

## RESTRUCTURATION AND THE SUBJECT OF ADJECTIVES

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A significant proportion of French adjectives can be described in a lexicon-grammar as adjectival simple sentences, i.e. simple sentences with an adjectival predicate and a support verb, *être*. Important distributional properties of such sentences involve their subject. The selectional restrictions on the subject of predicative adjectives in French are particularly complex, because of the existence of numerous types of [Restructuration] and metonymic variants of the subject, and often of both (A. Meunier 1981; R. Vivès 1982; M. Meydan 1999; cf. Nam J.S. 1996; E. Sklavounou 1997). Restructuration and metonymic variants also exist in other contexts, i.e. with distributional verbs like *imiter* and *récompenser* instead of adjectives, and in subjects or in essential complements (M. Gross 1975; A. Zribi-Hertz 1978; A. Guillet & Ch. Leclère 1981).

Due to these syntactic variations, the argument has different forms, with two different head nouns *Na* and *Nb*:

*Ce fruit est ferme*  
=  
*La consistance de ce fruit est ferme*

These nouns may have very different distributions, as in this example where *Nb* =: *fruit* is **concrete**, whereas *Na* =: *consistance* is an **abstract**, predicative noun. Sometimes, a third construction is observed, with an echo complement in the sense of A. Guillet & Ch. Leclère (1981):

*Luc a été excessif*  
=  
*La réaction de Luc a été excessive*  
=  
*Luc a été excessif dans sa réaction*

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<sup>1</sup> This work was partly financed by a grant from Cofecub, and carried out during a stay at the Department of Literature of the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro. I am indebted to M. Gross, Ch. Leclère and A. Meunier for their comments on a previous version, which I presented at the 19th International Colloquium on Compared Lexicon and Grammar in 2000.

In the case of adjectives, the echo complement is usually optional.

In spite of the distributional differences between the two nouns *Na* and *Nb*, assigning separate entries to the respective constructions is usually not a satisfactory solution. The interpretation of the sentence is little modified by the structural change, and these syntactic relations are observed in a large number of sentences.

In some cases, these syntactic relations can be chained (A. Guillet & Ch. Leclère 1981:120), leading to forms with 3 different head nouns:

*Luc est charmant*  
 = *Le visage de Luc est charmant*  
 = *L'expression du visage de Luc est charmante*

When the subject of an adjectival sentence admits a restructuring or a metonymic reduction, any possible subject noun seems to be able to occur in one of these relations, either as *Na*, or as *Nb*, or both.

A satisfactory description of adjectives in a lexicon-grammar should take into account these constructions and the syntactic relations between them. Such a description implies identifying a basic simple sentence scheme, and describing other forms through general syntactic relations. However, it is not easy to determine which of these constructions should be considered as simple sentences. In addition, the problem is connected with the separation of senses and the description of the complements in the adjectival sentence (R. Vivès 1982). These two problems involve quite a number of entries, to such an extent that they have been slowing down the description of adjectives in the lexicon-grammar of French.

When we identify a restructuring or a metonymic reduction in a sentence which is a candidate for consideration as an elementary sentence, we can either consider both forms as basic, or only one of them, but in the latter case we have to choose one of the forms. Thus, we have four solutions *a priori*:

- 1) To include both sentence forms in the basic construction of these adjectives. This solution (L. Picabia 1978; J. Casteleiro 1981) is simple, but its main drawback is that the two forms are not distinguished, so the syntactic relation between them cannot be represented (cf. M. Gross 1975:142, about tables 12 and 13). We will consider this solution as an approximation.
- 2) To choose the sentence with subject *Na de Nb* as basic, and represent the syntactic relation with the other one as a reduction like the deletion of an appropriate noun (cf. E. Ranchhod 1990:122). This is consistent with the principle that assigns the status of basic construction to the maximal extension of the sentence.

- 3) To choose the sentence with subject *Na* (without *Nb*) as basic, and consider the *Na de Nb* sentence as a complex sentence obtained from several simple sentences through relativisation and other known transformations (É. Laporte 1995). As a matter of fact, *Na* is often a predicative noun with a support-verb construction:

(1) ?*Ce fruit a une certaine consistance*

This approach poses several problems, in particular the dubious, sometimes indeterminate status of acceptability of some of the sentences involved.

- 4) To take the sentence with subject *Nb* as basic, and consider the *Na de Nb* sentence as the result of the insertion of *Na*.

The same problem, to a lesser extent, has been faced by specialists in distributional verbs. It seems that this difficulty affects a smaller proportion of verbs than of adjectives. It did not interfere too greatly with the problems of separating verb senses and identifying their essential complements.

The four solutions above are not equivalent. Firstly, they are based on different basic forms with  $N_0 =: Na\ de\ Nb$ ,  $N_0 =: Na$  and  $N_0 =: Nb$ ; the respective basic forms must be acceptable for the corresponding solutions to be applicable. Secondly, solution 3 implies that a sentence with *Na* and *Nb* like (1) must be acceptable. Thirdly, the formal representation of selectional restrictions depends on the basic construction adopted. For example, solutions 2 and 3 are suitable for cases where the selectional restrictions observed between *Na*, *Nb* and *Adj* can be deduced from restrictions between *Na* and *Nb*, on the one hand, and between *Na* and *Adj*, on the other hand. What is at stake is the organization of the lexical entries of these adjectives in the lexicon-grammar of French.

In the following, we identify several situations where it seems possible to choose a satisfactory strategy. We discuss this organization through various examples of adjectives.

### 1. Determinative nouns

In certain cases of restructurations and metonymic relations, *Na* can be considered as a determiner of *Nb* (M. Gross 1977:59; Guillet & Leclère 1981; P.-A. Buvet 1994). In these cases, *Na* is called a determinative noun. Many determinative nouns denote sets, containers, or parts of **concrete** or **abstract** objects:

- (2) *L'armoire est poussiéreuse*  
 = *L'armoire est poussiéreuse (en partie + sur le dessus)*  
 = (3) *(Une partie + Le dessus) de l'armoire est poussiéreux/-euse*

- Ces événements sont imaginaires*  
 = *Ces événements sont en partie imaginaires*  
 = (4) *Une partie de ces événements est imaginaire*

In some examples, *Nb Prep Na* can be extracted into *c'est... que* (A. Guillet & Ch. Leclère 1981:105), but not in others:

*\*C'est l'armoire en partie qui est poussiéreuse*

We will therefore attempt to characterize this type of restructuration through other criteria.

The relation is easily iterated, by introducing determinative nouns as new *Na*'s:

*Le haut du côté de l'armoire est poussiéreux*  
*Une partie du haut du côté de l'armoire est poussiéreuse*

Such a chain is obtained by considering the relation as oriented from *Nb être Adj W* to *Na de Nb être Adj W*, and by taking the target form as a source form. The lexical choice of the new *Na*'s introduced is relatively independent of the initial *Nb* and *Adj*, but the initial *Nb* is dependent on the adjectival entry. Thus, the relation can be iterated only in one direction, which suggests organizing our lexico-syntactic description around the form with  $N_0 =: Nb$ , i.e. solution 4 above.

The possibilities of inserting a given *Na* into *Nb être Adj W* depend on *Nb*:

*Ce (film + fruit) est bizarre*  
*Le début de ce (film + ?\*fruit) est bizarre*

but usually not on the adjective:

*(Ce + Le début de ce) film est (bizarre + ?abordable + \*vermiforme)*

Therefore, the description of such insertions might be relatively independent of the description of adjectives. There are exceptions:

*(Ce + \*Le dessus de ce) siège est bancal*

In particular, adjectives with human subjects do not admit the insertion of the same nouns of body parts into their subject:

*Luc est (poilu + sincère)*  
*Les pieds de Luc sont (poilus + \*sincères)*

The existence of selectional restrictions between *Nb* and *Adj*, when there are no selectional restrictions between *Na* and *Adj*, is an argument against solutions 2 ( $N_0 =: Na$  de *Nb*) and 3 ( $N_0 =: Na$ ).

Solution 3 is unsuitable for additional reasons. Forms *Na être Adj W* are restricted. Some of them are acceptable, but they cannot be the initial sentence of

a discourse and they have a co-referential meaning with respect to a previous occurrence of *Nb*:

*Le dessus est poussiéreux*  
*Le début est agréable*  
*Une partie est imaginaire*

which suggests that such sentences are reductions of sentences like *Une partie de Nb est imaginaire*. Many forms *Ce Na être Adj W* are unacceptable:

*Cette partie est imaginaire*  
 ?\* *Ce dessus est poussiéreux*

Sentences like (3) and (4) are therefore not easily representable as a combination of simple sentences into complex sentences, even if one accepts forms like the following:

?\* *L'armoire a un dessus*  
 ?\* *Ce film a (un début + un milieu + une fin)*

Thus, (2) could be chosen as a basic construction, and the introduction of *dessus* could be described as an insertion (solution 4). The element inserted is not an autonomous elementary sentence. It can be compared to other determiners or to auxiliaries verbs (M. Gross 1975, table 1; M. Gross 1999):

- The set of insertible elements is large.
- These elements are not only grammatical, but convey a lexical content.
- Selectional restrictions take place between the subject of the sentence and the element inserted into it.
- The insertion of an element into a simple sentence does not add a new argument to the predicate.

We have applied four criteria to recognize instances of the insertion of determinative nouns:

- The relation can be iterated by inserting new *Na*'s into the *Na de Nb* form.
- The sentence with subject *Na* (without *Nb*) is either unacceptable, or co-referential with respect to a previous occurrence of *Nb*.
- *Nb Vsup Na* has a low level of acceptability.
- The possibility of inserting a given *Na* into *Nb être Adj W* may depend on *Nb*, but usually not on *Adj*.

According to these criteria, *début*, *dessus*, *haut*, *partie*... are extensions that can be inserted into simpler sentences as (1). Nouns of body parts behave in the same way with some adjectives like *poilu* but not with others like *sincère*, *cagneux* (D. Leeman 1993).

Many nouns denoting objects that may or may not be parts of other objects behave differently. They regularly occur in *Ce Na être Adj W*:

*Ces colonnes sont sales*

and in *Nb Vsup Na*:

*Ce monument a des colonnes*

An analysis with a relativisation is possible for such nouns (solution 3):

*Ce monument a des colonnes # Ces colonnes sont sales*  
 = *Les colonnes de ce monument sont sales*

## 2. Elementary adjectival constructions with predicative subject

Consider the adjective *bizarre*. Its observable subjects are non-restricted in the sense of M. Gross (1975). However, it seems that any possible other subject noun of the adjective can be used in one of the relations (5) and (6):

- (5) *Na de Nb être Adj W = Nb être Adj W*  
 (6) *Na de Nb être Adj W = Nb être Adj W Prep Na*,

either as *Na*, or as *Nb*, or both. We did not find convincing counter-examples to this assertion yet. For example, *Les circonstances sont bizarres* and *Cette sensation est bizarre* can be related respectively to

*Les circonstances de cet événement sont bizarres*

(*Na =: circonstances*), and to

?*L'expérience de cette sensation est bizarre*

(*Nb =: sensation*).

A large number of adjectives, either with non-restricted subjects or with actual selectional restrictions, apparently have the same property. Among the three sentence structures involved, the one with  $N_0 =: Na de Nb$  could be chosen as basic construction (solution 2):

- it comprises *Na*, *Nb* and *Adj*, unlike *Nb être Adj W*, and therefore it could be considered as the maximal extension of the sentence;
- it enters into both relations (5) and (6); i.e. for the adjectives involved, all sentences with a nominal subject are related to a sentence structure with  $N_0 =: Na de Nb$ . In contrast, the structure *Nb être Adj W Prep Na* is sometimes unacceptable:

*Ce voyage est abordable (E + \*Prep son prix);*

- it is structurally close to the forms with sentential subjects which can be observed with some of the adjectives involved (*Qu'il pleuve est bizarre*), as opposed to the structure *Nb être Adj W Prep Na*, which has an additional complement.

Solution 3 ( $N_0 =: Na$ ) is not completely satisfactory, because of the indeterminate acceptability of many forms *Ce Na être Adj W*:

*L'allure de Luc est insouciante*

(7) ?\* *Cette allure est insouciante*

(8) *L'odeur de ce fruit est alléchante*

*Cette odeur est alléchante*

*La consistance de ce fruit est pâteuse*

*Ce fruit est pâteux*

(9) ?\* *Cette consistance est pâteuse*

Native speakers tend to disagree on the acceptability of (7) and (9), or feel that it depends on sentences in the context. When *Ce Na être Adj W* is acceptable, it usually has a co-referential meaning with respect to a previous occurrence of *Nb*, and is intuitively felt as a reduction of *Na de Nb être Adj W*, which makes it difficult to consider *Na de Nb être Adj W* as a complex sentence and *Ce Na être Adj W* as one of its elements.

Solution 4 is not suitable either, since the possibility of inserting a given *Na* into *Nb* forms does not depend only on *Nb*, but often on *Adj* also:

*Luc est (courtois + ferme + gracieux)*

*Les habitudes de Luc sont (courtoises + \*fermes + \*gracieuses)*

*La décision de Luc est (\*courtoise + ferme + \*gracieuse)*

*La démarche de Luc est (\*courtoise + \*ferme + gracieuse)*

These facts support the idea that lexico-syntactic description could be organized around the form with  $N_0 =: Na de Nb$ , at least for the forms with nominal subjects<sup>2</sup>.

In the appendices, we display tables of a selection of adjectival entries with the properties mentioned in this section. The properties in the tables are about:

- the predicative subjects *Na* with restructuration or metonymic reduction,
- the possibility of occurrence and the actual form of the echo complement.

<sup>2</sup> And provided that *Na* itself does not behave as an *Nb*', the subject of a predicative noun *Na*', in another *Na'/Nb'/Adj* combination similar to *Na/Nb/Adj*.

In the rest of this article, we investigate the properties of these constructions.

### 3. Selectional restrictions

Clearly, selectional restrictions can be observed between *Na* and *Adj*. Several predicative nouns *Na* are generally suitable for a given adjective, which accounts for the ambiguity of *Nb être Adj W*. Many predicative subjects *Na* admit prepositional complements with adverbial properties. Selectional restrictions take place between *Na* and such complements. These complements are conserved in the reduced forms without *Na* (R. Vivès 1982). The presence of such a complement in a reduced form restricts the choice of *Na*. For example, we can relate

*Luc est bizarre sur ce point*

to sentences with *Na* =: *attitude* + *jugement*, and

?*Luc est bizarre envers Marie*

with *Na* =: *attitude*, but not with *jugement*.

The subject *Na de Nb* has several variants. We already mentioned examples where *de Nb* can be omitted. With human *Nb*'s, certain *Na*'s are compatible with a complement *de la part de Nb*:

*Cet enthousiasme est bizarre de la part de Luc*

The insertion of an adjectival or prepositional modifier into *Na de Nb* can be acceptable:

- (10) *La consistance (E + pâteuse + de velours) de ce fruit est bizarre*  
*Ce fruit est bizarre par sa consistance (E + pâteuse + de velours)*

or not (M. Meydan 1999:67), depending on *Adj*:

- (11) *La consistance (E + \*souple + \*de velours) de ce fruit est pâteuse*  
*Ce fruit est pâteux*

In particular, in many of the adjectival sentences related to the adverbs studied by A. Balibar-Mrabti (1980, 1987), *Na* cannot have a modifier:

*Le pas (E + \*saccadé) de Luc est rapide*

However, the modifiers with adverbial properties studied by J. Giry-Schneider (1997) can be accepted where others are not:

*La consistance habituelle de ce fruit est pâteuse*

*Le pas habituel de Luc est rapide*

As examples (10) and (11) show, the same *Na* may or may not be modified, depending on *Adj*. These restrictions on the insertion of modifiers, first noticed by A. Meunier (1995) and M. Meydan (1999) to our knowledge, seem to be important facts. They are correlated with other formal properties. For example,

- when an echo complement of the form (*de par + par + pour*) *Det Na* occurs, *Na* can usually be modified (10), whereas echo complements of the form *dans Det Na* and *de Na* preclude the occurrence of modifiers of *Na*;

- when a given adjective, like *bizarre*, accepts a subject *Le Na Modif de Nb* (10), it is usually relatively easy to erase *de Nb* from subjects *Na de Nb*, and sentential subjects are often accepted.

We used these restrictions on modifiers as a criterion to distribute syntactic properties across the three tables in the appendices.

From (8), two operations introduce *Nb =: fruit* into the position of the subject of *alléchant*. The possibility of restructuring (8) with an echo complement in *par* appears as a syntactic property of the pair<sup>3</sup> *odeur/alléchant*:

(12) *Ce fruit est alléchant par son odeur*

The deletion of *Na =: odeur* in (8) or in (12) appears as a metonymic reduction which is all the more acceptable as *Na* is more appropriate<sup>4</sup> in the context:

*Ce fruit est alléchant*

The appropriateness, and thus the reducibility, of *Na* is a cultural and contextual matter, not only a syntactic property.

All the constructions with nominal subjects can be connected, through general syntactic relations, to constructions with subject *Na de Nb* like (8). Subject nouns that do not behave as *Na* can thus be excluded from the subject position of the basic construction, and introduced with the aid of syntactic operations, as suggested in M. Gross (1975:143) about the direct complement of *louer* (table 13). Selectional restrictions are observed between *Nb* and *Na*: all concrete subjects of *Na =: odeur* are introduced as subjects of *Adj =: alléchant*. Conversely, for each sentence of the form *N<sub>0</sub> être alléchant* with a concrete subject, it seems possible to find at least a predicative noun that behaves as *Na* while *N<sub>0</sub>* behaves as *Nb*, and to relate the sentence to a structure like (8). This is consistent with our choice of classifying and describing these adjectival entries on the basis of construction (8).

<sup>3</sup> The pair *odeur/bon* does not admit the same restructuring: \**Ce fruit est bon par son odeur* is not accepted.

<sup>4</sup> A very particular context is needed to interpret *Ce fruit est bon* as the result of a metonymical deletion of *odeur* in *L'odeur de ce fruit est bonne*.

Some of the same adjectival entries are also used with non-nominal subjects, in particular with sentential clauses<sup>5</sup>:

*Que Luc ait cette attitude est courtois* (E + *de sa part*)  
 ? *Que ce fruit ait une telle odeur est alléchant*

Some adjectives do not:

?\* *Que Luc s'exprime de cette façon est (grandiloquent + indescriptible)*  
 \* *Que ce voyage ait ce prix est abordable*

The subject of some of these adjectives can also be an infinitive clause. Depending on the adjective, the implicit human subject of the infinitive clause is obligatorily co-referential either with the optional complement *de la part de Nb*:

*Avoir cette attitude est courtois* (E + *de la part de Luc*)  
*C'est courtois* (E + *de la part de Luc*) *d'avoir cette attitude*

or with a prepositional complement *Prep N<sub>1</sub>* of the adjective:

*Voyager est intéressant pour Luc*  
*C'est intéressant pour Luc de voyager*

In the sample of adjectival entries described in the appendices, we analysed prepositional complements *pour N<sub>1</sub>* as essential complements of the adjective when we observed an infinitive clause obligatorily co-referential with *N<sub>1</sub>*. According to a convincing argumentation by A. Meunier (1999), the infinitive clause in sentences like *Luc est original d'avoir cette attitude* is not a subject of the adjective, but could be related to *C'est être original que d'avoir cette attitude*.

It would be interesting to relate phrasal-subject sentences to nominal-subject sentences, but since these relations are still obscure, including all these forms in the basic sentence scheme seems to be the appropriate level of formalization and precision.

According to this analysis, the subject of the basic construction can be represented by marking as possible subjects:

- the lexical values of *Na* used in the definitional construction, if this is realistic given their number,
- sentential clauses,
- infinitive clauses.

This method of formalization indirectly marks *Nb* as a possible subject of *Adj*: if *Na* is marked as subject in the basic construction of *Adj*, if metonymic reduction is marked as applicable to this construction, and if *Nb* is marked as subject of *Na*,

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<sup>5</sup> Many adjectival derivatives of verbs of table 4 (M. Gross, 1975) belong to this class.

then *Nb* is implicitly marked as subject of *Adj* in metonymic sentences. The nouns *Na* =: *façon* + *manière* are a special case, since they obligatorily occur with an infinitive clause or a relative clause.

#### 4. Echo complements

The formal difference between restructuration and metonymic reduction is the presence vs. absence of an echo complement. The possibility of occurrence of an echo complement, and its form, i.e. the value of the preposition and determiner, are lexico-syntactic properties.

These properties depend primarily on *Na* but also on *Adj*. For example, *Na* =: *décision* usually can occur in echo complements with *dans*, and *Na* =: *odeur* with *de par* or *par*, and *Na* =: *enthousiasme* with both:

*Luc est rapide (dans + \*de par) ses décisions*  
*Ce fruit est bizarre (\*dans + de par) son odeur*  
*Luc est (charmant + ?\*excessif) de par son enthousiasme*  
*Luc est (?\*charmant + excessif) dans son enthousiasme*

Whether or not the echo complement can occur depends on the particular adjective:

*Ce voyage est (\*abordable + intéressant) de par son prix*

#### 5. Sentences *Nb Vsup Na Adj W*

Sentences of the form *Nb Vsup Na Adj W* are regularly observed as additional variants of the forms we examined:

(13) *Ce fruit (a + est de) une consistance ferme*

Again, they can be related to *Na de Nb être Adj W* in two ways: either through the application of a link operator sequence *Nb Vsup* (M. Gross 1981), or through a combination with *Nb Vsup Na* by a relativisation. However, constructions apparently similar to (13) are not always related to *Na de Nb être Adj W*. They can also be observed where *Na de Nb* is not a possible subject of *Adj*:

*Cette affirmation (a un caractère + est) diffamatoire*  
 \*(*Le + Un*) caractère de cette affirmation est diffamatoire

*Léa (est d'une humeur + est) joyeuse*

?\* *L'humeur de Léa est joyeuse*

even with nouns that occur in *Na* position in restructurations with other *Adj*'s:

*Le caractère inattendu de cette invitation est charmant*  
*Cette invitation est charmante par son caractère inattendu*

*L'humeur enjouée de Léa est charmante*  
*Léa est charmante par son humeur enjouée*

### Conclusion

Restructurations and metonymic reductions are known for the complexity of the conditions that determine their applicability, and for the formal diversity of echo complements. We have attempted to identify situations where it seems possible to organize the syntactic and transformational description of these relations around a basic construction. When *Na* is a determinative noun, we consider the sentence with  $N_0 = Nb$  as the basic construction; when *Na* is a noun denoting a part of a concrete object but occurring naturally in *Ce Na être Adj W*, we consider this sentence to be basic; and when the subject of the adjective obligatorily participates in a restructuration or a metonymic reduction, we consider the sentence with  $N_0 = Na de Nb$  as the basic construction.

We developed our analyses and descriptive methods on subjects of adjectival constructions, but part of them could probably be extended to subjects and essential complements of verbal and nominal constructions:

*(Cette odeur + Cette consistance pâteuse) plaît à Luc*  
*Luc (aime + a du goût pour) (cette odeur + cette consistance pâteuse)*  
*Luc imite (cette attitude + ce ton agacé)*

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### **Summary**

The distribution of the subject of adjectives in French is particularly difficult to represent in a lexicon-grammar, because of the numerous restructurations of the subject. In addition, the description of subject distribution is connected with the separation of senses and the description of the complements in the adjectival sentence. Thus, it is a fundamental issue. We identify several situations where it seems possible to choose a satisfactory strategy. We discuss this organization through various examples of adjectives.

### **APPENDICES**

