

Agentivity and suffix selection

The process of deriving nouns from verbal stems is a fairly regular process crosslinguistically and one which has been argued to involve argument structure processes (e.g., Grimshaw 1990). In particular, there has been much discussion of the licensing of syntactic arguments of the deverbal noun (e.g., Laczkó 1999, Markantonatou 1995) and the effect of the nominalizing suffix on the argument structure of the base verb. However, there has been rather less work on the more subtle issue of which verbal stems are compatible with which nominalizing suffixes and why (that is, research which goes beyond basic compatibility issues like unaccusativity vs. unergativity/transitivity).

This talk focusses on the selection of the French nominalizing suffixes *-age* and *-(e)ment*. In French, there are a variety of suffixes deriving nouns: *-ade*, *-age*, *-at*, *-ation*, *-ée*, *-erie*, *-(e)ment*, *-ure*, etc. Among these *-age* and *-(e)ment* are particularly interesting in that they yield more than 400 pairs of nominalizations derived from the same verbal base.

Several authors have proposed suffix selection accounts claiming that *-age* attaches to transitive verbs and *-(e)ment* is added to intransitive, reflexive or passivized verbs (Dubois 1962, Trésor 1971f, Lüdtke 1978). I argue that this rough understanding of (ultimately) argument structure properties is not sufficient for an account of these nominalization patterns. Rather, the lexical argument structure properties of the verbal bases must be analyzed more precisely in terms of Dowty's (1991) notion of Proto-Roles.

An extensive examination of corpora reveals that the subject-NP of the verbal base with which *-age* combines must possess more proto-agent entailments (Dowty 1991) than the verbal base which combines with *-(e)ment*. This perspective not only predicts adequately the selection for competing forms as in (1) to (6), but it also holds for cases which must be treated as exceptions under the previous approaches. For example, in (7) *-age* combines with an intransitive verb despite the claim that it limits itself to transitives. Conversely, in (8) *-(e)ment* combines with a transitive verb, but is supposed to select only intransitives.

The correct analysis for the distribution of *-age* and *-(e)ment* can be formulated nicely via a combination of LFG's mapping theory (Bresnan and Zaenen 1990) with Dowty's (1991) Proto-Role Approach (cf. also Zaenen 1993). (3') and (4') show that the number of proto-agent entailments (a: volition, b: sentience, c: cause, d: movement, e: existence) is important for the choice of *-age* and *-(e)ment* if both can in principle attach to one and the same verbal stem: *-age* is added if all proto-agent entailments are present, *-(e)ment* is attached if there are fewer. Nearly the same holds for the active *gonfler* and the passivized *gonflé* in (5') and (6'). The difference is that the subject of *gonflé* has no agent properties because it is a patient.

In (7') I give an analysis for *furetage*. The argument realized as subject is a proto-agent and therefore *-age* is chosen although *fureter* is intransitive. The table in (8') for *essoufflement* shows that the subject has only two proto-agent entailments favoring the selection of *-(e)ment*.

Lexical Mapping Theory ensures the correct mapping from arguments to grammatical functions, including cases of reflexivization, passivization, etc. This is not explicitly part of Dowty's proposal.

My approach thus presents an alternative analysis to the traditional perspective in that the basic (syntactic) valency of the verb is not solely responsible for the selection of the suffixes. Instead, the degree of agentivity of the subject of the base verb drives the combinatory possibilities of verbal stem and nominalizing suffix. This perspective allows an analysis which makes appropriate predictions for all cases including those that are exceptions for the traditional syntactic account.

Examples

(1)	battage 'threshing (of corn)'	< battre _{tr} 'beat, thresh'		
(2)	battement 'beating (of the heart)'	< battre _{intr} 'beat'		
(3)	étirage 'stretching (of metal)'	< étirer _{tr} 'stretch'		
(4)	étirement 'stretching of oneself'	< étirer _{refl} 'stretch'		
(5)	gonflage 'pumping (of a tire)'	< gonfler _{tr} 'pump up'		
(6)	gonflement 'filling (of a tire)'	< gonflé _{pass} 'pumped up'		
(7)	furetage 'searching'	< fureter _{intr} 'search'		
(8)	essoufflement 'losing of one's wind'	< essouffler _{tr} 'to lose one's wind'		
(3')	Max étire le métal. 'Max stretches the metal.'			
	verb	agent-entailments of SUBJ	suffix	derivation
	étirer <SUBJ OBJ>	a, b, c, d, e	-age	étirage
(4')	Max s'étire en baillant. 'Max stretches himself, yawning.'			
	verb	agent-entailments of SUBJ	suffix	derivation
	s'étirer <SUBJ>	a, b, e	-(e)ment	étirement
(5')	Max gonfle le pneu. 'Max pumps the tire up.'			
	verb	agent-entailments of SUBJ	suffix	derivation
	gonfler <SUBJ OBJ>	a, b, c, d, e	-age	gonflage
(6')	Le pneu est gonflé. 'The tire is pumped up.'			
	verb	agent-entailments of SUBJ	suffix	derivation
	gonflé <SUBJ>	–	-(e)ment	gonflement
(7')	Max a fureté dans tous les coins. 'Max has searched in all corners.'			
	verb	agent-entailments of SUBJ	suffix	derivation
	fureter <SUBJ>	a, b, c, d, e	-age	furetage
(8')	Les efforts l'ont essoufflé. 'The efforts made him lose his wind.'			
	verb	agent-entailments of SUBJ	suffix	derivation
	essouffler <SUBJ OBJ>	c, e	-(e)ment	essoufflement

References

- Bresnan, J. (2001): *Lexical-Functional Syntax*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell.
- Bresnan, J. & Zaenen, A. (1990): Deep unaccusativity in LFG, in: Dziwirek, K., Farrell, P. & Bikandi, E. M. (eds): *Grammatical relations: a cross-theoretical perspective*. Stanford, CA: CSLI, 45-58.
- Dowty, D. (1991): Thematic Proto-Roles and Argument Selection, in: *Language* 67, 3, 547-619.
- Dubois, J. (1962): *Etude sur la dérivation suffixale en Français moderne et contemporain*. Paris: Larousse.
- Grimshaw, J. (1990): *Argument Structure*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Laczko, T. (2000): Derived Nominals, Possessors, and Lexical Mapping Theory, in: Butt, M. & King, T. H. (eds.): *Argument Realization*. Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications, 189-227.
- Lüdtke, J. (1978): *Prädikative Nominalisierungen mit Suffixen im Französischen, Katalanischen und Spanischen*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- Markantonatou, S. (1995): Modern Greek Deverbal Nominals: an LMT Approach, in: *Journal of Linguistics* 31, 267-299.
- Trésor de la langue française (1971ff). Paris: Éditions du CNRS.
- Zaenen, A. (1993): Integrating Syntax and Lexical Semantics, in: Pustejovsky, J. (ed.): *Semantics and the Lexicon*. Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 129-161.