FROM THE CONFESSION OF IGNORANCE TO THE INDEFINITE :
WHAT IMPACT FOR A THEORY OF GRAMMATICALIZATION?

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Abstract. *The present study deals with the syntactic status of strings of the type* je ne sais qui, Dieu sait où, on ne sait comment, *etc. In French, these strings sometimes constitute independent 'sentences' and sometimes mere indefinite ProNPs. I address the question whether such examples are cases of what since Antoine Meillet has been known as* grammaticalization *and, in order to avoid a purely terminological debate, I attempt to bring to light in a precise way the discoursive conditions in which the observed recategorization takes place. I suggest that such cases are considered within the framework of a* diachronic pragma-syntax.

Résumé. *La présente étude porte sur le statut syntaxique des suites du type* je ne sais qui, Dieu sait où, on ne sait comment, *etc., suites qui constituent en français tantôt des « phrases » indépendantes, tantôt de simples pro-SN indéfinis. Je pose le problème de savoir si de tels exemples relèvent de ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler, depuis Antoine Meillet, la* grammaticalisation. *Et, pour éviter d'en rester à un débat de pure terminologie, je tente de mettre au jour avec précision les conditions discursives dans lesquelles s'ancre la recatégorisation constatée, proposant d'aborder de tels cas dans le cadre d'une* pragma-syntaxe diachronique.

The present study is organised in three parts. By way of introduction (§ 1), I will mention the main uses which have been made of the term *grammaticalization*, while pointing out the important questions raised by the scientific paradigm known under this name today. Secondly, I will move on to the main point of this article, which deals with the behaviour of *je ne sais qui / quoi / où... (I don't know who / what / where[1])* and of related sequences, including a finite form of the verb *savoir (to know)* : *Dieu sait qui / où, va savoir qui / où, (God knows who / where, who knows who / where)* etc. These strings will hereafter be

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[1] Translator's note: all translations are mine. All examples are given in the original French and followed by a rough English translation primarily intended to help the reader understand the French structure. (Version française de l'article sur demande à Marie-Jose.Beguelin@unine.ch)

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referred to using the abbreviation SQ. In French, as in some other languages, SQ sequences testify of a remarkable change in syntax and category[2] : at the start, they are autonomous verbal constructions, organised around the V *savoir* ; in the end, they are lower rank constituants belonging to the ProNP and indefinite determiner categories. In French, this change is manifested in a long-term synchronic variation (see § 2.4.). It also has a semantic component : the 'confession of ignorance' is resolved into an expression of the indefinite. My purpose here will be to bring to light as precisely as possible the *syntactic and pragmatic conditions* which make this phenomenon possible[3]. In the light of the study of SQ, which will be based on attested forms, I will come back, in conclusion, to the problem of grammaticalization and, more generally, of linguistic change. I will call for a general theory of change for the purpose of *modelling the contextual factors* which make this change possible. In particular, in order to account for the coalescence of SQ sequences, it is important to lay the foundations of a *diachronic pragma-syntax*.

1. Grammaticalization : definitions and main issues

1.1. Generally, the term *grammaticalization* refers to a process 'by which one term or one phrase acquires a grammatical status and enters a system of grammatical oppositions' (*Trésor de la langue française informatisé*). The term was coined by diachronist Antoine Meillet in an article published in 1912 under the title 'L'évolution des formes grammaticales' *(Change in grammatical forms).* Meillet points out in this article that the only process, together with analogic innovation, by which 'new grammatical forms are created' is 'the passage of an autonomous word to the role of grammatical element' (Meillet, 1912 = 1975 : 131[4]). In other words :

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[2] The phenomenon in question is common to several western languages : see Haspelmath, 1997, and, for the case of Russian, Inkova, to be published. See for example this extract translated from Tchekov, *Les trois sœurs (The Three Sisters)* : « vous êtes comme un gamin, toujours à dire *le diable sait quoi* ! » ('You are like a kid, always saying *the Devil knows what* !'). I would like to thank Alain Berrendonner, Claire Blanche-Benveniste, Virgine Conti, Corinne Rossari, Gilles Corminboeuf and Lise-Marie Moser Sigg (translator) for their careful rereading and their suggestions for improvement or clarification.

[3] See the case of *n'importe qui / où / quel* etc. (*anybody, anywhere, anyone*), which I have dealt with elsewhere in detail (Béguelin, 2002). In the same line of research, we have suggested elsewhere a scenario to account for the emergence of certain reversed hypothetical clauses (Béguelin & Corminboeuf, 2005), as well as of the quantifier *en veux-tu en voilà* (literally : *'do you want some here is some'*. The meaning is close to 'galore') (Béguelin, to be published).

[4] Meillet's article was intended 'for the general readers, but curious of science' of the journal *Scientia* as mentioned in the Notice of the book published in 1912 under the title *Linguistique historique et linguistique générale*. The popularizing nature of the text shows through in the paragraph introducing the article : 'There are two processes by which grammatical forms are constituted ; both are known **even by people who have never studied linguistics**, and **everybody** has had the opportunity, if not to think carefully about them, at least to notice them in passing.' (Meillet, 1975 = 1912 : 130 ; highlighting is mine, as will all highlighting in the examples used in this study.)

(1)   *While analogy can renew the detail of forms, but most often leaves the overall pattern of the system unaltered, the 'grammaticalization' of certain words creates new forms, adds categories which had no linguistic expression and transforms the whole system.* (Meillet, 1912 = 1975 : 133)

In this first definition, the term *grammaticalization* is introduced, between inverted commas, to refer to certain linguistic changes other than analogy but resulting, like analogy, 'from the use of language' (*ibid.*). Starting from autonomous terms belonging to major categories supposed to constitute the lexis, the changes under consideration historically enrich (or renew) the highly constrained and morpho-syntactically bound categories referred to as 'grammatical'. The first example provided by Meillet is the verb *être (to be)* and the process of auxiliation : in addition to its full meaning or 'own value' ('*je suis celui qui suis*') *('I am the one who is'),* the French verb *être* also has the value of a copula ('*je suis malade* '), *('I am ill'),* where, according to Meillet, it is almost no more than a grammatical element ; finally, in 'what is improperly called the auxiliary, it is merely one part of a complex grammatical form expressing the past' ('*je suis parti'), ('I left')* (Meillet, *ibid.*)

1.2. During the last quarter of the 20th century, research by Givón, Lehmann, Hopper & Traugott and many others has reconsidered and deepened the question of change in linguistic forms. Thanks to this renewed interest, the term *grammaticalization* has become the banner of a much more ambitious theoretical paradigm[5].

1.2.1. This paradigm relies on a number of hypotheses which can be summarized as follows :
    (i) Grammaticalization, in any language, goes through obligatory stages which can be represented in the form of 'scales' of grammaticalization going from a 'full' end to an 'empty' end, the basic idea being that the 'lexical' becomes 'grammatical' and the 'less grammatical' becomes 'more grammatical'. In the same way, on the semantic level, the 'semantically full' undergoes a 'bleaching', a 'chlorination' : the concrete goes towards the abstract, etc.
    (ii) Grammaticalization is a 'unidirectional' process. In other words, it goes through predetermined stages with no possibility of going back to a previous stage.
    (iii) Grammaticalization is a 'gradual' or progressive phenomenon.
    (iv) The processes of grammaticalization constitute a general type.

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[5] See the recent synthesis by Marchello-Nizia, 2006.

(v) Grammaticalization is dominant : it is more frequent and more prototypical than any other form of linguistic change.

The status of assertions (i)-(v) as either axioms or hypotheses is not entirely clear. All of them have indeed been discussed, or even challenged more or less fundamentally, both within and without the theoretical paradigm known as grammaticalization. Furthermore, in the writings of its contemporary promoters, grammaticalization has complex relationships, sometimes of identification and sometimes of differentiation, with other long-recognized factors of linguistic change like phonetic changes, metaphor-based or metonymy-based semantic changes, analogical extensions, reanalyses, syntactic recategorizations, renewals of forms or functions, lexicalizations, etc[6].

1.2.2. The preferred representation of the phenomenon of grammaticalization has been *scales* or *pathway* (*cline, path, pathway, grammaticalization chain…* Heine 2003 : 589). The pathway image concerns form as well as meaning or categories, as the few examples listed under (2) show :

(2)　　« scales » of grammaticalization

　　(a) Table 70.3. Grammatikalisierungskala (Lehmann *in* Jacobs & al. 1256):

Ebene	Diskurs	Syntax	Morphologie	Morphophonemik	
Technik	isolierend>	analytisch>	synthetisch-agglutinativ>	synthetisch-flektierend >	Null
Phase	Syntaktiesierung		Morphologie-sierung	Demorphologi-sierung	Verlust
Prozess	Grammatikalisierung				

　　(b) Discourse > Syntax > Morphology > Morphophonemics > Zero (Givón 1979 : 209)

　　(c) juxtaposition > syntactisation> morphologisation> fusion> chute (Melis & Desmet, 1998 : 18, quoting Lehmann and Hopper & Traugott)

　　(d) « fuller, freer, more complex structures to shorter, more bondend, simpler ones (e.g., lexeme > affix) » (Traugott, 2003: 629)

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[6] Borrowings, however, are treated separately.

(e) PERSON > OBJECT > ACTIVITY > SPACE > TIME > QUALITY
(Heine 2003 : 586)

The modern theory of grammaticalization, as I have understood it from my readings, appears roughly under two forms. The first one, which we can describe as moderate, is notably formulated in the research by Hopper and Traugott. These authors acknowledge that counterexamples to the unidirectionality symbolized by the scales do exist. They also admit that reanalysis can be a factor of grammaticalization. The second one is a more radical one and was exemplified a few years ago by Haspelmath (in the wake of Heine *et al.* 1991). In his 1998 article, Haspelmath rejects reanalysis out of the scope of grammaticalization on the account that reanalysis is sudden and not 'gradual'[7]. As to grammaticalization, it would only act gradually, without having recourse to reanalysis. While redefining grammaticalization in such restrictive manner, Haspelmath still considers it the prototype of linguistic change in general.

1.2.3. The paradigm of grammaticalization has had the merit of offering renewed popularity to diachronic phenomena, which had been somewhat neglected by mainstream linguistic research in the 20th century. As a consequence, many changes have now been researched, in a great number of languages.[8] However, debates over labels have tended to overtake the concern for clarifying the mecanisms of change as such : should such or such phenomenon be considered as *grammaticalization*, *degrammaticalization*, *lexicalization*, *pragmaticalization* or *reanalysis* ? Is it 'directional' or 'counter-directional' ? As to 'counter-directionality', is it the same as 'lexicalization' ? What are the relationships of compatibility, similitude, opposition, etc., between these many notions and what is truly essential to the definition of grammaticalization[9] ? There is a risk that the real issues of diachronic study will be neglected in favour of scholastic discussions. Indeed, the purpose of diachronic study is, first and foremost, to look at linguistic change in general, without overemphasizing any particular kind of change ; it is also to *model the conditions for change* and, more precisely, to bring to light the *language*

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[7] Several cases of reanalysis will be examined below in § 2.3. It must be pointed out that it is not always easy to know exactly what is implied by the notion of graduality in the writings of those who make use of this concept. The term seems to refer sometimes to the degrees or stages on the grammaticalization scales, see for example (2) *supra*, sometimes to the mode of extension of a new variant within a given linguistic community, sometimes to the spread of the said variant in new distributional contexts (see Lichtenberk, 1992) and even sometimes, in a 'fuzzy grammar' perspective, to the extent to which a linguistic unit belongs to a category.

[8] The achievements of historical and comparative linguistics, Indo-European studies, and studies on languages with long written traditions may be transferred into the paradigm in question, which, in the last decades, has produced an impressive amount of publications.

[9] See the epistemological syntheses provided by Prévost, 2003 and to be published.

behaviour likely to lead to one particular change in one particular state of language.

1.2.4. The theory of grammaticalization received severe criticism, notably by Newmeyer (2001), in an article with a programmatic title : 'Deconstructing grammaticalization'[10]. Among the fundamental objections to the paradigm of grammaticalization, I will take into account the following, which I reformulate in my own way, with no pretensions to exhaustiveness :

> (i) There are many examples of change which go against unidirectionality. Therefore, grammaticalization is either a contradictory concept or an *ad hoc*, circularly defined concept.
> (ii) Unidirectionality is merely a trivial statement of fact. It is inherent in the very notion of process.
> (iii) The theory of grammaticalization tends to describe isolated linguistic changes, taken out of their context.
> (iv) The spans of time to which this theory applies are cognitively inaccessible to the speakers, while at the same time these speakers are supposed to be the actors of the changes observed.

It should be added that since it first appeared in Meillet's article, the notion of grammaticalization has been based on an opposition between *lexis* and *grammar*, 'content words' and 'function words', 'concrete meaning' and 'abstract meaning'. Even though many contemporary authors admit that these are not clear-cut oppositions and that the limits between opposing terms are, in each case, difficult or even impossible to decide on[11], these traditional dichotomies are still used and serve as a basis for the notion of grammaticalization. The question remains whether they are scientifically operative, which seems doubtful as soon as we go away from the major categories and consider, for example, adverbs, prepositions, hierarchy markers, etc. The status of these not very homogeneous categories, as well as of derivational affixes, can hardly be grasped through a rudimentary opposition such as *lexis* versus *grammar*. Even if we reinterpret it under the form of scales, it is probably not an appropriate device to describe the different types of linguistic change in a stable and unquestionable way. In addition and above all, this opposition is not in itself able to explain the genesis of these changes. The fundamental problem which the theory of grammaticalization runs up against, as Melis & Desmet (1998 : 20 sqq.) have successfully shown, concerns the very definition of the domain of grammar and the assumed universality of categories : these are often supposed to exist 'for their own sake', regardless of their status within each particular language and regardless of the paradigmatic

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[10] See also Campbell, 2001.

[11] For the *lexis* vs *grammar* opposition, see Melis & Desmet, 1998 ; Lightfood, 2005, notably p. 588.

commutations on which they are supposed to be based (see, in the same vein, Blanche-Benveniste & Willems, to be published).

1.3. Be that as it may, a third meaning that has been given to the term *grammaticalization* must be mentioned. In the theory called 'Emergence of Grammar' developed by Hopper, 1987, *grammaticalization* indeed supplants *grammar*. In Hopper's view, grammar does not exist in itself but is constantly evolving and continually renegociated in and through speech. What we ordinarily call grammar, in fact merely consists in partial and temporary sedimentations which merge with strategies of discourse construction. Therefore, there is nothing which can be called *grammar*, but only *grammaticalization*. Within the scope of this article, I will not spend more time on this third acceptation[12]. This acceptation will, however, allow us to measure the progress made since Meillet. Indeed, the notion of grammaticalization first sprang from a reflexion of limited scope, intended for popularizing purposes, about some regularities in certain linguistic changes. It then turned into theories intended for generalizing purposes, one essentially diachronic, or rather macro-diachronic (§ **1.2.** hereabove), another claiming to go as far as explaining the way language functions in synchrony (§ **1.3.**). All this would in fact be worth elaborating on at more length. But it is time to move on to the study of SQ, which the present epistemological explanation had no other purpose than providing with a first framework.

2. 'Grafts' and linguistic change

2.1. Highlighting the phenomenon of SQ sequences

The syntactic destiny of SQ sequences, which I deal with in § 2, can be considered as one type among others of grammaticalization through coalescence (see, however, § 3.2.). It is close to a phenomenon which traditional grammar describes in terms of integration of 'parenthetical clauses'[13] or *asyndetic hypotaxis* (Arrivé *et al.*, 1986). More recently, in research on the syntax of spoken French, Deulofeu has dealt with similar cases under the name of 'couplings' or 'binary groupings' of verbal constructions (1989), while Lehmann (1989) refers to them under the more general label of 'reductions'. As to Choi-Jonin & Delais-Roussarie, 2006, they speak about 'association of clauses with no segmental markers'.

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[12] On which Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2005 : 90-91) reflects.

[13] **'Some parenthetical clauses lose their character** and become integrated in the sentence' (Goosse-Grevisse, § 373). This wording implies however, and this is puzzling, that the said 'parenthetical clauses' are placed under a higher sentence structure, a hypothesis that we do not necessarily share. See footnote 14.

Example :

(3)   (a) je me rappelle quand elle sortait des moutons des fois **ils mangeaient c'était minuit** (oral < Deulofeu, 1989 : 111)
(I remember she would take some mutton out sometimes they would eat it was midnight)
(b) **il est reparti ça fait un quart d'heure** (oral)
(he's left again it's been a quarter of an hour)

If we do not take intonation into account, the sequences under (3a-b) can theoretically be analysed in two ways :

In the first analysis, each of these sequences constitutes a series of two verbal constructions C_1 and C_2 (*micro-syntactic units : MSU*). These verbal constructions are uttered independently of each other and perform two autonomous and consecutive speech acts (French *énonciations* or $\mathscr{E}$)[14] :

(4) Analysis 1 : $\mathscr{E}_1$ (*ils mangeaient ∅*)$_{MSU1}$ $\mathscr{E}_2$ (*c'était minuit*) $_{MSU1}$
$\mathscr{E}_1$ (*il est reparti ∅*)$_{MSU1}$ $\mathscr{E}_2$ (*ça fait un quart d'heure*) $_{MSU2}$

In the second analysis, the two verb forms achieve a single $\mathscr{E}$ realising a single MSU, achieved via a single verbal construction :

(4') Analysis 2 : $\mathscr{E}$ ([*ils mangeaient* [*c'était minuit*]])$_{MSU}$
$\mathscr{E}$ ([*il est reparti* [*ça fait un quart d'heure*]])$_{MSU}$

In (4'), the material of MSU_2 is reduced to the role of mere constituent. It is captured by the rection of the verb of C_1 (*manger, repartir*) for which it fulfills the function of complement carrying the informational focus. The coalescence (4') can be explained through the *macrosyntactic relations* between the adjacent $\mathscr{E}$s in (4) :

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[14] I take the liberty of referring here to the research by Berrendonner, 2002, 2003a and b, Béguelin, 2002, Groupe de Fribourg, to be published, for a detailed presentation of the method of analysis exemplified here, which is based on the opposition between *micro-syntax* and *macro-syntax* (or *pragma-syntax*). For the needs of the argument that follows, it is enough to mention that the micro-syntactic relations are identical to the relations of uni- or bilateral implication characteristic of the domain of morpho-syntax (Hjelmslev, 1968). As to macro-syntactic relations, they are established between independent MSUs (maximal micro-syntactic units), among the sequencing of *communicative acts* (French *énonciations*), and they are praxeological. The limits between micro- and macrosyntax do not coincide (or at least not necessarily) with the limits of what is traditionally called the 'sentence', or the 'graphic sentence'. (Berrendonner & Béguelin, 1989). See also, on the couplings of verbal constructions, Béguelin, Avanzi & Corminboeuf, ed., to be published.

(i) $\mathscr{E}_2$ is, in relation to $\mathscr{E}_1$, in a relation of *continuation*. Its pragmatic function is to specify *a posteriori* a temporal reference which was not specified in MSU_1, but was implied in the process evoked in MSU_1 [15].

(ii) $\mathscr{E}_1$, compared to $\mathscr{E}_2$, brings relatively *little information*. The weaker the relevance[16] of $\mathscr{E}_1$ will seem in the context, the more the interpreter will be inclined to perceive the whole of MSU_1-MSU_2 as a single verbal construction inferring a single MSU. This implies the reycling of the material of MSU_2 as a governed focalized complement of the verb of MSU_1 (*manger*, *repartir*).

On the paradigmatic level, this reanalysis results in the establishment of an equivalence between the material of MSU_2 and the constituents of 'ordinary' prepositional phrases expected in the position of governed adverbial : *c'était minuit* therefore interchanges with *à minuit* ; *ça fait un quart d'heure* with *depuis un quart d'heure, il y a un quart d'heure*, etc. Moreover, the sequence *Il y a* + an expression of a lapse of time is well known to be the result of a similar reinterpretation :

(5)   (a) Il est parti **il y a deux minutes**. (Riegel *et al.* 447)
         (he left two minutes ago)
         (b) C'est **il y a dix ans** que l'événement s'est produit pour la première fois. (See Goosse-Grevisse §§ 373 and 1015)
         (It was ten years ago that the event took place for the first time.)

The possibility of clefting in *c'est... que* (5b), which does not exist for (3a-b), nevertheless shows that the change is at a further stage in this case : [*il y a* NP_{time}] generally functions as an adverbial PP and some grammars go as far as to include *il y a* among the prepositions of French.

> **2.2.** The case of *je ne sais / on ne sait /Dieu sait qui/où...* (= SQ)
>   *(I don't know / you don't know / God know who/where)*

The case of SQ is, like (3) and (5), can be described as a coalescence of constructions. It is illustrated with sophistication, though not explained, in § 373 of the *Bon Usage* by Goosse-Grevisse. Considered within a broad synchrony, the attested uses (subject to verification) are the following.[17]

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[15] See the notion of *epexegesis* in Bally, 1944 : 173 n. Within the framework of the prama-syntactic model developed by the Groupe de Fribourg (see n. 14), we consider that this is a subtype of the routine *action + continuation* (Berrendonner, 2003a).

[16] In the sense of Sperber & Wilson, 1989.

[17] An important proportion of the examples commented on here come from systematic scanning of the FRANTEXT database (September 2006). Of course, the research will be worth extending towards Middle

2.2.1. SQ constitute an autonomous $\mathscr{E}$

The extracts listed under (6) contain the V *savoir* in its full-meaning, used as a main verb constructing an indirect interrogative clause :

(6)   (a) *L'Amour y combat la Fierté, Je ne sçay qui des deux l'emporte ;* (Quinault, 1685)
(There Love fights Pride, I do not know which of them prevails)
(b) *Je ne sçay qui se peut vanter d'entendre cela parfaitement ;* (Bossuet, 1704)
(I do not know who can pride oneself on fully understanding this)
(c) *Au fond je ne sais qui me retient de leur appliquer vingt soufflets pour leur apprendre à avoir compteé sur ma maison comme ils l'ont fait en certaine circonstance.* (Sand, 1825)
(In reality I do not know who restrains me from giving them twenty slaps to teach them a lesson for counting on my house as they have done under certain circumstances.)
(d) *On ne sait qui vit ni qui meurt.* (gnomic utterance attested in Sand, Balzac, Chateaubriand, Genevoix…)
(One does not know who lives nor who dies.)
(e) *On ne sait qui est le décoré, qui est le membre, qui est le giflable.* (Bloy, 1887)
(One does not know who is the decorated, who is the member, who is the slapable)
(f) *Dieu sait où s'arrêtera sa furie.* (Constant, 1816)
(God knows where his/her fury will end.)

The examples under (7) are of the same kind, with the difference that the indirect interrogative clause is elliptic :

(7)   (a) *<…> une vieille femme qui portait le deuil, **je ne sais de qui,** nous reçut et nous introduisit dans un vaste appartement.* (Janin, 1829)
(<…> an old woman in mourning, who for I do not know, welcomed us and showed us into a huge apartment.)
(b) *l'amour s'en est allé, **Dieu sait où** ;* (Gautier, 1833)
(Love has gone, God knows where)
(c) *En un clin d'œil la nouvelle se répandit, **on ne sait comment**, **on ne sait par qui**.* (Maupassant, 1881)
(In the twinkling of an eye the news spread, one does not know how, one does not know who by.)

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and Old French as well as towards Latin (*nescio quis*, etc.)

In these examples, the missing material of the interrogative clause can be retrieved in the close context : *l'amour s'en est allé, Dieu sait où <il s'en est allé>, (Love has gone, God knows where <it has gone>)*, etc. The prepositional complement which follows the verbe *savoir* is selected in each case by the ellipsed verb. SQ here feeds parenthetical, autonomous, graphically separate ℰs. In (6) as in (7), the confession of ignorance is clearly the topic of the statement. As Inkova (to be published) mentions about comparable uses in Russian, *on ne sait Q* as much as *Dieu sait Q* allow us to infer the speaker's own ignorance. The pragmatic effect of these two variants of SQ therefore finally merges with that produced by the first-person variant.

2.2.2. Cues of graft

Other SQ occurences show more or less obvious symptoms of the establishment of an 'implicit ligament'[18] between SQ and the preceding verb phrase, of the type described hereabove under (4) and (4'). These cues of a coalescence are both prosodic and semantic.

2.2.2.1. Graphic and prosodic cues

For instance in (8), the segmentation marks present in (7) are missing. While reading out the line, one will probably choose bound prosody[19] :

(8)   (a) *J'entends **je ne sçay qui***. (Larivey, 1579)
(I can hear I do not know who)
(b) *on a massacré sur les boulevards et ailleurs, fusillé **on ne sait où on ne sait qui**, <...>* (Hugo, 1852)
(There was slaughter on the boulevards and elsewhere, there were shootings we do not know where we do not know who of...)
(c) *Les filles maigres aux grands yeux attendaient **Dieu sait quoi Dieu sait qui** derrière leurs vitres.* (Fallet, 1936)
(The large-eyed girls were waiting God knows what God knows who behind their windows.)
(d) *Je les remplace ces sourires et ces soupirs par ce papier banal et vague que je vous remettrai **je ne sais quand et dieu sait où***. (Mallarmé, 1871)

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[18] Taking up Bally's term (Bally, 1944) (French *'ligament implicite'*).

[19] The absence of punctuation does not, of course, prevent the speaker from separating SQ when realizing these examples. But the insertion of such delimitation would sometimes sound unnatural : in (b), for example we expect the rection of the verb *fusiller* to be saturated, just as was earlier that of the verb *massacrer.*

(I replace them these smiles and these sighs with this banal and vague paper which I will deliver to you I do not know when and god knows where.)
(e) *il avait perdu **je ne sais à quoi** tout son argent* (Proust, 1922)
(He had lost all his money I do not know what at)
(f) *Nous voilà donc en présence d'un fait observé **on ne sait par qui ni comment**, et noté **on ne sait quand ni comment**.* (Langlois & Seignobios, 1898)
(So here we are with a fact observed we do not know who by nor how, and noted down we do not know when nor how.)
(g) *venir, sortir, surgir, jaillir **on ne sait d'où*** (forms very frequently attested since the end of the 18th century)
(to come, get out, spring up, gush we do not know wherefrom)

The SQ sequence tends to be interpreted here *not* as an autonomous ℰ, but as a focalized complement of the verb preceding SQ. The internal syntax of SQ nevertheless remains conform to its syntax when used as independent ℰ, notably, when relevant, the position of the preposition ((8e-g) compared to (9) *infra*).

2.2.2.2. Semantic cues

In the examples under (8), notably (a-d) and (g), SQ can be commuted with indefinite NPs or ProNPs : *dieu sait où, on ne sait où ≅ quelque part, en quelque endroit*; *on ne sait d'où ≅ de quelque part* ; *on ne sait qui ≅ quelqu'un, des gens* ; *je ne sais quand ≅ un jour*, etc. (*God knows where, we do not know where ≅ somewhere, in some place*; *we do not know wherefrom ≅ from somwhere* ; *we do not know who ≅ someone , some people* ; *I do not know when ≅ one day*). The confession of ignorance gives way to an undetermined referent, which existence is admitted but which the speaker is not able to identify (and this corresponds to the functioning of a specific indefinite). I will only make two comments. (i) The commutation with an indefinite would be impossible in the 'free' uses of SQ as listed under (6) *supra*, or it would deeply distort their semantic aim. (ii) In (8), the expressive and argumentative load of SQ remains quite distinct from that of the indefinite like *quelqu'un / n'importe qui* ; *quelque part / n'importe où* etc. *(somebody / anybody ; somewhere / anywhere)* with which it is commuted[20] . So the hyperbolic potential of SQ is frequently expressed through – often asyndetic – reduplications : *je ne sais qui je ne sais où*, etc., *(I don't know who I don't know where*, etc., see (8b, c, f)). In the case of

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[20] However, the evolution of SQ seems to have gone one step further in some dialects of northern France :
see 'liégeois' *ine sakwè* 'quelque chose' (*something*), *ine sakî* 'quelqu'un' (*somebody*) (< *je ne sais quoi, je ne sais qui*) *(I don't know, what I don't know who)* : Goosse-Grevisse, *loc. cit.*

SQ just as in the case of *n'importe Q (anybody, anywhere,* etc.*)*, a pejorative inference may – or not, depending on the context – modify the designated referent. In this respect, (f), where this effect is perceptible, can be compared to (b), where it does not appear[21].

2.2.3. Evidence of a micro- reanalysis

Since older times, at least in the case of *je ne sais Q* used in the first person (*I don't know who / what / where,* etc.*)*[22], there have been cases where SQ is embedded as a NP in a prepositional phrase, its only possible function being indefinite ProNP. Here are a few examples of this indoubtedly micro-syntactic use :

(9)   (a) *et moy infortunée damoiselle je suis donnée **à** je ne sçay qui* ! (Jeanne Flore, 1537)
       (and me unfortunate lady I am given to I do not know who !)
       (b) *et de plus, j'ai ouï dire **à** je ne sais qui, c'est peut-être à moi, qu'on n'est pas méchant quand on est si gai.* (Barthélémy, 1788)
       (moreover, I heard someone say to I do not know who, perhaps to me, that one cannot be mean when one is so joyful.)
       (c) [...] *qui est sans bien, sans aveu, qui vient **de** je ne sais où, qui appartient **à** je ne sais qui, qui vit je ne sais comment.* (Diderot, 1758)
       ([...] who has no possession, no confession, who comes from I do not know where, who belongs to I do not know who, who lives I do not know how)
       (d) *Liège n'a plus l'énorme cathédrale des princes-évêques bâtie par l'évêque Notger en l'an 1000, et démolie en 1795 **par** on ne sait qui ;* (Hugo, 1842)
       (Liege no longer has its enormous cathedral of the prince-bishops built by the Bishop of Notger in the year 1000 and demolished in 1795 by we do not know who.)
       (e) *Isabelle alors, à quoi ça sert-il que j'aie passé mon temps à vous mettre en garde contre toutes ces slaves, qui arrivent **de** Dieu sait où et qui vivent **de** Dieu sait quoi ?* (Bourdet, 1931)

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[21] In this article focusing on the syntactic and pragmatic conditions of change, I will not spend more time on the question of the position of SQ in the paradigm of the indefinite in French.

[22] In a more detailed study, the attestations of *je ne sais Q, on ne sait Q, Dieu sait Q, (I do not know wh-, we do not know wh-, God knows wh-)* should be compared and contrasted, while also classifying them according to the type of interrogative (*qui, que, quoi, quand, où, comment, pourquoi, …*) *(who, what, when, where, how, why, …).*

(Isabelle, then what was the use of spending my time warning you against all those Slavic coming from God knows where and living on God knows what ?)

(f) *Elle tenait un flacon **de** Dieu sait quoi à la main,* […] (Simenon, 1958)

(She was holding a bottle of God knows what in her hand, [...])

In these examples, the preposition does not precede the interrogative as in (8e-g), but is close to its governing term (*donner à*, *venir de*, *flacon de*, etc.) and does itself govern SQ : compare the (8) type *donner je ne sais **à** qui* with the (9) type *donner **à** je ne sais qui*. Corollarily, the form *sais, sait (know)* here loses the status as head V which it had in (6) and (7), with the consequence of a strong tendency to fixation (notably as to modality, tense and person : see Blanche-Benveniste, 2001). The movement of the preposition, however remarquable it may be, is not sufficient to explain the change which has occurred : the movement is the consequence of the change and not its cause. The coexistence, in the same syntactic position, of attested occurrences of the *Prep SQ type* as well as of the *S Prep Q* type generates a phenomenon of synchronic variation which the extracts under (10) both illustrate and confirm :

(10)   (a) *Une voix venue on ne sait **d'**où, tombée **d'**on ne sait où* (Bernanos < Goosse-Grevisse, § 373)

(A voice coming we do not know wherefrom, falling from we do not know where)

(b) *Un tohu bohu d'usagers entraînés **de** je ne sais **d'**où et je ne sais où par le tapis roulant* (Claudel < Goosse-Grevisse, § 373)

(A confusion of passengers carried along from I do not know wherefrom and I do not know whereto by the moving walkway)

The example (10a) shows successively both competing variants (*S Prep Q*, followed by *Prep SQ*) whereas (10b), in a revealing slip, repeats the preposition within a single occurrence of SQ. These two different manifestations of an accumulation of variants are typical of a situation of morpho-syntactic variation (Berrendonner, 1986)[23].

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[23] We must of course also mention the numerous uses of SQ in N position, after a determiner, which seem to be most often in the first person :

(a) *il y eut **un je ne sçay qui** nommé Theophile, homme ridicule, bouffon, basteleur…* (Garasse, 1623)

(the was an I do not know who named Theophile, ridiculous, clownish, buffoonish man...)

(b) ***un je ne sais quoi*** (very frequent since at least the 16th century)

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2.3. A condition for change : metanalysis

As said before, this situation of variation cannot be explained in an *ad hoc* manner through a mere 'jump' of the preposition. It is necessary to find other contexts which have facilitated the reanalysis of SQ in indefinite ProNP and have opened the way to the creation of the phrases *à SQ, de SQ, par SQ*, etc. *(to SQ, of SQ, by SQ, etc.).* In order to describe these contexts, I will resort to the theoretical concept of *metanalysis* proposed by Jespersen, 1976 (= 1922) : 168, and developed a few decades later by Blinkenberg (1950). While considering the occurrence, concurrently with 'Elle a l'air méchant[24]' *('She looks mean'),* of the sequence 'Elle a l'air méchant**e**', where the agreement with the subject *Elle* shows that the string *avoir l'air* has taken up a copulative function, Blinkenberg writes :

(11)   *In order to fully understand the question of the appearance of the grouping, it is necessary to note that both analyses coexist in the masculine singular :*

<div align="center">

Il a l'air méchant.

</div>

Metanalysis indeed implies a single form which can be analysed in two different ways. The double-meaning sentence is the starting point and the pivot of the move towards grouping, while the double-form sentence is its outcome. No metanalysis can be explained without making use of equivocal examples and only they can prove the existence of metanalysis. A lot of the debate on evidence value in the field of historical syntax would gain from this easy methodological principle being kept in mind. (Blinkenberg, 1950 : 43)

(an I do not know what)

As to *je ne sais quel (I do not know what),* it was used after an indefinite determiner (*un je ne sais quel X* in the sense of *un certain X*) (*an I do not know what X* in the sense of *a certain X*), although nowadays this usage is considered archaic :

(c) **Un je ne sais quel charme** *encor vers vous m'emporte* (Corneille < Goosse-Grevisse § 373)

(an I do not know what charm still carries me towards you)

These uses, which probably result from a delocutive transfer (cf. Benveniste, 1966 : 277-285), appear separately from the cases of coalescence studied here. We will not spend more time on them.

[24] Where *méchant* agrees with *air* of which it is the attributive adjective.

It could not have been stated better, nor more concisely. Today still, many debates about linguistic change and the operativity of the notion of reanalysis would gain from taking into account the words of the Danish linguist.

2.3.1. SQ : [V$_0$P] / [ProNP] metanalysis in micro-syntactic context

But let us come back to the case under consideration. (12) represents a univocal example where *savoir* is a head verb:

(12)   *Je ne sais qui m'a mis au monde, ni ce que c'est que le monde, ni que moi-même.* (Pascal, 1662)
(I do not know who gave birth to me, nor what the world is, nor myself.)

From the point of view of information, this utterance is stratified. It gives two pieces of information simultaneously, the first one being presupposed while the second one is given.

> (a) *quelqu'un m'a mis au monde* (presupposed)
> *(somebody gave birth to me)*
> (b) *je ne sais pas qui* (given)
> *(I do not know who)*

Inversely, (13) is a univocal example where SQ can only be an indefinite ProNP :

(13)   *Un soir, **je ne sais qui** fit une grimace, une autre sourit, une troisième dit un bon mot, et voilà le rire qui fait le tour de la classe, <…>* (Sand, 1855)
(One evening, I do not know who made a face, another smiled, a third said a joke, and here is laughter going round the classroom)

> *je ne sais qui fit une grimace ≅ quelqu'un fit une grimace*
> *(I do not know who made a face ≅ somebody made a face)*

In (13), *je ne sais qui* is interpreted as a subject, just as *une autre* and *une troisième* are in the following verbal constructions. The speaker's ignorance has no informational relevance. In comparison to (12), only the presupposed information remains, promoted to the status of given information. As to (14), it is a case of metanalysis in the sense of Jespersen and Blinkenberg, that is to say that it can be indifferently interpreted as two completely different grammatical structures, with no significant change in the meaning conveyed[25] :

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[25] This relative semantic and pragmatic equivalence between the two concurrent grammatical analyses

(14)   *Un des convives saisit un brandon et y mit le feu. Une flamme jaillit. Elle serpentait de l'eau de vie au sucre et retournait.* **On ne sait qui commanda** *: « soufflez les chandelles : » ce fut fait.* (Pesquidoux, 1928)
(One of the guests grabbed a firebrand and lit it. A flame spurted out. It was snaking from the eau-de-vie to the sugar and returning. We do not know who ordered : 'Blow up the candles :' and it was done.)

Analysis 1 : [[on ne sait]$_{Vo}$ [qui commanda…]$_{que-P}$]$_{MSU}$

(a) *quelqu'un a commandé* (presupposed)
(somebody ordered)
(b) *on ne sait pas qui* (given)
(we do not know who)

Analysis 2 : [[on ne sait qui]$_{NP}$ [commanda…]$_{VP}$]

quelqu'un, un quidam commanda
(*somebody, an individual ordered*)
(with no informational stratification)

This type of micro-syntactic analysis is not very frequent in corpora and it is doubtful that it can, on its own, trigger the category reclassification of SQ.

2.3.2. *Parenthetical ℰ / indefinite ProNP metanalysis*

However, there are more examples, in macro-syntactic contexts, of *enumerations* (or *lists* in the terminology of Blanche-Benveniste & Jeanjean, 1987) in which SQ can be interpreted according to two grammars :

(15)   (a) *Ma pauvre amie, accusez la poste, les commissionnaires,* **je ne sais qui**, *tout le monde, avant de croire que je vous oublie.* (Eugénie de Guérin, 1847)
(My poor friend, please accuse the post office, the customs agents, I do not know who, everybody, before thinking that I am forgetting you.)

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results in the possibility for metanalysis to remain perfectly unnoticed, to the contrary of other structural ambiguities. Indeed, it has no problematic consequence on the verbal interaction. As Blinkenberg points out, forms such as (9) or (12), which unambiguously result from a reinterpretation of SQ as ProNP, reveal the existence of a 'silent' metanalysis in equivocal examples such as (14) (or (15-17) below). The *productivity* of the new analysis is the indirect but undisputable proof that metanalysis is not the product of the linguist's imagination. It is necessarily rooted in the speakers' competence. Langacker, 1977 : 58, points out the same phenomenon as Jespersen et Blinkenberg, which he names *reanalysis*, and is often considered the discoverer of this phenomenon.

(b) […] *pour sauver d'une punition peut-être un peu exagérée, mais juste au fond, **on ne sait qui**, un voleur, un drôle évidemment, il faudra que tout un pays périsse !* (Hugo, 1881)

([…] in order to save we do not know who, a thief, a little rascal anyway, from a perhaps exaggerated – but basically fair – punishment, a whole country should perish !)

(c) *Je vous le demande... est-ce raisonnable à lui, qui a de si grosses affaires à Paris... des entreprises de toutes sortes... la Bourse... un journal... **Dieu sait quoi** !* (Mirbeau, 1903)

(I am asking you... is it reasonable from him, who has such big affairs in Paris... firms of all kinds... the Stock Exchange... a newspaper... God knows what !)

Always in equivalent pragmatic conditions, in these examples SQ can be perceived either as an autonomous comment $\mathscr{E}$ or as a ProNP of identical syntactic rank as the neighbour NPs, with neither analysis overtaking the other.

Analysis 1 :

$\mathscr{E}_1$ with list phenomenon		parenthetical $\mathscr{E}_2$
(accusez$_V$	la poste$_{NP}$	
	les commissionnaires$_{NP}$	
		(je ne sais qui) $_{MSU2}$
	tout le monde$_{NP}$)$_{MSU1}$	

Analysis 2 :

$\mathscr{E}$ with list phenomenon	
(accusez$_V$	la poste$_{NP}$
	les commissionnaires$_{NP}$
	je-ne-sais-qui $_{Pro\text{-}NP}$
	tout le monde$_{NP}$) $_{MSU2}$

The recategorizing effect of context is particularly effective in sequences like *s'enfuir **quelque part, on ne sait où**,* where SQ is put in a list with an indefinite.

2.3.3. *Formulating $\mathscr{E}$ / indefinite ProNP* metanalysis

We have already seen hereabove in § 2.1, ex. (3), contexts in which a first $\mathscr{E}$, including a V with a non-full-fledged valency, precedes a *formulating $\mathscr{E}$,* glossing an implicit actant semantically implied by this V. The following

examples are of the same kind, with the difference that the gloss is reduced to a confession of ignorance as to the identity of the actant.

(16)   (a) […] *je m'imagine en vous je ne sçay quoi, qui me fait aymer passionnément, **je ne sçay qui**.* (Voiture, 1648)
         ([…] I imagine in you I do not know what, which makes me passionately love I do not know who)
         (b) *Aussi, quelqu'un ayant déterré, **on sait où**, un buste de Sieyès en abbé* […] (Las Cases, 1823)
         (So, as somebody had unearthed, we do not know where, a bust of Sieyès in abbot dress […])
         (c) *Je ne sais qui a rencontré au Bois de Boulogne le gros Zola bicyclant avec sa maîtresse, pendant que sa femme voyage toute seule, **je ne sais où**.* (Edmond & Jules de Goncourt, 1896)
         (I do not know who has met the big Zola bicycle riding with his mistress in the Bois de Boulogne, while his wife is travelling on her own I do not know where)

Just like the parentheticals included in enumerations (15), the sequences under (16) lend themselves to metanalysis : according to a first interpretation, the V preceding SQ is in absolute construction (*aymer $\emptyset_{obj}$ = être amoureux (to be in love)* ; *déterrer $\emptyset_{loc}$,= sortir de terre (take out of the earth)* ; *voyager $\emptyset_{loc}$ = être en voyage*) *(be on travel)*. In this case, SQ forms an independent $\mathcal{E}$, formulating 'after the event' either an actant implied by the V or a more or less expected free modifier. According to a second interpretation, however, the rection of V is, right from the start, saturated by SQ which then functions as NP. These two concurrent (macro-syntactic *vs* micro-syntactic) interpretations constitute a third metanalytic context favourable to a coalescence and to a transcategorization of SQ.

2.3.4. *formulating-after-a-break $\mathcal{E}$ / indefinite ProNP metanalysis*

Finally, in some of my examples (see also (25) *infra*), typographical indications seem to suggest that a first verbal construction was left out, which left the valency with one of its constituents unsaturated :

(17)   (a) *Tu me caches... **dieu sait quoi** !* (Bernstein, 1913)
         (You are hiding me... god knows what !)
         (b) *Les parents regorgeaient d'une fortune acquise, **Dieu scait comment** ;* (Diderot, 1779)
         (The parents abounded in a fortune acquired God knows how)

After this type of interrupted $\mathcal{E}$, $\mathcal{E}$(SQ) may, at least at the start, be used to make the cause of this loss explicit. In a second analysis, however, its verbal material is likely to be used to saturate the valency of the constituant in question. The ritualisation of such repairs, which are certainly much more frequent in oral than in written language, increases the contexts favourable to a change in the status of SQ.

2.4. *Change* or *evolution* ?

In his 1929 book, Frei proposed a distinction between what he names *static change* or simply *change* and diachronic change, or *evolution*.

(18)   *We will call* static change *or simply* change, *every reversible transition, i.e. a transition in which the initial term can be spontaneously restored by the speakers. In the opposite case, we will talk about* evolution. (Frei, 1929 : 29)

Frei gives the example of the contrasting destinies of two abbreviations : *perm* for *permission*, which initial term remains restorable, and *dèche* (= *dénuement, besoin*) (meaning '*destitution*'), which has ceased to be perceived as a clipped form of the word *déchéance* ('*decline, decay*'). In the case of SQ sequences in French, the examples studied above show that these sequences are undergoing a process of coalescence which takes the form of a change of status and of a very long term metanalysis. The question must actually be considered whether we are dealing with a *static change* or with an *evolution*, in Frei's terms. In favour of the first option, we can argue that, since the 16th century at least, the sequences *S Prep Q* (verb *savoir,* preposition, question word) and *Prep SQ* (preposition, verb *savoir*, question word) have coexisted – whereas in the very similar case of *n'importe Q* (anybody, anywhere, etc), evidence from available corpora indicates that, since the 1830, the *n'importe à qui* type was clearly supplanted by the *à n'importe qui* type (Béguelin 2002). In favour of the second option (*evolution*), it must be pointed out that, in the examples studied up to now, there is no negative adverb *pas* in the negation: *je ne sais qui* and not *je ne sais pas qui*. From the point of view of contemporary French, the negation restricted to *ne* undoubtedly is an archaism. It may be that the presence of this archaism contributes to the interpretation of potentially ambiguous examples like (15), (16), (17), etc. swinging over to the indefinite, especially with the younger generation. However, this is only a hint and *evolution*, in the sense of Frei, is not proved. The hypothesis of a stabilized metanalysis therefore remains perfectly defendable until otherwise proven.

2.5. Lexical renewal, remotivation

In relation to this point, it is interesting to make a quick incursion into more 'advanced' French and search for expressions including the verb *savoir* modalized by the discontinuous negation *ne...pas* or by the reduced negation *pas* (variant considered informal), in order to examine the behaviour of such strings with regard to the change we are dealing with. I will only consider here the case of *on ne sait pas Q*. Corpora unsurprisingly provide uses where *(ne) pas S* is a constructing V and which constitute autonomous ℰs with complete or elliptic interrogative forms (19a-b). They also provide a number of parenthetical ℰs (19c-e) among which one glosses an indefinite *a posteriori* ((19e), see end of § 2.3.2.) :

(19)   (a) *Il ajoute fermement : nous dormirons dans la voiture, **on ne sait pas qui traîne sur les routes en ce moment.*** (Sartre, 1949)
(He adds firmly : we will sleep in the car, we do not know who hangs around on the road these days.)
(b)   *- […] Elle a ensuite appelé Monte Carlo...*
- Quel numéro ?
- L'Hôtel de Paris...
*- **On ne sait pas qui** ?*   (Simenon, 1958)
(-[...] Then she rang Monte Carlo...
-   What number ?
-   The Hôtel de Paris...
-   We do not know who ?)
(c) *On a ça dans le sang... ça serai[t] un pouvoir qui nous serez [serait] insufflez [é], **on ne sait pas par qui** :* (Internet, original spelling)
(It's in our blood... it would be a power that would be infused into us, we don't know who by.)
(d) *Et elle mange des trucs préparés (**on sait pas par qui**) et c'est écrit dessus ce que c'est.* (Internet)
(She eats things prepared (we don't know who by) and it's written on it what it is.)
(e) *<…> il y a un silence, puis quelqu'un murmure : QUELQU'UN, **on ne sait pas qui.*** (Anouilh, 1977)
(<…> there is a silence, then somebody murmurs : SOMEBODY, we do not know who.)

But, more instructively, the tendency to coupling or binary grouping is also attested for *on ne sait pas Q*. It is at work in the following example, which is very similar to (8e-g), except for the negation.

(20) *... primes ou dotat[i]ons sont detournés **on ne sait pas par qui*** (*sic*, Internet)

(subsidies and grants are embezzled we do not know who by)

Here the internal syntax of *ne pas SQ* is identical to (19c). The database Frantext, consulted in September 2006, provides a univocal attestation of *ne pas SQ* in micro-syntactic context, functioning as object complement (French *attribut de l'objet*) (21a). The database also provides a few metanalytic attestations like (21b), which is similar to (16) :

(21) (a) *<…> une femme de pêcheur qui se croyait **on ne sait pas qui**, une effrontée, une païenne* (Henri Queffélec, 1944)
(<…> a fisherman's wife who thought she was we do not know who, an insolent woman , a pagan)
(b) *Dans l'après-midi, le chat s'en va **on ne sait pas où**, et Jeanne quitte la maison pour aller choisir au jardin les poireaux, la salade, les carottes, le persil, les navets.* (Dhètel, 1930)
(In the afternoon, the cat goes we do not know where, and Jeanne leaves the house to go to the garden and choose leeks, salad, carrots, parsley, turnips.)

The example (21a) is an isolated case in this predominantly literary corpus. However, it is easy to gather from the internet a series of attestations of post-prepositional forms of *ne pas SQ* (22a) and also of *pas SQ*, the truncated form of the negative common in informal French (22b) :

(22) (a) *une banque de donnée accessible par **on ne sait pas qui**, imaginons que cela est communiqué à d'autres entreprises, ils bloquerons [t] aussi le MAJ ou autre **...*** (Internet, *sic* ; 348 results of the same kind)
(a database accessible we do not know who to, imagine it is passed on to other companies, they will also stop the MAJ or other...)
(b) *Faire le standard, corriger les CR, répondre aux commandes, retrouver les documents perdus par **on sait pas qui,** préparer les réponses aux appels d'offres, ...* (Internet : 266 results of the same kind)
(Answer the phone, correct the CRs, fill the orders, find again the documents lost we don't know who by, prepare the replies to invitations to tender, ...)

These examples are univocally micro- and they demonstrate both the permanence and the vitality of the coalescence of confessions of ignorance, which, in French, is not limited to the morphologically archaistic string *je ne sais Q, on ne sait Q*. Instances like (23) are another proof of this :

(23) (a) *<…> la famille nombreuse de cette nana vivant, à **nul ne pouvait dire combien**, dans une bâtisse croulante de la rue Philippe-de-Girard.* (Simonin, 1977)
(<…> this girl's numerous family living, the no-one-could-say-how-many of them, in an old crumbling building on Philippe-de-Girard street.)

(b) *Mais le feu, c'est sûr maintenant, rien ne l'arrêtera ; rien sauf les pompiers, peut être ! tiens les voilà justement, prévenu par **va savoir qui*** (Internet, original spelling)
(But nothing will stop the fire, now that's for sure. Nothing except perhaps the firemen ! Here they are, precisely, called out by who knows who)

(c) *je te parie qu'ils vont encore faire la guerre à **va savoir qui***. (Internet)
(I bet they're going to be at war again with who knows who.)

(d) *Super les poulets boucanés cuits dans des vieux bidons de "**j'veux pas savoir quoi**".* (Internet)
(Marvellous smoked chickens cooked in old drums of 'I don't want to know what'.)

All these extracts are post-prepositional and also show a propensity to use, instead of indefinite ProSN, (ex-)ℰs expressing a confession of ignorance, whatever their precise lexical content. The same form appears in (24), which is one of the cases of 'coupling' (or binary grouping) studied by Deulofeu.

(24) *il avait **on aurait dit une tonsure** là* (oral, Deulofeu, 1989: 129)
(there he had what looked like a tonsure ; literally : *'there he had we would have said a tonsure')*

In this case, the 'coupled' MSU carries a modality of uncertainty expressed through the past conditional of the verb *dire (to say)*. As to (25), it brings together two similar examples where a formulating ℰ with an epistemic content in broad sense takes the place of the NP expected as complement of the preposition.

(25) (a) *Elle revenait du champ de courses d'Auteuil... elle repartait pour, **je ne demandais pas où**, je me serais pas permis.* (Boudard, 1995)
(She would come back from the racecourse of Auteuil... and leave again I didn't ask where, I wouldn't have dared.)

(b) *avec un commentaire de de de- **je ne connais que lui*** (oral, spring 2006 ≅ <je ne retrouve pas son nom pourtant> *je ne connais que lui*)
(with a commentary by by by- he's the only one I know)

($\cong$ < I cannot remember his name, although> *he's the only one I know*)

In these examples, it looks like a prepositional phrase is initiated and then interrupted[26] by a confession of ignorance which function is to justify the interruption (note, in (b), the tinge of paradox in the justification). As we have seen in the case of (17), it can reasonably be thought that restorations of this type can, as they turn into routines, contribute to the integration of SQ sequences in broad sense[27]. Here is, finally, a rare example of a positive form of SQ in the first person[28], quoted from a personal message published in the daily newspaper *Libération* :

(26)   Comment retrouver la boule, donne-moi une heure de RV **je sais où**. (*Libération*, 18-19.11.2006)
         (How to find your marbles again, give me a meeting time I know where.)
Here the SQ sequence really seems, once again, to take a micro- position as a governed focalized complement of *donner une heure de rendez-vous.*

2.5. Provisional synthesis

I have shown hereabove that the destiny of SQ sequences in French depends on the following circumstances :

(i) In some micro-syntactic contexts and for reasons of informational relevance, SQ, which information is initially stratified, tends to get destratified. This process implies a syntactic reanalysis (13).
(ii) In some other – this time macro-syntactic – contexts, for example comment parentheticals inserted in enumerations (15), or formulating glosses of zero complements (16) or of indefinite complements (18a), an

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[26] See the punctuation in (25a) and the repetition of the preposition *de* in (25b), which signal an ongoing lexical search.

[27] (17a) shows, just before SQ, a suspension mark, that is a signal of hesitation functionally comparable to the repetition of the preposition followed by a pause which can be observed in (25b). These examples can also be compared with the following delocutive use kindly provided by Gilles Corminboeuf :

*Cette traînée, cette fille des rues, cette **on ne sait pas quoi**, cette **on n'ose pas dire**…* (Ramuz, *La beauté de la terre*). See *supra* footnote 23.

(This slut, this street girl, this we do not know what, this we do not dare say...)

[28] It seems to me that *je sais où (I know where)* is usually rather used in euphemistic wordings, to avoid (while suggesting it) a more or less unsuitable designator : *il mériterait un coup de pied je sais où = un coup de pied quelque part / là où je pense = un coup de pied au derrière. (He would deserve a kick I know where = a kick somewhere / where I'm thinking of = a kick in the bottom.)* But this question would deserve more detailed investigation.

$\mathscr{E}$(SQ) tends to be reinterpreted as a constituant of same rank as the element(s) glossed or commented on.

(iii) Finally, in contexts of *restoration* like (17) or (25), after a governing V or the initial preposition of a prepositional phrase, the insertion of SQ or of an $\mathscr{E}$ of epistemic nature tends to turn into a routine, which also facilitates a micro- reinterpretation of SQ.

Some of my examples are particularly appropriate for the observation of the influence (or the pressure) exerted by the syntagmatic order on the paradigmatic order. It is the case not only in enumerations (15) but also in (13), repeated below :

(13)   *Un soir, **je ne sais qui fit une grimace, une autre sourit, une troisième dit un bon mot,** et voilà le rire qui fait le tour de la classe,* <…> (Sand, 1855)
        (One evening, I do not know who made a face, another smiled, a third said a joke, and here is laughter going round the classroom)

The interpretation of SQ as an indefinite here necessarily goes with the hypothesis of a structural parallelism between the three verbal constructions in bold type : we read three successive [NP VP] structures, rather than a [V_0P] followed by two [NP VP].

3. Conclusive remarks

3.1. Understanding the conditions for metanalysis

In the many languages in which they are attested, the changes affecting confessions of ignorance will gain from being considered in context, that is to say within the pragma-syntactic contexts where they appear. The strings of the type of SQ do indeed, in several languages[29], evolve towards the indefinite, but this is not due to an internal or inherent semantic vocation. In this respect, the 'clines' of grammaticalization (of the type *SQ > indefinite*) can be confusing. Because these 'clines' operate on doubly isolated forms, taken out both of the discourse where they appear and of the linguistic system which they belong to, they seem to imply that they include in themselves the explanation of the change observed, which is inexact.

The type of grammaticalization that we have been dealing with does not operate out of context. It is therefore in certain specific uses that we must look for an

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[29] See the examples in Old English, Old Norse, Old Slavic, Bulgarian, etc. gathered by Haspelmath 1997 : 131. In these languages, which are all of European origin, it would be necessary to measure the impact of the Latin model *nescio Q.*

explanation for it. In the cases where I have observed the change *SQ > indefinite*, it is mainly linked, in French, to the existence of metanalytic contexts favourable to a reinterpretation of macro-syntactic relations as micro-syntactic relations (see (4) and (4') and § 2.5. *supra*). These situations of metanalysis facilitate the observed shift in category and meaning. They are perhaps even a condition for it to be initiated. In this perspective, it really makes sense to say that discourse feeds grammar and that *'la langue'* in the Saussurian sense, is reprocessed by *'la parole'*. A lot remains to be done, however, to model the diverse and complex conditions in which linguistic change is initiated. Indeed, although most researchers more or less agree that change is always rooted in social or synchronic variation, only few of them set out to describe the conditions for variation methodically instead of putting forward hasty conclusions about the 'directionality' of changes. Moreover, it is doubtful whether we can simply trust the current prejudices on the 'natural' erosive orientation of linguistic change : from concrete to abstract, from objective to subjective, etc. While waiting for sufficiently documented studies on the conditions of change likely to support typological generalizations, we must keep in mind the risks resulting from the absence of a view rooted in phenomena and from attention being too exclusively given to one subset of them. As Boone & Pierrard 1998, following G. Guillaume, point out :

(27)   […] *in fact there are two superposed diachronies : the first one, which is sufficiently described by traditional historical grammar, is destructive, while the second one is constructive (*Leçons, *1989 : 1-2). […] There is a constant systemic reorganization. […] the history of the systems, that is to say the 'diachrony of the synchronies', should, according to Gustave Guillaume, be at the centre of linguistic research. In this perspective, what is important is not the particular forms undergoing change, but rather the relations between these forms.* (Boone & Pierrard, 1998 : 7 ; for the Saussurian conception of diachronic study, see Béguelin, 2007).

3.2. Epilogue : grammaticalization, reanalysis, graduality, etc.

Should the case of SQ sequences studied hereabove be regarded as one of grammaticalization ? Yes, certainly, if we stick to the initial definition by Meillet (§ 1.2.1.), although he does not, in his article, take into account the fact that categories can be fed not just by 'words' but also by 𝒮s. No, probably not, if we understand grammaticalization in the sense of Haspelmath (§ 1.2.4**.**), because the observed process, in the case of SQ, is not gradual, at least not in the sense of the scales presented under (2). The characteristic of SQ indeed is to jump *directly* from the status of autonomous 𝒮 to the status of NP (or even to the status of N in delocutive uses : see footnote 23). However, this is no more

than a trivial problem of labelling, in itself lacking real scientific interest. What is much more important is understanding the mecanisms of the observed change and drawing, if possible, some generalizations. For example, we can point out the constant and important role played by the pragma-syntactic routines of the type $\mathscr{E}_1action + \mathscr{E}_2formulation$ in the initiation of metanalyses. This role can be demonstrated in French not just in the case of SQ, but also in the case of *n'importe Q* and other 'paratax' candidates to coalescence (*ça fait (it has been)* or *il y a (for)* + expression of a lapse of time, etc.[30]). It can also be pointed out here that metanalysis, which is the pivot of any reinterpretation, is both discreet and discrete, that is to say both 'unobtrusive' and 'separate'. As to the notion of continuum, or graduality, so often mentioned in the study of diachronic facts (see footnote 7), it leads to many misunderstandings. Indeed, the graduality of some phenomena put in a line by the diachronist on his/her own authority does not necessarily imply the graduality of the mecanisms of (re)conceptualization of the linguistic chain by the speakers. Besides, from the speakers' point of view, it is hard to conceive how a change in category could happen gradually. (Re)conceptualization necessarily takes place in one go, without any intermediary stage and it has a catastrophic nature, even if its effects are not immediately visible (this is even the very definition of metanalysis, as seen in § 2.3.). Unfortunately, and in spite of profound reflections by Saussure on the subject (1916 : 251-258), two points of view on the facts, that of the scholar and that of the speaker, often remain mixed up in diachronic studies.

For example, Bart Defranq[31] has recently (and wrongly, in my opinion) argued in favour of the graduality of the grammaticalization of *n'importe Q*. What he has in fact shown is the graduality of the *graphic manifestation*[32] of the phenomenon. This graduality does not call into question the abrupt nature of reanalysis, proved by the appearance, around 1830, of ***preposition** n'importe Q* sequences in contexts where *n'importe **preposition** Q* sequences were found previously.

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[30] See (3)-(5) *supra* and Béguelin, 2002. See also Borillo, 1996, Choi-Jonin 2005, as well as this example from Mathieu Avanzi's corpus : *et je suis tombé c'était mon frère (and I came across it was my brother)* (= *et je suis tombé sur qqn (and I came across somebody)* <i.e. on the phone> *c'était mon frère (it was my brother)*) (oral).

[31] Defranq, 2006. The study is excellent, though.

[32] *N'importe Q* tends to be written all in one word, without graphic space, especially in non-standard spellings gleaned on the internet.

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