

DERIVATIVES OF THE VERB 'TOURNER' IN A PRAGMATIC CONNOTATION

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Abstract: *The rigor with which constraints of suffixation are applied in evaluative derivatives and the fact that a given stem readily welcomes suffixes rejected by others tends to show that evaluative endings compete with each other. This quasi-complementary distribution leaves the field open to semantic differentiation. Experience shows that speakers do tend to establish differences in meaning between different endings. But these differences do not appear to be marked and are perhaps not based on the arbitrary association of semantic instructions with these endings.*

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It is not uncommon for the same verbal lexia to be followed sometimes by an evaluative suffix and sometimes by another. Thus, for example, one can find *gambergeouiller*, *gambergeailler* and *gambergeasser*. The author of these lines would be very embarrassed if he had to decide whether these or other derivatives of the same 'water' present a difference in meaning or not. To find out for sure, we therefore imagined a test that we submitted to two groups of speakers. At the end of these experiments, it seems that the evaluative suffixes are semantically different from each other. But this differentiation is not very clear, and it is not certain that it should be attributed to semantic instructions associated with suffixes.

To make aware of the differences that intuition would establish between deverbal evaluative suffixes, Pichon offers his reader a text in his own way comprising eight derivatives of the verb 'tourner' placed in different contexts; the use of each of these derivatives would be imposed on linguistic consciousness by agreement with the context:

"A while ago I listed the multitude of verbo-verbal suffixes. But how acutely does a Frenchman feel their semantic diversity when they are applied to the same primitive verb! In the common room of a house, the child turns (*tournille*) here and there in inconsistent and graceful games, while the housewife foolishly turns (*tourne*) around without doing anything useful, without knowing what occupation to devote herself to; now she is swirling (*tournoille*) the soup which is cooking quietly on the fire; she looks in her cupboard at some leftover milk that seems to have twirled (*tournoché*) around; she whirls (*tourne*) around her husband and overwhelms him with observations and questions when he would like to work quietly. Outside, a half-deserted fairground continues: a poor merry-go-round of merry-go-rounds whirls (*tourne*) about, almost without customers; yet a prostitute still roams (*tourne*) around, stubborn, and bad boys roam (*tourne*) around looking for a bad shot. »

This demonstration by example did not seem entirely convincing to us, in particular insofar as all the derivatives are not equally available and where some of them seem to us to be of dubious acceptability. Apart from certain cases close to lexicalization (e.g. *tournicoter* is constructed half the time with *around*; *tourniquer* often takes the meaning of 'turning on itself'), it seems that evaluative suffixes show a marked preference for meaning of turning (*tourner*) which refers to one or more changes in orientation of the agent of the action: the T.L.F. defines the primary meaning of *tournailler* by the periphrasis 'to come and go in all directions, generally without apparent purpose [...]' and gives *ournasser*, *tournicoter*, *ourniller* and *ourniquer* as synonyms of this verb. It is this meaning which is predominant (the child 'ournille', the housewife "ournique", the prostitute "ournasse", the bad boys "ournillent"), but we also find in his text other meanings : 'perform a rotational movement around an axis' (the merry-go-round 'ournote'), 'remuer' (the housewife 'ournouille' the soup), 'se corrompre' (the milk 'ournouche'). Note that it is for these somewhat semantically deviant derivatives the rounded vowel suffixes -ot(er), -ouill(er) and -och(er), which never appear with turn in the TLF nor in Frantext. In the end, this text seems rather unnatural.

In our opinion, they do not make it possible to establish that each evaluative suffix is associated with a particular semantic instruction. We are very far from a free and spontaneous use of language. Furthermore, their choice was guided more than once by associations rather than by a keen sense of the semantic diversity of suffixes. If the prostitute "ournasse", we were told, it is because she is a *pétasse*; if the bad boys "ournillent", it is because they are scoundrels; and the housewife "ournouille" her soup as she stirs her *ratatouille* or her noodles. This last comment, which came up several times, tends to show that we are dealing less with semantic instructions associated with suffixes than with semantic fields associated with endings. Finally, if it is permissible to state a personal feeling, it seems to us that the type of evaluation suggested by the derivatives is closely linked to the vocalism of the suffix of these.

This contribution establishes quite clearly that the distribution of verbal evaluative suffixes in French obeys mainly euphonic constraints — especially dissimilative constraints. Togeby's remarks need to be extended and refined: evaluative suffixes are absolutely loath to append to a stem that ends in a consonant identical to their own, whatever that may be; this absolute repugnance also applies to the closest phonetic relatives of this consonant and is tempered as the resemblance fades; although less marked, the incompatibility between identical vowels is also clear. This quasi-complementary distribution leaves the field open to semantic differentiation.

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