



**HAL**  
open science

## Metaphors for the Sentence

Sophie Jollin-Bertocchi

► **To cite this version:**

Sophie Jollin-Bertocchi. Metaphors for the Sentence. Henry Sweet Society Colloquium, Henry Sweet Society, Sep 2019, Edinburgh, United Kingdom. hal-04030676

**HAL Id: hal-04030676**

**<https://hal.uvsq.fr/hal-04030676>**

Submitted on 15 Mar 2023

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

# Metaphors for the Sentence

Sophie Jollin-Bertocchi

Université Paris-Saclay, Versailles / Centre d'Histoire Culturelle des Sociétés contemporaines (CHCSC)

Defined from a semantic point of view as "*an act of indirect predicate denotation*" (Kleiber, quoted in Bordas 2003: 13), metaphor constitutes a strategy that conflicts with the definitions and descriptions of language theorists. Nonetheless, as is true of other sciences, linguistics has used metaphorization to conceptualize its theories and metaphor therefore plays a role in metalanguage (Thom 1983 [1980]; Rodriguez H 2018). Charles Bally expresses the view of the linguistic imaginary (1905: 102, quoted in Curea 2018: 35):

(1) [...] [l]a plupart des hommes pensent par impressions, les idées pures ne les satisfont pas; le plus souvent la sensibilité est mêlée à l'élaboration des idées [...] et c'est pour cela que les images sont nécessaires [...]. (Bally 1905: 102)

[...] the majority of people think in impressions, they are not content with pure ideas; most often, feelings are involved in developing ideas [...] and this is why images are needed [...].

The literature on grammar, linguistics and lexicography has produced a variety of metaphors for the sentence understood as a metonym for language (Seguin 1993). They reflect the confusion surrounding a complex and protean concept.

In addition, the discourse of twentieth-century literary criticism has been a major source of analogies for the sentence, something which perhaps at one time might have been explained by literary criticism's propensity to speak the same language as its object of study, but which has now become a fixture.

After a brief overview of the tradition of metaphors used with reference to language, in a french corpus, I shall present the main metaphors for the sentence by attempting to chart how they have been expressed and to do so in a way that makes it possible to assess the role of both tradition and innovation. At the same time, I shall explore the links between the academic discourse of grammarians and linguists and discourses about literature.

## 1. THE TRADITION OF METAPHORS REFERRING TO LANGUAGE

Linguistics has changed the way of metaphorizing its theoretical concepts in the course of its history, from clarity in the Eighteenth Century, to vitalist metaphors in the Nineteenth Century.

### 1.1. The Eighteenth Century: Clarity

As noted by Pierre Swiggers:

(2) À partir de Vaugelas ("la clarté du langage, que la Langue Française affecte sur toutes les langues du monde", *Remarques*), puristes et grammairiens ne cessent de vanter la clarté ou la netteté du français, tellement oppose aux équivoques et à "toute sorte d'obscurité". (Swiggers 1987: 22-35)

Beginning with Vaugelas ("the clarity of language, for which French has a greater predilection than all the languages of the world", *Remarques*), purists and grammarians have

continually extolled the clarity or precision of the French language, so greatly opposed to ambiguities and to "all manner of obscurity". (Swiggers 1987: 9)<sup>1</sup>

Hence, Boileau's famous remark: "Whatever is well conceived is clearly said". This ideal was crystallized in the eighteenth century by Rivarol:

- (3) La langue française ayant la clarté par excellence a dû chercher toute son élégance et sa force dans l'ordre direct; cet ordre et cette clarté ont dû surtout dominer dans la prose, et la prose a dû lui donner l'empire; cette démarche est dans la nature; rien n'est en effet comparable à la prose française. (Rivarol 1784, cité dans Wilmet 1987: 14).

The French language, possessed of clarity *par excellence*, was obliged to seek all its elegance and power in direct word order; this order and clarity came to dominate prose in particular and prose ensured its ascendancy; this strategy is innate; indeed, there is nothing comparable to French prose.

This fixed metaphor promotes a normative vision of the French language. It is still to be detected in works of literary theory from the beginning of the twentieth century, where sentences are sometimes described as "limpid" (Albalat 1903: 59, *passim*), and sometimes as "obscure" (*ibid.*: 284 and 301).

## 1.2. The nineteenth century: the living organism and vitalist metaphors<sup>2</sup>

In the nineteenth century, metaphor—but comparison too—became a primary means of understanding and expression thanks to the widespread cognitive stranglehold generated by Correspondence Philosophy (Swedenborg, etc.). Metaphor sets forth an *identity* and postulates *heterogeneity* in order to become an *argument* and to establish a stream of *analogical correspondences* between domains that are naturally alien to one another.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the historical and comparative linguistics of the day were greatly influenced by the natural sciences and by Darwinian theory in particular. Evolutionism therefore became established in metaphors in France between 1850 and 1920 (Stadius 2009: 71-72). Languages were spoken of as living organisms, subject to increase (and decrease), of which only the fittest could survive, the rest quite simply dying out<sup>3</sup>; and this by natural selection:

- (4) S'il est une vérité banale aujourd'hui, c'est que les langues sont des organismes vivants dont la vie... peut se comparer à celle des organismes du règne végétal ou du règne animal... (Darmesteter 1889: 3)

If there is a commonplace truth today, it is that languages are living organisms, of which the life... may be compared to that of organisms in the vegetable or animal kingdoms...

<sup>1</sup> "Les deux piliers de la clarté française sont (1) l'ordre naturel des mots (opposé au « style figuré ») et (2) la netteté et la richesse du vocabulaire." (Swiggers 1987: 9). Voir aussi Meschonnic 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Voir Desmet 1996 et Klippi 2010.

<sup>3</sup> La même chose valait pour les mots et leurs significations: on parlait de la naissance, de la vie et de la mort des mots. Des phénomènes comme l'évolution et l'arbre généalogique des langues, On voulait découvrir les lois de développement des langues, leur filiation la manière dont elles étaient apparentées, faire leur arbre généalogique en utilisant des notions comme langue-mère, langues-filles, etc. "De fait rien n'est résolu par les néo-grammairiens lorsqu'ils ridiculisent sans merci les figures naïvement organicistes du premier comparatisme, car la vraie nécessité c'est une terminologie juste, et là tous sont à reprendre, les néogrammairiens comme les autres" (Normand 1995: 81).

Consequently, contemporary linguistics drew a good many theory metaphors from physiology and medicine.

The French critic Roland Barthes, however, in the twentieth century, attributed an even older origin to the

(5) [...] mythe humaniste de la phrase vivante, effluve d'un modèle organique, à la fois clos et générateur (mythe qui s'exprime dans le traité *Du sublime*). (Barthes 1971: 1269)

[...] humanist myth of the living sentence, effluvium of an organic model, at once closed and generative (a myth discussed in the treatise *On the Sublime*). (From "The Rustle of Languages", Roland Barthes, trans. Richard Howard, University of California Press: 96)

The organic metaphor is central in Humboldt (1836 VII, 15; Caussat 1974: 144), who regarded language as an "organic structure" in which each part depended on the others<sup>4</sup> (Nerlich 1988: 21).

As demonstrated by Gerda Hassler (2017), however, the concept of an organism was not always linked to the natural sciences in Romance Era Philology, was not, in other words, always a metaphor, although its point of departure was always a comparison with an organic entity. In fact, the organism could be natural or artificial and in the latter case referred to "a whole made up of several parts forming a [coherent] unit":

(6) Au cours du temps, et dans un développement parallèle à la biologie, le concept spéculatif et anti-mécaniste d' "organisme" chez les romantiques cédait progressivement la place à un concept mécaniste d'organisme [...]. Comme la biologie était amenée, au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, à remettre en cause son origine vitaliste pour se reconstruire sur la base du mécanisme physico-chimique, la linguistique a abandonné la conceptualité romantique en faveur d'une approche plus mécaniste, influence par le positivisme, notamment chez les néo-grammairiens (Séguy-Duclot 1911: 10; cité dans Hassler 2017: 90)

Over time and in step with the development of biology, the Romantics' speculative and anti-mechanistic concept of an "organism" gradually gave way to a mechanistic one. Just as biology in the nineteenth century was led to challenge its vitalist origins in order to be rebuilt on the basis of physico-chemical mechanisms, so linguistics abandoned its romantic conceptuality in favour of a more mechanistic approach influenced by positivism, particularly among the Neogrammarians.

G. Hassler (2017: 92) concludes that the vitalist concept of the organism declined in the first half of the twentieth century, whereupon physiological metaphors acquired a somewhat pejorative meaning.

In short, the concept of an organism makes it possible to express several metaphors, vitalist and construction analogies alike, as I shall now consider with regard to the twentieth century. This is evidenced by Charles Bally when he says: the "organism of this language, its structure, its frame" (1965 [1913]: 60).

<sup>4</sup> C'est une "façon de parler qui est évidemment influencée par la notion d'organisme dans la *Critique du jugement*" (Nerlich 1988: 21) de Kant, et qui fonde sa vision énergétique du langage humain, conçu comme "l'émanation du dynamisme spirituel de l'homme" (1836; Caussat 1974: 155).

## 2. THE DOMINANT PARADIGMS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Two dominant lines emerged in the twentieth century: the organicist/vitalist metaphor from the previous century and the construction metaphor.

### 2.1. Construction and spatial metaphors

As discussed in relation to organicist metaphors, scientific metaphors were in keeping with the zeitgeist. In the twentieth century, during the period of structuralism, the basic metaphor was constructional. The sentence in particular was seen as a complex structure, a “syntactic edifice” (Lauwers 2004: 132), its foundations made up of phonology (phonemes) and the upper levels of morphology and then of syntax (morphemes and syntagms). The generic term *construction* itself stemmed from grammatical metalanguage already in use in the seventeenth century. It was applied, with the figurative meaning of “organization”, to the field of syntax. The latent image was revived in literary criticism as the result of an extended metaphor:

(7) Buffon rompt la coupe, brise la construction et, par des changements de temps, rebâtit la phrase [...]. (Albalat 1903: 170)

Buffon destroys the blueprint, smashes up the structure and, through changes of tense, rebuilds the sentence [...].

The expression "the architecture of a sentence" (Albalat 1899: 146) helped to convey an imagined solidity.

(8) Il n’y a pas de différence essentielle entre la phrase et le vers; le vers n’est qu’un mot, comme le mur n’est qu’un bloc. Ni du mur, ni du vers, ni de la phrase on ne peut retirer une pierre ni un mot, que le bloc ne se fende et croule. (Gourmont 1899: 507)

There is no essential difference between a sentence and a line of verse; a line of verse is merely a word, just as a wall is merely a solid block. Not a stone or a word can be removed from the wall or the line of verse or the sentence without the block cracking and collapsing. (Gourmont 1899: 507)

The isotopy recurs in expressions that do not constitute fixed sentences, such as Bally’s “the framework of a sentence” but also in Albalat (1903: 302) and later in the structuralist Tesnière (1959: 287). Furthermore, the image is made clearer in the latter’s thinking by his system of *stemma*, which pictorially produces the shape of a roof frame.

The author Marcel Proust, writing as literary critic, enhances the metaphor by using the religious register<sup>5</sup>:

(9) [...] en permettant de faire jaillir au cœur d’une proposition l’*arceau* qui ne retombera qu’en plein milieu de la proposition suivante, elles (les phrases) assuraient l’étroite, l’hermétique continuité du style. (Proust 1920: 195)

<sup>5</sup> Cependant la phrase est plus loin, dans le même article, assimilée à un engin de chantier:

Mais nous les aimons ces lourds matériaux que la phrase de Flaubert soulève et laisse retomber avec le bruit intermittent d’un excavateur. Car si, comme on l’a écrit, la lampe nocturne de Flaubert faisait aux mariniers l’effet d’un phare, on peut dire aussi que les phrases lancées par son « gueuloir » avaient le rythme régulier de ces machines qui servent à faire les déblais. (Proust 1920: 204)

[...] by allowing an *arch* to surge up from the centre of one clause and come down again only in the middle of the next, they (the sentences) guaranteed the style's strict, hermetic continuity. (Proust 1920: 195; my italics)

The register of manufacturing offers a reduced image of construction. It is utilized in the classic “mould” metaphor and the metaphors of a sentence as “untreated” (Lanson 1908: 59) or “shaped into a straight line” (Albalat 1925: 56) in Lanson and Albalat's works.

This object-focused vision is enriched by a mechanist discourse: “the mechanism of sentences” (Albalat 1903: 24):

(10) Ne prodiguez pas ces boulons, si vous ne voulez pas que vos phrases aient l'air artificiellement soudées. (Albalat 1925: 137)

Do not dispense these nuts and bolts, if you do not want your sentences to seem artificially welded together.

(11) [...] la force de ses charnières, l'aisance de ses emboîtements (Gandon 1938: XIII)

the strength of its hinges, the ease of its jointings

More broadly, it is location in space that is at issue, particularly through the image of *delineation* (Lanson 1908: 271, and Valéry above, *to delineate (dessiner)*): “this sentence plots my limits precisely” (Green, *Journal: vol. 3: 1940-1943*, 1943, p. 12 – 1940), which may be juxtaposed with the wording of Le Goffic, a contemporary French grammarian, “the outer limit of language” (Le Goffic 2001: 99)<sup>6</sup>.

Geometric metaphors suggest the notion of a vanishing point, which may be regarded as the poetic element in the notion of a sentence. Thus, two grammarians, Frenchman Le Goffic (1993) and Belgian Wilmet (1997), each devote a chapter in their grammars to defining a sentence. They are entitled, respectively, “Overview” and “Panorama”. Like *vanishing point*, these are optical metaphors.

That a sentence can be delineated summons up the notion of a “world”. This spatialization expands still further, to cosmic dimensions, in Benveniste's definition (1966: 130), where it is based in addition on the thinking of general linguistics (my italics):

(12) [...] avec la phrase on quitte le *domaine* de la langue comme système de signes, et l'on entre dans un autre *univers*, celui de la langue comme instrument de communication, dont l'expression est le discours. (Benveniste 1966: 130; je souligne)

[...] with the sentence we leave the *domain* of language as a system of signs and enter into another *universe*, that of language as an instrument of communication, whose expression is discourse.

As it happens, these two analogies are sufficiently part of the lexicon to go unnoticed were they not linked to an extended metaphor that reveals their meaning.

The metaphor of roundness—

<sup>6</sup> Voir aussi Gautier 2018. La question ou la hantise de la limite semble sous-jacente dans ces images: « Je me suis promené dans cette phrase comme dans une grande avenue ombreuse qui conduirait tout droit hors de cette vie » (Green, *Journal: t. 2: 1935-1939*, 1939, p. 119 – 1937).

(13) Des phrases trop rondes n'encerclent plus le réel. (Guéhenno, *Carnets du vieil écrivain*, Grasset, 1971, p. 51)

Sentences that are too round no longer circumscribe reality.—

was already attested in Chateaubriand ("to round off our sentences", quoted in Albalat (1925: 36) and Flaubert "the curve of the sentence" (quoted in the *Trésor de la Langue Française informatisé*). It is located at the intersection of the constructional/spatial imaginary and that of the body, which are notably combined in the next two quotations<sup>7</sup>:

(14) [Les grands hommes] dessinent d'une seule phrase tout le corps d'une pensée achevée. (Valéry, *Variété I*, 1924: 175)

[These great men] delineate in a single sentence the entire body of a completed thought [Les grands hommes]

(15) [...] comme si la phrase solidement installée sur ses piliers syntaxiques lançait ses filets tous azimuts afin d'attraper ce qui se passe, ou comme si elle enrobait son squelette des innombrables pièces de chair et de vêtement qui lui tombait sous la main. (Goux 1982: 71)

[...] as if the sentence, firmly established on its columns of syntax, was casting its nets in all directions to catch whatever went by, or as if it had draped its skeleton in the innumerable scraps of flesh and clothing that came its way.

## 2.2. From organism to eroticized body

And so we slip gradually into the register of the body<sup>8</sup>, an "inexhaustible matrix of metaphor" (Bordas 2003: 69), which modulates the living organism concept.

Saussure's writings contain metaphors which insist that language has a body, encased in the "stifling corset of official French" (*Writings in General Linguistics*, trans. Carol Sanders and Matthew Pires, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 105; II.8, Normand 1995: 89). This specialized metaphor of a piece of female clothing, its purpose as much restrictive as aesthetic, is an avatar of structure. The same metaphor was taken up later in the century by a literary critic: "all these sentences with their stifling iron corsets" (Gandon 1938: 120). Saussure returns elsewhere to language as body:

(16) Il n'est pas facile de se débarrasser du voile que met l'écriture. Il faut toute une éducation même quand on est averti, pour voir la langue nue, non revêtue de l'écriture. Pour se convaincre que l'écriture n'est qu'une guenille sur son corps. (Saussure 572/1.85, cité dans Normand 1995: 89)

It is not easy to be rid of the veil imposed by writing. Even when one is aware in advance, it takes an entire education to see the language naked, not covered by writing. To be persuaded that writing is nothing but a rag on a body.

This "preferred expression of the tumult of terminology delineates the working style of a way of thinking", according to Normand (1995: 90). Closer to our own times, it is still possible to read the expression "the skeleton of grammar" in the historiographical studies of Peter Lauwers (2004: 568).

<sup>7</sup> Les citations suivies d'une référence complète sont extraites de la base textuelle FRANTEXT.

<sup>8</sup> Au sens propre ou au sens figuré d' "ensemble organisé d'unités matérielles ou intellectuelles" (*Trésor de la Langue Française informatisé*).

As an extension of the naturalist notions of language, which were the prevailing paradigm in the nineteenth century, vitalist analogies formed a counterpoint to the objectal and static view of the sentence. The idea of a language's life could not be more commonplace today. It constitutes "the most common expression of the language's democratization" (Stattius 2009: 71-72). Thus numerous instances in criticism and in writers' output establish the understanding of the sentence as a living body:

(17) des phrases nous montent au visage en coups de sang (Albalat 1925: 117)

sentences rise like blushes to our faces

(18) J'attends trop souvent que la phrase ait achevé de se former en moi, pour l'écrire. Le mieux est de la prendre par le bout qui se présente d'abord, tête ou pied, sans connaître aussitôt le reste; puis de tirer [...]. (Gide, *Journal: 1889-1939*, 1939, p. 986 – 1930; André Gide, *Journals* vol.3 1928-1939)

I too often wait for the sentence to have finished taking shape in me before writing it. It is best to take it by the end that first offers itself, head or foot, without yet knowing the rest, then to pull [...]. (Trans. Justin O'Brien, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2000, p. 108-109)

(19) [...] une palpitation étrange de la phrase. (Green, *Journal: t. 1: 1928-1934*, 1934, p. 54 – 1931)

a strange palpitation of the sentence

(20) [...] le mot, la phrase ne sont point figurations abstraites, mais créatures de chair pour le moins autant que les personnages surgis de toutes pièces de son imagination. (Yves Gandon 1938 : XVIII-XIX)

[...] the word, the sentence are by no means abstract representations but creature of flesh at least as much as the characters that arise from all parts of his imagination.

(21) sa phrase haletait (Guéhenno: vol. 3: *Grandeur et misère d'un esprit: 1758-1778*, 1952: 154).

his sentence sputtered

Also worth quoting is André Breton's famous surrealist image: the sentence "knocking at the window" (*Les Manifestes du surréalisme*, 1946; First Manifesto, 1924: 38; *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, 1969, p. 21).

In this way, just like language for which it is a metonym, the sentence is subject to life and death:

(22) Lui, l'enfant, profère tout d'abord ce que je cherche si souvent, tuant la phrase, cassant le mot, évoquant le babil même des organes, c'est-à-dire des... choses! (Gide et Valéry, *Correspondance (1890-1942)*, 1942, p. 402; Valéry to Mme Gide Dec. 1903)

He, the baby, immediately proclaims what I am so often in search of, murdering the sentence, breaking the word, calling to mind the babble even of internal organs, in other words of ... things!

(23) [...] cette perfection continue a quelque chose d'inhumain, elle tue chaque phrase au passage, sans en rater une. (Green, *Journal: t. 1: 1928-1934*, 1934, p. 38 – 1931)

[...] this continuous perfection has something inhuman about it, it kills each sentence in passing without missing a single one

The "movement of a sentence" (Albalat 1925: 12-13) to refer to its "organization" is a common metaphor in literary and stylistic analysis. It leads back to an energy-based vision:



(24) [...] la phrase qui veut être rapide, alerte, incisive [...] la phrase qui s'affranchit de toutes règles au nom du libre parler et de la verte allure populaire [...]. (Arland 1955 : 76)

[...] the sentence that seeks to be quick, alert, incisive [...] the sentence that frees itself from any rules in the name of free speech and a furious informal pace.

(25) [...] – écrivez une phrase. Bien. Nous allons lui faire faire le tour du monde. Six minutes plus tard, ma phrase a volé de Londres à Bombay; de là, elle bondit à Shanghai, puis me revient par les Etats-Unis. (Morand, *Londres*, 1933: 279)

[...] – write a sentence. Good. We're going to take it on a world tour. Six minutes later, my sentence has flown from London to Bombay; from there, it leaps over to Shanghai and then comes back to me via the United States. (Paul Morand, *A Frenchman's London*, trans. Desmond Flower, Cassell, 1934).

Accentuating the analogy thus results in a personification that has lasted until the contemporary period in various types of discourse (here these are successively lexicographical and essayist<sup>9</sup>):

(26) La phrase emprunte sa forme, ou groupe plusieurs propositions comme un organe du corps groupe des cellules [...] la proposition lui donne sa chair [...]. La phrase est une unité syntagmatique dans la mesure où la proposition lui donne sa chair [...]. (Guilbert *et al.*, 1971-1977, p. 4256)

The sentence borrows its shape or groups several clauses together in the way that an internal organ groups together cells [...] the clause gives it flesh [...]. The sentence is a syntagmatic unit inasmuch as the clause gives it its flesh [...].

(27) [...] la syntaxe est bien plus que le squelette de la phrase, c'est son système circulatoire [...]. (Alféri 1991: 25)

[...] syntax is much more than the sentence's skeleton, it is its circulatory system [...]. (Alféri, *Seeking the Sentence*, in *A Guide to Poetics Journal: Writing in the Expanded Field*, 1982-1998, eds. Lyn Hejinian and Barrett Watten)

(28) La phrase a donc un corps, un corps syntaxique, et ce corps n'est vivant, comme il se doit, que par l'amour qu'on lui porte [...]. (Goux 1999: 66)

The sentence then has a body, a syntactic body, and this body is properly alive only through the love that is felt for it [...].

Psychologization—which, moreover, sustains part of the era's grammatical thinking, as evidenced by Damourette and Pichon—is the corollary of corporalization. In other words, personification of the sentence sometimes favours specific metaphorization and at others abstract metaphorization. The mental isotopy of this achieves its full potential by presuming a double-sided unit in the manner of Saussure's linguistic sign: “Modality is the soul of the sentence” (Bally 1932: 36, §28).

Lastly, out of linguistic works, eroticized depictions appear in certain utterances:

(29) caresser ses phrases (Gourmont 1899: 50)

to caress ones sentences

(30) Exprimer le plus succinctement sa pensée et non le plus éloquemment. Mais c'est lorsqu'elle est toute vive que ma phrase se plait à l'êtreindre, et qu'elle se débâte et

<sup>9</sup> Le discours (pseudo-)philosophique se l'est également appropriée comme en témoigne l'essai de F. Grinand (2016) intitulé *La Phrase*, dont la principale section est précisément intitulée "le corps".

qu'on la sente palpiter encore sous les mots. (Gide, *Journal: 1889-1939*, 1939, p. 1114 – 1932; *Journals* vol.3 1928-1939)

Express one's thought most succinctly and not most eloquently. But it is when the thought is most alive that my sentence enjoys embracing it, and that it struggles, and that one feels it still palpitating under the words. (Trans. Justin O'Brien, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2000, p. 222).

(31) La phrase de René de Solier caresse les mots, les palpe, les énerve, les écoute gémir [...]. (Alain Robbe-Grillet, "René de Solier: *Les Gardes* », *Nouvelle NRF*, 1<sup>ère</sup> année, 1953, p. 146-148: 147)

A René de Solier sentence caresses the words, palpates them, irritates them, listens to them moan [...].

The female gender of the noun *phrase* (sentence) is exploited:

(32) Phrases gémissantes et câlines (Albalat 1925: 3)

moaning and cuddlesome sentences

(33) [pas] une phrase qui puisse perdre sa chemise et tenir dans le lit mental d'un honnête homme. (Gide et Valéry, *Correspondance* (1890-1942), 1942, p. 417 - Valéry à Gide, Juil. 1908)

[not a sentence] that could drop its shirt and fit into the mental bed of a gentleman. (*Self-Portraits: The Gide/Valéry Letters: 1890-1940*, ed. Robert Mallet, trans. June Guicharnaud, University of Chicago Press, 1966, p. 256)

(34) [la] petite phrase que nous recommandaient nos professeurs d'antan, "légère et court vêtue" (Butor 1964: 445)

[the] short sentence recommended to us by our professors of yesteryear, "light and skimpily clad"

The vital force (élan vital) is again linked to desire using a psychoanalytical approach:

(35) Il faut voir dans cette expérience d'un vide aspirant ou d'une propulsion que constitue l'élan initial de la phrase une expérience très élémentaire du désir. (Goux 1999: 127)

It is important to see a very basic experience of desire in this experience of a sucking void or of a thrust, which is created by the sentence's initial momentum.

In addition, these specific inflections of the organicist/vitalist and constructional metaphors are challenged by a dispersal of metaphor.

### 3. THE DIVERSIFICATION OF METAPHOR DISCOURSE

It is not easy to map the irreducible diversity of analogies that are testimony to the plasticity of the object sentence, particularly in the discourse of literary criticism (and on as far as fictional texts).

Firstly, in the aesthetic register, music metaphors exploit a word's specialist meaning:

(36) "orchestration de la phrase", "musique de sa phrase" "ses phrases s'arrangent musicalement" (Lanson 1909: 211 et 274)

"orchestration of the sentence", "music of his sentence" "his sentences are arranged musically"

(37) J'ai voulu faire de ma phrase un instrument si sensible que le simple déplacement d'une virgule suffise à en détériorer l'harmonie. (Gide, *Journal: 1889-1939*, 1939, p. 1090 – 1931)

I wanted to make of my sentence so sensitive an instrument that the mere displacement of a comma should be enough to destroy its harmony. (Trans. Justin O'Brien, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2000, p. 201)

Secondly, the metaphor of the “fabric of the sentence” is not uncommon (it occurs several times in Albalat 1899 *Art d'écrire*: 32, 295) and may be regarded as a transformation of the organism metaphor. It recurs, for example, in the contrarian output of a mid-twentieth-century writer and critic:

(38) La phrase ample, en forme d'écharpe (Nimier, *Journées de lecture II*, 1951-1962, “Valéry Larbaud”, 1995, p. 157-160: 158)

The roomy, scarf-shaped sentence

(39) Comme on fait avec le vison, ici l'insolence n'est plus extérieure, elle sert de doublure à la phrase. (Nimier, *Journées de lecture II*, 1951-1962, « Stendhal », 1995, p. 247-256: 255)

As with mink, insolence here is no longer on the outside, it acts as a lining to the sentence.

Owing to the porous nature of discourses about language, however, a form of diversification can also be seen in the discourse of language professionals. Thus, in order to condemn the concrete view of the sentence as an observable linguistic phenomenon set against the abstract concept inspired by generative grammar, which he champions, one grammarian resorts to what is a polemically useful and, to say the least, surprising comparison with a living organism:

(40) [...] la phrase ne peut se limiter à une structure formelle statique présente dans un texte comme un fruit dans un cageot. (Le Goffic 2001: 106)

[...] the sentence cannot be confined to a static formal structure present in a text like a fruit in a crate.

In the same article, he borrows another vegetable analogy from La Fontaine's fable, "The Oak and the Reed", a metaphor that exposes his perseverance as much as his struggle to solve the definitional and descriptive problems that sentences pose:

(41) [...] la phrase plie mais ne rompt point. (Le Goffic 2001: 97 et 105)

[...] the sentence bends but it does not break.

Since “metaphor is essentially a discourse phenomenon” (Murat quoted in Bordas 2003: 34), it “is first a marker of individual subjectivity” (Bordas 2003: 34), as attested by the more original metaphors of the contemporary period, in literary critics:

(42) Bien sûr, nous aimons la grande phrase littéraire, bien frappée, rythmée, harmonieuse, qui enchaîne ses propositions sans heurts ni grincements et emmaillote ce qu'elle décrit dans son fil de soie au risqué de substituer à la mouche qu'elle prétendait capturer vivante une momie de mouche [...]. (Chevillard, "Intérieur jour", *Le Monde des livres*, Friday 6 April 2012, p. 8)

Certainly, we love the great literary sentence, whipped into shape, cadenced and harmonious, which strings its clauses together, without bumping or creaking, and swathes what it describes in its silken thread at the risk of replacing the fly it claimed to be catching alive with one that has been mummified [...].

In a metaphor, the vehicle "refers to an entire world view, an entire representation, in its capacity as an 'impertinent sermon' freighted with ontological engagement (Bordas 2003: 49). It "suggests semantic recategorizations [...], in particular through value-laden depictions"

(Bordas 2003: 62). According to Barthes, for example, the sentence as enclosure and as hierarchical structure is an "ideological object" (Barthes 1995: 174) symbolizing bourgeois values. Despite the great attraction of Chomsky and his new theory of the transformational production of sentences, "Barthes was not to stop denigrating the object 'sentence', even as he increased [...] the word's metaphorical uses" (Philippe 2003). The metaphor of power, in particular:

(43) La grammaire elle-même ne décrit-elle pas la phrase en termes de pouvoir, de hiérarchie: *sujet, subordonnée, complément, rection*, etc. ? (Barthes, cité dans Philippe 2003: 203)

Does not grammar itself describe the sentence in terms of power, of hierarchy: *subject, subordinate, complement, government* etc.?

This reappears in the writing of Chervel, a historian of school grammar, for whom the sentence "is hierarchically structured, like the army or the civil service" (Chervel 1977: 233).

## Conclusion

The imaginary of the sentence is linked to advances in linguistic theories, while also demonstrating the persistence of ideas from previous centuries. Traditional linguistic metaphors were carried over into the literary field where they endured even when no longer used in the scientific domain. "[C]ertain metaphors [became] hackneyed: they are no longer even seen as such, that is as designations using *imagery*" (Bordas 2003: 25). These fixed metaphors, however, are sometimes broken apart in a given context thanks to extended metaphors.

If linguistics and grammar are dominated by a small number of metaphor paradigms able to pull their variants together, the sentence is by contrast more protean in the literary imaginary. The dispersal of metaphor in the twentieth century may therefore reflect the increased individualization of literary practices.

In short, rather than a change of metaphor paradigm, we should talk about a reconfiguration of the nineteenth century's organicist and physiological paradigm and perhaps even of the constructional paradigm being superimposed on the latter.

## Bibliography

ALBALAT, Antoine (1899), *L'Art d'écrire enseigné en vingt leçons*, Paris, Armand Colin et Cie.

ALBALAT, Antoine (1902), *La Formation du style par l'assimilation des auteurs*, Paris, Armand Colin.

ALBALAT, Antoine (1903), *Le Travail du style enseigné par les corrections manuscrites des grands écrivains*, Paris, Armand Colin.

ALBALAT, Antoine (1925), *Comment on devient écrivain*, Paris, Plon-Nourrit.

ALFÉRI, Pierre (1991), *Chercher une phrase*, Paris, Christian Bourgeois.

ARLAND, Marcel (1955), *Essais critiques et nouveaux essais critiques*, Paris, Gallimard.

BALLY, Charles (1905), *Précis de stylistique: esquisse d'une méthode fondée sur l'étude du français moderne*, Genève, Eggimann.

BALLY, Charles (1944 [1932]), *Linguistique générale et linguistique française*, Berne, A. Francke.

BALLY, Charles (1965 [1913]), *Le Langage et la vie*, Genève, Droz.

- BARTHES, Roland (1994 [1971]), “Le style et son image”, dans *Œuvres complètes*, t. II, Éric Marty (éd.), Paris, Le Seuil, p. 1264-1271; “The Rustle of Languages”, Trans. Richard Howard, University of California Press, p. 96.
- BARTHES, Roland (1994 [1972]), *Le Grain de la voix*, dans *Œuvres complètes*, t. II, Éric Marty (éd.), Paris, Le Seuil, p. 1436-1442.
- BARTHES, Roland (1995 [1975]), *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, dans *Œuvres complètes*, t. III, Éric Marty (éd.), Paris, Seuil, p. 79-250.
- BENVENISTE, Émile (1966), *Problèmes de linguistique générale* t. 1, Paris, Le Seuil; trans. Elizabeth Mary Meeks; Coral Gables, FL; University of Miami Press.
- BORDAS, Éric (2003), *Les Chemins de la métaphore*, Paris, P.U.F.
- BUTOR, Michel (1964), *Répertoire II*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit.
- CHERVEL, André (1977), *Et il fallut apprendre à écrire à tous les petits français. Histoire de la grammaire scolaire*, Paris, Payot, rééd. coll. ”Petite bibliothèque”.
- CUREA, Anamaria (2018), “De la distinction affectif/intellectuel à une théorie de la phrase modalisée. Représentations mentales et opérations linguistiques chez Charles Bally”, *Histoire, épistémologie, Langage*, p. 31-47.
- DARMESTETER, Arsène (1887), *La Vie des mots étudiés dans leur signification*, Paris, Delagrave.
- DESMET, Piet (1996), *La Linguistique naturaliste en France (1867-1922). Nature, origine et évolution du langage*, Leuven, Peeters Orbis Supplementa 6.
- GANDON (1938), *Le Démon du style*, Paris, Plon.
- GAUTIER, Antoine (2018), “La phrase dans la grammaire scolaire, de Domergue à Bentolila”, *Colloque de la SHESL 2011*, janvier 2011, Paris; dans B. Colombat, J.-M. Fournier et V. Raby, *Vers une histoire générale de la grammaire française: matériaux et perspectives*, Paris, Champion, p. 393-412.
- GOURMONT, Remy de (1899), *Esthétique de la langue française*, Paris, Mercure de France.
- GOUX, Jean-Paul (1982), *Les Leçons d’Argol*, Jean-Paul Goux lit *Au château d’Argol* de J. Gracq, Paris, Messidor/Temps Actuels.
- GRINAND, Frédéric (2016), *La Phrase*, Édilivre.
- GUILBERT, Louis, LAGANE, René et NIOBEY, Georges (1971-1977), *Grand Larousse de la Langue Française*, Paris, Librairie Larousse.
- HASSLER, Gerda (2017), “Les métaphores physiologiques comme désignations de concepts linguistiques dans la philologie romane de la deuxième moitié du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle et la première moitié du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle”, dans Anne-Marie Chabrolle-Cerretini (dir.), *Paradigmes et concepts pour une histoire de la linguistique romane*, actes du colloque de l’ATILF-CNRS, 11 avril 2013, Limoges, Lambert-Lucas.
- HUMBOLDT, Wilhelm (1836 [1974]), *Introduction à l’œuvre sur le kavi et autres essais*, trad. Pierre Caussat, Paris, Éditions du Seuil.
- KLIPPI, Carita (2010), *La Vie du langage, la linguistique dynamique en France de 1864 à 1916*, Lyon, P.E.N.S. Lyon.
- LANSON, Gustave (1996 [1908]), *L’Art de la prose*, Paris, La Table ronde.
- LAUWERS, Peter (2004), *La Description du français entre la tradition grammaticale et la modernité linguistique. Étude historiographique et épistémologique de la grammaire française entre 1907 et 1948*, Leuven-Paris-Dudley, Peeters (Orbis/Supplementa 2).
- LE GOFFIC, Pierre (2001), “La phrase revisitée”, *Le Français aujourd’hui*, n°135, p. 96-107; <https://www.cairn.info/revue-le-francais-aujourd-hui-2001-4-page-96.htm>.
- MESCHONNIC, Henri (1997), *De la langue française. Essai sur une clarté obscure*, Paris, Hachette.
- NERLICH, Brigitte (éd.) (1988), *Anthologie de la linguistique allemande au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Münster, Nodus Publikationer.

NORMAND, Claudine (1995), "Le Cours de Linguistique générale, métaphores et métalangage", *Langages*, n°120, 1995, p. 78-90.

PHILIPPE, Gilles (2003), *Sujet, verbe, complément: le moment grammatical de la littérature française*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. "Bibliothèque des idées".

PROUST, Marcel (1987 [1920]), "À propos du style de Flaubert", dans *Sur Baudelaire, Flaubert et Morand*, Paris, Éditions Complexe (NRF 1<sup>er</sup> janvier 2020) p. 63-87.

RIVAROL, Antoine (1929 [1784]), *Discours sur l'universalité de la langue française*, Berlin, Académie de Berlin.

RODRIGUEZ H., Claudio (2018), "Productive perils: on metaphor as a theory-building device", *Linguistic frontiers*, vol. 1, issue 2, p. 102-111.

SEGUIN, Jean-Pierre (1993), *L'Invention de la phrase au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle: contribution à l'histoire du sentiment linguistique français*, Bibliothèque de L'Information Grammaticale, Paris, Éditions Peeters.

STATIUS, Sophie (2009), "Le rapport à la langue contemporain: éléments de réflexion pour un concept", *Revue de recherches en éducation*, Suppl. n°43, p. 69-83.

SWIGGERS Pierre (1987), "À l'ombre de la clarté française", *Langue française*, n°75, p. 5-21.

TESNIÈRE, Lucien (1959), *Éléments de syntaxe structurale*, Paris, Klincksieck.

THOM (1983), *Paraboles et catastrophes*, Paris, Flammarion.

*Trésor de la Langue Française informatisé*, <http://www.atilf.fr/tlfi>.

WILMET, Marc (1987), "Présentation", *Langue française*, "La clarté française", n°75, p. 3-4.

WILMET, Marc (2010), *Grammaire critique du français*, Louvain-la-Neuve, De Boeck/Duculot.