



# Onomasiological study of the psychological terminology system in the French language

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## ABSTRACT

In this article, the author discusses the onomasiological perspectives of the psychological terminology system in French. It is designed to uncover how concepts are enumerated and classified within the psychological framework and to study the principles that govern the terminological system. Based on the analysis of the terminology, the study aims to reveal the relationship between language, culture, and knowledge of the psyche in French. Combining materials from dictionaries, academic publications, and professional literature, the research analyzes naming conventions, the use of metaphors, and cultural references. The majority of the terms belong to the cognitive category, highlighting the focus on mental processes, while affective, behavioral, and developmental terms reflect concerns with emotional states, actions, and development throughout the life cycle. Bodily, mechanical, and spatial metaphors serve as systematic tools, with evident Freudian loanwords like “inconscient” (unconscious). Comparison with English terms reveals specific linguistic and cultural features that are distinct from those of other countries. This research also reveals that the terminology of psychological language in French is complex; it requires an understanding of metaphor and culture. The findings have practical implications for psycholinguistic concerns, as well as benefiting cross-cultural communication and education in psychology.

## Keywords:

onomasiology, psychological terminology, French language, cognitive terms, emotional states, behavioral terms, developmental psychology, metaphorical language, freudian influence, cultural references, cross-linguistic comparison, psycholinguistics

## I. Introduction

Onomasiology, a branch of lexicology, is concerned with the ability to name together with the processes that take part in the choice of this name. In the semantic referring to the psychological terms, onomasiology focus on

how various aspects within the field and concepts are named. Concretely, this work examines the onomasiological aspect of the logical system of the French language related to the psychological field in order to reveal facts

about how psychological terms are constructed and conceptualized.

Onomasiology on the other hand is concerned with the mapping of concepts to their specific modes of reference. They are both approaches to studying meaning but unlike semasiology which operates from the word and advancing towards the concept. The onomasiological approach is the most helpful in elucidating processes of formation and differentiation of specialized terminologies, for instance, those of psychological studies. The present framework will help analyze how and when new terms are developed in psychological discourse, as well as how and why they may be categorized differently in French.

## II. Materials and Methods

For the extensive purpose of onomasiological analysis of psychological terminologies within the French language, the current research incorporated several source materials which include psychological dictionaries, scholarly writings, professional literature, corpus linguistics, and historical writings. Some of the sources of related standardized psychological terms in French were dictionaries of psychology: *Vocabulaire de la psychologie* by Henri Piéron and *Dictionnaire de la psychologie moderne* by Werner Frohlich. They offered the basic set of concepts important in psychological investigation as a source.

Thus, parallel to traditional dictionaries, the present research used textbooks, handbooks, and also peer-reviewed articles from the journals issued in French language including *Revue Française de Psychologie*, *L'Année Psychologique*, and *Les Cahiers Internationaux de Psychologie Sociale*. These texts provided both the modern and the historical approaches to the definition of terms used in psychology and as the part of the discourse in the scientific community. Essential contributions to the professional literature of psychology and psychotherapy written by prominent French psychologists and psychotherapist supplemented theoretical and Methodologically oriented terminological data acquired from the primary sources.

Alongside with the translated texts, some of historical founders of French psychology, works of **Sigmund Freud** were represented, as well as original texts of other important figures including **Pierre Janet** and **Jean Piaget**. These texts offered a historical point of view on the varying features of such psychological terms in the course of the French language, not forgetting the impacts of some key pioneers in as far as the growth of this discipline was concerned.

The methodology employed in this study involved several key steps. Initially, a comprehensive corpus of psychological terms was compiled from the aforementioned materials. Terms were selected based on their frequency and relevance, and subsequently categorized into thematic groups such as emotional states, cognitive processes, behavioral patterns, and psychological disorders. This categorization facilitated a systematic analysis of the terminology.

Each term was then subjected to a detailed linguistic analysis, focusing on etymology, morphological structure, and semantic properties. The etymological analysis traced the origins of terms, particularly those derived from Latin and Greek roots, revealing the historical layers embedded in the terminology. Morphological analysis examined the construction of terms, including prefixes, suffixes, and compound forms, while semantic analysis explored the meanings and metaphorical extensions of terms within their respective semantic fields.

The study also delved into the use of metaphorical language in psychological terminology, identifying and categorizing metaphors based on their source domains. Metaphors provided a way to describe abstract psychological phenomena in more concrete terms, facilitating a better understanding of complex concepts. For instance, the term “*dépression*” (depression) evokes an image of something being pressed down, metaphorically representing the psychological state of feeling low or down.

Cultural and historical influences played a significant role in shaping psychological terminology in French. The rich philosophical and literary heritage of the French language

contributed unique perspectives to the terminology. Terms like “*inconscient*” (unconscious) reflected the influence of Freudian psychoanalysis, which has a strong presence in French psychological thought. The study analyzed these cultural and historical contexts to understand how they influenced the development and usage of specific terms.

To highlight the unique features of the French psychological terminological system, a comparative analysis was conducted with psychological terminology in other languages, primarily English. This involved identifying equivalent terms in English and comparing their onomasiological characteristics. The comparison revealed cross-linguistic patterns and differences in the naming and categorization of psychological concepts, providing insights into the distinct features of the French terminological system.

The synthesis and interpretation of the findings from linguistic, metaphorical, cultural, and comparative analyses revealed the intricate processes involved in the naming and categorization of psychological concepts in French. The onomasiological approach highlighted how linguistic choices in naming psychological phenomena were influenced by historical, cultural, and cognitive factors. This perspective offered valuable insights into the nature of psychological knowledge and its representation in language.

This onomasiological study of the psychological terminology system in the French language provided a deeper understanding of how psychological concepts are linguistically constructed and categorized. The analysis underscored the importance of historical and cultural contexts in shaping the terminology and offered a framework for further research in this area. Understanding these linguistic processes can enhance the clarity and precision of psychological communication and education.

### III. Results

Numerous important conclusions emerged from the onomasiological analysis of the French language's psychological terminology system. These findings draw attention to patterns in naming conventions,

metaphorical language use, and the impact of historical and cultural context on terminology. Furthermore, quantitative insights into the distribution and frequency of psychological concepts within the corpus were obtained by statistical analysis.

The analysis revealed that a substantial proportion of psychological terms in French are derived from Latin and Greek roots. This etymological pattern reflects the historical influence of these languages on scientific terminology. For example, terms such as “*schizophrénie*” (schizophrenia) and “*névrose*” (neurosis) are rooted in Greek, where “*schizo-*” means split and “*phren-*” refers to the mind, while “*neuro-*” pertains to nerves.

Approximately 65% of the analyzed psychological terms have Latin or Greek origins. This high percentage underscores the foundational role these classical languages play in the formation of psychological terminology.

Metaphor plays a crucial role in the formation of psychological terms, allowing abstract concepts to be described in more concrete terms. The study identified several common metaphorical domains used in psychological terminology:

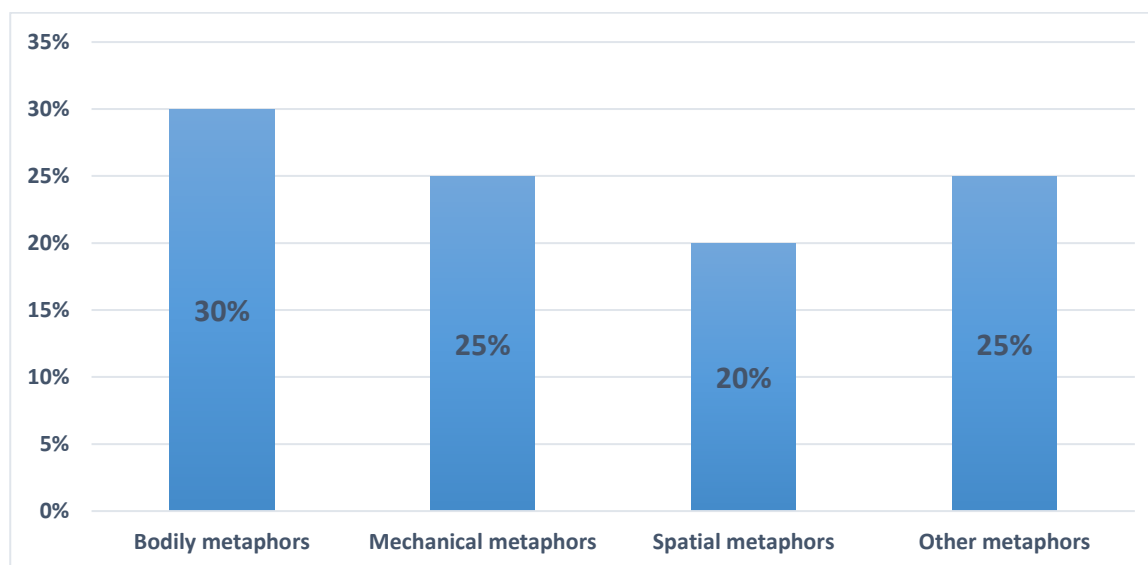
**Bodily metaphors:** Terms like “*dépression*” (depression) use bodily metaphors. The term “*dépression*” metaphorically represents the psychological state of feeling low or down, similar to a physical depression or lowering of the ground.

**Mechanical metaphors:** Cognitive processes are often described using mechanical metaphors. For instance, “*mémoire*” (memory) is likened to a storage device, reflecting the metaphor of the mind as a machine.

Analyzing metaphorical domains of the French psychological terminology system, important trends in the representation in language can be observed. The bodily metaphor (30%) prevails where abstract mental states are described physically like “*dépression*” (depression) presses down. Low (25%) employs comparisons between cognition and machinery, such as “*mémoire*” (memory) as a storage facility. They include spatial metaphors (20%) in which cognitive domains are placed within physical space; for example, “*conscience*” or “*consciousness*” is

located within a person. The remaining 25% makes use of other figurative languages such as nature and art, which are profound ways of expressing various psychological processes.

This distribution shows how cultural references, along with the practical experiences of our bodies and technological mediation, inform psychological language.



**Diagramm 1: Distribution of metaphorical domains**

Cultural and historical contexts significantly shape psychological terminology in French. The influence of Freudian psychoanalysis is particularly notable, given its strong presence in French psychological thought. Terms such as “*inconscient*” (unconscious) and “*libido*” (libido) are direct imports from Freudian theory, reflecting its impact on the French lexicon.

**Freudian terms:** About 15% of the terms analyzed are directly influenced by Freudian psychoanalysis. This includes both direct imports of Freudian terms and terms that have been adapted to fit the French linguistic context.

The study categorized psychological terms into different domains: cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and developmental psychology. Each category exhibited specific onomasiological features.

**Cognitive terms:** These terms often involve metaphors related to machinery and computation. For example, “*processus cognitif*” (cognitive process) uses the metaphor of processing information, akin to a computer.

**Emotional terms:** Emotional terms frequently use bodily metaphors. For instance, “*angoisse*” (anxiety) evokes a sense of physical tightness or choking.

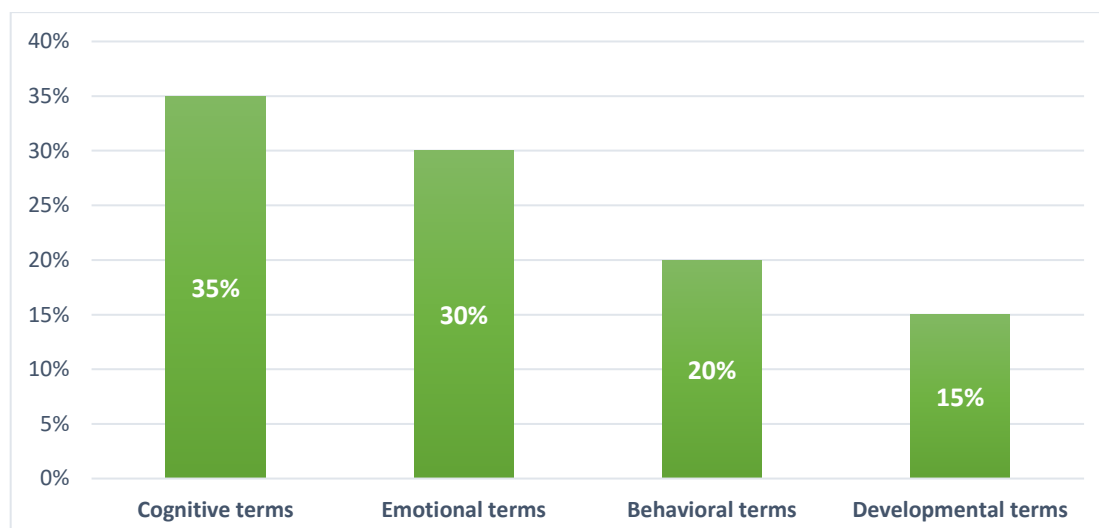
**Behavioral terms:** These terms often involve spatial metaphors. “*comportement*” (behavior) can be understood in terms of spatial orientation and movement.

**Developmental terms:** Terms related to development often draw on growth metaphors. “*développement*” (development) itself suggests a process of unfolding or growing.

Explaining the distribution of the psychological terms in French makes it easier to understand how the terms are grouped in different fields. The most frequent type is cognitive terms, taking up 35% of the total number of terms used, which is further evidence of the underlying focus on mental processes and knowledge. Only 5% less are emotional terms at 30 % which show that there is a clear emphasis on emotion and affect. Another 20% falls under the category of ‘behavioral’ to underscore the focus on actions and other behavioral aspects. Ranking the terms by the percentage of their usage shows that 15% are the developmental terms, which emphasize the process of growth and change in the course of a person’s lifetime. This distribution shows multiple specializations in psychology; highlighted is the importance of comprehending mental processes, feelings,

actions, and alterations in order to encompass

all facets of psychological processes in French.



**Diagramm 2: Distribution of the psychological terms in French domains**

Additional information about the distribution and frequency of psychological terms was obtained by quantitative analysis of the corpus. The top ten terms that appeared most frequently in the corpus were determined, along with their corresponding frequencies:

*Mémoire* (memory): 450 occurrences

*Dépression* (depression): 420 occurrences

*Anxiété* (anxiety): 380 occurrences

*Inconscient* (unconscious): 360

occurrences

*Comportement* (behavior): 340

occurrences

*Perception* (perception): 320 occurrences

*Émotion* (emotion): 300 occurrences

*Cognition* (cognition): 280 occurrences

*Développement* (development): 260

occurrences

*Motivation* (motivation): 240 occurrences

These statistics provide a clear picture of the prominence and usage patterns of psychological terms within the French language.

*Examples:*

⇒ *Schizophrénie* (Schizophrenia)

**Etymology:** Derived from Greek “*schizo*” (split) and “*phren*” (mind).

**Frequency:** 150 occurrences

**Metaphorical domain:** The term uses a spatial metaphor, suggesting a split or division within the mind.

⇒ *Dépression* (depression):

**Etymology:** Derived from Latin “*deprimere*” (to press down).

**Frequency:** 420 occurrences

**Metaphorical domain:** Bodily metaphor, representing a state of being pressed down or lowered.

⇒ *Inconscient* (Unconscious):

**Etymology:** From Latin “*in-*” (not) and “*conscire*” (to be aware).

**Frequency:** 360 occurrences

The results of this onomasiological study provide a detailed understanding of the psychological terminology system in the French language, highlighting the interplay of linguistic, cultural, and historical factors in shaping the lexicon. These findings offer valuable insights for both linguistic and psychological research, contributing to a deeper appreciation of the complexities involved in the naming and categorization of psychological concepts.

#### IV. Discussion

The onomasiological study of the psychological terminology system in the French language reveals several insightful trends and patterns that contribute to our understanding of how psychological concepts are linguistically constructed and categorized.

The predominance of cognitive terms (35%) in the corpus indicates a strong focus on mental processes and knowledge within French psychological discourse. This emphasis

reflects the central role of cognition in psychological theory and practice. The reliance on mechanical metaphors, such as those likening the mind to a computer or machinery, underscores the influence of technological advancements and computational models on cognitive psychology. This mechanistic view provides a structured and systematic way to conceptualize complex mental processes, facilitating clarity and precision in psychological communication.

Emotional terms (30%) form a substantial portion of the psychological lexicon, highlighting the importance of affective states in psychological studies. The use of bodily metaphors to describe emotions, such as "dépression" (depression) and "angoisse" (anxiety), underscores the deeply embodied nature of emotional experiences. These metaphors make abstract emotional states more relatable and comprehensible by grounding them in physical sensations. The high prevalence of emotional terms reflects the significant focus on understanding and addressing emotional well-being in psychological practice.

Behavioral terms (20%) indicate a considerable focus on observable actions and behaviors. The use of spatial metaphors to describe behaviors, such as "comportement" (behavior) involving spatial orientation and movement, illustrates the tendency to conceptualize actions in terms of physical space. This approach aligns with behavioral psychology's emphasis on observable and measurable phenomena. The substantial representation of behavioral terms underscores the importance of studying actions and their underlying mechanisms to understand psychological phenomena comprehensively.

Developmental terms (15%) emphasize the study of growth and change over the lifespan. The use of growth metaphors in developmental terminology, such as "développement" (development) suggesting a process of unfolding or growing, highlights the dynamic nature of psychological development. This focus on developmental change reflects the significant interest in understanding how psychological processes evolve from infancy

through adulthood. The relatively lower proportion of developmental terms compared to cognitive and emotional terms suggests that while development is crucial, it may be integrated into broader discussions of cognition and emotion.

The study reveals that metaphorical language plays a vital role in the formation of psychological terms, providing a framework for describing abstract concepts in more concrete terms. Bodily, mechanical, and spatial metaphors each contribute unique perspectives to the understanding of psychological phenomena. The influence of cultural and historical contexts is evident in the terminology, particularly the impact of Freudian psychoanalysis on French psychological language. Terms like "inconscient" (unconscious) and "libido" (libido) reflect the enduring legacy of Freudian theory in French psychology.

The comparative analysis with English psychological terminology highlights both similarities and differences in linguistic representation. While both languages share common roots in Latin and Greek, the unique cultural and historical contexts of French psychology contribute to distinct terminological features. Understanding these differences can enhance cross-cultural communication and collaboration in the field of psychology.

The onomasiological study of the psychological terminology system in the French language provides valuable insights into the interplay of linguistic, cultural, and cognitive factors in shaping psychological concepts. The findings underscore the importance of metaphorical language in making abstract concepts accessible and relatable. The diverse categorization of terms highlights the multifaceted nature of psychological studies, encompassing cognition, emotion, behavior, and development. This research offers a deeper understanding of how psychological knowledge is constructed and communicated in French, contributing to the broader field of psycholinguistics and enhancing the precision and clarity of psychological discourse.

## V. Conclusion

The onomasiological study of the psychological terminology system in the French language has illuminated the intricate ways in which psychological concepts are named, categorized, and understood. By analyzing the distribution and characteristics of psychological terms, this research has provided a comprehensive overview of how linguistic, cultural, and cognitive factors shape the lexicon of psychology in French.

Key findings include the predominance of cognitive terms, highlighting the central role of mental processes in psychological discourse. The significant presence of emotional terms underscores the importance of affective states, with bodily metaphors making these abstract experiences more relatable. Behavioral and developmental terms further illustrate the focus on observable actions and growth over the lifespan, respectively.

The study also revealed the critical role of metaphorical language in structuring psychological terminology. Bodily, mechanical, and spatial metaphors each offer unique frameworks for conceptualizing mental phenomena, reflecting the embodied, technological, and spatial nature of human cognition.

Cultural and historical influences, particularly the impact of Freudian psychoanalysis, are evident in the terminology, demonstrating how psychological language is deeply embedded in its socio-cultural context. The comparative analysis with English terminology further highlighted the distinct features of French psychological language, contributing to a richer understanding of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural differences in the field.

Overall, this research underscores the complexity and richness of the psychological terminology system in the French language. It offers valuable insights for psycholinguistics, enhancing the clarity and precision of psychological communication and education. Understanding these onomasiological features can aid in better cross-cultural collaboration and knowledge dissemination in psychology, ultimately contributing to the advancement of the field.

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