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Pages 81–98 of

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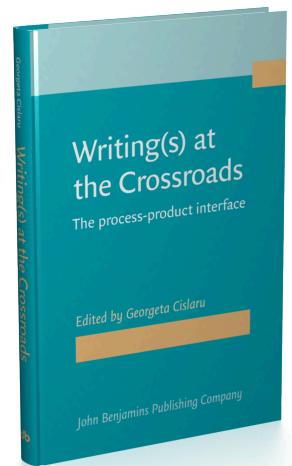
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Re-writing operations and their effects of meaning

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This chapter studies the effects of meaning generated by re-writing operations (insertions, deletions, replacements) in a corpus of social worker reports. Intended to describe the situation of a child and his or her family, these reports are produced within the framework of educational guidance and assessment orders. The *proper* functioning of the judicial process is therefore contingent upon the *proper* composition of these reports. In this context, we focus our attention on the modifications undertaken by the reports' authors with a view to making the writing more precise or adjusting the intensity of certain expressions – a composition process that navigates between producing an effect of objectivity and producing an effect of subjectivity.

Keywords: re-writing operations; effects; precision; intensity; objectivity; subjectivity

1. Introduction

The professional discourse of social workers is characterized in part by re-writing procedures. In this chapter, we analyze the features that are modified during the composition of social worker reports, looking for regularities. Re-writing operations can take a variety of forms, including insertions, deletions, replacements, and text movements, as defined by Grésillon (1989). We will undertake a linguistic and discursive analysis of the modifications made by the authors of the reports by using a bottom-up model, which aims to elicit the effects of the modifications on meaning. Lastly, the results will be linked to generic and institutional constraints, which are characteristic of the production of these writings.

Social worker reports produced as part of an educational guidance and assessment process are intended to describe the situation of the child and his or her family. They are addressed to the judge who is to give a ruling on the child's situation,

as well as to the families, who, since 2002,¹ may consult the reports produced by the social services responsible for children and families. These writings are thus “subject to editing constraints which, in turn, are caught between the functions of help versus control – a paradox characteristic of social assistance brought about by the double recipient of the discourse, namely the judge and the family”² (Pugnière-Saavedra 2008, 28).

Within this context, our attention was drawn to the recurrence of modifications intended either to *intensify* the text or to make it *more precise*:

Precision:

- (1) *Elise est en bonne santé* Ø → *Elise est en bonne santé physique*
 ‘Elise is in good Ø health’ → ‘Elise is in good physical health’
 (DD, File 2, lines 70–71)

Intensity:

- (2) *Un rendez-vous de médiation a eu lieu entre Carine, ses parents et ses éducateurs au sujet d’une soirée d’anniversaire au domicile des parents qui a « débordé »* → *Un rendez-vous de médiation a eu lieu entre Carine, ses parents et ses éducateurs au sujet d’une soirée d’anniversaire au domicile des parents qui a « dégénéré »*

‘A mediation meeting took place between Carine, her parents and her youth workers regarding a birthday party at her parents’ home which “got out of hand” → ‘A mediation meeting took place between Carine, her parents and her youth workers regarding a birthday party at her parents’ home which “ended badly”

(HC)

2. Modifying to be more precise

Strictly speaking, the term *precision* refers to “that rigorous precision in calculations and in the sciences”³ (Bat-Zeev et al. 2010, 3), but in everyday language it has come to refer to “that which is or has been clearly identified and made explicit,

1. More specifically, since the publication of Decree No. 2002–361 of 18 March 2002 (see Huyette & Desloges 2009, 86). For a more thorough discussion of the linguistic and contextual constraints on social workers’ written production, see Cislaru (2014).

2. “[...] soumis à des contraintes rédactionnelles subordonnées à un paradoxe caractéristique de l’aide sociale, prise entre la fonction d’aide et celle de contrôle, paradoxe matérialisé par un destinataire double du discours: le juge et la famille”. Translator’s note: all the French citations in the text have been translated.

3. “[...] cette exactitude rigoureuse dans les calculs et les sciences”.

leaving no room for any uncertainty or hesitation”⁴ (*Trésor de la langue française*). Writers appear to make these modifications in order to avoid characterizations that are *approximate*, *unclear*, *vague*, *imprecise* or *uncertain* in the text, and make sure that nothing important is left out. As a lack of information is often perceived of and judged to be characteristic of a “vague” and “approximate” discourse (Brunner 2014), the quest for clarity contributes to the goal of providing the information needed to analyze the situation.

Thus, clarity constitutes a means of “attuning the discourse to reality,”⁵ and allows for the “creation of an effect of objectivity”⁶ (Paveau 2013, 214). In her book on the relationship between morality and language, Paveau observes that “[n]umerous utterances are considered dishonest by others because the utterances do not seem to describe the world as it appears to them.”⁷ In order to be seen as virtuous, a discourse must express the truth, and this leads the writer to adopt a “virtue of exactitude”⁸ (Paveau 2013, 212). The more details that are provided, the more precise the referents, and the more prominent this *virtue*. The quest to accurately *report the facts* is chiefly manifested in the addition and replacement of linguistic elements in order to make the information being transmitted in the text *more precise*.

As Nadeau (1999) indicates, it is difficult to determine the degree of precision of an utterance. It is, however, possible to establish that the degree of precision of Utterance 2 is greater than that of Utterance 1 (Nadeau 1999, 500).⁹ This is the way

4. “ce qui est, qui a été bien identifié, explicité et ne laisse place à aucune incertitude, à aucune hésitation”.

5. “ajustement du discours à la réalité”.

6. “fabriquer de l’effet d’objectivité”.

7. “[n]ombre d’énoncés sont considérés comme malhonnêtes par les agents car ils ne leur semblent pas décrire le monde tel qu’il leur semble être”.

8. “vertu d’exactitude”.

9. For the author, while it “may seem difficult to determine the degree of precision of an utterance, it is sometimes easy to establish that the degree of precision of Utterance E_2 is greater than the degree of precision of Utterance E_1 . To do this, one merely needs to show that E_1 can be deduced from E_2 , or that E_2 contains elements that make it potentially more easily refutable than E_1 (it being understood that E_1 and E_2 have the same degree of universality). For example, Utterance E_2 (“The train came through between 1 pm and 2 pm”) is more precise than Utterance E_1 (“The train came through between noon and 3 pm”). If the train came through between 1 pm and 2 pm, it is possible to deduce that it came through between noon and 3 pm. By contrast, E_2 (singular statement) can be refuted more readily than E_1 (singular statement), because if the train came through between noon and 12.59 pm, or between 2.01 pm and 3 pm, E_2 would be refuted but not E_1 ” (Nadeau 1999, 500). “[s’il] peut paraître difficile de déterminer le degré de précision d’un énoncé, il est parfois aisé d’établir que le degré de précision de l’énoncé E_2 est plus élevé que le degré de précision de l’énoncé E_1 . Pour ce faire,

that modifications have been tackled, - that is, an utterance can only be deemed to be precise in relation to an earlier version of that same utterance. In this context, we can define *precision* as the movement from the general to the particular, leading to a *restriction* of an entity's referential field. This movement can be applied to a range of different entities, including persons, objects, times, and places.

2.1 Precision concerning the identity of persons

This type of precision mainly occurs when a segment that was initially anaphoric is replaced by an expression with an absolute referential value (in particular a proper noun). This modification can be explained by a concern for textual consistency and a desire to reduce the cognitive efforts required of the reader. This process is therefore intended to avoid confusion and make the identification of the protagonists as clear as possible, as the following examples show:

- (3) *Vive et curieuse elle participe pleinement aux activités proposées par sa famille d'accueil* → *Vive et curieuse, Elise participe pleinement aux activités proposées par sa famille d'accueil*

'Lively and curious, she fully participates in the activities proposed by her foster family' → 'Lively and curious, Elise fully participates in the activities proposed by her foster family'

(DD, File 2, lines 43–45)

- (4) *Il est originaire de Rennes où il vit* → *Monsieur Herisson est originaire de Rennes où il vit*

'He is a native of Rennes where he lives' → 'Mr. Herisson is a native of Rennes where he lives'

(DD, File 11, lines 158–159)

- (5) *Son souhait est de s'orienter en « Mécanique parc et jardin »* → *Le souhait de Didier est de s'orienter en « Mécanique parc et jardin »*

'He wants to train as a garden machinery mechanic' → 'Didier wants to train as a garden machinery mechanic'

(DD, File 11, line 29)

il suffit de montrer que E_1 est déductible de E_2 , ou encore que E_2 contient plus de réfutateurs potentiels que E_1 (étant entendu que E_1 et E_2 ont le même degré d'universalité). Par exemple, l'énoncé E_2 'Le train est passé entre 13h et 14h' est plus précis que l'énoncé E_1 'Le train est passé entre 12 h et 15 h': en effet, d'une part, si le train est passé entre 13h et 14h, on peut en déduire qu'il est passé entre 12 h et 15 h, et, d'autre part, E_2 (énoncé singulier) est plus réfutable que E_1 (énoncé singulier), puisque, si le train est passé entre 12 h et 12h 59, ou encore entre 14h 01 et 15 h, E_2 se trouve réfuté, mais non E_1 '.

In these examples, replacing the pronouns with proper nouns eliminates a potential ambiguity for the reader regarding the identity of the referent. This is because the proper noun is cognitively more stable (Gary-Prieur 2009, 157; Charolles 2002, 215–216) in that the designation of the referent is independent of contextual variations and, as a result, univocal. Thus, the shift from a pronominal form, in which the identification of the referent relies on contextual features, to a denominational form, by means of a proper noun, is part of this process of making the writing more precise. The final version of the utterance therefore has a greater degree of precision than the initial one.

2.2 Precision regarding objects

Certain referents can be made more precise by attributing a characteristic to them, as in (6) and (7):

- (6) *Elise est en bonne santé* Ø → *Elise est en bonne santé physique*
 ‘Elise is in good Ø health’ → ‘Elise is in good physical health’
 (HC, File 2, lines 70–71)

The adjective *physique* (physical) in (6) modalizes the head noun *santé* (health) and thus restricts its extension. By making this addition, the author emphasizes that the girl’s *physical* health is not a problem – an emphasis that could be seen as implying that her *psychological* health is not quite as good. This is a hypothesis that the final recipients of the written product (i.e. the judge and the family) will be able to set against the rest of the information contained in the social worker report.

Example (7) is of particular interest regarding the pragmatic aim of the utterance. It contains the same precision mechanism as in (6), but as the addition of the prepositional phrase here clarifies not simply the nature of the excesses, but also the consequences for the girl, this information could well influence the judge’s decision:

- (7) *Elle sait profiter de ses relations d’école et amicales et s’autorise des débordements* Ø → *Elle sait profiter de ses relations amicales et s’autorise des débordements, sans gravité ni conséquence néfastes pour elle*
 ‘She knows how to take advantage of her relationships with friends and classmates and exhibits certain excessive behaviors Ø’ → ‘She knows how to take advantage of her relationships with friends and classmates and exhibits certain excessive behaviors, without any serious or harmful consequences for herself’
 (DD, File 10, lines 55–56)

In the following extract, the modification concerns the definite determiner, which is replaced by a demonstrative determiner: *le placement* (the placement) thus

becomes *ce placement* (this placement). This seems to be part of the same process of trying to make the writing more precise:

- (8) *De grandes difficultés relationnelles sont rapidement apparues entre les membres de la nouvelle famille d'accueil et Robert qui n'acceptait pas le placement* → *De grandes difficultés relationnelles sont rapidement apparues entre les membres de la nouvelle famille d'accueil et Robert qui n'acceptait pas ce placement*

'Significant relational difficulties quickly arose between the members of the new foster family and Robert, who did not accept the placement' → 'Significant relational difficulties quickly arose between the members of the new foster family and Robert, who did not accept this placement'

(DD, File 8, 7–8)

This modification has the effect of removing a potential ambiguity in French between the specific and generic readings generated by the use of the definite article (Riegel et al. 2005 [1994], 154). The replacement of the definite article by a demonstrative makes for greater precision, because the latter removes the potential generic value from the definite phrase and maintains the specific reference: Robert is not against placement in general, but against the placement with this particular family. Precision is therefore achieved by specifying the referent, and it contributes to an accurate evaluation of the situation. Given that the new family has already been mentioned, and this in itself encourages the reader to opt for a specific reading, this example shows just how concerned the author is to eliminate ambiguity from the text as far as possible, in order to avoid the slightest uncertainty.

2.3 Precision concerning time

Temporal and spatial expressions undergo modifications of the same type. Either spatio-temporal information is added that was absent from the previous version, as in (9), or else absolute landmarks are added, allowing the date in question to be clearly identified. No such clarity is provided by the deictic "last year" in (10):

- (9) *Il s'est laissé prendre en flagrant délit Ø* → *il s'est laissé prendre en flagrant délit le 11*

'He was caught in the act Ø' → 'he was caught in the act on the 11th'

(HC)

- (10) *L'année dernière Ø, Anne était scolarisée au Collège* → *L'année dernière (99–2000), Anne était scolarisée au Collège*

'Last year Ø Anne attended middle school' → 'Last year (99–2000) Anne attended middle school'

(HC)

The addition of the term *désormais* (as of now) provides important information in (11) that makes the events temporally more precise:

- (11) *Pour autant, Didier montre Ø certaines capacités d'autonomie qu'il n'avait pas il y a peu → Pour autant, Didier démontre désormais certaines capacités d'autonomie qu'il a récemment acquises.*

'For all that, Ø Didier shows certain autonomous abilities he did not have until recently' → 'For all that, as of now Didier demonstrates certain autonomous abilities he recently acquired'

(DD, File 11, line 72)

Here, attention can be focused on the value of the verbs *montrer* (to show) and *démontrer* (to demonstrate), which can have a *deictic* value in the present tense, insofar as the verb is "closely linked to the moment of speech"¹⁰ and "indicates an event or a state of things contemporaneous with the utterance act",¹¹ and may even have an *extended* value that is still centered on the moment of speech, but occupies "a more or less extended time span"¹² (Riegel et al. 2005 [1994], 299). The addition of the complement of time *désormais* (as of now) allows the duration to be restricted: Didier did not show autonomous abilities at the beginning of the placement, but has done since Time X, as indicated by the expression *as of now*. This idea of temporal restriction is, however, already present in the phrase *qu'il a récemment acquises* (that he recently acquired), so the addition of *désormais* (as of now) once again attests to the writer's desire to emphasize the change in the child's behavior by accentuating the temporal restriction through the use of several linguistic means, including the adverbs *désormais* (as of now) and *récemment* (recently) and the verb *acquérir* (to acquire) indicating progress.¹³

The replacement of the negative particle "pas" (no) by the temporal adverb "plus" (no longer) in (12) makes the statement more precise by restricting the temporal field for the experience of worrying. In the first version of the utterance, there is no cause for concern at any point in the placement, whereas in the second version, the presupposition generated by *no longer* also implies an improvement in the situation.

10. "étroitement repéré par rapport au moment de la parole".

11. "il indique un événement ou un état des choses contemporains de l'acte d'énonciation".

12. "un espace de temps plus ou moins large".

13. As Née, Sitri & Veniard (2013) observed, the adverb *désormais* (as of now) is used fairly frequently in the corpus, where it appears in a particular *pattern* ('as of now' + predicate expressing the ability), as in Example 11. The authors emphasize that this pattern expresses a "common place of progress" which is central to the assessment process undertaken by the social workers, insofar as it highlights the youth workers' interventions with the child.

- (12) *il n'y a pas lieu de s'inquiéter → Il n'y a plus lieu de s'inquiéter pour sa santé physique*
 'there is no reason to worry' → 'There is no longer any reason to worry about his physical health'
 (DD, File 10, lines 7–19)

The presence of temporal elements,¹⁴ as well as elements intended to specify the identity of the actors and the nature of the objects, allows the reader to clearly perceive the reality of the events. In all the examples cited above, the operations of replacement and addition lend an effect of precision and accuracy to the text, together with an effect of congruency between what is said and what actually took place, and an *impression* of an objective description of reality.

3. Objectivity and subjectivity, coexisting effects

This precision produces an *effect of objectivity*. By objectivity, the following quality is intended: “that which exists independently of all knowledge and ideas”¹⁵ and which is therefore valid for everyone, not just one or two individuals (Nadeau 1999, 451). In the present context, producing an effect of objectivity involves implementing a set of modifications intended to adapt the text to the situation experienced by the child and his or her family. The writer adopts the posture of an *observer* and regards the situation that he or she is supposed to describe and give an opinion on as an *object* that exists outside of the mind and must be understood as such.

We do not mean by this that the objectivity sought by the writers can actually be attained. This idea does, however, influence the composition process, which is why we prefer to talk about the *effect* of objectivity or objectification. In general, objectivity is viewed positively, as the quality of that which is true, rational and credible. Objective speech implies the use of a language “that is clearly and precisely defined, that is straightforward and direct”, without ambiguity and corresponding to reality (Lakoff & Johnson 2003 [1980], 187).

This positive conception of objectivity is to be found in the *Guide de la protection judiciaire de l'enfant* (Huyette & Desloges 2009). The authors of this guide acknowledge the importance of social worker reports for the sound functioning of the judicial process: “it is indeed possible to say that, in too many cases, there is

14. Operations making the spatial field more precise were likewise observed.

15. “ce qui existe indépendamment de toute connaissance ou idée”.

only a semblance of an open discussion in the chambers of the family court judge. All too frequently, the debate consists of generalities and sterile rejoinders, as the written evidence on which it is based is *too vague, too imprecise*, such that it prevents the full complexities of each of the concrete difficulties from being properly addressed.”¹⁶ Thus, in order for there to be a full debate on both sides, which is a prerequisite for the validity of the judicial process, “it is not sufficient that people meet together. It is not even sufficient that prior to the meeting all the people present had at their disposal the written documents that would serve as the starting point for the debate. For these documents must be sufficiently *detailed* and *specific* to allow for an exchange of precise arguments.”¹⁷ Furthermore, experience has shown that families “accept severe criticism when it *corresponds to reality*. By contrast, they do not accept more superficial remarks when they are couched in *imprecise or caricatured terms*”¹⁸ (Huyette & Desloges 2009, 357–359, our italics).

Thus, the conditions under which the reports are composed demand that the writing be objective. Social workers are required to provide precise, detailed, well argued, and substantiated written reports, to allow the judge to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the family situation about which he or she has to render a decision. Analysis of the corpus does indeed show that the reports’ authors endeavor to describe the situation in as *precise* and *depersonalized* way as possible, in order to leave no room for doubt or for subjective interpretation by the reader.

While the author’s position can be that of an observer who describes the situation by regarding it as an object, it is above all that of a subject who evaluates, taking charge of the discourse and leaving evidence of his or her subjectivity in the textual material. The reinforcement of what we can call the *effect of subjectivity* involves a set of modifications intended to adapt the text to the perception the author has of the child’s situation. As the situation may be perceived of as more or less serious, this subjective perception will be reflected in the degree of intensity of

16. “il est bien possible de dire que, dans un trop grand nombre de cas, il n’y a pas dans le bureau du juge des enfants qu’un simulacre de débat contradictoire. On en reste trop souvent à des généralités, à des réparties stériles, à cause d’une base de départ constituée par des écrits *au contenu trop vague, trop imprécis*, qui interdit d’aborder chacune des difficultés concrètes dans toute son ampleur”.

17. “il ne suffit pas que des personnes se réunissent. Il ne suffit même pas que toutes les personnes présentes aient eu à disposition avant la rencontre les documents écrits qui serviront de point de départ au débat. Encore faut-il que ces documents soient suffisamment *détaillés et précis* pour permettre un échange d’arguments pointus”.

18. “acceptent des critiques sévères quand elles *correspondent à la réalité*. À l’inverse, des remarques plus superficielles ne sont pas acceptées lorsqu’elles sont énoncées de façon *imprécise ou caricaturale*”.

the words the writer chooses to describe the situation. The effect of objectivity is thus accompanied by an effect of subjectivity that is related to the evaluation of the situation. The writer is called upon to choose the *correct* words (of greater or lesser intensity) to describe the situation.

4. Modifying to adjust the intensity

In recent years, many studies have focused on the theme of intensity and its modulation, which includes both intensification and attenuation.¹⁹ A volume of *Langue française* was recently devoted to this theme (Anscombe & Tamba 2013), highlighting the heterogeneity of its manifestations, as well as the problems of defining intensity, given that it is frequently in competition with the concepts of quantification and scalarity. In order to grasp the diversity of the phenomena encountered when identifying rewriting operations, we propose a broad definition of intensity.

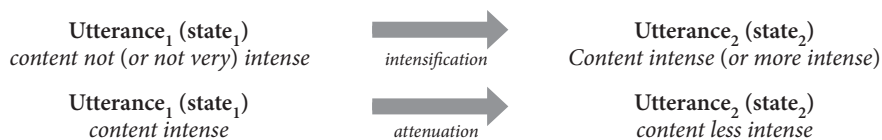
Analyses of our corpus of drafts lead us to conceive of intensity as *accentuation*. It concerns the transition from an indistinct and neutral utterance to a distinct and accentuated one, via a process of rewriting and modification (Kiesler 2000, 232). This accentuation is thus above all a *transformation* that “consists in changing the intensity of the effect that the utterance gives to the interlocutor”²⁰ (Kiesler 2000, 225). Intensity also establishes a relationship – a *tension* – between two states or properties: “the intensity of a phenomenon X consists of the divergence (or the difference) between two states x_1 and x_2 relative to this phenomenon”²¹ (Romero 2007, 59). This difference can cause either a *reinforcement* (an intensification) or an *attenuation* of the content of the initial utterance.²²

19. See, in particular, Hadermann, Pierrard, and van Raemdonck (2007); Kleiber & Schnedecker (2007); Romero (2001, 2007).

20. “consiste à changer, chez l’interlocuteur, l’intensité de l’effet de l’énoncé”.

21. “l’intensité d’un phénomène x consiste dans l’écart (ou la différence) entre deux états x_1 et x_2 relatifs à ce phénomène”.

22. A terminological explanation is needed here: Kiesler uses the term *intensification* to refer to accentuation. According to him, this intensification “can take two opposite directions, such that the effect is either reinforcement (increase in intensity), or attenuation (decrease in intensity)” (Kiesler 2000, 225). In this chapter, however, the term *intensification* refers solely to the processes of reinforcement, and thus contrasts with the term *attenuation*.



As noted by Romero, intensity is conceived of as a difference – either quantitative or qualitative – between two states and two properties.

In quantitative terms, intensity thus implies an idea of scale: (A) *peu de courage* (not much courage) → (B) *beaucoup de courage* (much courage); (A) *assez gentil* (quite kind) → (B) *très gentil* (very kind),²³ with State B being *quantitatively* greater and more intense than State A. In the corpus, this aspect is expressed either by the addition of a linguistic marker denoting intensity or by the replacement of one element by another of greater or lesser intensity.

In qualitative terms, and from a perspective that is better suited to the data, the contrast is between two lexemes: (A) la situation *déborde* (the situation *gets out of hand*) → (B) la situation *dégénère* (the situation *ends badly*), where the intensity effect results from the opposition between two lexemes with semantic contents of different intensities. It is thus the choice of vocabulary that is decisive here. In the corpus, this aspect of intensity is reflected in the replacements made over the course of composition. While the effect of intensity is brought out explicitly in the analysis through the opposition between the two versions (versions displayed side by side), it also remains perceptible in the final version of the text (the one that is supplied to the judge and the concerned parties), as the terms themselves have a distinct intensity that contrasts implicitly with a norm of neutrality.²⁴

In the following section, we list the different types of intensity phenomena, according to whether they are quantitative or qualitative.

4.1 Using quantifiers to increase or decrease intensity

Our analysis of the corpus brought to light a set of modifications dealing with states or properties in terms of *quantity*. In these cases, intensity can thus be defined as

23. As we have said, intensity as we define it here refers to properties and states (not much courage → much courage). Here, intensity contrasts with quantification, which deals with substances, objects, and events (few cars → many cars).

24. *Norm* refers here both to the idea of *normal* (e.g. the mean on a scale) and to the idea of *normativeness* (prescribed usage in a specific genre).

the “quantitative determination of a property or a state”²⁵ (Kleiber 2013, 71), and is produced by the insertion of a quantifier, generally an adverb of intensity, which introduces a difference between two states of the same property:

- (13) *Sur le plan du langage nous constatons des progrès importants chez [Marjorie] notamment depuis son entrée à l'école maternelle. Elle sait Ø se faire comprendre → Sur le plan du langage nous constatons des progrès importants chez Marjorie notamment depuis son entrée à l'école maternelle. Elle sait très bien se faire comprendre*

‘Regarding language, we have observed that [Marjorie] has made significant progress, particularly since she started nursery school. She knows Ø how to make herself understood’ → ‘Regarding language, we have observed that Marjorie has made significant progress, particularly since she started nursery school. She is very good at making herself understood’

(DD, File 3, line 39)

The intensification here comes from the addition of the adverb *très* (very), which makes the content of the second utterance more intense in comparison with the initially neutral content of the first utterance. Here is a process of rewriting that leads to the quantification of a property (in this case, *knowing how to make herself understood*, being clear). Other linguistic markers may generate the same effect, as in the following example:

- (14) *En ce sens, la demande de PSP [...] qui permettrait ensuite une prise en charge par le service d'accompagnement à l'extérieur reste Ø d'actualité → En ce sens, la demande de PSP [...] qui permettrait ensuite une prise en charge par le service d'accompagnement à l'extérieur reste totalement d'actualité*

‘In this sense, PSP’s request [...] that would then allow the child escort service to take charge remains Ø relevant’ → ‘In this sense, PSP’s request [...] that would then allow the child escort service to take over remains entirely relevant’

(DD, File 13, line 123)

The addition of the adverb *entirely* signals the difference between the initial, neutral state and the final state with the more intense content. In this example, the determination of quantity concerns the property of *remaining relevant*: rather than modify the nature of the property, the inserted adverb determines its quantity.²⁶ In other words, the adverb intensifies the property.

25. “détermination quantitative d’une propriété ou d’un état”.

26. Markers of quantity do not qualify the entity itself, because they are not a property of it. Rather, they determine, within a category X, what the quantity of X is. “This

The deletion of a quantifier leads to the opposite effect: attenuation. In the following example, the adverb of intensity is deleted over the course of successive modifications, thus making the final version of the utterance less intense:

- (15) *Elle a eu un discours très similaire à son père à propos de son malaise et sur le fait que peut être son état de santé était très préoccupant* → *Nous avons observé des similitudes dans le discours d'Evelyne, sur sa santé, et le discours habituel de Monsieur Roux, qui se veut inquiétant pour ses enfants*
 'She had a very similar discourse to her father's regarding her collapse and the fact that perhaps her state of health was very worrying' → 'We observed similarities between Evelyn's discourse regarding her health and Mr. Roux's habitual discourse, which gives his children cause for concern'
 (DD, File 16a, line 389)

A substitution can be seen in the following example:

- (16) *Adèle est plus ouverte aux autres qu'auparavant, moins angoissée dans son rapport à autrui et beaucoup plus capable de démarches extérieurs qu'autrefois (sorties avec des copines, prendre le bus...) → Adèle est plus ouverte aux autres qu'auparavant, moins angoissée dans son rapport à autrui et désormais plus capable de démarches extérieurs qu'autrefois (sorties avec des copines, prendre le bus...)*
 'Adèle is more open to others than before, less anxious in her relationships with others and much more capable of going out in public than before (outings with friends, travelling by bus, etc.)' → 'Adèle is more open to others than before, less anxious in her relationships with others and as of now more capable of going out in public than previously (outings with friends, travelling by bus, etc.)'
 (DD, File 13, line 27)

This example highlights two distinct phenomena: attenuation resulting from a deletion, and temporality resulting from an addition. In the first version of the text, the presence of the adverb *beaucoup* (much) indicates an intensification because

may seem a trivial point, but, besides the fact that it is regularly highlighted to identify expressions that mark intensity, it crucially signifies that the quantitative variation or modulation is performed not on something that is heterogeneous but on something that is homogenous". "Ce fait peut paraître trivial, mais, outre qu'il se trouve régulièrement mis en avant pour identifier les expressions qui marquent l'intensité, il est essentiel dans la mesure où il signifie que la variation ou modulation quantitative s'effectue, non pas sur de l'hétérogène, mais sur de l'homogène" (Kleiber 2013, 65).

it denotes the degree of a property, namely that of *being capable*. Therefore, its deletion results in an effect of attenuation, an operation that reduces intensity. A second operation is subsequently undertaken and concerns a completely different feature: the addition of the adverb *désormais* (as of now) serves to reinforce the temporal aspect of the utterance. After the modifications, the content of an utterance that had expressed intensity now expresses only temporality.²⁷

The following example features the substitution of a modal adverb²⁸ *forcément* (necessarily) with an adverb of intensity *excessivement* (excessively):

- (17) *Ses résultats ne sont pas forcément mauvais* → *Les résultats scolaires de Didier ne sont pas excessivement mauvais*

‘His grades are not necessarily poor’ → ‘Didier’s grades at school are not excessively poor’

(DD, File 11, line 21)

This modification has the effect of intensifying the content of the utterance. While in the first version, the focus was on the possible *mauvaiseté* (poorness) of the grades (*they are poor... but not necessarily*), in the second version the emphasis is on the degree of *poorness* of the child’s grades (on the *poorness* scale, his grades are not *excessively* poor, *they do not exceed the norm*).

4.2 Using qualifiers to increase or decrease intensity

Effects of intensification or attenuation can be seen in other types of modification, too. For instance, they can be produced by lexemes whose semantic content includes features that express intensity. Here, it is a question of a *quality* of the word itself - a quality that is perceived of as more or less intense in comparison with a norm that is either implied or made explicit. The issue here is one of *designation* (Kleiber 2001), of the choice of the word that seems most suitable to describe the situation. Thus, we are no longer concerned with the quantitative difference between two states on a scale, but with the difference in semantic intensity between two words.

In the following example, the replacement of the term *rencontre* (encounter) by the term *confrontation* has an effect of intensification, owing to the fact that confrontation includes not only the idea of meeting, but also the idea of a potentially conflictual encounter. Thus, compared with the word *rencontre* (encounter),

27. Given that intensity and temporality are so disparate, we wondered whether we could really talk about replacement, or whether we should conclude that there are two different rewriting operations going on here, owing to the absence of a semantic link between the two.

28. *Modal* in the sense that the adverb concerns the degree of certainty of the assertion.

the semantic content of the word *confrontation* includes a feature of greater intensity, implying that the encounter is *very* difficult...

- (18) *Anne a été perturbée par la rencontre entre leurs deux problématiques différentes* → *Anne a été perturbée par la confrontation de leurs problématiques différentes*
 ‘Anne was perturbed by the encounter of their two different sets of issues → Anne was disturbed by the confrontation of their different sets of issues’
 (HC)

In the following example, the verb *affirmer* (to assert or maintain) combines the action of *dire* (to say) with the values of conclusiveness and assurance. We should also emphasize that in reporting the father’s words, the writer interprets the illocutionary force of the utterance.²⁹

- (19) *Il dit craindre de nouvelles révélations de la part de sa fille* → *Il **affirme** craindre de nouvelles révélations de la part de sa fille*
 ‘He says he fears fresh disclosures from his daughter’ → ‘He **maintains** that he fears fresh disclosures from his daughter’
 (DD, File 2, line 106–107)

The adjective *inquiétant* (disturbing) in the example below qualifies the behavior as being *particulier* (peculiar, unusual), and reinforces this idea of peculiarity by introducing an emotional and alarming dimension that will have a greater impact on the judge’s decision:

- (20) *Bertrand manifestait des comportements particuliers* → *Bertrand manifestait des comportements inquiétants*
 ‘Bertrand displayed peculiar behaviors’ → ‘Bertrand displayed disturbing behaviors’
 (DD, File 16, line 149)

In the following example, the perceived intensification is due to the fact that the verb *dégénérer* (to end badly) implies – in comparison to the verb *déborder* (to get out of hand) – a profound change in nature that begins with boundaries being exceeded. Both verbs have an intense value (as attested by the presence of the

29. The same type of modification can be observed in (11), where the verb *montrer* (to show) is replaced with the verb *démontrer* (to demonstrate). The latter can be perceived of as more intense, insofar as it implies the idea of establishing a truth in a clear and rigorous manner, accompanied by proof.

prefix *dé* in French), but the contrast between the two generates a greater effect of intensity for the latter.³⁰

- (21) *Un rendez-vous de médiation a eu lieu entre Carine, ses parents et ses éducateurs au sujet d'une soirée d'anniversaire au domicile des parents qui a « débordé »* → *Un rendez-vous de médiation a eu lieu entre Carine, ses parents et ses éducateurs au sujet d'une soirée d'anniversaire au domicile des parents qui a « dégénéré »*

'A mediation meeting took place between Carine, her parents and her youth workers regarding a birthday party at her parents' home which "got out of hand"' → 'A mediation meeting took place between Carine, her parents and her youth workers regarding a birthday party at her parents' home which "ended badly"'

(HC)

Moreover, the presence of inverted commas here emphasizes the challenge of selecting the *right* word. The social worker uses autonymy to indicate that the choice of these terms is not self-evident and may not adequately reflect the reality of the situation. All these examples are, in fact, evidence of this concern with correctly evaluating the child's situation in order to allow the report's recipients to familiarize themselves with it, too.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, we have shown that the composition process navigates between producing an effect of objectivity and producing an effect of subjectivity. This tension can be attributed to the generic constraints imposed by the *social worker report* genre, which requires the text to report the situation in a precise way that adequately conveys the nature of the situation through the choice of more or less intense terms. In other words, the social worker has to tailor the text not just to the reality itself, but also to the perception he or she has of that reality. By proceeding in this manner, the social worker fulfills the two writing goals here, namely enabling the judge to grasp the reality of the child's situation in order to give a ruling on it, and allowing the family to become acquainted with the facts and understand the decision made by the judge. Emphasizing that there is *no longer* any reason to be

30. *Déborder* literally means *to exceed the boundaries or limits*. As for the verb *dégénérer*, it comes from the Latin verb *degenerare*, where the prefix *dé* (indicating distancing) is added to the morpheme *genus* (race, species). The verb therefore contains the idea of a change in nature and the loss of natural qualities, which is not present in the English expression "end badly".

concerned about the child's physical health implies that there has been a change for the better in his situation (cf. Example 12). Similarly, describing a situation as *disturbing* prompts the judge to take the necessary measures and opens the family's eyes to the difficulty of the situation (cf. Example 20). The *correct* composition of the social worker report is thus a *sine qua non* for the *correct* functioning of the judicial process.

To conclude, we return to the idea of *effect*. The effects of objectivity and subjectivity generated by the modifications undertaken during the composition process not only take account of the perceptual dimension of the interlocutor (including the analyst) but also contain a reference, be it conscious or unconscious, to the social values that constrain professional writing. The analysis thus shows that several factors, not least institutional ones, come into play in the composition process, leading the writer to make modifications. As a result, the text is imbued with objectivity and, at other times, with subjectivity, and these *effects* are perceptible to the interlocutor.

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