

*In fact, en fait, de fait, au fait:*

**A contrastive study of the synchronic correspondences and diachronic development of  
English and French cognates**

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<sup>1</sup> The research reported on in this article was carried out in the framework of the Project "Grammaticalization & (Inter)Subjectification" (Project Number P6/44 Interuniversity Attraction Poles), funded by the Belgian Science Policy. The names of authors are in alphabetical order. Tine Defour carried out the analysis of the English data, Ulrique D'Hondt did the research on the French data. Dominique Willems (French linguistics) and Anne-Marie Simon-Vandenberg (English linguistics) are the supervisors of the project. The authors wish to thank the editor and the anonymous referees for their constructive feedback.

## **Abstract**

This article examines the relation between the English expression *in fact* and the cognate French expressions *en fait*, *de fait* and *au fait*. All expressions are combinations of the English and French words for ‘fact’ with a preposition. While in English it is only *in fact* which has developed adverbial and discourse marker use, French *fait* combines with three different prepositions (*en*, *de*, *au*) and all three phrases have developed into expressions with adverbial and pragmatic meanings. The four words display distinct meanings and functions in present-day language uses, although their similarity in form suggests historical links, and results from present-day translation data also show connections and partial overlaps on the semantic-pragmatic level. The question is how the different forms came to follow divergent paths of change, at what time, and what types of factors and contexts led to the different developments. On the basis of a detailed analysis of English and French corpus data, the study traces the cognates’ meanings back to their earliest uses. Similarities and differences in the historical developments are interpreted in the framework of grammaticalization/ pragmaticalization and (inter)subjectification.

### **1. Research context and aims**

In their present-day uses, the French marker *en fait* (see e.g. Blumenthal 1996) and its English counterpart *in fact* (see e.g. Oh 2000; Schwenter and Traugott 2000) display a number of similarities and have shared semantic-pragmatic meanings. While these two cognates appear to be the most obvious cross-linguistic equivalents, translation data also show a connection with the related French form *de fait*. While the connection between *en fait* and *de fait* has been studied (e.g. Danjou-Flaux 1980; Rossari 1992), *au fait* appears to have a distinct use that stands somewhat apart from *en fait* and *de fait*. However, historical analysis shows that *au fait* also has a specific place within the semantic field of factuality, to which the other forms belong.

Each of the four cognate forms appears to be in a distinct stage of pragmatic diversification, which suggests that they have undergone (partially) different semantic-pragmatic developments. The intra-linguistic comparison between the three French cognates combined with the cross-linguistic one provides insightful information on shared and divergent paths of semantic-pragmatic development.

The research questions focused on in the present article are the following:

- a) To what extent do the present-day and historical uses of these four cognates display (cross-linguistic) similarities and / or differences, on a semantic-pragmatic level?
- b) How did the forms come to develop partially overlapping but clearly different meanings, at what time and in what contexts?
- c) Can we place the respective developments within the framework of grammaticalization and/or pragmaticalization?

## 2. *Methodology and theoretical background*

The results that are presented in this paper are based on analyses of data from a selection of English and French corpora. For the English historical data, three corpus collections were used, covering a period from Old English until 1920. The *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts* (HC) (c. 1.6 million words) contains various text genres and includes data from the Old English period (c. 750) up to 1710. The *Corpus of English Dialogues* (CED) (c. 1.2 million words) runs from 1560 to 1760 and specifically contains dialogues and ‘written spoken texts’. The latter include both recorded (‘reconstructed’) text types such as trial proceedings or witness depositions, and constructed (imaginary) speech (e.g. drama, prose fiction, educational handbooks in dialogue form). The CED offers a methodological advantage because it contains representations of spoken discourse, from periods for which we otherwise do not have spoken discourse. The third English corpus is the *Corpus of Late Modern English Texts (Extended Version)* (CLMETEV) (c. 10 million words), which contains a varied range of genres (letters, literary fiction, scientific works), spread over three periods between 1710 and 1920. No synchronic corpus was used for English because Present-day English *in fact* has been studied in a number of publications (e.g. Schwenter and Traugott 2000) which could be relied on for the synchronic description.

The analysis of the French cognates is based on two historical corpora. The historical part of the *Frantext* database (*Frantext Moyen Français*) consists of two parts, i.e. the *Base textuelle du Moyen Français* (BTMF, 1330-c. 1502) and the *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français* (DMF). It contains 250 text documents in various genres (mainly philosophical treatises, religious texts and battle narratives). In addition, the non-categorized version of *Frantext* (which covers a wider range of texts than the categorized one<sup>2</sup>) contains texts between 1500 and 2005, in various literary genres (novels, plays, travel stories). For the present study texts

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<sup>2</sup> During the completion of this paper, the categorized and non-categorized versions were integrated into and became available as one full version.

between 1500 and 2000 were searched. The present-day uses of the French cognates were studied on the basis of two synchronic corpus collections. The *Le Monde* (LM) corpus provides an electronic archive of journalistic texts, to which about 200 articles are added every day. The corpus contains more than 500, 000 articles, dated from 1987 onwards. The *Corpaix* corpus contains spoken present-day data, with a total of 1,702,000 words divided over three types of transcribed texts (i.e. interviews, conversations and meetings).

In addition to these English and French corpora, a parallel translation corpus (*Namur Corpus*) was used to trace cross-linguistic correspondences<sup>3</sup>. The *Namur Corpus* contains English, Dutch and French fiction and non-fiction extracts (from novels, the Unesco Courier and the European Parliament debates), with translations into the other two languages. Texts cover the period 1982 till 1992.

The results from the diachronic and cross-linguistic analyses are interpreted in the theoretical frame of grammaticalization and pragmaticalization (cf. Traugott and Dasher 2002). The framework provides hypotheses accounting for a number of structural and / or semantic-pragmatic changes of individual discourse markers in their historical developments. According to the hypothesis (cf. Traugott 1995; Traugott and Dasher 2002), semantic elements such as adverbials can undergo structural changes (e.g. syntactic shift towards utterance-initial position) that correlate with changes in meaning (e.g. increased scope; shift from propositional, referential to increasingly discursive, evidential or pragmatic functions). The shifts in meaning are said to correlate with a heightened degree in subjectivity, which entails that newly developed meanings are more frequently based in the subjective perspective of the speaker (cf. Traugott, in press). The historical developments of the four expressions are examined from these perspectives.

### 3. *Synchronic overview of present-day semantic-pragmatic functions*

#### 3.1. *Present-day functions of English in fact*

The semantic-pragmatic uses of *in fact* have been examined in a number of synchronic studies (e.g. Oh 2000; Schwenter and Traugott 2000; Aijmer and Simon-Vandenberg 2004). Schwenter and Traugott (2000) distinguish three main uses of present-day *in fact*. The first use is illustrated in example (1). It is a clause-internal, adverbial use with the meaning 'in practice, as far as can be told from evidence' (Schwenter and Traugott 2000: 11).

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<sup>3</sup> The term *correspondence* is used here to refer to a form in the target language which correlates with a form in the source language (see e.g. Johansson 2007: 23).

- (1) Humanity, comfortably engaged elsewhere in the business of living, is absent **in fact** but everywhere in feeling. (Schwenter and Traugott 2000: 11) (our bold *et passim*)

From a structural perspective, *in fact* is a prepositional phrase (*in + fact*) which functions as an adverbial of circumstance, with limited scope. In example (1) *in fact* has scope over ‘absent’. The adverbial meaning of *in fact* emphasizes a fact-based reality, which is in this context contrasted with a less factual notion (i.e. ‘in feeling’). Humanity is said to be absent in the verifiable, visible practice, though it is present in feelings.

A second type of *in fact* can occur in various positions in the clause – viz. either ‘adjacent to the tensed verb’ (Traugott and Dasher 2002: 158) (example (2)) or clause-initially (example (3)). It is a sentence adverb, with scope over the whole proposition. As is illustrated in example (3), it frequently occurs in contrastive contexts and often follows the conjunction *but*.

- (2) Humanity is **in fact** absent. (Traugott and Dasher 2002: 157)
- (3) The levels of dioxin appear to be small, **but in fact** they have been found to be higher in paper tissues and in paper towels than in some other things. (Schwenter & Traugott 2000: 11)

In this second use, *in fact* combines two meanings. First, the form has a modal epistemic meaning (‘in reality’) expressing the speaker’s commitment to the proposition. The degree of certainty that is expressed in this use can be compared to that of epistemic adverbs such as *certainly*. In addition, *in fact* also has contrastive properties (with a meaning comparable to the contrastive form *however*), which allow it to be used as a means to introduce a perspective which is opposed to what has been previously said, and which signals a contrast with existing expectations. This type has been termed an ‘adversative adverb’ (Schwenter and Traugott 2000: 11), and forms a unit – rather than a combination of two separate forms – that has greater mobility in the sentence compared to the use of *in fact* as a prepositional phrase (cf. example (1)). It also occurs in initial position in the sentence, as in (3) above.

The third use of *in fact* distinguished by Schwenter and Traugott (2000) can be classified as a discourse marker. It primarily has an additive meaning and serves to indicate that the upcoming proposition is a more precise formulation than the one immediately before (e.g. examples (4) and (5)).

- (4) Humanity is not often present. **In fact**, it/humanity is usually absent. (Traugott & Dasher 2002: 158)
- (5) [...] though these statements may provide useful, **in fact**, compelling evidence for such a theory. (Chomsky, N. 1965. *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press: 89)

This third type of *in fact* is generally placed clause-initially, as a unit which is separated from the rest of the clause, over which it has scope. Oh (2000: 249) found that the utterance-initial use of *in fact* is most frequent (86% of all cases) in spoken language. Alternatively, this syntactically marginal form can occur clause-finally or in medial parenthetical position. With an additive rather than an adversative meaning, this use of *in fact* introduces a part of discourse that presents a stronger argument than what precedes. As such, it also serves to strengthen the speaker's argumentative position.

### 3.2. Present-day functions of French *en fait*

The present-day diversity of *en fait* has been dealt with in a number of existing studies, some of which have also examined its relationship to other markers with similar meanings (e.g. Danjou-Flaux 1980, Rossari 1992, Blumenthal 1996). In its present-day use, *en fait* shows many resemblances to the various meanings of English *in fact*, and occurs in similar contexts of use.

A first use can be compared to the circumstantial adverbial use of *in fact*. As illustrated in example (6), *en fait* then occurs as a prepositional phrase, with the meaning 'dans les faits', i.e. 'in the (actual) fact(s)'.

- (6) Je resterai pauvre **en fait**, libre en principe (G. Sand, 1851)

I will stay poor **en fait**, but free in principle. (our translation *et passim* – except otherwise indicated)

As is the case with the adverbial use of *in fact*, this use of *en fait* is fairly infrequent, especially in spoken discourse where pragmatic uses are predominant.

Further, French *en fait*, like *in fact*, also functions as a contrastive epistemic adverb. Examples (7) and (8) illustrate this adversative function. In example (7) *en fait* marks the

contrast between *truand* and *policier* and is explicitly embedded in a situation where a contrast in expectations is expressed (*c'est en fait le contraire...*) in example (8).

- (7) Une prostituée tombe amoureuse d'un truand qui est **en fait** un policier (LM 2006)

A prostitute falls in love with a crook who is **en fait** a policeman.

- (8) C'est **en fait** le contraire qui se produit: les œuvres sont mises à l'épreuve de l'architecture, qui prédétermine les travaux et les artistes qui pourront occuper le bâtiment. (LM 2006)

It is **en fait** the opposite that takes place: the works are put to the test of the architecture, which determines the work and the artists who will be allowed to occupy the building.

*En fait* has the double function of marking a contrast with the preceding part of discourse, and of emphasising the perspective of the speaker.

Thirdly, as a discourse marker, *en fait* can be used with an additive meaning, supporting the preceding assertion. In examples (9), (10) and (11), for instance, *en fait* serves pragmatic (viz. text-structuring) functions, introducing an elaboration or precision.

- (9) Un groupe de gardes rouges venu des environs a encerclé le lieu de réunion du village qui était **en fait** la boutique de ma mère et j'ai eu très peur pour elle. (LM 2006)

A band of Red guards coming from the outskirts has encircled the meeting point of the village which was **en fait** the shop of my mother and I was really scared for her.

- (10) Le médiateur est **en fait** un conseiller du ministre qui a une capacité de dialogue avec la société civile. (LM 2006)

The mediator is **en fait** an adviser of the minister who can engage in dialogue with the people.

- (11) Un faux exemplaire (**en fait**, un Caudron C800 rouge revêtu de la signature des deux comiques) trônerait, pour la plus grande joie des amateurs émus, en un musée d'Azay-le-Rideau. (LM 2006)

A fake copy (**en fait**, a red Caudron C800 with the signature of the two comics) would figure, to the greatest joy of excited amateurs, in an Azay-le-Rideau museum.

In cases where *en fait* has a strengthening function, the marker can introduce a subjective perspective, as in examples (12) and (13) where *en fait* figures in sentence initial position, which favours a discourse marker reading.

- (12) L1 mh d'accord mh est-ce que la différence entre l'oral et l'écrit euh va rester longtemps à ton avis...ne la prend-on pas de moins en moins en compte  
L2 ben pff je sais pas m- moi **en fait** j'arrive pas à pas à voir de différence entre l'oral et l'écrit pour moi c'est c'est c'est aussi important l'un que l'autre. (Corpaix)

L1 mh alright mh will the difference between spoken and written language uh continue to exist for a long time in your opinion... isn't it taken less and less into account

L2 well pff I don't know – I **en fait** I don't see a difference between spoken and written language for me they're they're they're equally important.

- (13) **En fait**, il faudrait savoir par cœur ces poèmes oubliés pour en saisir la transposition musicale, une belle lecture ne suffit pas. (LM 2006)

**En fait**, one should know those forgotten poems by heart in order to capture the adaptation for music, a nice reading is not enough.

The present-day pragmatic functions of *en fait* resemble those of English *in fact*, but in addition also show connections with the English marker *actually* (cf. section 3.5 on translation evidence). *En fait* shares the pragmatic functions of *actually*: on a textual level, they can both either introduce elaboration or indicate contrast; on an interpersonal level, they can indicate a shift in perspective (cf. Oh 2000<sup>4</sup>).

### 3.3. Present-day functions of French *de fait*

Table 1 gives an overview of the frequencies of *en fait*, *de fait* and *au fait* in the corpus data of *Le Monde* and *Corpaix* (also cf. Simon-Vandenberg and Willems, forthcoming) and shows that *en fait* is clearly the most frequent form of the three French forms, both in written data (*Le Monde*) and in spoken ones (*Corpaix*; figures based on a total of 1 702 000 words). The

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<sup>4</sup> Oh (2000) compares the syntactic and functional behaviour of *in fact* and *actually* in American English, and finds that there are clear differences in terms of positional typicality, with *in fact* being less mobile and more likely to occur in initial position. In addition, both forms indicate counter-expectation, but while *in fact* is frequently used as a means to strengthen an assertion, *actually* tends to be used to deny an assertion.

results from *Le Monde* were retrieved from varying periods from the searchable archive. For *au fait*, for instance, a much longer period of time (24 months) needed to be searched to attain a minimum of occurrences. The frequencies that are added are based on the total number of words in the respective periods that were searched. With 8.6 occurrences per 100,000 words (237 occurrences / 2 764 059 words or 2 months) *en fait* is shown to be the most frequently occurring cognate, compared to *de fait* (4.3 / 100,000, i.e. 243 occurrences / 5 704 572 words or 4 months) and *au fait* (0.1 per 100,000, i.e. 50 occurrences / 40 589 527 words or 24 months).

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

While *de fait* is less frequent than *en fait* (cf. Table 1), it appears to occur in the three contexts in which we find *en fait*. The distinct functions largely depend on the form's syntactic position. When placed after the verb, *de fait* has a propositional meaning ('dans les faits, concrètement') with limited scope, as in (14) and (15). The specific context of the examples (14: context of factual proof provided by the court; 15: a report has been written, research has been done on the facts) as well as the sentence position of *de fait* (immediately after the verb), show that the meaning of *de fait* is still close to its etymology 'in the actual facts' and therefore, the scope is limited to the verb.

- (14) Le tribunal correctionnel de Paris balaie **de fait** toute cette argumentation. (LM 2006)

The magistrates' court of Paris **de fait** denies the entire argumentation.

- (15) Ces deux rapports, surtout Doing Business, sous-tendent **de fait**, consciemment ou non, une approche essentiellement normative. (LM 2006)

Those two reports, especially Doing Business, support **de fait**, consciously or not, an essentially normative approach.

In examples (16) and (17) the scope of *de fait* is limited to the adjective complement, respectively *indépendante* and *insuffisantes*.

- (16) Ce sont en effet les aléas de l'histoire qui ont amené cette concentration de chefs-d'œuvre d'art chinois sur cette île, indépendante **de fait** depuis plus d'un demi-siècle.

It is indeed the vagaries of history that have led to this concentration of Chinese masterpieces on the isle, **de fait** independent for over half a century.

- (17) Aujourd'hui, les interventions à caractère humanitaire sont **de fait** insuffisantes pour éviter une aggravation de la situation.

Today, the interventions of a humanitarian nature are **de fait** insufficient to avoid an aggravation of the situation.

*De fait* frequently occurs in utterance-initial position (in 181 out of 243 occurrences in *Le Monde* 2006; in 3 out of 4 occurrences from Corpaix) (cf. Table 2), where it either has a contrastive meaning (cf. '(but) in fact'; '(mais) de fait') as in example (18), or a confirming meaning that can be compared to *indeed* or French *en effet*, as in example (19). The paragraph introduced by *de fait* in example (19) confirms and even strengthens what has just been said: since the Islamic power in Khartoum is against the deployment of the blue helmets in the Sudanese province, the region is not safe anymore and has been declared as a 'no go area'.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

- (18) [...] peut l'attribuer aux événements extérieurs **mais de fait** c'est un [euh] c'est un déroulement [...] (Corpaix)

[...] can ascribe it to external events but **de fait** it's a [uh] it's a development [...]

- (19) Face à cette situation, le Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies a voté, le 31 août, l'envoi de casques bleus sur le terrain. Mais Khartoum n'en veut pas, et le déploiement de soldats de la paix semble de plus en plus improbable. Pour le régime du général El Béchir, "c'est tout bénéf", commente avec amertume le représentant d'une ONG française. **De fait**, en dehors des grosses agglomérations, souvent tenues par les forces gouvernementales, la majeure partie de la province a **en effet** été déclarée -, du fait de l'insécurité croissante, "no go area" par les organisations humanitaires. (LM 2006)

Faced with this situation, the Security Council of the United Nations voted on 31 August for sending blue helmets to the field. But Khartoum is opposed, and the deployment of the UN peacekeeping forces seems more and more unlikely. For the government of general el Béchir “it’s a great deal”, the representative of a NGO comments with bitterness.

**De fait**, outside the big suburbs, often controlled by governmental forces, the major part of the province has indeed, because of growing insecurity, been declared a ‘no go area’ by the humanitarian organizations.

Whether *de fait* is used with its propositional meaning or in a contrastive or confirming use, its meaning always stays very close to a semantic, factual meaning. According to Rossari (1992: 156) and Simon-Vandenberghe and Willems (forthcoming), *de fait* is used to refer to a well established fact rather than to indicate a contrast with a preceding point of view – while *en fait* does introduce a new perspective which differs (strongly) from existing expectations or from what is said previously. According to our data, *de fait* can be confirmative or contrastive. However, the contrastive use of *de fait* is infrequent, which makes us wonder whether it could not simply be explained by the influence of *en fait*.

#### 3.4. Present-day functions of French *au fait*

Since in the literature *au fait* is never discussed together with the other two forms, whereas *en fait* and *de fait* have been studied together (cf. Rossari 1992), it can be assumed that the form *au fait* needs to be considered as quite different from *en fait* and *de fait*. Our data have confirmed this assumption. First, it occurs very infrequently as a separate unit. From a total of 114 occurrences of *au fait* in *Le Monde*, 50 were found valid and were included in Table 1. Excluded were the cases where *au fait* still functions as a noun, for example ‘Cela est dû *au fait* que [...]’ (That is due to the fact that [...]) or is part of a verbal phrase as in ‘être *au fait* de’ (to know, to be informed about) and its causative equivalent ‘mettre *au fait* de’ (to inform about). Secondly, it is striking that it typically occurs in questions. In the data from *Le Monde* (October 2004-September 2006) (cf. Table 1), *au fait* is used in the context of a question in 40 out of 50 occurrences, where it has a clear discourse marker function. In the following examples (20) and (21), *au fait* occurs in questions that introduce elaboration. At the same time the questions function as the starting point of a new discursive unit, a new sub-topic, and *au fait* in this sense serves as a link with what precedes as well as with what is to follow.

- (20) **Certains utilisent même des cages.** Là encore, il est difficile de s’y opposer. [...] Le fonctionnaire est reparti, la cage est restée. Mais la salle a dû fermer, plus tard, pour raisons financières. **Pourquoi des cages, au fait?** Pour le spectacle. Mais pas seulement. “Cela réveille des instincts primaires. Moi, je me sens bien dedans”, confie Jean-François Lenogue, un autre free fighter français, [...]. (LM 2006)

Some even use cages. There again, it is difficult to be opposed. [...] The official has left, the cage has remained. But the room needed to be closed, later on, for financial reasons. Why cages, **au fait?** For the show. But not only. “It awakens primitive instincts. As for me, I feel good inside”, confesses Jean-François Lenogue, another French free fighter, [...]

- (21) Pas un jour sans qu’on ne parle de la baisse de motivation des cadres. En période de crise, [...] délocalisations se succèdent, difficile d’actionner les leviers de **la motivation au travail**. Entreprises et spécialistes de l’“incentive” - pour reprendre l’équivalent anglo-saxon - déploient leurs outils pour stimuler ces salariés désillusionnés. **Mais au fait, qu’est-ce que la motivation au travail?** Quels en sont les ressorts? (LM 2004)

Not a day without mention of the decline in motivation of the managers. In a period of crisis, [...] relocations follow one another, it is difficult to activate the levers of motivation at work. Companies and specialists of the ‘incentive’ – to use the Anglo-Saxon equivalent – use their tools to stimulate those disillusioned employees. But **au fait**, how can one define motivation at work? What are its drives?

A similar text-structuring use also appears in declarative sentences, where *au fait* is used to pick up an element from the preceding context as a new topic (example 22), elaborate on a previous topic (example 23), return to the essence (examples 24 and 25). In example (22) an idea suddenly comes up in the speaker’s mind. Sylvain, who belongs to the comment in the previous sentence, now becomes the topic of the sentence introduced by *au fait*. In example (23) the speaker provides an additional comment on what he has uttered before. By doing so, he searches to strengthen his previous utterance. Example (24) is taken from a special edition of the literary section of *Le Monde* on the Book Fair. That year’s edition had Martinique as its central theme. The author of the article points out that the artistic production of Martinique has always been if not ignored at least minimized. He concludes his article by insisting on the importance of Martinique’s cultural wealth compared to that of France. In example (25) *au*

*fait* introduces a rhetorical question by which the speaker concludes that the Vatican cannot have its say in the matter since few immigrants actually live there.

- (22) Elle revenait ensuite rue du Bac pour surveiller le départ des enfants qu'accompagnait Françoise et prendre un second petit déjeuner avec Sylvain. **Au fait**, pourquoi ne l'a-t-il pas réveillée, ce matin ? (Frantext, Dormann Geneviève/*La Petite main*/1993, Pages 169-171)

She then came back to the rue du Bac to watch the departure of the children accompanied by Françoise and to have a second breakfast with Sylvain. **Au fait**, why did he not wake her this morning?

- (23) Tout ce que j'ai dit est, bien entendu, 'off the record', assène Kennedy. [...] Sur le trottoir, les deux hommes sont face à face. Kennedy: "**Au fait**, si vous publiez ce que j'ai dit, vous allez faire du tort à beaucoup de gens." (LM 2006)

All I have said is, of course, 'off the record', Kennedy flings out. [...] On the pavement, the two men are standing face-to-face. Kennedy: "**Au fait**, if you publish what I have said, you will harm a lot of people".

- (24) Annie Le Brun répond sans mollir à la doctrine de la "créolité" et aux successeurs critiques, Edouard Glissant puis Chamoiseau et Confiant (Statue cou coupé, éd. Jean-Michel Place, 1996). **Au fait**: la Martinique représente environ un tiers d'un département français. En est-il tant, en France, qui offrent un tableau si luxuriant d'écrivains, de poètes, de musiciens, de polémiques, d'amour, d'amertume, de promesses? (LM 2006 Le Monde des Livres Spécial Salon du Livre 2006 "Ma poésie est née de mon action" Aimé Césaire au présent En France, Aimé Césaire reste aussi méconnu que ses Antilles natales.)

Annie Le Brun answers without softening the doctrine of the "créolité" and the critical successors, Edouard Glissant then Chamoiseau and Confiant (Statue cou coupé, ed. Jean-Michel Place, 1996). **Au fait**: Martinique represents approximately a third of a French department. Are there as many in France which offer such an impressive range of writers, poets, musicians, polemics, love, bitterness, promises?

- (25) La gauche et Le Monde, semble-t-il, font, avec le problème de l'immigration, la même erreur qu'avec l'insécurité jadis : nier qu'il y ait un problème et [...] On a vu le résultat en 2002.

Quant aux Eglises, qu'elles s'occupent de leurs ouailles. (**Au fait**, combien d'immigrés dans l'Etat du Vatican ?) (LM 2006)

The left and Le Monde seem to be making the same mistake with the immigration problem as they did before with the insecurity issue: to deny that there is a problem and [...] We saw the outcome in 2002. As for the Churches, they should only deal with their flock. (**Au fait**, just how many immigrants are there in Vatican City?)

The matter-of-fact meaning of *au fait* can in certain contexts have the effect of addressing and challenging the addressee on an intersubjective level, as in example (26), where the author wants his readers to see the similarity between the life of Alexandre Dumas and the events described in Dumas' story *Les trois mousquetaires*, where d'Artagnan is also accompanied by 'trois turbulents camarades'. By introducing this rhetorical question, the author refers to common knowledge.

- (26) Mais, lorsque le jeune homme s'engage comme simple cavalier dans les dragons de la reine, c'est sous le pseudonyme roturier d'Alexandre Dumas. Il aurait francisé le nom africain de sa mère, Douma, qui signifiait "dignité". L'engagé se lie avec trois turbulents camarades. **Au fait**, cela ne vous rappelle rien? (LM 2006)

But, when the young man joins the Queen's dragoons as a cavalryman, it is under the common pseudonym of Alexandre Dumas. He would have gallicized his mother's African name, Douma, which means 'dignity'. Once enlisted, he unites himself with three unruly friends. **Au fait**, does that not remind you of something?

### 3.5. Synchronic correspondences?

The semantic-pragmatic functions of *in fact*, *en fait*, *de fait* and *au fait* in present-day discourse are clearly very close to one another and in some cases there is apparent overlap. This is particularly so for English *in fact* as compared with French *en fait* and to a lesser extent with *de fait*. *Au fait* stands somewhat apart from the other forms.

Support for these connections comes from translations. A search for the words in the *Namur Corpus* provides information on their corresponding forms in English and French respectively. The search takes into account original (source) texts as well as translated texts. This means that the occurrences that were found are both source items and translations. A search in all three genres of the corpus yielded a total of 163 occurrences of *in fact* and 188 of

*en fait*. Of the 163 occurrences of *in fact*, 63 were original forms (from English texts), in 70 cases *in fact* was a translated form (of a Dutch original (31) or a French original (39)). The 30 occurrences that are left are taken from the *Unesco Courier*, for which no source language is mentioned in the *Namur Corpus*. From the 188 instances of *en fait*, 27 come from a French text. In 123 cases, *en fait* is a translation from an English text (83) or from a Dutch one (40). In 38 occurrences, no source is mentioned (*Unesco Courier*). Table 3 presents an overview of the most frequent correspondences of *in fact* and *en fait*. In a further search in the *Namur Corpus* (both source texts and translated texts) 19 occurrences of *de fait*, and 19 instances of *au fait* were found (see further Table 4). The translations found in examples (27) to (34) are not our own but are all drawn from parallel searches in the *Namur Corpus*.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

The category ‘zero’ stands for cases in which the translation simply leaves out an equivalent of the source item. This is not unusual in the case of pragmatic elements such as discourse markers (see e.g. Aijmer and Simon-Vandenberghe (2003)). Example (27) is an illustration of such a case. The French original *Logique? En fait non*, marking a contrast with what is expected, is translated by *there is no logic to it*, which contains no equivalent of *en fait*. The Dutch translation, which has been added for comparison, does contain an equivalent (*Logisch? In feite niet*).

- (27) Malheureusement, ce choix entre deux nations n'est pas voulu mais imposé par la Chine communiste. Logique? **En fait non**. Nos nations européennes l'ont très bien compris, [...]  
(*Namur Corpus*, DDFI: 002:001. Debates. Source language: French)

No one wishes to make this choice between the two nations, but unfortunately it is being imposed by communist China. **There is no logic to it**, as the countries of the European Community have clearly understood very well, [...]

Helaas is deze keus tussen beide naties niet echt gewild, maar opgelegd door het communistische China. Logisch? **In feite niet**. Onze Europese landen hebben dit zeer goed begrepen, [...]

The label ‘other’ refers to cases in which the meaning of the source adverb is expressed by means of other word classes or paraphrases (e.g. in the form of a descriptive adjective or verb). In example (28) the combination of ‘say’ and ‘in fact’ is translated by the verb form *précisa*.

- (28) She did not say what **in fact** this was. (*Namur Corpus*, FHED: 065: 001. Fiction. Source language: Dutch)

Elle ne **précisa** pas ce que c’était.

Table 3 shows that *in fact* most frequently corresponds to the French cognate form *en fait*, and conversely that *en fait* mainly corresponds to *in fact*. The data show that both *in fact* and *en fait* predominantly correspond to forms that can be placed on an axis of factuality (*in fact / en fait; en effet, effectivement; the fact is that...*), an axis of reality or truth (*en réalité, réellement; also vraiment* (1 occurrence); *really*). Interestingly, the English form *actually*, which appears to be one of the most frequent correspondences of *en fait*, is most frequently translated by *en fait* when *actually* is taken as a source form (cf. Defour et al. forthcoming).

Tables 3 and 4 indicate that *in fact* can also be translated by (or serves as a translation of) *de fait* (7 out of 163 occurrences – cf. Table 3), and that conversely, *in fact* also features among the possible correspondences of *de fait* (7 out of 19 occurrences). Table 4 shows that 4 out of 19 English correspondences of *de fait* are ‘embedded forms’, as in *ménages de fait* (translated in English as ‘unmarried couples’ – example (29)).

- (29) Face à l’augmentation importante du nombre des séparations et des divorces, à la multiplication **des ménages de fait**, à l’accroissement du nombre des enfants nés hors mariage, [...] le problème de la garde des enfants prend une acuité toute particulière. (*Namur Corpus*, DYFE: 002:001. Debates. Source language: French)

In view of the considerable increase in the number of separations and divorces, in **unmarried couples** and the number of children born outside wedlock, [...] the problem of the custody of children is becoming especially acute.

Met de grote stijging van het aantal scheidingen en echtscheidingen, met het steeds groter wordende aantal **feitelijke samenlevingen**, het toenemend aantal kinderen dat niet uit een huwelijk geboren wordt, [...] krijgt het vraagstuk van de hoede over de kinderen een zeer bijzondere actualiteit.

INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

Table 4 shows that *de fait* mainly corresponds to *in fact*. Example (30) provides an illustration of this correspondence, showing a contrastive meaning in the English '(when) in fact'. Examples 31 and 32 respectively illustrate the matter-of-fact and the confirming meanings of *de fait* (cf. section 3.3) through the corresponding forms *by definition* (31) and *indeed* (32).

- (30) une grande quantité de gens affluaient en cherchant le point de rendez-vous car Stéphane avait tenu à faire paraître une annonce dans deux quotidiens, il craignait que la cérémonie soit maigrichonne en comparaison des funérailles pompeuses de l'autre grand penseur mort quelques années plus tôt, **de fait** le quartier était cerné par des camionnettes de la police, et il y avait tant de monde massé dans la cour de la sortie des corps que je renonçai à me faufiler dans la foule pour me rapprocher, [...]. (*Namur Corpus*, FJFE:016:001. Fiction. Source language: French)

A crowd of people milled through the narrow grey streets of that older part of the city, next to the Seine (and rather close to the Institut Médico-Légal, now that I think about it, that morgue that sends chills down my spine whenever I pass it), for Stéphane had insisted on placing an announcement in two daily newspapers, since he was afraid the ceremony might be sparsely attended in comparison with the elaborate funeral accorded the other great French intellectual who'd died a few years earlier, **when in fact** the neighbourhood was surrounded by police vans and there were so many people gathered in the hospital courtyard through which the body would pass that I gave up trying to get any closer, [...]

- (31) Nouvelles politiques économiques ou sociales, nouvel ordre mondial, mais aussi nouvelle formule de lessive, nouveau goût d'un biscuit, nouvelle édition d'un journal... tout semble nous faire croire que la nouveauté d'une chose l'inscrit, **de fait**, dans la modernité, que le mot "nouveau" suffit en lui-même, telle une formule magique, pour faire basculer son objet dans la modernité. (*Namur Corpus*, UGFB:003:001. Unesco Courier. Source language: not given)

We are confronted nowadays with an endless stream of new products and ideas -- new brands of detergent, new biscuit flavours, the latest issue of the newspaper, new economic and social policies, a new world order -- and we might be tempted to think that if something is new then it is **by definition** modern, that the very word new is enough to give the cachet of modernity to anything it is used to describe.

(32) **De fait**, Horace, contrairement à son habitude, n'avait pas émis un son, tout occupé à ravalier ses larmes en présence d'une femme. D'ailleurs, l'eût-il voulu, il aurait éprouvé certaines difficultés. (*Namur Corpus*, FLFB:021:001. Fiction. Source language: French)

**Indeed**, Horace, contrary to custom, had not emitted a sound, completely occupied as he was in sniffing back his tears in the presence of a woman. Besides, even had he wanted to, he would have experienced certain difficulties.

**Inderdaad** had Horace, tegen zijn gewoonte in, geen kik gegeven, druk bezig als hij was zijn tranen in aanwezigheid van een vrouw in bedwang te houden. Maar zelfs als hij iets had willen zeggen, zou dat tot problemen hebben geleid.

In contrast to *de fait*, *au fait* (cf. Table 4) does not appear among the possible correspondences of *in fact* nor does *au fait* display many similarities with the other forms in terms of semantics or structure.

In 13 out of 19 instances *au fait* is found in an embedded structure, as in *c'est dû au fait que*, *s'opposer au fait que*, *être intéressé au fait*, *mettre au fait*, or *être au fait*. In these cases *fait* is a noun and/or functions in an idiomatic expression. In 4 out of 19 cases *au fait* is not translated (cf. category 'zero'). Only in two instances does *au fait* appear in utterance-initial position, as a separate unit. In one of these instances *au fait* is a translation of the English phrase *oh, by the way* (example (33)), indicating topic change and elaboration or a casual digression. It is interesting to see that *au fait* is used to introduce a question here (cf. section 3.4). In the second occurrence 'au fait!' serves as a translation of *I just realized* (example (34)), which also indicates the introduction of new information. *Au fait(!)* is an injunction which can be translated as *let's come to the point*, and in example (34) it is used to create a bridge to new information that is in the original text presented as a sudden realization.

(33) Mes parents m'ont annoncé la nouvelle sans aucun ménagement. On était tous les trois en train de manger des spaghetti, quand soudain mon père a dit d'un ton désinvolte: - **Au fait**, Adrian, tu sais pas? Ta mère est enceinte de trois mois. C'est une bonne nouvelle, non? (*Namur Corpus*, FDFB:120:001. Fiction. Source language: English)

My parents didn't prepare me or anything. We were all eating spaghetti on toast when my father said casually, 'Oh, by the way, Adrian, congratulations are in order, your mother's three months pregnant.'

- (34) 22 heures 30. **Au fait!** La grande sauterelle a parlé de sa relation avec mon père au présent. Quelle honte! A trente ans, ignorer encore les règles fondamentales de la grammaire! (*Namur Corpus*, FDFB:090:001. Fiction. Source language: English)

10.30 p.m. **I have just realized** that Stick Insect used the present tense when she was referring to her relationship with my father. It is absolutely disgraceful. A woman of thirty not knowing the fundamentals of grammar!

Not only because of the close formal similarity between the cognates *in fact*, *en fait*, *de fait* and *au fait*, but also because of the intra- and cross-linguistic similarities and differences between their respective semantic-pragmatic functions in present-day discourse, a closer look at the forms' historical developments is in order to throw light on the nature of the respective semantic-pragmatic changes.

#### 4. *Taking a closer look at the historical development of the four cognates*

##### 4.1. *The semantic-pragmatic development of in fact*

###### 4.1.1. *Frequencies in the corpora*

An overview of frequencies (i.e. actual figures due to the low frequencies) of *in fact* as they appear in the English historical corpus data (HC, CED and CLMETEV) is provided in Tables 5 and 6 below. The two tables give an overview of occurrences of *in fact* per period (with normalized frequencies per 100,000 between brackets) as well as reference figures indicating the total number of occurrences of the form 'fact' as a noun.

INSERT TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

INSERT TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE

These figures show that *in fact* first appears in the Early Modern English period (cf. below section 4.1.2) and suggest that the form becomes more frequent after 1700 (cf. higher figures in the Clmetev data). The 7 occurrences from the CED (which has a total of c. 1,183,690 words) amount to 0.6 per 100,000 words, which is significantly lower than the 1200 instances

from the Clmetev (with a total of nearly 15 million words), which amounts to 8.01 per 100,000 words.

#### 4.1.2. In fact as a prepositional phrase

Previous studies (e.g. Powell 1992, Traugott 1995, Schwenter and Traugott 2000, Traugott and Dasher 2002) have established that the earliest occurrences of the noun *fact* were found in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and derive from Latin *factum*. As a noun, *fact* referred to a physical action or deed ('a thing done or performed' - *OED*, *fact*, *n.* 1). The earliest occurrence of the prepositional phrase *in fact* (*in* + *fact*) in our data appears in the same century (1571). It is shown in example (35).

- (35) [...] whether you have done any thing to the Destruction of the Prince's Person, if the Lords, upon the Evidence already produc'd, do **think the Matters true in Fact** that are already alledg'd against you, surely the same must needs be constructed a compassing of the Queen's Death; (CED, *Trial of Thomas Howard Duke of Norfolk*: 1571 (publication date 1730))

In this early use, *in fact* has an adverbial meaning ('in practice, as shown by factual evidence'). In (35) 'true in fact' refers to the availability of proofs of the criminal acts committed. The fact-based meaning of the noun is highlighted by collocations with words referring to related concepts or to things that are less tangible or verifiable such as imagination, 'mere' intentions, or expectations. In its earliest occurrences, but also sporadically in later periods, *in fact* is often found either in coordinate constructions (example (36)) or in contrasting contexts (example (37)).

- (36) But it is **evident in fact and experience** that there is no such universal Judge (HC, Tillotson, *Sermons*: 1640-1710)

- (37) [...] which was so innocent **in fact**, but so injurious in its **result** (Clmetev: Hunt, Henry, *Memoirs of Henry Hunt*: 1820-22)

The earliest occurrences of *in fact* in our corpus data contain a number of collocations with the verb *be*, including *be (so) in fact* (3 occurrences out of the 8 occurrences in the CED and HC), *be true in fact* (2 occurrences), or *be evident in fact* (1 occurrence). These collocations

emphasize that *in fact* refers to what is what is empirically observed and tangible and therefore considered to be real or true.

#### 4.1.3. In fact as an epistemic adverb in contrastive contexts

The first step then in the semantic change was from what is physically done (cf. ‘in actual fact, in deed(s)’) to what is empirically witnessed and consequently experienced as real and true. This new meaning created a stepping stone for the shift of *in fact* as a prepositional phrase towards an epistemic adverbial use in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This is a shift towards the speaker’s perspective. Examples (38) and (39) below show that *in fact* is placed in a contrastive context where an emphasis is put on the speaker’s belief that what is said is a fact, despite contrasting expectations.

(38) ...but I can aver for matter of *fact*, that they have often recommended it by their example as well as arguments...In whatever light you may consider it, this is **in fact** a solid benefit. (1732 – Traugott 1995: 10)

(39) Here the reader may be apt to conclude that the bailiff, instead of being a friend, was really an enemy to poor Booth; **but, in fact, he was not so**. His desire was no more than to accumulate bail-bonds; (Clmetev: Fielding, H.: *Amelia*: 1751)

In this stage, *in fact* evolves from a prepositional phrase to a sentence adverbial with a wider scope (cf. Schwenter and Traugott 2000; Traugott and Dasher 2002). Traugott and Dasher suggest that this evidential use often occurs in already contrastive environments in which a contrastive conjunction such as *but* or *yet* is found (cf. example (39)). The reason is that speakers feel a special need to emphasize the truth value of their utterances when there are doubts, counter-expectations, or differences of opinion.

#### 4.1.4. In fact as an additive discourse marker

The last use of *in fact* to develop has the function of strengthening rather than opposing the preceding part of discourse. Our earliest very clear occurrence of this discursive use is found in 1749 (example (40)).

(40) One would indeed think that love quite puts out the eyes of an old woman. **In fact**, they so greedily swallow the addresses which are made to them, that, like an outrageous glutton, they

are not at leisure to observe what passes amongst others at the same table. [...] (Clmetev, Fielding, H.: *The history of Tom Jones, a foundling*: 1749)

Schwenter and Traugott (2000: 20) describe this third additive use of *in fact* as a means to introduce a proposition that is stronger than the preceding one – but has the same orientation. In other words, *in fact* introduces an intensification (rather than a contrast). In example (40) the initial proposition (*love puts out the eyes of an old woman*) is followed by an elaboration or specification that is rhetorically stronger (*they so greedily swallow the addresses...that they are not at leisure to observe...*). A very similar example is (41), in which *tempus fugit* is strengthened by *tempus is fugit-ing most fearfully*:

- (41) It is New Year's Eve to-day, and nearly nine months since I came up to London. Tempus fugit! **In fact** tempus is fugit-ing most fearfully, considering that I am twenty-one on Sunday next, you know, and that I haven't begun to do anything really. (Clmetev, Caine, H., *The Christian*: 1897)

Traugott and Dasher (2002: 168) situate their first occurrence of this additive discourse marker use around 1816. In the data examined in the present study, the second, contrastive use of *in fact* and the third, additive use appear at about the same time. This difference in dates of attestation may either simply be data-related and/or it may indicate the close link and subtlety of the difference between the second (contrastive) and third (additive) uses of *in fact*. After 1800 this use becomes very frequent. Here is one more example in which *in fact* introduces a strengthening of (*live*) *moderately* by (*live*) *abstemiously* (example 42).

- (42) Some of my more rustic neighbours expressed great surprise to see me look so well, after coming out of a prison; their idea of which had led them to expect to see me look thin, pale, and emaciated. On the contrary, they found that I had lost none of my usual ruddy and florid appearance, and, instead of looking as if I had been fed upon bread and water, I had grown stout and fleshy, although I had taken regular exercise, and, compared with my usual habits in the country, had lived moderately, and **in fact** abstemiously. (Clmetev2, Hunt, Henry, *Memoirs of Henry Hunt* (Vol. 1): 1820-22)

#### 4.2. Frequencies of the French expressions

As can be seen in Table 7 (also cf. Simon-Vandenbergen and Willems, forthcoming), *de fait* was the most frequent of the three French cognates before 1600. From 1600 onwards, the

frequency of *de fait* decreases and it becomes even less frequent than *au fait*. From 1750 onwards its frequency gradually rises again, although it remains significantly less frequent than *en fait* (Table 7). *Au fait* becomes significantly more popular from 1700 onwards.

INSERT TABLE 7 ABOUT HERE

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

#### 4.3. *The semantic-pragmatic development of de fait*

Table 7 shows that the French expressions *en fait*, *de fait* and *au fait* appear very early in the corpus data. All three forms were attested from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards, though not all with similar levels of independence. *De fait* was the first of the three forms to develop an adverbial meaning ('concrètement, en réalité'), from 1400 onwards (cf. examples (43) and (44)).

Other – dependent – uses of *de fait* are [Noun + *de fait*] as in *gens de fait* meaning 'good fighters' or *voie de fait* meaning 'act of violence' (example (45)) and [*de fait* + *de* + Noun] as in example (46) where *de fait* is used as an equivalent for 'en raison de' ('in view of').

- (43) Et jadis fus femme, **de fait** home suis, je ne ment pas (Chr. de Pisan, 1400-1403)

And while I was a woman before, **de fait** I am a man, I do not lie.

- (44) Il revenge **de fait** les femmes, en fait, en dit et en diffames (ibid.)

He takes revenge **de fait** on women, by acts, by words and by vile abuse.

- (45) [...] garder et faire raison et justice à tous et en tous cas, sanz y souffrir, ou faire aucunes pilleries ou roberies, ne proceder aucunement **par voie de fait** (Trés. Reth. S.L., t. 2, 1391, 368).

[...] to act rightly and justly towards everyone and in all cases, without suffering, nor plundering or robbing, nor proceeding **by any act of violence**.

- (46) Dient avec ce, ladite Ameline qui parle, que, **de fait de marchandise** de leurdit mestier, elle a le plus garde et gouverne, parce que elle est et demeure le plus à l'ostel de son amy et mary (DMF, *Reg. Crim. Chât.*, I, 1389-1392, 159).

They hereby confirm that the named Ameline who is speaking, in view of the trade of their named occupation, is the most concerned and has the greatest authority, since she resides and stays most in the house of her friend and husband.

In example (43), *de fait* occurs in a contrastive context. The claim ‘de fait home suis’ (‘in reality (now) I am a man’) is contrasted to ‘jadis fus femme’ (‘formerly I was a woman’), and the speaker adds that he is not lying, thus emphasising the truth of the utterance. Example (44) is an extract from *The Book of the City of Ladies* by Christine de Pisan. In her work de Pisan describes how she felt hurt after having read the work of a certain Mathéolus who offends women and considers them sinful.

As in the earliest stages of the development of English *in fact*, *de fait* is initially frequently contrasted to things that are less concrete, as for instance in the phrases *de fait, de parole et de semblant* or *de cœur, de pensée et de fait* (example (47)). From 1549 onwards, *de fait* increasingly occurs in utterance-initial position, with a wider – sentential – scope (examples (48) and (49)). It is also in this period that *de fait* becomes extremely popular. The original meaning of *de fait* (i.e. a confirming ‘en effet, effectivement’, cf. ‘indeed’), however, remains the same, also when used in initial position. Whereas *en fait* could assume a strengthening function and a contrastive meaning, *de fait* had a clear confirmative value. In present-day use, however, *de fait* can, on rare occasions, appear with a contrastive value (‘mais de fait’), probably under the influence of *en fait* (cf Willems and D’Hondt 2009).

- (47) Si suis desert, despointé et deffait **De pensee, de parole et de fait**, De los, de joye et de tout ce qui fait Cuer en jennesse [...] (DMF, CHART., Compl. 1424, 322).

If I am ruined and deprived in thoughts, in words and **de fait**, of praise, of joy and of anything that gives courage to youth [...]

- (48) Certes, il faut bien que cela surmonte tout le firmament. Et **de fait**, quiconque nie que la regeneration ne soit une oeuvre de Dieu supernaturelle, non seulement se monstre profane, mais renonce ouvertement la foy chrestienne (Frantext, Calvin, Jean, *Advertissement contre l’astrologie judiciaire*: 1549)

Of course, it is necessary that that transcends the entire universe. And **de fait**, whoever denies that regeneration is the supernatural work of God's hand, not only shows himself profane, but also renounces openly the Christian faith.

- (49) [...] donna par fantaisie plus de cent coups de dague à l'acheveur; et luy dura la nuict plus de mil ans qu'il n'estoit desjà après ses vengeances. Et, **de fait**, la première chose qu'il fit quand il fut levé, ce fut d'aller à ce sire André, auquel il dit mille outrages, le menassant qu'il le feroit repentir du meschant (Frantext, Des Périers, Bonaventure, *Les Nouvelles récréations et joyeux devis de feu*: 1558)

[...] in his imagination he struck the attacker more than a hundred times with his dagger, and for him the night lasted more than a thousand years because he had to wait for his vengeance. And, **de fait**, the first thing he did when he woke up, was go to this Lord André, to whom he addressed a thousand insults, threatening that he would make him pay for the evil done.

Especially in the period 1650-1800, which is a period of decreased frequency (see Table 7), *de fait* is mostly used either as a nominal complement (e.g. in *des convictions de fait* (factual convictions), *des preuves de fait* (factual proofs), *une tyrannie de fait* (factual tyranny) (Dutch translation = 'feitelijk'), or as a verbal complement (e.g. in *être de fait* (to actually be) , *exister de fait* (to actually exist), *dérober de fait* (to actually steal), *renoncer de fait* (to actually renounce) or *préparer de fait* (to actually prepare)). In both cases the meaning of *de fait* remains very factual ('in the facts, in reality, factually'). Thus, while *de fait* developed an adverbial use very early – viz. one that stands apart from its preceding complement uses – with the meaning 'in reality, concretely', this meaning has stayed the same throughout its historical development. In present-day discourse, *de fait* is still frequently found in utterance-initial position with sentential scope, but the form itself has decreased in frequency from 1600 onwards (Table 7).

#### 4.4. The semantic-pragmatic development of *en fait*

In terms of relative frequencies, *en fait* and *de fait* undergo reverse evolutions after 1600. Whereas *de fait* decreases in frequency from 1600 onwards, the use of *en fait* increases significantly (Table 7). In present-day discourse, *en fait* is the most frequent form of the three French cognates. *De fait* was the first to develop an adverbial use (c. 1400). Although *en fait* developed into an adverbial much later than *de fait*, it has gone further in its pragmatic development. *En fait* also started its development as a discourse marker surprisingly late

compared to English *in fact* but there are recent signs that it may be catching up with its English equivalent. What is more, specifically in spoken language, *en fait* no longer seems to fulfil any distinct discursive functions.

Before 1500, *en fait* only occurs in the frame of a prepositional phrase (e.g. examples (50) and (51)), where (*en*) *fait* is contrasted to references to what is ‘merely’ said, thought, or pretended (cf. the phrases *en faits et en dits*; *en fait et en manière*; *en penser, en parler, et en fait*).

(50) Et donquez quant les gens se descordent **en fait** de ce qu’ils disent. (DMF: 1370)

And thus, when people differ **en fait** from what they say (‘when they differ in acts and words’)

(51) Et sommes faulx, Desnaturez, vilains et desloyaulx Desvergondez, mauvais et bestiaulx **S' en fait** n'en dit nous pourchassons leurs maulx. (DMF: 1412-1413)

And we are false, corrupt, wicked and disloyal, shameless, bad and brutal if we do not pursue their evil deeds either **en fait** or in words.

Between 1500 and 1700 *en fait* is mainly used in an embedded context (‘*en fait de* + Noun’), for instance in *en fait de penitence* (concerning penitence), *en fait d’amour* (concerning love) or *en fait de mœurs* (concerning morals/habits) (‘concerning’, ‘en ce qui concerne...’), or in the context of the verbs *poser en fait* or *mettre en fait* (i.e. prove, propose as being true, lay down as a fact). The frame ‘*en fait + de + noun*’ becomes even more frequent between 1800 and 1850 (see Table 8 and Figure 2) but is now generally replaced by ‘en ce qui concerne’. The phrases *mettre en fait* and *mettre en question* (‘to call into question’) are also used frequently until 1850 but are no longer used in present-day discourse.

INSERT TABLE 8 ABOUT HERE

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

It is not until 1855 that *en fait* starts appearing as a separate unit (‘in reality’), either with a contrastive meaning (example (52)) or with a strengthening meaning of elaboration (example (53)). In example (52) there is a sudden twist in the speaker’s words, indicated by *mais*. She

contradicts her previous rather harsh words by searching for fine qualities of the person being described. In example (53), *en fait* is, on the contrary, introduced by *et*. Here *en fait* has a strengthening function: the speaker emphasizes the unexpected character of the event.

- (52) Enfin, à l'exception de deux ou trois paysans dont il avait sauvé la vie et refusé l'argent selon sa coutume, il n'y eut guère que moi au monde qui pleurai le grand homme, et encore dus-je m'en cacher pour n'être pas raillée et pour ne pas blesser ceux qu'il avait trop cruellement blessés. Mais, **en fait**, il emportait avec lui dans le néant des choses finies toute une notable portion de ma vie, tous mes souvenirs d'enfance, agréables et tristes, tout le stimulant, tantôt fâcheux, tantôt bienfaisant, de mon développement intellectuel. (Frantext, G.Sand, *Histoire de ma vie*, 1855)

Well, except for the two or three peasants whose life he had saved and whose money he refused, as was his custom, there was scarcely anyone but me who mourned for the great man, and still I had to hide it in order not to be mocked and not to hurt those whom he had hurt too cruelly. But **en fait** he carried with him in the emptiness of finite things an important part of my life, all my childhood memories, pleasant as well as sad, the whole stimulus, sometimes bad, sometimes beneficial, of my intellectual development.

- (53) Entre tous ceux de sa classe, elle était peut-être la personne qui s'attendît le moins à être frappée dans cette grande catastrophe; et, **en fait**, en quoi sa conscience pouvait-elle l'avertir qu'elle avait mérité collectivement de subir un châtement social? (Frantext; *ibidem*)

Among her classmates, she was perhaps the person who least expected to be struck by that huge catastrophe; and **en fait**, how could her consciousness have warned her that she had collectively deserved to suffer social chastisement?

From 1800 onwards, *en fait* undergoes an increase in frequency, as well as in pragmatic meaning. This development has gone further, as shown by the fact that the large majority of the 1067 occurrences of *en fait* in the present-day spoken data from *Corpaix* (cf. Table 1) can be labelled pragmatic. Earlier non-pragmatic uses of *en fait* are now no longer used and have been replaced by other forms on the clause and phrase levels. As indicated by the translation data from the *Namur Corpus* (cf. Table 3; section 3.5), the present-day pragmatic uses of *en fait* show semantic-pragmatic similarities with the English forms *in fact* and *actually* (cf. also Defour et al. forthcoming).

#### 4.5. *The semantic-pragmatic development of au fait*

In comparison with *en fait* and *de fait*, the form *au fait* differs somewhat in a number of respects (See Willems and D'Hondt (2009) for a more detailed analysis of *au fait*). *Au fait* is the least frequent form of the three cognates, already from its earliest stages of development (except for the period 1700-1900, where it was more frequent than *de fait*) (see Table 7 above), and does not occur as a separate unit until the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Before that date, *au fait* can be found in embedded contexts such as *mettre au fait* ('to inform'), *venir au fait* or *aller au fait* ('come to the point, come to the heart of the matter'), or in collocation with an imperative form in *(venons) au fait!* ('let's come to the point'). In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, after ellipsis of the verbal complement, *au fait* acquires a more independent adverbial use with the meaning 'in reality' in utterance-initial position which becomes increasingly frequent. This discursive use is often contrastive (cf. 'mais au fait') - as illustrated in example (54) where *mais au fait* points out a contrast between what is said and what is actually the case (the man is believed to possess a lot more money than he actually does).

- (54) [C]royez-vous que cet homme ait de revenu? Mais, dis-je, il passe pour avoir quatre-vingt mille livres de rente. Il le croit aussi, reprit le notaire, **mais au fait** il en a quatorze. (Frantext, Mirabeau marquis Victor de, *L'Ami des hommes ou Traité de la population*: 1755)

Do you think that that man has an income? But, said I, he is supposed to have an allowance of eighty thousand pounds. He also believes it, the solicitor resumed, but **au fait**, he has only fourteen pounds.

Around the same time *au fait* becomes increasingly frequent in questions (as shown in Table 9), which is its main context in present-day discourse (e.g. example (55)).

INSERT TABLE 9 ABOUT HERE

- (55) **Au fait** quand il ne pourra plus douter de sa déconvenue, quand elle sera bien publique et bien notoire, que nous importe qu'il se venge, pourvu qu'il ne se console pas? (Frantext, Choderlos de Laclos Pierre, *Les Liaisons dangereuses*: 1782)

**Au fait** when he can no longer doubt his misfortune, when it becomes public and well-known, what will it matter if he avenges himself, as long as he does not find any consolation ?

This discursive use of *au fait* becomes the predominant one in the final half of the nineteenth century, while the previously more frequent phrases *mettre au fait* and *être au fait* are gradually replaced by the phrases *mettre au courant* and *être au courant*.

### 5. *Summing up and conclusions*

The connection between English *in fact* and its French cognates *en fait* and *de fait* is supported by the cross-linguistic equivalents found in the translation data from the *Namur Corpus*. *In fact* is most frequently translated by *en fait*, and to a lesser extent by *de fait*, while both *en fait* and *de fait* are most frequently translated by *in fact*. *Au fait* on the other hand is never translated by *in fact*. The more pragmatic uses of *au fait* receive original contextual translations such as ‘oh, by the way’.

Not only in its translations, but also in its semantic-pragmatic development, *au fait* stands apart from the other three forms. Throughout its entire development, *au fait* is the least frequent form (except for the period 1700-1900, where it was more frequent than *de fait*), but also the last to develop an adverbial use. Nevertheless, *au fait* is increasingly placed in utterance-initial position from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, and develops a discursive use which becomes predominant from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. In present-day discourse, many of the older uses of *au fait* in embedded contexts have been replaced by other structures. *Au fait* is now mainly used in questions. Summing up, we can say that the main semantic step in the case of *au fait* was its (late) development into a marker of a topic shift, calling the hearer’s attention to the upcoming question. The predilection of *au fait* for dialogues and plays might explain its preference for questions. Furthermore, *au fait* originally occurred either with an infinitive or with an imperative. Later on, the infinitive disappeared in favour of the imperative. The imperative as the prototypical mood for expressing requests has a strong intersubjective function, addressing the hearer directly with a range of pragmatic overtones. Afterwards, ellipsis of the verb took place and *au fait* started functioning autonomously. In a last stage, *au fait* was integrated in the following sentence, which was often a question, hence its pragmatic value. Because of this deconstruction process, *au fait* can be considered a clear case of successive recategorizations, which enabled *au fait* to also assume pragmatic uses.

In contrast, *de fait* was the earliest of the French forms to develop an adverbial meaning (c. 1400) but its factual meaning ('in the facts, in reality') has remained practically unchanged. However, this 'etymological' meaning increasingly appeared with pragmatic uses expressing a confirmative or – to a lesser degree – a contrastive value. That is why *de fait* can be considered an instance of pragmaticalization. Its earlier uses as a nominal or verbal complement (e.g. *preuves de fait*; *être de fait*) have been complemented by an increasingly more frequent utterance-initial position, in which it had a broader scope. The general frequency of *de fait* decreases from 1600 onwards, which is, interestingly, the point when the (pragmatic) use of *en fait* starts to increase. They clearly were competitors, having practically the same meaning.

*En fait*, which is the most frequent of the French cognates in present-day use, initially develops from an embedded use ('en fait de + noun') towards an independent use (c. mid 19<sup>th</sup> century) with pragmatic meanings (i.e. either with a contrastive, connective use or a strengthening, elaborating meaning). As the frequency and pragmatic character of *en fait* becomes more pronounced, the form's earlier non-pragmatic uses are gradually replaced by other forms on the clause and phrase levels. Its immediate English counterpart *in fact*, which has broadly developed the same meanings, appears to have changed much faster. *In fact* develops an adverbial use in the (second half of the) 16<sup>th</sup> century, evolves into an utterance-initial, discursive adverbial with evidential and contrastive properties in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and into an additive, more pragmatic marker after the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. *En fait* develops similar uses as *in fact* but does so much later (second half 19<sup>th</sup> century). A possible explanation for the later development of *en fait* can be found in its coexistence with *de fait*. However, nowadays *en fait* seems to have become even more pragmatic than its English counterpart.

What we see then is firstly that all four forms, the English as well as the three French combinations of 'preposition + noun' have developed more subjective meanings. Certainly, subjectification has taken place in all cases. Further, they have all developed uses which have moved them towards initial sentence position where they have a broader scope. This is one criterion of pragmaticalization. On the other hand, there are clear shifts in frequencies, differences in timing, and differences in the extent to which the earlier patterns and meanings are still around. It is clear that when forms are in competition, as in French, overlap is reduced to a minimum and division of labour takes place. On the other hand the availability in English of *actually*, which has uses very close to *in fact*, means that French *en fait* apparently has to do 'more work' than English *in fact*.

It is especially interesting to find that, whereas French *en fait* and English *in fact* are very similar, the three French forms show significant differences in their developments. *En fait* and *de fait* have both been subject to pragmaticalization but the former has gone a lot further in its development. *Au fait*, on the other hand, has followed a different pragmaticalization path and took on pragmatic uses in a later stage.

The results from the cross-linguistic historical semantic-pragmatic analysis of the cognate forms offer food for thought, raising questions regarding syntagmatic variability and its influence on the processes of grammaticalization and pragmaticalization. The empirical facts established in this article also call for further research into the history of comparable cognates as well as into more adverbs in the semantic field.

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**Corpora used for the present study**

*Base Textuelle du Moyen Français (1330-1502) and Dictionnaire du Moyen Français*, laboratoire (BTMF / DMF) ATILF (Analyse et Traitement Informatique de la Langue Française), Nancy: France. <<http://www.atilf.fr/dmf/>> (21/12/2009)

*A Corpus of English Dialogues 1560-1760 (CED)*. 2006. Compiled under the supervision of Merja Kytö (Uppsala University) & Jonathan Culpeper (Lancaster University). <<http://www.engelska.uu.se/corpus.html>> (21/12/2009).

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*The Helsinki Corpus of English Texts (1991) (HC)*. Department of English, University of Helsinki. Compiled by Matti Rissanen (Project leader), Merja Kytö (Project secretary); Leena Kahlas-Tarkka, Matti Kilpiö (Old English); Saara Nevanlinna, Irma Taavitsainen (Middle English); Terttu Nevalainen, Helena Raumolin-Brunberg (Early Modern English).

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For information on the *Namur Corpus*: [http://www.kuleuven-kortrijk.be/~hpauluss/NC/NC\\_descr.html](http://www.kuleuven-kortrijk.be/~hpauluss/NC/NC_descr.html) (21/12/2009)

	En fait	De fait	Au fait
Le Monde	237 (2 months) (8.6)	243 (4 months) (4.3)	50 (24 months) (0.1)
Corpaix	1067 (62.7)	4 (0.2)	7 (0.4)

**Table 1:** Frequencies of *en fait*, *de fait* and *au fait* per corpus (Normalized frequencies per 100,000 words between brackets)

	Initial position	Total occurrences of <i>de fait</i>	%
Le Monde	181	243	74,48
Corpaix	3	4	75

**Table 2:** Utterance-initial occurrences of *de fait*: actual figures and total occurrences of *de fait* per corpus

In fact		En fait	
<b>En fait</b>	54	<b>In fact</b>	53
zero	22	zero	39
<i>en effet</i>	12	<b>actually</b>	29
<i>en réalité</i>	10	<i>really</i>	18
other	9	other	12
<i>d'ailleurs</i>	8	<i>indeed</i>	8
<i>effectivement</i>	8	<i>well, (ehm...); ah well</i>	3
<b>de fait</b>	7	<i>the point is that...</i>	2
<i>même</i>	4	<i>the truth is...; or rather; the fact is that...; if anything; but perhaps;...</i> <sup>5</sup>	15
<i>au fond; également; enfin; réellement</i>	8	Invalid / fragment missing	9
<i>d'abord; dès lors; justement; par conséquent; pourtant; précisément; vraiment; ce qui m'importe surtout...</i> <sup>6</sup>	8	TOTAL	188
Invalid / fragment missing	13		
TOTAL	163		

**Table 3:** Most frequently occurring correspondences of the forms *in fact* and *en fait* (Namur Corpus)

<sup>5</sup> The forms mentioned here are singletons – the full list of forms that occur only once as correspondences for *en fait* includes the following forms: *as for; as it happens; at all; at least; but perhaps; de facto; effectively; if anything; in effect; in the event; or rather; quite; so; the fact is that...; the truth is.*

<sup>6</sup> The eight correspondences mentioned here are singletons and only occur once.

De fait		Au fait	
<b>In fact</b>	7	other: embedded forms	13
other: embedded forms	4	other	4
zero	2	<i>oh, by the way</i>	1
<i>as a matter of fact</i>	1	<i>I have just realized that...</i>	1
<i>by definition</i>	1	<b>TOTAL</b>	19
<i>indeed</i>	1		
<i>it was true that...</i>	1		
<i>supposedly</i>	1		
<i>the fact that...</i>	1		
<b>TOTAL</b>	19		

**Table 4:** Most frequently occurring correspondences of *de fait* and *au fait* (Namur Corpus)

	HC	CED	Total 'in fact'	Total 'fact'
Middle English (1150-1500)	0 (0.0)	(not applicable)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Early Modern English (1500-1640)	0 (0.0)	3 (0.74)	3 (0.38)	30 (3.8)
Modern English (1640-1760)	1 (0.58)	4 (0.51)	5 (0.53)	118 (12.4)
<b>Total</b>	1 (0.06)	7 (0.6)	8 (0.3)	148 (5.4)

**Table 5:** Frequencies of *in fact* per period: HC and CED (Normalized frequencies per 100,000 words between brackets)

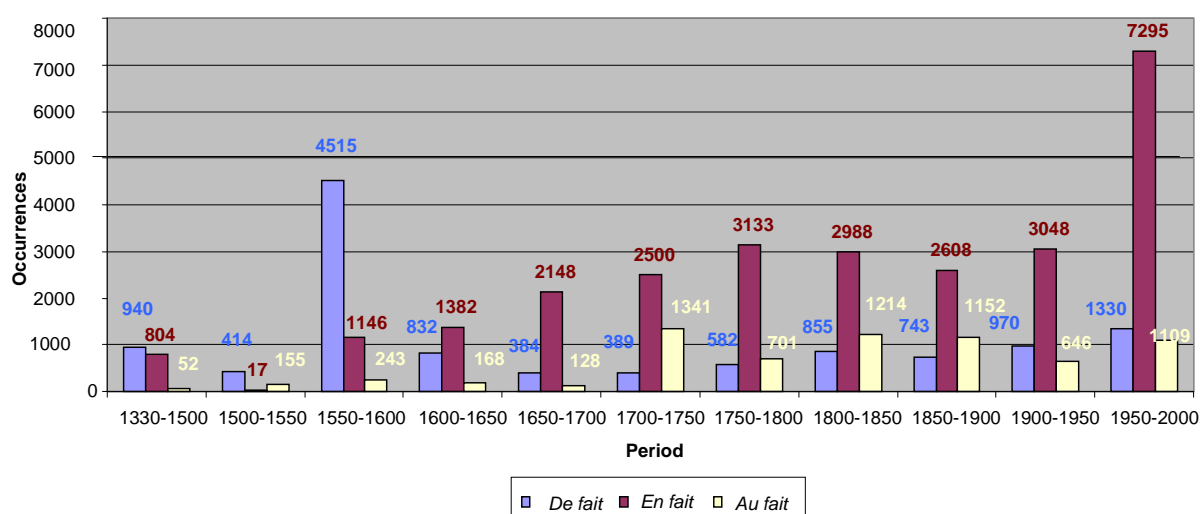
	Total 'in fact'	Total 'fact'
Clmetev 1 (1710-1780)	77 (2.53)	259 (8.5)
Clmetev 2 (1780-1850)	420 (7.34)	1122 (19.6)
Clmetev 3 (1850-1920)	703 (11.24)	2244 (35.9)
<b>Total</b>	1200 (8.01)	3625 (24.2)

**Table 6:** Frequencies of *in fact* per period: CLMETEV (Normalized frequencies per 100,000 words between brackets)

	De fait	En fait	Au fait
1330-1500	235 (3.40)	201 (2.91)	13 (0.19)
1500-1550	24 (1.65)	1 (0.07)	9 (0.62)
1550-1600	465 (9.64)	118 (2.45)	25 (0.52)
1600-1650	183 (1.83)	304 (3.04)	37 (0.37)

1650-1700	138 (1.14)	771 (6.37)	46 (0.38)
1700-1750	81 (0.64)	520 (4.13)	279 (2.21)
1750-1800	206 (0.89)	1109 (4.79)	248 (1.07)
1800-1850	412 (1.20)	1440 (4.20)	585 (1.70)
1850-1900	381 (1.00)	1338 (3.53)	591(1.56)
1900-1950	908 (1.72)	2853 (5.40)	605 (1.15)
1950-2000	988 (1.95)	5420 (10.72)	824 (1.63)

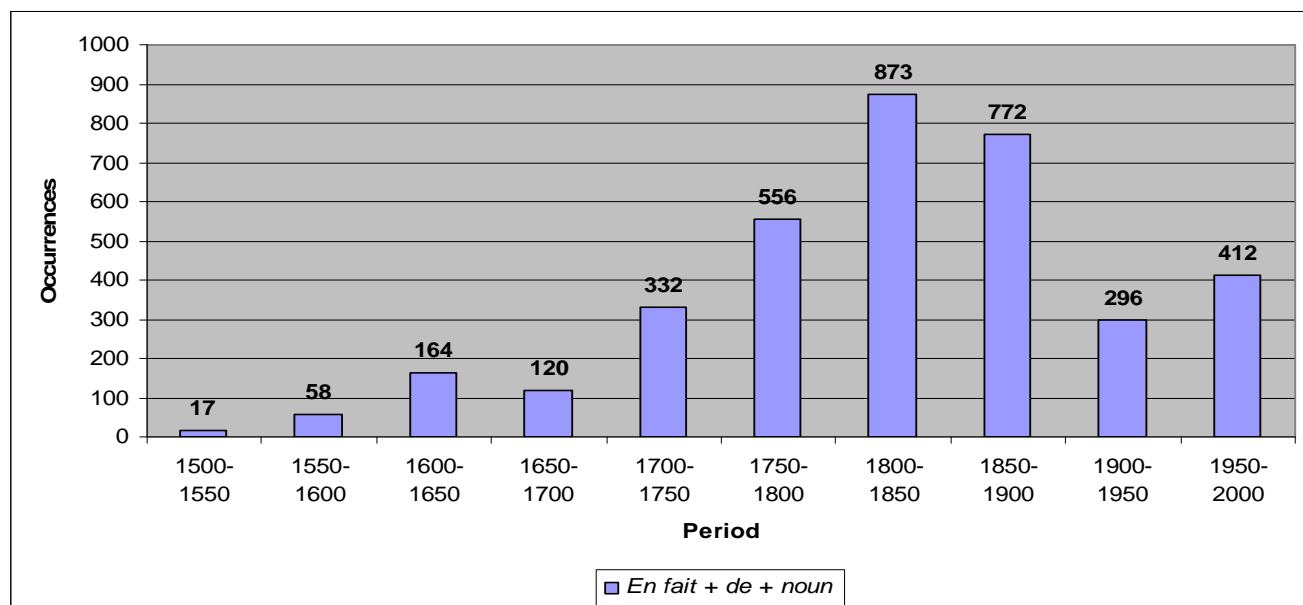
**Table 7:** Actual frequencies of *de fait*, *en fait* and *au fait* between 1330 and 2000 (*DMF*, *Frantext*) (Normalized frequencies per 100,000 words between brackets)



**Figure 1:** Number of occurrences of *de fait*, *en fait* and *au fait* between 1330-2000 (*DMF*, *Frantext*) per 100,000 words

	En fait + de + noun
1500-1550	1 (0.07)
1550-1600	6 (0.12)
1600-1650	36 (0.36)
1650-1700	43 (0.36)
1700-1750	69 (0.55)
1750-1800	197 (0.85)
1800-1850	421 (1.23)
1850-1900	396 (1.04)
1900-1950	277 (0.52)
1950-2000	306 (0.61)

**Table 8:** Actual frequencies of ‘*en fait + de + noun*’ between 1500 and 2000 (*Frantext*) (Normalized frequencies per 100,000 words between brackets)



**Figure 2:** Number of occurrences of *en fait + de + noun* between 1500-2000 (*Frantext*) per 100,000 words

TOTAL NUMBER OF OCC. PER PERIOD	au fait + question	%
1330-1500 (13 occ)	0	/
1500-1700 (117 occ)	0	/
1700-1750 (279 occ)	0	/
1750-1800 (244 occ)	8	3.28 %
1800-1850 (250 occ)	14	5.6 %
1850-1900 (250 occ)	27	10.8 %
Oct 2004- Sep 2006 (50 occ)	40	80 %

**Table 9:** Actual frequencies of *au fait + question* between 1330 and 2006 (*DMF, Frantext, Le Monde*)