Argument realization and encoding in the noun phrase

SFB 732

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Starting point: results of B1 & C1

- In our work on nominalizations and noun phrases, we concluded that while all (verb-derived and root-derived) nouns contain a DP layer, they differ as to their internal make-up.

- The focus of our work has been to determine the internal building blocks, i.e. the layers of functional structure that are responsible for the interpretation of nominals.

- We have identified two main structures:
Starting point: results of B1 & C1

Root derived nouns:

[DP[ Number [Classifier [n [Root

Deverbal nouns:

[DP[Number[Classifier[(n) Aspect[(n) Voice[ (n) v[Root

The structures are flexible, i.e. not all the array of functional projections is necessarily present yielding different interpretations of nouns.
Starting point and a first set of questions

- On the empirical side, we found that nominalizations within a language and across languages cannot be attributed to any kind of parameter. What we actually find is micro-variation constrained by the compatibility of the general building blocks of verbs and nouns.

- Thus our research supports proposals about the existence of categories in a continuum (cf. Ross 1972).

- But, if this is the right way to interpret categories, i.e. they are not primitive but decomposable, then:

  1. What are the criteria one can use to do so?
  2. What is the relevant feature set languages can choose from?
  3. What regulates the cross-linguistic distribution?
Argument structure in nominals

While our approach correctly distinguishes between the nouns that have argument structure and the ones that do not, it leaves several questions without an answer:

Question 1:

The optionality of argument realization in nominals which is not found in the verbal domain.

1. John examined the book
2. John’s/the examination (of the book)

How can we account for this optionality?
Argument structure in nominals

- Does telicity play a role?
- It seems that Number and Classifier interfere with the projection of arguments. How can we formalize this?
- If argument structure comes from the verbal layers, why would the presence of Number and Classifier block the projection of arguments?
Question 2: source of the internal argument in nominalizations.

Concerning the external argument of the nominal, two options are available to us, DP, and VoiceP, depending on the noun;

Assuming that the internal argument is introduced by the root lead us to expect that the argument should be obligatory in all contexts. But they are not!

Do we have evidence for assuming that internal arguments as well are introduced by functional structure, see e.g. Borer (2005), Marantz (2005)?

What are the layers involved? Aspect? PP? What are the criteria we can come up with in order to determine the source of AS?
Nominals: passives or middles?

- Several authors argued that nominalization is akin to passivization in that it absorbs the external argument (Grimshaw 1990). If this is the case, we would expect nominalizations to behave like verbal passives.

- But: not all nominalizations are alike. We concluded that the view of nominals as "passive" is misleading. Not all nominalizations are passive in the sense of containing passive Voice; some, lack a Voice head altogether.

- It has been argued that a link exists between nominalizations, adjectival participles and middle constructions. Do we get the same effects across domains?
Nominals: passive or middle?

In the verbal domain, we often find Voice syncretisms, i.e. passive, anticausative and middle surface with identical morphology.

Can we identify something similar in nominalization? How is Voice realized in the nominal domain?
Passive nominals

- Those nominalizations that are passive are Agent-exclusive. Why?

(1)a. Das Öffnen der Türen durch Peter
the open-en the-gen doors through Peter

b. *das Öffnen der Türen durch den Wind
the open-en the-gendoors through the wind

- Representation of implicit argument in nominalizations and verbal passives?
Case in nominals

- Empirically we find a number of Case patterns:

1. John’s reading the book
2. John’s reading of the book
Case in nominals

- How can we account for them in a formal theory of Case?

Genitive = default Case in the noun phrase?

- Related to this: genitive assignment in general in the noun phrase, e.g. also in the case of possessors with object nouns. How can we distinguish between possessor genitives and argumental genitives? Is it a valid distinction?

- Can we predict the case realization options on the basis of the building blocks involved in the nominalization?
Case in nominals

Crosslinguistically, the argument encoding in nominalizations differs from the argument encoding in active verbal constructions.

Observation 1:
In both areas, arguments become implicit or optional.

Observation 2:
Default case marking differs (Nom<->Gen). Sometimes accusative remains in the presence of Genitive.

Observation 3:
Both nominalizations as well as passive/middle/antipassive Voices are characterized by a shift in case marking.
Case in nominals

- **Theoretical hypothesis:** Many researchers formulated the hypothesis that nominalization involves specific **Voice-alternation** (passive/middle-like) or a specific **case system** (ergative-absolutive-like).

**Ergativity:** (Alexiadou 2001 and others). For instance, in German nominalizations (Grosz 2008), the word order in the DP is VOS and the morphological alignment of cases is O/S vs. A and not S/A vs. O as in the verbal domain.

1. Das Öffnen der Türen durch Peter
2. Das Öffnen der Türen
Case in nominals

- What triggers the shift from the one case system to the other?
- Is this related to presence vs. absence of Tense? How?

In sum:

- We need to investigate the semantico-syntactic and morpho-syntactic parallels between specific verbal Voices and nominal Voices.
- Parallels and differences in the two domains:
  
  i) implicit/covert/optional arguments
  ii) case marking (default case, dependent case)
  iii) prepositions as licensors of optional arguments