. He looked too uninterested, and when he saw her watching him he avoided her eyes. Pretty certain this must be the man, Paige set off down the street, stopping **every now and then** to look in shop windows and cast surreptitious glances backwards. (JY8 319)

Now and then is used in (3) and *every now and then* in (4). In (3), the situation is seen as normal, expected, with people enjoying walking in the streets and looking at shop windows. In (4), the behavior is unexpected, not "normal". The woman feels threatened and is certainly not simply enjoying window shopping. The context clearly expresses negative evaluative elements.

The BNC systematically reveals that *now and then* is used in contexts of factual regularity whereas *every now and then* is nearly only used in evaluative contexts, where the recurrent events are seen as unexpected, erratic, coloured negatively in terms of norms generally admitted.

This insistence on the erratic quality of the events described can paradoxically lead to nuances where their importance is toned down and where they are seen as not as frequent as it seems after all as in (5)-(8):

(5) "I still had nightmares about it," said William, "well into my teens**.** Still do, sometimes, **every now and then**." Preston looked at him and wondered if they were the same nightmares he had. They'd be worse, probably. William always went that step further into life's nightmares [...]. (F9C 3262)

(6) Splurge-weed grows as a set of straggling, amorphous branches in the sea. **Every now and then** branches break off and drift away. These breakages can occur anywhere in the plants, and the fragments can be large or small. As with cuttings in a garden, they are capable of growing just like the original plant. This shedding of parts is the species's method of reproducing. (ARR 1604)

(7) Let us suppose that **every now and then**, perhaps every million atoms or so, slight irregularities occur. (CEG 439*)*

(8) What Taylor suggested was that **every now and then**, but very rarely, a sheet of atoms is not complete. (CEG 442)

Not only are corpora necessary to analyze such phenomena but occurrences are to be considered in rather large contexts if the system of oppositions is to be fully described. The balance between the weights of quantitative *vs.* qualitative values can then be appraised. In example (9) *every now and then* is used to underline the exceptional quality of the behavior described:

(9) When I was 15 I was in a depressed state and I thought, I'll do these last paintings about the end of the world and then I'll end it. So I go into these depressions **every now and then**, but I think the general tone of the work is about humanity struggling against all odds. (CFL 474)

In (9) the conjunction *but*[3] following *every now and then,* introduces the correction implying: "this is not normal, you shouldn't pay too much attention". The recurrence of the depressed states is toned down. In (10) which describes events in Belfast, the marker *but* is also used to underline the disconnection between what is normal, and thus expected, and what is absolutely awful but fortunately rather rare:

(10) This is what living here's about. People will tell you there's normality here and there is, but **every now and then** an abnormal thing happens which is quite horrific. The city then becomes a collapsed face, the perspectives will change. (G21 220)

On the contrary, in (11), with *now and then*, there is no toning down:

(11) The best solution, I have found, is to throw them down, one by one, on to the horses' deep bed of wood-chips, off which they almost always bounce unscathed. In spite of these hazards, I generally visit the wall-nest every two or three days; but **now and then**, I have to admit, it escapes my attention. (A5K 142)

The speaker does not want to minimize his shortcomings: he admits them (*I have to admit*). *Every now and then* would not seem to be possible in this context because it would insist on the rarity of the events and would sound apologetic whereas here the speaker owns up and only states facts.

These examples show that *now and then* and *every now and then* are not exact synonyms. They are used in different types of contexts to express the different weights of quantitative *vs.* qualitative values. Whereas *now and then* expresses quantitative periodicity, *i.e.* a periodicity

[3] In the BNC, *but* precedes 10% of the occurrences of *every now and then* and only 6.4% of the occurrences of *now and then*.

established on the temporal axis, with *every now and then* periodicity is no longer the main stake; even if events are described as recurring, qualitative values of unexpectedness or of justification and toning down are dominant. This can even paradoxically lead to imply that the events in question are rare or at least not that frequent.

The English system possesses the means of opposing these two types of recurrence and of integrating subjectivity by imposing *every now and then* in cases where evaluative nuances are at play, signaling either that subjects have internalized social norms or else that they are expressing personal judgments. These two kinds of social or personal subjectivity are revealed through the markers they use, or rather by the way the system makes them speak, without any awareness on their part.

This paradigmatic opposition shows the need for meta-linguistic tools which can describe such phenomena. In A. Culioli's *Théorie des Opérations Prédicatives et Énonciatives,* utterances are described as having an "enunciative" origin where two components combine and can have different weights: the quantitative component T, which pertains to the temporal axis, and the subjective component S, from which stem evaluative nuances and inter-subjectivity. The system imposes constraints in the choices of markers but it does so according to subjective symbolic representations. Such tools are useful to explain numerous phenomena, be it for instance the different values of modal auxiliaries (Gilbert 2001, Deschamps 2001, Bourdier 2008), or the two values of *since, while* or *when* according to whether they help determine temporal quantitative values or are used in inter-subjective argumentation (Sekali 1991, Wyld 2001).

The same two components will be used to describe the second set of examples, in which a different type of violence is exemplified.

II. Subjective violence imposed on the linguistic system

There are cases where the limits of the English system seem to be reached, where the system gives way to ambiguities or even apparent contradictions: this is sometimes due to the weight of the subjective component.

I will deal here first with some representations of the moment of utterance and then with the occasional use of the present perfect with determinations using *ago*. In both cases temporal and thus quantitative specifications are back grounded to allow qualitative evaluative specifications to emerge.

II.1.The moment of utterance: a malleable and adjustable representation

Concerning the opposition between the qualitative value of the present perfect and the temporal disconnection marked by the preterite, oppositions such as (12a) and (12b) are well known (Dubos 1990):

(12a) Once I met him on the bus.
(12b) I have met him once.

In (12a) *once* can occur at the beginning of the sentence. It is used with a preterite and specifies a temporal value of disconnection, locating the event as unique on the time-space axis. (12a) would be followed by more specific information about the encounter. In (12b) *once* is post-posed and no longer has a temporal meaning because of the present perfect: it says something about the quality of the knowledge. The following utterance could well be *I hardly know him*. The present perfect is the marker of this qualitative change. *Once* cannot appear at the beginning of the sentence in (12b) where it would then be detached from the expression of the change of state.

The same qualitative specification is found in (13):

(13) Because for centuries they have braved one of the world's worst climates, sturdy Londoners do not find leaky roofs and damp shelters unbearable. Because they've fought so many wars in the past, they don't look upon this war as a calamity, even though it's coming down on top of them.[4]

A more precise specification than *in the past* would not be possible here because it would switch the determination into a purely temporal location and the system would not allow it.

As the present perfect expresses links between the present and the past time, it can sometimes lead to ambiguities as to the exact location of the moment of utterance relative to the duration of the process. In the following pair of examples (Cotte 1987), the preposition *for* would seem to introduce a "temporal" specification:

(14a) He's lived in China for about thirty years.

[4] Walter Graebner. 1941. *Their Finest Hour, First-Hand Narratives of the War in England,* in A. A. Michie and W. Graebner (Eds.), 203-206. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.