

Unit 53 - Expressing opposition and concession

1 Conjunctions

Expressing opposition involves presenting an idea that opposes or contrasts with an idea previously mentioned or about to be mentioned. Conjunctions expressing opposition can be followed by the indicative or the subjunctive.

1.1 *Bien que, quoique* [both + subjunctive] - *although, even though*

Encore que [less common] [+ subjunctive] - *even though*

Bien que / quoique elle soit née en France, elle ne parle pas couramment le français
Although / Even though she was born in France, she doesn't speak French fluently

Encore qu'il n'ait que 35 ans, il vient d'être nommé ministre
Even though he's only 35, he's just been appointed minister

1.2 *Alors que* [+ indicative] - *when*

Tandis que [+ indicative] - *while, whilst, whereas*

Quand elle est rentrée, Pierre dormait au soleil **alors qu'**il était censé tondre la pelouse
When she got back, Pierre was sleeping in the sun when he was supposed to be mowing the lawn

Elle aime les chats **tandis que** lui préfère les chiens
She likes cats whilst he prefers dogs

1.3 *Même si* [+ indicative] - *even if*

Quand bien même [formal] [+ conditional] - *even if*

Même si je lui en parlais, je doute qu'il m'écouterait
Even if I spoke to him about it, I doubt he would listen to me

Quand bien même je lui en parlerais, il ne m'écouterait pas
Even if I spoke to him about it, he wouldn't listen to me

The idea of *even if* can also be expressed by juxtaposing two conditional clauses, or by linking them with *que* :

J'obtiendrais les notes requises, je n'**irais** pas à cette université

J'obtiendrais les notes requises **que** je n'**irais** pas à cette université

Even if I got the right marks, I wouldn't go to that university

1.4 *Sans que* [+ subjunctive] - *without*

Le voleur a réussi à pénétrer dans le bâtiment **sans qu'**on le voie

The thief managed to enter the building without being seen

1.5 *Mais* - *but*

C'est lui qui m'a dit de le rencontrer à 3 heures, **mais** quand je suis arrivé il n'était pas là

It's him who told me to meet him at 3 o'clock, but when I arrived he wasn't there

2 Expressing *whatever, however, whoever, wherever*

A **concessive clause** is a type of clause that serves to concede a point, i.e. one that describes a state of affairs that might have been expected to rule out what is described in the **main clause** but in fact does not. For example, in the sentence *Although he had been warned, he refused to stop shouting*, the clause *although he had been warned* is concessive. The term is used in particular to refer to indefinite relative clause structures involving *whatever, however, whoever* and *wherever* :

2.1 Expressing *whatever* + noun

This can be translated into French using two structures according to whether the verb in the concessive clause is *être* or another verb.

Whatever + [noun / pronoun] (verb often omitted) =
1 *Quel(le)(s) que* + [**either** : pronoun] + [subjunctive of *être*] + [**or** : noun] **OR**
2 *Quelque(s) + [noun] + que* + [subjunctive of verb other than *être*]

Whatever his problems (may be), they cannot excuse such behaviour

[1] *Quels que soient ses problèmes, ils ne peuvent excuser un tel comportement*

[2] *Quelques problèmes qu'il puisse avoir, ils ne peuvent excuser un tel comportement*

His problems, whatever they may be, they cannot excuse such behaviour

[1] *Ses problèmes, quels qu'ils puissent être, ne peuvent excuser un tel comportement*

2.2 Expressing *however* + adjective

However + [adjective] + [noun / pronoun] + [verb] =
Si + [adjective] + *que* + [**either** : pronoun] + [subjunctive verb] + [**or** : noun]

However big your problems are, they cannot excuse such behaviour

Si grands que soient tes problèmes, ils ne peuvent excuser un tel comportement

Your problems, however big they are, cannot excuse such behaviour

Tes problèmes, si grands qu'ils soient, ne peuvent excuser un tel comportement

In more formal French, *si* can be replaced with *aussi, quelque* or *pour* [plus subjunctive], or *tout* [generally plus indicative]. Note that all these words are invariable here :

Tes problèmes, **aussi / quelque / pour** grands qu'ils soient...

Tes problèmes, **tout** grands qu'ils sont...

2.3 Expressing *however* + adverb

2.3.1 There are various ways of translating this structure into French. One is by using the adverb *tout* with the structure below :

However + [adverb] + [noun / pronoun] + [verb] =
Tout + [adverb] + *que* + [**either** : pronoun] + [subjunctive verb] + [**or** : noun]

However carefully one drives / people drive, there is always the risk of an accident

Tout prudemment que conduisent les gens / que l'on conduise, il y a toujours le risque d'un accident

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2.3.2 When translating adverbs expressing intensity, such as *much* or *hard*, generally those with the structure *However much + subject + verb*, are best translated into French using the construction *avoir beau faire* :

<i>However</i> [adverb] + [subject] + [verb] [subject] <i>avoir beau</i> + [verb]
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However much I speak to him, I cannot convince him
J'ai beau lui parler, je n'arrive pas à le convaincre
However hard I try, I can't get the hang of computers
J'ai beau essayer, je n'arrive pas à me débrouiller avec les ordinateurs

2.3.3 Note also that French often converts adverb structures into noun structures :

However much / little I buy - *Quelque soit la quantité que j'achète*
However much / little it costs - *Quelque soit le prix*
However many / few people - *Quelque soit le nombre de personnes*
However long it takes - *Quelque soit le temps que ça prend*

2.4 Expressing *whoever* / *whatever* / *wherever*

2.4.1 *Whoever* as direct object of relative clause :

<i>Whoever</i> + [noun / pronoun] + [verb] = <i>Qui que</i> + [either : pronoun] + [subjunctive verb] + [or : noun]
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Whoever this boy / he is, he has no right to go in without permission
Qui que soit ce garçon / Qui qu'il soit, il n'a pas le droit d'entrer sans autorisation

2.4.2 *Whatever* as direct object of relative clause :

<i>Whatever</i> [noun / pronoun] + [verb] = <i>Quoi que</i> + [either : pronoun] + [subjunctive verb] + [or : noun]
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Whatever this boy / he does, he always ends up getting into trouble
Quoi que fasse ce garçon / Quoi qu'il fasse, il s'attire toujours des ennuis

Be careful not to confuse *quoi que*, meaning *whatever*, with *quoique*, meaning *although* (see section 1.1 above).

2.4.3 *Wherever*

<i>Wherever</i> + [subject] + [verb] = <i>Où que</i> + [subject] + [subjunctive verb]
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Wherever you go in this part of France, the people are always very friendly
Où que vous alliez dans cette région de France, les gens sont toujours très sympathiques

3 Prepositions

3.1 *Malgré, en dépit de* (less common) + noun - *in spite of, despite*
Malgré / En dépit de leurs différences, Marie et Nathalie sont restées de très bonnes amies
In spite of / despite their differences, Marie and Nathalie have remained very good friends

3.2 *Contrairement à, à la différence de* + noun - *unlike*
Contrairement à / A la différence de sa soeur, Pierre n'est pas allé à l'université
Unlike his sister, Pierre did not go to university

Note that *contrairement à* can also mean *contrary to*, and can also be used in a subordinate clause :

Contrairement à ce qu'on pourrait penser, les Français boivent beaucoup de bière
Contrary to what one might think, the French drink a lot of beer

3.3 *Sans* + infinitive or noun - *without*
 Ils ont fait agrandir leur maison **sans** avoir l'autorisation des autorités compétentes
They had an extension to their house built without getting permission from the appropriate authority

3.4 *Au lieu de - instead of ; plutôt que (de) - rather, instead of* (both + infinitive)
Au lieu de / plutôt que (de) me le dire tout de suite, il m'a fait deviner le résultat
Instead of telling me / rather than tell me straightaway, he made me guess the result

3.5 *Loin de* (+ infinitive) - *far from*
 Sa santé, **loin de** s'aggraver, s'est plutôt améliorée
His / her health, far from getting worse, in fact got better

3.6 *Quitte à* (+ infinitive) - *even if it means*
 Je veux absolument avoir fini ce projet avant vendredi, **quitte à** travailler tard le soir
I'm determined to finish this project before Friday, even if it means working late

3.7 Using *tout* + gerund (*en* + present participle)
Tout en prenant la route la plus longue, il est arrivé le premier
Despite taking the longer route he still arrived first
Tout en comprenant ses arguments, je ne suis pas d'accord avec son projet
Whilst I understand his arguments, I do not agree with his plan

4 Adverbial phrases

4.1 *Quand même, tout de même* - *even so, nevertheless*
 Il était très occupé, mais il a **quand même / tout de même** trouvé le temps de m'aider
He was very busy, but even so he found the time to help me

Note that *quand même* can also serve to reinforce a statement, in which case it does not necessarily express opposition :

Tu ne vas pas **quand même** rester devant la télé par un temps pareil ?
You're surely not going to watch television on a nice day like this ?

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- 4.2** *Pourtant, cependant* (both written) - *yet, however, nonetheless*
Votre devoir était bon, **pourtant / cependant** j'ai quelques reproches à vous faire
Your homework was good, however I have a few criticisms to make

- 4.3** *Néanmoins, toutefois* (both written) - *nevertheless*
L'économie semble en voie d'amélioration ; **néanmoins / toutefois**, le ministre s'en est tenu à sa politique de prudence
The economy appears to be improving ; nevertheless, the minister has kept to his policy of prudence

Note that *nevertheless* can also be expressed by the structure *n'en + [verb] + pas moins* :

Si cet appareil photo est bon marché, il **n'en est pas moins** un produit de grande qualité
If this camera is cheap, it is nevertheless a high-quality product

- 4.4** *En revanche, par contre* - *on the other hand*
L'Allemagne a une structure fédérale ; la France, **en revanche / par contre**, est plus centralisée
Germany is federal in structure ; France, on the other hand, is more centralized

Note also the structure *d'une part ... d'autre part* for *on the one hand ... on the other* :

La légalisation du cannabis sous forme de comprimé est beaucoup discutée à l'heure actuelle. **D'une part** il y a des arguments médicaux favorables. **D'autre part** il y a des arguments légaux contre.

The legalisation of cannabis in tablet form is being widely discussed at the moment. On the one hand there are medical arguments for it. On the other there are legal arguments against it.

- 4.5** *Au contraire*
Certains le trouvent froid. D'autres, **au contraire**, trouvent qu'il est sympathique
Some people find him cold. Others, on the contrary, find him kind

- 4.6** *Pour autant* (written) - *nevertheless, still*
J'admets que vous avez fait un effort ce trimestre : vous avez beaucoup à rattraper **pour autant**
I accept that you've made an effort this term : still, you've got a lot of catching up to do