Abstract in English

This dissertation studies suffixal derivation of adjectives from nouns in French. It is based on a lexicon of about $15,000$ adjectives, 40% of which may be considered denominal.

I first present the data under investigation. I describe the *Dénom* database, which was derived from large scale lexica. In order to assess the position of denominal adjectives in the more general adjectival system, I present a classification of French adjectives on the basis of their morphological properties. In the process, I spot cases where the fringes of the class of denominals are unclear, and question the distributional and semantic cohesion of the class. I finally review different types of formal or semantic mismatches between the adjective and its base noun.

In a second step, I present a study of the formal and semantic properties of a subset of denominal adjectives where the morphological relation between base and derivative is regular. This subset is selected on the basis of the type frequency of formal patterns of alternation between base and derivative. I describe the phonological and morphological properties of base nouns, with the aim of uncovering factors that play a role in the formation of adjectives. This leads to the observation of morphological niches, that is, cases where the presence of a particular suffix in the base attracts a particular adjectival suffix. Sequential suffixation is rare outside of these niches. In addition, I show that one adjective may simultaneously entertain a derivational relation with more than one member of its morphological family.

These observations finally lead me to question the view that derivation is binary and strictly oriented, and more specifically that each denominal adjective is associated with a unique base. I propose to analyze the formation of denominal adjectives in terms of *cumulative patterns* recording regularities that may be observed in a set of lexemes of any size. I thus show that adjectives participate in networks relying on more than two elements. At a more abstract level, I observe that patterns rely on some recurrent semantic relations. Morphological patterns thus instantiate more general lexical patterns that abstract away from the detailed formal relationship between the lexemes they relate. Lexeme formation is thus seen as integration in a non-oriented network at variable levels of generality.