

# WORD ORDER AND THE ROLE OF INVERSION: A COMPARISON BETWEEN FRENCH AND SWEDISH\*

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## 1. *Introduction*

For comparative studies of French and Swedish, word order constitutes a particularly fruitful field of research. The similarities between the two languages are evident, but there are also enough differences to justify a detailed study of this area of syntax.

It seems reasonable to assume that the sequence subject–verb–complement represents the canonical word order in both French and Swedish. However, inversion of the subject and the verb is possible in the two languages and a superficial look at some sentence pairs could make one believe that the similarities go beyond this canonical order:

- (1) a. "C'est pour votre bien," dit Michel  
b. "Det är för ert bästa," sade Michel  
'It is for your best, said Michel'<sup>1</sup>
- (2) a. Avez-vous l'occasion d'y aller?  
b. Har ni tillfälle att resa dit?  
'Have you the opportunity to go there?'

However, a minor change of tense or of subject reveals that even in the case of the sentences above the two languages behave differently:

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<sup>1</sup> The English translations of the French or Swedish examples are literal translations that are particularly intended to respect the word order of the French or Swedish sentence; it follows that the English sentence is often ungrammatical, due to the word order differences between the three languages.

- (3) a. "C'est pour votre bien," avait dit Michel/\*avait Michel dit  
 b. "Det är för ert bästa," \*hade sagt Michel/hade Michel sagt  
 'It is for your best, had said Michel/had Michel said'
- (4) a. \*A ta soeur l'occasion d'y aller?  
 b. Har din syster tillfälle att resa dit?  
 'Has your sister the opportunity to go there?'

In the present study, we intend to underline the differences that exist between Swedish and French with regard to the syntactic and semantic conditions determining the use of inverted word order and the differences in the structural description of sentences which have undergone inversion. As is well known, it is impossible to examine inversion in French without taking into consideration the stylistic aspects. We will talk about it briefly, but the focus will be on a comparison between the elaborate word order system in French and the Swedish system.

We will thus start by examining some points where the differences between the two languages are particularly striking. They concern the place of the inverted subject, the doubling of the subject which is characteristic of complex inversion in French but nonexistent in Swedish, the possibility or impossibility of applying the rule of inversion in a subordinate clause and the nature of the initial element of a sentence with verb-subject order. We will equally consider the different importance attributed in the two languages to the style factor when it comes to judging the grammaticality of sentences. To resume, we will enumerate a series of data concerning inversion which must be taken into consideration by every theory aiming at a coherent and exhaustive explanation of this linguistic domain.

## 2. Place and form of the inverted subject

As we can see from examples (3a) and (3b) above, the definition of inversion as a process which places the subject after the verb or the verb before the subject, is too simplistic. In the cited examples, Swedish places the subject after the finite verb, whereas French places it after the verb phrase.

A closer look reveals that the finite verb is the fundamental unit for all inversion in Swedish, but that in French this unit is either the verb phrase or the finite verb, depending on the form of the subject. If the subject is a clitic pronoun (an unstressed personal pronoun, *on* or *ce*), the place of the inverted subject is directly after the finite verb ("Où est-il allé?" 'Where is he gone?'). Every other type of subject is placed after the verb phrase ("Où est allé ton frère?" 'Where is gone your brother?').

This distinction in French between a clitic and a non-clitic subject manifests itself also outside the domain of inversion. The particular status of a clitic subject is responsible, for example, for the impossibility of inserting an element which is not a negation or a clitic object pronoun between the clitic subject and the finite verb (\*"Je les tout de suite ai vus" 'I them at once have seen'), as well as the obligation in speech to make a "liaison" between such a subject and the following element (finite verb or clitic object pronoun). Swedish, which in some dialects

attaches a clitic object pronoun to the verb phrase ("Jag såg'na" 'I saw her', "Jag har inte sett'en" 'I have not seen him'), does not make this distinction between clitic and non-clitic subjects.

Because of this variation in the position of the inverted subject, it is necessary in French to distinguish two types of inversion. Kayne (1973:11) establishes two inversion rules, one, "l'inversion de clitique sujet", concerning clitic subjects, and the other, "l'inversion stylistique", dealing with those structures where a non-clitic subject is postponed. The terminology, however, could be criticized. Even clitic inversion can apply or not apply according to criteria which must be characterized as stylistic.

The place of the inverted subject – after the finite verb or after the verb phrase – entails a difference in the applicational restrictions of inversion between, on one hand, inversion in Swedish and clitic inversion in French and, on the other hand, stylistic inversion in French. In this latter case, where the inverted subject is non-clitic and placed after the verb phrase, the presence of a direct object or of a subject complement after the verb leads, in general, to ungrammaticality:

- (5) \*Quand terminera Pierre son travail?/\*terminera son travail Pierre?  
 'When will finish Pierre his work?/will finish his work Pierre?'
- (6) \*Quand est devenu Pierre pilote?/\*est devenu pilote Pierre?  
 'When has become Pierre a pilot?/has become a pilot Pierre?'

No similar restriction limits the application of clitic inversion in French nor of inversion in Swedish:

- (7) Quand terminera-t-il son travail?  
 'When will finish he his work?'
- (8) Quand est-il devenu pilote?  
 'When has he become a pilot?'
- (9) I kväll skall Anna skriva brevet  
 'Tonight will Anna write the letter'

Let us underline that in the examples above the inhibiting factor is the presence of a direct object after the verb and not the transitivity of the verb. A direct object which is placed before the verb (a relative pronoun or a reflexive object pronoun) is no obstacle to inversion:

- (10) Ce travail qu'a fait ton père ...  
 'This work that has done your father ...'
- (11) Soudain s'est éteinte la lumière  
 'Suddenly went out (itself has put out) the light'

The restriction seems to concern the number of arguments in postverbal position. In principle, one noun phrase seems to be acceptable in this position, be it the subject, the object or a subject complement.

Grevisse (§ 379 d. 3), who gives the following counterexample:

- (12) Seuls ont le droit d'être modestes les voyageurs munis de billets  
(Sartre, *Mots*, p. 91)  
'Alone have the right to be modest the travellers who have tickets'

locates the restriction at the level of interpretation. When there is no ambiguity, the order verb-direct object-subject would be possible. Wall (1980), who examines the use of inversion in subordinate clauses, seems to be of the same opinion when stating that "ce qui importe, c'est que les relations sémantiques entre les divers segments de la subordonnée soient suffisamment claires pour que l'inversion ne gêne pas l'interprétation" (Wall 1980:101)<sup>2</sup>. Our example shows, however, that this explanation is not satisfactory.

On the other hand, Korzen (1992), who examines the position of a non-clitic subject in interrogative clauses in French, argues convincingly that syntactic proximity to the verb as well as rhythm are decisive factors when it comes to judging the grammaticality or the acceptability of a sentence with an inverted non-clitic subject. If the direct object is part of a verbal locution, inversion is in general possible; the following sentence is Korzen's example 139 (Korzen 1992:100):

- (13) A quelle heure aura lieu la séance?  
'At what time will take place the session?'

Our own examples (5) and (6) will also become much more acceptable, if an expansion of the inverted subject makes it "heavier":

- (14) Quand terminera son travail ce garçon excessivement méticuleux?  
'When will finish his work this excessively pedantic boy?'  
(15) Quand deviendra pilote l'homme dont tu m'as parlé hier?  
'When will become a pilot the man of whom you talked to me yesterday?'

However, the sentences where the inverted subject is placed before the direct object can not be improved in the same way. Korzen suggests the following principle to explain this phenomenon (Korzen 1992:113f.): "Even if the subject in the inversion occupies the place that is normally occupied by the direct object and has to obey the same mechanisms of rhythm as the other elements following the verb group, it acts as a foreign body in the postverbal zone and cannot separate narrowly connected elements." Speaking about the sequence verb-subject-complement, Wall (1980) makes a similar statement; for this sequence to be acceptable, the complement "doit être d'un caractère assez indépendant pour tolérer l'éloignement du verbe" (Wall 1980:118)<sup>3</sup>.

Kayne (1973), who considers the inversion of a non-clitic subject as the result

<sup>2</sup> "what imports is that the semantic relations between the different segments of the subordinate clause are clear enough for inversion not to obscure the interpretation"

<sup>3</sup> "must have a sufficiently independent character to tolerate the separation from the verb"

of the application of the stylistic inversion rule, states that the acceptability of a sentence which has undergone this rule "est déterminée par des considérations de longueur" (Kayne 1973:12f.)<sup>4</sup> and that the complements allowed to follow the inverted subjects "sont exactement ceux-là mêmes qui ne se trouvent pas dominés par un noeud intermédiaire, appelons-le VP" (Kayne 1973:14)<sup>5</sup>. The exact formulation of this principle is not unproblematic, as can be seen in Korzen's paper, but it is evident that it will exclude for instance the order verb-non-clitic subject-direct object.

### 3. Complex inversion – a French speciality

It would be appealing to view the so called complex or double inversion in French as a complement to clitic inversion, applicable in exactly those cases where clitic inversion is inoperative because of the non-clitic nature of the subject. With a clitic subject, clitic inversion is found in truth questions (or yes-no questions), in content questions (or wh-questions) introduced by *pourquoi* and also in affirmative sentences introduced by a conjunct or by an adverb of probability:

- (16) A-t-il été terminé?  
'Has it been finished?'  
(17) Pourquoi a-t-il été terminé?  
'Why has it been finished?'  
(18) Aussi/Sans doute a-t-elle choisi de ne pas répondre à l'appel  
'So/Probably has she chosen not to answer the call'

In the case of a non-clitic subject, it is the complex interrogation form which takes over:

- (19) Le travail a-t-il été terminé?  
'The work has it been finished?'  
(20) Pourquoi le travail a-t-il été terminé?  
'Why the work has it been finished?'  
(21) Aussi/Sans doute l'actrice a-t-elle choisi de ne pas répondre à l'appel  
'So/Probably the actress has she chosen not to answer the call'

Rizzi and Roberts (1989) who in their paper on complex inversion in French examine mainly the truth questions, underline this complementarity. It is undoubtedly for the same reason that Pedersen et al. (1982:66) as well as Togeby (1985) have chosen to treat the two inversion types under the same heading and to talk of complex inversion both in examples like (16), (17) and (18) and in the obvious cases illustrated by (19), (20) and (21). According to this way of looking at the problem, you encounter a complex inversion whenever a non-clitic subject would result in the insertion of a clitic pronoun. To Rizzi and Roberts, clitic inversion

<sup>4</sup> "is determined by length considerations"

<sup>5</sup> "are exactly those that are not dominated by an intermediate node, which we could call VP"

is an obligatory step in the derivation of a complex inversion construction; another rule involved in the derivation is that which moves the non-clitic subject to the left.

A problem for this analysis is the imperfection of the complementarity. There are cases where clitic inversion alternates with stylistic inversion whereas complex inversion is excluded. Let us repeat our example 1a and modify it in order to display first clitic inversion and then complex inversion:

- (22) a. "C'est pour votre bien," a dit Michel  
       'It is for your best, has said Michel'  
       b. "C'est pour votre bien," a-t-il dit  
       'It is for your best, has he said'  
       c. \*"C'est pour votre bien," Michel a-t-il dit  
       'It is for your best, Michel has he said'

The same pattern is found in certain content questions:

- (23) a. Qui est cet homme?  
       'Who is this man?'  
       b. Qui est-il?  
       'Who is he?'  
       c. \*Qui cet homme est-il?  
       'Who this man is he?'

Pedersen et al. (1982) consider this as a case of "inversion simple" whose only characteristics seem to be that inversion of a clitic subject appears under the same conditions as the inversion of a non-clitic subject.

In other cases, finally, clitic inversion corresponds to either complex inversion or stylistic inversion when the subject is non-clitic. This is what happens in some other content questions:

- (24) a. Quand va-t-il s'arrêter?  
       'When will it stop?'  
       b. Quand ce bruit va-t-il s'arrêter?  
       'When this noise will it stop?'  
       c. Quand va s'arrêter ce bruit?  
       'When will stop this noise?'

Inversion in content questions in French is in fact a phenomenon which is hard to pin down in simple and concise rules. Several different factors influence the result: the interrogative word itself (how explain the particular status of for example *pourquoi*?), the semantic "simplicity" of the verb (predominance of *être* in cases like (23)), the tense of the verb (simple finite form or auxiliary + main verb).

In her study on "Pourquoi et l'inversion finale en français", Korzen (1985) gives arguments in favour of a syntactic description where the interrogative word *pourquoi* occupies an intermediate position between sentential adverbials and scenic adverbials (indicating time and place). *Pourquoi* looks more like the abstract in-

terrogative operator, which in the framework of generative grammar is present in truth questions, than the interrogative words *quand*, *où* etc. with their clear syntactic relation to the verb of the clause. This would explain the similar inversion pattern of questions beginning with *pourquoi* and of truth questions and also why this interrogative word is not found in the final position of a question (\*"Il a refusé pourquoi?" 'He has refused why?'), a normal position for other interrogative words ("Il est arrivé quand?" 'He has arrived when?'). Cornulier (1974:139f.) also points out the exceptional status of *pourquoi* among the interrogative words. Only *pourquoi* can combine directly with the negation *pas* to form a question ("Pourquoi pas?" 'Why not?' but \*"Quand/Où pas?" 'When/Where not?'). On the other hand, *pourquoi*, unlike other interrogative words, is hardly acceptable at the beginning of an indirect elliptic question ("Dis-moi où aller/qui voir/avec qui partir" 'Tell me where to go/whom to see/ with whom to go away' but ?"Dis-moi pourquoi partir" 'Tell me why to go away').

In the case of truth questions, there can be a superficial similarity between sentences with complex inversion and sentences where a subject has been dislocated to the left ("Cette question peut-elle être résolue?" 'This question can it be solved?'). As a matter of fact, the two constructions belong to different stylistic levels. Complex inversion is rare in spoken language, where dislocations are legion. However, there exists a zone where the two constructions overlap stylistically, since dislocation is not banned from a more formal language. From a structural point of view, a dislocated element differs from a non-clitic subject in a complex inversion in being separated from the rest of the sentence by a potential pause, which can be filled by parenthetical expressions (of the type *tu sais* etc). Furthermore, a dislocated noun phrase has definite or generic reference, never indefinite. No similar restriction concerns the non-clitic subject of a complex inversion. As Kayne (1973:31) points out, the clitic subject that appears in a complex inversion is not subjected to the normal rules of pronominalization and thereby differs from the pronominal copy of a dislocated sentence. In a complex inversion, and only there, the subject *cela* is repeated as *il* ("Cela est-il vrai?" 'This is it true?') and the same thing applies to the indefinite pronouns *rien* and *tout*. In spite of these differences, the analysis of a written corpus can present difficulties in certain surroundings where the two constructions are equally plausible. As we said initially, the possible ambiguity concerns truth questions; in content questions, the difference between the two constructions manifests itself in the position of the noun phrase. A non-clitic subject in a complex inversion follows the interrogative word ("Pourquoi ce client n'est-il pas venu?" 'Why this customer has he not come?'), whereas a dislocated element precedes it ("Ce client, pourquoi n'est-il pas venu?" 'This customer why has he not come?').

#### 4. Main clause and subordinate clause

In Swedish, inversion is a phenomenon which concerns only main clauses, whether these are affirmative or interrogative. In French, clitic inversion and complex inversion behave in a similar way, while stylistic inversion may apply both

in main clauses and subordinate clauses. A condition for its application in subordinate clauses is, however, that the subordinate clause is introduced by a structurally "meaningful" element ("Je me demande ce qu'est devenu leur fils" 'I ask myself what has become their son' but \*"Je me demande si viendra leur fils" 'I ask myself whether will come their son'). The complementizer position may be occupied by a relative or interrogative pronoun, which thus has a syntactic function in the subordinate clause, or by a conjunction that signals an adverbial relation between the subordinate clause and the main clause. In a nominal subordinate clause, introduced by *que* or by *si*, on the other hand, the presence of this conjunction is not sufficient to permit stylistic inversion.

##### 5. The role of the sentence initial element in affirmative sentences and in content questions

If we leave aside for a moment the truth questions to which we will come back later, we can observe that in Swedish the factor which triggers inversion is the presence in the beginning of the sentence of a constituent that is not the subject of the sentence. This initial element can have a close syntactic relation to the verb; this is the case with a direct object (including a direct quotation) or an indirect object, a subject complement or a manner adverbial ("Den boken har jag inte läst" 'That book have I not read', "Vacker är han inte" 'Beautiful is he not', "Så gör man" 'So does one'). However, in this position will also be found adverbials whose relation to the verb is looser, such as place and time adverbials and adverbials that signal the link to the preceding sentence or the attitude of the speaker:

- (25) Nu börjar föreställningen  
'Now begins the spectacle'  
(26) Här slutar allmän väg  
'Here finishes the public road'  
(27) Dessutom kom han för sent  
'Furthermore arrived he to late'  
(28) Lyckligtvis gick allt väl  
'Happily was everything all right'

The content questions do not form a separate case. As soon as the interrogative word assumes another function than that of the subject of the sentence, inversion is obligatory:

- (29) Vem tänker du på?  
'Whom think you of?'  
(30) När kommer de?  
'When come they?'

This uniform behaviour is typical of a language which obeys the constraint of locating the finite verb in the second position of the sentence ("a V2 language").

In French, which is not a V2 language, the conditions for applying the inversion rules are diverse, even if the description is limited to purely syntactic conditions. Affirmative sentences must be treated separately from interrogative sentences and subdivisions must be made in each category.

As in Swedish, a French sentence very often begins with an adverbial constituent. In some sentences, the presence of this initial constituent entails or may entail inversion. However, all initial adverbial constituents do not influence the word order of the sentence in the same way. If the adverb belongs to a limited set of conjuncts (*encore, du moins* etc) or probability adverbs (*peut-être, sans doute* etc), the inversion is either clitic or complex, depending on the clitic or non-clitic nature of the subject.

- (31) Du moins/Sans doute (le ministre) n'a-t-il pas tardé à présenter ses excuses  
'At least/ Probably (the minister) has he not waited to present his excuse'

If the adverbial is more closely linked with the verb, as in the case of a time or place adverbial, both clitic inversion and complex inversion are excluded. It is possible, however, to place a non-clitic subject after the verb phrase, if there are no other postverbal complements. This is thus a case of stylistic inversion:

- (32) a. \*Ici (mes grands-parents) habitent-ils  
'Here (my grandparents) live they'  
b. Ici habitent mes grands-parents  
'Here live my grandparents'

Stylistic inversion is also found in sentences where the initial element is not an adverbial. As we mentioned earlier, it is the only type of inversion which can apply both in main clauses and in subordinate clauses. In a subordinate clause, the initial constituent can have the syntactic function of a direct object, a possibility which does not exist in main clauses. In these, a direct object may be placed at the beginning of the sentence, but then the syntactic function is taken over by a pronominal copy in the verb phrase; it is thus a case of left dislocation. In main clauses, the initial position may also be occupied by a subject complement and in subordinate clauses, finally, inversion may apply in those cases where the subordinate clause is introduced by an adverbial conjunction:

- (33) C'est justement ce type de travail qu'aurait voulu faire mon père  
'It is exactly this type of work that would have wanted to do my father'  
(34) \*Ce type de travail aurait voulu faire mon père  
'This type of work would have wanted to do my father'  
(35) Telle fut sa décision  
'Such was his decision'  
(36) On a pris des mesures pour que se réalise ce projet  
'One has taken measures so that becomes reality this project'

As we will see in the next section, inversion is optional in this case with the exception of the sentences where the initial element has the function of a subject complement ("Telle fut sa décision" 'Such was his decision'). However, it is generally preferred when the sentence would otherwise end with a single form of the verb *être*. This must be considered as a mainly linguistic factor and be kept separate from the sociolinguistic aspects which we will examine briefly later.

In French, the sentences which begin with a direct quotation followed by a reporting clause, constitute a particular case of inversion. Inversion applies both with a clitic and a non-clitic subject. If the subject is clitic, its place is as always after the finite verb; if it is non-clitic, it must be placed after the whole verb phrase:

- (37) "Ce n'est pas tout," a-t-il remarqué/a remarqué Jacques  
 "That is not all", has he observed/has observed Jacques

We have seen that in Swedish the initial element that triggers inversion may be any interrogative word which is not the subject of the sentence. On this point, too, the French system is rather more complicated. If clitic inversion is always possible in content questions whatever the interrogative word, this does not hold either for complex inversion or for stylistic inversion. In questions introduced by *pourquoi* or by *qui* /direct object, clitic inversion and complex inversion are complementary while stylistic inversion is excluded:

- (38) Pourquoi (ce problème) n'a-t-il pas été résolu?  
 'Why (this problem) has it not been solved?'  
 (39) \*Pourquoi n'a pas été résolu ce problème?  
 'Why has not been solved this problem?'

With other interrogative words, there is a choice between two different constructions, complex inversion or stylistic inversion, when the subject is non-clitic:

- (40) Quelle place les enfants occupaient-ils alors dans sa vie?  
 'Which place the children occupied they then in his life?'  
 (41) Quelle place occupaient alors les enfants dans sa vie?  
 'Which place occupied then the children in his life?'

The last construction is constrained by the general restrictions with regard to verbal complements that we have commented upon earlier. Furthermore, the choice between the two constructions does not seem to be wholly arbitrary. If we only take the formal aspects into consideration, we can observe that the tense of the verb is an important factor. If the tense is compound, complex inversion is preferred. However, what we are talking about here are tendencies; stylistic inversion is not excluded in these cases ("Quand ce changement a-t-il eu lieu?" 'When this change has it taken place?', "Quand a eu lieu ce changement?" 'When has taken place this change?').

A third type of content questions is represented by interrogative sentences introduced by *quel*/subject complement, *que*/direct object or subject complement and *qui*/subject complement. Here only stylistic inversion is possible if the subject is non-clitic:

- (42) Quel aura été son but?  
 'Which will have been his goal?'  
 (43) \*Quel son but aura-t-il été?  
 'Which his goal will it have been?'

According to Togeby (1985), the impossibility of the complex inversion is due to the clitic character of the pronouns *quel* and *que*. This is an obstacle to the insertion of a noun phrase between one of these pronouns and the following verb. We can note that, because of the syntactic function of the interrogative word, the conditions for the use of stylistic inversion that concern verbal complementation are always met in this case.

#### 6. Truth questions

Compared to the constructions discussed in the preceding section, truth questions that are formulated using inverted word order are characterized by the sentence beginning with the finite verb. This is true for inversion in Swedish regardless of the nature of the subject, while in French it holds only for clitic inversion:

- (44) a. Är hon sjuk?  
 b. Est-elle malade?  
 'Is she ill?'  
 (45) a. Är Marie sjuk?  
 b. \*Est Marie malade?  
 'Is Mary ill?'

In complex inversion, which applies when the French subject is non-clitic, this subject occupies the initial position. This type of inversion only concerns direct questions.

#### 7. The influence of stylistic aspects

Up to now, the focus has been on the syntactic conditions that must be fulfilled in order to make inversion *possible*, but we have paid no attention to the consequences for the grammaticality of the sentence following from the application or lack of application of the rule. Neither have we commented on the sociolinguistic factors that influence the use of inversion in those cases where it is not compulsory.

One of the main differences between Swedish and French with regard to word order is the fact that, in French, inversion is generally felt as a structure which belongs to a careful language style and not to familiar conversational contexts. Hulk (1994), who examines French interrogative sentences, underlines this differ-

ence between careful and familiar style and claims that French possesses two different systems for the formulation of a question, the choice between the two systems depending on the stylistic level. The following scheme is taken from Hulk's paper (Hulk 1994:3) and presents these differences in outline:

	familiar style	careful style
subj.cl.inv.	-	+
complex inv.	-	+
styl.inv.	-	+
wh-mvt without inv.	+	-
wh-in-situ	+	-
wh+ESK <sup>6</sup>	+	-

It seems, however, that the situation is less clearcut than this scheme might suggest. In a note, Hulk herself makes the observation that clitic inversion is sometimes tolerated in the familiar style, especially if the clitic pronoun is *tu* or *vous* ("Es-tu prêt?" 'Are you ready?', "Voulez-vous m'aider?" 'Will you help me?'). There are also cases of inversion in certain content questions, especially those introduced by *où*, an inversion that Hulk would prefer not to classify as stylistic inversion (Hulk 1994:11). On the other hand, if content questions where the interrogative word is followed by the sequence (clitic) subject+verb are typical of familiar style, the structures which Hulk names "wh-in-situ" and "wh+ESK" are not entirely absent from the careful style. The scheme, albeit sketchy, obscures the fact that the stylistic value of the different structures that mainly belong to the familiar style is not identical and the same holds for the structures that are mainly found in a more careful language style.

In view of the consequences of the absence of inversion for the grammaticality of a sentence, an obvious question that has to be asked is the following: grammatical with regard to which norm? In Swedish, the answer is simple because of the uniformity of the word order norm. In a Swedish affirmative or interrogative sentence which begins with a constituent that is not the subject of the sentence, inversion is obligatory and the violation of the inversion rule leads to an ungrammatical sentence, regardless of the stylistic level (\*"Nu han kommer" 'Now he comes', \*"Var de bor?" 'Where they live?'). The same thing applies to truth questions. Even if there are other ways of formulating such a question, inversion is not felt as an oddity, not even in a familiar language.

In French, the absence of inversion only rarely leads to ungrammaticality at all stylistic levels. Stylistic inversion must be considered as optional in most cases, which does not mean that there are no differences at all between those sentences where it applies (more formal) and those where it does not (less formal). However, it is important to underline that in general the sentences without inversion are not excluded from careful style.

<sup>6</sup> The last three abbreviations stand for, respectively, movement of interrogative word to the beginning of the sentence, interrogative word in deep structure position and interrogative word followed by the formula *est-ce que*.

In other cases, this difference between a more formal and a less formal style as a consequence of the application or non-application of inversion, is more drastic. The omission of inversion in content questions ("Où il est?" 'Where he is?'), for example, which is very common in familiar conversational contexts, is still not accepted in a more careful language.

To avoid inversion, the familiar language uses two different procedures. It can either construct the sentence as in careful style except for the inverted word order; this is the procedure that we just mentioned for the content questions. It can also modify the sentence in such a way that the conditions which trigger inversion are no longer met. The use of the expression *est-ce que*, which has become an interrogative formula to introduce a question with subject-verb order, must be explained along these lines. According to Behnstedt (1973:207), however, truth questions involving this procedure are rare in familiar conversation, except after *où* and in the more or less fixed expression *qu'est-ce que*, but they are frequent in a somewhat more formal style (what Behnstedt calls "radiophonic" language). It is possible that the use of the formula is tied to some particular pragmatic function, for example that of introducing a new theme into the discourse.

Another way of modifying the structure of the sentence is to insert a *que* after a probability adverb or after a quotation:

- (46) Peut-être qu'il viendra plus tard  
'Perhaps "that" he will come later'
- (47) "Je serai là," qu'elle a dit  
'I will be there, "that" she has said'

There has been much discussion on the nature of this *que*, but in the perspective of generative grammar (see Rizzi and Roberts 1989:4) it is natural to consider it as the lexicalization of a complementizer and thereby explain the impossibility of applying clitic inversion as well as complex inversion in the following clause.

Inversion can also be avoided by moving an initial constituent to the right in those cases where this constituent would normally be followed by inverted word order. A probability adverb such as *sans doute* may, for example, be inserted at different places within the sentence and an interrogative word (except *pourquoi*, *quell*/subject complement and perhaps some others) can occupy the final position of a question (what Hulk calls "wh-in-situ"). Content questions can also be reformulated as truth questions, often implying a dislocation of the subject with a neutral pronoun as the pronominal copy:

- (48) C'est quoi, son métier? (instead of: Quel est son métier?)  
'It is what, his profession?' instead of: 'Which is his profession'
- (49) Lui, c'est qui? (instead of: Qui est-il?)  
'Him, it is who?' instead of: 'Who is he?'

A question introduced by *pourquoi* may be replaced by a series of alternative truth questions. As Lightbown observes (1979:118), this is a simplification proce-

ture which is frequently used by native speakers when talking to young children or strangers (instead of asking "Where do you live?" they prefer "Do you live in Montreal or in Québec?").

Generally speaking, it is the complex inversion that is most difficult to assimilate in a familiar language style and a way of avoiding it is to dislocate the non-clitic subject to the left or to the right.

In truth questions, inversion is just one of several means to express the question, both in Swedish and in French. A sentence which displays the normal order subject-verb can assume the same communicative function as a question with inverted word order, provided that it is pronounced with a special intonation contour. What makes French different from Swedish is the very strong tendency in familiar French to choose an alternative construction, especially in order to avoid the complex inversion which is practically nonexistent in spoken French. In Swedish, the questions containing inverted word order are normal and frequent in careful language as well as in familiar conversation.

#### 8. From description to explanation

As appears from the presentation above, inversion in Swedish is a relatively simple phenomenon in the sense that the syntactic conditions are easy to establish and that stylistic factors only minimally influence its use. The fact that the inverted subject has a unique position, after the finite verb, as well as the impossibility for inversion of operating inside a subordinate clause can be elegantly explained in the generative theoretical framework. The "V2" effect, typical of main clauses, is considered as a result of the movement of the verb into a position, which in subordinate clauses is blocked by the presence of a lexicalized complementizer, such as a subordinating conjunction or a relative pronoun (for further details, see for example Platzack (1994)).

Rizzi and Roberts (1989) propose, within the same theory, a similar derivation for clitic and complex inversion in French while adding a rule which amalgamates the clitic subject and the finite verb and introducing in the base structure two positions for the subject, one clitic and the other a full noun phrase. However, the authors only marginally discuss stylistic inversion and consequently do not deal with the alternation between clitic/complex inversion and stylistic inversion in content questions.

Whatever the theoretical framework, an exhaustive description of the inversion phenomena is more difficult to achieve for French than for Swedish. Every tentative explanation must at least take the following facts into consideration:

- that clitic inversion as well as complex inversion are excluded from subordinate clauses while stylistic inversion can operate both in main and subordinate clauses; does this mean that stylistic inversion should not be regarded as a movement of the verb to the beginning of the sentence?
- that the place of the inverted subject depends on its being clitic or non-clitic;

- that the location of a non-clitic subject after the verb phrase restrains considerably the possibility of adding verbal complements at the end of the sentence;
- that there is a difference between conjuncts and probability adverbials on one hand and adverbials indicating for example time and place on the other hand, with regard to the type of inversion that may follow them;
- that stylistic inversion can apply in many subordinate clauses, but not in nominal subordinate clauses introduced by *que* or by *si*;
- that all content questions can not be treated uniformly; especially, the exceptional status of the interrogative word *pourquoi* must receive an explanation;
- that stylistic factors influence the use of inversion but not in a uniform way; for instance, the fact that the interrogative word *où* is frequently followed even in familiar conversation by stylistic inversion and by the formula *est-ce que* must be considered;
- that other factors, such as the tense and the semantic weight of the verb, can influence the use of inversion or the choice between complex and stylistic inversion; how explain the role of the imponderable rhythm factor, for example?

Obviously, every point in this problem inventory must be examined thoroughly. In the present study, our goal has been a more modest one, namely to display the relative complexity of inversion in French and to underline the differences that exist in this domain between Swedish, a typical representative of a "V2" language, and French, where word order is at the same time a less regular and less automatic phenomenon.

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