

Copular constructions and adjectival uses of bare nouns in French: a case of syntactic recategorization?¹

Abstract. This paper deals with three copular constructions in French that take bare nominals as a predicative complement (*attribut du sujet*). From a lexical point of view, these constructions, which are typical of colloquial French, are very open frames. After a detailed analysis of the syntactic and semantic properties of these constructions, I will examine them in the light of a more theoretical question, viz. that of the categorial status of the bare nouns involved. More precisely, I will determine to which extent they are ‘recategorized’ into adjectives.

On the basis of a fine-grained syntactic and semantic analysis, I provide a nuanced — gradual — account of adjectivization. First, I discard what I call the ‘lexicalized’ cases of recategorization, i.e. the fully adjectivized ones (*vache, chatte, . . .*), in order to focus on ‘syntactic recategorization’, i.e. the occasional adjectival use of (bare) nouns in the constructions under investigation. Then, I show that the first of the three constructions involves a primarily syntactic (i.e. non permanent), contextual recategorization of the bare noun. By contrast, the second adjectival use, which is characterized by a superficial adjectivization, involves the copula as well and should be considered as a copular construction *sui generis*. Finally, the third use is somewhere in between the two other syntactically as well as semantically.

By way of conclusion, I suggest that the best way to account for the recategorization of bare nouns into ‘adjectival’ nodes might still be Tesnière’s (1959) concept of *translatif*. A parallel will be drawn with the role of determiners in nominalizations.

Keywords: Word class change, Adjective, Bare noun, Subject complement, Contextual change

1. Introduction. In this paper, I will focus on a series of four copular constructions that take bare nominals as a predicative complement (*attribut du sujet*), bare nouns being understood here in a general and purely syntactic sense, i.e. as nouns that are not preceded by a determiner:

- (1) Mon frère est très professeur/curé.
(My brother is very teacher/priest.)
'My brother is very 'teacher-/priest-like'
- (2) Ce film est très théâtre.
(This film is very theatre.)
'This film is very 'theatre-like.'
- (3) Je suis (très) fromage.
(I am very cheese.)
'I like cheese (very much), I eat cheese very often; I am into cheese'
- (4) Cet été sera (très) livre/cinéma/sport.
(This summer will be (very) book/cinema/sport.)
'This summer's focus will be on literature/film/sports'

These very 'open' constructions—one can insert, for instance, the lexeme *théâtre* in (2), (3), and (4)—have not yet been studied in depth,² although they are quite frequent in colloquial³ (hexagonal?⁴) French.⁵ They will be described in the first section of this paper. Apart from the problem of their mutual relationship (similarities and divergences), these four constructions raise a crucial theoretical question, which will be treated in the second section of this paper. The question concerns the nature of the nouns occurring in the complement position. Bare nouns are a central issue in what I would call the problem of (syntactic) *re-categorization* (in this case, recategorization of nouns into adjectives). Recategorization is a syntactic phenomenon in which words (lexemes) are occasionally used in the prototypical function of a word class other than that with which they are primarily associated.

2. Description. The four constructions mentioned fall into three types on the basis of their (abstract) meaning:

- resemblance: 'X presents characteristics of Y'
(1) + (2)
- inclination, propensity: 'X is characterized by the fact that X is keen on/into Y'
(3)
- content: 'X is characterized by the fact that X 'has' (contains) Y'
(4)

There exist more copular constructions with bare nouns, e.g. the very frequent and well-known ‘classifying’ construction:

- (5) Il est professeur.
‘He is a teacher.’

As the nouns used in this type of construction have clearly a more nominal status, I will examine them (with other types) in another paper.

Table 1 shows the relative frequency of the four constructions in Frantext, a tagged, but mainly literary corpus:

Table 1. Absolute frequencies of constructions I to IV in the Frantext corpus

	être + très/si/un peu + N	Frantext (1900–2000)
	construction type	n attested
I	il est très professeur/curé	63
II	ce film est très théâtre	12
III	je ne suis pas très fromage	5
IV	cet été sera très livre/cinéma/sport	0
	Lexicalizations	54
	Total	134

The fourth construction is the most recent one. All examples I have found (40 in total) are taken from press articles and advertisements. In the remainder of this article I will refer to these four constructions by roman numbers I to IV.

One could make the objection that the constructions under investigation, or at least a number among them, might be mere ‘fossilized’ or even ‘semi-phraseological’ uses of *être*, in spite of their very ‘open’ character. This is not the case, however, since other copular verbs can be inserted:

Table 2. Constructions I to IV with other copular verbs

très professeur	très théâtre	très fromage	été très sport	VERBS
+	+	+	+	rester/demeurer 'stay'
+	+	– (+: perf/de <i>plus en plus</i>)	– (+: perf/de <i>plus en plus</i>)	devenir 'become'
(+) datif ↑ : +	(+) datif : ↑ +	– / ? datif ↑ : +	– / ?? datif ↑ : (+)	sembler, paraître 'seem'
+	+	–	– ((+): spatial)	faire '± look/sound/ act . . . like'
+	– /(+)	(+) ¹	–	passer pour 'be taken for'
–	+	–	+	s'annoncer 'look/promise to be + adj.'
(+)	+	(+)	(+)	s'avérer 'prove to be'
(+)	+	+	+	se révéler 'prove to be'
+	–	+	–	se montrer 'show oneself to be'
–	–	–	–	passer 'become/be appointed'

This grid, which does not list all semi-copulas, is based on corpus research, completed by Google searches and—sometimes very awkward—native speaker judgments on constructed examples.⁶

Although these predicative uses of bare nouns have a lot in common, a closer semantic and syntactic analysis shows that they also exhibit some differences, as witnessed by their different abstract meanings⁷. These differences will be examined into more detail:

Table 3. Overview of the distinctive properties between constructions (I) to (IV)

	(I) + (II)	(III)	(IV)
A. selectional restrictions subject— predicative complement	(I) human (+ metonymic extensions: inanimate)— human; (II) inanimate- inanimate	animate— inanimate	inanimate (spatial/ temporal locus) + inanimate [animate (metonymy): <i>l'été sera très Bernard Henri Levi</i>
B. implication of a full NP (Riegel 1985: 195)	—	— +: object of an inclination	— +: content of a spatial/ temporal locus
C. pronominalization (interrogative)	comment	?comment	Comment
D. substitution by <i>faire</i> (semi- copula) (Riegel 1985: 195) e.g. <i>X fait très théâtre</i>	+	—	—

(continued)

Table 3. Overview of the distinctive properties between constructions (I) to (IV) (*continued*)

E. also attributive use	+ (II) – (I) [exc. with inanimate subj.]	–	+
F. substitution by a qualifying adjective	+	– (+: descriptive use of some classifying adj.)	– (+: descriptive use of some classifying adj.)

The first two properties are of a semantic or referential nature, the remaining four are of a syntactic kind. As the semantic/referential criteria will allow the reader to understand the internal meaning structure of these constructions better, I will examine them first.

A. The four constructions under investigation are characterized by different selectional restrictions (which tolerate some extensions and borderline cases (as in the case of animals⁸), which I cannot treat in detail here):

(i) human subject + human complement

(6) Pierre est très curé.
'Pierre is very priest-like'

Metonymic extensions (cf. Riegel 1985: 197) to inanimate subjects (gesture, attitude, etc.) are possible:

(7) C'est très femme, ces blagues-là. (Bourget, P./Lazarine/1917, p. 137 ; Frantext)
'Those jokes are very woman-like.'

(ii) inanimate subject (very often *ce*) + inanimate complement (including proper nouns)

- (8) Je sais bien que vous n'aimez pas les paysages. Vous devriez aimer celui-là, parce qu' il est un peu théâtre. (Maurois, A./ *Climats*/1928; Frantext)
'I know that you don't like landscapes, but you should like that one, because it's a bit theatre-like'.
- (9) Il y a la route, le voyage la nuit, le désir . . . c'est très "Lost Highway". (Google : christophebevilacqua.superforum.fr/t92-origines-des-chansons)
'There is the road, the trip by night, there is desire . . . it is very much like "Lost Highway".'
- (iii) human subject + inanimate complement/human complement
- (10) Je suis très fromage.
'I am very much into cheese'.
- (11) Je ne suis pas très Chirac.
'I don't like Chirac (or his policy).'

In this construction the human subject is very crucial for the interpretation which is based on propensity, and therefore also on intentionality.

Some categories are very well represented in the complement position of III. Most of them are very concrete in nature (cf. Goes 1999: 162), but not all are: food (drinks), entertainment, ideology (*marriage*, *Chirac*, etc.), marks, etc. The extreme popularity of the construction makes it possible to have a human complement (both proper nouns and common nouns):

- (12) Je ne suis pas très médecin (je néglige un peu ma santé, je l'avoue . . .). (Google : www.volcreole.com/forum/sujet-1807.html)
'I do not like doctors (I neglect my health a bit, I admit . . .).'

Moreover, in cases of ambiguity, native speakers tend to interpret these copular constructions as examples of construction III, rather than examples of construction I.⁹

- (iv) inanimate subject (spatial or temporal locus) + inanimate complement (sometimes human, by metonymic extension)

- (13) L'été sera très cinéma.
'This summer's focus will be on cinema'.
- (14) L'automne sera "BHL" ou ne sera pas: six ouvrages consacrés à "sa vie—son oeuvre" sont annoncés! (Le Soir, oct. 2004)
(The autumn will be Bernard-Henri Lévy or will not be at all [. . .]) [a philosopher → books about him]
'This autumn, the focus will be on BHL: six studies devoted to "his life and his work" are announced!'
- (15) Le niveau zéro, [. . .], est très peinture, encore que quelques fortes sculptures y habitent (Google)
'The ground floor is very much about painting, although there are also some strong sculptures exposed.'

The fourth construction, by far the least frequent (cf. *supra*), requires a special type of inanimate subject, viz. a spatial or temporal locus, and a mostly inanimate complement, which indicates on a very abstract level the existence of a 'content' (an activity, an object, a person, . . .) that characterizes the locus through a predicative relation.

From the point of view of subcategorisation, it is not uninteresting to note that creative language users do not restrict the predicative slot to nouns. We find also infinitives and even clausal elements (referring to an attitude):

- (16) Que penses-tu des parcs d'attractions ? je suis pas trop tourner manège. (Google)¹⁰
'What do you think about amusement parks ? I am not very much into fairground attraction.'
- (17) J'étais [sic] très «fais comme tu veux, tout ce que tu veux, garde la [sic] comme maitresse, je m'en fous, mais reviens!!!!» (Google)
'I was all "do as you please, do anything you like, keep her as a lover, I don't care, but please come back!!!!"'

B. In order to evaluate the second criterion (implication of a full NP), it is necessary to remember that there are more predicative constructions with bare nouns than those examined in this paper. The best-known type is that in which an official status (mostly a profession) is predicated over a human subject (Lauwers 2007).

- (18) Pierre est professeur.
 'Pierre is a teacher.'

This construction, which should not be confused with structure I, necessarily implicates an indefinite or definite, and hence a full NP:

- (19) Pierre est professeur / chef de l'armée.
 'Pierre is a teacher / chief of the army.'
 ⇔ un professeur / le chef de l'armée.

This implication does not hold for constructions I and II:

- (20a) Pierre est très professeur/curé.
 'Pierre is very teacher-like/priest-like.' Id est : 'he is not (but he behaves like one)'
 (20b) ≠ un professeur/ un curé

Rather the opposite is true: 'he is not (but he behaves, seems like . . .).' The concept expressed by the corresponding full NP has been wiped out so to speak. What is expressed here is only a vague, approximative, relation of 'resemblance', based on the extraction of salient semantic properties deriving from the nominal concept. These semantic properties can be rendered by true adjectives:

- (21) il est très professeur = il est très pédant, . . . ('pedantic').

The limits of constructions I and II are a matter of knowledge of the world.¹¹ We all know some typical, stereotypical properties of professors, priests, and so on, which are ready to be extracted from the corresponding nominal concept. We all know the image of the rather plump baker's wife which allow us to say:

- (22) ce spectacle virtuose que nous offrent ce boulanger débonnaire, son épouse très . . . «boulangère» et leur marmiton détonnant.
 (Google: <http://www.billetreduc.com/1436/evt.htm>)
 'this virtuoso spectacle offered by the baker and his wife, who was a typical example of a "baker's wife".'

But what about *member*, *widow*, etc.? It is very unlikely to find a possible world in which *Il est très membre du club* makes sense.

The non-implication of a full NP holds also for constructions III and IV, of course. However, the nominal concept as expressed by the full NP is semantically more prominent in III and IV, in another perspective, viz. as the object of an inclination in III or as the content of a temporal or spatial *locus* in IV.

C. The pronominalization by *comment* ('how') points towards a more descriptive, and hence adjectival, nature of the noun:

- (23) *Comment est sa femme? Elle est gentille.* (= descriptive adjective; "adjectif qualificatif")
'How is his wife? She is kind.'

Whereas in I, II and IV, questioning by *comment* is quite natural, in III some native speakers tend to reject *comment*.

D. The substitution by *faire*, a semi-copula which corresponds to an 'impression reading' (Lauwers 2008a), confirms the abstract meaning of I and II¹² as opposed to III and IV:

- (24) *Pierre fait très médecin.*
(Pierre makes very doctor.)
'Pierre behaves like a doctor / gives the impression of being a doctor.'

E. The impossibility of having attributive, i.e. adnominal uses, clearly opposes the *cheese*-construction (= III) to the *theatre*-construction (= II). Strangely, it is not possible to transform the predicate noun of the *professor*-construction (= I) into an attributive noun, except with inanimate nouns. Obviously, animate complements cannot be linked directly to animate nouns in order to construct a 'characterizing' (descriptive)¹³ meaning:

- (25) **J'ai vu un type très médecin.* vs *J'ai vu un film très 'théâtre pour enfants.*
(*I saw a guy very doctor' vs 'I saw a film very theatre for children.')
- 'I saw a guy who gave the impression of being a doctor.' vs 'I saw a film which was very much like theatre for children.'

F. Finally, substitution by full-fledged adjectives is always possible for the *theatre* and *professor* constructions:

- (26) Pierre est très professeur. ~ Pierre est très pédant,
etc.
'Pierre is very teacher-like.' ~ Pierre is pedantic, etc.
- (27) Ce film est très théâtre. ~ Ce film est très théâtral/exa-
géré/surjoué/ . . .
'This film is very theatre-like.' ~ This film is very theatrical /
exaggerated / overacted / . . .

In the case of III and IV, by contrast, substitution by adjectives turns out to be problematic. However, in some cases existing denominal adjectives can be used to fill the gap. This holds for construction IV:

- (28) Le 14 juillet à Segré sera très festif avec: [. . .] (Google)
'July 14th at Segré will be very festive with: [. . .]'
- (29) La saison estivale sera très musicale et ponctuée d'émissions
d'information sur la culture (Google : www.radiosfrancophones.org/pdf/juil-aout2002_259.pdf)
'The summer season will be very 'musical' and will have many
informative programs about culture.'

Even in the case of III, examples can be found:

- (30) Ce peuple est très festif et organise de grandes fêtes régulière-
ment avec des chants, danses, . . . (Google)
'Those people are very party-loving and regularly organize great
festivities, with songs, dancing, . . .'
- (31) Marshall est un excellent père et il est très familial. (Google)
'Marshall is an excellent daddy and he is very family-minded.'

All in all, these substitutions should be considered as marginal, for at least three reasons. First, substitution is far from automatic:

- (32) un été très show → ?
'a summer during which a lot of shows are broadcast'.

- (33) un étage très peinture → ≠ pittoresque; ??pictural
 ‘a floor focussing on painting’

Second, the adjectives attested here are all denominal ones. Most of them are primarily—and/or originally—classifying adjectives, accompanied by a degree modifier, which transforms them into descriptive adjectives (*adjectifs qualificatifs*):

- (34) année sportive/festive/musicale/cinématographique → une année très festive/ très sportive/
 ‘the year in terms of sports/festivities/music/cinema’ → ‘a very festive year / a year focussing very much on sports’ / . . .

The adjectives found in the complement slot of III and IV do not correspond to the “core” uses of the word class called ‘adjective’. This observation is confirmed by the fact that they constitute rather ‘creative’ uses, for they are very marginal when compared with the central uses of the lexical items involved. For instance, ‘family minded’ does not correspond to the ‘central’ meaning of *familial* (‘convivial’ / ‘intimate’ / ‘low-threshold’ / . . .), neither to ‘small-scaled, everybody knows each other, as in a family’, which we find in *Notre élevage est très familial* (Google) [‘Our breeding is very small-scaled.’], nor to ‘composed of families’, a use in which degree modification applies to the quantitative aspect (like in *étang très poissonneux* ‘a pond very rich in fish’):

- (35) Le public est (très) familial: des mères avec des jeunes adolescents . . . (Google)
 ‘The audience is composed of families : mothers with their young adolescents . . . ’

In short, in the case of construction III, the French language forges the ‘ad hoc’ means to express a special meaning relation through affixational derivation, combined with degree modification.¹⁴

This first analysis raises two questions: is there a difference between I and II and how should we consider the place of IV in relation to II and III?

Constructions I and II, which express the same meaning (‘resemblance’), have been considered together because they behave identically, except for the criteria A and E. However, the selectional restrictions A are not watertight, as frequent ‘institutionalized’ metonymic extensions allow also inanimate subjects, in combination with human

complements. The possibility to have inanimate subjects also weakens the constraints on the adnominal use of human complements (= criterium E):

- (36) Pendant l'excursion, le prof nous ennuyait. Il ne faisait que raconter des blagues très femme.
'During the excursion, our teacher was very boring. He could not stop telling very female jokes.'

Third, the fact that the difference between I and II can be explained by referring to a general opposition like human vs inanimate, suggests that the differences observed here are not mere effects of a particular construction. These arguments seem to justify an identical treatment of I and II. This position will be confirmed by the 'adjectivization' analysis *infra*.

A far more difficult question to answer is the place of IV in relation to II and III. At first sight, the abstract interpretation of a period or a place 'oriented to' an object or an activity might be derived from the propensity interpretation of III, applied to inanimate, i.e. non-intentional, subjects¹⁵ (= criterion B). Moreover, adjectival substitution is very awkward in both cases (= criterion F). However, at least three of the six criteria (A, C, E) used to differentiate the constructions under investigation point towards a strong relationship between II and IV.¹⁶ The most decisive syntactic argument seems to be the attributive use. It is clear that construction IV is linked to an attributive use, whereas III does not seem to allow any adnominal use at all:

- (37) Cette année sera très chanson → une année très chanson
'This year's focus will be on songs' → (a year very song), 'a year in which the focus will be on songs'
- (38) J'ai un frère qui est très fromage/télé → ??un frère très fromage/télé
'I have a brother who is very keen on cheese/TV. → (a brother very cheese/TV), 'a brother who is very keen on . . .'
The intermediate status of construction IV will be confirmed by the analysis of the categorial nature of the four complement-types under study (cf. 3.2.2.).

3. Recategorization. The phenomenon of recategorization, that is the fact that lexemes are sometimes used in a function that is typical of

another word class than that to which they have been primarily assigned, has been treated in various ways, as reflected in the rich terminology in this domain (which does not always refer to exactly the same phenomenon): *recategorization*, *functional shift*, *conversion*, *zero-derivation* / *dérivation impropre*, or, quite prominently in the French-speaking European linguistic tradition (cf. Lauwers 2004), *transposition* (Geneva structuralism) and *translation* (Tesnière).

The most extreme and detailed application of this concept is found in the *Eléments de syntaxe structurale* of the French syntactician Lucien Tesnière (1959). However, the scope of what he called *translation*, which in its strict interpretation would affect about one word in four, has more recently been reduced in various ways by scholars who continue to elaborate his ideas (Koch, Krefeld, Wunderli, Lambertz, Tlaskal, and, to a lesser extent, Werner and Lago Garabatos).¹⁷

In what follows, I will examine the recategorization question for bare nouns in copular constructions in more detail (3.2), after a brief discussion of what I would call “lexical recategorization” (3.1). The analysis will lead to a first attempt at formalization (3.3).

3.1. Lexical recategorization. As a matter of fact, many examples of the constructions studied here could not be taken into account because the nouns they contain are on their way to lexicalization:

- (39) Jeanne Birkin est très chatte / vache
 ‘Jeanne Birkin is very cuddlesome / nasty.’ (< ‘female cat’ /
 < ‘cow’)
- (40) Ce yaourt est nature.
 ‘This yoghurt is pure (= without additives)’ (< ‘like nature’)

These nouns have become true adjectives and should not be used in order to characterize constructions in which a noun is occasionally used as it were an adjective. These are cases of *lexical recategorization*, which, of course, diachronically go back to non-systematic uses (= syntactic recategorization), but which should henceforth be mentioned in the lexicon under the heading of adjectives. From a distributional perspective, they behave like (normal) adjectives in many other contexts. Therefore, they cannot be taken as the basis to determine the adjectival properties of the nouns used in the four constructions under study.

In order to measure the lexical character of these cases of adjectival recategorization, one can use a series of distributional tests. A noun is undergoing — gradual — lexical recategorization if:

- it can be used as an adjective without a degree modifier
- (41) Ces trois jeunes gens sont amis / trois jeunes gens amis
 ‘These three youngsters are friends.’ / ‘three youngsters that are friends’
- (42) Cette fille est canon. / une fille canon.
 ‘This girl is very beautiful’. / ‘a very beautiful girl’
- it can be used attributively (with a descriptive value¹⁸) [this test only applies to animate (human) nouns]
- (43) trois jeunes gens (très) amis
- it can be used in other adjectival contexts like quelque chose/quelqu’un de + adjective
- (44) Tu vas forcément retrouver quelqu’un de canon comme toi . . .
 (Google)
 ‘You surely will find someone who is very handsome like you . . .’
- selection restrictions are loosened
 - e.g. inanimate + human:
 - (45) une unité / pièce ennemie¹⁹; un paysage si enchanteur
 ‘a unit of the enemy’ [war] / ‘a piece of the enemy’ [chess]; ‘an amazing landscape’
 - e.g. human + inanimate:
 - (46) cette fille est canon; ma soeur est tarte
 ‘this girl is very beautiful’ (< canon-like); ‘my sister is very stupid’ (< like a tart)
- there is a meaning shift²⁰
 - ‘nature-like’ → ‘without addition of . . .’ (e.g. *yaourt nature*)
 → ‘simple, pure, . . .’ (e.g. *jeune fille nature*)
 - ‘canon -like’ → ‘handsome’ (e.g. *une fille canon*)
- there is a strong tendency towards agreement in number

- (47) vos questions sont parfois très tartes.
 (Google:<http://www.babelio.com/livres/Geluck-Le-Docteur-G-repond-a-vos-questions/124569>)
 ‘Your questions are sometimes very stupid.’

This is very clear in the case of *limite* (‘ok, but only just’), as shown by Google (limited to France) frequencies: *sont très limite* (17 ex.) vs *sont très limites* (87 ex.).

— the noun allows preposing:²¹

- (48) une vache bagarre
 ‘a nasty fight’ (< a cow-like fight)

These cases of stable “lexical recategorization” are a lexical matter and should be distinguished from ‘momentaneous’ syntactic recategorization.

From the point of view of the individual *lexeme*, it appears not at all problematic to add new or occasional syntactic recategorizations to already lexicalized ones. In other words, a lexical form can be associated both with its original word class and with a new word class as a result of lexical recategorization (*vache*, *chatte*, . . .) and on the basis of occasional insertion into a constructional scheme (syntactic recategorization). The following example (*chocolat*) illustrates the coexistence of both kinds of recategorization:

[– lexicalized]
 (construction I)

- (49) c’est très chocolat en bouche
 ‘It tastes like chocolate.’
 (construction III)

- (50) je suis très chocolat
 ‘I am very keen on chocolate.’
 (construction IV)

- (51) Cette sauce est très chocolat
 ‘This sauce contains a lot of chocolate’.
 [+ lexicalized]

- (52) Choco par ci, choco par là, sans choco je suis chocolat.
(Google: brozeur.pagesperso-orange.fr/textes/maq2/05maq2.html)
'Chocolate paste here, chocolate paste there, without chocolate paste I feel frustrated'.
- (53) Le teint est plutôt chocolat. (= color name)
'The color is rather like chocolate'.

However, additional syntactic recategorization exposes the speaker to 'homonymic clashes', which are sometimes exploited ironically.

3.2. Syntactic recategorization

3.2.1. Between noun and adjective: criteria. In order to determine to what extent a bare noun in a certain construction loses its nominal features and adopts adjectival ones, I have applied a number of—mainly distributional—tests to the four constructions under investigation.

The criteria that indicate *less nominal status* [- NOUN] are:

- (i) absence of a determiner
 - (ii) no implication of a full NP (Riegel 1985)
 - (iii) impossibility of anaphoric reference to the predicative bare noun²² (Schnedecker 1997: 187)
- (54) Pierre est curé/très curé. *Ce curé organise des voyages.
'Pierre is a priest / very priest-like. *This priest organizes trips.
- (iv) impossibility of free adjectival modification of the noun
- (55) *Pierre est très curé bizarre.
'Pierre is very [odd priest-like]'.
- (v) impossibility of coordination with a full NP
- (56) Pierre est très curé et un homme sage.
'Pierre is very priest-like and a wise man.'

The criteria that indicate *a more adjectival status* [+ ADJECTIVE] are:

- (i) pronominalization by *Comment* ('how?') [cf. supra]

- (ii) degree modification, e.g. by *très* ('very')
- (iii) substitution by a full-fledged adjective
- (iv) coordination ('conjunction') with a descriptive adjective by *et*²³ ('and')
- (v) attributive use
- (vi) possibility of insertion into *quelqu'un de / quelque chose de + adj.*:
quelque chose de beau/quelqu'un d'intelligent ('something beautiful', 'someone intelligent')
- (vii) number agreement imposed by the subject
- (viii) the general possibility to give way to lexical recategorization

As to criterion (vii), in construction III and IV the number of the predicative noun is not dictated by the number of the subject. Subject and complement vary freely in number (constructed examples):

(construction III)

- (57) Pierre [sing.] est très fruits exotiques. [plural]
 'Pierre is very keen on exotic fruit.'
- (58) Pierre et Pauline [plural] sont très fromage. [sing.].
 'Pierre and Pauline are very keen on cheese.'

(construction IV)

- (59) Les prochaines années seront très cinéma.
 'The next few years' focus will be very much on cinema.'

As a matter of fact, the subject and the complement concept are 'independent': the rather abstract homomorphism implied by number agreement between two nouns is not at play here. This is what we should understand when Goes (1999: 162) states that the complement noun "est totalement extérieur au sujet". In the case of III, this is very clear: human subjects are generally combined with inanimate complements, which cannot be homomorphous by definition (or only in a metaphorical sense).²⁴

As predicative adjectives agree in number with their subject noun, the absence of strict agreement rules in the case of III and IV is clearly a symptom of the non-adjectival nature of the bare noun in these constructions.

On the other hand, the agreement criterion is not distinctive in the case of I and II, and therefore cannot be used. In these cases it is not clear if the agreement triggered by the subject is an adjectival or

a nominal feature. In the case of I, for instance, obligatory agreement seems to be a characteristic of [+human] predicates, as agreement is also obligatory in the classifying construction with a full NP or a zero determiner, combined with a human subject:

- (60) Les danseurs sont fonctionnaires de nos jours /des artistes.
 ‘Nowadays, dancers are public servants/artists.’
- (61) Les danseurs [plural] sont très typés, très «hommes et femmes de la rue» [plural] (Google, La Libre Belgique [Belgian newspaper])
 ‘The dancers have a very well-rounded character, are very much like men and women on the street.’

In the case of inanimates (= construction II), the situation is even more complex. In general, the number of the complement is not imposed by the number of the subject noun:

- (62) des scènes très “théâtre” (Google)²⁵
 ‘very theatre-like scenes’

Conversely, we find also examples of singular subjects and plural nouns, although this kind of combination is hard to find:

- (63) [site web] un design très comment dire . . . très jeux vidéo, très clair et très lisible (Google : http://www.ciao.fr/Informations_jeux_10363_4)
 ‘[web site] a design that is, how should we say, very much like that of video games, very clear and readable.’

As a consequence, number agreement might be a very strong criterion to prove lexical recategorization. However, it turns out that even inanimate subjects impose agreement on the basis of the same kind of homomorphy as in I:

- (64) le divan et le sofa sont des meubles qui ne «s’ouvrent» pas (Google)
 ‘A divan and a sofa are furniture that cannot be « opened »’.

In other words: there are reasons to call into question the reliability of the agreement criterion in order to measure “adjectiveness” in the

case of I and II, although in the case of II, agreement often seems to be a symptom of adjectiveness (and even of lexical recategorization).

The results of the tests are summarized in **Appendix 1**.

3.2.2. *The categorial nature of predicative bare nouns.* If we summarize the results reported in the appended table, we obtain the following scores:

Table 4. Synthesis of the categorial nature of the non verbal predicate in Constructions I to IV

(I)/(II)		(IV)		(III)	
+ adj.	– N	+ adj.	– N	+ adj.	– N
6	4	4	3	2	3
10		7		5	
– adj.: 1		– adj.: 2		– adj.: 6 7	

As the features of [+ adjective] can also be considered as symptoms of [– noun], we can add them up, which leads to the following results for the [+ adjective] features. Structures I and II are clearly the more adjectival ones [6 + 4 = 10], whereas III, the *cheese*-construction, is by far the least adjectival one [2 + 3 = 5]. Construction IV is somewhere in between [4 + 3 = 7].

How should we explain these results in the light of a more general framework of syntactic recategorization? All these particular uses have in common the fact that they involve bare nouns, i.e. nouns that are ‘weakened’ compared to full NPs. But this small degree of decategorialization does not lead to adjectivization to the same extent. A gradual view imposes itself.²⁶

3.2.2.1. Constructions I and II: predicative use of recategorized bare nouns. Some uses of bare nouns are clearly modeled on the prototypical uses of adjectives. This is the case for I and II. That is why these non-systematic adjectival uses of bare nouns share a lot of properties with full-fledged adjectives (but not all: preposing in attributive use is not possible, for instance²⁷).

The rationale behind these productive cases of recategorization is as follows. First, the bare noun undergoes contextual property extraction

triggered by a degree adverb. The restrictions on this mechanism are a matter of pragmatic knowledge (stereotypical associations). Once the nominal element has adopted adjectival semantics (characterization), it also takes on adjectival syntactic properties. As a result, the contextually adjectivized sequence [degree adverb + bare noun] enters in a distributional network on the basis of a certain categorial status, namely [+ adjectival]. Indeed, the bare nouns in I and II cannot only be used in a predicative slot, but appear in adnominal (except for [+ human]) and appositive contexts as well.²⁸

Two of the criteria mentioned above seem to be very relevant in supporting the claim that the predicative slot in I and II has an adjectival nature (in contrast with (III)):

- (i) the bare nouns (like the prepositional phrases) found in this construction can easily be substituted —*salva veritate*— by descriptive adjectives (*il est très professeur 3 pédant, pontifiant*, etc.); to a certain extent, the use of bare nouns even seems to be triggered by the existence of such adjectival synonyms.
- (ii) In the long run, the nouns encountered in this slot may be exposed to a process of lexicalization (or lexical recategorization) and become stable, full-fledged adjectives (in the case of simple forms²⁹), which should be mentioned in the lexicon as adjectival elements.

3.2.2.2. Construction III: a copular construction *sui generis*. By contrast, other uses of bare nouns adopt only some ‘adjectival’ properties. This is clearly the case for III. Paradigmatically as well as syntagmatically, the bare nouns in construction III do not behave like true qualifying adjectives:

- no coordination with qualifying adjectives
- the extreme rarity and the very special nature of the adjectives which can substitute them
- the problematic pronominalization by *comment*

As a consequence, no lexicalization paths can be opened.

The only incontestable indicator of adjectival behavior is the nearly obligatory presence of a degree adverbial. Again, rather than being a symptom of adjectivehood, the degree adverbial seems to trigger it. Its lower recategorization power in III may be explained in terms of a difference in semantic scope, which in its turn may be related to its insertion in a larger construction scheme. Indeed, the most crucial syntactic

difference between the bare nouns in I-II on the one hand and III on the other hand may be the fact that III rests clearly on a predicative relation, as is shown by the unacceptability of the attributive use of III (*??un fils très musique*). As is consistent with this underlying predicate relation, the appositive use, which supposes a kind of secondary predication, is licensed (*Mon père, très vin rouge, n'a pas hésité à acheter tout le lot*). By contrast, in the case of I-II, the degree adverb transforms the weakened noun into an element with adjectival properties licensing attributive, appositive and predicative uses. On the semantic plane, this syntactic difference corresponds to a difference in scope. While in I-II, *très* has the noun directly under its scope (property extraction through gradability), in III *très* relates to the predicative relation between the human subject referent and the entity denoted by the predicative noun (gradation of inclination). We can render this gradable relation explicit as follows:

(65) Il est très (porté sur le / pour le / . . .) sport / vin rouge / . . .

As a matter of fact, the adverbial gradation does not really affect the nouniness of the noun, which still varies freely in number. Indeed, the relation between subject and predicative noun is still a relation between two entities (rather than a relation between an entity and a consubstantial property). Furthermore, the predicative entity is still implicated, yet in a special way, viz. as the object of a certain inclination. The entity-character of the denotatum of the noun also follows from the rareness and the special nature of the adjectives which can replace bare nouns. Indeed, we find only *denominal* classifying adjectives turned into qualifiers by degree adverbs.

The restricted distributional scope of the 'adjectivized' elements and the necessary presence of a copula block the way to lexicalization.

In short, the differences observed in the adjectiveness-rates derive from structural differences, which also affect the scope and the power of the degree adverbial:

(I-II): [^{DegAdv} (N°)]_{adj} ---> afterwards insertion in a predicative / appositive / attributive slot

(III): ([SN] [^{DegAdv} [(copula) (N°)]) = construction *sui generis*

In fact, the scope of the degree adverbial in III is not that exceptional. A parallel can be seen between III and the fact that degree adverbials like *très* apply to the nominal part of a function verb (= *verbe support*), while they cannot modify full NPs (Gaatone 1981):

- (66) Il fait très attention.
Lit. he made very attention.
'He paid a lot of attention'
- (67) J'avais très peur.
Lit. I had very fear.
'I was very scared'
- (68) *J'avais très une peur terrible.
Lit. I had a fear terrible.
'I was terribly scared'

In both cases, it is the strong coalescence between verb (respectively function verb and copula) and complement that allows this particular use of degree adverbs.

3.2.2.3. What about construction IV? Construction IV seems to be a recent extension of II, characterized by rather specific types of subjects (temporal/spatial locus), which has probably been influenced by the 'inclination' interpretation of III, resulting in a "blend" of both constructions. The nominal denotatum is still present somewhere in the mind of the speaker and hearer and the bare noun does not receive its number from the subject. Substitution by *comment* becomes more natural, as does coordination with a classifying adjective. In the same sense, substitution by denominal classifying adjectives accompanied by a degree adverb is more common than in the case of III. In short, syntactically and semantically, IV is an intermediate case between I-II and III.

3.2.3. The typology of copular constructions. The discussion about re-categorization brings us to the question of the place of the four types discussed here within the global domain of copular constructions in French.³⁰ The following typology is mainly based on Riegel (1985), and roughly completed by the "other types" offered in the typological work of Pustet (2003: 29–33).

1. definite:

- (69) M.Flahaut est **le** chef de l'armée belge.
'Mr Flauhaut is the chief of the Belgian army'

2. indefinite:

- (70) Pierre est **un** écrivain doué.
'Pierre is a gifted writer'

3. $\emptyset$ ('categorization'):

- (71) Pierre est $\emptyset$ professeur.
'Pierre is a teacher'.

4. $\emptyset$ ('inclination'):

- (72) Pierre est très $\emptyset$ télé. [= construction 3]
'Pierre likes to watch television'.

5. adjective:

- (73) Pierre est (très) gentil.
→ extension of the adjectival paradigm:

- (74) Pierre est (très) en colère. ('furious') (cf. Danlos 1988)

- (75) Ce décor est trop 'théâtre pour enfants'. [= construction 2]
'This scenery resembles that of child theatre too much.'

- (76) Pierre est très professeur. [= construction I]
'Pierre behaves like a real teacher'.

- (77) Le week-end sera très sport. [= construction IV]
'This weekend's focus will be on sports.'

+ Other types (Pustet 2003):

- + adverbial (or locative) predicates (*la clé est ici*; 'the key is here')
- + temporal predicates (*il est 11 heures*; 'it is 11 o'clock')
- + existential predicates (*c'est but!*; *c'est marché aujourd'hui*; 'Goal!'; 'today there is a market')
- + oblique case predicates (*il est avec elle*; 'He is with her')

Constructions I and II are clearly extensions of type number 5., by means of syntactic recategorization. Construction III has been reported under 4. as a construction *sui generis*; construction IV is somewhere in between.

3.3. A note on recategorization theory. As was argued above, the special, creative uses of nouns dealt with in this paper can be considered—to a different extent—as mismatches between the internal (*casu quo nominal*) and the external (*c.q. adjectival*) syntax of a phrasal node.

This becomes particularly clear when we take a closer look at the nature of the dependent elements, which are still those found typically in combination with nominal heads:

- (78) je ne suis pas très vin blanc/moelleux/ . . .
 'I don't like white / sweet wine very much . . .'
- (79) des costumes très "théâtre pour enfants" / Japon médiéval
 'very child theatre-like / medieval Japan-like costumes'

Depending on one's theoretical framework, one could specify the absence of endocentricity as a conflict between the form (class) and the function (class) of a constituent, between constituent structure and function, or between filler and slot (cf. *terme* vs *position*: Milner 1989; Kerleroux 1996) or construction (Michaelis 2003, Lauwers 2008b).

Of course, we could simply state that a bare noun forms part of the constituent class that occupies the predicative slot in a characterizing copular construction, together with adjectives and PPs (*il est en colère*), for instance. However, this kind of approach misses an intermediate generalization in terms [+ (qualifying) adjectival]—which could avoid redundancy in the descriptive model—and does not explain the fact that these uses of (bare) nouns are rather exceptional, as is their non-endocentricity. Moreover, this approach does not seek for possible generalizations across recategorization phenomena.

Although a slot/filler approach like that of Kerleroux (who elaborates a very fruitful distinction proposed by Milner 1989), is very promising, it does not seem entirely adequate for the empirical problems dealt with in this paper. She recognizes the existence of *categorical distortions* (distorsion catégorielle), that is, cases of discrepancy between the categorical nature of the *slot* (la *position*, which is taken in an abstract, non-linear sense) and the lexical *filler* (le *terme*, being a lexeme or a more complex structure) which occupies the slot. As a consequence, some nominal properties of the filler are suspended, whereas the filler inherits adjectival features from the slot in which it occurs. These adjectival properties are contextual ones; they are not intrinsically related to the item in the lexicon, in contrast to what I have called 'lexical recategorization'. Although the view that adjectival features are contextually inherited is correct, Kerleroux's approach does not give a satisfactory account of the nearly obligatory presence of a degree adverbial. In other words, in the immediate context there is an element that is crucial for the transfer of adjectival features. In a certain sense, this triggers the whole process. Moreover, in this case, recategorization (or the mismatch between form and function) is not forced by a superordinate node (e.g. a verb which governs its valency elements), but rather by a subordinate element (a degree adverb), a configuration which is somewhat paradoxical.

The framework of the French syntactician Tesnière (1959) gives a more satisfactory answer to these questions. In his framework, *très* should be analysed as a *translatif*, i.e. a ‘category-shifter’. In his view, *translatifs* do not form part of the dependency-network (*connexions*), but act as operators effecting shifts from one function class (as predicted by word class) to another. Without endorsing the complete analysis of Tesnière (and, hence, the very wide application of the concept of *translatif*), I would like to suggest that his approach gives a rather satisfactory account of the categorial mismatches studied here. However, against Tesnière, I would discard the idea that *translatifs* are somewhere ‘out of the system’ (be it conceived as a dependency or a constituency structure). They form part of the constituent structure, but by their frequent association with a certain type of head³¹, they acquire the status of a category indicator, which explains why they can act as recategorizers when applied to other kinds of heads. In other words, within the adjectival phrase (AP), they have a supplementary function. A second adjustment to the theory of Tesnière concerns the non-discrete character of the recategorization phenomenon. My analysis has shown that certain factors can interfere to the point where intermediate cases should be recognized, and, hence, a gradual view adopted.

In fact, the behavior of degree adverbials is very similar to that of articles (or other determiners) in relation to nominal heads. In the traditional NP-hypothesis, determiners are specifiers of the nominal head. When applied (productively) to non-nominal elements, determiners transform these into nominal elements, but not always in the same way, as the following differences in terms of modification—which deserve a separate in-depth study—seem to suggest:

→ retention of modification patterns of the source category (respectively a clause and adjectives):

(80) J’aimais son “fais travailler ta matière grise” sonore
 ‘I adored his sonorous “let your little grey cells work”’

(81) Le vraiment drôle de l’histoire était que . . .
 ‘The really funny aspect of the story was . . .’

(82) Mon frère est d’un inapte aux travaux manuels! (Kerleroux 1996: 122)
 ‘He is completely unsuited for manual work’

→ loss of ‘source-modification’ (respectively color adjective and infinitive):

- (83) J'aime le *légèrement crème du plafond
'I like the light cream-color of the ceiling.'
- (84) l'agir de l'homme, son penser *au progrès
'the acting of man, his thinking of progress'

It is interesting to note that within recategorized nodes the degree adverbial is almost obligatory (it can hardly ever be deleted). As a result, its status is similar to that of a determiner (article). This observation offers a new argument (and perhaps a new dimension) in favour of the specifier analysis of degree adverbs in APs (e.g. Jackendoff 1977 [1981]: 146–147 and others; for a critical analysis of this hypothesis, see Abeillé—Godard 2003).

4. Concluding remarks and perspectives for further research. The detailed analysis of three quite marginal homonymic constructions, which only consist of a subject, a copula and a complement, has offered a descriptive basis for a theoretical question which needs further research. It is clear that the conditions under which a lexical item can be recategorized—and also the types of recategorization (and decategorization)—need to be examined in more detail (in terms of restrictions, syntactic properties, etc.).

We should therefore analyze the devices which allow the syntax of a language to call into question the grammatical categories applied to the lexicon, a process which considerably extends the expressive potential of the language. In this respect, the proposals of Tesnière (1959) need to be refined syntactically and semantically. More particularly, it is necessary to distinguish several types of recategorization. We should try to delineate notions such as lexical recategorization, categorial distortion (Milner, Kerleroux), conversion, etc., taking into account a more gradual approach to these phenomena.³²

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ENDNOTES

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² See Goes (1999: 162–171), Riegel (1985: 195–203), Noailly (1990), Kerleroux (1996: 161–162) and Salles (2004). [Note that López Díaz' (2008) study on the adjectival uses of proper nouns—which I reviewed—was published after the present paper was accepted for publication in *Word* (2005).]

³ This is why many examples are taken from Google, in addition to examples of the literary corpus Frantext (mostly found in dialogues) and examples found in newspapers. All examples have been tested with native speakers.

⁴ As observed by one of our reviewers, there might exist genre-specific and even regional differences with respect to these constructions, since they “do not seem common at all” in Canadian French. However, a quick Google search (conducted on January 7, 2014) showed that *très théâtre* is attested more than ten times on Canadian web pages (restricting Google searches to site:ca). Similar observations hold for *très famille*, *très médecin* (expressing preferences, cf. construction 2). Nevertheless, it would be very interesting to conduct a study across variants, including socio-linguistic surveys taking into account region and age, for instance.

⁵ It is not uninteresting to note that German, Dutch and English, for instance, use productive suffixes for the expression of the meaning of I and II, respectively *-haft*, *-achtig* and *-like* (Maesfrancx—Taldeman 1998: 94). Strangely, Dutch *-achtig* also allows the propensity interpretation (= 3), at least in substandard language (Maesfrancx—Taldeman 1998).

⁶ The use of what one may call *semi-copulas* is restricted by categorial, lexical, aspectual and even pragmatic factors. This discussion would lead us too far. See Lauwers (2005) for a more detailed analysis.

⁷ Goes divides the predicative uses of bare nouns into two categories: [+human] and [+object]. In this perspective, II and III belong to the same category (1999: 162–163).

⁸ E.g. *Mon chat est très viande* [(my cat is very meat)—‘My cat likes meat very much’].

⁹ As the ‘resemblance’ reading is very difficult to construe with a first person (since observer and object of the resemblance relation coincide), in that case interpretation III is the only possible one.

¹⁰ Construction III interacts even with a construction type in which an adjective is predicated over a generic object which remains unexpressed, as in *Je mange salé: En temps normal, je suis plutôt salé*. (Google: xlastdays.wordpress.com/.../mes-coups-de-coeur-artistiques/) ‘Normally, I prefer salty food.’

¹¹ See also Maesfrancx—Taldeman (1998) for the suffix *-achtig* in Dutch: *voorzitterachtig* vs **lidachtig*. Wierzbicka (1986, *apud* Kupferman 1991: 59) shows that similar socio-cultural aspects determine the possibilities of nominalization in the case of color names (viz. the extent to which they can be characteristic of a person).

¹² *Faire* is felt to be even more natural by native speakers in the case of II.

¹³ This excludes examples like *un officier médecin*, which are cases of coordination of nouns (‘he is an officer and ALSO a doctor’) (cf. also **un officier très médecin*).

¹⁴ Apart from these cases, there is also the suffix *-phile* (and its antonym *-phobe*) which encodes the ‘propensity’ meaning of III. However, this derivation pattern is primarily a device creating nouns, rather than adjectives, and if an adjectival use is attested, it is mostly a classifying use (*société colombophile*, TLF; *édition bibliophile*) (‘pigeon keepers’ society’, ‘bibliophile edition’). Only some derivations on *-phile* can also be considered as true—i.e. lexicalized—(descriptive) adjectives: *je suis très bédéphile / cinéophile / bibliophile* (‘I am a lover of comics, films, books’).

¹⁵ Another factor which may contribute to the emergence of construction IV is the existence of a hidden human actor, as in a name of a city or in the case of a period. As a matter of fact, if we say *Paris/cet été sera très sport*, it is of course the people (of Paris) who organize sports activities.

¹⁶ Some native speakers might accept *faire* (‘impression’) in IV if it is constructed with a spatial locus: *La ville fera très nature/sport cet été*. (‘the city will give a very nature-like / sport-like impression this summer’).

¹⁷ See Lauwers (2004) for bibliographical details. The work of Vogel (1996) puts the topic in a general typological perspective.

¹⁸ I.e. not in a purely coordinative sense: ‘X that are ALSO Y’.

¹⁹ Note that *pièce *très ennemie* is not possible. This observation suggests that *ennemi* is a kind of classifying adjective (cf. also **Cette pièce est très ennemie*).

²⁰ The recategorization path and the resulting semantic shifts are difficult to predict and sometimes even difficult to retrace diachronically, in particular in the case of metaphoric uses in colloquial language. But very often, one can recognize a transfer of salient properties which are “fossilized” in the adjective.

Some noun/adjective pairs are recurrent, like colour nouns/adjectives and homonymic pairs, in which the noun designates a human being (*un idiot*, *un blagueur*, etc.) and the adjective characteristics attributed to human beings (*[très] idiot*, *[très] blagueur*). Some of them are based on metaphorical derivation (e.g. *ballot* → *un ballot_N* → *ballot_{adj.}*), which makes it easier to retrace the diachronic development.

²¹ Another parameter of complete adjectivization is the derivation of adverbs (*vachement*) or modern superlatives through *-issime*, a suffix that applies to adjectives (cf. Salles 2004: 10; *cultissime*, *tendancissime*, etc.). However, the latter can also be found in very creative uses with the meaning of construction IV: *un spectacle «chiantissime»* (‘a show with a lot of Chianti’) (www.ciep.fr/chroniq/chroni1b.htm).

²² This kind of anaphorical reference is possible with full predicative NPs (Schnedecker 1997).

²³ Coordination by *mais*, for instance, yields a contrast, which always increases combinatory possibilities.

²⁴ The absence of agreement holds also for the rare examples of human complements: *Nous ne sommes pas très médecin* [*≠ pas très médecins*]. (‘we do not like doctors a lot / we are not very doctor-like’)

²⁵ Some frequency data taken from Google: *sont très film* (40 ex.) vs *sont très films* (4 ex.).

²⁶ This holds also for other cases of decategorialization. If we compare *Pierre est médecin* and *Carmen est toute passion* with *Pierre est très fromage*, it is not very difficult to prove that the former two slots are closer to the [+ noun] pole than the latter one, an analysis which is confirmed by Riegel (1985: 193–197): “adjectivation totale” as opposed to “adjectivation partielle” (*il est professeur*).

²⁷ But this is not a core feature of adjectivhood, as most adjectives are normally postposed and are only preposed for ‘stylistic effect’.

²⁸ It is important to note that the opposite is not true: attributive nouns cannot very often be used predicatively (Goes 1999: 160). As a matter of fact, the attributive slot in the case of bare

nouns is not *per se* a 'full adjectival' slot. As has been highlighted by Noailly (1990), there exist four major (meaning) types of attributively used bare nouns (*noms épithètes*): "qualification", coordination (*canapés-lits*), "détermination" (*vêtements sport*) and identification (*le président Pompidou*). But even in the case of a 'qualification' meaning, the alleged examples do not always fit in a predicative complement slot (cf. also Salles 2004: 11). The reason for this might be the fact that most examples are to be paraphrased by 'est (comme) UN X' (Noailly 1990), which shows that the nominal concept is still somehow present (cf. Goes 1999: 158): *une ville symbole* (ex. of Goes 1999: 156; 'symbolic city') → **une ville très symbole* / **Cette ville est très symbole*.

²⁹ Or fossilized entities (in the case of prepositional phrases).

³⁰ This classification, which is mainly based on the categorial nature of the complement in *predicational sentences* (Higgins 1976; Declerck 1988; Verheugd-Daatzelaar 1990), does not take into account *specificational sentences* (e.g. *Le chef est Jean Dupont*), *identificational* (*Cet homme est J. Chirac*) ones, or *identity statements* (*The evening star is the morning star*, Higgins 1976, *apud* Verheugd-Daatzelaar 1990: 54). The views found in the literature concerning the status of these types of copular sentences diverge (e.g. Declerck 1988 vs Pustet 2003). These discussions do not affect the status of the constructions discussed in this paper.

³¹ Note that, more in general, degree adverbials reinforce the adjectival (qualifiers) character of (already) adjectival elements. For instance, the adjunction of a degree adverbial, makes it possible to prepose adjectival PPs: **le à la mode jean* → *le très à la mode jean*. Degree adverbials also turn classifying adjectives into classifying ones (which allow, by the way, also anteposition): *il a encore sorti sa très présidentielle voiture*.

³² On the other hand, we should first carefully examine every construction in order to determine the categorial preferences of each syntactic slot. See for instance Melis (2004) for a critical discussion of the categorial nature of the complement slot of some prepositions in French.

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Appendix 1: Criteria for nounhood and adjectivehood

il est très prof (I) / c'est très théâtre (II)				cet été sera très sport (IV)				je suis très fromage (III)			
+ N	- N	+ Adj.	- Adj.	+ N	- N	+ Adj.	- Adj.	+ N	- N	+ Adj.	- Adj.
	zero determination				zero det.				zero det.		
	full NP not (necessarily) implied (resemblance)			– but full NP in other perspective				– but full NP in other perspective			
	no anaphoric reference				no an.ref.				no an. ref.		
	no free adjectival modification				no free adj. mod.				no free adj. modif.		
		comment				comment				?comment ¹	
		Très				très (but less necessary)				très (but less necessary)	
		substitution by descriptive adjective → adjectival position					substitution by a special type of adjective: denominal (classifying) adj. transformed into a descriptive adj.: <i>très musical, très festif, très sportif, livresque, cinématographique</i> etc.)				substitution by a special type of adjective: denominal (classifying) adj. transformed into a descriptive adj.

¹ bit more difficult than in (4), but not impossible for certain native speakers: *?Elle était comment, cette fille? Ben, elle est un peu trop livres pour moi.*

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