Pseudo-Constructions or Quasi-Morphemes? A diachronic study of *quasi* in French

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Morphemes can be regarded as schematic constructions (Hilpert 2013, Hartmann 2014, Booij 2018), and as such, they may emerge out of a process of constructionalization. However, the details of this process, when it comes to morphological elements, are not necessarily well understood. For the French language, grammaticalization has been offered as a mechanism (e.g. *-ment* for adverb formation; cf. Combettes 2008); analogy is certainly at work for lexical morphemes (e.g. *e-* for 'digital', from *e-mail*), while coalescence may play a critical role in some occasions (e.g. the obligatorification of clitic pronouns replacing the former verbal conjugation; cf. Auger 1995). As for reanalysis-driven splints, they seem to occur more rarely than in English (cf. the rise of *-zilla*, Mattiello 2018), likely because of the lack of compounds in French to sustain such a reanalysis.

In this contribution, I will focus on the rather confused history of the morpheme/construction *quasi* ('almost') in French, based on data from the Frantext textual database, in order to show that individual scenarios of change may diverge from these theoretical narratives, especially insofar as they involve a variety of interacting forms, all with their own dynamics and histories. The form *quasi*, seemingly a direct borrowing from its Latin counterpart (Bertocchi et al. 2017) emerges as an adverb around the end of the XVth century, in texts that mix both uses of the *quasi* within Latin quotes and uses of *quasi* in French sentences. This adverb becomes remarkably successful (about 100 hits per million words), yet declines all throughout the XVIIth century, almost disappearing by the first half of the XVIIIth.

At this point, two things happen. First, around the end of the XVIIIth century, a whole paradigmatic system of prefixes starts getting entrenched (with *pseudo-*, *anti-*, etc.), and *quasi-* becomes reanalyzed as a possible prefix, likely by attraction to this newly rising paradigm. In the meantime, *quasiment* becomes significantly more frequent, taking over some of the adverbial uses of *quasi*, especially its combination with other adverbs (e.g. *quasiment jamais*, 'almost never'), therefore reinforcing the reading of *quasi* as a prefix. From then on, *quasi* can combine with nouns as well, and the frequencies of use of both *quasi*-ADJ and *quasi*-N increase according to the same trajectory, comforting the interpretation that a single, almost morphological construction [*quasi*(-) + ADJ/N] has become entrenched as such.

The story doesn't end here: from the 1950s, *quasi* in *quasi* + ADJ is likely reanalyzed as a clipping of *quasiment*, which gains new momentum at that time. As such, *quasi*-ADJ, that is, the typological marking of *quasi* as a morpheme when combined with an adjective, starts declining, while *quasi* ADJ does not, and becomes an alternative to *quasiment* (Dao & Do-Hurinville 2020). Inversely, when it combines with nouns, *quasi* becomes more systematically marked as a prefix, so that *quasi* N disappears while the frequency of *quasi*-N increases. Therefore, we observe a split from the single construction [*quasi*(-) + ADJ/N], to a system of two separate constructions {[*quasi*(*ment*) + ADJ], [*quasi*-N]}, where the former is clearly adverbial and the latter clearly morphological.

The emerging picture is therefore that of a complex interplay between a variety of forms and shows the fundamental porosity between morphological and syntactic constructions, in support of a Constructional Grammar-inspired take on morphological markers.

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