

MORPHOLOGICAL AND ETYMOLOGY OF VERBS OF THINKING IN FRENCH

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Annotation: This article explores the morphological and etymological characteristics of cognitive verbs in the French language. Cognitive verbs, which denote mental processes such as thinking, believing, understanding, and knowing, play a vital role in expressing abstract thought. The study analyzes their conjugation patterns across different verb groups (1st, 2nd, and 3rd) and highlights irregularities in usage. Furthermore, it investigates the Latin roots of these verbs, shedding light on their historical development and semantic evolution. The findings provide valuable insights into the structure and origin of key French verbs used in intellectual and reflective discourse.

Keywords: French language, cognitive verbs, morphology, etymology, verb conjugation, Latin roots, semantics, language structure, reflective verbs, verb groups

Introduction: Language is not only a tool for communication but also a mirror of human thought. In this regard, cognitive verbs—those that express mental processes such as thinking, believing, understanding, and knowing—serve as essential elements in articulating inner states, reasoning, and reflective discourse. The French language, as a member of the Romance language family, offers a rich system of cognitive verbs that not only reflect semantic depth but also demonstrate diverse morphological patterns and complex etymological roots.

Understanding the structure and origin of these verbs is fundamental to grasping the broader syntactic and semantic systems of French. Morphologically, cognitive verbs in French belong to various conjugation groups, exhibiting both regular and irregular forms. Some verbs, such as *penser* (to think) and *croire* (to believe), follow predictable patterns, while others, like *savoir* (to know) and *comprendre* (to understand), show unique inflectional behaviors that must be learned individually.

Etymologically, most of these verbs trace their origins to Latin, the linguistic foundation of French. Their Latin roots not only provide insights into their original meanings but also help explain shifts in usage and meaning across time. For example, the verb *réfléchir* (to reflect) originates from the Latin *reflectere*, implying both a physical and metaphorical turning back—an idea central to reflection and introspection.

This paper aims to examine the morphological structures and etymological developments of key cognitive verbs in French. By doing so, it seeks to enhance the understanding of how abstract thought is encoded linguistically and how historical language evolution has shaped modern French verb usage. Such an analysis is particularly relevant for linguists, language learners, and educators interested in the intersection of grammar, meaning, and historical linguistics.

Main part: Cognitive verbs are verbs that denote mental actions or processes such as thinking, understanding, believing, knowing, assuming, or realizing. They are essential in expressing internal cognitive states and are often used to report thought, convey knowledge, express doubt

or certainty, and construct arguments. In French, these verbs play a critical role in both spoken and written discourse, especially in academic, philosophical, and reflective contexts.

French verbs are typically divided into three conjugation groups based on their infinitive endings:

First group: Verbs ending in **-er** (e.g., *penser* – to think)

Second group: Verbs ending in **-ir** with a regular participle form (e.g., *réfléchir* – to reflect)

Third group: Irregular verbs with varied endings (e.g., *savoir*, *comprendre*, *croire*)

Many cognitive verbs belong to the third group, making them morphologically complex. Below are examples of common cognitive verbs across these groups:

Verb	Translation	Conjugation Group	Present Tense (1st Person Singular)
<i>penser</i>	to think	1st	<i>je pense</i>
<i>réfléchir</i>	to reflect	2nd	<i>je réfléchis</i>
<i>croire</i>	to believe	3rd	<i>je crois</i>
<i>savoir</i>	to know (facts)	3rd	<i>je sais</i>
<i>connaître</i>	to know (people)	3rd	<i>je connais</i>
<i>comprendre</i>	to understand	3rd	<i>je comprends</i>

The morphological complexity of these verbs is evident in their irregular conjugations across tenses, moods, and persons. For instance, *savoir* displays unique forms in the subjunctive and past participle (*je sache*, *su*), while *croire* includes vowel alternations (*je crois*, *nous croyons*).

Cognitive verbs in French often function as **main verbs** followed by subordinate clauses introduced by **que** (that):

Je pense que tu as raison. (I think that you are right.)

Elle croit qu'il viendra. (She believes he will come.)

They also appear in **impersonal expressions**, **interrogative clauses**, and **conditional structures**, playing a vital role in expressing subjectivity, inference, and epistemic modality.

Many French cognitive verbs are derived from Latin roots, reflecting the language's historical development. Understanding their etymology not only clarifies their meanings but also explains morphological irregularities.

Penser ← Latin *pensare* (to weigh, to consider) – from *pendere* (to hang, weigh)

Croire ← Latin *credere* (to believe)

Savoir ← Latin *sapere* (to taste, to be wise)

Comprendre ← Latin *comprehendere* (to grasp, to seize)

Réfléchir ← Latin reflectere (to bend back, to turn around)

The shift from physical to abstract meanings (e.g., “weighing” thoughts in *penser*, or “grasping” ideas in *comprendre*) illustrates metaphorical extension, a common mechanism in semantic evolution.

Despite their shared cognitive domain, these verbs carry distinct semantic shades:

Penser often implies tentative or subjective thought.

Savoir indicates concrete knowledge or factual certainty.

Croire conveys belief or assumption without guaranteed truth.

Connaître reflects familiarity or personal acquaintance.

Réfléchir suggests deliberate or critical thinking.

Pragmatically, these verbs influence the tone and stance of discourse. For example, using *je pense* (I think) softens a statement, while *je sais* (I know) asserts authority or certainty.

The irregularities in conjugation, subtle semantic distinctions, and differences in use between *savoir* and *connaître* (both meaning “to know” in different contexts) often confuse learners. Linguists, meanwhile, are interested in how these verbs function syntactically and semantically across discourse types and how their evolution mirrors changes in thought expression.

Conclusion

Cognitive verbs in the French language serve as linguistic gateways into the human mind, enabling speakers to express thought, belief, understanding, and knowledge with precision and nuance. Through the exploration of their morphological and etymological features, this study has highlighted the rich linguistic diversity and historical depth embedded within these verbs.

Morphologically, French cognitive verbs exhibit both regular and irregular conjugation patterns, with many of the most commonly used ones falling into the third verb group - known for its irregularity and complexity. Understanding these patterns is crucial for accurate verb usage, particularly across tenses and moods that are central to both written and spoken French.

Etymologically, the Latin origins of these verbs offer invaluable insights into their original meanings and semantic development. Verbs such as *penser*, *croire*, and *comprendre* illustrate how concrete actions in Latin - like weighing, believing, or grasping - have evolved into abstract mental operations in modern French. These metaphorical extensions underscore the cognitive nature of language change and the intricate ways in which language captures thought.

Beyond grammar and etymology, cognitive verbs function as key tools in structuring discourse, framing arguments, and expressing epistemic stance. Their semantic subtleties - such as the difference between *savoir* and *connaître* or the implications of *croire* versus *penser* - reflect not only linguistic knowledge but also cultural and communicative competence.

In conclusion, a deeper understanding of the morphological and etymological characteristics of French cognitive verbs enhances both linguistic accuracy and interpretive sensitivity. For linguists, educators, and language learners alike, these verbs offer a compelling intersection between form, meaning, and historical evolution - making them an essential area of study in French linguistics.

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