

REFLECTIONS ON TEACHING DEVICES ARTICULATING GRAMMAR AND TEXT

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Abstract

Over and above the theoretical questions it raises, the interaction between grammar and text is a particularly open problem, constituting a real challenge for language teaching and teacher training. In this article, we will first examine the origins and characteristics of this problem, as it emerged several decades ago and as it appears today in the cantons of French-speaking Switzerland. We will then examine theoretical and pedagogical conceptions of the status of grammars and texts, and present the goals of grammar teaching so as to understand how the teaching problem that articulates grammar and texts is anchored in it. Then we will describe elements of a research program on this type of articulation which we are conducting in French-speaking Switzerland with the GRAFE'MAIRE group. This program, called *Principles of a fundamental didactics of grammar*¹, is particularly focused on *the function of noun phrase complements* and *the values of past tenses*. The experimental part of our research is ongoing, but as we will indicate in the conclusion, preparatory analyses of these experiments have revealed the need for a serious re-examination of the very status of these grammatical objects, and the efficient pedagogical approaches they require.

Keywords: language teaching, teaching devices, grammar, text, integrative approach.

¹ *Principes d'une didactique fondamentale de la grammaire. Analyse de la situation en Suisse romande, expérimentation de dispositifs innovants et réexamen du statut de la transposition des objets grammaticaux. "Principles of basic grammar teaching. Analysis of the situation in French-speaking Switzerland, experimentation with innovative devices and re-examination of the status of the transposition of grammatical objects". Project supported by the Swiss National Fund for Scientific Research (subsidy 100019-179226) and carried by the GRAFE'MAIRE group we are leading (Ecaterina Bulea Bronckart, Véronique Marmy Cusin, Roxane Gagnon; Florence Aubert, Daniel Bain, Rosalie Bourdages, Jean-Paul Bronckart, Vincent Capt, Anouk Darne-Xu, Virgine Degoumois, Jean-François de Pietro, Serge Erard, Christopher Laenzlinger, Matthieu Merhan, Martine Panchout-Dubois and Sandy Stoudmann).*

1. THE TEACHING OF TEXTS AND GRAMMAR IN FRENCH-SPEAKING SWITZERLAND

The teaching of French as a first language began to be modernized in the 1970s. This consisted essentially in establishing *practical mastery of the language* as the main purpose of this teaching, thereby abandoning more scholastic aims and normative approaches. The goal was to develop students' communication skills, and more specifically to enable them to understand and produce the text genres used in the community to which they belong. This modernization has resulted in a "re-configuration" of French language teaching (cf. Elalouf, 2012; Halté, 1992; 2008), placing the activities of production and reception of various oral and written texts at the center of teaching. It has also led to the establishment of an "integrative" model (cf. Laurent, 2011) promoting the articulation between the sub-domains of language functioning (in particular between "language" and "speech" and between "oral" and "written") and taking into account the sociolinguistic realities of a community and the sociological aspects of communication. In this context, grammar teaching necessarily had to be profoundly transformed. This involved the way grammatical concepts were organized and presented, the choice of activities to be implemented in teaching these concepts, and especially the articulation of this newly renovated grammar teaching with teaching centered on producing and receiving oral and written texts.

In French-speaking Switzerland, the principles of this global renovation were formulated in the book *Maîtrise du français* (Besson *et al.*, 1979), a work that assumed the main purpose of language teaching is to enable pupils to carry out efficient language activities adapted to various contexts of interaction. In this perspective, which accentuates the communicative and social dimensions of language, the construction of grammatical knowledge fell under a second objective, described as *structuration de la langue* (*language structuring*). The goal was to provide pupils with useful tools for implementing language activities, in the framework of *inductive approaches*: first proposing sen-

tences of contemporary French that the pupils had to observe and manipulate, in order to identify regularities and carry out conceptual work:

On partira, chaque fois qu'il est possible, des productions verbales de l'enfant. Il s'agit, par rapport à la méthode en vigueur jusqu'ici, d'opérer un renversement. [...] En conséquence, on amènera l'enfant à faire fonctionner la langue. Les activités d'expression, les manipulations lui feront découvrir progressivement, de façon tout d'abord intuitive, puis réflexive, les principes de ce fonctionnement.² (Besson et al., 1979, p. 3).

This quotation testifies to a first attempt at the pedagogical construction of an interaction between verbal production activities and grammatical activities. Yet it hardly specified the ways and means by which grammatical knowledge would be effectively reinvested in verbal production and comprehension. After subsisting for a long time, this difficulty was dealt with in two relatively recent official documents: a text entitled *Enseignement / apprentissage du français en Suisse romande – Orientations*³ (CIIP, 2006, henceforth *Orientations*) which sets out the aims and general principles of French teaching, and the *Plan d'études romand*⁴ (CIIP, 2010) which lists learning objectives and teaching content.

These official documents are based on an innovative position involving the concepts of "text" and "text genres". The *Orientations* document proposes an update of the French teaching program based in particular on two principles: *articulating the purposes of teaching French* ("learning to communicate", "mastering the functioning of the language" and "building cultural references"), and *anchoring French learning in the production and understanding of various socially and pedagogically relevant text genres*. While the first principle actually poses an "articulation", the second establishes the text genre as a central notion, insofar as genres allow reflection on the general organization of texts and can be used in teaching activities relating to speaking and reading, as well as to written production. With regard to grammar,

² "We will start, whenever possible, from the child's verbal productions. Compared to the current method, it involves operating a reversal. [...] Consequently, one will bring the child to make the language work. The expressive activities, manipulations of language, will make him gradually discover, first intuitively, then reflexively, the underlying functional principles."

³ "Teaching / learning French in French-speaking Switzerland – Orientations"

⁴ "Study Plan of French-speaking Switzerland"

the structuring framework for learning is clearly of a textual nature: a permanent articulation between text genres and grammar is thus recommended, which can moreover be implemented orally or in writing. Production-reception of texts and grammar are no longer to be considered as separate and autonomous sub-disciplines but are called upon to interact within French learning.

The official documents therefore clearly advocate implementing a pedagogical program that articulates the construction of a representation of the language system and the development of skills of text production and comprehension, which implies that the work in grammar can generate useful skills for textual activities. However, in their organization and in the types of activities they offer, the two main textbooks officially promoted for primary education (*L'île aux mots*, henceforth *IAM*; and *Mon Manuel de français*, henceforth *MMF*) hardly seem able to encourage this positive interaction (cf. Bulea Bronckart, Marmy Cusin & Panchout-Dubois, 2017).

The *IAM* textbooks are structured in autonomous sections dealing with the classic sub-domains of the discipline (reading, expression, grammar, spelling, conjugation, vocabulary) and do not offer any combination or even alternation of activities in these sub-domains; they only mention the possibility of establishing links between the activities of the two sub-fields, but they retain their specificity and their autonomy.

The *MMF* textbooks are structured in disciplinary and thematic units, pertaining to literature as well as geography, mathematics, civic education, etc. Each of these units comprises ten lessons which alternate and combine, in the area concerned, reading, speaking, writing and grammar activities, the last designating, in a broad sense, all aspects of "language functioning". Unlike their predecessors, these manuals do not have a specific grammar, conjugation or spelling section, and all grammatical activities are linked to texts that are also worked on in reading, comprehension or production, and are scattered throughout the different units of the manual. However, it is not this type of dissolution of grammar in textual activities that was recommended in the innovative teaching approaches and in the new prescriptions of French-speaking Switzerland, for two main reasons. The

first is that all grammatical work is carried out on the basis and within the limits of a single text genre; as a result, grammatical concepts are studied according to what the texts allow, in a situation of permanent back and forth between the original text and the rewriting of certain terms or passages. The second reason is that the supposedly textual reinvestment of grammatical work in reality remains purely phrasal: the pupils mobilize their acquired grammar teaching, not by producing short texts, but by reformulating almost identical sentences extracted from the original text.

The two textbooks adopted in French-speaking Switzerland have obvious qualities, but our analyses summarized above (for more details, cf. Bulea Bronckart, 2015b; Bulea Bronckart, Marmy Cusin & Panchout-Dubois, 2017) reveal the difficulties of setting up teaching that effectively coordinates textual and grammatical dimensions. It is therefore necessary to propose and test pedagogical devices that allow a true articulation of these dimensions, and these are the conditions for elaborating and implementing this project that we examine below. We will first present, as part of a theoretical argument, our conception of text and grammar; and then present our didactic engineering in which teaching sequences proposing two modes of text-grammar articulation were designed and in which their respective efficiency is tested.

2. WHAT ARE GRAMMARS AND WHAT ARE TEXTS?

The term *grammar* is, as we know, polysemous (cf. Brown, 1851/2015; Combettes & Lagarde, 1982; Lyons, 1968) and can in particular designate the following entities or phenomena:

- a) The set of rules which underlie the functioning of a given natural language, and which are in principle used by the members of a community; it is in this sense that we can evoke “French grammar”, “Latin grammar”, “Catalan grammar”, etc.
- b) A theoretical construction aimed at describing and conceptualizing the constituent entities and the operating rules of one of these natural languages, or the rules common to all languages; the *Reasoned and General Grammar of Port-Royal*, Chomsky’s

Generative and Transformational Grammar, and Halliday's *Functional Grammar* are such constructions, differentiated by their epistemological principles, their methodologies for analyzing linguistic facts, and their modes of conceptualization.

- c) A work or another type of document proposing, as a reference for teaching or for the culture of the general public, a more or less developed or simplified version of the rules of language or a natural language, drawing on the theoretical devices mentioned under b (cf. Bulea Bronckart, 2015a).

It should be noted that, in all of these meanings, the objects designated by the term grammar have *a sociohistorical and evolutionary character*. First of all, as Saussure particularly highlighted in his courses of 1891 (cf. Saussure, 2002), any living language necessarily and continuously changes over time, even if this change is slow and hardly perceptible in the course of a single human generation; consequently grammar as the apparatus of rules underlying the functioning of a natural language (meaning a above) must necessarily change at the rate of historical changes. Secondly, grammar as a theoretical construction aiming at the conceptualization of this apparatus of rules (meaning b above) can, necessarily, only address the "state of language" of a circumscribed era, and the same is true for pedagogical grammars (meaning c).

If these three meanings of the term grammar are generally accepted, this is not the case with regard to the grammatical knowledge learners have of their first language or other languages they have to acquire. In a traditional perspective and in contemporary pedagogical orientations including that of Krashen (1988), grammar is developed by implementing specific cognitive processes, and must consequently be the subject of specific teaching approaches (a position sometimes called *A Priori Grammar*). From another perspective, inspired by interactional approaches to language including those presented by Hopper (1988; 1998) and Ochs, Schegloff and Thompson (1996), grammar is made up of readable regularities in verbal exchanges and / or texts. Such a position implies an extension of the range of facts supposed to belong to grammar. According to this approach, we would observe in learners an *Emergent grammar* that arose "from discourse and is

shaped by discourse in an ongoing process” (Hopper, 1998, p. 156). In pedagogical approaches inspired by this orientation, devices are set up following the *inductive approach* (cf. Prince & Felder, 2006), which, as Bilash (2009) has shown, allows learners to build a rich conception of grammar and exploit it effectively.

In this context, the appearance and content of grammar books has also changed over time and is still changing before our eyes and the school discipline “grammar” has undergone a succession of changes over the past few decades, linked to debates about establishing a new form of teaching, that is to say teaching that integrates some of the advances in theories and descriptions emanating from contemporary linguistics.

The term “text” designates in everyday language a unit of written language production, but in language science its meaning has been extended to any unit of verbal production, whatever its size and whatever its mode of production, oral, written or mixed (cf. Adam, 1992; Genette, 1986; Halliday, 2003; Rastier, 2001; Voloshinov, 1930/1983 or 1981). Texts are concrete entities resulting from the verbal activity of the members of a group, entities which interact with a situation of production, and which have different levels of internal structuring. To acquire an adequate conception of textuality, it is necessary to take into consideration these dimensions and their modes of interaction, and to do this we rely on the conceptual system developed within the framework of *socio-discursive interactionism* (cf. Bronckart, 1997; 2012).

Texts, the empirical traces of verbal actions, have the form of a sequential organization of verbal signs specific to a natural language. This sequential organization involves implementing structuring mechanisms exploiting resources that are sometimes in competition, and it therefore implies choices related to selecting and combining the mechanisms and their linguistic methods of implementation. Although texts thus mobilize linguistic units and structures, the way they begin, end and are planned in general is largely determined by the communicative situations and non-linguistic activities in which they are implicated; this is why texts have the status of communicative units.

Insofar as the most general function of texts is to comment on non-linguistic activities (to contribute to their description, their planning, the evaluation of their effects, etc.) some of their internal properties are necessarily related to the components of this praxeological context and are differentiated in response to contextual variations. Texts are therefore manifested in the form of genres, that is to say linguistic configurations that are more or less adapted to commenting on a particular practical activity, and their status is fundamentally adaptive and praxeological. If their functional specificity is sometimes supported by relatively stable labels (“novel”, “sermon”, “interview”, “report”, “recipe”, etc.), genres are nevertheless dynamic entities, which appear and are transformed or disappear according to the evolution of the kinds of human activities and communication contexts with which they interact. In a given synchronic state their organization therefore takes the form of a nebula, comprising both stabilized and labelled text genres, and text genres under construction or in disrepair.

Like the human activities to which they are related, genres are potentially unlimited in number. The parameters that can be used as criteria for classifying them (general human purpose, specific social issue, thematic content, cognitive processes mobilized, media support, etc.) are heterogeneous, difficult to demarcate, and in constant interaction. Furthermore, the classification of genres cannot be based on the only easily objectifiable criterion, namely the specific configurations of linguistic units they contain. Whatever the genre to which they belong, texts are in fact composed, in very variable ways, of segments of different kinds (theoretical presentation, narrative, commentary, dialogue, etc.), and it is at the level of these segments that regularities or constants of organization and linguistic marking can be identified. Structurally, genres have segments organized in sequences, as described and conceptualized by Adam (1992: narrative, descriptive, argumentative, explanatory and dialogical sequences). On the enunciative level, as Genette (1986) has shown, genres exploit and combine segments made up of modes, in the Aristotelian sense, that is to say different ways of semiotizing which are independent of the social and praxeological contexts of textuality, and in fact ways of shaping thought processes that are in principle universal:

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[...] l'usager de la langue doit constamment, même ou surtout si inconsciemment, choisir entre des attitudes de locution telles que discours ou histoire (au sens benvenistien), citation littérale et style indirect, etc. La différence de statut entre genres et modes est essentiellement là : les genres sont des catégories proprement littéraires, les modes sont des catégories qui relèvent de la linguistique [...] ⁵ (Genette, 1986, p. 142)

Bronckart (1997; 2007; 2019) has developed this concept by defining and describing the properties of four discursive types (*interactive discourse, theoretical discourse, narrative and narration*) as specific modes of organizing thematic content, forming enunciative entities that are potentially universal and likely to enter into the composition of all textual genres.

If, as the analysis above shows, grammar(s) and text(s) can be clearly distinguished theoretically, in the concrete use of language, these two dimensions are nevertheless in permanent interaction, to the point of often being inseparable for speakers.

On the diachronic level, the actual rules of language organization are inevitably transformed, and these changes are manifested only in the concrete properties of the text genres produced by speakers. On the synchronic level, all textual production mobilizes linguistic units and structures which come under the effective rules of a language (meaning a), but which are also under the control of formal scientific grammars (meaning b) and pedagogical grammars (meaning c). Texts and different grammatical levels are actually in a permanent dialectical movement. New genres are produced by relying on grammatical knowledge already there, and are in turn the empirical objects of knowledge processes, under whose effect grammatical knowledge as well as grammatical units, structures or systems are confirmed and/or transformed.

Given this permanent dialectic between text(s) and grammar(s), teaching which recognizes and explicitly recommends the articulation between these dimensions appears to be extremely relevant. But for

⁵ “[...] the language user must constantly, even (or especially) unconsciously, choose between speaking attitudes such as speech and history (in the Benvenistian sense), literal quotation and indirect style, etc. This is where the difference in status between genres and modes essentially lies: genres are properly literary categories, modes are linguistic categories [...]”

it to be effectively implemented, teaching of this type cannot result from simply applying linguistic principles or research. A properly didactic conception is necessary which takes into consideration the adaptation of grammatical and textual objects to the objectives of the school and its different levels; and the criteria of curriculum progression, which transforms the interaction between grammar and texts in teaching objects and approaches.

3. THE PURPOSE AND METHODS OF TEACHING GRAMMAR

In traditional pedagogical approaches, the main purpose of grammar teaching was to provide students with the *formal mastery* of a set of rules and concepts, and it was assumed, implicitly or explicitly, that this type of mastery could be re-used, firstly in grammatical exercises that demonstrated understanding, and then in various other exercises involving the production and the reading-comprehension of texts, especially literary ones. Subsidiary to this central purpose were the mastery of spelling and of Latin, as grammar teaching was in fact at the service of the acquisition of these two skills.

The modernization of teaching undertaken in French-speaking Switzerland in the 1970s was the result of the firm desire to reverse this hierarchy: rather than aiming to provide students with an abstract and decontextualized mastery of grammatical rules, it emphasized the need to equip them instead with a *practical mastery* of the language, allowing them to communicate effectively in various interactive situations. In this perspective, constructing grammatical knowledge became a secondary objective, the grammatical domain now being grasped from a procedural angle, as a place and means of structuring the language, or as a tool capable of supporting the primary objective of mastering verbal production and comprehension skills (cf. Bronckart & Sznicer, 1990). This transformation of the purposes of grammar teaching was obviously not limited to Switzerland. Chartrand (2012) has thus highlighted the generalization of what she describes as a *utilitarian point of view*: this is the perspective advocated in Quebec by Nadeau and Fisher (2006), for whom the primary purpose of grammar teaching is developing in pupils a real competence in writing.

They consequently consider understanding the operating mode of the language system to be a subordinate purpose. It is also the position adopted in Belgium by Dumortier (2006), who advocates a *communication point of view* foregrounding the ability to use linguistic resources adequately in communication situations. Grammatical knowledge is at the service of this capacity; apart from this its utility is put into question.

This utilitarian-communicative view was, however, the subject of discussion. In the absence of data demonstrating that grammatical knowledge was really useful for improving pupils' expressive capacities, certain authors disputed the principle of a grammar at the service of expression and advocated a reevaluation of the teaching / learning of grammar for its own sake, from a perspective that is clearly different from the traditional pedagogical approach mentioned above. Referring to Vygotsky, Boutet (2005), for example, argued that grammatical thinking is likely to constitute a veritable *moment of the pupil's intellectual development*, whose success (or failure) only potentially and secondarily influences his mastery of writing. In the same perspective, Schneuwly (1998) defended the role of grammar as a system of strictly scholarly knowledge, whose learning contributes to the development of the students' capacities of abstraction and generalization; according to Schneuwly, the distancing of the language that grammar teaching actually involves allows students to transform both their relationship to language and their cognitive functioning.

It therefore appears that, even if we can easily understand the initial motivations that led to the reversal of the traditional perspective, and consider that the objectives of structuring the language are tools for expression, this form of prioritization seems problematic.

For our part, on the basis of the review of recent pedagogical developments as well as the theoretical analyses summarized in 2 above, we have adopted an *integrative approach to language teaching* based on the following principles (for more details, cf. Bulea Bronckart, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c; Bulea Bronckart, Gagnon & Marmy-Cusin, 2017).

- Abandoning any hierarchical conception of the purposes of language teaching, and therefore considering that this teaching must

aim at both the development of textual production and comprehension capacities, and the construction of systemic knowledge relating to the properties and structures of one or more natural languages.

- Giving oneself the theoretical means to highlight the ways grammar manifests itself in texts, as well as the influence that the differential properties of texts (generic or other) can exert on how grammatical structures occur.
- As a consequence, arguing that the areas of grammars and texts do not constitute interacting blocks, and so taking into account the specificities of their levels of internal structuring, and designing objects (or groupings of objects) whose modes of interaction are to be studied; language pedagogy thus focuses on the interaction between *grammatical objects* and *textual objects*.
- Admitting that the problem of identifying and implementing the interaction of these two kinds of objects pedagogically remains largely open, and constitutes *an empirical question*, to be treated not on the basis of slogans (“grammar makes it easier to read and write”), but on the basis of research aimed at designing innovative pedagogical devices and testing their efficiency.

4. CONSTRUCTING AND TESTING INNOVATIVE TEACHING DEVICES

In a French-speaking context, various innovative pedagogical proposals combining grammar and texts have already been formulated (cf. Boivin, Pinsonneault & Côté, 2014; De Pietro & Wirthner, 2006; Marmy Cusin, 2012; Nadeau & Fisher, 2011). These consist on the one hand of teaching sequences relating to different grammatical objects (agreement management, homophones, punctuation, anaphoric binding, etc.) and their reinvestment in written work, and on the other in modeling the type of relationship between grammar and writing which is supposed to be useful for researchers as well as teachers (cf. in particular the model proposed by Boivin, Pinsonneault and Côté, *op. cit.*). Despite their intrinsic relevance, these proposals remain few in number. New experiments are therefore necessary, to approach other teaching objects at different school levels, but also to adopt other

methodological and engineering perspectives. Most of the existing proposals are more particularly focused on writing and on the way in which grammatical knowledge is, could be, or should be reinvested in written work, the ultimate aim being the improvement of students' writing abilities. Without questioning the relevance and fruitfulness of this focus, the perspective we adopt does not particularly favor writing, but relates to textuality / textual fabric, and this emphasis on texts concerns both production and comprehension. In a perspective of reciprocity between grammar and textuality (cf. Bulea Bronckart, 2015c), without subordinating one of the dimensions to the other (cf. the principles mentioned above), we seek to conceive *didactic logics of articulation* which contribute at the same time to the construction of a representation of language as a system, and to the awareness (or exercise) of the effective functioning of language in texts.

4.1 *The general architecture of the GRAFE'MAIRE project*

The research program we are currently conducting, entitled *Principles of a fundamental didactics of grammar* (cf. note 1, *supra*), was conceived in the perspective we have just mentioned. This program is broadly articulated around three pedagogical questions.

The first is methodological: if it is now accepted that grammar includes, in addition to the rules of phrasal syntax, a set of rules for structuring texts (cf. 2, *supra*), can or should the teaching methods concerning these two sub-fields be similar or different?

The second question arises from the duality of the objectives assigned to grammar teaching (objectives to which we give equal importance and status): on the one hand to build knowledge of the units and the language system; on the other to develop skills that are useful for producing and understanding texts. How can we go beyond the partitioning of these fields without inducing the idea that, since it is opposed to partitioning, "articulation" is a necessarily unique or uniform didactic logic? To avoid the risk of such a levelling off, we immediately recommend two types of engineering relating to articulation (cf. 4.3, *infra*): one advocating the integration of grammatical activities into the approach to the properties of texts, the another advocating

the interaction between an autonomous work of constructing grammatical notions and the subsequent work of exploiting these assets in textual activities. The purpose of research in this area is to highlight the respective potentialities and effects of these two types of devices and to determine if one of them can be privileged in teaching programs, according to the levels or the grammatical objects targeted.

The third question follows from the heterogeneity of the orientations and contents of theoretical and school grammars, as well as from the practical dimension of teaching objectives. In a field where the reference knowledge is multiple, heterogeneous, shifting and unstable, as is the case in grammar, what is the relevance of the theory of didactic transposition, developed for other school disciplines, in particular for mathematics where the body of reference knowledge is much more homogeneous? It is worth asking whether it is necessary to re-adjust the conceptualization of didactic transposition according to the characteristics of the grammatical domain.

The research we are conducting aims to provide answers to these three orders of questions. But this work will allow us at the same time to develop conceptual proposals to refine and clarify the objectives of grammar education, as well as proposals to improve the processes and devices proposed in textbooks and other teaching methods currently in use.

The entire research project is being carried out in four French-speaking cantons (Geneva, Fribourg, Neuchâtel and Vaud), in 7th (primary level) and 10th (secondary level) classes. It is centered on two teaching objects on the program of these two school levels:

- Firstly an object that is always considered to be specifically grammatical, *the function of noun phrase complements*. Research (cf. Gomila & Ulma, 2014; Melis, 1998) has shown that this often gives rise to compartmentalized identification and naming activities which do not take into account the role that noun phrase complements can play in textual organization. Examples of noun phrase complements, in *italics*:

Un *gros* chat traverse la route.

Un *gros* chat *de mauvaise humeur* traverse la route.

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Le chat *de ma voisine* traverse la route.

Le chat *que nous avons nourri hier* traverse la route.⁶

- And secondly an object that is always considered to be specifically textual, *past tense values* (notably the *Imperfect*, the *Compound Past* and the *Simple Past*) which research (cf. Corteel & Avezard-Roger, 2013) has shown are most often taught using literary narratives, without extending these to other textual genres and without the prospect of building general knowledge relating to the values of verbal tenses. Examples of past tense values⁷:

Hier, Pierre *a rencontré* dans la rue un homme qui *paraissait* un peu bizarre.

Un jour, le roi *décida* d'épouser une femme qui *était* pourtant plus âgée que lui.⁸

For these two grammatical objects, the research program includes the following major phases:

- Documenting the situation of their teaching, by:
 - analyzing the didactic resources present in the documents and manuals;
 - analyzing ordinary teaching practices for these objects;
 - examining, through interviews, the representations that teachers have of these objects and how they should be taught;
 - examining the difficulties encountered by the pupils, but also of the reasoning which they put in place during the lessons on these two objects.
- Developing and testing two types of teaching sequences, one designed according to the logic of integration and the other according to the principle of alternation between grammatical work and textual work (cf. 4.3, *infra*).

⁶ - A big cat crosses the road. - A big cat in a bad mood crosses the road. - My neighbor's cat (lit: the cat of my neighbor) is crossing the road. - The cat we fed yesterday is crossing the road.

⁷ In French, one of the problems of Past tense values is the distinction between genres which require either the use of the pair Simple Past – Imperfect, or the use of the pair Compound Past – Imperfect.

⁸ a) Yesterday, Pierre met in the street a man who looked a little strange. b) One day the king decided to marry a woman who was older than him.

- On the basis of the results obtained in this experiment, revising the pedagogical sequences initially designed or building new sequences that can be integrated into teaching programs and made available to teachers and trainers.
- Finally, developing engineering principles highlighting the pedagogical frameworks suitable for teaching the two objects and, on this basis, proposing an extension of the devices to other grammatical objects, as well as modeling the transposition relevant to grammar education in general.

Depending on the phase, research thus involves several types of data, in particular: documents produced by political and educational authorities; audio and video recordings of lessons, either from current practices or from sequences proposed by researchers for experimentation; interviews with teachers; materials and documents used during lessons (texts, worksheets, tables, diagrams, etc.); and pretests and posttests of students who have experienced the sequences proposed in the experimental phase. The processing of this data mobilizes both methodologies for content analysis, interaction analysis and discourse analysis which we have also used in previous research, and statistical analyses of variance and covariance, in particular for the processing of tests addressed to students.

4.2 The teaching situation of the two concepts in French-speaking Switzerland

The following considerations relate to the first phase of the research and reflect the first, still partial, results concerning the teaching of the two objects selected. These results relate in particular to the didactic resources present in the textbooks, and, in a more fragmentary way, to ordinary practices.

In the documents supporting the renewal of language teaching in French-speaking Switzerland, noun phrase complements were presented, on the one hand as the function taken by the three “continuations of the noun,” namely the adjectival group, the prepositional group and the embedded sentence (in *Maîtrise de la grammaire*; Bes-

son et al., 1984) and on the other hand as optional components capable of taking several forms, from the adjective to the relative sentence (cf. *Memento*; Fumeaux et al., 1990). In current textbooks, the dominant notion is that of “noun expansion” defined primarily in semantic terms and consisting of the enrichment or characterization of the meaning of the core noun. At the syntactic level, if the optional nature of the entities having this function is sometimes mentioned, it does not give rise to work exploiting syntactic manipulations. The proposed activities are repetitive in nature and are introduced by three types of instructions addressing a set of a few sentences: identification, substitution and addition. These contemporary textbooks in fact show a great deal of indecision concerning the status, definition and modes of analysis of noun phrase complements (cf. Bulea Bronckart, Marmy Cusin & Panchout-Dubois, 2017). To complete this study, we collected documents accessible on the internet on the question of the identification, the description-conceptualization and the teaching methods of this teaching object (keywords: “noun phrase complement” and “noun expansion”). This exploratory research shows that internet users (teachers and students included) are exposed to information of variable quality, which is sometimes erroneous or corresponds to different theoretical perspectives, with nothing to indicate how they should assess their consistency or relevance.

Regarding the values of past tenses, in most traditional textbooks their treatment consists of common sense explanations of the use of the different forms: for example, “the simple past is used to indicate what happened at some point in the past” (Atzenwiler, 1933, p. 173). In general, the Imperfect is presented as expressing an action of indefinite duration and the Simple Past as expressing an action of short and fixed duration, and even expressing its completion. The descriptions of the Compound Past have less regularity, this tense being especially defined in its opposition to the Simple Past, and as particularly suitable for dialogue and conversation. As far as the current situation in French-speaking Switzerland is concerned, only one manual (the 10th textbook of *Livre unique*) offers a systematic approach to past tenses, centered on the “anchored phrase vs non-anchored phrase” distinction, the foreground vs background opposition, as well as prior / posterior

relationships. In the other textbooks, the values of past tenses are presented during the activities of recognizing and producing the properties of texts of various genres. In this way the conceptualization of these values combines elements from discursive analyses (the distinction between foreground and background), traditional formulations (“the imperfect describes past facts which take place over a certain period of time or are repeated”) and occasional references to aspectual oppositions (completed / not completed).

To complete the picture of the teaching situation of these two notions, the ongoing study of current teaching practices allows us to formulate a set of considerations which remain partial but nevertheless provide the following insights.

The noun phrase complement (henceforth NPC) turns out to be a much more complex notion than we initially thought, in particular because this syntactic function implies a network of knowledge relating to other objects, whether syntactic structures (in particular the Nominal Group, the Adjectival Group, the Prepositional Group and the relative subordinate sentence) or functions (in particular the Sentence Complement and the Attribute of the Subject). In class practice, the study of the NPC is not always, or not explicitly, included in the context of the analysis of the Nominal Group, the identification of the NPC taking place in relation to the Noun that the NPC would “complete”. This study therefore mobilizes mainly semantic, even referential dimensions of the NPC, designated as information, indications or details concerning the Noun. The low use of the Nominal Group framework as a syntactic segment delimiting the possible location of the NPC, as well as the almost total absence of syntactic manipulations to identify the NPC, has the consequence that its status as a syntactic function is in reality very little perceived. Likewise, as the role the NPC can play in texts is never discussed, the teaching of this concept confronts us with a relative paradox: we have a tendentiously semantic analysis that is not anchored in texts, along with an absence of syntactic manipulations, while the material used in the analysis is of the order of a sentence.

Concerning the values of past tenses (henceforth VPT), the analysis remains dependent on the effective properties of the kinds of texts

analyzed. The texts used as examples are not specifically literary texts; they also consist of stories, even of texts found on the internet and made or adapted for observing the distribution of verbal tenses. With all the caution necessary at this stage of our analyses, we can however note the predominance of a VPT approach in terms of lists of values associated with each verbal tense, according to a one-to-one logic: this time would correspond to this value. Thus, the Simple Past would express a single, main action; the Compound Past an action preceding the time of speech; the More-than-perfect a previous action in the past. The Imperfect is the only tense with which several values are associated, including the expression of a habit, an action that lasts, an action that is not completed, a secondary action, and even a description. From these examples we can see the heterogeneity of the criteria for apprehending values as well as the non-differentiation between criteria relating to the timeline (action prior to the moment of speech), forms of tracking (action prior to another action in the past) and aspectual dimensions (an action not completed). The principle of the plurality of values of the same verbal tense as a function of co-occurring forms, other temporal organizers, and enunciative choices, seems to be absent, as is any explicit emphasis of the systemic organization of these values.

4.3 Experimentation of two types of sequences

As indicated above, the experimental component of the research program consists in developing and comparing the implementation of teaching sequences relating to two logics, or two didactic devices, for each of the two grammatical objects selected. These didactic logics share several characteristics, in particular:

- Articulating *within the same teaching sequence* syntactic and textual approaches to the notion studied: this is concretized by the arrangement of tasks requiring syntactic work, textual work and/or reciprocal reinvestment of these two dimensions.
- Designing *relatively short sequences* (3 to 5 lessons), motivated by the following elements: consideration of the curriculum progression (the notions are reworked each year); the time that teachers

can actually devote to the study of the notion taking into account the various constraints of the program; formulating didactic proposals which are not, from this point of view, too far from ordinary practices to be acceptable; distancing ourselves from the idea that a long time devoted to a concept could solve all the problems posed by its learning.

- Presenting the grammatical object under a dual face, as an object having dimensions *that must be known* (dimensions considered as such according to the educational level, and which are therefore institutionalized) and dimensions *that need to be thought about*: this choice allows us both to show students the stabilized aspects of knowledge, and to present it as open to new and future restructuring.
- Implementing activities that put students in *a research posture*: this posture asks them to target the object studied, to formulate hypotheses about its functioning and its characteristics, to verbalize these hypotheses, to verify them, and to compare them with other hypotheses or with a previous state of knowledge, etc.
- Presenting the targeted knowledge under *several semiotic modalities*: the oral and written verbal modality, but also figurative, schematic modalities, coming for example from concept maps.

In terms of their specificities, the two devices have the following characteristics. The first device, designed according to the principle of integrating grammar teaching into activities aimed at textual mastery, takes the form of teaching sequences qualified as structuring integration sequences (SIS). These include the following phases:

- a) *Study the role of the notion within texts*. The goals of this phase are:
 - to give students the opportunity to become aware of the presence of syntactic structures in texts;
 - to use grammatical metalanguage while working on text units, in order to experience the interaction between the two domains;
 - finally to understand or to conceive what can be used for the grammatical notion studied from a properly textual point of

view (for example: to contribute to marking the textual genre concerned, to structure a dominant type of sequence, to realize textualization mechanisms like verbal or nominal cohesion, to give the text stylistic dimensions, etc.).

- b) *Corpus analysis*. This phase is carried out on the basis of a few segments extracted from the texts examined, chosen for their illustrative nature, as well as a complementary set of sentences. The activities proposed here are grammatical in nature and explicitly mobilize syntactic manipulations (especially in the case of NPC), contrasting (especially in the case of VPT), verbalizations and justifications, the formulation of hypotheses or observations, in order to make explicit, as much as possible, the systemic character of grammatical notions.
- c) *Synthesis of observations and conceptualizations*. This phase aims particularly at stabilizing the knowledge pointed out during the analysis phase using vocabulary as close as possible to the reference knowledge, taking into account the school level concerned. The activities are here oriented towards the synthetic formulation of the defining dimensions of the notion studied, in two different semiotic forms: verbal and figurative or schematic. It is during this phase that the dimensions of the object which cannot yet be addressed, but which are nevertheless relevant (the dimensions that we have called “to think about”, for example the case of appositions for the NPC at the academic level of the 7th year) are mentioned, with the aim of leaving the object its open character towards future restructuring.
- d) *Text reinvestment in production and / or understanding*. This phase consists of a return to text units, partially new, partially identical or similar to those of the analysis phase centered on the role of the notion in texts (in this device, phase a). The proposed activities aim at a conscious re-exploitation of the conceptualized elements, but with a greater degree of autonomy on the part of the student in the management of grammatical knowledge (for example, during grammatically oriented textual production, such as that of writing the end of a text; or when

interpreting a text which presupposes removing ambiguities by clarifying elements of verbal or nominal cohesion).

The second device, designed according to the principle of alternating between grammar teaching and activities aimed at textual mastery, takes the form of teaching sequences qualified as close alternation sequences (CAS). These include the same phases as the SIS, but in a different arrangement which gives them a “grammar → text” logic rather than “text → grammar → text”. The phases of this device are distributed as follows:

- a) *Corpus analysis*. This phase is carried out on the basis of a corpus of sentences and short texts, chosen for their illustrative nature. As in SIS, the proposed activities are grammatical in nature and involve syntactic manipulations (in the case of NPC), contrasting (in the case of VPT), verbalizations and justifications, the formulation of hypotheses or observations, with the aim of making explicit, as much as possible, the systemic character of grammatical notions. The specificity of this phase in the CAS system is that it begins with a problem situation, which immediately puts the student in a research posture.
- b) *Synthesis of observations and conceptualization*. The characteristics of this phase are identical to those described at the level of the SIS, the emphasis still being placed on stabilizing the knowledge pointed out during the analysis phase, on the use of metalanguage and on the synthetic formulation of the definitive dimensions of the concept studied in different semi-otic forms (verbal and figurative or schematic).
- c) *Text reinvestment in production and / or understanding*. In CAS, this phase truly introduces the textual units and text-related activities. The proposed activities always aim at re-exploiting the elements conceptualized in the previous phase, by drawing the students’ attention to the reinvestment and the new management of the constructed grammatical knowledge.
- d) *Study the role of the notion within the texts*. In the CAS, this phase extends the previous one by work explicitly observing what the grammatical notion can be used for from a properly

textual point of view. The same criteria for highlighting the textual role of the concept are used, namely the way in which it contributes to the marking of generic features and the structuring of sequences, of the mechanisms of textualization, and of the stylistic dimensions of texts. The difference from the SIS device consists in the fact that a second conceptualization can take place, putting the syntactic and textual dimensions of the notion studied into perspective.

Elaboration of the sequences according to the principles and phases described above is currently nearing completion, and their experimentation should start in spring 2020. Although we therefore cannot, for the moment, provide results about that, we can emphasize that the didactic engineering work had various repercussions, including:

- Strictly theoretical repercussions, concerning the linguistic description of the function of noun phrase complements and past tense values. With reference to the three poles of the pedagogical triangle of teacher, pupils and knowledge, the object of knowledge as an object to be taught has been further explored and questioned, going far beyond what is presented in the textbooks, as well as in theoretical reference grammars.
- Educational and engineering benefits, particularly concerning the balancing of activities within a sequence and each of its phases, but also their possible length, taking into account what the reality of the field shows as being potentially possible in practice, beyond partially artificial research situations.
- Methodological repercussions, especially concerning the methods of coding students' errors during tests, and particularly errors relating ultimately to a systemic functioning (for example the past tense system), but whose statistical processing also requires processing item by item.

5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article was to show that, beyond the a priori interesting, relevant and potentially beneficial nature of teaching based on the articulation between grammar and texts, the challenge of finding

pedagogical instruments making it possible remains almost whole. Implementing official prescriptions, however relevant and innovative they may be, cannot rest solely on teachers, especially if the textbooks available offer neither concrete means nor credible paths for applying them.

In French-speaking Switzerland, and in French-speaking countries more generally, the challenge of articulation concerns teaching and learning practices at all school levels, and this situation shows the need to continue research in engineering and to involve in this process not only theoreticians, but also (as much as possible) teachers. This challenge obviously also concerns teacher trainers. We were not able to address this last aspect in this article, but it is nevertheless present in our reflections since the students we are training, future teachers, are already confronted with local language teaching prescriptions, like the ones described in the first part of our article. These prescriptions, of both teaching material and recommended procedures, potentially conflict with the teacher trainees' academic knowledge, and indeed their inability to understand these prescriptions can have a negative effect on their knowledge, and on the exercise of their profession, particularly in the early stages of a career (cf. Garcia Debanc, 2007).

Examining the origins and characteristics of the articulation between grammar and texts as a current issue allowed us to understand that this articulation was in fact part of the very history of French didactics and part of the evolution of the objectives assigned to French as a school subject in different contexts, including French-speaking Switzerland. This evolution is also parallel to the theoretical and methodological evolution of the language sciences, as shown by the acceptance of the notions of "grammar" and "text" which we examined in the second part, and which contribute to developing knowledge of the discipline of linguistics and configuring its subdivisions.

All of these developments, sometimes parallel and sometimes at cross purposes, as well as the specificity of the learning and teaching processes, lead us to reject any 'applicationist' approach and to consider that the problem of the articulation between grammar and texts in teaching is an ongoing empirical question. In what ways can grammatical knowledge be useful for producing and understanding texts?

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By what means is it possible to contribute to constructing a representation of language as a system, while making use of the way it functions in textual production? How should we conceive the internal stratification of syntactic structures in their relation to textuality and the different levels which it entails? What, ultimately, is the feasibility and efficiency of didactic articulation approaches?

The research program that we described is anchored in these types of questions. This program mainly consists of conceiving, experimenting with, and reworking teaching sequences relating to two contrasting objects that are emblematic of the grammatical domain. As explained above, we consider that the articulation between grammar and texts is not a single logic, which is why the simultaneous experimentation of two types of devices, whose design takes account of the observation of ordinary practices, seems relevant and necessary for a better understanding, ultimately, of how to conceive the relationship between prescription, teaching practices and tools.

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