

Constraints on the French [*non-N*] construction

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1. Introduction

In contemporary French, the prefix *non-* can attach to nouns to form nouns ([*non-N*]) with a negative meaning, such as *non-qualification* ‘non-qualification’, *non-Italien* ‘non-Italian’, and *non-ville* ‘non-city’:

- (1) Une **non-qualification** serait un cataclysme pour l’équipe de France, qui a disputé tous les Mondiaux depuis 1997.
‘A non-qualification would be a disaster for the French team, which played all World Cups since 1997.’
- (2) Pour un **non-Italien**, la cuisine italienne se résume à des plats classiques comme la pizza napoletana, les pâtes à la bolognaise ou un délicieux Tiramisu.
‘For a non-Italian, the epicentre of Italian cuisine comes down to classic dishes such as pizza napoletana, pasta bolognese or a delicious tiramisu.’
- (3) Sarcelles c’est l’archétype de la **non-ville**, le chef d’œuvre de l’aberration urbanistique.
‘Sarcelles epitomizes the non-city, the masterpiece of urban aberration.’

[*Non-N*]s are morphological constructions where *non-* is a prefix (cf. Dugas 2016a for a discussion on the status of [*non-N*]s in French).

The goal of morphology is the study of the relationship between meaning and form in lexical items and how speakers make use of this relationship. One important question when investigating the characteristics of a morphological construction is that of the degree of productivity of this construction. Morphological productivity is a tricky issue and it can be defined several ways (cf. Bauer 2001 and references therein). In this paper, I assume that productivity (i) concerns patterns (i.e. schematic or semi-schematic constructions), not words, (ii) is, as most linguistic phenomena, a matter of degree and (iii) must be observed for a particular period of time. A construction is productive to the extent to which it leads to new coinages during a particular period of time (cf. Bauer 2001: 41).

This paper aims at investigating the productivity of the construction [*non-N*] in contemporary French (20th and 21st centuries). I am not interested in the *profitability* of the [*non-N*] pattern, but in its *availability* (Corbin 1987; Plag 1999; Bauer 2001). This preference for a qualitative approach to productivity explains why the corpus for this study consists of *types*, that is, different instances of the [*non-N*] construction. The paper, I hope, provides possible answers to the following questions: why do speakers coin new [*non-N*]s? How do speakers understand a [*non-N*] form they have never encountered before? Is the [*non-N*] pattern able to host any noun, and if not, why? Are these restrictions due to phonological, and/or semantic factors?

I will show that the construction [*non-N*] can be considered very productive in contemporary French as it can host almost any noun (subject to semantics and morphological complexity), but that the high productivity of the [*non-N*] construction is only apparent if we take into

account the fact that it actually corresponds to three sub-constructions which have their own “constraints”, namely, the semantic properties of the base noun (which often correlate with formal properties) and pragmatic information provided by the context.

The paper is organized as follows. In the next section, I present the theoretical background, the data and the methodology of this study. Section 3 describes the productivity of the general [*non-N*] pattern, compared with other French negative morphological patterns. In section 4, I show that the three [*non-N*] sub-constructions (ontological, classifying and qualifying) display varying degrees of productivity. Section 5 sums up the results presented in the paper and offers perspectives for further research.

2. Theoretical background, data and methodology

2.1 Construction morphology

In a Construction Grammar sense (Fillmore et al. 1988; Croft 2001; Goldberg 2006; Booij 2010), a construction is a conventionalized and entrenched symbolic pairing of form, meaning and/or discursive function. A construction is a node in the constructicon, the network of constructions of the language (Jurafsky 1992). Constructions can be substantive (e.g. *non-violence*), schematic (e.g. [prefix-N]) or semi-schematic (e.g. [*non-N*]). Schematic and semi-schematic constructions “specify the predictable properties of classes of complex lexical items” and “how similar new words can be coined” (Booij & Hüning 2014: 589). As mentioned above, productivity must be measured on the level of schematic or semi-schematic constructions. Two constructions can be different with respect to meaning, or form, or both (*contra* Traugott & Trousdale 2013, for example): for example, two patterns which have the same morphosyntactic structure, but different semantics, qualify as two distinct constructions. I believe also that the meaning of a construction should not be restricted to semantics, but should include pragmatic information.

2.2 Data

I assume that type frequency is a good proxy for productivity. Moreover, its role in lexical prediction has been emphasized in the literature (Chapman & Skousen 2005) as well as the link between type frequency and entrenchment (Bybee 1985; Langacker 1987). The [*non-N*]s that make up the corpus come from three different sources reflecting different genres and registers: the nomenclature of the dictionary *Trésor de la Langue Française informatisé (TLFi)*, the Frantext database of literary texts (from 1900 onwards) and the internet/online press, via the search engine GlossaNet. Table 1 indicates the number of types for each sub-corpus and the total number of types after doublets or triplets (instances of the same type in different sub-corpora) have been removed.¹

Table 1: Number of [*non-N*]s (types)

	<i>TLFi</i>	Frantext	Internet/Online press	Total ²
Types	174	798	267	978

¹ What is called a *type* here is a [*non-N*] with a given base noun and a given interpretation. As mentioned later, some base nouns may appear in different [*non-N*]s. So, for example, a classifying [*non-N*] and a qualifying [*non-N*] with the same base noun each have a separate entry in the corpus.

² There are instances which can be found in two or three sub-corpora (“doublets or triplets”), and which therefore have been deleted. This explains the total we get.

2.3 Annotation of the base nouns

The base noun (bN) of each [*non-N*] has been annotated for morphological complexity and semantics. The bNs were grouped into ten morphological categories:

- Deverbal nouns: nouns with the suffixes *-ade*, *-age*, *-ance/-ence*, *-ée*, *-ment*, *-ion*, *-ure* (*qualification* ‘qualification’), or nouns derived by verb-noun conversion (*désir* ‘desire’);
- Deadjectival nouns: nouns with the suffixes *-ité*, *-eur*, *-esse*, *-ise*, *-ice*, *-ion*, *-erie*, *-itude*, *-ance/-ence* (*tristesse* ‘sadness’), or nouns derived by adjective-noun conversion (*le malade* ‘the patient’);
- Denominal nouns: nouns with the suffixes *-ade*, *-age*, *-ance*, *-aille*, *-at*, *-ier*, *-ure* (*candidature* ‘candidacy’);
- Nouns related to pronouns (*moi* ‘self’);
- Nouns related to infinitives (*être* ‘being’);
- Nouns related to past or present participles (*admis* ‘admitted’, *combattant* ‘combatant’);
- Nominal compounds (*auteur-compositeur* ‘composer-songwriter’);
- Polylexical nouns (*roman policier* ‘police novel’);
- Simplex nouns (*oiseau* ‘bird’);
- Proper nouns (*Kadhafi* ‘Kadhafi’, *Protocole de Kyoto* ‘Kyoto agreement’).

Some nouns could not be classified: (a) nouns with the suffixes *-isme* or *-iste*, (b) nouns such as *calcul* ‘calculation’ or *oubli* ‘oblivion’, for which the orientation of the verb-noun conversion is difficult to determine (Tribout 2010), (c) nouns in *-ance* or *-ence* (*concordance* ‘concordance’, *équivalence* ‘equivalence’) for which one cannot decide whether they come from a verb or from an adjective (Dal & Namer 2010).

Concerning the semantics of the bNs, the following six classes have been distinguished, on the basis of tests proposed in the literature (Van de Velde 1995, 2006; Haas et al. 2008; Koehl 2009; Haas & Huyghe 2010):

- Artefacts (*chaussure* ‘shoe’, *livre* ‘book’);
- Natural entities (*oiseau* ‘bird’, *soleil* ‘sun’);
- Human beings (*journaliste* ‘journalist’, *juif* ‘Jew’);
- Events (*guerre* ‘war’, *communication* ‘communication’);
- Properties (*tristesse* ‘sadness’, *amour* ‘love’);
- Abstractions (*l’être* ‘the being’, *la beauté* ‘the beauty’).

Proper nouns constitute one of the ten morphological categories listed above, but they are also a separate semantic class, given that their denotation is different from that of common nouns (Kleiber 1981; Flaux 1991; Flaux & Van de Velde 2000).

Semantic annotation has been done using the meaning of the bN in its context of use (more precisely, in the context of use of the [*non-N*]). It is thus possible for a [*non-N*] to appear twice in the corpus. For example, *admissible* ‘eligible’ in *non admissible* ‘ineligible’ is classified as a human being in (4) and as an abstraction in (5):

- (4) dans le même couloir, [...] il y a les Trois Mousquetaires qui font passer les **non-admissibles**, pour une session de rattrapage.
 ‘in the same corridor, [...] the Three Musketeers are administering a compensatory session of tests to the **ineligible**’

- (5) c'est important que cela se passe avant l'entrée en maternelle, [...] avant que l'enfant soit pris dans l'admissible et le **non-admissible** par la société.
 'it is important that it happens before kindergarten, [...] before the child gets caught in the eligible and the **ineligible** of society'

In section 3.3, I give more details about the most frequent base nouns in the corpus.

3. A very productive pattern?

3.1 State of the art: productivity of [*non-N*] and other negative prefixation patterns

What stands out from the literature on [*non-N*]s is the relatively high productivity of the pattern, especially when compared to the other negative prefixation patterns of contemporary French. Most authors consider that the [*non-N*] pattern does not impose any (semantic, phonological) constraints on its bN. Di Sciullo and Tremblay (1993) nonetheless argue that *non-* cannot attach to pronouns or proper nouns (**le non-il* 'the non-he', **le non-Paul* 'the non-Paul'). These authors also consider that *non-* "works well" with nouns denoting events (e.g. *non-destruction*, *non-production*).

Yet the literature on French [*non-N*]s is scarce and a look at English [*non-N*]s may be useful. Here as well, it seems that any noun can enter the [*non-N*] construction. As in French, however, the construction has a preference for nouns denoting events, or, which is something which has not been noted for French, human beings. According to Jespersen (1917), "*non* is chiefly used with action-nouns; but it is also frequent with agent-nouns, such as *non-combatant*, *non-belligerent*, *non-communicant*, *non-conductor*" (Jespersen 1917: 147). We will see in section 3.2 to what extent this observation is borne out.

I would like to stress that there is a significant discrepancy between the descriptions of [*non-N*]s in grammars and in linguistics papers (this discrepancy is actually frequently observed). On the one hand, grammars give the impression that [*non-N*]s are a very marginal phenomenon and that the number of [*non-N*] types and tokens is too small (or too high? Or maybe are [*non-N*]s not seen as lexical units?) to be worthy of linguistic analysis. On the other hand, linguists consider that the [*non-N*] pattern is very productive as it does not impose any constraints on its bN. Evidence for this high degree of productivity is the fact that only a few [*non-N*]s are listed in dictionaries (Jespersen 1917; Zimmer 1964; Kalik 1971).

For example, Kalik (1971: 140) writes that "one could ask whether, in principle, words in *non-* should be listed in dictionaries. Their number is almost infinite". Kalik's observation echoes Zimmer's (1964) who, before him, had underlined the productivity of [*non-X*]s: "a listing of semantically transparent attested forms (which in any case is in practice bound to be incomplete) is hardly less futile than an attempt to count the drops in a pool during a rainstorm. Moreover, it has to some extent the effect of obscuring the fact that the process is synchronically productive" (Zimmer 1964: 32).

I wish to add here that most work on words in *non-* concerns adjectives (e.g. *non violent* 'non-violent', *non remboursable* 'non-refundable') and that, when nominal bases are studied, it is together with adjectival bases, whereas they correspond to two distinct constructions with specific characteristics (Dugas 2016a). It is therefore difficult to say whether the high productivity of *non-* words, which is assumed in the literature, apply equally to [*non-N*]s and to [*non-Adj*]s.

When it comes to forming negative nouns with nominal bases, *non-* prefixation has no real competitors in contemporary French. A number of prefixes also attach to nouns to form negative nouns: *a-*, *anti-*, *dés/dis-*, *in-*, *mal-*, *mé(s)-* (a. o. Staaff 1928; Guilbert 1971; Thiele 1987; Béchade 1992; Cartoni 2008; Amiot & Montermini 2009). The patterns [*dés/dis-N*], [*mal-N*] and [*mé(s)-N*] are

not productive today: they are not used to coin new negative nouns anymore. The [a-N] pattern forms nouns with a meaning of privation or absence, as in *anormalité* ‘abnormality’, *apesanteur* ‘weightlessness’, but it is different from the [non-N] pattern in several respects.

Among other things, there is very little overlap between the bases of the [non-N] pattern and the bases of the [a-N] pattern, notably because most [a-N] bases come from Latin or Greek and most [a-N]s belong to specialized languages. The [anti-N] pattern forms nouns with a meaning of opposition: symmetrical opposition (e.g. *anti-Liban* ‘anti-Lebanon mountains’), adversative opposition (e.g. *anti-limaces* ‘slug pellet’), contrary opposition (e.g. *anti-héros* ‘antihero’). As we will see, [non-N] words lack this opposition flavor and the [anti-N] pattern cannot, therefore, be seen as a competitor of the [non-N] pattern either.

We are left with *in-* prefixation, which, semantically speaking, is very similar to *non-* prefixation as it expresses negation without the privation/opposition flavour which is displayed by the aforementioned prefixation patterns. However, *in-* prefixation mainly forms adjectives (e.g. *immangeable* ‘inedible’, *impossible* ‘impossible’); the few attested *in-* nouns are older than *non-* nouns and it seems that today no or very few new *in-* nouns are coined: the pattern [in-N] cannot be said to be productive, or at least not as productive as the [non-N] pattern.³

3.2 Data: a very productive pattern?

When we look at the [non-N]s gathered for the corpus, it seems that any noun can enter this construction, but that some nouns are more likely to be prefixed by *non-* than others. Compared to other negative prefixation patterns and, in particular, to *in-* prefixation, the [non-N] construction is not very demanding regarding the noun it hosts:

- (i) Semantics: all types of “referents” can be found: artefacts, natural entities, human beings, events, properties, abstract entities, even proper nouns;
- (ii) Derivational history of the base: simple and derived lexemes, affixed lexemes as well as compounds, non finite verbs and pronouns converted into nouns, etc.
- (iii) Phonology: there are apparently no phonological constraints, unlike the [in-N] construction for example (*in-* has several allomorphs, whereas *non-* has no allomorphs).

Yet as summarized in table 2, some bases are more frequent than others. In the corpus, the most (type-)frequent bases are deverbal nouns (28%), deadjectival nouns (24%), simplex nouns (21%) and nouns related to participles (10%). Most bases denote events (34%), human beings (25%) and abstractions (22%) – which is partly consistent with Di Sciullo and Tremblay’s (1993) intuitions and Jespersen’s (1917) for English.

Table 2: Morphosyntactic and semantic properties of the bases

Morphosyntactic properties of the bN	% of types ⁴	Semantic properties of the bN	% of types
deverbal	28.4%	event	34%
deadjectival	24.1%	human being	25.3%
simple	21.5%	abstraction	22.7%

³ For example, the *TLFi* lists 148 [non-N]s and only 41 [in-N]s; furthermore, most bNs of my corpus are not acceptable when prefixed by *in-*.

⁴ As mentioned in the paper, some nouns could not be classified, which is why the total is not 100%.

participial	10.5%
polylexical	4.2%
non-finite verb	2.2%
compound	0.9%
pronoun	0.5%
denominal	0.3%
proper noun	0.3%

property	12.17%
artefact	3.2%
natural entity	1.7%
proper noun	0.3%

In a study where the 59,334 nouns listed in the *Trésor de la Langue Française informatisé* have been automatically prefixed by *non-* and the derived [*non-N*] lexemes were/have been searched on Google, it has been shown that 25% of the *non-* nouns had no attestation (Dugas 2016b). Some bases are too infrequent to be prefixed by *non-*, because either they belong to a very specialized language, or they are dialectal, or their referent does not exist anymore (e.g. *aberrographe* (type of camera), *gouttier* (kind of gutter), *grisoumètre* ('firedamp detector')). But other [*non-N*]s are not attested, although their bases are not altogether infrequent (e.g. *non africanisme* 'non-Africanism', *non multicoque* 'non-multihull', *non orangerai* 'non-orangerie'), so the question remains why they are not attested with the prefix *non-*.

4. Three different sub-constructions with their own constraints

4.1 Three interpretations

I have described above how the bNs have been annotated. Another important task has been to annotate the meaning of the [*non-N*]: three different interpretations have been identified, which I call *ontological*, *classifying* and *qualifying*.

A closer examination of the [*non-N*]s of the corpus reveals that there is not only one, but three [*non-N*] patterns that differ in meaning and, to a certain extent, in form. The examples given at the outset of the paper are repeated here. In (6), the [*non-N*] refers to the absence of an entity; in (7), it refers to a class of entities and in (8), it assigns a lack of stereotypical properties to an entity:

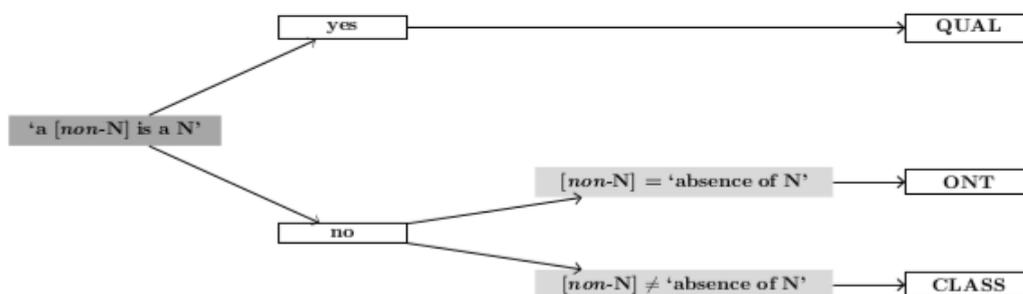
- (6) Une **non-qualification** serait un cataclysme pour l'équipe de France, qui a disputé tous les Mondiaux depuis 1997.
'A non-qualification would be a disaster for the French team, which played all World Cups since 1997.'
- (7) Pour un **non-Italien**, la cuisine italienne se résume à des plats classiques comme la pizza napolitana, les pâtes à la bolognaise ou un délicieux Tiramisu.
'For a non-Italian, the epicentre of Italian cuisine comes down to classic dishes such as pizza napolitana, pasta bolognese or a delicious tiramisu.'
- (8) Sarcelles c'est l'archétype de la **non-ville**, le chef d'œuvre de l'aberration urbanistique.
'Sarcelles epitomizes the non-city, the masterpiece of urban aberration.'

Constructions such as (6) will be called *ontological* [non-N]s, whereas (7) is an instance of *classifying* [non-N] and (8) an instance of *qualifying* [non-N]. Tests have been designed to determine the interpretation of each [non-N], and are summarized below.

- (i) Ontological [non-N]s refer to something which did not happen or which is not present, in a context where its occurrence or its presence was expected:
- The [non-N] refers to the absence of the referent of the bN;
 - The [non-N] and its base are in a semantic relation of contradiction (for more details on this notion, which traces back to Aristotle, see Horn 1989, and Schapansky 2002, 2010 for French).
- (ii) Classifying [non-N]s have a categorizing function; they divide a set of entities and create two classifying sets which are construed as sub-classes (or sub-sets):
- The [non-N] refers to a class of entities which is complementary to the class of entities the bN refers to;
 - The [non-N] and its base are in a semantic relation of contradiction.
- (iii) Qualifying reading:
- The [non-N] refers to an entity which is the same entity as what is referred to by the bN;
 - The referent of the [non-N] possesses the classifying, non-stereotypical properties of the referent of the bN, but not the stereotypical properties: for example, the non-city in (3) is a city;
 - The [non-N] conveys a negative evaluation and is metalinguistic, since the speaker calls into question the assertability of ‘the [non-N] is a N’.

As shown in figure 1, two tests allow us to distinguish between the three interpretations: (i) the test ‘a [non-N] is an N’ works with the qualifying interpretation only; (ii) the test ‘the absence of N’ works with the ontological interpretation, but not with the classifying interpretation.

Figure 1: Interpretation of the [non-N]s: decision tree



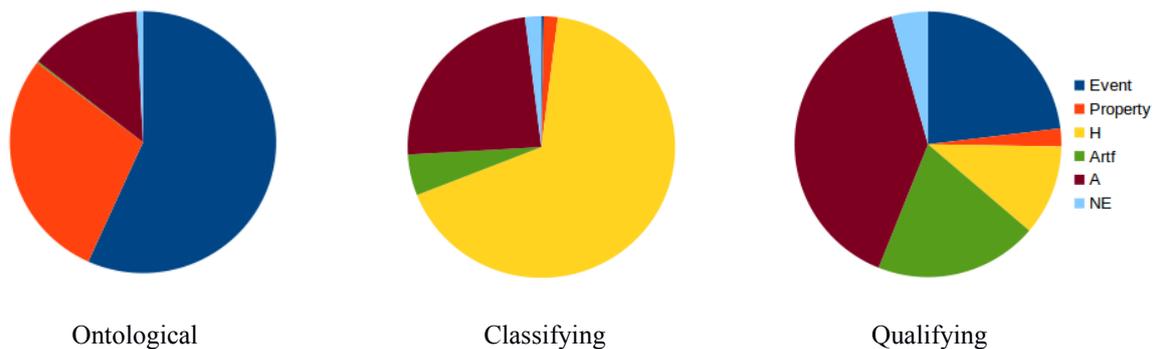
In the corpus, 73% of the [non-N]s have an ontological reading, 23% a classifying reading and only 4% a qualifying reading. This suggests that the three types of [non-N]s do not have the same productivity.

4.2 Different types of bases, varying degrees of productivity

In section 3.2, I showed that the [non-N] construction is very productive, but in section 4.1 we saw that it is more accurate to speak of three [non-N] constructions and thus to examine the productivity of each of these constructions separately. The analysis of the corpus suggests that some nouns are linked to a particular derived meaning (ontological, classifying, qualifying) with a very high probability: derived meanings collocate with particular base nouns.

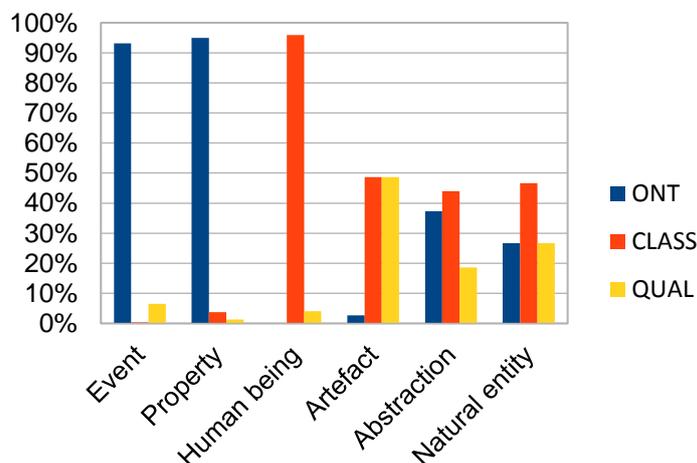
Figure 2 shows the distribution of the different types of bNs according to the three interpretations. The ontological interpretation is mostly found with bases denoting events (*non-qualification* ‘non-qualification’, *non-mise à jour* ‘non-update’, *non-remboursement* ‘non-refund’, *non-guerre* ‘non-war’) and properties (*non-patriotisme* ‘non-patriotism’, *non-conformité* ‘non-conformity’). The classifying interpretation is mostly found with bases denoting human beings (*non-Italien* ‘non-Italian’, *non-gréviste* ‘non-striker’, *non-magicien* ‘non-magician’) and abstractions (mostly adjectives used as nouns, e.g. *(le) non-intelligible* ‘(the) non-intelligible’, *(le) non-sérieux* ‘(the) non-serious’). The qualifying interpretation does not exhibit a clear preference for a semantic type of base, although it seems that it is found mostly with bases denoting abstractions (*non-réponse* ‘non-answer’, *non-rapport* ‘non-relation’).

Figure 2: Semantic types of base nouns in [non-N]s
(events, properties, human beings, artefacts, abstractions, natural entities)



Similarly, figure 3 shows that nouns do not yield any interpretation equally when they are used in a [non-N]. This is most obvious in the case of nouns denoting events and properties, which in the vast majority of cases yield the ontological interpretation, and nouns denoting human beings, which yield the classifying interpretation.

Figure 3: Interpretation of the [non-N] according to base noun semantic type



These data suggest that ontological, classifying and qualifying [*non-N*]s do not put the same constraints on their bN and that it is not the case that any noun can enter any [*non-N*] construction. Yet it is not obvious why some bases are very rare in certain [*non-N*]s:

- (i) Ontological interpretation: in syntax, the construction [*il n'y a pas de* + N] ‘there is no/there isn’t any’ allows us to refer to the absence of any kind of entity (events, but also human beings, artefacts, etc.). So why, for example, are there almost no ontological [*non-N*]s with a bN referring to a human being? A hypothesis would be that these bNs are very frequent in classifying [*non-N*]s and that there is a division of labour between the two interpretations, as it were. Yet this does not explain why ontological [*non-N*]s do not work well with bNs denoting artefacts.
- (ii) Classifying interpretation: the preference for bNs denoting human beings may be due to the fact that we tend to refer to human beings through the group(s) they belong to. Complementary [*non-N*]s are a very handy way of categorizing people. The lack of bNs referring to events can be explained by the fact that these bNs are very frequent in ontological [*non-N*]s.
- (iii) That qualifying [*non-N*]s do not show a clear preference for a type of bN is not surprising, given that these [*non-N*]s, as said in section 4.1, are evaluative and metalinguistic. Any noun can enter this construction as soon as it is endowed with enough stereotypical properties by the speaker.

Not only the type of bNs, but also the context plays an important role in the interpretation of the [*non-N*]. The constraints described above are better described as *probabilities* for a bN to yield a given interpretation (or as probabilities of a given [*non-N*] to have a particular base noun). As a matter of fact, pragmatic information provided by the context can at least partially override the constraint on the semantic properties of the bN. For example, bNs denoting events usually yield ontological [*non-N*]s, but they can also yield a classifying (9) or a qualifying (10) [*non-N*]:

- (9) Certaines langues [...] utilisent un auxiliaire “faire” pour souligner la réalité (affirmation) ou la non réalité (négation) de ce qu’on affirme, ainsi présenté comme relevant du faire ou du **non-faire**.
‘Certain languages [...] use the auxiliary “to do” to emphasize the reality (assertion) or non reality (negation) of what is asserted, which is presented as pertaining to the do or the **not-do**.’
- (10) Le simple fait d’aller voter n’implique pas du tout comme conséquence la mise en place de la démocratie. Malheureusement [...], **non-élections** et non-informations sont manipulées et payées par les multinationales qui ne sont pas démocratiques, mais libérales. (www)
‘The mere fact of voting does not necessarily imply the setting up of democracy. Unfortunately [...], **non-elections** and non-information are manipulated and paid for by multinational companies which are not democratic, but liberal.’

Similarly, although bNs denoting artefacts are most likely to yield classifying or qualifying [*non-N*]s, they can also, although very rarely, yield ontological [*non-N*]s, such as in (11):

- (11) [Je conseille quand même le “tu veux un coup de main” alors qu’il ne reste rien à faire hormis poser son cul pour passer à table. Ce qui prend donc la signification suivante dans la citerne de gaz qui sert de tête à Madame : “mais il se fout de ma gueule, à arriver après la bataille, avec son sourire provocateur, en plus ?”, là où] Monsieur pensait sincèrement que mettre le **non-pain** sur la table (normal, personne veut aller en acheter avec ce mistral, sans compter que Monsieur a terminé sa nuit en début d’après midi, boulange à sec de stock de Campagnette, donc), rendrait service à tout le monde. (www)
 ‘Mister sincerely believed that putting the **non-bread** on the table (well, no one wants to go and buy some with such a strong wind, besides, Mister woke up in the afternoon, so the bakery has no baguette anymore) would be helpful to everyone.’

Finally, the role of the context is particularly obvious in the case of qualifying [non-N]s (as in 8): the same qualifying [non-N]s can have several meanings, depending on the stereotypical properties which are involved. For example, the noun *femme* ‘woman’ can be associated with different properties as illustrated in (12) and (13):

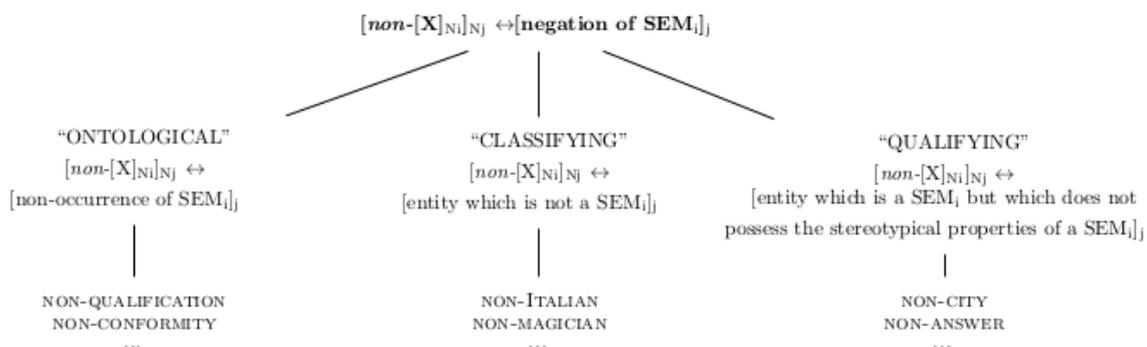
- (12) Je suis petite, menue, je ne me maquille pas, je ne porte pas de jupe ni de talons. [...] Mais est-ce que ça fait de moi une **non-femme** ? (www)
 ‘I am small and thin, I don’t wear make-up, I don’t wear skirts or high heels. Does that make me a **non-woman**?’
- (13) Je suis dingue de plantations. Les fleurs, par contre, bof, je m’en fiche ! Serais-je une **non-femme** ? (www)
 ‘I am fond of plants. But flowers, I don’t care about them. Am I a **non-woman**?’

So, [non-N]s also nicely illustrate the role played by context in the meaning of morphological constructions; context is part and parcel of the productivity of [non-N]s.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have shown that the French negative construction [non-N] corresponds to three constructions with a more specific negative meaning and certain constraints on their bases. This network of constructions is represented in figure 4.

Figure 4: Constructional network of [non-N]s



Given that it is not entirely possible to predict the interpretation of a [non-N] from the semantics of its base, the three subconstructions have the same form [non-[X]N]N, with no specification as to the type of noun entering the construction. I have shown, however, how it is possible for

a speaker to understand and to use a [*non-N*] with the correct meaning; the type of base combined with information provided by the context provide the cues to decode a given [*non-N*] construction.

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