

The Chart of French NSM Semantic Primes*

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Semantic primes are the vocabulary of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage. The chart displays the French words for the primes and some of their combinatorial possibilities, according to NSM grammar. The chart reflects an updated version of French NSM since Peeters et al. (2006). The revisions are described below.

Notation used:

- Exponents of primes are given in capital letters. Allolexes are preceded by the symbol ~, for example for I: JE~ME~MOI.
- Round brackets are used for exemplification: *beaucoup de quelque chose (ex. d'eau)* 'much of this something (e.g. water)' – and in some instances (*peu (de temps) avant, toutes (ces) choses, peut-être (que)*) indicate optional material.
- Square brackets indicate how an expression can be a composite of two primes: [pendant longtemps = pendant quelque temps, longtemps]
- Forward slashes indicate alternative constructions, and are used as shorthand to save space: *quelqu'un dit quelque chose de bien/de mal* 'someone says something good/bad'
- Abbreviations of frequent words are sometimes used to save space: *qqch = quelque chose* 'something'
- Agreement morphology is not given for exponents in the chart. For example, adjective PETIT (masculine singular) 'small', agrees in gender and number with the noun it describes and could also occur as *petite* (feminine singular), *petits* (masculine plural), and *petites* (feminine plural), but only one form PETIT is listed here. Likewise, person marking on verbs and sequence of tenses will be occurring in the prime combinations, but exponents that are verbs are given in their infinitival form. Note that in NSM, tense is always indicated by a lexical manifestation (BEFORE...) and is not just captured by tense marking on the verb.
- Forms of pronouns are given as allolexes in the chart, since this is the only area where French retains case marking: I~ME: JE~ME~MOI; YOU: TU~TE~TOI. However, it is not sure that the form, TOI, will ever actually occur in NSM explications. I put TOI here for symmetry with MOI, and added the sentence: *quelqu'un comme toi* 'someone like you' to illustrate this form.

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Another possible use might be *c'est à toi* 'it is yours', but this could be rendered by : *Tu dis: « c'est à moi »* 'You say : 'it is mine' '

ONE + KIND

This collocation requires disambiguation in French with singular *certain*: *les gens d'un certain type*. 'people of one kind'. *Les gens d'un type* does not work well, probably because the form *un* can be both the numeral 'one' and the indefinite article 'a'. Note that this (use of) *certain* is not the exponent of the prime SOME which is always plural CERTAINS.

SOME

In current NSM, it is important to have the prime SOME not tied to appearing in subject position. The only structures considered in 2006 were subject initial, with the collective noun *les gens* 'people'. We proposed at the time *il y a...qui...*, as in our example (127) repeated below, and should have indicated that this structure also obligatorily contains *des* 'some' (*il y a des... qui...*).

(127) (From Peeters, et al. 2006: p.69)

Il y a des gens qui ne savent pas ces choses.
there.are ART people REL NEG know:3PL.PRES not these things
'There are people who do not know these things.'

However, non-topical structures cannot be expressed with *il y a des... qui*. In more recent work, CERTAINS has made a come-back (it was in fact already in use before 2006). I therefore reverted to also considering CERTAINS as well as DES and DE as exponents of the prime SOME. This allows all the necessary combinations exemplified below:

(il y a...) des gens, des choses, des parties, des types (qui...)
some people, some things, some parts, some kinds

à certains endroits, certaines fois, à certains moments
at some times, in some places

certaines de ces choses/certains de ces gens
some of these things/people

de quelque chose (ex. de l'eau)
some of this something (e.g. water)-

WHEN

This prime has several allolexes in French. In addition to *quand* and *moment*, depending on the combinations, we have combinations of *fois*, including *quelquefois*. *Parfois* used in Peeters et al. in (2006) has been eliminated because of its more formal register, following Guiraud's (2008) analysis.

FOR SOME TIME

In 2006 we proposed *pour un temps*, but this is a bit literary, and does not work well in NSM combinations with AFTER and BEFORE. It was abandoned shortly after in favour of POUR QUELQUE TEMPS, but the more common and more flexible (PENDANT) QUELQUE TEMPS may be even better, with the optionality of *pendant*, depending on the construction. Compare:

some time before/after
*?pour un temps avant/après
*?un temps avant/après
quelque temps avant/après

it happens like this for some time
?ça arrive comme ça pour un temps
ça arrive comme ça pendant quelque temps

The French data is also supporting evidence that (FOR) SOME TIME is a distinct prime and not a combination of SOME and TIME, since the exponents proposed for SOME and TIME could not be used in this combination.

A SHORT TIME + BEFORE/AFTER

French has a fairly common elliptical way of saying this; *de temps* can be left out and has therefore been placed in brackets in the chart.

peu de temps avant/après
a short time before/after

peu avant/après
few before/after

INSIDE

In most cases, NSM current usage would opt for DANS. *Dedans* would be used for translation of *inside it*, or *inside this* like in elicitation sentences 125 and 126 (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014), but in actual NSM explications, these sentences would be: *inside this thing/something*, or even *inside this someone*, respectively: *dans cette chose/ce quelque chose/*, *dans ce quelqu'un*.

In 2006, we were already unsure about the frequency of *dedans* in NSM (see discussion p. 170). Therefore, the potential allolex *dedans* is not included in the chart. We probably do not need it.

MOMENT

INSTANT is proposed, because its meaning is what is intended with the prime:

ça arrive en un instant
it happens in one moment

à cet instant-là
at that moment

Moment doesn't have the same meaning in French and in English, as discussed in Peeters, et al. (2006: p.139), with French *moment* not necessarily referring to a brief period of time. It is therefore not appropriate as an exponent of the prime MOMENT, and this will avoid possible confusion with the French exponent of the prime TIME, which has *moment* as one of its allolexes.

KNOW

We used to have two allolexes for this prime: SAVOIR and CONNAITRE. Upon further consideration, and as suggested by Anna Wierzbicka and Cliff Goddard, the contexts of *connaître* are not necessary in NSM (i.e. *to know someone*), and *connaître* can be decomposed and explicated by *savoir*, as shown by the French explications and their English counterparts:

Je connais cet endroit.

Je sais des choses sur cet endroit
comme quelqu'un peut savoir des choses sur un endroit
si ce quelqu'un était à cet endroit pendant quelque temps avant

I know this place.

I know some things about this place
like someone can know some things about a place
if this someone was in this place for some time before

Je connais ces gens.

Je sais des choses sur ces gens
comme quelqu'un peut savoir des choses sur quelqu'un d'autre
si ce quelqu'un était avec ce quelqu'un d'autre pendant quelque
temps avant

I know these people.

I know some things about these people

like someone can know some things about someone else
if this someone was with this other someone for some time before

THIS

Up to now, the more literary form *ceci* had been used in NSM. In this chart, the more frequent and oral form ÇA is now being preferred as the exponent of the prime.

References:

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