

# Adjectival Suffixation in French

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## ABSTRACT

Suffixation covers various processes of word formation and commonly changes the word-class of the base lexeme. It also covers the formation of adjectives. This study attempts to investigate the formation of adjectives using derivational suffixes in French and describes the meaning of the semantic function of the suffixes used. The study was conducted by using the qualitative method with corpus-based analysis as a research design. The data were collected by purposive sampling technique from *MorphoLex-FR*, a derivational morphological database for 38,840 French words. In addition, French sentences containing adjectives on *Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales* (CNRTL) website were used to analyze semantic functions of the suffixes used by morphology and semantic theoretical framework. The findings show that Adjectives can be formed from different word classes, from verbs (using suffixes: *-able*, *-eur*, *-ant*, *-if/-ive*) and nouns (using suffixes: *-aire*, *-al*, *-el*, *-ique*). Most adjectives formed from verbs show a sense of liable to do the action signified by the verbal root as or has a passive interpretation which explains the nature of the noun by giving the passive meaning of an intransitive verb. While adjectives formed from nouns mostly show a sense relating closely to the thing named by the root. This study should contribute to increasing the entry of French speakers (native or non-native) and to provide useful references for similar research.

**Keywords:** Adjective formation, French language, suffixes.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Adjective has a function of qualifying or determining the noun to which it is attached (Dubois, 1970). The use of adjectives in the communication process can make a situation, condition, or subject clearer and more specific, so that it can help speakers communicate the message better. The discussion about the formation of an adjective cannot be separated from morphology as the study of the internal structure of words. Morphology also discusses the form-meaning relationships between lexical units and their arrangement in forming words. According to Colé, Royer, Leuwers, and Casalis (2004) "*La morphologie renvoie à un domaine de la grammaire qui étudie la façon dont les morphèmes (unités minimales de sens) se combinent pour former des mots*" [Morphology refers to an area of grammar that studies how morphemes (minimum units of meaning) combine to form words].

Morphology divides the word formation process into two types: inflectional morphology and derivational morphology. Derivation is defined as the process of forming a new word by adding an affix to the root (Guillet, 1971). In some cases, derivation can change a word class as in Activation (N) from *Activer* (V) that is

caused by the suffixes which attach to the root (Sunardi, 2012). Others do not change the word class of the root (called inflectional morphology). Bauer (1988) explained that inflectional morphology is the study of the modification of words to fit into different grammatical contexts (such as by adding plural marks or by conjugation) as in the example below.

- (1) *Je chante* (I sing)  
*Tu chanteras* (You will sing)  
*Vous chantiez* (You were singing)  
(françaisfacile, n.d)

Derivation includes three modes (Quirk et al. in Sunardi, 2012). First, prefixation consists in the attachment of a prefix to the left of the root. Second, suffixation which consists in the attachment of a suffix to the end of a root. The third mode of derivation is parasyntesis which combines a prefix and a suffix (Tamime, 1981).

This linguistic phenomenon has been studied by many researchers. Okiwelu (2003) investigates the mechanism of forming adjectives word and syntagms in French called as adjectivization. The result showed that there are various types of adjectivization due to different

transformational mechanisms such as suffixation, prefixation, juxtaposition, substitution, addition, deletion, and passive.

The research found 24 suffixes that can be used to form adjectives from nouns and 8 suffixes that can form adjectives from verbs. Another study found 11 suffixes used to form adjectives from verbs and 3 suffixes used to form adjectives from nouns (Harastani, Daille, & Morin, 2013). Meanwhile, De Carvalho (2018) in his research “«Gérondif», « Participe Présent » et « Adjectif Déverbal» en Morphosyntaxe Comparative” used a morphosyntactic approach to examine the process of forming adjectives from verbs and compares it with the characteristics of *gérondif* and participle present. These studies have succeeded in showing the various processes of adjective formation and their morphosyntactic comparisons with other word class forms. But the derivational morphological process does not only consist of one process, it involves three processes at once (Sunardi, 2012). So that in the process of forming adjectives, other studies outside the morphology field are needed. One of them is the study of the meaning produced by the suffixation process in the formation of adjectives.

Based on the discussion, the questions in this study are: 1) How to do verb and noun form adjectives? 2) How does the suffix change the meaning? This study aims to describe the formation of adjectives using derivational suffixes in French and describes the meaning of the semantic function of the suffixes used.

## 2. METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with corpus-based analysis as the research design. Data collection techniques using purposive sampling to focus on characteristics of a population that are of interest, which will best enable to answer the research questions. In this case, researchers focus on characteristics of adjective and adjectival suffixes in French. The data were collected from *MorphoLex-FR*, a derivational morphological database for 38,840 French words by Mailhot, Wilson, Macoir, Deacon, and Sánchez-Gutiérrez (2019). In addition, French sentences containing adjectives on website CNRTL (*Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales*) are used to analyze semantic functions of the adjective and the suffixes.

The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman Model (2014) with the following steps: 1) Data Collection, obtain a wordlist of all the words end with adjectival suffixes; 2) Data Reduction, selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in corpus; 3) Data Display, presenting data in the narrative text form. This is as stated by Miles & Huberman (2014) “the most frequent form to display

data for qualitative research data in the past has been narrative text”; 4) Data Verification / Conclusion, ensuring reliability and validity from the findings and drawing conclusions.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study found 271 derivational suffixes in *MorphoLex-FR*, consisting of noun suffixes, adjectival suffixes, verbal suffixes, and adverbial suffixes. This research will focus on adjective suffixes that are most often used to form adjectives from nouns and verbs as the data presented in Table 1.

As can be seen in Table 1, there are two types of derivational suffixes categories that can be used to form adjectives. The most frequent suffixes to form adjectives from verbs are: (-able), (-eur), (-ant) and (-if/-ive). While the suffixes that are most used to form adjectives from the noun are (-aire), (-al), (-el), (-ique), and (-aire). These results also suggest that people frequently use adjectives which are formed from verbal roots rather than nominal roots. Meanwhile, the semantic function of these suffixes refers to the grammatical meanings that arise as a result when they are added to roots.

### 3.1. Deverbal Adjective

According to morphological theory, the suffix is a bound morpheme because it cannot stand alone. It is attached to some other morpheme. The transformation of a verb into an adjective can be seen in the following data.

- (2) Une vibration pesante et **grandissante** de metro entrant en gare.  
[A heavy and growing vibration of the metro entering the station].

(CNRTL, 2012).

In sentences above, there is an adjective **grandissante** derived from the verb **grandir**. The suffixation process occurs as follows:

*Grandir* (V) + (-ante) ⊕ *Grandissante* (Adj)

As a categorical marker, suffix (-ante) changes a lexical item from verb into adjective. As a meaning marker, it adds a special meaning to the derived formation. The verb **grandir** had the lexical meaning of “devenir plus grand” [get bigger], while after the derivation process, it became the adjective **grandissante**

**Table 1.** The most common suffixes used

| No | Adjective Forming |             |               |             |
|----|-------------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|
|    | Verbal Roots      | Sum of Freq | Nominal Roots | Sum of Freq |
| 1  | (-ant)            | 3302,44     | (-al)         | 1125,04     |
| 2  | (-eur)            | 2127,06     | (-el)         | 1103,4      |
| 3  | (-able)           | 1042,69     | (-aire)       | 853,76      |
| 4  | (-if/-ive)        | 409,41      | (-ique)       | 852,45      |

which has the lexical meaning “*qui grandit*” [that grows].

The suffix (-ante) shows the meaning liable to do the action signified by the verbal root. From the example, *une vibration grandissante* [a growing vibration] is *une vibration* [a vibration] which apt to *grandir* [grow]. It shows a different meaning. The adjective *grandissante* shows the quality of a subject while the verb *grandir* indicates an action did by the subject.

On the other hand, all French adjectives agree with the noun in gender (feminine or masculine) and number (singular or plural) (Tobing, 2020). The suffix (-ante) is the feminine form of suffix (-ant). So, from these findings it can be concluded that the use of suffixes can also provide grammatical information about the subject being described. This suffixation process is also found in other data below.

- (3) *En vérité l'on se demande maintenant avec inquiétude où s'arrêtera l'avidité de ce ministre accapareur de nos plaisirs.*

[In fact, we now wonder with concern where to stop this ministerial greed monopolizing our pleasures].

(CNRTL, 2012)

*Accaparer* (V) + (-eur) ⊕ *Accapareur* (Adj)

- (4) *La procédure en déclaration affirmative sert à cette fin.*

[The affirmative declaration procedure serves this purpose].

(CNRTL, 2012)

*Affirmer* (V) + (-ive) ⊖ *Affirmative* (Adj)

The use of the adjective *accapareur* and *affirmative* are also influenced by the genre and number of the subject to be explained. *Accapareur* is a masculine form, a feminine form is *accapareuse*. While *affirmative* is a feminine form, and the masculine form is *affirmatif*.

To find out the semantic function of the two suffixes, we can compare the lexical meanings formed after the suffixation process. The verb *accaparer* has a lexical meaning: *amasser un bien en grande quantité pour en provoquer la rareté et le revendre à un prix élevé* [amassing a good in large quantities to cause its scarcity and resell it at a high price]. After adding the suffix (-er) it becomes *accapareur* means “*Qui accapare, détient des biens de consommation dans une intention spéculative*” [Who monopolizes, holds consumer goods with speculative intent]. While in sentence 3, the lexical meaning of the verb *Affirmer* is “*Assurer fermement la véracité de quelque chose: soutenir, certifier*” [Firmly assure the veracity of something; support, certify], and after adding the suffix (-ive) become *affirmative* means “*qui marque l'affirmation*” [which marks the affirmation]. The lexical meaning and the context of the sentences show that the suffixes (-eur) and (-if) have almost the same semantic function. They indicate proper or relation to do the action signified by the verbal root.

Furthermore, the suffix that is most often used to form adjectives from verbs is the suffix (-able) as in the following data:

- (5) *Ce potage n'est pas bon, mais il est mangeable.*  
[This soup is not good, but it is edible].

(CNRTL, 2012)

*Manger* (V) + (-able) > *Mangeable* (Adj)

The semantic function of the suffix refers to the grammatical meaning formed by the addition of a suffix to the basic form it is attached to. A lexical meaning of adjective *mangeable* is “*Qui peut se manger*” [suitable to be eaten], meanwhile the roots (verb *manger*) mean swallow for food (a solid or hearty food) after chewing. From this sentence, it can be concluded that the semantic function of the suffix (-able) can undergo the action referred to in the verbal root. In the context of the sentences, the adjective *mangeable* has a function as an attribute of the subject *ce potage* [The soup]. So, the soup has a bad taste, but still it can be eaten. The adjectives so formed have a passive interpretation in that the action performed on the verb requires an external agent. It means, an external agent is a subject who can eat the soup.

All of the examples above suggest that the suffix (used to change a verb to an adjective) can show the meaning of liable to do the action signified by the verbal root as in the use of the suffixes (-ant), (-eur) and (-if) while the suffix (-able) has a passive interpretation which explains the nature of the noun by giving the passive meaning of an intransitive verb.

### 3.2. Denominal Adjective

First, like *deverbal* suffixation process, *denominal* suffixation also acts as a profiler in the derivation process. It is significant as an indicator of word class (changing the class of the added lexical item) and as an indicator of meaning (contributing to the semantic arrangement of the associated lexical item). It adds meaning to the results obtained and serves to reflect the speaker's conceptualization of the situation. Below are the data which consist of a *denominal* adjective.

- (6) *Un chef génial, capable par miracle d'un coup d'œil d'ensemble.*

[A brilliant chef, miraculously capable of seeing the whole thing].

(CNRTL, 2012)

The sentence shows that the adjective *génial* derived from the noun *génie* attached to the suffix (-al).

*Génie* (N) + (-al) ⊖ *Génial* (Adj)

**Excerpt 1**

- Génie* (N) : *Aptitude naturelle de l'esprit de quelqu'un qui le rend capable de concevoir, de Créer des choses, des concepts d'une qualité exceptionnelle.*  
[Natural aptitude of the mind of someone which makes it capable of conceiving, of creating things concepts of exceptional quality].
- Génial* (Adj) : *Qui porte la marque du génie* [who has the mark of genius]

The lexical meaning before and after the suffixation process can be seen as example in Excerpt 1. *Génie* as a noun referring to the capability or competence of someone. Meanwhile *Génial* occurs mainly in a predicative position and is preceded by nouns referring to people such as a student, a teacher or anyone else who has capability relating to *génie*. Based on the lexical meaning of the two words, it can be seen that the suffix (-al) gives sense relating closely to the thing named by the root.

Furthermore, the use of the suffix (-el) can be seen in the following data.

- (7) *Les véritables instruments d'optique, c'est-à-dire ceux qui sont destinés à amplifier la faculté visuelle de l'œil humain.*  
[The real optical instruments, that is to say those /which are intended to amplify the visual faculty of the human eye].

(CNRTL, 2012)

Adjective *visuelle* derived from a noun *vision*: *Vision* (N) + (-ion) □ *Visuelle* (Adj). The difference in lexical meaning can be seen as the example in Excerpt 2.

**Excerpt 2**

- Vision* (N) : *Fonction par laquelle les images captées par l'œil sont transmises par les voies optiques (cellules rétiniennes et ganglionnaires, nerf optique, chiasma optique) au cerveau.* [Function of capturing images captured by the eye and transmitted by the optical pathways (retinal and ganglion cells, optic nerve, optic chiasm) to the brain.]
- Visuelle* (Adj) : *Relatif au sens de la vue* [Relative to the sense of view]

From the explanation of the lexical meaning, the functions of the suffixes (-el) and (-al) look similar. Both give a sense relating closely to the thing named by the root. Another suffix that is often used to form an adjective is the suffix (-aire) which appears in the following data:

- (8) *C'était pourtant un despote, un souverain absolu et plus autoritaire que tous les autres.*  
[Yet he was a despot, absolute ruler, and more authoritarian than the rest]

(CNRTL, 2012).

The morphological process of adjective *autoritaire*: *Autorité* (N) + (-aire) □ *Autoritaire* (Adj), as example in Excerpt 3.

**Excerpt 3**

- Autorité* (N) : *Pouvoir de décider ou de commander, d'imposer ses volontés à autrui: Affermir, perdre, rétablir son autorité.*  
[Power to decide or to command, to impose one's will on others: To strengthen, lose, restore one's authority.]
- Autoritaire* (Adj) : *Qui use de toute l'autorité qu'il possède sans s'imposer de limite qui ne supporte pas la contradiction.* [Who uses all the authority he possesses without imposing limits, who cannot stand the contradiction.]

From the explanation of the lexical meaning, the suffixes (-aire) show a *sens* of relating to the *capacité autorité*. The usage of the adjective *Autoritaire* referring to noun as "agent d'action" [action agent].

- (9) *Il contempla dans son miroir magique des combats gigantesques.*  
[He contemplated gigantic battles in his magic mirror].

(CNRTL, 2012)

The morphological process of adjective *magique*: *Magie* (N) + (-ique) □ *Magique* (Adj), as example in Excerpt 4.

**Excerpt 4**

- Magie* (N) : *Ensemble de croyances et de pratiques reposant sur l'idée qu'il existe des puissances cachées dans la nature, qu'il s'agit de se concilier ou de conjurer, pour s'attirer un bien ou susciter un malheur, visant ainsi à une efficacité matérielle.*  
[Set of beliefs and practices based on the idea that there are powers hidden in nature, that it is a question of reconciling or conjuring, to attract good or cause misfortune, thus aiming at a material efficiency.]
- Magique* (Adj) : *Qui relève de la magie: Pouvoir magique.*  
[That falls under magic: Magic power.]

The lexical meaning of each data shows that the suffix (-ique) has a function as *relatif à, qui est propre à* [relating to, which is proper to].

From the findings, it can be concluded that adjectives formed from nouns mostly act as epithets in a sentence. It shows the character of the thing named by the nominal root. This meaning comes to attention when the suffix is added to roots applying to humans. Before being derived into adjectives, each noun has its own genre and number. Nouns that syntactically change their word class to become adjectives still have the obligation to agree on the

number and genre of the noun being explained by adding (-e) or (-s) to the end of the words.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Adjectives in French can be formed by suffixing processes from other word classes such as verbs and nouns. The research results suggest that the most frequent suffixes used to change verbs into adjectives are: (-ant), (-eur), (-able) and (-if/-ive). While the suffixes that are mostly used to form adjectives from nouns are: (-al), (-el), (-aire), and (-ique). Based on the findings, adjectives derived from verbs have a higher frequency of occurrence than adjectives formed from nouns. It means that the number of adjectives formed (through the suffixation process) from verbs is higher than the adjectives formed from nouns.

In the derivation process, the changes that occur are not only at the morphological level but also related to meaning or semantics. Adjectives formed by the derivation process also have grammatical functions in a sentence as attributes and epithets depending on the structure and context of the sentence or speech. Meanwhile, the grammatical meaning can be seen from the change in lexical meaning. Most adjectives formed from verbs show a sense of being liable to do the action signified by the verbal root as in the use of the suffixes (-ant), (-eur) and (-if). On the other side, the suffix (-able) has a passive interpretation which explains the nature of the noun by giving the passive meaning of an intransitive verb. Adjectives formed from nouns mostly show a sense relating closely to the thing named by the root.

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