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## Loss of inflection in the diachrony of French nouns

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This case study contributes a diachronic perspective on the development of uninflectedness and its interaction with other non-canonical phenomena.

Modern French nouns have a CONTENT PARADIGM (inventory of morphosyntactic feature sets required by syntax, Stump 2016) with 2 cells, corresponding to the values ‘singular’/‘plural’ of the single feature NUMBER; this contrast is discernable via agreement patterns (1). Some nouns, e.g. *journal* ‘newspaper’, have two distinct forms in the REALISED PARADIGM (array of inflectional wordforms, Stump 2016). However, nouns of the majority inflectional class, e.g. *livre* ‘book’, display SYNCRETISM for number; as the realised paradigm thus has only a single form, such nouns may also be considered UNINFLECTABLE in the sense of Spencer (2020).

- (1) a. *Ce livre/journal est intéressant.*  
sə livʁ/zʝʁnal    ɛ    ɛ̃tɛkɛsɑ̃  
this.M.SG book.SG/newspaper.SG is interesting.M.SG
- b. *Ces livres/journaux sont intéressants.*  
sɛ livʁ/zʝʁno    sɑ̃    ɛ̃tɛkɛsɑ̃  
these.M.PL book.PL/newspaper.PL are interesting.M.PL

These patterns result from progressive LOSS OF INFLECTION (Baerman & Sims-Williams 2021). Mediaeval French nouns had a content paradigm of four cells, with two values each for the features NUMBER and CASE (Schösler 1984, 2013); their Latin etyma had a content paradigm of twelve cells, with two values of NUMBER and six values of CASE. Loss occurs via a complex series of incremental changes, correlated with inflectional class, phonological shape and gender; the loss of case contrasts involves regular sound change, analogy and syntactic change, while the loss of number contrasts is principally due to sound change. Contrast in number is consistently retained longer than contrast in case. It is also noteworthy that, while the overall trend is towards reduction, change is not fast-paced: lexical items with and without given contrasts coexist over several centuries.

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