

# SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN OPINIONS ABOUT GRAMMATICAL NORMS IN THE FRENCH LANGUAGE OF THE XVII<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

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**Abstract:** *The article deals with the main points of grammar of the French language in the XVII<sup>th</sup> century which was represented by two main aspects: development of correct practical and analytical grammar. Both branches contributed to forming the social elite, drawing their material in philosophy and logic. The article analyzes the most famous researches that were focused on the classification of words within the bounds of certain parts of speech. It also mentions that with the emergence of practical grammar books, logical analysis of grammatical phenomena appears, which starts developing modern grammatical theory of the structure of statements.*

**Keywords:** *French grammar, grammatical norm, parts of speech, agreement of words, threefold structure of sentence.*

According to the researchers, the XVII<sup>th</sup> century occupies a special place in the development of socio-political and cultural processes as well as in the multiplicity of literary and linguistic changes caused by these processes. In educated environment of the XVII<sup>th</sup> century two trends of reflection on language can be traced: the first is aimed at establishing the linguistic norms within the hierarchical view of the society, the second - at the basis of philosophical reflection on the language. These tendencies, which have their origins in the antiquity, get implanted in teaching practice of the XVII<sup>th</sup> century, especially in small schools of Port-Royal [7]. We analysed the major literary and artistic trends of this period in our previous articles [2], [3]. However, the desire for regulation and concordance, according to V. B. Burbelo [1] affects also the principles of formation of French grammatical structure, in particular, the use of parts of speech, the place of the pronoun and noun in the sentence, the agreement of participles, the declension of verbs. These are the problems to be considered in this article.

In the XVII<sup>th</sup> century the greatest grammatical works were «Grammaire et syntaxe françoise» of Maupas (1607), «Grammaire Françoise Rapportee av Langage dv Temps» of Oudin (1632), «Remarqves sur la langve françoise» of Vaugelas (1647), «Essay d'une parfaite grammaire de la langue françoise» of Chiflet (1659) and «Grammaire générale et raisonnée» of Arnauld and Lancelot (1660). It was this grammar that was often called «Grammaire de Port-Royal». The authors of these works, inspired by the disputes of previous ages, set the basic rules recorded in the first real grammars that were published in the XVI<sup>th</sup> century: «Lesclaircissement de la langue

francoyse» of Palgrave, «Grammatica latino-gallica» of Sylvius, «Le tretté de la grammere françoee» of Meigret, «Traicté de la gramaire Francoise» of Estienne and «Grammaire de Ramus».

The grammar books of Maupas, Oudin and Chiflet were aimed at learning French as a foreign language. However, they could also be used by the French who wanted to improve the structure of their oral and written language. The authors presented grammatical rules which were common at that time, adapting them to the norms of ideal “noble man” (“gentilhomme” in French). This vision of the role of the grammar is best presented in the work of Vaugelas “Remarqves sur la langve françoise” (1647). His comments deviate from the manual of grammar and provoke discussion about the way of speech that should be used by everybody who wishes to speak and write correctly in French. The book is written in the form of short practical remarks and it avoids theoretical considerations, therefore the reader will not find here any elements common to all grammar books in general and, in particular, the category of words and their morphological aspects. The work is completely dedicated to the agreement of words or to the selection of the appropriate term, because these were the issues that the grammarians of that time could not reach an agreement.

All grammatical problems examined by Vaugelas become a quite authoritative linguistic guide to “good and correct speech” (“le bon usage” in French) [8]. Therefore, they have not only scientific and practical value, but also affect the secular education of citizens.

At the same time new trends of grammar studies, related to logic and philosophy, appeared. They were represented by Antoine Arnauld and Claude Lancelot, both from Port-Royal, the authors of “Grammaire générale et raisonnée” [4]. This grammar book was considered “general” because, although most of attention was paid to the French language, it exceeded the limits of only the French language and analyzed a set of characteristic principles in all languages. And logical and philosophical reflections on the language gave it a “rational” character.

Grammarians-practitioners of that time - Maupas, Oudin, Chiflet and especially Vaugelas - supported a linguistic norm. They paid a lot of attention to the fact that the speech was good, and offered different ways of expression under certain circumstances. So Maupas finishes an optional rule of inversion of the subject and the verb after the words “lors”, “alors”, “aussi”, etc. with an aesthetic note - “le langage semble plus vigoureux et de meilleure grâce” (speech seems more clear and polite) [6, p. 123]. Each of the authors of grammar books offers his own vision of reasons that must precede the adoption of a certain rule. L. Chifflet, for example, insists that it is necessary to know the rules of using the past tenses and the etymology of words [5], whereas for Vaugelas the most important thing is the manner of

conversation of the smartest part of the Court, according to the writing manner of the smartest authors of the time [8].

This point of view of Vaugelas can be illustrated on the example of his explanation of the verb “hair” [air] (hate). In the present tense of Active Voice this verb is declined as follows : “*je hais* [ʒə-‘ε], *tu hais* [ty-‘ε], *il hait* [il-‘ε], *nous haïssons* [nu-`a-i-‘sõ], *vous haïssez* [vu-`a-i-‘se], *ils haïssent* [‘il-a-‘is]”, where all three personal singular forms have one syllable, and all three personal plural forms have three syllables. Many people decline this verb, keeping the two-syllable personal singular forms: “*je hais* [‘ʒə-a-‘i], *tu hais* [‘ty-a-‘i], *il hait* [‘il-a-‘i]”, and others do even worse saying “*j’haïs*” [‘ʒai], as if the original «h» of this verb is not aspirate and the letter “e”, which is located in front of it, may be reduced. In the plural, the verb should be declined as we noticed above, and not “*nous hayons* [nu-zε-‘jõ], *vous hayez* [vu-zε-‘je], *ils hayent* [il-‘ze]”, as a lot of people do, even at the Court, and it is very bad [8, p. 20]. Thus Vaugelas supports strict linguistic discipline and proclaims the most elite social criteria of the linguistic norm.

The grammar book “Port-Royal” written by Arnauld and Lancelot offers a completely different point of view of the linguistic norm. It adjusts the norm with the process of thinking. Insisting that the norm is the product of regularity and reasonableness, the authors, however, don’t deny the remarks clearly defined by Vaugelas. Some of these remarks are cited and taken by the authors as a starting point for their rules. Thus, Arnauld and Lancelot devote a whole chapter to “Verification of one rule of the French language” (“l’Examen d’une règle de la Langue Française”) that was formulated by Vaugelas. The rule concerns the fact that you cannot put a relative pronoun after a noun without an article [4, p. 318-325]. For example, the authors cite the sentence “Il a été traité avec violence”, where the noun *violence* is used without any article. They assert that only the noun defined by a relative pronoun can take the indefinite article: “Il a été traité avec une violence qui a été tout à fait inhumaine”. Here we see the word combination *avec une violence* because the definition of this noun is represented by a relative pronoun *qui*, introducing the subordinate clause of a sentence. Analyzing various examples, presenting the theory of classification of nouns, Arnauld and Lancelot realize the evolution of the language and its norm. “If there are other ways of expression that seem controversial and cannot be explained with all these observations, it can only be, in my opinion, remains of the old style, where the articles were almost always missed” [4, p. 324]. The historical perspective and the combination of diachronic and synchronic analysis enable them to explain the real exceptions of the rules.

Another issue that has caused conflicting visions of grammar of the French language in the XVII<sup>th</sup> century considered the classification of parts of speech. Nouns and adjectives are combined into one large class - the class

of names (it means that adjectives are not distinguished as a separate part of speech). Maupas also supports such classification. He defines “nine parts of speech, such as: article, noun, pronoun, verb, participle, adverb, preposition, conjunction and exclamation...” [6, p. 42]. The noun is divided into nouns (in modern grammar these are common and proper names) and adjectives (all adjectives, or qualitative adjectives of traditional grammar). The principle of this combination is that all these words reflect objects of our thinking or their description. They present substances that can exist independently: the words “Pierre” (Peter) and “table” (table) don’t require additional semantic information for their existence in the language. So they are called noun names (*des noms substantifs*). Adjectives, by contrast, give only a description. These words cannot exist in the language as independent units, because they make sense only if they join another word. Hence the term - adjectival name (*le nom adjectif*).

Grammarians continue the theme of the noun and, of course, speak about the article. We should mention that in the XVII<sup>th</sup> century the article occupies a strong position among the parts of speech. Most scientists consider unified determinatives and prepositions as the articles: “j’ai parlé *au* Roy” (I spoke with King), “je suis le serveur *du* Roy” (I am a servant of the King) [6, p. 45], “il appartient *à* Roy *de* gouverner” (it belongs to the King to govern) [6, p. 46], “la statue *de* César” (Caesar statue), “adressez *à* Dieu vos prières” (send your prayers to the God) [6, p. 53]. Maupas expresses doubts on this matter, considering some unified determinatives and prepositions with determinatives to be “rather prepositions than articles” [6, p. 62].

As for pronouns, the logic of their uniting in one class comes out of the classification proposed in the previous century. Possessive, demonstrative and indefinite determinatives, which, as we remember, before a new grammar appeared, were considered as adjectives, in the grammar books of the XVII<sup>th</sup> century were defined as pronouns, for example: “ce” and “cette” (both mean ‘this’) were classified as demonstrative pronouns and were placed next to the “luy” (he) and “elle” (she); indefinite pronouns have the determinative “quelques” (some) in their structure, while among possessive pronouns there are “mon, ma, mes” (my); “ton, ta, tes” (your), etc. [6, p. 116-117]. Maupas is guided by the historical tradition (as he does in the case of some of the articles) and gives his assumptions according to which “mon, ma” (my) are not really pronouns but possessive adjectives. “These possessive pronouns are actually adjectives that cannot exist in speech without nouns that follow them immediately: “Voilà mon livre” (Here is my book), “ici ma plume” (here my pen). You can also insert epithets between them: “Celui-ci est mon plus grand ami” (This one is my best friend)” [6, p. 161].

Regarding the interpretation of participle (*le participe passé*), it is located at the intersection of many grammatical problems. Participle is considered as an entirely separate class because it has characteristic features of both verbs and adjectives, but differs from them. Grammarians interpret the participle equally as the verb, noun and preposition. It has morphological variants, may be used in present and past tenses and has an auxiliary verb. They devote more attention to the grammatical norm and concordance, although they don't define such rules clearly and don't classify them. They assume some deviations associated with agreement of the participle rather on intuitive criteria: "If a woman speaks, she says: "je suis allée" (I went), "je suis arrivée" (I arrived), "je suis venue" (I came), etc. The exception is the case if directly after the form of preterite (past tense - note of the author) goes the infinitive, then you have to leave a masculine participle, as in the sentence "Ma mère est allé voir son beau-fils" (My mother went to visit her son-in-law)" [5, p. 98-99]. To explain the rules of agreement, scientists often refer to Latin cases (namely nominative and accusative, which are the subject and the direct object of the verb): "...Where there is the accusative case, the participle agrees, and where there is the dative - no" [6, p. 314]. "But if before the preterite (past tense form of the verb - note of the author) is a relative pronoun, the participle must agree with it in gender and number: "La lettre que mon père m'a écrite" (the letter which my father wrote me), "les lettres que mon père m'a écrites" (letters that my father wrote me), "les livres que mon père m'a envoyés" (books that my father sent me). Exception is the case when the nominative goes after the preterite. Then we should say: "les lettres que m'a envoyé ma mere" (letters that my mother sent me). Here the participle *envoyé* doesn't agree. The second case is when directly after the form of the past tense goes the infinitive, such as: "Les lettres que j'ai vu écrire". Here we have *vu*, and not *vues*. The same situation is in the sentence "Je les ai fait peindre, elles se sont fait peindre", where we see *fait*, and not *faites*. Not following this rule, or its exceptions is a blunder" [5, p. 62].

The grammar book "Port-Royal" also treats cases of agreement of *participe passé* and does it very precisely. The chapter devoted to the participle is especially extended: the authors try to "explain such manner of speech" [4, p. 374] and dare to criticize the rules of the predecessors such as F. Malherbe. Malherbe formulated the rule, according to which it was not necessary to agree past participle in the sentence "Elle s'est trouvé morte" [4, p. 380]. The authors of the grammar "Port-Royal" note that common sense dictates to agree the participle. They advise "not to take into account the observations of Malherbe, who offers to consider if after a participle goes a noun or another participle" (*morte* is a participle formed from the verb *mourir*) [4, p. 380]. Thus Malherbe wanted that the phrase "elle s'est trouvée"

differed from the “elle s’est trouvé morte”. Arnauld and Lancelot do not accept Malherbe’s opinion which seems superficial for them, and sometimes they even criticize it quite sharply. They realize yet unstable nature of agreement of participle passé and propose to use such grammatical concept as “supplement” (*régime*, in old French language - an indirect case) (equivalent to modern *object*). “I know that our language has no clear laws about the latest methods of speech; but I do not see anything more useful, so I think, to determine them than to use this supplement (*régime*), at least in all cases where the use is not yet fully defined and approved” [4, p. 381].

If the grammar of Arnauld and Lancelot represents the structure that was common in other grammars of the XVII<sup>th</sup> century, written in French, and if it approves some theoretical positions, written in them, however there is a difference between them which lies in determining the purpose of creating these books. According to Arnauld and Lancelot, philosophical and logical concepts play a primary role in linguistic analysis. This concerns especially the classification of words. The words are divided into two sub-categories: one for the “object of thought” (noun, article, pronoun, participle, preposition and adverb); and the second for “form and manner of our thoughts” (verb, conjunction and exclamation) [4, p. 272]. In addition, the authors take for axiom of linguistic analysis all three acts of mind: perception, judgment and conclusion. Among these actions the central is the judgment expressed by a verb. To judge is to “assert that the thing that we perceive is such as it is or that it is not like that” [4, p. 271]. Thereby, the pronunciation of the phrase “La Terre est ronde” (the Earth is round) is a judgment, because the Earth is the thing that we perceive and it has certain characteristics, namely it is round. When people assert something and express a judgment, they say a serie of words. These words, according to Arnauld and Lancelot, are divided into three parts: the object, about which a statement was made (here it is the Earth), the statement made on this object (its characteristic - round) and expression of the relationship between the object and its characteristic: Earth = round. Thus, any sentence has a threefold structure: a subject, a linking verb, and an attribute (nominal part of a compound predicate). “The judgment that we make about a thing such as “the earth is round”, is called a sentence; every sentence must consist of two members; one is called a subject and is the thing about which we make assertion, as in this case, the Earth; the second, called an attribute, is what we claim as round; and in addition, there is a link between the two members of the sentence - the verb *to be* [4, p. 271]. The verb *to be* (*être* in French) is almost the only verb that can link the members of the sentence. It is, in the terminology of Arnauld and Lancelot, a “substantive verb” [4, p. 370]. All other verbs give it shades of meaning. For example, the verb *to live* (*vivre*) does not mean anything else than to be alive (*être vivant*). The sentence *I live*

(je vis) is divided into the subject *I* (je), linking verb *is* (suis) and attribute (predicative of compound predicate) *alive* (vivant). Progressive grammatical position of “Port-Royal” lies in the fact that it has established connection between grammatical material (phrases), philosophical concepts (perception, judgment and conclusions) and logical analysis (presence of one sentence, which can be divided into smaller elements). The phrase thus is reduced to three functional elements (subject, linking verb, and attribute). It was then, in 1660, that the French grammar gave rise to logical analysis of grammatical phenomena.

To sum up our study of the main points of grammar of the French language in the XVII<sup>th</sup> century, we can say that it is represented by two main aspects: development of correct practical grammar, which had to facilitate the formation of social elite, and to be an important primary source for this, and the development of analytical grammar, which drew its material in philosophy and logic. Authors’ researches were focused on the classification of words within the bounds of certain parts of speech (articles, prepositions and pronouns). Practical grammar books use only Latin cases (nominative and accusative), to smooth the absence of functional analysis. At the same time, the publishing of the grammar “Port-Royal” initiated the logical analysis of grammatical phenomena, which started developing modern grammatical theory of the structure of statements. Grammarians of the XVII<sup>th</sup> century are working hard at creating perfect grammar with unique and absolute rules.

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