

The "comme NP" construction in French: manner adverbial and predicative complement

Els Tobback, Ghent University

Our contribution will reflect on structures of the types illustrated in (1) and (2) :

- (1) *Le soir je retourne dans mon hangar, je regarde mon Mustang. Je le regarde comme un tableau.* (Le Monde, 16/04/1994, p.R10)

'In the evening I return to my shed, I watch my Mustang. I look at it as a (at) a painting.'

- (2) *J'aurais plutôt tendance à regarder ces phénomènes comme des péripéties [...].* (Le Monde 04/10/1994, p.2)

'I would be inclined to regard these phenomena as entanglements.'

Although these sentences present the same morphosyntactic construction :

- (3) NP – V – NP – comme NP,

most French speakers will agree to say that the interpretation of the "comme NP" constituent is different in both examples : in (1), the "comme NP" will be interpreted as a manner adverbial (cf. Moline 2001), whereas in (2), it will be analysed as a predicative complement (Tobback 2005).

The difference between these two examples is quite clear and it can easily be linked to a difference in the semantics of the verb : when *regarder* has a perceptive meaning, the "comme NP" is likely to have a manner content ; when it takes the meaning of an opinion verb, the "comme NP" has a predicative reading.

In other cases, however, things are less clear cut. In (4), for instance, both analyses for the "comme NP" constituent seem acceptable :

- (4) *Il faut peut-être regarder l'Australie comme le tigre auquel on ne pense pas.* (LM 19/07/1994, p.R03)

'Maybe we have **to look at / regard** Australia as the tiger we don't think of'.

This way, the "comme NP" constructions seem to show some correspondence with other constructions where "the same morphosyntactic construction may render [predicative]¹ and adverbial content" (Himmelmann and Schultze-Berndt 2005 : 3) and which are, consequently ambiguous (or vague) between both interpretations :

- (5) *Claire hat wütend das Zimmer verlassen (= (3) id. : 2)*

- a. Claire left the room angrily.
b. Claire left the room angry.

The objectives of our contribution are the following :

1. We will, in the first place, try to account for the possible ambiguity of both "comme NP" constructions. We will proceed to the semantic interpretation of the manner "comme NP"

adverbial and examine the ambiguity between the "comme NP" constructions with reference to the hypothesis of participant orientation (cf. Ernst 2000, Geuder 2000, Himmelmann & Schultze-Berndt, 2005) of the "comme NP" adverbial.

2. We will, next, concentrate on the formal and contextual analysis of the "comme NP" constructions in order to show that it is often possible to find elements which enable the reader to arrive at the correct interpretation of the sentence. The analysis will be corpus based (corpus *Le Monde*) and will focus on a limited number of verbs (amongst which *imaginer, voir, regarder*) that admit the manner and the predicative complement reading. It will be shown that the adverbial reading is favoured, amongst others, by the following factors :

- the detachment of the "comme NP" constituent
- the occurrence of the "comme NP" construction in a context of comparison
- the occurrence of elements such as *en quelque sorte comme + NP, comme une sorte de + NP, un peu comme*.

Bibliographical references

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- Tobback E., 2005, *Les constructions à attribut de l'objet et le marquage de la relation prédicative seconde*. Ph.D. dissertation, Ghent University.

¹ By using "predicative" in stead of "depictive" as the authors do, I extend the discussion from adjunct secondary predicates (which are concentrated on in Himmelmann and Schultze-Berndt) to predicative complements.