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Pragmatics of prepositions

A study of the French connectives *pour le coup* and *du coup*

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Abstract

Prepositions are rarely described in terms of their pragmatic potential. Yet, some prepositions help build connective locutions, and we show that their general value may then contribute directly to the pragmatics of these locutions. The French complex connective *pour le coup* – translated as a blend of “at the time” and “as a result” – can be analysed into a complex expression maintaining the core meanings of *pour*, *le* and *coup*, which does not allow too specialized a view of, respectively, prepositions, articles and nouns. When compared to *du coup* (“and so”) the contribution of *pour* is mainly pragmatic. That observation is to be added to the many arguments in favour of theories that allow for such plasticity in linguistic meaning.

1. Introduction

The semantics of prepositions is currently dealt with (Brugman, 1988; Cervoni, 1991; Cresswell, 1978; Herskovits, 1985; Pottier, 1962; Rauh, 1991; Spang-Hanssen, 1963; Vandeloise, 1986) within a unique framework, namely the prepositional phrase, where the preposition is the “head” and the nominal phrase serves as an argument of this head. The meaning of the head-preposition is supposed to interact “freely” with its nominal argument, thus generating new acts of reference. But it is well-known that there are many so-called idioms, or idiomatic expressions, based on prepositions, where preposition and nominal argument are more or less constrained in the way their parts are combined. Preposition and nominal argument are tied to one another in such a way that there seems to be no clear composition of the meaning of both parts. Let’s recall the work of Nunberg, Sag and Wasow (1994) distinguishing between IDIOMATICALLY COMBINING EXPRESSIONS (e.g. *take advantage*), and IDIOMATIC PHRASES (e.g. *kick the bucket*). While studying two French “connectives” of the form [(prep) + _{NP}(*le coup*)_{NP}], we will show they are IDIOMATICALLY COMBINING EXPRESSIONS. But making this point clear depends a great deal on a rather new way of conceiving the lexical meaning of both parts (preposition and *coup*).

2. Syntactic profiles

Many French idioms are based on the simple word *coup*, which is highly polysemic. It can be roughly translated into English as "attempt, blow, deed, hit, knock, move, rap, shot, stroke,

thrust, trick, try" and probably some other words as well. But of course, as will be illustrated throughout this paper, idiomatic phrases and idiomatic sentences rarely make use of such simple words. Some of these expressions are adverbial phrases (*à tout coup*, *du coup*, *pour le coup*, *sous le coup*, *sur le coup*), while others are prepositional (*au coup de*, *sous le coup de*). They have gone far in the process of lexicalization, as shown in these distributions:

- (1) (**pour* / **sous*) *le premier coup*
*as a first result / *under the first blow'

The same insertion, when possible, corresponds to a neat semantic difference and to the loss of lexicalization:

- (2) *au premier coup* / * *au coup*
'at the first attempt / *at the shot'
du premier coup ≠ *du coup*
'at the first blow ≠ and so'
?sur le premier coup ≠ *sur le coup*
'at the first shot ≠ at the time'

In the same way, expressions such as the following are either impossible, or analysed as “free” prepositional groups:

- (3) ?? (*au* / *pour* / *sous* / *sur*) (*le*) *même coup*
?? 'at the same shot'
?? 'as a same result'
?? 'under the same blow of'
?? 'at the very time' (≠ 'at the same time')

The expression *du même coup* seems to oscillate between two linguistic analyses: a prepositional group functioning as an adverb (it would then translate into "at the same time") or an extension of the lexicalized connective phrase *du coup* ("and so") (*du même coup* would then be translatable as "thereby" or "by the same token").¹ The first value is responsible for an anaphoric role of the noun *coup*, whereas the second value allows for a connection between arguments.

Besides, these expressions behave differently depending on their syntactic incidence or syntactic scope:

Au coup de and *sur le coup de* introduce rather “temporal” adverbial groups. *Sous le coup* admits three different statuses, from the more internal syntactic incidence to the more external:

- (4) *Il a agi sous le coup de la colère.*
 'He acted out of anger.'
Je suis encore sous le coup.
 'I am still shocked.'
Sous le coup, il est resté groggy.
 'Under the blow, he remained groggy.'

More relevantly for us, the distribution of these expressions may oscillate between sentence adverbials (mainly *sur le coup* and *sous le coup*) and performative adverbials (*du coup* and *pour le coup*). This intuitive and well-known difference appears as follows:

- (5) *Paul a eu un petit accident...*
 'Paul had a small accident...'
 ...*Sur le coup, il était très choqué.*
 '...At the time, he was very shocked.'
 ...*Sous le coup, il était très choqué.*
 '...Under the blow, he was very shocked.'
 ...*Du coup, il était très choqué.*
 '...And so, he was very shocked.'
 ...*Pour le coup, il était très choqué.*
 '...As a result, he was very shocked.'

These adverbials are equally mobile:

- (6) *Paul a eu un petit accident...*
 ...*Il était sur le coup très choqué.*
 ...*Il était sous le coup très choqué.*
 ...*Il était du coup très choqué.*
 ...*Il était pour le coup très choqué.*

But a cleft structure shows differences²:

- (7) *Paul a eu un petit accident...*
 'Paul had a slight accident.'
 ...*C'est sur le coup qu'il fut très choqué.*
 'It was at the time that he was very shocked.'
 ...*C'est sous le coup qu'il fut très choqué.*
 'It was under the blow that he was very shocked.'
 ... * *C'est du coup qu'il fut très choqué.*

* 'It was and so that he was very shocked.'

... ? *C'est pour le coup qu'il fut très choqué.*

'It was as a result that he was very shocked.'

The tests may be only about relative acceptability; nonetheless they indicate different incidences: *sur le coup* and *sous le coup* qualify the second sentence “from the inside”, whereas *du coup* and *pour le coup* connect utterances. The first are complements, the second are connectives, hence more pragmatic than semantic (Hölker, 1988).³

The following test confirms this difference in syntactic behaviour:

(8) *Paul a eu un petit accident. Il fut très choqué, ...*

'Paul had a small accident. He was very shocked,...'

...*mais heureusement pas sur le coup !*

'...but fortunately not at the time!'

... *mais pas tellement sous le coup !*

'...but not that much under the blow!'

... * *mais pas du coup.*

'...* but not and so.'

... * *mais pas pour le coup.*

'...* but not as a result.'

3. Pragma-semantic values

In this section we will concentrate on *pour le coup* and *du coup*. The other expressions will be considered again in the last part of the section, concerning the polysemy of *coup*.

Du coup and *pour le coup* are (at least with regard to their most significant uses) classified as discursive – or pragmatic – connectives. The values of connectives, which have been recently intensively studied (Cadiot et al., 1985a; Ferrari and Rossari, 1994; Jayez and Rossari, 1996, 2000; Leroy, 2004; Mokni, 2004; Nemo, 1998), vary considerably:

“rephrasing” (*en fait, simplement, autrement dit, de toute façon, d'ailleurs, en tout cas, pour autant* -- "as a matter of fact, simply, in other words, anyhow, besides, anyway, for all that");

“conclusion” (*en somme, somme toute, bref, au total, finalement, en fin de compte, tout compte fait, au bout du compte, au final* – "all things considered, altogether, in short, on the whole, finally, in the final analysis, in the last analysis");

“opposition/restriction” (*mais, pourtant, et pourtant, cependant, toutefois, et encore* – “but, however, and yet, however, and still”), regulation of “engagement” or “resumption” (*tu sais, au fait, à propos* – “you know, by the way, incidentally”);

“uttering” regulation (*bon, euh, voilà* – “well, there”);

“transfer” or “shifting” (*en outre, par ailleurs, certes, au fond, d’un autre côté* – “moreover, in addition, indeed, basically, on the other hand”);

“listening regulation” (*hum, ouais, d’accord, soit, sans doute, assurément, justement⁴, bof* – “hum, yeah, ok, all right, undoubtedly, sure, I don’t know”);

“sequence, connection, revaluation” (*donc, alors, enfin, finalement, du coup, pour le coup* – “therefore, then, finally, eventually, and so, as a result/this time”).

Besides, the categories of “causation” (*puisque, parce que⁵* -- “since, because”), “concession” (*même si, bien que* – “even though, although”), “opposition” (*au contraire, par contre* – “on the contrary, on the other hand”), etc., waver between a semantic and a pragmatic status. Of course, the historic perspective reveals reanalyses of many kinds, which have appeared recently.⁶

A. *Donc, du coup, pour le coup*

The three connectives *donc, du coup* and *pour le coup* establish different kinds of connections:

(9a) (*Paul est malade*)_p, *donc* (*il ne va pas travailler*)_q

'(Paul is sick)_p, so (he will not go to work)_q'

(9b) (*Paul est malade*)_p, *du coup* (*il ne va pas travailler*)_q

'(Paul is sick)_p and so (he will not go to work)_q'

(9c) (*Paul est malade*)_p, *pour le coup* (*il ne va pas travailler*)_q

'(Paul is sick)_p as a result (he will not go to work)_q'

(10a) (*Paul est malade*)_p, *pourtant* (*il va à l'école*)_q

'(Paul is sick)_p, yet (he will go to school)_q'

(10b)? (*Paul est malade*)_p, *pourtant* (*il ne va pas à l'école*)_q

?

'('Paul is sick)_p, yet (he will not go to school)_q'

(11a)? (*Paul est malade*)_p, *donc/alors* (*il va à l'école*)_q

'?(Paul is sick)_p, so/then (he will go to school)_q'

(11b)? (*Paul est malade*)_p, *du coup* (*il va à l'école*)_q

'?(Paul is sick)_p, and so (he will go to school)_q'

(11c) ? (*Paul est malade*)_p, *pour le coup* (*il va à l'école*)_q

'?(Paul is sick)_p, and so (he will go to school)_q'

Typically, examples in (9) are not controversial and so illustrate the notion of “normative connection” (Carel, 2001; Ducrot, 2001). Examples in (10) illustrate the notion of “transgressive connection”. The pragma-semantic mechanisms that validate those regularities are “*topoi*”,⁷ or argumentative supports, i.e. sociological principles that themselves are normative. They are not, as one would expect, logical rules, but cultural stereotypes that connect premise and consequent through utterances that are internal to language and lexicon. Examples in (11) are relatively difficult to accept⁸ only because they have trouble finding support in these rules of usage that language incorporates. Only non-normative connections seem to correspond to the link between *p* and *q* in (11), so these examples are easily interpreted as paradoxes.

We may observe that the very notion of “consequence”, highly appropriate here, presupposes the notion of “argument”: all the connectives that we study are interpreted as a certain content, e.g. action, event, situation, state, relation, expressed by *q* “follows”, “comes from” or “is a sequel to” another content expressed by *p*, through a certain argument and not through coincidence. The nature of this argument depends on the expression that is used:

- *donc* ("so"): the connection is a simple “unfolding” or “development” along certain dimensions of the premise *p*, supported by a cognitive (referential/perceptual/informational) or logical⁹ coherence. The particularity of *donc* is that *p* itself supports multiple indications, one of them being unfolded by *q*. By “*p* itself”, we mean all the things that can follow considering language-based knowledge, hence knowledge that is generic enough to be considered by language users as pertaining to language. *Donc* directs interpretation only towards arguments that do not involve a specific work on token-situations, so it can be considered “intra-propositional”¹⁰. That is coherent with the ability of *donc* to be “reduced” to a simple coordinator, as in (12a),
- *du coup* ("and so"): the connection realized by *du coup* is not intra- but inter-propositional, and is difficult to reduce it to a simple coordination (example (12b)). Proposition *p* doesn't “unfold” but rather “rebounds” to reach proposition *q*. The nominal anaphora plays a role in this indirect connection, though in a weakened way, as we will see below,

- *pour le coup* ("as a result/this time"): the connection implies a “discursive break” in which the noun *coup* ("hit, shot, thrust,...") plays an active role (impact, punctual event). It is clearly inter-propositional and impossible to paraphrase with coordination (example (12b)).

(12a) *Paul est malade, donc alité.*

'Paul is sick, hence confined to bed.'

(12b) * *Paul est malade, du coup alité.*

*'Paul is sick, and so confined to bed.'

(12c) * *Paul est malade, pour le coup alité.*

*'Paul is sick, as a result confined to bed.'

Another characteristic, the ability to invert the order of *p* and *q* (without any “transgression”), distinguishes *donc* from *du coup* and *pour le coup*:

(13a) *Paul est alité, donc il est malade*

'Paul is confined to bed, so he is sick.'

(13b) *Paul est alité, donc malade*

'Paul is confined to bed, hence sick.'

In this case, the connection mechanism is not deductive but abductive. In other words, the locator relies on perceptual data (*Paul is confined to bed*), and considers as a sequel information that is in fact, from the argumentative perspective, a starting point. The very possibility of this construction depends upon a strong explicitness of the possible arguments, hence the reference to language-based knowledge: the consequence in the “normal” direction (sickness → confined to bed) has to be already “inside language” so as to appear altogether as a “sequel” of the mere observation that someone is confined to bed.¹¹ Interestingly, this construction, made possible by *donc*, is not accessible through a participial reduction, which is clearly far too “hierarchical”:

(14a) *Etant malade, Paul est alité*

'Being sick, Paul is confined to bed.'

(14b) * *Etant alité, Paul est malade*

*'Being confined to bed, Paul is sick.'

Du coup and *pour le coup*, on the other hand, appeal to a discursive solution of continuity (Cadiot, 1991) and so are easier to use in relation to utterer-centered mechanisms (reflexive trends, modalisation).¹² For this reason, neither direct inversion (15) nor coordination reduction (16) are allowed with *du coup* and *pour le coup*:

(15a) ?? *Paul est alité, du coup il est malade.*

??'Paul is confined to bed, and so he is sick.'

(15b) * *Paul est alité, pour le coup il est malade.*

*'Paul is confined to bed, as a result he is sick.'

(16a) * *Paul est malade, du coup alité.*

*'Paul is sick, and so confined to bed.'

(16b) * *Paul est malade, pour le coup alité.*

*'Paul is sick, as a result confined to bed.'

An easy way of transforming (15) into acceptable sentences is to make explicit the notion of point of view, as in (17):

(17a) *Paul est alité, du coup on peut penser qu'il est malade*

'Paul is confined to bed, and so one can think that he is sick.'

(17b) *Paul est alité, pour le coup on peut penser qu'il est malade*

'Paul is confined to bed, as a result one can think that he is sick.'

It follows that *du coup* and *pour le coup* are closer to simple paratactic connections than to *donc*:

(18a) ?? *Tiens, il fait beau, donc on devrait sortir.*

??'Hey, it's sunny, so we should go out.'

(18b) *Tiens, il fait beau, on devrait sortir.*

'Hey, it's sunny, we should go out.'

(18c) *Tiens, il fait beau, du coup on devrait sortir.*

??'Hey, it's sunny, and so we should go out.'

(18d) *Tiens, il fait beau, pour le coup on devrait sortir.*

'Hey, it's sunny, this time we should go out.'

Du coup and *pour le coup* are then adapted when the support for the connection is not already incorporated in the language, when it is more indirect and contextual.

Besides, the ontological status (event, state, quality) of proposition *p* is irrelevant¹³:

(19a) *Paul s'est cassé la jambe...*

'Paul broke his leg.'

(19b) *Paul est malade...*

'Paul is sick.'

(19c) *Paul est vieux... (Du coup / Pour le coup) il ne va pas à l'école*

'Paul is old ... (And so / As a result) he doesn't go to school.'

Then we have to admit that the established connection is sensitive not only to content but also to acts. These expressions function not as connections between static objects (whether they are themselves acts, attitudes or contents) but as “transactions” between dynamic objects (Jayez and Rossari, 2000). *Du coup* filters the quasi-mechanical dimension of the transition from *p* to *q* – insisting on the immediate accessibility of the consequence – and makes the transition a punctual one. The first constraint is weaker than that of *donc*, and the second is due to the semantics of *coup*.

Being sensitive to acts, *du coup* differs from *donc* also in a pragmatic dimension: *du coup* depends on *assertions*, i.e. illocutionary acts. Therefore, connections based on exclamations or imperatives, such as the following, are difficult:

(20a) ?? *Aïe, je me suis pété la jambe ; du coup je ne vais pas à l'école.*

??'Ouch, I've smashed my leg; and so I don't go to school.'

(20b) ?? *Ouvre la fenêtre ; du coup il fera moins chaud*¹⁴.

??'Open the window; and so it will be cooler.'

Finally, we can state that a simple deductive procedure (referring to a mere “unfolding” semiotic movement) treating *p* and *q* as propositional contents, not as illocutionary events, is sufficient for *donc* but cannot hold as a description of *du coup* and *pour le coup*. As far as pragmatic acts are concerned, we can add that the semantics of *coup* intervenes through its “active” dimension.

B. Du coup / Pour le coup

1. *Abductive inversion.* We will now concentrate on the difference between *du coup* and *pour le coup* in the light of new examples. When *p* and *q* are in a favourable scenario, abductive inversion is much better with *pour le coup*:

(21a) *Paul a bien travaillé, du coup il a eu son examen.*

'Paul worked well, and so he passed.'

(21b) **Paul a eu son examen, du coup il a bien travaillé.*

*'Paul passed, and so he worked well.'

(21c) *Paul a bien travaillé, pour le coup il a eu son examen.*

'Paul worked well, this time he passed.'

(21d) *Paul a eu son examen, pour le coup il a bien travaillé.*

'Paul passed, this time he worked well.'

It is easy to understand why (21b) is difficult: it would need a shift of perspective, an anticipation level different from that of p . An easy way to make this happen, as we have already seen in (17), is to add an explicit metadiscursive point of view: *Paul a eu son examen, du coup on peut penser/dire qu'il a bien travaillé* ("Paul passed, and so **one could think/say** that he worked well"). This point of view automatically presupposes a debate about how much q is true, allowing p to be portrayed as intermediate. What is crucial with *du coup* is that this debate is presented as a new discursive event. If not, then *donc* is more suitable. We may also notice that the whole construction builds a deductive connection from a presupposed content leading to q , despite the abductive branch from p to q .

A consequence is that it is particularly difficult to construct an example where $p \rightarrow q$ is abductive and where *du coup* only is possible. We can propose the following attempt:

(22) *Tu vois, tu te demandais ce que Paul pouvait avoir fait de bien récemment. Il a réussi son examen, (du coup / * donc) il a bien travaillé.*

'You see, you wondered what Paul could possibly have done well recently. He passed his exam, (and so / * so) he worked well.'

In (22) the abductive connection $p \rightarrow q$ happens to be completely irrelevant, hence the impossibility of using *donc*, whereas p can be considered an intermediate support coming from an expectation of something Paul didn't mess up, and leading to q : "having worked well" now means that Paul didn't mess up (this time).¹⁵

Turning now to examples (21c) and (21d), we observe that abductive inversion poses no problem for *pour le coup*. Apparently, *pour le coup* builds up an even stronger anticipation level, picturing q as a surprising event. In these examples, Paul is portrayed as someone having difficulties passing exams (in 21c) or having trouble with work (in 21d). This time the possible connection between p and q is only a pretext. The real connection is between what is implied (Paul having trouble with exams or work) and q . Proposition p is then only a support for that implicit content. The necessary pause in the utterance is certainly linked to that implicit reference.

2. Actualisation. Actualisation can be considered as a somewhat semantic dimension of the pragmatic work that characterises, each in its own way, *du coup* and *pour le coup*. Let's analyse these examples:

(23a) *Paul est malade, du coup il reste au lit.*

'Paul is sick, and so he is confined to bed.'

(23b) **Paul a une otite, du coup il est malade.*

*'Paul has an otitis, and so he is sick.'

Properties such as being sick have to be actualized in some ways and discourse can project a property as actualizing a change in the course of events. That's what *du coup* is particularly adapted to. In (23a) being sick is considered a legitimate source for an *actual* event that changes the course of previous events. Such a thing is impossible in (23b), since actualisation cannot intervene in the mere "unfolding process" going from *otitis* to *sickness*. Lack of actualisation here prevents any attempt to see *p* as a pragmatic intermediate.

Clearly, *pour le coup* works perfectly in the same contexts but not without modifying the conditions of the connection:

(24a) *Paul est malade, pour le coup il reste au lit.*

'Paul is sick, (this time/as a result) he is confined to bed.'

(24b) *Paul a une otite, pour le coup il est malade.*

'Paul has otitis, (this time/* as a result) he is sick.'

In (24a) Paul is seen as having trouble staying in bed even when he is sick, and in (24b) we imagine him not being sick very often. Interestingly, the English translation of *pour le coup* is different in the two examples. The translation "as a result" seems to be possible in (24a) but in fact would be a translation of *et donc* rather than *pour le coup*. On the other hand, only "this time" can be a near equivalent to *pour le coup* in (24b). The English translation reveals clearly that any direct, logical connection between *p* and *q* is completely irrelevant as far as *pour le coup* is concerned. *Pour le coup* indicates much more a "discursive break" in the connection than a connection per se.

3. Pragmatic model. The general pragmatic mechanisms of *du coup* and *pour le coup* are very different from that of *donc* but the two phrases are not the same, either. *Du coup* gives an instruction to conceive *p* as a mere intermediate in a reasoning process, and so requires from the speakers a contextual interaction. Nonetheless, *du coup* remains essentially deductive and based on logics that speakers are not supposed to discuss; the pragmatic mechanism of *du coup* is typical of that of "presupposition" (French: *présupposé*). The pragmatics of *du coup* is then illocutionary. On the other hand, *pour le coup* focuses exclusively on discursive strategy, involving a significant break and, as a consequence, reference to specific knowledge. To a certain extent, *pour le coup* deals with "implicatures" (French: *sous-entendus*) rather than "presuppositions", and so is of the perlocutionary type.

However suggestive these qualifications may be, we could extend them to the case of *donc*, which is supported by language knowledge, and so it is of the locutionary type.

We can sum up the characteristics as follows:

	<i>donc</i>	<i>du coup</i>	<i>pour le coup</i>
pragma-semantic characteristics	deduction/ “unfolding”	actualisation/ ”rebound”	discursive break
support	language / public stereotypes	situation / personal experience	interlocution / discursive strategy
pragmatic model	locutionary	illocutionary	perlocutionary

C. *Pour le coup*

We observed earlier that there is no straightforward English translation of *pour le coup*, and that a mixture of "this time" and "as a result" is the best approximation. Now we can add that "this time" is closer to translating *pour le coup*, and that when "as a result" is a possible equivalent, it misses what is really specific of *pour le coup*. For instance, example (24a) could be translated into "Paul is sick, as a result he is confined to bed", but the translation then lacks the reference to the pragmatic support, such as ‘Paul is known to hate being confined to bed’. *Harrap’s Shorter Dictionary* gives "as a result" as a possible translation when the ‘consequence’ dimension is involved, but that occurs only when a direct connection is grammatically possible, leaving aside the reasons why specifically *pour le coup* was used in the French utterance. As a result (!), we can state that "as a result" is in general a bad translation of *pour le coup*, and that any translation that gives rise to a discursive break is better. For instance, the *Collins Robert Dictionary* (2002) proposes the following translation for *là, pour le coup, il m’a étonné*: "he really surprised me there". The specifics of *pour le coup* are distributed on "really" and "there",¹⁶ referring to previous knowledge and to the “breaking aspect” of the situation.

Here is one last example showing the specifics of *pour le coup* in light of the translation issue:

(...) *un passant follement imprudent entreprend de slalomer entre les projectiles, et vous fabrique une bavure en moins de deux. Oh ! pas bonnard du tout, la bavure ! Le ministre, pour le coup, convoque la presse et fait des excuses à l'opinion.*¹⁷

'(...) an incredibly careless passer-by begins to slalom between the projectiles, and makes a blunder in next to no time. Oh! a very bad one, this blunder! The minister, **this time/for once**, calls a press conference and makes apologies to the public.'

The English translation in this example lacks two dimensions of *pour le coup*. First, because of the position of *pour le coup* just after *Le ministre*, we understand that the ministerial intervention qualifies the intensity of the situation at the same time, as we understand that it is exceptional for a minister to make apologies. Hence the possible translation to *for once*. Second, the connection between premise and consequence is made explicitly through the anaphora *le coup*.

This last dimension is very important, as we will see in the next section.

D. Coup

We encounter in the noun *coup* itself the main values observed in the connectives derived from *coup*. 'Discursive break' and 'rebound', in particular, can be considered as extensions of 'impact', 'punctual aspect' and 'outbreak'¹⁸:

- when *coup* is non-anaphoric, it depicts an initiatory act programmed in continuation of a gesture. The notion of 'impact' presupposes a gesture, canonically physical but sometimes used in a metaphorical way as in *coup dur* ("hard blow"), *coup tordu* ("dirty trick"), *fomenteur un coup* ("to be up to something"). *Coup* is then resultative, from an agent or patient point of view: *donner un coup* ("to hit, to knock", etc.), *prendre un coup* ("to have a knock, a bump", etc.). If we consider the possible pragmatic extensions, we may notice that the notion of 'impact' provides a pattern for kinds of connections where the notion of "consequence" is put forward.
- when *coup* works as a qualitative resumption, it expresses suddenness, punctual aspect: *à coup* ("shock"), *coup de blues* ("the blues"), *coup de genie* ("stroke of genius"), *coup de pot* ("stroke of luck"), *boire un coup* ("to have a drink").
- 'outbreak', leaving marks: *valoir le coup* ("to be worth"), *réussir/rater son coup* ("to pull it off/to blow it"), *être dans le coup* ("to be in on it/to be with it/to know all about it/to know what's what"), *donner un coup de main* ("to give a hand"). Here the instruction spreads over a time period, the outbreak is portrayed with 'shock waves' downstream. Outbreak means a new turn and consequently promises that these uses particularly highlight. This complex rephrasing of the very meaning of "coup" makes our term for the connectives *idiomatically combining expressions* coherent (in the sense of Nunberg et al., 1994).

4. Conclusion

The compositionality issue is vigorously discussed among semanticists. Many insist on what they think is non-compositionality: there would be no (“bottom-up”) composition in idiomatic or set expressions, in so-called metaphorical uses of nouns, adjectives and verbs, in ‘auxiliary’ or ‘control’ uses of verbs, in prepositions when used as tools of government, in adverbs when used as performatives or connectives, etc.

We, among others, have promoted, on the contrary, a gestaltist compositionality principle (Cadiot, 1997). Within this framework, the noun *coup*, for instance, can never be, at whatever level, identified with its psychologically prototypical value. In particular, the meaning of *coup* is not the first of the three values given above but is a “scheme”, a “motive”, some kind of anticipation. The referential intuition that there is some kind of trope in *coup de génie* (“stroke of genius”) is secondary to syntagmatic construction and only appears after the syntagm has been plunged into a world of objects and experience.¹⁹ The value of an occurrence remains suspended before it is linked necessarily to what follows.²⁰ To sum up, we think it essential to insist on the fact that any semantic or ontological typing is a secondary or “discursive” phenomenon.

Such a reasoning is even more obvious for the preposition *pour* in *pour le coup*: its value here deals with pure discourse management, the equivalent of a mere index, as in many of its uses: *pour une fois* (“for once”), *pour cette fois* (“for this time”), *pour le cas où* (“in case”), *pour aujourd’hui* (“for today”), and also *pour cette affaire je m’en charge, pour cette autre, c’est à toi* (“for this matter, I deal with it, for this other one, it’s on you”), etc. *Pour* is no more than a simple mark, a kind of punctuation mark (a point, with instruction to go to the next line or to the next paragraph). But we also understand that the notion of discursive break that we proposed for describing *pour le coup* as a connective follows directly from this discursive “scansion”. If we add the fact that the definite article *le* is implicated here in discursive anaphora (with a tendency towards “associative” – or “notoriety” – anaphora), the connective *pour le coup* can be granted a perfectly compositional status.

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¹ In addition, and though there are no exact matching set phrases, the two values of *du même coup* seem to correspond to the two possible translations of *même*: *same* or *very*.

² Another example: *ce coup-ci, sur ce coup-ci, ? sous ce coup-ci*, where *coup* is truly anaphoric. Conversely, * *de ce coup-ci*, * *pour ce coup-ci* are impossible if considered as connectives. This indicates that the definite article in *du coup* and *pour le coup* does not function as a plain anaphora (rather an “associative” or indirect anaphora).

³ It is well-known (cf., among others, the work of O. Ducrot, A. Cadiot and al., F. Nemo) that this criterion (semantic information vs. pragmatic indication) reveals the different values of *enfin* or *toujours*:

A cette réunion sont venus Max, Paul et enfin Jean.

'Max, Paul and **last** Jean, came to this meeting.'

Mais enfin, qu'est-ce qu'il fabrique ?

'What **the hell** is he doing?'

Pierre est toujours là.

'Pierre is **still** here.'

Cause toujours ; Mange toujours ta soupe

'Talk **anyway**; **at least** eat your soup.'

But we have to insist that the semantic/pragmatic division only indicates differences in linguistic behaviour, dependent on contexts and collocations, which do not call into question the instructions “laid down” by morphemes for the readers in their interpretation of the discourse. This division could not be the result of a conventional priority (Nemo, 2001: 210, 216).

⁴ Serça (1996) shows that *justement* marks a “retaking” of the addressee’s utterance.

⁵ Cf. De Fornel, 1989; Debaisieux, 2004.

⁶ Cf., as regard to grammaticalisation, (Sweetser, 1990), and the work of Mokni (2004) on *or*.

⁷ “Topics”, in the sense defined by Ducrot, 1980.

⁸ It is of course only a matter of minimal imagination to consider natural an example such as *Paul est malade, donc il va à l'école* ("Paul is sick, so he will go to school"). It is even easier to accept *Paul est malade, pour le coup il va à l'école* ("Paul is sick, as a result/this time he will go to school").

⁹ Let’s recall (cf. the work, among others, of Jayez and Rossari (1996, 2000)) that *donc* has many other values:

deduction: *Il faisait chaud donc je me suis habillé légèrement.*

'It was hot so I dressed up lightly.'

resumption: *C'est donc à ce moment que je lui ai répondu...*

'So it is at this moment that I answered...'

discourse: *Qu'elle est donc jolie!*

'Well how pretty she is!'

argumentation: *Il ne l'a pas lu donc il ne peut rien dire*

'He didn't read it therefore he can't say anything.'

metadiscourse: *C'est votre point de vue donc que vous présentez*

'So, it is your opinion that you are exposing.'

recapitulation: *Tout individu a donc le droit à la dignité*

'Then every man has a right for dignity.'

¹⁰ cf. Leroy, 2004.

¹¹ The possibility if inversion of *donc* is analogous to that of *puisque* (*since*), as opposed to *parce que* (*because*):

Paul est alité, puisqu'il est malade.

'Paul is confined to bed, since he is sick.'

Paul est malade, puisqu'il est alité.

'Paul is sick, since he is confined to bed.'

Paul est alité parce qu'il est malade.

'Paul is confined to bed, since he is sick.'

**Paul est malade parce qu'il est alité.*

*'Paul is sick, because he is confined to bed.'

The particularity of *puisque* (*since*) is to presuppose that the proposition it introduces is not already known or accepted by the addressee. It follows that the proposition can easily be positioned as a starting point for an argument.

¹² As Jayez and Rossari (2000) point out, the absence of “actualisation” that is inherent to *donc* is responsible for the following contrast:

Il est Italien, donc il est européen.

'He is Italian, so he is European.'

? *Il est Italien, du coup il est européen.*

'He is Italian, and so he is European.'

¹³ As long as it is compatible with the status of proposition *q*. The following example is of course more difficult to justify:

? *Paul est vieux. (Du coup / Pour le coup) il ne va pas à l'école aujourd'hui.*

'Paul is old. (And so / As a result / This time) he is not going to school today.'

¹⁴ For obvious reasons, these examples are even worse with *donc*.

¹⁵ Conversely, it is possible to construct a context where only *donc* is possible, to the detriment of *du coup*:

- *Pensez ce que vous voulez des capacités de Paul, moi je ne juge que par le résultat. Paul a réussi son examen (donc / * du coup) il a bien travaillé.*

'You may think what you want about Paul's abilities, I judge only by results. Paul passed his exam, (* and) so he worked well.'

- *On peut débattre des heures sur ce que veut dire « bien travailler ». Pour moi, dans ce cas c'est simple. Paul a réussi son examen (donc / * du coup) il a bien travaillé.*

'We can debate for hours about what “to work well” means. For me, in this case it is simple. Paul passed his exam, (* and) so he worked well.'

This time, what is relevant is either (first example) the strength of a stereotype ('success is impossible without work'), or (second example) the definition of good work. In either case, making *p* a mere intermediate leads to discursive incoherence.

¹⁶ We could think that *there* translates *là* ; but *là* is actually unnecessary in the French sentence.

¹⁷ A. Vergne, *L'innocence du boucher*, 1984.

¹⁸ The verb *couper* shares the same characteristics.

¹⁹ The hierarchical structure of *coup de génie* does not imply any semantic conversion of the noun *coup*. Instead, interpretation grasps the whole motive of *coup* and adjusts it to syntagmatic typing.

²⁰ As Recanati (2005) points out, a possible transfer process (for instance from *lion* to *stone lion*, or from *door* to *key to mystery*) would intervene only *before* the construction of the compound. Since it is hard to imagine what could initiate such a mechanism, the principle of a morphemic motive is the only coherent explanation. Fundamentally, it implies not to treat referential prototypes as entry points to transfer processes (Cadiot, 1999; Cadiot and Visetti, 2001).