
Innovative uses of French neological *-ance* nominalizations

Philippe Gréa
Université Paris Nanterre &
Modyco, UMR 7114

Marie L. Knittel
Université de Lorraine & ATILF,
UMR 7118

Rafael Marín
CNRS, STL, UMR 8163 &
Université de Lille

Florence Villoing
Université Paris Nanterre &
Modyco, UMR 7114

1 Data

French *-ance* nominals (N-*ance*) are mostly built on verbs (*surveiller* ‘to monitor’ > *surveillance* ‘monitoring’) and adjectives (*élégant* ‘elegant’ > *élégance* ‘elegance’) (Dal & Namer 2010, Knittel 2016).

However, in the standard lexicon, Object Experiencer Psychological Verbs (OEPV) are not used as basis for *-ance* nominalizations (Knittel 2016, Knittel & Marín 2022, from the nouns registered in the lexical base Lexique3 (New et al. 2001). The only example found in this base, *attirance* ‘attraction’ from *attirer* ‘to attract’, has been coined by Baudelaire (Rey & al. 1998). This peculiarity sets *-ance* deverbal nominalization apart from *-ion* (1a) and *-ment* (1b) suffixation and V to N conversion (1c) nominalization patterns, that are commonly used with this verb class (Barque, Fábregas & Marín 2012).

- (1) a. *fasciner* > *fascination* ; *obséder* > *obsession* ; *préoccuper* > *préoccupation*
to fascinate / fascination; to obsess / obsession; to preoccupy / preoccupation
b. *apaiser* > *apaisement* ; *décourager* > *découragement* ; *épanouir* > *épanouissement*
to appease / appeasement; to discourage / discouragement; to fulfill / fulfilment
c. *craindre* > *crainte* ; *désirer* > *désir* ; *regretter* > *regret*
to fear / fear; to desire / desire; to regret / regret

Yet, at first sight, *-ance* neological nominalizations are frequently related to OEPV (2a). Furthermore, they regularly belong to morphological families also comprising an *-ant* adjective built on the verb, thus resulting in triplets (2b).

- (2) a. *charmer* / *charmance* ; *écoeurer* / *écoeurance* ; *désoler* / *désolance*
to charm / charm-ance to disgust / disgust-ance to afflict/afflict-ance
b. *charmer* / *charmant* / *charmance* ; *écoeurer* / *écoeurant* / *écoeurance* ;
to charm / charming / charm-ance to disgust / disgusting / disgust-ance
désoler / *désolant* / *désolance*
to afflict / afflicting / afflict-ance

2 The issue

The question is why *-ance* can form neological nominalizations from OEPV, contrary to what is observed in the general lexicon.

We show that depending on their interpretation, and the inheritance of the arguments of the base verb, *-ance* nominals are either built on the verb or on the *-ant* adjective.

3 The database

The database on which our study is based comprises 350 neological nominals built with the nominalizing suffix *-ance*, extracted from the frCow, which is currently the largest and more recent web corpus available for French (it comprises 9 billion words extracted from the Internet (Schäfer & Bildhauer 2012; Schäfer 2015), lemmatized, annotated according to their syntactic categories and informed by frequency (Missud, Amsili, Villoing 2020).

We based the selection of neological N-ance on their frequency of occurrence in corpora. Only those having a 1 to 20 frequency have been selected. We identified this frequency as optimal to detect neologisms; on the one hand, we have enough varied contexts to grasp the meaning and analyze the environment of the neological form; on the other hand, we observed that nouns with higher frequencies are often not neological, and belong to specialized vocabulary. The data have first been automatically processed, so as to constitute plausible V-N pairs, then sorted manually. Contexts of discursive use extracted from Google or Twitter, were then added for each N-ance, in order to grasp their meanings. At the end of this process, about 350 neological -ance nominals were gathered, with contexts of use, and paired with the morphologically related adjectives (273 adjectives) and verbs (322 verbs). Finally, the base verbs were annotated according to their lexical aspect, and the -ance nominals for their argument structure. Among these 322 verbs, we detected 51 OEPV, which represents 15,83% of the verbs paired with neological N-ance. We can thus count 51 trio of N-ance / OEPV / ADJ-ant on OEPV.

4 Results

The argument structure of OEPV is presented in (3) (Arad, 1998; Pesetsky, 1995; Pylkkänen, 2000). When such verbs are nominalized by *-ment* / *-ion* suffixation, the corresponding noun inherits the Experiencer argument of their base verbs, which is introduced by *de* 'of' (Grimshaw, 1990). The Stimulus is optional and surfaces as a PP introduced by *pour* 'about' / 'with', and less frequently by *par* 'by' (4).

- (3) a. Subject_{STIMULUS} V Object_{EXPERIENCER}
 b. {*Pierre / la musique*}_{Stim} {*fascine / émerveille / apaise / dérange*} Marie_{Exp}.
 ' {*Pierre / music*} {*fascinates / delights / appeases / bothers*} Marie.'
- (4) a. *la* {*fascination / émerveillement*} *de* Marie_{Exp} *pour* {*Pierre / la musique*}_{Stim}.
 'the *fascination / delighting*} of Marie with {*Pierre / music*}.'
 b. *l'*{*apaisement / dérangement*} *de* Marie_{Exp} *par* {*Pierre / la musique*}_{Stim}.
 'the {*appeasement / bothering*} of Marie by {*Pierre / music*}.'

The data we gathered show that, by contrast, a large part of neological N-ance built on OEPV inherit the Stimulus argument (5), a pattern that is not available for lexicalized N-ance.

- (5) a. *l'apaisance du reggae*_{STIM} ≈ '*Le reggae*_{STIM} *est apaisant*.'
 lit. 'the appease-ance of reggae' ≈ 'Reggae is appeasing.'
 b. *la déconcertance du mec*_{STIM} (*à ce sujet*) ≈ '*Ce mec*_{STIM} *est déconcertant*.'
 lit. 'the puzzle-ance of the guy (on that matter)' ≈ 'This guy is puzzling.'

Yet, they can also inherit the Experiencer, also realized by a *de* PP (6).

- (6) *la fascinace des Targaryen*_{Exp} *pour les dragons*_{STIM}
 'the fascin-ance of the Targaryans with dragons'

These data raise the question of the origin of this uncommon inheritance pattern.

Two competing hypotheses can be suggested.

- i. The -ance suffix exhibits a particular behavior in neologisms, in that it enables the inheritance of the Stimulus argument of the verb. However, this hypothesis is highly improbable, since no model predicts that -ance can behave differently from the general lexicon.
- ii. The base of -ance nominal is not the verb, but the corresponding adjective -ant adjective, also derived from the corresponding OEPV.

Two arguments favor the second hypothesis.

First, -ant adjectives can be used as bases of -ance nominals in neologisms, cf. *méchance*_N 'wickedness' from *méchant*_{Adj} 'wicked', as well as in the general lexicon, cf. *élégance* 'elegance' from *élégant* 'elegant'. In the absence of a verb, these -ance nominals can only be built on adjectives.

Second, when a neological N-*ance* inherits the Stimulus argument of the verb, it regularly behaves as a property-denoting nominal, and typically refers to a inherent property (or quality) of an individual. This is why, unlike event and state nouns, they are compatible with the so-called genitive of quality, intensity markers, and the expression of paragon (Flaux & Van de Velde, 2000). This is indeed the case for the neological nouns *contraingance* lit. 'coerce-ness', *époustouflance* lit. 'stuning-ness', and *gênance* lit.'bother-ness'.

- | | |
|---|-----------------------|
| (7) a. <i>Cet accord est d'une contraingance ridicule</i> | [genitive of quality] |
| lit. 'This agreement is of ridiculous coerce-ance' | |
| b. <i>l'époustouflance absolue du design</i> | [intensity] |
| lit. 'the absolute astonish-ance of the design' | |
| c. <i>le prime de la gênance</i> | [parangon] |
| lit. 'the height of bother-ance' | |

Crucially, according to Flaux & Van de Velde (2000), derived property nominals are mostly adjectival based.

Thus, our analysis suggests that all neological *-ance* nominals that inheritate the Stimulus argument are built on adjectival bases, that are in turn built on verbs. The Stimulus argument is in fact inherited by the adjective, and transmitted to the corresponding *-ance* nominal when the adjective is nominalized.

5 Conclusion

To conclude, our analysis of neological N-*ance* has shown, on the one hand, a new tendency of deverbal suffixation in *-ance* to take OEPV as bases similarly to *-ment* and *-ion* nominalizations, whereas this possibility has not yet been exploited by *-ance* nominalizations in the standard lexicon. On the other hand, we have shown that there are two construction patterns available for N-*ance* neologisms that have an OEPV in their morphological family:

- the first has a verbal base. In this case, only the Experiencer argument is inherited (6). It also reveals the originality of *-ance* neological suffixation, that can maintain the Experiencer argument, similarly to *-ment* and *-ion* nominalizations, a pattern that is however less frequent.
- the second has an adjective as a base, the adjective itself being deverbal (5). The *-ance* nominal does not inheritate the stimulus argument from the verb, but from the adjective.

This double construction is enabled by the fact that *-ance* suffixation can select either verbal or adjectival bases.

We therefore observe, in the line of Dal & Namer (2010), the facilitating character of a morphological family containing a verb and a related adjective in *-ant* for the emergence of a N-*ance*. However, contrary to what they stated for lexicalized N-*ance*, it is not secondary to decide whether the noun is built on the verb or on the adjective in *-ant*, since the category of the base determines which argument is inherited by the N-*ance*. If the derivational family is indeed a facilitator in the emergence of an N-*ance* related to an OEPV, this is related to the existence of binary relations between the members of this family: between verbs (OEPV) and *-ant* adjectives, and between *-ant* adjectives and *-ance* nouns.

There is one question, however, that remains to be properly addressed: why we found *-ance* neological nominalizations related to OEPVs, contrary to what is observed in the general lexicon? Part of the answer would be that psych nouns in standard French, mostly derived from verbal bases (typically with *-ment* and *-ion* suffixes), systematically denote states (Barque et al., 2012). By contrast, neological *-ance* suffixation has the capacity to generate psych nouns (from *-ant* adjectives) denoting qualities. This is, we argue, the gap that many speakers try to fill, in a similar way as Charles Baudelaire did in his time, quite successfully, with his innovative *attirance du gouffre* 'attraction of the abyss'.

References

- Arad M. 1998. Psych-notes. *UCL Working Papers in Linguistics* 10.
- Barque L., Fábregas A. & Marín, R. 2012. Les noms d'états psychologiques et leur "objet" : étude d'une alternance sémantique. *Lexique* 20 (2012). 21-41.
- Dal G. 2004. *Vers une morphologie de l'évidence : d'une morphologie de l'input à une morphologie de l'output*. Doctoral dissertation, Université Lille 3.
- Dal G., Namer F. 2010. Les noms en -ance/-ence du français : quels patrons constructionnels ? In F. Neveu et al. (eds.), *Actes en ligne du 2e Congrès Mondial de Linguistique Française*, 893-907. La Nouvelle Orléans. 12-15 juillet 2010.
- Flaux N., Van de Velde V. 2000. *Les noms en français. Esquisse de classement*. Ophrys, Paris.
- Grimshaw J. 1990. *Argument structure*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
- Knittel M.L. 2016. Les noms en -ance : un panorama. In F. Neveu, G. Bergounioux, M-H Côté, J.-M. Fournier, L. Hriba et S. Prevost (eds.), *Actes du CMLF 2016*. ILF.
- Knittel M.L. & Marín R. 2022. L'héritage transcatégoriel des propriétés sémantiques : le cas des noms en -ance et des verbes et adjectifs apparentés. Actes du CMLF 2022, F. Neveu, S. Prévost, A. Steuckardt, G. Bergounioux and B. Hamma (eds.), ILF.
- Lignon S., F. Namer et F. Villoing. 2014. De l'agglutination à la triangulation ou comment expliquer certaines séries morphologiques. In F. Neveu, P. Blumenthal, L. Hriba, A. Gerstenberg, J. Meinschaefer & S. Prévost (eds.), *Actes du 4ème Congrès Mondial de Linguistique Française*, 1813-1835. ILF, Berlin.
- Missud A., Amsili, P. & Villoing, F. 2020. VerNom : une base de paires morphologiques acquise sur très gros corpus. *Actes de la 27e conférence sur le Traitement Automatique des Langues Naturelles (TALN 2020)*, 305-313.
- Missud, A., Villoing, F. 2022. Nominalisations sans base verbale suffixes en -ion, -age et -ment du français : conditions morphologiques. Actes du 8ème Congrès Mondial de Linguistique Française (CMLF 2022), Orléans 4-8 juillet 2022, Paris EDP Sciences.
- Namer F. 2009. *Morphologie, lexique et traitement automatique des langues*. Hermès-Lavoisier.
- New B., Pallier C., Ferrand L., Matos R. 2001. Une base de données lexicales du français contemporain sur internet : LEXIQUE, *L'Année Psychologique*, 101, 447-462. <http://www.lexique.org>.
- Pesetsky D. 1995. *Zero Syntax: Experiences and Cascades*. Cambridge MA: The MIT Press.
- Pylkkänen L. 2000. On stativity and causation. In C. Tenny & J. (eds.), *Events as Grammatical Objects*.
- Rey A. & al. 1998. *Dictionnaire Historique de la langue française*. Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert
- Schäfer R. 2015. Processing and querying large web corpora with the COW14 architecture. In P. Baaski, H. Biber, E. Breitnender, M. Kupietz, H. Langen & A. Witt (eds.), *Proceedings of Challenges in the Management of Large Corpora 3 (CMLC-3)*. Lancaster: UCREL IDS.
- Schäfer R. & Bildhauer, F. 2012. Building large corpora from the web using a new efficient tool chain. In n. C. C. Chair, K. Choukri, T. Declerck, M. U. Doăyan, B. Maegaard, J. Mariani, A. Moreno, J. Odijk & S. Piperidis (eds.), *Proceedings of the Eight International Conference on Language Resources and Evaluation (LREC'12)*, 486-493. Istanbul, Turkey: European Language Resources Association (ELRA).