Stage level and Individual level Readings of Quality Nouns
Deadjectival Suffixes as Aspectual Disambiguators
Fabienne Martin, Stuttgart University

1. Introduction

-Ité, -isme, -esse, ence/ance, -(er)ie, -ise, -itude and *-ion* are among the suffixes used to derive Quality Nouns (QNs) from evaluative adjectives (*stupid, intelligent,* etc.) in French. Although several in-depth studies have been recently devoted to some of them (cf. e.g. Kerleroux (2008) on *-ion*, Koehl (2009) on *-ité* or Roché (2010) on *-isme*), their morpho-semantic differences have not been investigated since Bécherel (1981, 1976) in French (but see Daude (2002) for Latin and Rainer (1988, 1989) for Italian). Our goal is to compare the aspectual polysemy of the adjectival root and the derived noun. Our main hypothesis is that some of the deadjectival suffixes at least are endowed with some aspectual value, by which they contribute to disambiguate the root on the aspectual side. Let us immediately note that this hypothesis contributes to explain the existence of several doublets of QNs derived from the same root, cf. (1). This would have been *a priori* problematic for the Blocking Effect (Aronoff (1976)) if both forms were functionally identical.

(1) a. coquett**erie**/coquett**isme** (>*coquet* 'coquettish')
     b. drôl**erie**/drôl**isme** (>*drôle* 'funny, weird')
     c. fanfaronn**erie**/fanfaronn**isme** (>*fanfaron* 'swanky')
     d. crapul**erie**/crapul**isme** (>*crapule* 'scoundrel')
     e. crétin**erie**/crétin**isme** (>*crétin* 'moron')
     e. importun**ité**/importun**isme** (>*importun* 'out of place')

The aspectual value of >150 deadjectival nouns are analysed for the study. The adjectives chosen are the first 130 ones in a list of evaluative adjectives ordered alphabetically. In relevant cases, neologisms were identified on the Internet. The created list of 150 QNs includes 45 Ns in *-ité*, 33 Ns in *-ence/ance*, 18 in *-ion*, 17 in *-erie*, 15 in *-isme*, 8 in *-esse*, 7 in *-ie*, 5 in *-ise* and 3 in *-itude*. As expected (cf. Koehl (2009)), *-ité* is the most represented deadjectival suffix.

2. Aspectual polysemy of evaluative adjectives

It is now well-known that *stupid* predicates are aspectually polysemous; besides their use as *individual level predicates* (ILPS), they can be coerced in stage-level ones (SLPS) in some contexts or constructions (cf. Fernald (1999), Barker (2002), Geuder (2000)), cf. e.g. (2).

(2) a. Pierre a joué avec la sourdine. Il a été intelligent./*Peter played with the soft pedal. He was clever*.
     b. Feynman était stupide de danser sur la table./*Feynman was stupid to dance on the table.*

Besides, it has been several times independently argued that in some of their SLP uses, *stupid* predicates tend to presuppose the occurrence of an action through which the quality is concretely manifested (cf. Barker (2002), Geuder (2000)). For instance, (2b) presupposes that Feynman danced on the table.

3. Aspectual polysemy of derived QNs

The aspectual polysemy of derived *stupidity* nouns have been comparatively less investigated. Daude (2002) for Latin and Meunier (1981), Beauseroy and Knittel (2007) or Beauseroy (2009) for French distinguish for QNs (i) a (stative) IL reading under which the QN denotes a quality [1] , (ii) an event reading (or e-reading), (iii) a metonymic object-reading (o-reading).

---

[1] Some authors have argued that NPs like *Peter's intelligence* or *Mary's happiness* denote *tropes*, cf. e.g. Moltmann (2004) and Villalba (2009). A problem with this view is that according to the definition of tropes endorsed by these authors, tropes can be placed on temporal and spatial axes. Villalba's example (3a) supports this view for *happiness*. However, at least for French, this type of data can only be extended to a subset of QNs, cf. (3b) vs (3c). I see several solutions to this problem. Firstly, one can distinguish, among QNs, those who denote tropes (compatible with temporal predicates), and those who do not. Secondly, one could give up the idea that tropes are concrete entities (cf. e.g. Campbell (1990) for such a view), and admit that all QNs uniformly denote tropes. In the latter case, one should still explain why some QNs only are compatible with the type of predicates illustrated in (3).

(3) a. John's happiness lasted only one year.
     b. *L'intelligence de John a duré toute sa vie./* John's intelligence lasted his whole life.
     c. La maladresse de John a duré toute sa vie/John's clumsiness lasted his whole life.

According to our data, the acceptability of QNs with spatio-temporal predicates seems related to the availability of the eventive reading (as described *infra*). We will not adopt a particular view for now and simply assume that QNs denote (particular instances of) qualities/dispositions.

	-erie	-ie	-esse	-ise	-ité	-ance	-isme
[+EV] QNs	100%	71%	62%	40%	25 %	25 %	0%
[+SL] QNs	100%	100%	88%	100 %	68 %	66%	26%

Table 1: Aspectual readings of QNs classified according to the deadjectival suffix used

(4) a. *Pierre est d'une grande gentillesse.* (IL-reading)
  Pierre is of-a great kindness
  'Pierre is very kind'
  b. *Pierre a fait des gentillesses.* (e-reading)
  Pierre did sm kindness-PL.

'Pierre did some acts of kindness'

c. *Pierre a apporté des petites douceurs.* (o-reading)
  Pierre brought some little delicacies

'Pierre brought some little delicacies'

This typology reflects the description of dictionaries like the *Trésor de la langue française*. The indicators for the e-readings are among others the optionality of argument structure, cf. (8a)-(8b), the verbs *faire* or *commettre* 'commit', cf. (4b) and (8a), and the verb *avoir lieu* 'take place', cf. (8b). [2]

(8) a. *La chatte a commis **une méchanceté**.*
  The cat committed a malicious-TÉ (=malicious act).
  b. ***Ces bêtises** ont eu lieu dans la cuisine.*

These stupid-ISE-s (=stupid acts) took place in the kitchen.

3.1. A temporary stative reading

Differentiating three readings is not enough though, since among the [−EV] QNs like *discrétion* or *intelligence* incompatible with the e-reading indicators *faire/commettre* or *avoir lieu* (cf. (9)), some like *discrétion* are still acceptable in environments which force them to denote a temporary eventuality (i.e. are [+SL]). Among the environments imposing the SL reading to the QN are the demonstrative following an event description in (10) and the temporary adverbial in (11).

(9) **Pierre a fait une discrétion/intelligence.*
  Pierre did a discrete-ION/intellig-ENCE. (intended: discrete/intelligent act)

(10) *Pierre n'a rien dit au comité. Cette discrétion/*cette intelligence m'a étonné.*
  Pierre didn't say anything to the committee. This discrete-ION/this intellig-ENCE surprised me.

(11) *Sa discrétion/# son intelligence de ce matin m'a beaucoup étonné.*
  His discrete-ION/intellig-ENCE of this morning surprised me a lot.

Given these facts, I will assume the existence of two temporary (stage-level) readings for QNs, an eventive one (the e-reading), cf. (9), and a stative one (the SL s-reading), cf. (10)-(11). Under the SL s-reading, QNs describe the quality as temporarily delimited by the act which manifests it. Note that while the adjective *intelligent* has a SL s-reading (cf. (2a)), the derived QN *intelligence* does not (cf. (9)-(11)), but see the comments about (14) below. This supports the hypothesis that the nominalisation process contributes to aspectually disambiguate the base.

3.2. The polysemy of quality nouns and their suffixes

A first indication that deadjectival suffixes play a role in the aspectual interpretation of QNs is that the range of their possible readings significantly varies with the suffix at hand. The first line of Table 1 gives the percentage of [+EV] QNs (QNs which accept the e-reading) for each type of suffixes. The second one gives the percentage of [+SL] QNs, i.e. QNs which accept a (stative or eventive) SL reading.

Although these results should be confirmed on a larger set of QNs and by a larger set of speakers [3] to be fully

2. The interpretation of *beaucoup* 'a lot' also differs when the e-reading is available (cf. e.g. Obenauer (1983) and Doetjes (2002) on the polysemy of *beaucoup*). With [+EV] QNs like *tendresse*, *beaucoup* can have a quantitative reading paraphrasable by *souvent*, cf. (5), hence the possibility to have (6). With [−EV] QNs like *intelligence*, the intensive reading is the only one available, cf. (7). With these nouns, it is impossible to build consistent discourses of the type (6).

(5) *Pierre a fait montre de beaucoup de tendresse.*
  Pierre showed much tenderness.
  i. Pierre showed tenderness many times.
  ii. Pierre showed a great tenderness

(6) *Pierre fait montre de beaucoup de tendresse, mais n'en donne qu'un petit peu à la fois.*

Pierre shows much tenderness, but gives only a bit at once.

(7) *Pierre a fait montre de beaucoup d'intelligence.*
  Pierre showed much intelligence.
  i. #Pierre showed intelligence many times.
  ii. Pierre showed a great intelligence.

Given the difference illustrated through these examples, we disagree with Flaux and Van de Velde (2000) or Beauseroy (2009) according to which the quantity reading of determiners like *beaucoup* is never available with QNs.

3. For most nouns, we used the *TLF*, Frantext and the Internet to check our intuitions of native speaker.

convincing, they still strongly suggest that (i) it is useful to differentiate two types of SL readings as proposed above (stative or eventive), and (ii) it is neither true that permanency is equally exhibited by any type of QNs as suggested by Daude 2002:229 for Latin, nor that all QNs are aspectually underspecified on the lexical level as claimed by Beauseroy 2009:129 for French. The data presented in Table 1 suggest on the contrary that deadjectival suffixes used to form QNs differ from each other by their range of aspectual values. More particularly, *-isme* seems the only suffix to almost univocally convey permanency once attached to QNs (and the related suffix *-iste* also appears to univocally select the IL reading of its root, cf. *infra*). Two additional facts support this claim. First of all, (12a) and (12b) below do not have the same truth conditions: the speaker of (12a) might find that Pierre was an idiot at one occasion only (thanks to the present perfect on *être*), while the one of (12b) seems committed to the belief that Pierre is permanently stupid.[4] The same way, there is no entailment from (13a) to (13b): being one time in favour of X does not entail that I am a X-ist, because 'X-ist' implies that I am permanently in favour of X, hence the oddness of the present perfect in (13b) (which can be accommodated once admitted that Pierre is a versatile person).[5]

(12) a. *Pierre a été crétin. Ca m'a étonné.*
          Pierre was stupid. It surprised me.
      b. *Le crétinisme de Pierre m'a étonné.*
          The stupid-ISME of Pierre surprised me.

(13) a. *Ce matin, Pierre a été favorable à la suspension.*
          This morning, Pierre was in favour of the suspension.
      b. *Ce matin, Pierre a été suspensionniste.*
          This morning, Pierre was suspension-ISTE.

(14) *# Son infantilisme de ce matin m'a étonné.*
       His childish-ISME of this morning surprised me.

Secondly, when *isme*-Ns are combined with temporal punctual adverbials like *ce matin*, instead of denoting a 'temporary disposition' like in (11), they tend to refer to a (possibly permanent) *subkind* of disposition. For instance, (14) does not imply that *x* was temporarily childish, but rather that *x* manifested a subkind of childishness this morning.

3.3. Factors at play for the emergence of the e-reading

The availability of the e-reading depends on several interacting factors of morphological, semantic and pragmatic nature. Firstly, although QNs are derived from an adjectival **root**, the e-reading is almost automatically obtained when the derivational family of the root includes an agentive verb, which could then possibly be the **base** of the derived noun (see Roché (2010) on the distinction between the root and the base of a derived word). For instance, while the adjectival root *extravagant* has the agentive verb *extravaguer* in its derivational family, *exubérant* is only related to the rare and largely unknown verb *exubérer*, which is, besides, unaccusative; as (15) shows, *extravagance* only has an e-reading, although both QNs are built with the same deadjectival suffix.

(15) a. *Pierre a commis une extravagance.*
          Pierre committed an extravag-ANCE (=an extravagant act)
      b. **Pierre a commis une exubérance.*
          Pierre committed an exuber-ANCE.(intended: an exuberant act)

Secondly, when the derivational family of the adjectival root contains no verb, the e-reading is *ceteris paribus* easier to get when the QN denote an 'abnormal', 'salient', 'marked' disposition, cf. the contrasts in (16) below. This seems due to the fact that a disposition is more easily conceived as temporally delimited to an event and gets more easily the cognitive salience of an event when it is *abnormal*.

(16) a. *Pierre a fait/commis une indiscrétion/*une discrétion.*
          Pierre did an indiscrete-ION/discrete-ION (=indiscrete/discrete act)
      b. *Pierre a fait/commis une indélicatesse/#une délicatesse.*
          Pierre did an insensitive-ESSE/sensitive-ESSE (=insensitive/sensitive act)
      b. *Pierre a fait/commis une bêtise/*une intelligence.*
          Pierre did a stupid-ISE/intellig-ENCE (=stupid/intelligent act)

Thirdly, on the relevant e-reading, several QNs behave like *pluralia tantum* (even when they denote 'abnormal' dispositions). For instance, contrary to *bêtise* 'stupidity', *courtoisie* 'courtesy/kindness' only gets the e-reading once pluralised, cf. the contrast in (17).

(17) a. *Pierre lui a fait ?une courtoisie/OK des courtoisies.*
          Pierre committed a courteous-ITÉ/some courteous-ITÉ-s (=a/some courteous act(s))
      b. *Pierre a fait ?une frivolité/OK des frivolités.*
          Pierre committed a frivolous-ITÉ/some frivolous-ITÉ-s (=a/some frivolous act(s))
      c. *Ils ont commis ?une cruauté/OK des cruautés.*
          Pierre committed a crual-ITÉ/some crual-ITÉs (=a/some crual act(s))

---

4. Note that the entailment would go through with a [+SL] noun like *amabilité*, which confirms that no other factor intervenes in the construction we have in (12).

5. Among the three models of *-isme* derivations distinguished by Roché (2010), QNs systematically instantiate Model 3 (the 'be' model), and nouns like *suspensionnisme* 'prosuspension' instantiate Model 1, in which N-*isme* is based on the predicative axiological relation *to be favourable to N* (for instance, *esclavagisme* 'proslavery' is the property of being in favour of slavery).

The fact that plural introduces countability certainly contributes to explain why the plural is sometimes compulsory for the e-reading; events are countable, states are not. But this does not explain in which case exactly it has to be used for the e-reading to be accessible. Again, this varies with the suffix. None of the Ns in *-ance* or *-erie* require the plural to get the e-reading, contra 60% of the Ns in *-esse* or 66% of the Ns in *-ité*. At least for *-erie*, data can be explained by the fact that the suffix is already frequentative/collective by itself (cf. e.g. Dubois (1962), Lieber (2004)).

Interestingly, QNs which do not have an e-reading, like *isme*-QNs in general or other [-EV] QNs like *intelligence*, cannot pluralise under their non-generic readings. For instance, (18a) cannot be paraphrased as in (18b). This is expected if these QNs are inherently stative, since states are massive and thus non-countable. The only available reading is the (often pragmatically weird) subkind reading illustrated in (18c).

(18) a. ?*Les infantilismes/intelligences de Pierre.*
         Peter's childishnesses/intelligences.
      b. ≠ *les manifestations d'infantilisme de Pierre*
         The manifestations of Pierre's childishness
      c. = ?*Les différents types d'infantilisme/d'intelligence de Pierre.*
         The different types of Pierre's childishness.

4. Conclusions

French deadjectival suffixes differ from each other by their aspectual value. In the doublets presented in the introduction (1) for instance, QNs in *isme* have a strong bias towards the IL reading while the corresponding QNs in *erie* can easily have a (stative or eventive) SL one. It is interesting to note that most of the doublets we found until now consist of *erie*-QNs vs *isme* ones. Given the fact that the *erie/isme* suffixes present the biggest differences in terms of aspectual values (cf. Table 1), the prevalence of this kind of pairs can be explained by the fact that they exhibit the greatest degree of semantic dissimilarity.

References

Aronoff, M. (1976). *Word Formation in Generative Grammar*. MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass.

Barker, C. (2002). The Dynamics of Vagueness. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 25:1–36.

Beauseroy, D. (2009). *Syntaxe et sémantique des noms abstraits statifs : des propriétés verbales ou adjectivales aux propriétés nominales*. PhD thesis, Université de Nancy.

Beauseroy, D. and Knittel, M.-L. (2007). Nombre et détermination. le cas des noms de qualité. *Revista di linguistica*, 2:231–262.

Bécherel, D. (1976). *La dérivation des noms abstraits en français*. PhD thesis, Université Paris-Sorbonne.

Bécherel, D. (1981). Différenciation morpho-sémantique des suffixes nominalisateurs de l'adjectif. *Cahiers de Lexicologie*, 38:45–59.

Campbell, K. (1990). *Abstract Particulars*. Blackwell, Oxford.

Daude, J. (2002). Les substantifs abstraits de qualité. In Kircher-Durand, C., editor, *Grammaire fondamentale du latin, t. IX. La création lexicale : la formation des noms par dérivation suffixale*, pages 225–305. Peeters, Leuven/Paris.

Doetjes, J. (2002). Comparing Adverbs of Quantity. Manuscript, Utrecht University.

Dubois, J. (1962). *Étude sur la Dérivation Suffixale en Français Moderne*. Nathan, Paris.

Fernald, T. (1999). Evidential Coercion: Using Individual-level predicates in Stage-level Environments. *Studies in the Linguistic Sciences*, 29/1:43–63.

Flaux, N. and Van de Velde, D. (2000). *Les noms en français. Esquisse de classement*. Ophrys, Paris.

Geuder, W. (2000). *Oriented Adverbs*. PhD thesis, Universität Tuebingen.

Kerleroux, F. (2008). Des Noms indistincts. In Fradin, B., editor, *La Raison Morphologique. Hommage à la Mémoire de Danielle Corbin*, pages 113–132. John Benjamins, Amsterdam.

Koehl, A. (2009). Are French *-ité* Suffixed Nouns Property Nouns? In Montermini, F., Boyé, G., and Tseng, J., editors, *Selected Proceedings of the 6th Décembrettes*.

Lieber, R. (2004). *Morphology and Lexical Semantics*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Meunier, A. (1981). *Nominalisations d'adjectifs par verbes supports*. PhD thesis, Université Paris 7.

Moltmann, F. (2004). Properties and Kind of Tropes: New Linguistic Facts and Old Philosophical Insights. *Mind*, 123/1:1–41.

Obenauer, H.-G. (1983). Une quantification non. canonique: la quantification à distance. *Langue française*, 58:66–88.

Rainer, F. (1988). Towards a Theory of Blocking: the Case of Italian and German Quality Nouns. In van Maarle, J. and Booij, G., editors, *Yearbook of Morphology*. Foris Publications, Dordrecht.

Rainer, F. (1989). *I nomi di qualità nell'italiano contemporaneo*. Braumüller, Vienna.

Roché, M. (2010). Quel traitement unifié pour les dérivations en *-isme* et en *iste*? In Roché, M., Boyé, G., Giraudo, H., ad S. Lignon, N. H., Montermini, F., and Plénat, M., editors, *Des unités morphologiques au lexique*. Presses Universitaires de Vincennes. to appear.

Villalba, X. (2009). Definite adjective nominalizations in spanish. In Espinal, M. T., Leonetti, M., and McNally, L., editors, *Proceedings of the IV Nereus International Workshop 'Definiteness and DP Structure in Romance Languages*. Universität Konstanz. Arbeitspapier 12x Fachbereich Sprachwissenschaft.