Verb Morphology in French Microsystem Verb Conjugation in Present Indicative

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Abstract

This paper presents a model of the systemic linguistic analysis that implies the relation between stems of the French verbs by adding -an ending element. This paper aims to show the theory used for verb formation in describing the French verbal inflection system even though the linguistic systems have their own specificities. Language is a system whose related parts work together as a whole for a particular purpose. This paper's main function is to describe the related elements by isolating the stem of the verb present indicative. It also analyzes its rules and shows how they work together with patterns in a simple way named a micro-system which describes the element related to verbs in their relations with person and number of its subject.

Keywords: Verb Morphology, French, Micro-system, Conjugation, Present-Indicative

1.   INTRODUCTION

The systemic language analysis is based on the postulate that a language can be segmented into individual systems based on observation that such systems influence each other. All levels of language analysis can be described in this way (lexis, syntax, morpho-syntax, semantics, morpho-semantics and others.) (Cardey. S.& Greenfield.P., 2005). This systemic language analysis is used to describe the French present-indicative verb system.

2.   THE GEO-LINGUISTICS OF THE FRENCH LANGUAGE

Among the Indo-European languages, French is formed from Celtic origin, Latin and Germanic groups. The Celtic language originated in Central Europe and once dominated Western Europe (around 400 BC). The Central European people migrated across to the British Isles over 2000 years ago. Later, one group of Celts moved to France when the Germanic speaking Anglo Saxon arrived (Kryss Tal, n.d.). Frankish is derived from Germanic branch and Latin is a subgroup developed from the Italic speakers. Thus, the French language is descended from the origin of the Celtic, Latin and Germanic languages, which all these languages are the subfamily from Indo-European. The Figure 1 shows that the French language is derived from the Indo-European macro-family and it is part of the Latin group. French is also a flectional language where the words are filled with grammatical morphemes that indicate the function of the units that are inflected. This article focuses on French present-indicative verb system.

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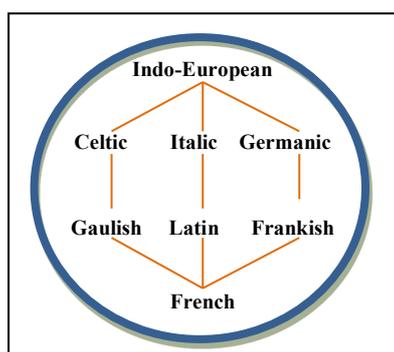E-mail: azan@ums.edu.my

Fig. 1: French language formation (Mohd Nor Azan Abdullah, 2013)

3.   PROBLEM STATEMENT

French language descended from Latin language which came from a big family language called Indo-European. This language is a flexion language. The French grammar formed flexive rules which means that it bounds the morpheme to mark word forms grammatically. This form of flexive governs the verb conjugation. In French the verb conjugate with regular -er verb, drop the -er of the infinitive to get the stem which have become a complex system of forms. The grammatical categories are marked by conjugation as well as voice, mood, tense, person and number. The verbs determine its status of being regular, irregular or impersonal. It's not easy to memorise all conjugation rules in French. The diagram and microsystem in this study are decomposed at the most basic component and shows how the verb conjugation work. It helps us to better understand the conjugations paradigms. This model could be a useful tool in learning and teaching the French verbal conjugation.

4.   OBJECTIVE

The objective of this research is to describe the related elements in verb conjugation by isolating the stem of the verb present indicative. It also analyzes its rules and show how they work together with patterns using a simple system known as the micro-system which describes the element related to verbs in their relations with person and the number of its subject.

5.   METHODOLOGY

This study used qualitative research method. Qualitative approach is more adequate in linguistic research which is used to analyze the texts. By using qualitative procedure seems to be the most appropriate choice to achieve the objective of this study. The qualitative approach employed ranges from observing, analyzing and describing the stem verb conjugation system to conclude the findings. In linguistic research, it is often a descriptive quantitative approach which is used to observe and analyze the texts. Thus, this paper employs qualitative research methods.

6.   THE SYSTEMIC LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

The combined element from the verb stem is separated and is named after their roles in accordance to the verbal system. In order to do so, we need to observe the stems from the verb. Then, we identify the structure before we isolate the elements from the stem to be distinguished, analyzed and name their roles in the conjugation according to their subject and numbers. We show the stem relation between the grammatical elements which form the verb. The pronouns and numbers work together to give a meaning to the language itself as a system where every element depends on each other to form a structure. We use this methodology to show that language is a system that structures itself internally and coherently. We can isolate the verb structure to show their component by using diagram.

7.   THE VERB SPECIFICITIES OF THE FRENCH LANGUAGE

7.1   Verb

Verb is the core element in a sentence. It is related to the subject. Verbs indicate phenomena which takes place during time: activities, processes, and states (Hadumod, Gregory & Kerstin, 1996) which have become a complex system of forms. The grammatical categories are marked by the conjugation as well as the/its voice, mood, tense, person and number. The verbs determine its status of being regular, irregular or impersonal. The pattern of the verb conjugation also depend on its status. The basic form of verb which is not conjugated is called infinitive. In this article, our objective is to describe the relationship and the function between the verb with its subject and number by diagrams in present tense indicative form.

7.2   Group of verbs

Figure 2 shows three groups of verbs in French that are classified as regular and irregular (Bescherelle, 1993). The regular verbs in infinitive forms end with – *er*, e.g., *inviter* and *travailler* but although ALLER's verbs end up with ER but the verb is an irregulier verb because the verb does not follow the verb conjugation system which ends with er. This disorder is a rule in the irregulier verb system whilst the irregular verbs are divided into two groups which is the second and third group. The second group ending with –*ir*, e.g., *finir* and *hair* (Bescherelle, 1993), the third group ending with –*ir* other than *finir* and *haïr*, -*oir*, and –*re*. All these groups of verbs have two parts. For the first part, we refer it as stem. The second part is the ending of the verb which is a variable. The stem of a verb can be seen by removing the ending of the infinitives, - *er, -ir, -oir* and –*re* as in Travaill*er* [*to work*], fin*ir* [*to finish*], recev*oir* [*to receive*] and boi*re* [*to drink*]. The twelve most common French verbs are irregular verbs. They are *être, avoir, faire, dire, voir, savoir, pouvoir, falloir, vouloir, venir, prendre* (Bescherelle, 1993). The impersonal verb is only conjugated with third person singular *il* (It).
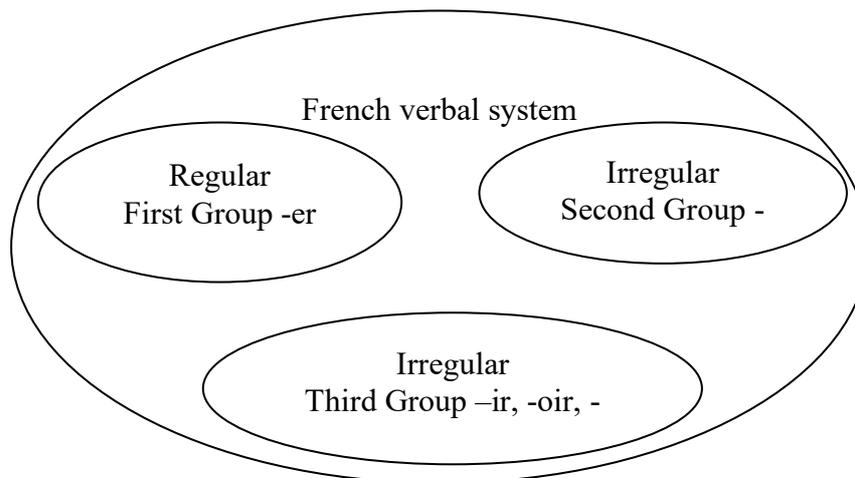

Fig. 2: Verbal group (Mohd Nor Azan Abdullah, 2013)

7.3   Class of verbs

Other specificities of the French verbs are their verbs distribution. The verbs are grouped into two categories (Figure 3). They are the main verbs and the auxiliary verbs. The main verbs are divided according to their functions into 3 classes: transitive, intransitive and attributive. Ditransitives verbs are verbs which need one direct object and one additional object introduce by a preposition. Exemple: Conduire les enfants à l'école (to drive children to school); Autoriser les enfants à jouer au badminton (to allow children to play badminton) but in this research only the segmentation of morphological elements in several selected verbal conjugations was studied and did not discuss the verbal trasitivities.
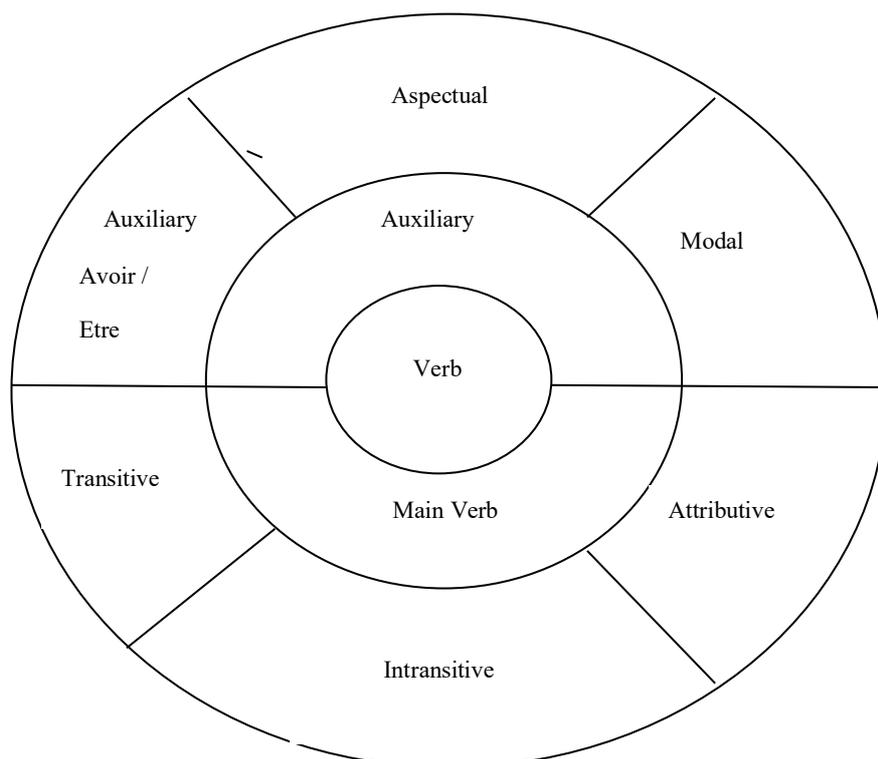
Fig. 3: Class verb (Mohd Nor Azan Abdullah, 2013)

The auxiliary verbs include three subclasses: auxiliary *avoir* (to have) and *être* (to be) formed the compound tenses, the aspectual: *commencer* (start), *finir* (to finish), *continuer* (to continue) which is followed by the preposition (de or à: finir de jouer (finished playing); commencer à pleuvoir (started raining); continuer à faire quelque chose (continue do to something)) and by the second verb which is not conjugated, known as the infinitive. Aspectual verbs express the action of the subject, including the duration or completion of the action, and the modal verbs: *pouvoir* (can/ able), *devoir* (must) and *vouloir* (want), followed by infinitive, expresses the need, probability or possibility of the verb. In this article, the focus is only on the pattern and the role of the main verbs according to their conjugations in present indicative tense.

8.   SYSTEM AND MICROSYSTEM

The language is considered as a system formed with phoneme, morpheme and syntagm or in their given grammatical classes. There is a set of relationship tied to each other among these classes. Therefore, if one of the terms is changed, the system will be affected, and the language will be grammatically incorrect. Hence, all these terms are correlated closely together inside the general system of language. The system includes all terms in a set of rules together or group of term associated with each other.

A microsystem is a subsystem that is found inside a larger structure. Each such system may be a component of a larger system to which the system's properties can be extended (Greenfield.P., 2003). The system which is the object of study is decomposed at the most basic component. These components are maintained which means that the elements decomposed are coherent especially in the term of relationships (Cardey. S., 1987). The internal structure of the verb organization is shown in our diagram 5, 6 and 8.

9.   FRENCH VERBAL STEM

Most of the ending sound in the verb conjugation orally tend not to be pronounced especially in first person, (Je fini*s* -/ʒə fini/- *I finish*), second (Tu fini*s* - /tu fini/- *you finish*) and third (Il / Elle fini*t* -/il/ɛl fini/- He / She finishes) but it is not the case for ' vous - *you* ' vous finissez - *you finish* and 'nous - *we*' nous finissons - *we finish*. < Tu > and < vous > both mean *you* but < tu > is usually referred to as the familiar and informal form and < vous > is used as a polite and formal form. This article is based entirely on written forms. We take into account not only the ending of the verbs but also their base called stems. The French verbs have several stems. The conjugation is

founded on the variation of the verb's elements named stem and its inflectional morpheme. We classify the verbs according to the stem's variation. E.g. verb has one stem, (chanter [*to sing*], ouvrir [*to open*], etc) (Jean, 1968), two stems, (acheter [*to buy*], appeler [*to call*], etc), three stems, (devoir [*must*], connaître [*to know someone or something*], etc) (Martin, 1994), four stems,(savoir [*to know facts*], venir [*to come*], etc) (Jacqueline, Bernard, 1981), five stems,(faire [*to do*], vouloir [*to want*], etc) , six stems (aller [*to go*], avoir [*to have*]) , and seven stems, (être [*to be*]) (Martin, 1994). The new of this study is to segment the gramiticals elements and is presented in the root word and followed by the flexion morpheme that forms the conjugation described through the line diagram of morphological elements

Some spelling particularities presented by verbal conjugations. The final syllable –cer (pla<u>cer</u>) change to ç in front of letter – o - e.g., Placer (to place) Nous Pla*ç*ONS. The verb who's final –ger add an - e – in front of the –o-. e.g., Nous mang*e*ONS. The final –eler (geler) and – eter (acheter) receive accent grave: è (slope) instead of –e-. but not in first person and second person pluriels (nous achetons, vous achetez). e.g., J'achète, nous achetons. *Double the consone –t- or –l* in front of –e- with the family verbs group: jeter: appeler e.g j'appelle, je jette but the consonant remains singular in nous and vous e.g nous appelons, vous jetez.

In the French verbs guide as stated in Bescherelle Complete Guide to Conjugating (Bescherelle:1993), verbs are classified according to their groups and their ending that researcher called as the 'Bescherelle traditional verbs conjugation'. However, in this paper the verbs are segmented onto stem with their grammatical elements who are related with the subject in the conjugation and shown visibly by the diagrams, that are named as "verbal microsystem".

10.   HOW THE SYSTEM WORKS

Based on French verbal of conjugation (Figure 4), each verb has a stem word. We analyze the verbal elements and identify the stem of the verb from their ending, as in *Travailler* (to work). Its stem word is *travaill* and *er* is its ending. However, there is an exception where the stem verb in the third person is excluded that we call as a zero morpheme. For example, in the verb *descendre* (to descend) with the ending *–re*, the third person singular **Il / elle** (he / she) uses zero morpheme (je **descend**s, tu **descend**s, il **descend**Ø). There are also stems linked to the verbal conjugation in the person form which is the subject. Basically, the stem is easily identified from the infinitive. Once identified, we distinguish the elements according to their grammatical roles as well as the person and number of its subject in the conjugation. We show the isolated elements in diagrams to prove that these elements actually work together as a system of conjugation.
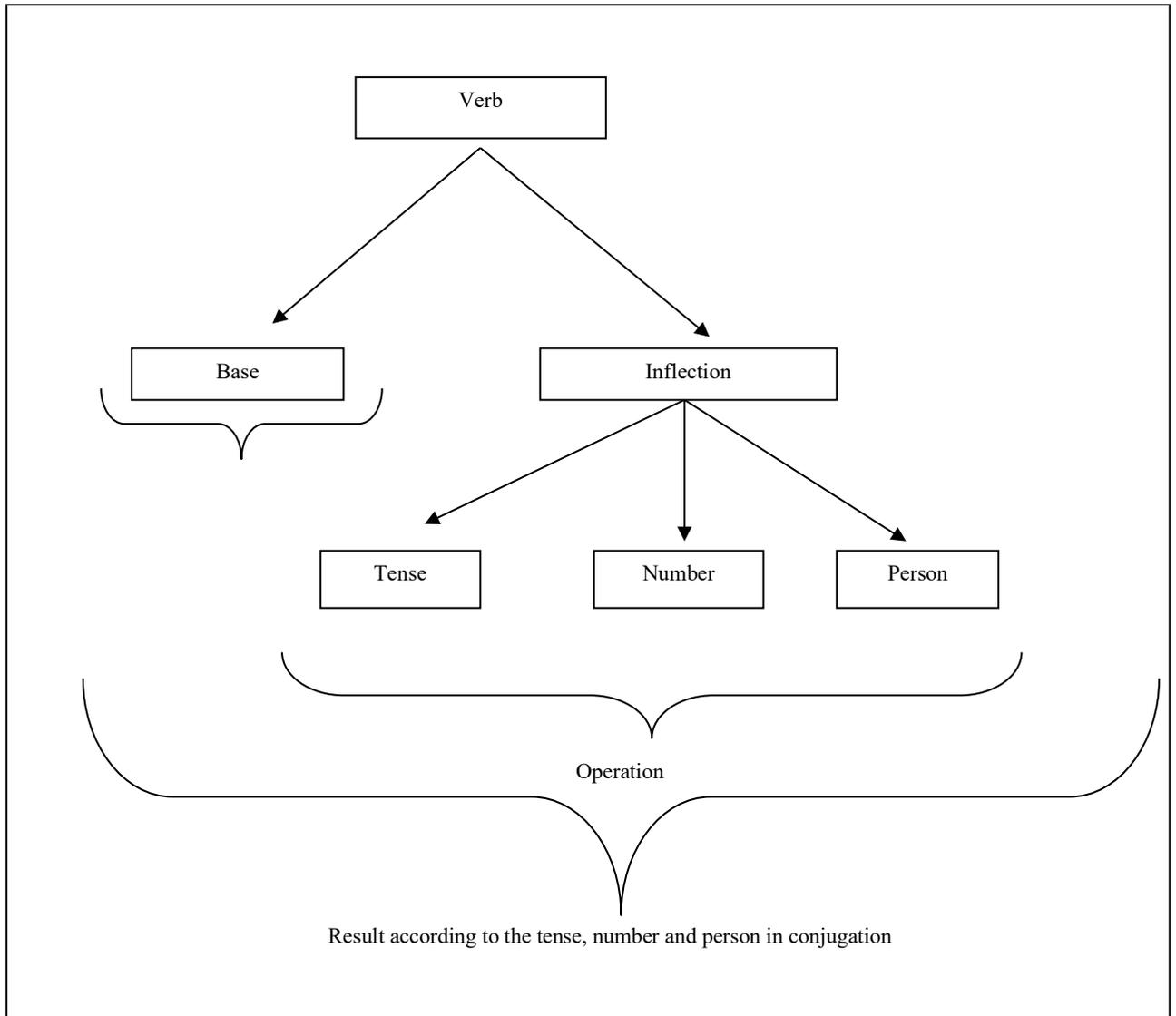
Fig. 4: French verbal of conjugation base (Mohd Nor Azan Abdullah, 2013)

11. THE MORPHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE VERBAL SYSTEM

Verb is a morpheme that consists of the inner structure, function and grammatical categories like tense, person, number, and others. In the diagram below, the chosen verbs are shown in verbal paradigms using verbal microsystem. The verb *parler* (to speak) has a stem. The suffix of the tense, person, and number are welded together in the conjugation. We select the verbal base and isolate the following verbal elements: tense, person and number which is marked by its suffix.

11.1 Exemple of a Verb with only one stem: Parl*er (to speak)*

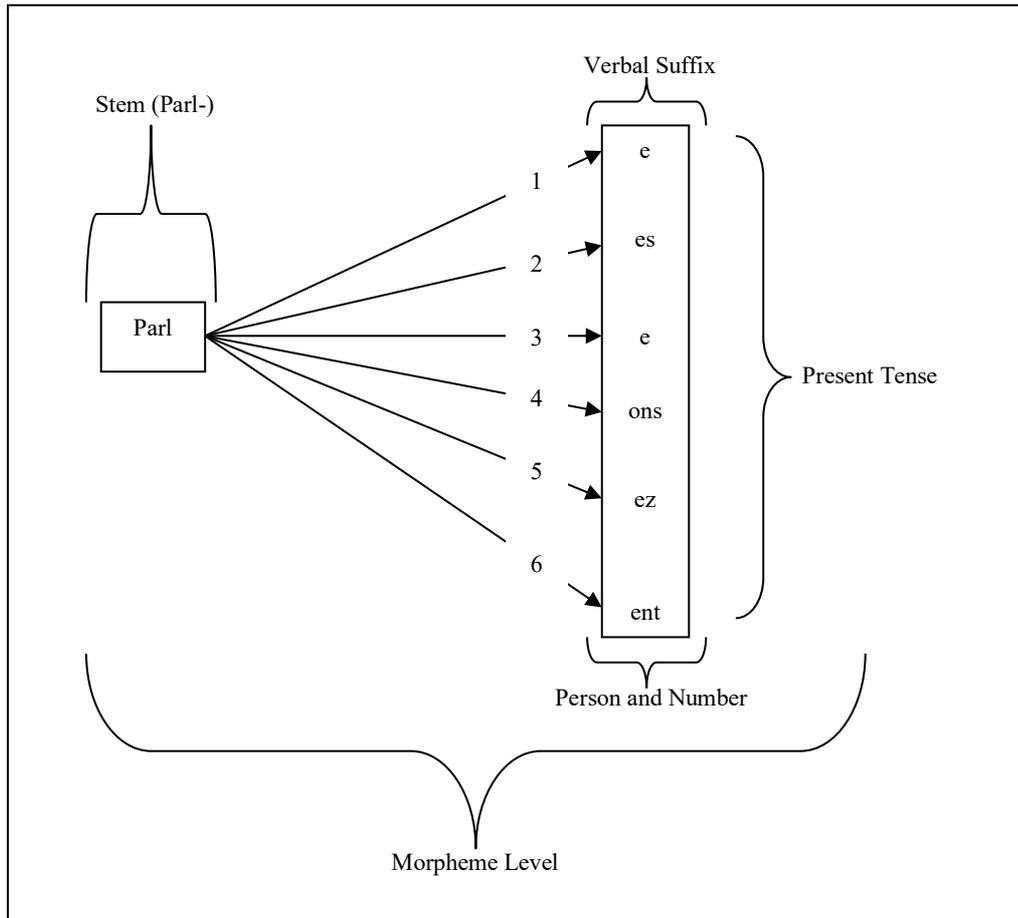The verb *parler* is in the first group called regular group and ending with –er.

Fig. 5: Microsystem *Parler*: one stem [parl] (Mohd Nor Azan Abdullah, 2013)

The personal pronouns of the subject (I, you, he, etc.) also provide information on the meaning of the verb 'form' called the person. Number 1 refer to the first person (Je), 2, second person (Tu), 3, third person (Il / Elle, On), 4, first person plural (Nous), 5, second person plural (Vous) and 6, third person plural (Ils / Elles).

In Figure 5 this microsystem shows that < Parl > is a stem of the verb < parler >. This stem is followed by the verbal suffix. Based on our observation, we issue the following remarks on the verbal morphology. The suffix [-es, -ons,-ez,-ent] marks present tense. The first person and the third person singular possess the same ending [e] but their roles are differentiated by its subjects. The stem [parl] followed by *-es* marks the second person singular. The inflection *-ez* represent the form of the second person plural. The declension in the form *-ons* refer to the first person plural and the inflection form of *-ent* belongs to the third person plural. All suffixes are added to its stem according to its pronoun.

11.2   Exemple of a Verb with two stems

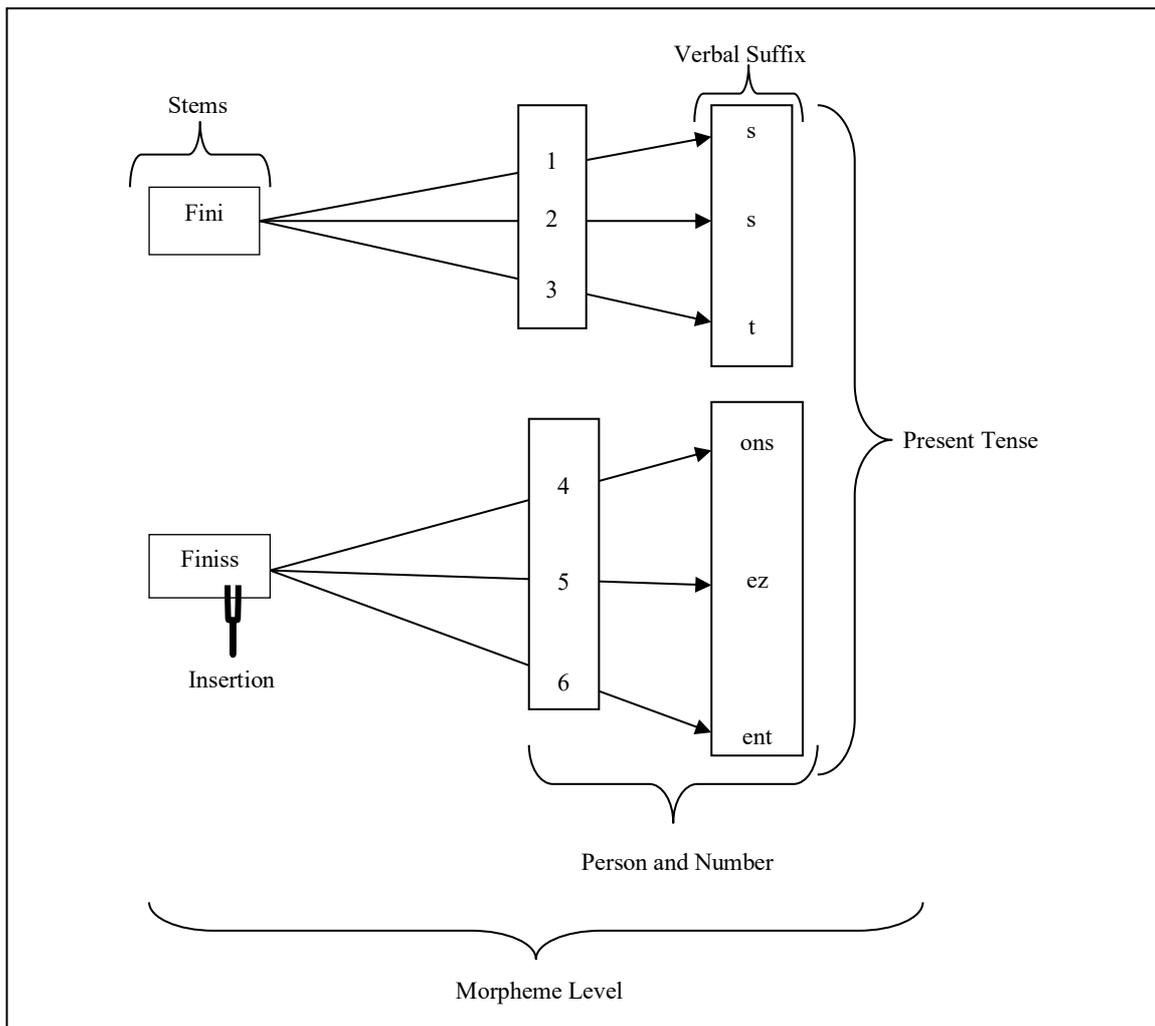The verb *finir* is in the second group called irregular verb with two stems (in Figure 6).

Fig. 6: Microsystem *finir* : two stems [*fini-* and *finiss-*] (Mohd Nor Azan Abdullah, 2013)

In Figure 6, we segment the verb *finir* and show the inflectional elements and its grammatical roles in the conjugations. *finir* contains two stems which is < fini and finiss >. The second stem derived from *fini* received double –*s* by the process of insertion. This addition of –*ss* harmonizes the pronunciation of the plural conjugation. The stem follows by the verbal suffix -*s, -s, -t,* related for first, second and third person are different form from the verb *parler* whose ending in –*er*. The first stem *fini is* related to singular subject and *finiss* stand for plural categories. This suffix [-ons, -ez,-ent] is added to *finiss*.

11.3. Exemple of a Verb with three stems: *Devoir* (must)

The diagram below shows that < Devoir > belongs to the third group and ending with –oir. This verb has three stems [doi-], [doiv-] and [dev-]. The difference between the singular and the third person plural stem is done by adding a morphophoneme [v].
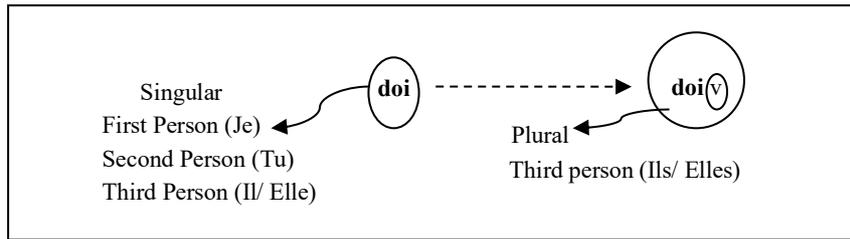
Fig. 7: Morphophoneme [v] (Mohd Nor Azan Abdullah, 2013)

This verb (devoir) is derived from old French *devier* (Ourdictionary, n.d., para 3). Thus, it is still preserved with the same stem *dev-* and it appears in its second- and first-person plural.
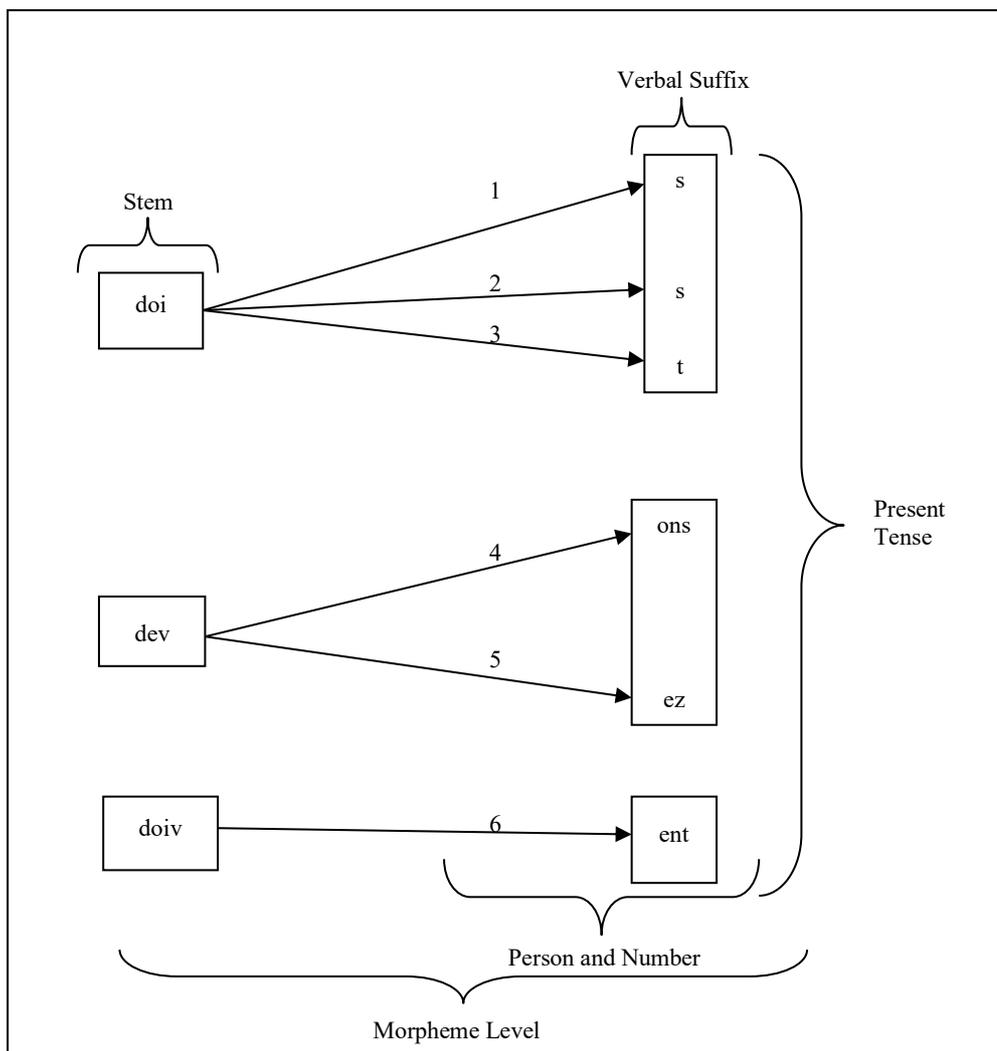

Fig. 8: Microsystem: *Devoir* three stems (Mohd Nor Azan Abdullah, 2013)

In Figure 8, we examine *Devoir* and the relation with its verb declension. The microsystem proves that *Devoir* contains three stems which are < doi, dev and doiv >. The stem *dev* emerged after the ending of *oir* is omitted. *Dev-* combined with the suffix *–ons* and *–ez* formed first person and second person plural. The tense allomorph *–s-s-t* function as a suffix agglutinate with its stem *doi* to form the first, second and third person singular. The suffix *–ent* is combined with *doiv-* to indicate third person plural.

12.   CONCLUSION

This article relates how the French verbs conjugations are formed through its stems in the present indicative tense. Recognizing the verbal stems according to their subject as well as person and number helps us to understand better the conjugations paradigms. The most important aspect that the people should be aware of is the mechanism of verbal morpheme level which is composed by its stem and suffix which agglutinate in the verbal conjugation shown in our verbal microsystem. Furthermore, our verbal description by the microsystem model is crucial to demonstrate and to explain not only the verb formation but also the function through the system of morphological analysis. This model could be a useful tool in learning and teaching the French verbal conjugation.

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