

## Gender inversion in Romance derivatives with *-arius*

Michel Roché, Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail

The research we present here deals with both gender assignment and the lexical structuration of derivatives constructed with Romance suffixes descended from Latin *-arius*, *-aria*, *-arium*. On the one hand, studies on gender assignment in French (Roché, 1991) have shown that gender inversion – from base to derivative – is one of the processes through which gender can be assigned to derivatives built on a nominal base, especially in the derivation with *-ier/-ière*. This observation makes one wonder whether such inversions can be observed in other Romance languages. On the other hand, the descriptions of this family of suffixes – It. *-aio/-aia* and *-iere/-iera*, Fr. *-ier/-ière*, Oc. *-ièr/-ièra*, Ca. *-er/-era*, Sp. *-ero/-era*, Po. *-eiro/-eira* – have stumbled on the difficulty to account for the wide range of derivatives, on the categorial, semantic and referential fields. Our purpose is to connect these two approaches, which throw light on each other, and thus make up for a gap in the understanding of word construction.

**1. The suffixes originating in *-arius*** have generally been regarded as fundamentally adjectival, in traditional historical studies (e.g. Rohlfs (1969) on Italian) as well as in recent synchronic ones (e.g. Corbin (1991) on French). Therefore, the distribution of nominal derivatives between masculine and feminine is explicitly (Rohlfs) or implicitly (Corbin) supposed to follow the rules of gender assignment applied to nominalized adjectives. That is to say, for */-an/* nouns: (1) agreement with an implicit determinatum (through ellipsis or not); (2) neutralization of gender, which results in the choice of masculine as the unmarked gender, in all instances where no implicit determinatum prevails. This is the reason why masculine is more frequent than feminine among nominalized adjectives (in the proportions of ca. 70% to 30% in French). Among Romance */-an/* derivatives with *-arius*, things are clearly different: (1) for most of them, it is impossible to find an implicit determinatum which could explain the gender; (2) the feminine derivatives are more numerous than the masculine ones. Consequently, these derivatives cannot be all deadjectival. A number of them, at least, are directly nominal and are assigned their gender by other means. This distinction has been made by Rainer (1993: 477, 488) for Spanish: the derivatives which are considered as the result of an ellipsis – a minority – are set apart from the other *Bildungstypen*. But the author does not explain the distribution of these *Bildungstypen* between *-era* and *-ero*.

**2.** A closer study allows to assert that **gender assignment to the derivatives of this family** may follow three processes: (1) the deadjectival one; (2) gender inversion; (3) attraction of a homogeneous lexical paradigm. The distribution of the derivatives into these three categories is connected with the semantic and referential aspects of the derivation, but there is no clear-cut coincidence of the two approaches. Gender assignment, indeed, is a result of a conflict between competing processes, and the observation of large series of derivatives is essential to establish which one prevails in a particular class.

**2.1. Deadjectival** gender assignment can be witnessed, for instance, in the comparison of Fr. *baleinier* "whaling ship", (*cargo*) *bananier* "banana-boat", *pétrolier* "tanker", etc., with It. *baleniera*, (*nave*) *bananiera*, *petroliera*, etc. Even though the ellipsis is

not testified in all cases, the masculine words *navire*, *bateau*, *cargo* in French, the feminine *nave* in Italian, act implicitly as generic terms. These derivatives belong to many referential classes, and the semantic relations between base and derivative are very diverse. However, as a whole, they constitute a minority of the/-an/ nouns constructed with our suffixes. As regards the gender of the base, no constraint can be observed: masculine derivatives have a feminine base as well as a masculine one, and so do feminine derivatives.

**2.2. Gender inversion**, on the contrary, is generally associated with a particular relation between the derivative and its base. Broadly speaking,  $N_{\text{der}}$  designates something that contains what is designated by  $N_{\text{base}}$ . More precisely, this relation may be:

- Container / thing contained.  $N_{\text{der}}$  designates an artefact which is used to contain (or hold) what is designated by  $N_{\text{base}}$  (container, box, case, bag, holder, piece of furniture, room, etc.): e.g. Fr. *salade* → *saladier* "salad bowl"; Sp. *botella* → *botellero* "bottle rack"; Po. *lápiz* → *lapiseira* "pencil holder"; It. *piatto* → *piattaia* "dresser". In this class taken as a whole, gender inversion ranges from 66% to 72% in Italian, French, Occitan, Catalan and Spanish (57% in Portuguese).

- Collective / element.  $N_{\text{der}}$  designates an amount of what is designated by  $N_{\text{base}}$  (countable or non countable), e.g. Sp. *cabello* → *cabellera* "hair"; Oc. *nèu* → *nevièr* "snowdrift"; a collection, e.g. Sp. *canción* → *cancionero* "songbook"; a complex artefact, e.g. Fr. *pédale* (f.) → *pédalier* (m.) "pedal mechanism", "pedal-board" (compare to It. *pedale* (m.) → *pedaliera* (f.)). In this class, gender inversion ranges from 76% to 83% in Italian, French, Occitan and Catalan (58% to 67% in Spanish and Portuguese). It is noticeable that in French nearly all the derivatives are masculine, whence it may be inferred that the derivation, through gender inversion, operates a selection among the possible bases.

The main other series are animal dwelling / animal (e.g. Oc. *lop* → *lobièra* "wolf's den"); plantation / plant (e.g. It. *cipolla* → *cipollajo* "onion field"); tree / fruit (e.g. Fr. *cerise* → *cerisier* "cherry tree"); quarry / mineral product (e.g. Sp. *canto* → *cantera* "stonequarry"); piece of garment / part of the body (e.g. Fr. *genou* → *genouillère* "kneepad"). Each one requires a specific study. The last two are almost exclusively feminine, without gender constraint on the bases or recognizable implicit determinatum. It may be supposed that gender is due to a "leader word" (Baldinger's *Leitwort*) which originated the whole series. In the first three, gender inversion can be observed in some languages and not in the others. It works best in Occitan and French, worst in Portuguese where, for instance, names of trees are generally feminine whenever the name of the fruit is feminine, masculine whenever it is masculine (e.g. *lima* → *limeira* "(sort of) lemon tree" / *limão* → *limoeiro* "lemon tree").

In the lexical series where gender inversion works for a majority of derivatives, exceptions may be due, for instance, to interferences with deadjectival gender assignment; to a gender variation of the base; to special gender effects (e.g. "small"/"big" opposition in Occitan: *garba* → *garbièr* "stack of sheaves" / *garbièra* "bigger stack of sheaves"); etc.

From a historical point of view, two important stages can be distinguished: (1) the institution of gender inversion, in late Latin or Proto-Romance, as a break with the

system of gender assignment in classical Latin; (2) the development of homogeneous lexical series, whose attraction gradually supplanted gender inversion in many cases. Occitan and French names of trees, for instance, have been assigned their gender, first, in opposition to the names of fruit inherited from Latin, which were almost all feminine; afterwards, they continued to be masculine when the series integrated masculine names of fruit.

References:

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