

Argument structure of Czech event nominals

Background. Nominal structures with a mixed categorial behaviour, namely those that share many properties with verbs stand in the focus of linguistic attention basically from the time of Chomsky's 1970 *Remarks on nominalization*. While Chomsky admits that gerunds of the type *John's refusing the offer* are derived by syntactic transformation of the base sentence-like structure, the limited productivity and structural properties of derived nominals such as *John's refusing of the offer* or *John's refusal of the offer* lead him to the extension of base rules, and therefore to a simplification of the transformational component.

However, it was first extensively argued in Grimshaw (1990) that not only English gerunds but also other derived nominals *take obligatory arguments* in the same sense as verbs. Of these, the 'ing-of' action nominals represent the most consistent group of non-ambiguous argument-takers (Grimshaw 1990, pg. 67). According to Grimshaw's analysis it is the presence of the semantic event structure what determines argument-taking properties of nominals: complex event nominals are distinguished from simple event and result nominals by the presence of the external *Event* argument in their lexico-semantic specification. This argument takes over the internal thematic arguments of a predicate but suppresses the agentive one.

Proposal. I examine the group of nominals derived by the -(e)*ní/tí* suffix (traditionally called 'verbal nominals' or 'verbo-nominal hybrids' in Czech grammars) which primarily denote states or events but can refer to results of events as well. I propose that these nouns represent Czech counterpart to the English 'ing-of' nominals in that they license argument positions to the same extent as the corresponding verbal structures. In contrast to Grimshaw's lexicalist approach I use purely syntactic analysis in terms of a finely articulated functional sequence: I claim that only the presence of the extended verbal projection (including VoiceP/vP and AspP but not IP) within the nominal projection can account for all the generalizations regarding the morphosyntactic structure of -(e)*ní/tí* nominals.

Employing the Distributive Morphology architecture of grammar (Halle and Marantz 1994, e.g.) I argue in line with van Hout and Roeper (1998) that it is the feature-checking defined on event-related projections which captures the morphological structure of nominalizations. Moreover, I show that the distinction between event-denoting and result-denoting -(e)*ní/tí* nominals follows naturally within this framework as well; cf. the similar approach to Greek nominalizations in Alexiadou (2001).

Data. Two types of data were driving my analysis of -(e)*ní/tí* nominals:

1. realization of their external and internal arguments which clearly patterns with the Case-marking system of active clauses in ergative-absolutive languages; see Williams (1987) for the same observation in English
2. aspect-sensitive obligatoriness of the internal argument which is in Czech identical for both nominal and active verbal structures

While the internal argument of *imperfective -(e)ní/tí* nominals does not have to be expressed overtly as in (1-a) but can be just “implicitly satisfied by being existentially quantified over” (Zucchi 1989, pg. 185 et seq.), nominal structures derived from *perfective* stems become ungrammatical unless their object position gets filled by some overt DP:

- (1) a. Nicení (městečk-a) trva-lo asi hodin-u.
 destroying.**impf**.NOM.SG town-GEN.SG last-3.SG.PAST about hour-ACC.SG
 ‘The destroying of the town lasted about an hour.’
- b. Z-ničení *(městečk-a) trva-lo asi hodin-u.
 pf-destroying.NOM.SG town-GEN.SG last-3.SG.PAST about hour-ACC.SG
 ‘The destroying of the town lasted about an hour.’

Extensions. The additional support for the proposed analysis is provided by the behaviour of intransitive structures and structures with a lexical-case marked argument under nominalization.

References

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