

EN FRANCE, A PARIS, LA-DEDANS - OU?

An old puzzle about French country names (Cornulier 1972, Zwicky 1987, Miller 1992, and Miller, Pullum and Zwicky 1997) is that they show unexpected behavior in combination with the locative prepositions *à* ‘at, to’ and *de* ‘from’. The definite article that they appear with in argument positions, as in (1), does not give rise to the expected combinations in the feminine and with country names starting with a vowel. Thus instead of *à la/à l’* in (2) we obtain *en*:

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|-----|----|---------------------------------------|-----------------|
| (1) | a. | la France, la Mauritanie... | feminine |
| | b. | le Canada, le Pérou... | masculine |
| | c. | l’Irlande, l’Egypte... | feminine/vowel |
| | d. | l’Afghanistan, l’Angola, l’Iran... | masculine/vowel |
| | e. | les Philippines, les Indes | plural |
| (2) | a. | en France, en Mauritanie... | feminine |
| | b. | au Canada, au Pérou... | masculine |
| | c. | en Irlande, en Egypte... | feminine/vowel |
| | d. | en Afghanistan, en Angola, en Iran... | masculine/vowel |
| | e. | aux/*en Philippines/Indes | plural |

Nowhere else in the language is there an *en/au* allomorphy. The *à la/à l’* combination cannot be replaced by *en* if the meaning of the preposition is not locative:

- (3) *lié à la France/*en France*

A similar phenomenon occurs with the locative *de*: the article disappears in the feminine and with country names starting with a vowel:

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|-----|----|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| (4) | a. | de France, de Mauritanie... | feminine |
| | b. | du Canada, du Pérou... | masculine |
| | c. | d’Irlande, d’Egypte... | feminine/vowel |
| | d. | d’Afghanistan, d’Angola, d’Iran... | masculine/vowel |
| | e. | des/*de/*d’ Philippines/Indes | plural |

Likewise, the article cannot disappear if the meaning of the preposition is not locative:

- (5) *discuter de *(la) France*

The realization of the “à+DEF” and “de+DEF” combinations with country names is therefore simultaneously conditioned by syntax (gender features), semantics (locative meaning) and phonology (first segment).

I will argue that French country names should be treated as inherently denoting locations (as a separate semantic type) and that the *en/au* allomorphy results from locative case realization rather than a combination of two independent nodes. Evidence for this view will be provided from multiple sources, including modification, locative clitics and urban landmarks.

References

- Cornulier, Benoit de. 1972. A peeking rule in French. *Linguistic Inquiry* 3, pp. 226-227.
- Miller, Philip H. 1992. *Clitics and Constituents in a Phrase Structure Grammar*. New York: Garland.
- Miller, Philip H., Geoffrey K. Pullum, and Arnold M. Zwicky. 1997. The principle of phonology-free syntax: four apparent counterexamples in French. *Journal of Linguistics* 33, pp. 67-90.
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