The French anteriority pluperfect in contrast to the Czech language

Keywords: anaphoric meaning; anteriority; contrastive view; pluperfect; semasiological approach

The present study deals with anteriority expressed by the French pluperfect, investigating how Czech translators deal with the expression of anterior meaning. The material for the study comprises modern fiction written in French, drawn from the InterCorp parallel corpus.

The pluperfect (henceforth PQP) signifies an action preceding another past action. French includes several anterior verb forms, of which the pluperfect is the most universal (Maïa Grégoire, Grammaire progressive du français, perfectionnement, 2012:144-153). The Czech tense system offers no comparable alternative as the Czech plusquamperfect has died out.

As Czech does not use verbs to signify anteriority, this poses the question of how it is expressed. Leaving aside instances where the anteriority is left unexpressed[1], there are various possibilities. Otakar Radina (1977:74-81) primarily refers to the lexical level (*předtím, kdysi, tenkrát; totiž; už,* "before, a long time ago, then; that is why; already"). Further, he lists verb prefixes expressing finished action (*špatně se vyspal,* "he didn't sleep well") and framing a situation as a final result. In a footnote, Radina mentions the option of switching the word order, i.e. presenting the pluperfect action first in the utterance so its anteriority need not be expressly stated.

This study aims to specify, quantify and complement this list. Our data is primarily sourced from the parallel French-Czech InterCorp corpus, from which a random sample of 1000 PQP occurrences was extracted[2]. The sample comprises texts by 64 Francophone authors. The corpus analysis is demanding due to the length of texts investigated. Some anaphoric PQP forms refer several pages back. This is difficult to reveal since the corpus interface only displays a short text segment at a time. Therefore, the second part of the study consists in a qualitative analysis of several works with multiple Czech translations, e.g. L'Étranger by Albert Camus or La vie devant soi by Emile Ajar.

The preliminary results of our analysis confirm the presence of temporal (*předtím, předcházející, tehdejší* "before, previous, the then") and resultative expressions (*už* "already"). To achieve more detailed results, we define the French PQP from a text-linguistic viewpoint: as one of several options of referring to an anterior situation as an antecedent. We are thus composing a detailed semantic image of each anterior situation and identifying all anaphoric expressions referring to it. This method requires some spatial adverbials to be added to the list of anterior expressions (Peut-être qu'elle rêvait$_2$ de sa jeunesse$_1$, (...). Je ne sais pas ce que faisaient ses parents mais c'était$_1$ en Pologne$_1$. Elle *avait commencé$_1$* à se défendre *là-bas$_1$* (…) Možná , že se jí zdálo$_2$ o jejím mládí$_1$, (...). Nevím, co byli její rodiče zač, ale bylo to$_1$ v Polsku$_1$. S obživou *začala tam$_1$* (...).)

1 The data likewise suggest that Czech translators often omit the pluperfect meaning altogether. These cases are subjected to a detailed analysis. However, surprisingly some French examples need not or even may not signal anteriority neither. These include a series of basic sentences in the passé composé (e.g. Est-ce que tu as vu la voiture que j'ai achetée? "Have you seen the car which I have bought?"), where the latter clause clearly refers to an anterior action. These banal sentences present a real puzzle to FLE students as they contradict the basic rules for tense use in French while being among the most basic sentences, encountered already by A2 level students.

2 As the French PQP can express multiple meanings, we first identify the anterior PQP occurrences in the data. Disregarding its normative use (conditional sentences and concordance of tenses), two uses remain: analeptic (pluperfect meaning) and non-analeptic (aspect, authorial idiolect etc.) The pluperfect sample is difficult to compile as the pluperfect meaning is often combined with the aspectual one, requiring the individual lexical-aspectual forms to be considered separately. Another complication is due to the exact reference of the PQP action being unclear sometimes.

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