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Competing connectives in the causal domain. French *car* and *parce que*

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ABSTRACT.

In Modern French, *parce que* “because” seems to be replacing *car* “because, for”. This is not a new phenomenon: the competition between these two causal conjunctions (among others) started out almost a thousand years ago. Our corpus data show that *parce que* only recently gained the upper hand, but only in Spoken French, while Written French still allows the use of *car* on a par with *parce que*.

We investigate here this double evolution – the dying out of *car* and development of *parce que* – with a corpus study including a written diachronic corpus (from Preclassical to Contemporary French) and modern spoken data. Our aim is to see when and how *parce que* came to the fore, and to study the role of *grammaticalization* and *subjectification* in this process.

KEYWORDS.

grammaticalization, subjectification, causal connectives, diachrony, corpus study, written language, spoken language.

1 Introduction

The point of departure of our study is the observation that the use of the French causal connectives *car* and *parce que* (both meaning “because”) diverges strongly in written and spoken language. Most native speakers will agree that *car* has nearly disappeared from spontaneous Spoken French¹, while *parce que* seems to fulfill a role of default causal connective (Simon and Degand, 2007, Debaisieux, 2002). Our proposal here is to put this observation in a diachronic perspective of competition between two markers with similar semantics, which could lead eventually to the demise of one of the markers. In line with functional approaches to language, we assume that the locus of language change is primarily

¹ Interestingly, *car* resurfaces in chats, forums and text messages, as noted by Véronis and Guimier De Neef (2006), probably because *car* is more easy to type (“sans doute pour des raisons de facilité de saisie”, *ibid*:241). We thank an anonymous reviewer for having pointed this out to us.

within language in use, i.e. “une langue change parce qu’elle fonctionne” (Martinet, 1955/2005:xiii, cited by Babiniotis, 2009:27)². We thus formulate the hypothesis that the striking imbalance in the frequency of use of present-day *car* and *parce que* is the result of diverging paths of evolution in the use of the two markers: *car* has apparently reached a (temporary) semantic stability, while *parce que* still pursues its semantic evolution³ (Degand and Fagard, 2008). In particular, we will show that the evolution of *parce que* is an instance of subjectification, and even intersubjectification. According to Traugott and Dasher (2002:88 sqq.), the latter constitute semantic phenomena which often accompany the grammaticalization of discourse markers. Our contribution thus also aims to mingle with the debate on the relation between subjectification and grammaticalization (see, among others, Davidse et al., 2010; Athanasiadou et al., 2006; Traugott, 1995, 2003), where we will follow the view that grammaticalization should be seen as a morpho-syntactic, as well as discourse-pragmatic phenomenon (cf. Degand and Simon-Vandenberg, 2011).

Thus, under the premise that today’s language variation is the result of (ongoing) change and also an enabling factor for change, our preliminary observations lead to the following research questions:

- What can the diachronic evolution of *car* and *parce que* tell us about the origins of the synchronic divergences in Contemporary French? What diachronic notions can best describe the evolution of *car* and *parce que*?
- Can the study of their diachronic evolution help us account for the striking contrast they present in Contemporary French?

The article is structured as follows: Section 2 describes the use and function of *car* and *parce que* in spoken and written Contemporary French. Section 3 discusses the diachronic notion of subjectification as a potential account for the semantic evolution of our connectives, which is presented in detail in section 4. Concluding remarks and a discussion of the relationship between grammaticalization and subjectification are given in Section 5.

2 *Car* and *parce que* in Contemporary French

The connectives *car* and *parce que* in Contemporary French have been and continue to be the object of numerous linguistic studies which investigate their use mostly in writing, but also in speech (see, among others, Bentolila, 1986; Debaisieux, 2002, 2004; Degand and Pander Maat, 2003; Ferrari, 1992; Groupe λ -1, 1975; Herslund, 1998; Iordanskaja, 1993; Lambrecht et al., 2006; Moeschler, 1987, 2005, 2007; Pit, 2007; Simon and Degand, 2007; Zufferey, this issue).

In a nutshell, while the specific perspective of investigation diverges among these different authors, they all seem to agree that *car* and *parce que* signal a causal (coherence) relation introducing causes, reasons, and/or arguments. As such, *car* and *parce que* belong to the French causal paradigm of connectives expressing (backward) causality (Pit, 2007).

A recurrent distinction that is made between the two connectives, especially in written French, builds on the one made by Groupe λ -1 (1975) describing *parce que* as a ‘content conjunction’ and *car* as a ‘speech act conjunction’. This semantic difference is reflected in the diverging syntactic behaviour of the two connectives. In oral language, however, this

² For a discussion of the interpretation of the Saussurean dichotomy between diachrony and synchrony and its impact on postsaussurean theories, see e.g. Verleyen (2008). Also, Fischer and Rosenbach (2001) give a brief overview of functional and formal approaches to grammaticalization that grew out of the “dissatisfaction with the strictly dichotomous ‘structural’ model (in terms of the split between diachrony and synchrony) and with the idea of an autonomous syntactic theory” (p.4).

³ Of course, we do not mean to say here that *parce que* or *car* evolve on their own; rather, language use brings about changes which affect linguistic elements. Here and elsewhere, if we speak of *car*’s or *parce que*’s evolution, it is only to state things more simply.

distinction appears to be blurred (Debaisieux, 2002). Simon and Degand (2007) show on the basis of written and oral data that the distinction between the two connectives in Contemporary French can be re-expressed in terms of scalar subjectivity or degree of Speaker Involvement (Pander Maat and Degand, 2001), and that the semantics of the two connectives varies between oral and written mode. We will partially build on their main results in order to formulate hypotheses with respect to the semantic evolution of the two markers in the diachrony of French, and we will test these hypotheses on corpus data in Section 4.

2.1 Frequency of *car* and *parce que* in written and spoken language

Before turning to the divergences we found in the frequency and semantics of our connectives in written vs spoken language, a few words of caution are in order. We are of course well aware that the ‘real’ difference is not between speech and writing *per se* but between features that are linked to both modes of discourse. Among these, there is the register with formal and informal uses of language (cf. Koch and Österreicher, 1985; Chafe and Tannen, 1987), and medium seems to play a role in the discrimination between text types (e.g. casual coffee conversation between colleagues, business meeting, e-novel), but there are also extra-linguistic parameters, such as emotional weight or spatio-temporal distance between the interlocutors. Here our assumption will be that there remains a global tendency, spoken language often being more informal than written language. Thus, we tried as much as possible to choose data which at least partly reflect this opposition between more formal and more informal registers (see below).

For the analysis of the spoken data, we made use of the Valibel database⁴ counting more than 400 hours of transcribed speech, which corresponds approximately to 3.7 million words. Details about the constitution and evolution of the database can be found elsewhere (Dister et al., 2009), and we will simply describe here the main characteristics of the data used. The database was initially meant as “un *observatoire* du français en Belgique francophone” (Dister et al., 2009:3), i.e. a collection of transcribed data for the study of (socio-)linguistic variation in Belgian French at all levels of linguistic description (phonology, prosody, morphology, lexicon, syntax, discourse organization); since then, the database has been put to use in many linguistic studies focusing on Spoken French, also very often outside the area of socio-linguistic studies. The collection of data started in 1987 and is ongoing. As for the interaction types included to date, approximately 42% are interviews concerning sociolinguistic topics; 30% are informal “guided” conversations (two or more speakers acquainted with one another), and 6% are non-elicited spontaneous conversations. Another 6% are media productions (radio interviews, debates, news broadcasts), 2,5% are composed of business meetings and another 2,5% are (secondary) classroom interactions. Finally, 11% are composed of reading tasks; the latter were excluded from the present study. The analysis of the spoken data relies on a former study by Simon and Degand (2007) which took into account all Valibel data (except for the reading tasks) for the frequency study. The semantic analysis, in turn, was performed on a random selection of 50 occurrences of each connective in the Valibel data set, resulting eventually in a balanced set of more formal and more informal occurrences for *parce que* (sociolinguistic interviews, radio interviews, elicited conversation between acquainted, and spontaneous conversation) and mainly formal contexts for *car* (sociolinguistic interviews, radio interviews, and news broadcasts).

The written data used in this study are composed of novels and travel stories written between 1990 and 2007 extracted from the Frantext⁵ database. The written data set amounts to

⁴ Part of the database is available on-line (see <http://www.uclouvain.be/valibel>).

⁵ <http://www.frantext.fr>.

approximately 3.7 million words. The advantage of a written subcorpus restricted to narrative writing is that the genre can be kept constant for the diachronic studies (Section 4), which would not be the case for written press for instance. This choice of narrative writing turns out to be legitimate for the synchronic comparison of written and spoken language as well. Indeed, by distinguishing two subtypes of data, namely “pseudo-oral” and “narration proper”, we were able to control for potential confounding factors of level of formality, communicative goals and other context-bound data in these writings (such as the use of deixis, interjections, pragmatic markers). This made it possible to put the level of formality between speech and writing on a par. To this end, we made a finer distinction in the written data between (more formal) “narration” (narrative sequences lacking a ‘subject of consciousness’ (Pander Maat and Sanders, 2001)) and (more informal) direct speech (explicit presence of a ‘subject of consciousness’). In addition, for the semantic study, a comparison was made with former studies which included written press (formal writing), and with a study on the use of our connectives in more informal writing (blogs, forums, chats, ...).

Coming back now to our initial distinction between the written and the spoken mode, the frequency of our connectives appeared to be highly divergent: in the spoken data we found 13,614 occurrences of *parce que* (or 3.70‰) and only 80 occurrences of *car* (or 0.02‰); in writing we counted 0.43‰ occurrences of *car* and 0.45‰ of *parce que*.⁶ Thus, while the frequency of *car* and *parce que* is very similar in (narrative) writing, we witness a huge discrepancy in speech. These data also tend to confirm that *parce que* is indeed the default causal connective in spoken language, since it appears to be more than eight times more frequent in speech than in writing, and that it is also far more frequent than all the other connectives in the French causal paradigm (Fagard, 2009).

2.2 Semantic distribution for *car* and *parce que* in writing

Building on the findings of Degand and Pander Maat (2003), we assume that *car* and *parce que* can be described as expressing different degrees of Speaker Involvement (Pander Maat and Degand, 2001), or different levels of subjectivity (Pit, 2003; Pander Maat and Sanders, 2001). Inspired by the seminal work by Sweetser (1990), we established that in written press *parce que* tends to express more objective (non-volitional and volitional) causal relations with a lower degree of speaker involvement, while *car* tends to express more subjective (epistemic and speech-act) relations with a higher degree of speaker involvement ($\chi^2(1) = 21.374$; $p < .0001$; Cramer’s V: .462).

Since our present study aims at tracing back the semantic evolution of *car* and *parce que* by building on narrative data, we performed an additional corpus analysis of contemporary data of the same genre in order to ensure comparability of the data throughout time. To establish the connectives’ semantic profile, we followed the methodology described in Degand and Bestgen (2004) and discussed in Spooren and Degand (2010), which consists in categorizing each occurrence in one of the four relation types by paraphrasing the relation expressed by the connective and taking into account the situational context. We selected 100 random occurrences of both connectives, balanced for direct speech (more informal) and narration sequences (more formal) (50/50), in the corpus of narrative writing mentioned above. The statistical analysis shows a significant tendency for *parce que* to express more objective relations, and for *car* to express more subjective relations, thus confirming the results obtained with a corpus of written press ($\chi^2(3) = 17.780$; $p < .0001$; Cramer’s V: .298); see Figure 1. A more detailed analysis of these results shows that this significant difference is

⁶ Note that these frequencies are higher than the ones found by Simon and Degand (2007) in a corpus of written press, but that the proportion between *car* and *parce que* does not fundamentally diverge. In narrative writing, the frequencies of *car* and *parce que* simply lie closer to one another.

mainly due to the more frequent use of *parce que* to express volitional relations ($Z = +1.9$)⁷, and the more frequent use of *car* to express interactional relations⁸ ($Z = +2.0$). Also interesting to note is the fact that there is no statistically significant difference in the semantic distribution of *parce que* in the more formal and the more informal samples ($\chi^2(3) = 5.037$; $p = .169$; N.S.). However, for *car*, there is a significant difference: *car* expresses more interactional relations in more informal contexts than in more formal contexts ($\chi^2(3) = 10.073$; $p < .02$); this is not the case for the epistemic relations. We will come back to this discrepancy between epistemic and interactional relations later.

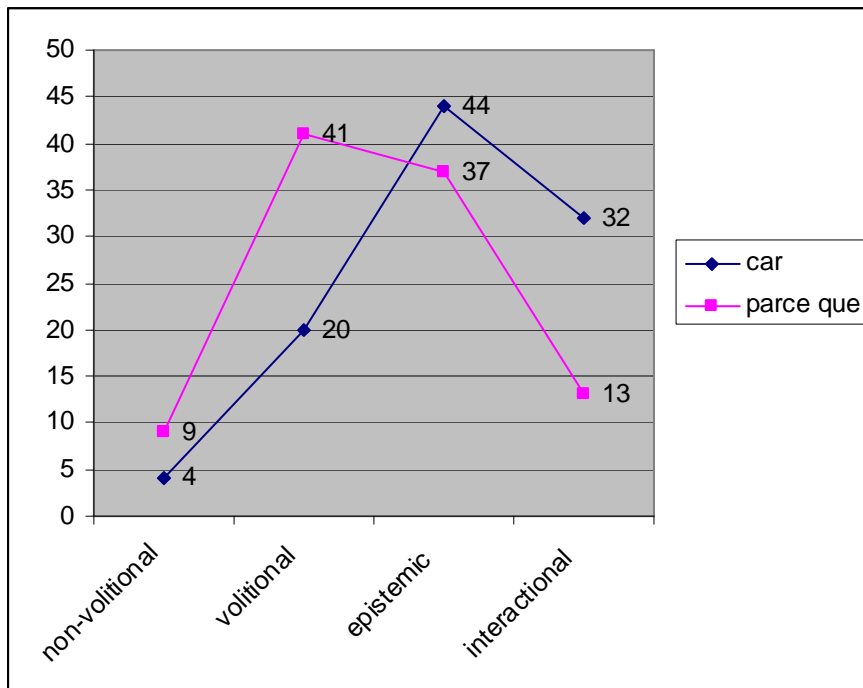


Figure 1: Semantic distribution of *car* and *parce que* in Contemporary French narrative writing

Illustrative *parce que* and *car* examples are given in (1) and (2), respectively:

- (1) - Ma mère... Tout ce qu'elle vous a dit sur Papa, ça n'est pas vrai. Papa est parti **parce qu'**il en avait marre. (Contemporary, Literature)
 - My mother... Nothing she's been telling you about Dad is true. Dad left **parce que** (because) he was fed up.
- (2) (...) un tout petit royaume gouverné par un prince qui était très riche et très juste. Le prince et la princesse, qui était très belle, bien entendu, **car** les princes, dans les contes, ont toujours des femmes très belles, étaient les parents d'un fils qu'ils avaient appelé Gautama. (Contemporary, Literature)
 (...) a very small kingdom governed by a prince who was very rich and very fair. The prince and the princess – who was very pretty, of course, **car** (for/because) princes, in fairy tales, always have very pretty spouses – were parents of a son whom they had called Gautama.

⁷ The z-score gives the probability that a particular score will occur. A z-score of +/- 1.96 is significant at 0.05, +/- 2.58 at 0.01, and +/- 3.29 at 0.001.

⁸ The category 'interactional' covers both speech-act relations of the type *What are you doing tonight? Because there's a good movie playing*; and (meta)textual relations of the type *He's a bastard! 'cause no nicer word would apply ...*

In (1), the connective *parce que* is used to introduce the reason of Dad's (volitional) action of leaving, while in (2), *car* is used to justify the author's characterization of the princess towards the reader in the form of a metacomment which implies subjective reasoning. Actually, in line with Carlier and De Mulder (2010: 269)⁹, we would like to propose that such textual relations are intersubjective in nature because they "materialize the strategic interaction between speaker and hearer and reflect the active role of the speaker to orient and to guide the hearer in his interpretational tasks" (see also Section 3). We will here categorize non-volitional and volitional relations as being objective, epistemic relations as subjective, and interactional/textual/metadiscursive relations as intersubjective, thus extending our initial speaker-involvement scale (Pander Maat and Degand 2001) with an intersubjective category.

2.3 Semantic distribution of *car* and *parce que* in spoken language

Simon and Degand (2007) report the following main results for the semantic distribution for *car* and *parce que* in Contemporary Spoken French (Valibel database): in speech, the semantic profile of the two connectives is not divergent anymore ($\chi^2 = 3.357$, $df = 3$ and $p = .34$ (N.S.)). This similar distribution seems to be caused in the first place by a larger semantic distribution of *parce que*, the latter connective moving up on the subjective cline to express *car*'s more (inter)subjective relations, as in examples (3-4):

(3) ... mais euh en général euh **parce que** c'est une question tout-à-fait générale
(Contemporary, Spoken)

... but er in general er **parce que** ('because') it's a very general matter

(4) j'aimerais bien en tous les cas avoir une bonne entente avec mes élèves mais c'est pas le plus facile **parce qu'**il faut maintenir une certaine distance et en même temps communiquer pas mal avec eux (Contemporary, Spoken)

I would like to have a good relationship with my students anyway but it's not easy **parce que** ('because') a certain distance has to be kept and at the same time one has to communicate with them quite a lot.

Example (3) illustrates a 'typical' metadiscursive use reserved to *car* in writing, where *parce que* is used to justify the word choice *en général*, which we will categorize here as intersubjective (cf. Section 3). In (4), *parce que* establishes an epistemic relation between an opinion and the reason for this opinion. This similar semantic distribution is illustrated in Figure 2.

⁹ See Breban (2010) and Ghesquière (2010) for a similar view.

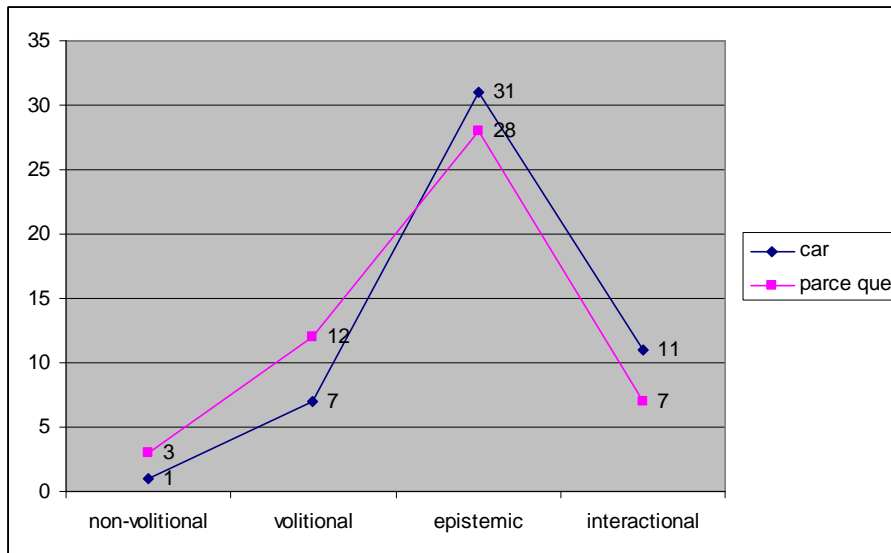


Figure 2: Relational distribution of *car* and *parce que* in spoken data (= Figure 2 in Simon and Degand 2007)

Comparing the use of *parce que* in speech and in writing¹⁰ confirms this more subjective use of *parce que* in Spoken French (Figure 3) in a statistically significant way ($\chi^2(1) = 5.002$; $p < .05$; Cramer's V: .224), which leads us to hypothesize that *parce que* is in the course of a subjectification process (Section 4).

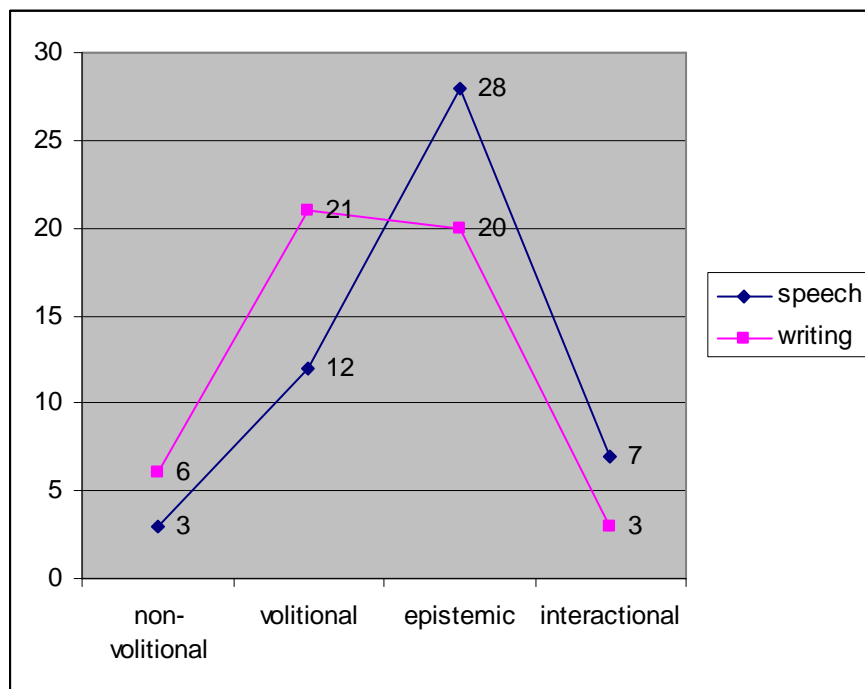


Figure 3: Relational distribution of *parce que* in narrative writing and spoken language

Car, on the other hand, does not present divergent semantic distributions in speech and (narrative) writing ($\chi^2 = 2.119$, $df = 3$; $p = 0.548$ (N.S.)), which brings us to the conclusion

¹⁰ We only took into account the 50 narration sequences, leaving out direct speech which is meant to mirror spoken language. But recall that the semantic profile of *parce que* is not different in direct speech vs. narration sequences (section 2.1).

that the use of *car* in Contemporary Spoken French is mainly the reflection of a learned, written use occurring in more formal contexts. This would also explain why it is so infrequent in spoken language. It is as if in Spoken French *parce que* were ‘taking over’ from *car* in all communicative contexts, from the most objective to the most subjective, thus coming to assume a status of default causal connective.

These results for Contemporary French lead us to the hypothesis that *car* and *parce que* are at different stages of their respective paths of semantic evolution. On the one hand, *car* seems to have reached a stage of decline. We assume that this low frequency keeps it from developing new uses, except by analogy (cf. McMahan, 1994; Campbell, 2004). This would explain its apparent stability: it presents no variation between speech and writing, which leads us to think that it is no longer evolving. On the other hand, *parce que* seems to pursue its evolution, especially in terms of subjectification; at least, this is what we assume, on the basis of the important variations we observed between speech and writing, the latter being as often more conservative. Before we turn to our diachronic analysis, a few words have to be said about the role of subjectification in our account of the semantic evolution of our connectives, in particular *parce que*.

3. (Inter)Subjectification

We take subjectification, following mainly Traugott (2003:126), to be the semantic-pragmatic (diachronic) mechanism “whereby meanings come over time to encode or externalize the speaker/writer’s perspectives and attitudes as constrained by the communicative world of the speech event, rather than by the so-called ‘real-world’ characteristics of the event or situation referred to”. Traugott (2010:35) insists on this aspect of semantic encoding, stressing that there is no subjectification unless subjective meanings become semanticized (via pragmatic strengthening). This line of reasoning has been followed by many authors (see e.g. the contributions in Davidse et al., 2010 and Athanasiadou et al., 2006, among others). The mechanism of *intersubjectification* should be seen as a further step in the marking of a (lexical or grammatical) item, with elements which are not only subjective but interactional, as with honorifics in Japanese (cf. Traugott, 2010:37-38). Note that interactional elements are necessarily subjective, while the reverse is not true; in other words, intersubjectification presupposes subjectification (cf. Narrog, 2010).

The matter which interests us here is whether the semantic evolution of *car* and *parce que* can be described in terms of subjectification and/or intersubjectification. A number of studies have described the semantic evolution of connectives and discourse markers in terms of subjectification (see e.g. Brinton, 1996; Traugott, 1995, 1999; Schwenter and Traugott, 2000; Defour, 2010; Hansen, 2006; Romera, 2009; Visconti, 2004; Evers-Vermeul et al., 2011, among many others). In this context, Breban’s (2010:112 sqq.) discussion of the relationship between intersubjectivity and “textual subjectivity” is a very welcome one. According to Breban, in the course of Traugott’s thinking about matters of subjectivity and intersubjectivity (and the corresponding diachronic processes of (inter)subjectification), too much stress has been put on the attitudinal aspects, with less emphasis on the text-creating meanings¹¹ and on the “textual function of the hearer as target/interpreter of discourse” (Breban, 2010:113). In line with Breban (2010:113) we believe that some “connectives and discourse markers display both types of subjectivity [i.e. attitudinal and text creating]”, and that

“there are good reasons to reinstate the earlier, two-way definition of subjectivity and subjectification and to extend it to the definitions of intersubjectivity and intersubjectification

¹¹ Traugott (1995), however, advocated a broader definition of subjectivity and subjectification, encompassing these textual meanings. In particular, textual subjectivity is considered as speaker-based in that it relates to the speaker as creator of text, including its function of organizing the representation of reality.

as well. Intersubjectivity would then be defined as the development of meanings that are ‘hearer or addressee centred’, in the sense of pertaining to the hearer’s attitudes and beliefs, i.e. the social relation between speaker and hearer, as well as in the sense of being concerned with the hearer as ‘decoding/interpreting text’” (Breban, 2010:114).

According to Breban, this interpretation of textual (inter)subjectivity implies a revision of Traugott’s three-step cline of (attitudinal) (inter)subjectification, where subjective meanings presuppose intersubjective ones. With textual subjectification, which is inherently intersubjective, the “development seems to consist of two stages only: non-subjective > textual intersubjective.” (Breban, 2010:116). In other words, attitudinal subjectification would consist of a three-step cline from objective (less-subjective) to subjective and intersubjective, and textual subjectification of a two-step cline from objective to intersubjective. From the examples given above, it appears that both *car* and *parce que* can express textual intersubjective meanings in Contemporary French as well as in earlier periods (see below). However, our diachronic data do not contain sufficient intersubjective uses to systematically test Breban’s hypothesis.

We also want to investigate whether this evolution along the cline of (inter)subjectification is accompanied by structural changes which could be described as instances of grammaticalization. While Traugott (2010:38) points out that “[n]either subjectification nor intersubjectification entails grammaticalization”, we agree with Defour (2010:161) that “there is definitely a close interaction between subjectification and grammaticalization because the latter involves the development of (pragmatic) markers towards the ideational component of discourse structuring and/or towards text-structuring functions.” However, grammaticalization is a very different linguistic phenomenon. In our view, it is best described in prototypical terms (cf. Company Company, 2006). This means that a prototypical process of grammaticalization involves a number of mechanisms, on which there is no definitive consensus¹² (cf. Lehmann, 1995; Heine, Claudi and Hünemeyer, 1991; Dostie, 2004; Traugott, 1995). We propose to retain the following list:

- semantic bleaching, or rather shift from referential to grammatical meaning
- phonetic erosion
- morphological decategorization
- syntactic bonding
- layering
- scope loss
- paradigmaticization
- (inter)subjectification

There are also non-prototypical or less prototypical instances of grammaticalization which involve only a subset of these mechanisms, and are therefore not always considered as such: for instance, discourse markers do not involve scope loss (Waltereit, 2006; Degand and Simon-Vandenberg, 2011), deictics do not seem to involve semantic bleaching (Diessel, 2006), case markers derived from body parts do not involve subjectification (Traugott, 2010:40), etc. Thus, (inter)subjectification is a feature of grammaticalization among other features. It is a mechanism which can occur independently in semantic change, but is often involved in the grammaticalization process.

One interesting distinction put forward by Traugott (2010:40-41) is that between primary and secondary grammaticalization:

¹² Note that this is consistent with a prototypical approach.

“Subjectification is more likely to occur in primary grammaticalization (the shift from lexical/constructional to grammatical) than in secondary grammaticalization (the development of already grammatical material into more grammatical material). This is because primary grammaticalization often requires prior strengthening of pragmatic inferences that arise in very specific linguistic contexts prior to their semanticization and reanalysis as grammatical elements.”

This does not seem to hold true for *parce que*, as we will see: *parce que* clearly first becomes grammatical in Middle to Classical French (cf. *infra*), and only later becomes (inter)subjective, during a ‘secondary grammaticalization’ process. Another element seems quite clear. Concerning *parce que*, its phonetic erosion and its use as a coordinating conjunction in Contemporary French could be considered as clues of its ongoing grammaticalization together with its increase in (inter)subjectivity. *Car*, on the contrary, does not undergo further (inter)subjectification or grammaticalization between Old and Contemporary French.. Concerning *car*, the lack of data for its period of emergence (Classical and mostly Late Latin) makes it difficult to say which came first. But for *parce que*, it seems quite clear from our corpus study (see next section) that grammaticalization came first, and subjectification next, with intersubjectification appearing after a second phase of grammaticalization.

4. Semantic evolution of *car* and *parce que*

In a previous study (Degand and Fagard, 2008), we tried to show that the contrast between *car* and *parce que* in Contemporary French, both on the syntactic and on the semantic level, can be explained by the diachronic development of the two connectives. In fact, this contrast appears as early as Middle French, that is when *parce que* grammaticalizes into a causal connective.

What happens is as follows: *car*, which grammaticalized in Late Latin, already has subjective and intersubjective uses in Old French, and closely resembles Contemporary French *car* (except that it is more frequent in Old French, and has now lost its subordinating uses and part of its intersubjective uses). It is then used mostly to introduce volitional, epistemic and speech-act causal relations. These uses are very different, in turn, from what we could observe for *par/por ce que* in Middle French, when it emerges as a stable (complex) subordinating conjunction (still not fully grammaticalized)¹³. It is then used almost only to introduce non-volitional and volitional causal relations. In other words, in Middle French, *par ce que* is employed when the causal relation is factual (less subjective) and *car* is employed when the causal relation is subjective or intersubjective (Figure 4).

¹³ In Middle French, *parce que* still does not have a fully grammaticalized status. The *par/por + demonstrative + que* construction appears only around the year 1000 (*por cio que* “for this reason that”, *Saint Léger*) and still displays an important morphological and semantic variation in Middle French (Fagard, 2008). Indeed, in Old and Middle French, *par ce que* and *por ce que* coexist with close meanings, in various combinations: *par, por, pour + ce, ceo, ceu, che, cio, ice, içou + que, ke (qu’, q’, k’), parce, porce + que (qu’)*. Their meanings include cause (mostly), concession, means and goal. The syntactic fusion of preposition and demonstrative is seemingly acquired very early on, as there are relatively few examples of other constructions (*par cele chose que*); however, the graphic fusion of preposition and demonstrative (*par ce > parce, por ce > porce*) appears only in the late 14th century. The fusion of *parce* with *que* is not acquired until Classical French: there are still cases of insertion between the two elements as late as 1740.

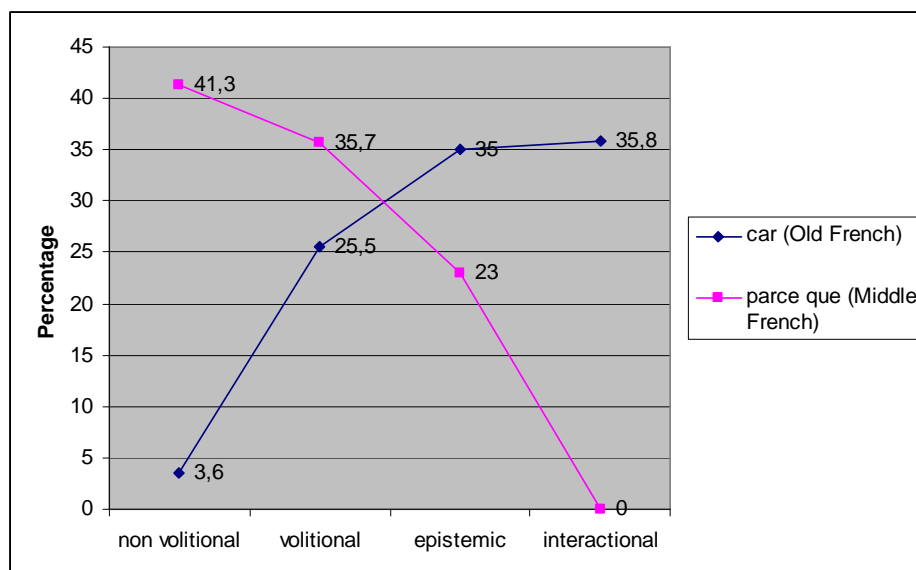


Figure 4: *Car* and *parce que* in Old and Medieval French (cf. Figure 9 in Degand and Fagard, 2008).

Relating the situation in Middle French to the one in Modern French (as described in Section 2), Degand and Fagard (2008) conclude that our pair of connectives gradually evolves to the point that *parce que* replaces *car*, which almost disappeared from Contemporary Spoken French.

In Middle French *car* has subjective (5) and intersubjective (6) uses, but it also has objective (7) uses:

(5) Subjective *car*: *Forment m'en poise, **quar** mout l'avoie amé*

“I am very sad, because I loved him dearly” (*Aliscans*, 12th c.)

(6) Intersubjective *car*: *Ferez i, Francs, **kar** très ben les veintrum!*

“Strike, Franks, for we will overcome them easily!” (*Roland*, c. 1100)

(7) Objective *car*: *Reposent sei **quar** lassét sunt.*

“They rest, because they are tired” (*Saint Brendan*, 12th c.)

The main evolution we observed is the drop in intersubjective uses, and the rise of epistemic (subjective) uses. The loss of its intersubjective uses could be explained by the fact that *car* disappeared from standard use – it gradually loses in frequency: from 40 occurrences per ten thousand words in Middle French to merely 0.2 in Contemporary Spoken French, where *car* might be considered extinct except in formal speech, which is much closer to Literary French than to the actual, everyday use of the language.

Contrary to *car*, *parce que* seems to have had mostly objective uses (8) in Middle French, but it gradually takes on more subjective uses (9), while intersubjective uses appear only in Spoken Contemporary French, as illustrated in (3) above, or in direct speech in narrative writing, which is supposed to imitate spontaneous conversation (10).

(8) Objective *parce que*: *Li anfes ploroit de grant fin **por ce que** n'avoit que mengier*

“The child cried of hunger, because he had nothing to eat” (*Roman de Renart*, early 13th c.)

(9) Subjective *parce que*: *mort me fis en mi la voie **por ce que** trop grant fain avoie*

“I played dead in the middle of the road, because I was terribly hungry” (id.)

(10) Intersubjective *parce que* (Contemporary French): Bon, vous me racontez. Qui conduisait votre taxi ? – Que je vous explique. J'ai un ami, Toni, enfin un copain. **Parce que**, vé, on est pas intimes, vous comprenez. (Izzo, 1995)

“Ok, you tell me. Who was driving your cab? – Let me explain. I have a friend, Toni, well, a buddy. Parce que (Because), y’see we aren’t intimate, you understand”

Its evolution is thus from objective causal uses to subjective and intersubjective uses in Contemporary French. This evolution apparently goes hand in hand with a global increase in frequency, from 7 occurrences per ten thousand words in our Middle French corpus to 37 in Spoken Contemporary French (Fagard and Degand, 2008). From the point of view of the paradigm of causal conjunctions, the evolution of *car* and *parce que* is very different. On the one hand, *car* is already completely grammaticalized in Middle French, loses frequency and tends toward obsolescence. An indication of its fully grammaticalized status is its loss of syntactic flexibility (see Groupe Lambda-L, 1975; Nazarenko, 2000:72, 78): unlike *parce que*, *car* cannot be used in cleft-constructions, sentence-initial position, etc. (cf. *c’est {parce que /*car} il fait beau que je sors* “Because the weather is nice, I’m going out”), at least in Standard Contemporary French (see, however, examples 14-16 below, and discussion) and is now considered not a subordinating but a coordinating conjunction¹⁴. On the other hand, *parce que*, which only appears in Middle French, gradually becomes more grammaticalized and subjective, and retains its use as a subordinating conjunction in most contexts. A very recent development concerns its use as a simple (rather than complex) morpheme, with much phonetic reduction in spoken language (*paske*, *parske*, *parce* – see Moeschler, 1986:158; Wiesmath, 2002:396) as well as a syntactic change, *parce que* no longer being used as a subordinating conjunction in some cases (Blanche-Benveniste, 1997:23; Debaisieux, 2004). This phonetic reduction, well-attested in corpora of spoken French¹⁵, is also witnessed by the written representation of *parce que* in informal written French, e.g. in blogs or chats, illustrated by the following example:

(11) *Rapido... paske* (< par ce que) j’ai un peu 2-3 tonnes de choses à faire
“(I’ll be) brief, ’cause I’ve got like a thousand things to do” (internet)

4.1 From Preclassical to Contemporary French

The present study is designed to address some questions left unanswered by our previous study: is the evolution of *parce que* from objective to subjective and intersubjective really gradual? Does *car* really fail to develop new uses, from Old to Modern French? And what does this semantic evolution tell us about their respective grammaticalization paths? In order to answer these questions, we compiled a new corpus which is compatible with the corpus we used then: we selected, in the Frantext database, narrative texts (novels and travel stories) from Preclassical (1550-1660), Classical (1661-1800), Pre-Modern (1801-1940), Modern (1941-1989) and Contemporary French (1990-2007)¹⁶ and randomly extracted 100 occurrences of *car* and *parce que* (or *par ce que*) for each period, and we retained (where possible) 50 occurrences of direct speech and 50 occurrences of narration¹⁷. We then analyzed the data with the same method, in order to have comparable results. All data were analyzed in their original context and annotated for relation type (non-volitional, volitional, epistemic, textual/interactional) and speech type (direct, narration). The data from Classical to

¹⁴ In fact, this syntactic-pragmatic difference between *car* and *parce que* might play a role in the evolution of these conjunctions, as noted by an anonymous reviewer. We feel, however, that this issue cannot be addressed here, and must be kept for further research.

¹⁵ For instance, in the CLAPI database, there are 1218 occurrences of *parce que*, including 664 with phonetic reduction (91 *parc’*, 1 *par’e*, 9 *pa’*, 443 *pa’ce*, 103 *pa’c’*, 15 *p’ce*, 2 *’ce*, see <http://clapi.univ-lyon2.fr/>).

¹⁶ Justification for this periodization can be found in Combettes and Marchello-Nizia (2008).

¹⁷ From a methodological point of view, direct speech occurrences are explicitly marked for direct speech by inverted commas, by dialogue hyphens or by second person deixis; narration sequences lack any explicit signs of direct or indirect speech.

Contemporary French were coded by one annotator both for *car* and *parce que*, while the Pre-classical data were analyzed by another annotator and double-checked by the first annotator (see Spooren and Degand, 2010 for a discussion of this methodology). Table 1 presents the data involved in the analysis.

	<i>car</i>		<i>parce que</i>		Total
	direct	narr.	direct	narr.	
Preclassical	31	69	17	83	200
Classical	50	50	50	50	200
Premodern	50	50	50	50	200
Modern	50	50	50	50	200
Contemporary	50	50	50	50	200
Total	231	269	217	283	1000

Table 1: Data involved in the diachronic analysis

Our main research question concerns the steady development of (inter)subjective meanings for the two connectives over time, in order to find out whether the synchronic variation between the two connectives found in Contemporary Spoken French can be traced back to their diachronic development. A side question is whether *parce que* is really taking over all uses previously found for *car*.

To answer these questions, we performed a loglinear analysis¹⁸ with the factors period, meaning, and connective. Initially, no distinction was made between narration and direct speech sequences. For lack of data in the variable non-volitional relation, we collapsed it with the variable volitional relation into the category objective relation, epistemic relations were put into the category subjective, and metadiscursive into the category intersubjective relations.

The three-way loglinear analysis produced a final model that retained two interactions, one between connective and subjectivity ($\chi^2(2) = 124.001$, $p < .0001$), and one between subjectivity and period ($\chi^2(8) = 20.962$, $p < .01$). The likelihood of the resulting model was $\chi^2(12) = 15.797$, $p = .201$. The interaction between connective and subjectivity reflects the fact that overall *car* is used significantly less ($Z = -5.3$) in objective relations than *parce que*, and significantly more in intersubjective relations ($Z = +5.5$). On the other hand, the interaction between subjectivity and period shows that objective relations are significantly more frequent in Preclassical French ($Z = +2.2$), i.e. the earliest period in our investigation, while intersubjective relations are significantly more frequent ($Z = +2.6$) in Contemporary French. In other words, over time, there is clearly a rise of intersubjective uses in the area of our causal connectives. Figure 5 illustrates that this process is at play for *parce que*, which demonstrates a steady increase of its intersubjective uses from Preclassical to Contemporary French ($\chi^2(8) = 24.42$, $p < .01$). Although there is a drop in objective uses and an increase in subjective uses between Preclassical and Classical French, this evolution is not significant (statistically speaking). Rather, it seems that from Preclassical French on *parce que* can be described most prototypically as an objective marker (of non-volitional and volitional relations), which also occurs in subjective contexts and gains rising use in intersubjective contexts. Whether the latter case should indeed be viewed as a case of intersubjectification cannot be answered yet for lack of data. Traugott (2010: 37) indeed warns that

¹⁸ A loglinear analysis is a statistical test that enables “to test the relationship between more than two categorical variables. Loglinear analysis is hierarchical: the initial model contains all main effects and interactions. Starting with the highest order interaction, terms are removed to see whether their removal significantly affects the fit of the model. If it does then this term is not removed and all lower-level effects are ignored.” (Field, 2005).

“what may look like it is a case of intersubjectification actually may not be. If it is derivable from the context, it is only a case of increased pragmatic intersubjectivity. In other words, there may be more addressee-oriented uses, but unless a form-meaning pair has come to code intersubjectivity, we are not seeing intersubjectification (*-ation* being the important item here)”.

That *parce que* can be used with intersubjective meanings, and that this use is becoming more frequent over time, seems clear. However, further research is needed to find out whether *parce que* can, in given contexts, *encode* this intersubjectivity. An argument in favor of the intersubjectivity encoding value of *car* and *parce que* in textual contexts is that the connective seems communicatively obligatory. It is thanks to the presence of the connective that the textual reading can be retrieved in the following examples. The absence of *parce que/car* from these segments would result in interpretation difficulties¹⁹.

(12) - Je t’avais pourtant prévenu. Vous en faites de drôles !... Ton Canaque je l’avais jugé du premier coup... un dingue ! Un dingue doublé d’un con. **Parce qu’il** y a tout de même des dingues qui sont pas si cons... (Frantext, Modern)

“- I had warned you. You’re making a bit of a face!... I had judged your Kanak at first sight... a nutcase! A nutcase as well as a bloody idiot. *Parce que* (‘Cause) there are after all nutcases who are not that stupid...”

(13) Courez donc après, monsieur, dis-je alors à l’oncle, qui, tout palpitant encore et d’une main tremblante, ramenait son manteau sur ses épaules (**car** il en avait un) ; courez donc, monsieur : voulez-vous que je sois la victime de ceci ?

“Do run after him, Sir, I said to my uncle, who, still panting and with a trembling hand, pulled his coat on his shoulders (*car* (because/for) he had one); run on, Sir: do you want me to be the victim of this?” (Frantext, Classical)

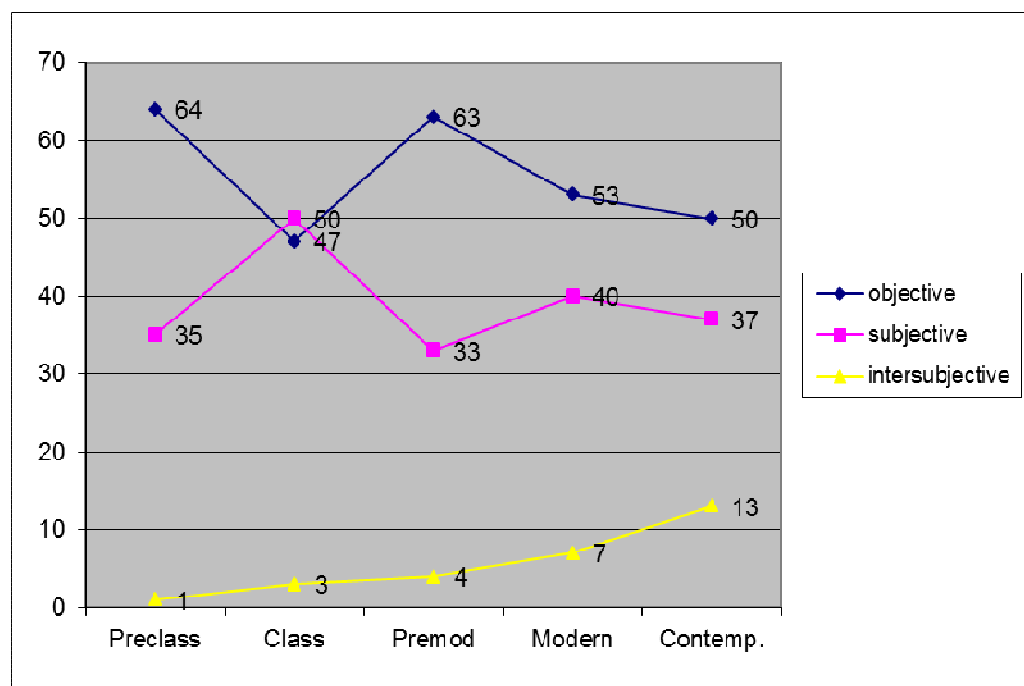


Figure 5: Use of *parce que* over time, from Preclassical to Contemporary French

¹⁹ We do not exclude that this type of intersubjective use can be left unmarked, but tracing such implicit relations lies beyond the scope of this article.

As for *car*, on the other hand, it shows a pretty stable image over time with mainly subjective uses, slightly rising intersubjective uses, and fairly stable objective uses ($\chi^2(6) = 9.583$, $p = .143$ (NS)) (Figure 6). This confirms our prior findings (Fagard and Degand, 2008).

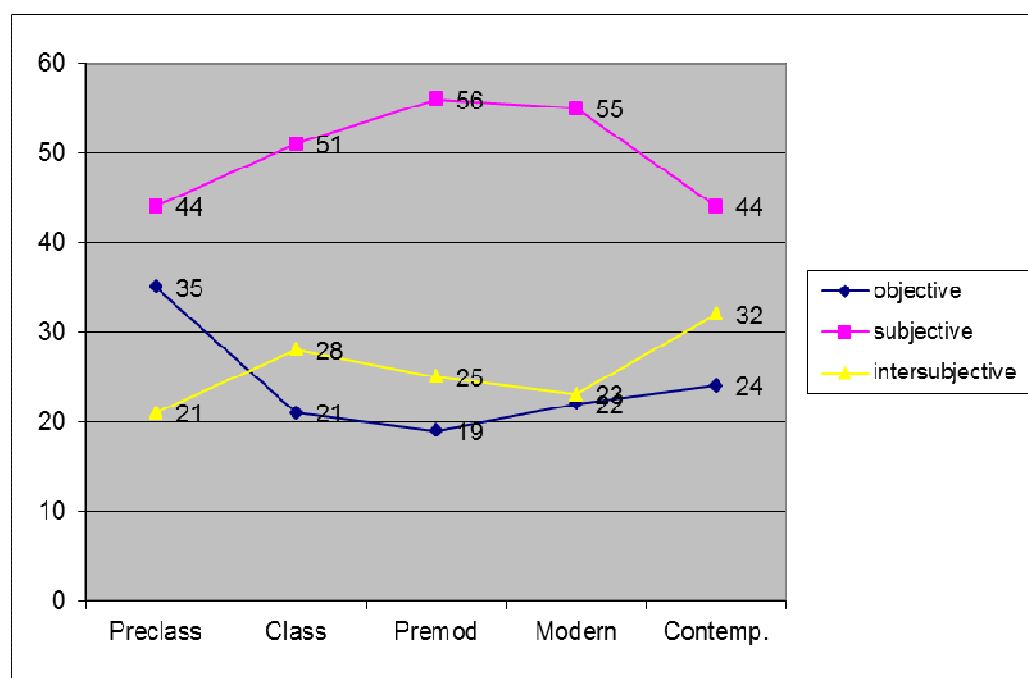


Figure 6: Use of *car* over time, from Preclassical to Contemporary French

We expected to observe a clear increase in subjective and intersubjective causal uses for *parce que* in our written corpus. Our results only partly reflect this scenario: there *is* an increase in intersubjective meanings, but the proportion of objective and subjective meanings does not vary significantly over time. In these conditions, can we still claim that the similarity in semantic distribution of *car* and *parce que* in speech is the result of a diachronic development, or should it be attributed to other factors related to more general differences between written and spoken mode? We could say, for instance, that the similar behaviour of *car* and *parce que* is due to the spoken modality itself, which differentiates itself from the written mode by ‘calling for’ a more (inter)subjective language use on account of its specificities²⁰ (Chafe and Danielewicz, 1987; Wiebe et al., 2004; Torres Cacoullos and Schwenter, 2005; Olson, 1997; Chafe and Tannen, 1987), and could thus ‘force’ a(n) (inter)subjective use of *parce que* in the spoken language mode. In other words, the intersubjective use of *parce que* would not be a matter of diachronic evolution, but rather one of synchronic variation between the written and the spoken mode²¹. Before turning to such ‘non-evolutionary’ accounts, however, we would like to pay some attention to the contexts in which these new intersubjective uses arise. After all, our results do show the step-by-step evolution of *parce que* towards intersubjective uses (from 1% to 13%, see Figure 5 above), which strengthens our belief that something *is* happening in diachrony.

4.1.1 Rising and declining frequencies

²⁰ I.e. real-time processing, face-to-face contact, shared context, etc., see e.g. Leech (2000).

²¹ This option leaves unexplained the fact that the use of (causal) connectives in speech and writing very often does remain stable (see e.g. Spooren et al., 2010 who show that *omdat* (the Dutch ‘counterpart’ of *parce que*) has a stable semantic profile throughout speech and writing).

Figure 7 displays the relative frequency evolution (per 100,000 words) of *car* and *parce que* over time in narrative writing²². While *car* is subject to a drastic decrease of its frequency of use (especially between Preclassical and Classical French), *parce que* rises gently over the five periods. This diverging frequency of use over time is statistically significant ($X^2(4): 80.251; p < .0001$). In particular, the imbalance in favor of *car* in Preclassical French ($Z = +3.6$) switches over time in favor of *parce que* from Modern French on ($Z = +3.1$), and is confirmed in Contemporary French ($Z = +3.6$), with an intermediary period from Classical to Premodern French.

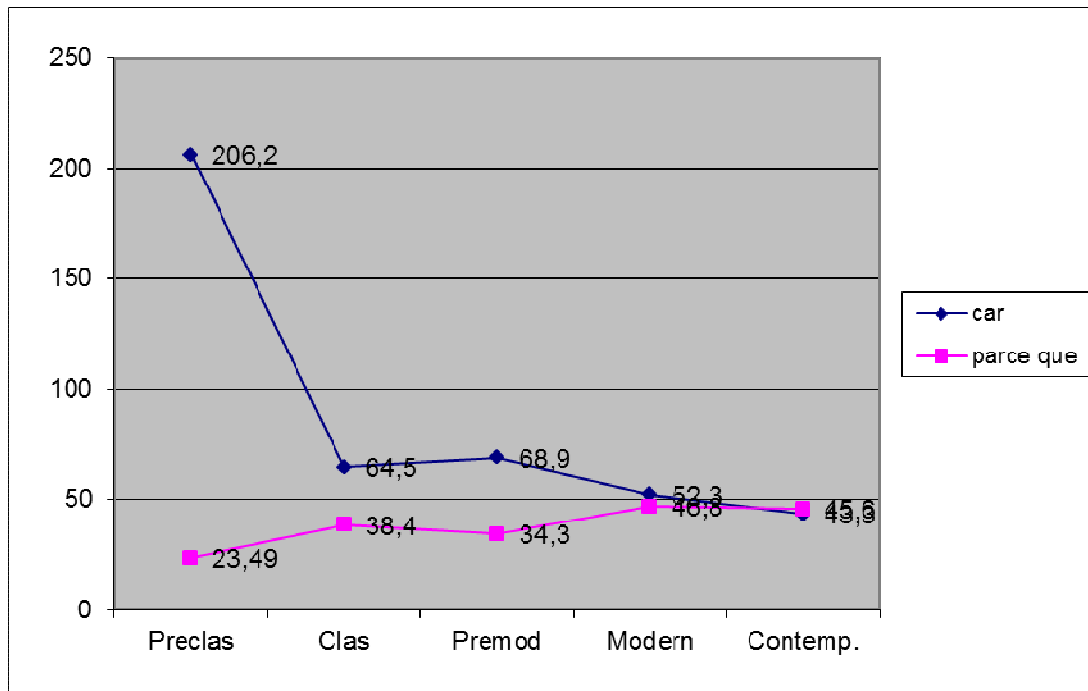


Figure 7: Frequency evolution of *car* and *parce que* (per 100,000 words)

According to Bybee (Bybee and Hopper, 2001; Bybee, 2006) frequency can be seen as a contributing factor to grammaticalization, while Pustet (2005) states that “if the frequency of a linguistic item increases in diachronic change, chances are that at the same time, its semantic complexity increases and its structural complexity decreases.” (p.149). *Parce que* seems to fit well in this scenario: its use in intersubjective contexts can be regarded as an increase in semantic complexity, while the coordinating use of *parce que* (Debaisieux, 2004) argues in favour of a decrease in structural complexity, as well as the signs of phonetic attrition we mentioned in 4 (*paske, parce*; see example (11)).

The rising use of *parce que* in intersubjective contexts together with *car*’s drastic frequency decline leads us to the conclusion that, if *parce que* replaces *car*, it does not do so in all contexts of use. After all, *car* is used on a par with *parce que* in (narrative and journalistic) writing (cf. Section 2.2). What *parce que* seems to have done is to replace *car* as the default causal connective, and it seems to have done so at some point between Classical and Premodern French. Of course, we cannot state with absolute certainty that *car* was really the default causal connective in the earlier stages of French, but its very high frequency, and the fact that it was at use in objective, subjective and intersubjective contexts, both constitute arguments in this direction. After all, it is difficult to imagine that a discourse marker that was

²² Note that we removed the writings of Honoré d’Urfé (1568-1625) who shows an extreme overuse of *parce que* compared to authors of that same period, i.e. 1808 occurrences of *parce que* for d’Urfé against a mean frequency of less than 100 occurrences for the other authors included in the corpus (Frantext, novels).

highly frequent in writing, including direct speech and plays (Fagard and Degand, 2008), would not have been at use in the spoken language. Next to the fact that *car*'s frequency in speech seems to have become too low to justify its status as a default connective, there is the observation that (native) speakers' linguistic competence with respect to *car* seems to be slipping, as they use *car* (in writing) in *parce que*-like syntactic structures, preceded by another coordinating conjunction (*et*) or in (a kind of) clefting-constructions²³ (14-16).

(14) Ce qui me fait rigoler doucement et discrètement **c'est car à cause de** vouloir toujours plus, bah on fini par ne plus rien avoir. (weblog)

“What makes me grin gently and quietly **is car because of** wanting ever more, well one ends up having nothing left”

(15) Dans le 3ème **c'est car** je travaille et j'en ai besoin **et car** malheureusement je n'ai pas moi aussi toujours la patience que je voudrais. (forum)

“In the third one it's **car** I work (outdoors) and I need it **and car** unfortunately I don't always have the patience I wish I had”

(16) Les parties suivantes concernent davantage la séquentialité à un niveau idéationnel ; **car** celle-ci se réalise par un marquage plus explicite qu'au niveau de la structure rhétorique **et car** celle-ci donne accès au contenu du texte. (doctoral dissertation in linguistics)

“The following sections concern more closely sequentiality at the ideational level; **car** it is realized by a more explicit marking than at the rhetorical structure level **and car** it gives access to the text content”

4.1.2 Evolution of *parce que* and *car* in direct speech

If language changes through language use (Croft, 2000; Milroy, 2003; Traugott, 2008), spoken interaction should be the context *par excellence* where traces of semantic change can be found. Since we do not have access to spoken data from past periods, an indirect way is to work with pseudo-speech such as direct speech in fiction (Marchello-Nizia, 1999; Culpeper and Kytö, 2000). If spoken language is the driving force behind language change, and if this change goes from objective to intersubjective meanings, then we expect to see significantly more intersubjective uses for *parce que* in pseudo-speech (direct speech) than in 'speaker-free' narration sequences together with a rising frequency of these intersubjective uses. If we assume no such semantic change for *car*, this discrepancy should not exist between direct speech and narration, and there should not be a significant rise of intersubjective uses.

Figure 8 contrasts the intersubjective uses of *car* and *parce que* in direct speech and narration contexts over time. Intersubjective uses of *parce que* appear in Preclassical and Classical French, but only in direct speech – and marginally; in Modern and Contemporary French, they appear even in narration, although they are still marginal. In this period, by acquiring intersubjective uses, *parce que* moves gradually closer to the semantic profile of *car*. *Car*, on the other hand, appears in intersubjective contexts from Old French on (Degand and Fagard, 2008), and appears to be well-established in this use, as can be concluded from its presence in narration from Preclassical French on (and probably earlier too).

²³ As noted by an anonymous reviewer (14) and (15) are strictly speaking not examples of clefted constructions since the “que-phrase” is missing. A “real” *car*-cleft would for instance be: *c'est car je travaille et que j'en ai besoin*.

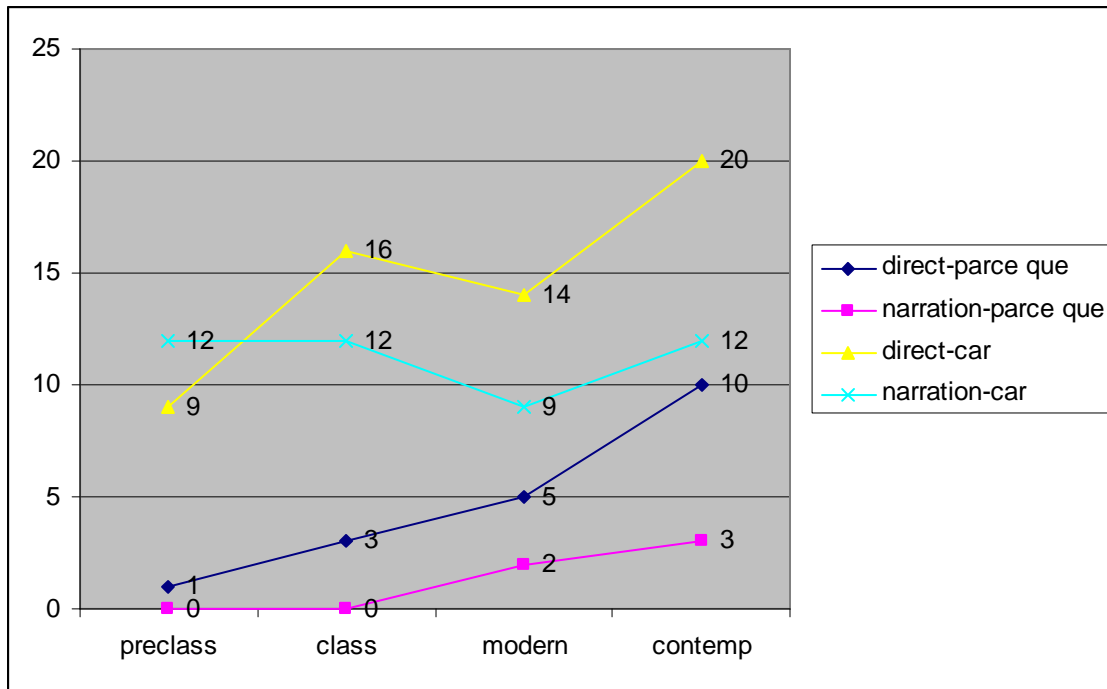


Figure 8: Use of intersubjective *car* and *parce que* in direct speech and narration over time

Although the data displayed in Figure 8 are too scarce to be decisive, they do suggest that intersubjective uses arise first in speech-like contexts and are then taken over to ‘purely’ written contexts. Further research is however needed to confirm these observations, for instance through the analysis of texts which could more closely reflect spoken language, such as plays.

5. Conclusions

The starting points of the present article were, on the one hand, the observation that *parce que* and *car* diverge strikingly from one another in speech and writing in Contemporary French, and, on the other hand, the results of Degand and Fagard (2008) showing a very different picture of the use of the two connectives in Middle French. What happened precisely between these two periods remained, however, unclear. We thus pursued a corpus-based study in order to find out whether the origin of the synchronic divergences between *car* and *parce que* could be traced back in the diachronic evolution of the two connectives. On the basis of the analysis of frequency data and semantic distribution data in Preclassical, Classical, Premodern, Modern and Contemporary French, our answer is yes. The Contemporary intersubjective uses of *parce que* can clearly be traced back in its diachrony from Preclassical French on. Its higher frequency in speech-like contexts favours a “language in use” explanation to semantic change. For *parce que* this change is to be situated between Classical and Premodern French, at a time when *parce que* started its gradual change of meaning leading to its actual status of default causal connective.

Now, to what extent is the evolution of the two connectives to be described in terms of grammaticalization and/or subjectification? With regard to our results, we can say that, at least for *car* and *parce que*, grammaticalization does entail subjectification. Though our data does not support this view clearly enough to make it a strong claim, we believe that, in Late Latin, *qua re* grammaticalized into *quare* and acquired subjective and intersubjective causal meanings somewhere along the path – we can only say here that *car* has these intersubjective uses in the oldest French texts (Fagard and Degand, 2008); after this, it evolved very slowly.

In Middle French, the construction *par/por ce que* grammaticalized into the conjunction *parce que* and acquired subjective meanings; between Classical and Modern French, *parce que* grammaticalized further (even from a morpho-phonological point of view, with the emergence of *parce* (Wiesmath, 2002:396) and *paske* (Moeschler, 1986), and acquired intersubjective meanings.

This evolution explains the differences observed in Contemporary French: the ‘frozen’ state of *car*, with similar uses in Spoken and Written French, is the result of a thousand years of literary survival, with a decline in speech. In contrast, the differences observed for *parce que* between Written and Spoken French is due to its – relatively – recent grammaticalization. The history of these conjunctions, which we have not finished to disentangle, thus accounts for the contrast they present in Contemporary French.

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Base Valibel (Groupe de Recherches Valibel – Discours & Variation, Université catholique de Louvain).