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Scalarity of French deverbal units. A functional approach

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Abstract

This article submits a philological and Discourse-based approach to deverbal units. Applied to French language, the study examines to what extent *ant*-forms (such as *suivant*, *concernant* and *durant*) appear in contemporary linguistic uses as units with a variable verbal consistency. The purpose of the paper consists in demonstrating how the specific features of this category meet a scalar phenomenon, depending on the fact that these elements occur respectively as gerunds, present participles, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, or operators.

After a brief introduction, the article exposes the outlines of the Dik's functional approach and exemplifies the scalarity through the cases of *partant* and *disant*. The discussion touches upon some borderline cases, and the conclusion puts forward four assumptions for an application of the scalarity hypothesis (SH) in other perspectives.

Key Words – Deverbal units; scalarity; French; Linguistics; Philology

1. Overview of the category

Deverbal units are common in Romance languages (Alexiadou 2001; Gràcia and Riera 2003; Plénat 2005; Huyghe and Marín 2007; Kerleroux 2008; Gaeta 2015; Rainer 2022). The category can be generalized to all languages in which the verb class is recognizable¹. In French, these elements correspond to words or phrases derived from verbs, many of them maintaining the trace of constructions (mainly intransitive or transitive) preceding their formation.

Extensively represented in current uses, deverbal units are formed by derivation (Fr. n. *lessiveur* < LESSIVER ‘to leach’, adj. *maniabale* < MANIER ‘to handle’), by composition (n. *savoir-faire* ‘know-how’, *essuie-tout* ‘paper towel’, adj. *non-consentant* ‘non-consenting’), or potentially by conversion (interj. *Allons!* ‘come on!’, prep. *excepté* ‘excepted’, conj. *vu que* ‘given that’, adv. *au demeurant* ‘besides’). Such configurations, when relevant, appear with *-ant* deverbals in French, as follows regarding *suivant* (< SUIVRE ‘to follow’) respectively instantiated as a verb (1 qua participle, 2 qua gerund: cf. Torterat 2012, 2016a), and thereafter as a noun (3), an adjective (4) and a preposition (5):

(1) La cour d’appel, **suivant** [emphasis mine] les réquisitions du parquet général, a rejeté ce mardi l’ensemble de ces requêtes en nullité.

‘**Following** the recommendations of the Public Prosecutor’s Office, The Court of Appeal rejected all of these requests for nullity on Tuesday’² (*Le Figaro*, 23/02/2021).

(2) Le tribunal ne l’entend pas de la même oreille **en suivant** les réquisitions.

‘**By following** the requisitions, the Court does not hear it the same way’ (*La dépêche*, 06/05/2021).

(3) Elles commencent faiblement, augmentent d’intensité, puis diminuent pour se calmer complètement jusqu’à la **suivante** [...].

‘They begin weakly, increase in intensity, decrease and settle down until the **next one** [...]’ (Hôpital Necker, 04/09/2022).

(4) Les gens s’engagent à atteindre les objectifs **suivants** entre le 31 mars et le 11 mai.

‘People have committed to the **following** targets between 31 March and 11 May’ (*L’Express*, 04/03/2016).

(5) C. est une plateforme de presse numérique vous permettant de lire aussi bien la presse quotidienne que des magazines **suivant** vos centres d’intérêt.

‘C. is a digital press platform which enables you to read the daily press as well as magazines **according to** your interests’ (*Médiathèques Côte d’Émeraude*, 03/09/2022).

Among the deverbal units, the *-ant* derivatives and compounds mainly belong to the nominal category, with features specific to participial units in general, and to this group in particular. Other remarkable characteristics are attributable to most deverbal nouns and adjectives in terms of Aktionsart (Brinton 1995), diathesis (Roy and Soares 2014), or eventuality (Roy and Soares 2012; Meinschaefer 2005). We would not argue, as Kiefer (1998: 56) does, that «their event structure» is only related to «the verbal base», but the fact remains that discourse uses confirm that deverbal units materialize predominantly both transitively and intransitively (completed or not), or in distinct types of combinations. Specifically, the point here is to show that there is a continuum between fully verbal uses and deverbal constructions, with possible intermediate and borderline cases.

In the above-mentioned excerpts, the present participle *suivant* in (1) is completed by the object *les réquisitions du parquet general* (‘the recommendations of the Public Prosecutor’s Office’) within

¹ See, for example, Fábregas and Marín 2012 for Slavic languages, Meinschaefer 2005 for the Germanic group, and Abondolo (ed.) 1998 concerning the Uralic group.

² All translations into English have been done by the Author and compared with those of a native English speaker.

an adjunction inserted between the subject and the main verb of the sentence, and in (2) constitutes the verbal node of a circumstance in an intermediate state between present participle and gerund. In (1) and (2), *suivant* remains a verbal element even if it does not have its own subject (which cannot be generalized to all non-finite verbs). On the other hand, the third example implies a unit *suivant* instantiated as a deverbal noun – that is, a nominalized deverbal adjective –, in such an utterance occurring with a specifier (*la* ‘the’) and a (feminine) gender (*suivant-e*) related to the antecedent *elles* ‘they’ by meronomic substitution (Cruse 2000). However, *suivant* in (4) fully appears as an adjective (modifying *objectifs* ‘targets’), and in (5) as a preposition (introducing the adjacent noun phrase *vos centres d’intérêt* ‘your interests’).

Concretely, what do these introductory examples show? First of all, they demonstrate that the «*ant-forms*» (McLaughlin 2017) of SUIVRE coincide with non-finite verbs participating in both verb and adjective categories as a participle or gerund, but integrate other categorial features in their uses as nouns, adjectives, and prepositions. Furthermore, in the three last utterances *suivant* corresponds to a deverbal unit with distinct syntactic features: in (3) it constitutes a predicate, in (4) the unit modifies the acceptance of an external predicate, and in (5) the same form coincides with a relational – non predicative – operator. Such a variable recategorization process influences: *a*) the syntactic patterns of the unit; and *b*) its compatibility with other near predicates. Consequently, we postulate that the form more or less retains its verbal consistency, with several phases of categorial variability. This perspective is in line with Dik’s approach (1997) to the influence of the context on the acceptations and the constructability of the lexicon. To demonstrate this, the following pages are based on attested examples sampled from a representative panel of widely distributed editorial media.

From this viewpoint, the French *-ant* units testify to a scale mechanism displaying a relative loss of capacities to having a subject and to receiving objects, but also to being predicative when the deverbal forms occur as operators (e.g. prepositions or conjunctions). The following sections return to some of the features exemplified above and present a study carried out on two deverbal units particularly used in French. Following this, we propose a systematisation of the scalarity through four assumptions crossing different word classes.

1.1. Dik’s functional approach

In Linguistics as well as in Philology, numerous studies have shown that the categorization of lexical units depends on what roles they perform, and how frequently, in discourse. This context-sensitive variability is now acknowledged in many cross-linguistic approaches, as can be noted among the Categorical Grammars, the Application Grammars, and through the methodological turning points operated within Construction Grammars (for general presentations, see Desclés 1990; Leeman [ed.] 2003; Torterat 2010, 2017; François [ed.] 2013)³.

More specifically, S. C. Dik’s Functional Grammar (FG) is one of the unification grammars which operates within a set of constraints and restrictions at various levels of analysis. Dik’s works refer to the «case system» for typifying the features specified in linguistic representations (e.g., the [macro]roles of AGENT, PATIENT and ADDRESSEE), but also the thematic features of discourse (THEME, TOPIC, FOCUS: Dik 1978, 1997a: 45, 76 and 289; 1997b: 133 and 325-328). By covering lexical, syntactic, and expressive areas, his approach makes it possible, for example, to tackle reflexive or passive constructions, as well as subordinate clauses, within templates where the valency and the contextual meaning of each lexical unit are not considered separately, but always in relation to specific uses. Several linguists, such as Hengeveld (1997), Hannay (1998), and Hengeveld and

³ The Categorical Grammars, for example, consider many elements as functions, i.e., as correspondences between arguments and values. Each unit is assigned a functional «type» related to its category (noun, pronoun, verb, etc.), its role (subject, object, etc.), its morphology (e.g., preverbs, affixes), and any other typification (agent, affected; topical, focus; asserted, negated, etc.).

Mackenzie (2006), have complemented this analytical background with a rhetorical dimension, knowing that Dik relies on gradual degrees of well-formedness to what he calls, for his part, the registers of expression (Dik 1997a: 104 and 436.; 1997b: 56 and 179)⁴. More accurately, Dik admits to the existence of scalar (or «gradual») mechanisms, which he represents accessorially in conjunction with the hypothesis of «markedness»⁵.

From this perspective, deverbal units can be analysed as marked uses of verbs, in the sense that they convert verbs into other types of elements (e.g., nouns, adjectives, or prepositions). The hypothetical historical phase from which the verb becomes a deverbal unit certainly draws on an abstraction, but this mechanism is based on effective recurrences in discourse.

In his Grammar (edited by Hengeveld in two volumes), Dik explores the conditions of use of predicates according to their «type» and «valence», but also their discourse embeddedness (Dik 1997a: 59 and 1997b: 409). Each utterance can thus be first summarized in what he calls an Underlying Clause Structure (UCS: input), with an expandable number of features. In such a presentation, the abbreviation *E* corresponds to a *clause*, namely a discourse-oriented content. So, the French utterance *j'ai suivi les autres* 'I followed the others' materialises the following UCSs (using English as a meta-language, here represented in terms of a) the syntactic roles of subject and object, and b) by the macroroles AGENT and PATIENT):

- a) $E \{ [\text{FOLLOW}_V (\text{I}_{\text{SUBJ}}) (\text{the others}_{\text{OBJ}})] \}$
 b) $E \{ [\text{FOLLOW}_V (\text{I}, \text{x}_1)_{\text{AG}}] [(\text{the others}, \text{x}_j)_{\text{PAT}}] \}$

In an *ant*-form, *suivant* 'following' may occur as a gerund with a function of circumstance expressing the cause. In the clause *j'ai appris beaucoup en suivant les autres* 'I learned a lot by following the others', with a modifier «a lot» occurring as a *satellite* (abbreviated through the sign *o*) of «learned», the UCS should be:

- $E \{ [\text{LEARN}_V (\text{a lot})_{\text{O}} (\text{I}, \text{x}_1)_{\text{AG}}] \text{CAUSE} [\text{FOLLOW}_V (\text{x}_1)_{\text{AG}} (\text{the others}, \text{x}_j)_{\text{PAT}}] \}$

With *suivant* used as deverbal unit, the UCS assigns distinct features and roles to the element. This occurs for instance in the clauses where *suivant* appears as an adjective (c) or a noun (d):

- c₁) on s'est parlé les jours **suivants** ('we talked in the **following** days')
 c₂) $E \{ [\text{TALK}_V (\text{We}_{\text{SUBJ}<\text{PRO}>}) (\text{in the following}_{<\text{ADJ}>} \text{days})_{\text{CIRC}}] \}$
 d₁) les **suivants** auront leur tour ('the **following** will have their turn')
 d₂) $E \{ [\text{HAVE}_V (\text{the following}_{\text{SUBJ}<\text{NOUN PHRASE}>}) (\text{their turn}_{\text{OBJ}})] \}$

These specifications allow the recategorization to be traced back by the Underlying Clause Structure while adding as many features as required by the analysis. But before returning to concrete cases of scalarity, let us consider some of the most relevant characteristics of deverbal *ant*-forms among similar units.

1.2. *Ant*-forms as part of deverbal units

As briefly exposed in the previous sections, deverbal units originate from a mechanism well-documented in Linguistics, namely a recategorization process, noting that this phenomenon can also emerge in an opposite direction (*souple*, adj. > vb. ASSOULIR 'to relax' / *bitume*, n. > vb. BITUMER 'to walk on the pavement'). The predicate frames that these units integrate become useful more or

⁴ See also the «aesthetical» dimension in Biber et al. (1999) in addition to linguistic and contextual features.

⁵ In Dik (1997a) for instance, it is stated that markedness «has come to be used in several different (though not totally unrelated) senses. [...] More recently, the term has also been used to indicate “marked” and “unmarked” construction types, both within and across language» (see also Dik 1978: 156-157 and 1989: 41).

less spontaneously, according to their capacity to assign roles to their complements (Dubois 1962; Grimshaw 1990), thus conditioning the meaning of the units depending on the constructions that host them.

For instance, these distinctions apply to adjectives. With the affix *-able*, deverbal units are linked either to the passive of the derivation verb or to one of its potential circumstances (*applicable* < APPLIQUER; *lavable* < LAVER; *navigable* < NAVIGUER). With *-ant*, most of them derive from transitive verbs (TENIR > (*séance*) *tenante*), CONCERNER (> *concernant*), while those in *-atif*, on the other hand, most generally refer to accomplishments (*commemoratif* < COMMEMORER; *bourratif* < BOURRER). Analogous characteristics affect nouns, about which Méleuc (1996: 98) raises the question of their status: «are they nouns derived from the verbal base or nouns resulting from a nominalization of an adjective independent of the verb?». In his opinion,

another difficulty comes from forms of which a verbal base exists, the participle generating an adjective and a noun (*croyant*, pres. part. *croyant.e* adj. and *croyant.e*, n.), but where we also find *incroyant* (“unbeliever”), adjective and noun, for which there is no prefixed verb.

Roy and Soare (2014: 3198) confirm in this regard that «derivatives in *-ant* are to be distinguished from those in *-é/i/u* [...] not only in terms of meaning, but also in terms of the structure they imply». In connection with the valence features of the verbs concerned, we note with the authors that the corresponding deverbals can be derived as much from «the nominalization of a predicate subject which in turn encompasses a participial structure» as from «the direct nominalization of an internal argument» (Roy and Soare 2014: 3198). Thereupon Méleuc (1996: 98, see e.g., 104) notes the frequency of forms «compounded with adverb», such as *bien-disant* or *mal-entendant*, and confirms their common use without insisting on their compositional (*soi-disant* / *tout venant* / *malséant*) or locutional frames (*ce faisant* / *affaire cessante*). Although nothing is mentioned about the compounds with *disant* in Henrichsen (1967), whose study on the derivatives in *-ant* is, on the other hand, abundantly exemplified, we note in Kacprzak (1988), concerning the deverbal nouns in *-eur* and *-ant* (*meneur* < MENER / *au tout venant* < VENIR), that the two classes can designate agents, «instruments» or «products» (her terminology). For Kacprzak (1988: 179), these classes are distinguished by the capacity of the nouns in *-eur* to be followed by genitive type complements, unlike those in *-ant*, unless for the latter there is a «particularization of the object that follows it». According to the author, the suffix *-ant* also favours an aspect of «frequency» (Kacprzak 1988: 180), which is not the case for words such as *assistant* or *prétendant*, for example, which express a more «punctual» eventuality.

In any case, it should be remembered that the transition from a verb to a deverbal unit entails both lexical and constructional mechanisms that depend in part on the initial patterns of the elements. Such patterns are not reducible to templates generalized to this or that suffix (such as *-eur* or *-ant*), despite the recurrences observed: the influence of their conditions of use needs to be documented by discourse-based and partially philological information (attested examples, archive of changes occurred over time, etc.). This means that according to their uses, these units gradually become nouns, adjectives or other types of word classes, in the sense that, to quote Rijkhoff (2002: 115), «there is growing evidence to suggest that the verb-noun distinction [for instance] is scalar rather than discrete».

2. Focusing on typical examples *partant* and *disant*

2.1. The deverbal *partant*

PARTIR (‘to part’; ‘to leave’; ‘to go’; ‘to start’) is a typical case displaying the capacity of *ant*-forms to appear both as full verbs and deverbal elements according to the contexts of use. For illustration, let us consult the excerpts quoted below, where *partant* materializes respectively as a gerund (6a), a full present participle (7a), and a present participle partly adjectivized (8a):

(6a) **En partant** en tête et en écrémant la concurrence, le Sarregueminois a d’abord bien secoué l’adversité.

‘By **starting** in the lead and weakening the competition, the Sarregueminois initially rattled adversity’ (*Le Républicain lorrain*, 20/11/2022).

(7a) Le premier médecin, lui, **partant** du symptôme sans recourir à l’anamnèse, a formulé des hypothèses.

‘The first practitioner, himself, **starting from** the symptom without resorting to anamnesis, formulated hypotheses’ (Viviane HUYS, *Espaces linguistiques*, 2, 2021).

(8a) Le ministère des Affaires étrangères coréen a mis en place un service dédié aux jeunes Coréens **partant** à l’étranger.

‘The Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs has set up a service dedicated to young Koreans **going** abroad’ (Ambassade de France en Corée, 01/03/2022).

In the first example, the clause *en partant en tête et en écrémant la concurrence* (‘By starting in the lead and weakening the competition’, thus including two coordinate gerund phrases) corresponds to a circumstance adjacent to the main clause, in accordance with the following underlying clause structure applied to *partant* (6b):

(6b) { CAUSE [START_v (x_i)_{AG} (in the lead)_O] [...] [RATTLE_v (the Sarregueminois x_i _{SUBJ})_{AG} (initially)_O (the adversity _{OBJ})] }

Within this construction, the *ant*-form (*en*) *partant* maintains its capacity both to express an accomplishment and to govern a satellite. Furthermore, it shares with the (finite) verb *secoué* ‘rattled’ a common subject, instantiated in the main clause while it is subjacent in the circumstantial clause. In these terms, *partant* occurs as a full verb even if it does not have the capacity to appear without contiguous support (like all gerunds generally: Torterat 2012).

Another predicate frame arises in (7a), where the present participle *partant* coincides with the core (or «nucleus»); Van Valin and LaPolla 1997; Van Valin 1999) of the verb phrase *partant du symptôme sans recourir à l’anamnèse* ‘starting from the symptom without resorting to anamnesis’, but relies this time on a noun phrase («The first practitioner», and its duplicate «himself»). Within such a configuration, the *ant*-verb clause completes the subject of the main verb formulated as follows in UCS (7b):

(7b) { FORMULATE_v [(the first practitioner, himself_{SUBJ}) [MANNER / TENSE (starting from)_{<VERB} PHRASE ⊕ IPREP PHRASE>]] (hypotheses _{OBJ}) }

That being said, it should be noted that the *ant*-clause still remains a circumstance at the level of the whole sentence, because it also influences the conditions of effectiveness of the event related in the utterance. This twofold incidence on the expression corroborates the relevance of several scales of meaning and scope that may be envisaged in discourse regarding the uses of *ant*-forms.

On the contrary, the scope of *partant* is limited in (8a), insofar as *partant à l’étranger* ‘going abroad’ expands only the noun phrase *jeunes Coréens* ‘young Koreans’ within the wider participle phrase *dédié aux jeunes Coréens partant à l’étranger* (‘dedicated to the young Koreans going abroad’ → UCS (8b) [dedicated_{ADJ} (to young Koreans [going abroad])_{COMPL ADJ}]). In this case *partant* is almost a deverbal unit although it keeps its verbal valency.

The occurrences of *partant* as a partial or fully deverbal unit testify to a scalar phenomenon in which the *ant*-form transitions from verb to effective recategorization (Torterat 2016b). However, this process is bidirectional, as can be seen in the French support verb construction *être partant*, which means ‘to agree’, as in the fourth example mentioned below:

(9) Originaire d’Ostricourt, j’en ai parlé au maire qui a tout de suite **été partant** [...].
 ‘Originally from Ostricourt, I talked about it with the mayor who immediately **agreed**’ [...] (*Voix du Nord*, 24/11/2022).

This predicate frame upholds an aporetic verbal consistency of *partir* through a fixed combination <finite verb – present participle>, while significantly reducing the scope and the valency of the *ant*-form within a single unit partly similar to a compound. For corroboration, the two verbs may not occur as coordinates, the negation applies to the group as a single unit, and the second element (*partant*) becomes intransitive⁶.

To complete the current demonstration with uses of *partant* as a full deverbal unit, let us examine constructions where it occurs as an adjective (10), a noun (11), and at the end as an adverb (12):

(10) La Rennaise Charlotte Marchandise se dit “**partante**”.
 ‘Charlotte Marchandise from Rennes says she is “**ready (to go)**”’ (*Ouest France*, 08/07/2021).

(11) Consultez les réunions et courses PMU du jour et accédez aux **partants**.
 ‘Consult the PMU meetings and races of the day and access the **starters**’ (*Turfomania*, 29/11/2022).

(12) La Cour rejette ce moyen unique et, **partant**, le pourvoi lui-même comme étant non fondé.
 ‘The Court rejects this single plea and, **consequently**, the appeal itself as unfounded’ (Cour de Justice de l’Union européenne, *Communiqué de presse* n° 181/22, 10/11/2022).

In (10) *partante* coincides with an adjectival unit within an attributive construction [BE_v (the Rennaise Charlotte Marchandise_{SUBJ}) (ready (to go)_{ATTR})], with a gender marking (feminine) specific to this class of words. Also variable and receiving here the marks of gender (male) and number (plural), the *ant*-form *partants* of (11) is also preceded by a specifier («the», in English), thus representing a full nominalization.

Frequent in expository texts, the (invariable) adverb *partant* means ‘consequently’, ‘thence’, or equivalents and it appears either at the beginning of a sentence in transition with the previous one, or after a coordinate marker, most often in an adjacent position. It operates in (12) a transition between the verbal clause «The Court rejects this single plea and the noun clause the appeal itself as unfounded», but also between two constructions where the verb «reject» is instantiated as transitive on the one hand, and subjacent (by ellipsis) as both transitive and attributive on the other hand. At a discourse level, the utterance relates two acts { REJECT_v (this single plea_{OBI})_ (the appeal itself_{OBI}) } while qualifying the second («as unfounded»): the deverbal *partant* indicates a turning point after which the Court’s conclusions intervene. As an adverb influencing the frame of the whole utterance, *partant* bolsters the coordination between the two clauses and distinguishes the two parts of the discourse.

Thus, while deverbal *ant*-forms share some common features, discourse contexts also play a major role, as we will also see with *disant* in the next section.

2.2. The deverbal *disant*

The case of *disant* highlights a distinct configuration. With a full verbal consistency (and thus fully predicative), this *ant*-form mainly occurs as a gerund and somewhat less frequently as a present participle, exactly like *partant*:

(13) **En disant** que Neandertal était comme nous, on l’a limité à nous.
 ‘**By saying** that Neanderthal was like us, it became limited to us’ (Ludovic Slimak, in *Le Monde*, 15/01/2022).

⁶ See Kor-Chahine and Torterat 2006 for similar analyses applied to infinitives.

(14) Christophe Naegelen rappelle qu'il y a eu récemment une enquête **disant** qu'elle n'est jamais présente aux réunions.

'Christophe Naegelen recalls that there was recently an enquiry **arguing** that she is never present at meetings' (*Europe 1*, 25/12/2019).

More than *partant*, the participle *disant* is primarily used in non-*wh* subordinate clauses (Haspelmath and König 1995) and more specifically in what we may call participial clauses, as formalized below in UCS:

(14') { ARGUE_V (an enquiry_{SUBJ<NOUN PHRASE>}) (that she is_{_OBJ}) }

In the whole utterance, (14') completes the verbal phrase «there was» (with its satellite «recently») in a construction similar to an object (as well as the *wh*-subordinate clause «that there were meetings» completes «recall», this other clause embedding itself a shorter *wh*-subordinate clause). However, the participial clause with *disant* can also be analysed as expanding the noun «enquiry». Factually *disant*, as a present participle, operates at these two levels, constituting the core of a participial clause and expanding one of the elements of an external object, what can be formalized as follows in (14'')

(14'') { an enquiry (x_I)_N [(arguing) (x_I)_{AG} (that she is_{_OBJ})] }

This ambivalence remains typical of the uses of the present participles in French as in other Romance languages, justifying the term «*parti-ciple*» itself: the units concerned participate in the categories of both verbs and adjectives, with a double level of valency.

Such combinations do not apply to the deverbal uses, which are limited concerning *disant* in two cases: as an adverb, *disant* appear in the locution *soi-disant* meaning 'purportedly' in English, and generally positioned just before a noun or an adjective; as a noun, it is realized in the idiomatic compounds *moins-disant* and *mieux-disant*, in a commercial acceptance⁷. Let us see below three examples of the predicate frames concerned:

(15) "Vague de froid", risque de neige en plaine [...] Attention à ces **soi-disant** "prévisions".
"Cold wave", risk of snow in the plain [...] Beware of these **purported** "forecasts" (*Le Parisien*, 28/11/2022).

(16) Le **moins-disant** social, levier de compétitivité [...].
'The social **lowest bidder**, a lever for competitiveness [...]' (*Banque des territoires*, 08/04/2013).

(17) Comment le choix du "**mieux-disant**" peut-il permettre le développement de l'économie circulaire?
'How can the choice of the "**highest bidder**" allow the development of the circular economy?'
(Aurélie Brongniart, *Économie circulaire*, 25/01/2021).

The deverbal *soi-disant* of (15) is inserted between the noun *prévisions* 'forecasts' and its specifier (*ces* 'these'), in a constructional frame where its instantiation makes it similar to an adjacent unit. Invariably and with a constrained position, *soi-disant* also includes a hyphenated characteristic of this compound. Semantically, the deverbal unit does not modify the acceptance of the noun postponed, nor its overtone, but influences the discourse representations that should be applied to the frequent uses of the previous and following terms. As confirmed by the quotation marks, the utterance is formalized for suggesting perplexity and scepticism: *soi-disant* contributes to this process by minimizing the validity of «forecasts».

On the other hand, (16) and (17) show the two single uses of *disant* as a noun, specifically in compounds, and generally with a hyphen as well, *moins-disant* meaning 'lowest bidder', as opposed

⁷ The translation of *soi-disant* in 'so-called' is not concerned here: in French, the English expression should rather correspond to 'ainsi nommé'. On this point, see Samardžija-Grek and Torterat, forthcoming.

to *mieux-disant* which means ‘highest bidder’. The predicate frames where they occur correspond to noun phrases, as we can note through the following UCS (16’ and 17’):

(16’) { [lowest bidder_N (the_{SPEC}) (social_{<ADJ>})] }

(17’) { of_{PREP} [highest bidder_N (the_{SPEC})] }

As a noun phrase in (16), «the social lowest bidder» constitutes an apposition (Lanwer 2017) to a subsequent noun phrase, or more exactly an adposition modifying the preceding noun within a non-verbal title. In (17), «the highest bidder» appears in a prepositional noun phrase (as a nominal core) which expands the previous noun «choice». These two cases express fully nominal values.

Such tendencies may be corroborated by quantitative approaches to the contemporary usages of the units. An investigation carried out in 2016 inside the *Généralis* database (limited access), which includes more than 200 French-language periodical titles (newspapers and magazines) and more than 310,000 articles, first revealed that out of 73 randomly selected occurrences of *disant* (period 1999-2015), the entries are divided as follows:

present participles	gerunds	<i>soi-disant</i> locution	<i>disant</i> as a noun	
			<i>moins-disant</i>	<i>mieux-disant</i>
12	18	36	3	4

As observed before, present participles and gerunds tend to imply verbal uses of *-ant* forms (Samardžija-Grek 2017; Torterat 2012, 2016c). Concerning the locution *soi-disant* ‘purportedly’, we have noted that 54.05% of occurrences appear before adjectives or adjectival phrases (such as «[soi-disant] old / equal / too expensive»), 29.73% before nouns or noun phrases, 10.81% before participles (such as «[a [*soi-disant*] refurbished]»), while 5.41% appear in absolute constructions⁸. However, the nominal compounds *moins-disant* and *mieux-disant* constitute 9.57% of the occurrences of *disant*, with a variable frequency among the journals and magazines⁹.

Another study, based on the Europresse database (which gathers 10,000 French-language information sources including social networks and reports¹⁰), confirmed these first findings: over the period July 2015 to July 2016 and on the basis of 24351 documents, we identified 258 occurrences of *disant*, distributed as follows:

present participles	gerunds	locution <i>soi-disant</i>	<i>disant</i> as a noun	
			<i>moins-disant</i>	<i>mieux-disant</i>
66	119	52	10	11

In this sample, the deverbal forms represent 28.29% of all occurrences of *disant* (8.3% concerning the compounds): such proportions conform to what we presume to be the contemporary written uses of these term. The results also confirm that gerunds are instantiated almost half as much as present

⁸ We found two occurrences: in the magazine *Lire* of 2008, February (n° 362, p. 40) and in an issue of *Télérama* (n° 3026, p. 48, 09/01/2008). Two incorrect spellings should also be noted: a «soit-disant [utilisés]» in the review *Vingtième Siècle* (81, p. 6, 01-2004) and «soit-disant [sans faille]» in an issue of the *Nouvel Economiste* (1584, p. 61, 13-12-20/11). Let us note that *soi-disant* sometimes receives a number mark (but not the gender), for example: «des *soi-disants* arrondissements» (*Le Courrier du Vietnam*, 19/04/2020); it should be due to the frequent position of the adverbial compound next to nouns, thus triggering a confusion with the adjectives.

⁹ *Le Moniteur des travaux publics et du bâtiment*, *Alternatives économiques* and *l’Usine nouvelle*, for instance, regularly use these compounds.

¹⁰ <<http://www.europresse.com/fr/rechercher/>> (accessed 11/11/2022).

participles, and that *soi-disant* is still quite widespread. That being said, we can assume that these uses are more frequent in oral discourse, with an almost total absence of present participles, and an upholding of gerunds and *soi-disant* units over a wide range of uses (Féron and Coltier 2013; Torterat 2018).

3. Discussion

In our view, two questionable cases appear regarding the *ant*-deverbal units in the French language. The first one corresponds to what Philology occasionally calls periphrases, and to what Linguistic sums up in the concept of converbs. The second coincides with small verb phrases, such as *ce disant* and *cela étant* (~ ‘anyway’ / ‘that being said’) which may be used as discourse operators.

Concerning converbs, let us recall that this type of unit differs not only from serial verbs (Bisang 1995), but also locutions and support verbs (Torterat 2016c)¹¹. See below with *ant*-verbs (18 and 19):

(18) Raymond Domenech en est reparti **souriant**.

‘Raymond Domenech went away **smiling** / **with a smile**’ (*Football.fr*, 29/11/2019).

(19) L’homme en noir va **titubant** à travers.

‘The man in black goes **lurching** through’ (transl. of the Grace Slick’s *Darkly Smiling* song by *LyricsFrance*, 11-2022).

About differences and similarities, converbs combine a main verb with a non-finite verb (infinitive or present participle, less frequently a gerund in French) around an aspectual meaning – such as progressive, illative or iterative process¹². In application to *ant*-forms and looking at some concrete examples, the verb preceding the unit influences the meaning of the non-finite verb in a contingent combination, which can be represented in UCS as follows for (18) and (19):

(18’) { SMILE (go away →) _v (Raymond Domenech _{SUBJ<NOUN>}) }

(19’) { LURCH (go →) _v (the man in black _{SUBJ<NOUN PHRASE>}) (through)_O }

Under this interpretation, we should envisage «smiling» (18) and «lurching» (19) as present participles, thus as full verbs. Such an assumption should be corroborated by the capacity of *souriant* (in French) to be replaced by a gerund:

(18’’) Raymond Domenech en est reparti **en souriant**.

However, doubt remains about the verbal consistency of the *ant*-verb in (18), which may occur as an adjective in exactly the same construction (20):

(20) Cette dame est repartie **souriante** avec ses colombes.

‘This lady went away **smiling** with her doves’ (*L’Est Éclair*, 25/02/2019).

This possibility does not concern (19), even if *titubant* can also be an adjective (cf. ‘Une Europe *titubante*’, in *Courrier international*, 28/04/2022): the scalar «coalescence» (Haspelmath 2011) between *va* and *titubant* here appears too narrow to allow an adjectival use of *titubant*.

¹¹ Serial verbs do not exist in the Romance languages. They correspond to «a monoclausal construction consisting of multiple independent verbs with no element linking them and with no predicate-argument relation between the verb» (Haspelmath 2016: 292). Concerning examples of locutions and support verbs, respectively: *au demeurant*, *vu que*, *ce faisant* in the first case, and *donner tort (à)*, *faire un salut (à)* in the second case.

¹² See Ašić et al. (2017) for a comparative approach.

Concerning transition operators, the two following examples show to what extent a doubt may appear:

(21) Ces régimes allouent des prestations financières dans le but de pallier une difficulté économique. **Cela étant**, aujourd’hui, ces aides sont fournies par des services différents.

‘These regimes allocate financial benefits to alleviate economic hardship. **However**, today, these benefits are provided by different services’ (Grand Conseil du Canton de Vaux, Lausanne, Postulat du 25/09/2018).

(22) Remarquons aussi, **en passant**, que chez Lacan l’art continue de s’appliquer à la psychanalyse.

‘Let us also note, **in passing**, that in Lacan art continues to apply to psychoanalysis’ (Benoît Goetz, *Le Portique*, 2, 1998).

From a functional point of view, these two sentences exemplify how the scalar process of the *ant*-units uses impacts *a*) their grammatical categorisation, and *b*) their relevant role in discourse. In (21), *cela étant* ‘however’ *a*) corresponds to an adversative unit connecting two sentences, such as an adverb should do, and *b*) intervenes at the transition between two statements for mitigating the previous generalisation. In this case, *cela étant* is locutional, and compatible neither with negation, nor with permutation, nor with the insertion of an element between the two elements of the deverbal compound.

In (22), what appears as a gerund cannot be referred to the subject of the main verb («we»), and might be extraposed at the beginning of the whole utterance. Concretely, *a*) *en passant* co-occurs with *aussi* ‘also’ as an adjacent unit attached to the verb *remarquer* ‘to note’, with a satellite role, and *b*) at the discourse level, it contributes to representing the sentence as an accessory information.

This acceptance of *en passant* as an operator is confirmed by the glossaries provided by several sources. For instance, let us note that in 2022 the *Cambridge Dictionary* (online) indexes *en passant* as an adverb, adding that «if you say something *en passant*, you mention it quickly while talking about something else: “She mentioned, *en passant*, that she’d been in L.A. the previous week”».

That being said, in (21) given that *cela* in *cela étant* sums up the previous argument and co-occurs before what may correspond to a present participle (in UCS [BE_v (that_{SUBJ<PRO>})]), doubt remains on its full use as a deverbal unit. On the other hand, within (22), we may assign to *PASSER* a subjacent subject coinciding with the indefinite pronoun «one», which it should be in examples such as the passive constructions (*que cela*) *soit dit en passant* (literally ‘(that this) be said in passing’). One other assumption should also make the phrase *en passant* correspond to an elliptical construction.

4. Some conclusions

The present approach resorts to a small range of features available in functional grammar: its purpose being to demonstrate some mechanisms testifying to the compatibility of *ant*-verbs with diverse constructions, the study is by no means exhaustive. Be that as it may, we believe that Dik’s formalisms, by setting the predication at the forefront of its classifications, allow us to comprehend the uses of (non-)verbal forms through their participation in a layered structure of processes. More generally, by assuming that for a given property or predicate, there are *n* members compatible with it (Dik 1989: 127-128), this type of approach sets the (non-)verbal predicate within combinatorial operations which make it possible to consider the scalar mechanisms as inherent to many linguistic units (see also Reinhart 2002; Diller 2005; Caudal and Nicolas 2005; Reinhart and Siloni 2005). For example, several studies have shown that this hypothesis also applies to subordinating and coordinating constructions (Torturat 2000; Andersen and Holsting Møller 2018, among others).

We do not use the terms «gradiance» nor «gradualness», opportunely applied to the mechanisms of grammaticalization by Traugott and Trousdale (2010), due to their one-way representations of the

recategorization process. Tangibly, the mechanism of scalarity is basically bidirectional, namely that an *ant*-form may occur as verbal or deverbal units according to the predicates' frames and the contexts of occurrences. From this perspective, the scalarity could have a broader range of applications in Linguistics:

- a) concerning the whole class of deverbal units, it can explain raising constructions due to recategorization and reanalysis;
- b) specifically regarding *ant*-forms, scalarity confirms a wide array of combinations including participles, gerunds, adjectives and nouns, but also locutional and conjunctive phrases;
- c) such a mechanism opportunely complements the concepts of nominalization or grammaticalization for instance, which refer to processes strictly unidirectional;
- d) it can be used in a cross-linguistic perspective.

In view of these prospects, we also consider that scalarity can be an interesting explanatory principle in Typology, among others, to examine the continuum between the class of nouns and that of verbs or adjectives. The *ant*-forms can constitute one of the contents from which to continue this examination.

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