

Unit 48 - Expressing time and duration (2)

1 Conjunctions and prepositions

1.1 Definitions

A subordinating conjunction can be recognized in French by the fact that it is generally followed by *que* and is nearly always followed by a conjugated verb. The presence of *que* (and sometimes *ne*) and the choice between the indicative or subjunctive makes using subordinating conjunctions more complex in French than in English. Compare for example the subordinate clauses in the two sentences below :

We must finish it **before he gets back**

= **Simple conjunction + pronoun + indicative verb**

Il faut le finir avant qu'il ne soit rentré

= **compound conjunction + pronoun + expletive *ne* + subjunctive verb**

As a result of this difficulty, French often avoids constructions introduced by a subordinating conjunction in favour of those introduced by a preposition. Prepositions can introduce two types of construction :

- An **infinitive clause** - this is where the verb plus *que* is replaced by an infinitive. E.g. *Avant qu'il (ne) soit rentré* ⇒ *Avant de rentrer*. This is called **infinitive transformation** (see 10:3.4).
- A **preposition phrase** - this is where a verb plus *que* or an infinitive is replaced by a noun expressing an action. E.g. *Avant qu'il (ne) soit parti* ⇒ *Avant son départ*. This is called **nominalization**.

Note that the majority of time conjunctions take the indicative. Exceptions are *avant que*, *jusqu'à ce que* and *en attendant que*. Most French people use *après que* with the subjunctive in informal or spoken French, but this is considered incorrect in formal usage. The conjunctions below take the indicative unless otherwise stated.

1.2 Expressing when

1.2.1 *Quand, lorsque* (written)

Note that where these serve to express present or past time, the tense used is the same as for English :

Quand nous allons dîner chez des amis c'est toujours ma femme qui conduit

When we go out to dinner with friends it's always my wife who drives

Lorsque son mari est mort elle a décidé de retourner dans sa ville natale

When her husband died she decided to return to the town where she was born

However, when they serve to express future time, a future tense is used where English generally prefers a present tense :

Quand il prendra sa retraite il n'y aura personne pour le remplacer

When he retires there'll be no one to take his place

Quand vous aurez fini cet exercice, passez au prochain

When you have finished this exercise, go on to the next one

1.2.2 *Au moment où* - at the time (when)

This is used when referring to precise moments :

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Il a vendu ses actions **au moment où** elles commençaient à remonter
He sold his shares just as they were beginning to gain in price

1.2.3 *Lors de* + noun - *when*

When referring to a specific event *lors* can have the sense of *when* :

Lors de sa parution, le livre a causé un scandale
When it was published, the book caused a scandal

1.3 Expressing *after*

1.3.1 *Après que* - *after*

Il viendra **après qu'**il aura terminé son travail
He'll come after he has finished his work

1.3.2 *Après* + past infinitive

Après avoir vérifié que toutes les fenêtres étaient fermées, il est rentré chez lui
After checking that all the windows were shut, he went back home

1.3.3 *Après* + noun - *after*

Les fortunes de la ville se sont transformées **après** la mise en oeuvre du projet
The fortunes of the town were transformed after the implementation of the project

1.4 Expressing *before*

1.4.1 *Avant que* (+ *ne*) + **subjunctive** - *before*

Avant que je **ne** puisse dire un mot il est parti - *Before I could say anything he left*

1.4.2 *Avant de* + infinitive - *before*

N'oubliez pas de couper l'eau et le gaz **avant de** partir
Remember to turn off the water and electricity before you leave

1.4.3 *Avant* + noun - *before*

N'oubliez pas de couper l'eau et le gaz **avant** votre départ
Remember to turn off the water and electricity before you leave

1.5 Expressing *as soon as*

1.5.1 *Aussitôt que, dès que* - *as soon as*

Aussitôt / dès qu'il m'a vu, il est venu me parler
As soon as he saw me he came to speak to me

1.5.2 *Dès* + noun - *as soon as*

Dès sa parution, le livre a causé un scandale
As soon as it was published, the book caused a scandal

1.6 Expressing *while, during* (see also Unit 44)

1.6.1 *Pendant que, alors que, tandis que* - *while, whilst*

J'ai appris la nouvelle **pendant que** j'étais à Paris
I heard the news while I was in Paris

1.6.2 *Pendant* + noun - *during*

J'ai dormi **pendant** tout l'après-midi - *I ('ve) slept the whole afternoon*

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1.6.3 *Tant que* - so long as, while

Tu dois en profiter **tant que** tu peux
You must make the most of it while you can

1.6.4 *Lors de* + noun - during, at (the time of)

Lors de la réunion il a été décidé de donner le feu vert au projet
At the meeting it was decided to give the project the go-ahead

1.6.5 *A mesure que, au fur et à mesure que* - as

Il distribuait des programmes (**au fur et à mesure que** les gens arrivaient)
He was handing out programmes as people arrived

1.6.6 *Au fur et à mesure de* + noun :

Elle se sentait de plus en plus à l'aise **au fur et à mesure de** la soirée
She felt more and more at ease as the evening went along

Au fur et à mesure can also be used on its own :

Tu inventes les règles **au fur et à mesure** !
You're making up the rules as you go along !

1.7 Expressing *since* (see also Unit 44)

1.7.1 *Depuis que* - since

Depuis qu'il habite ici il s'est fait beaucoup d'amis
Since he's been living here he's made a lot of friends

1.7.2 *Depuis* + noun

Pierre travaille dans la société **depuis** sa création il y a dix ans
Pierre has worked for the company since it was founded ten years ago

1.8 Expressing *until*

Generally, *until* is translated by a *jusqu'à* construction in affirmative sentences, and by an *avant* construction in negative sentences.

1.8.1 *Jusqu'à ce que / avant que* + **subjunctive** - until

Mon père me lisait une histoire **jusqu'à ce que** je m'endorme
My father would read me a story until I fell asleep
Nous ne commencerons pas à manger **avant que** tu sois de retour
We won't start eating until you get back

1.8.2 *Jusqu'à* + noun / *avant* + noun or infinitive - until

Il faudra que tu te débrouilles **jusqu'à** mon retour
You'll just have to manage until I get back
Il ne veut pas sortir avec ses amis **avant** la fin de ses examens
He doesn't want to go out with his friends until his exams are over

1.8.3 *Jusqu'au moment où* - this can often be used as an easier alternative to *jusqu'à ce que* :

Mon père me lisait une histoire **jusqu'au moment où** je m'endormais
My father would read me a story until I fell asleep

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1.8.4 *En attendant que* + **subjunctive** - *waiting for*

Il a décidé de prendre un café **en attendant que** son train arrive
He decided to have a coffee until his train arrived

1.8.5 *Tant que* + negative - *until* + affirmative

Sa santé ne s'améliorera pas **tant qu'il** ne renoncera pas à fumer
His health won't improve until he gives up smoking

1.8.6 *Attendre que* + **subjunctive** / *attendre* + infinitive - *to wait until*

Il a décidé d'**attendre qu'**elle soit de retour avant de lui annoncer la nouvelle
He decided to wait until she got back before telling her the news
Il a décidé d'**attendre** d'être de retour avant de lui dire les nouvelles
He decided to wait until he got back before telling her the news

1.9 Other time contructions

1.9.1 *Maintenant que* - *now that*

Maintenant que ses enfants sont tous à l'école elle peut reprendre le travail
Now that her children are all at school she can go back to work

1.9.2 *Chaque fois que, toutes les fois que* - *every time that*

Chaque fois qu'elle va à Paris elle m'achète un livre
Every time she goes to Paris she buys me a book
Toutes les fois que j'ai le temps je vais à la piscine
Whenever I have the time I go swimming

1.9.3 *A peine ... que* - *no sooner ... when*

A peine s'était-il endormi **que** le téléphone sonna
No sooner had he fallen asleep when the telephone rang

1.9.4 *Une fois que* - *once*

Une fois qu'il aura fini ses études il a l'intention de voyager
Once he's finished college he intends to travel

2 Participles

2.1 Gerunds :

Veillez vous-adressez à l'accueil **en arrivant**
Please go to reception on arriving

2.2 Present participle :

Se **promenant** dans le parc, il est tombé sur un vieil ami
Whilst walking in the park he bumped into an old friend

2.3 Past participle :

Le repas **fini**, ils ont fait la vaisselle
When the meal was over, they did the washing-up