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Semantic constraints on lexical categories? Two case studies on  
morphological conversion in French

Abstract

I will address problems illustrated by the following examples:

- (1) *Une porte ouverte* 'an open door'
- (2) *Je ferai le nécessaire* 'I will do what is required'
- (3) *Le malade va mieux* 'the patient is better'

I will assume that

- *Ouverte* in (1) is an adjective derived from a participle.
- *Nécessaire* and *malade* in (2) and (3) are nouns derived from adjectives.
- Such derivations are lexical processes.

Regarding example (1), the distinction between participles and adjectives is not obvious. Four tests of adjectiveness were applied to a sample of 200 passive and unaccusative participles. 94% of the items passed at least one of the tests. The remaining 6% can be explained by lexical blocking.

The analysis of the data is focused on the semantics of the converts. The main research question is:

- To what extent are changes of meaning triggered by category changes?

Additional questions arising from the data are:

- Unlike ordinary adjectives, the adjectives derived by conversion combine with eventive adjuncts. How can this be accounted for?
- The polysemy of the nouns derived from adjectives by conversion cannot be inherited, but it still is partly predictable. How can this be explained?

The study is a contribution not only to the morphology of French, but also on the question of whether lexical categories constrain lexical meaning.

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