

Argument Inheritance and Category-Changing Morphology

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1 Background to the non-inheritance problem

- The **non-inheritance problem**: Category change making AS of V optional/illegal:
 - (1) a. People observed *(the aliens/that some aliens read *LI*).
b. several observers (of the problems/*that some aliens read *LI*)
c. several observations (of aliens by biolinguists)
 - (2) a. This thing opens *(cans).
b. Pass me the opener (*(of cans).
 - (3) a. dismissive/appreciative/supportive of that
b. *exaggerative of problems; *deceptive of people; *creative of good art;
*administrative of this area; *corrosive of copper; *prescriptive of grammar

1.1 A problematic solution to the non-inheritance problem

- If we embrace something like (4b) in lieu of (4a), we expect affixes selecting V(P) to disallow inheritance.
 - (4) a. [_{VP} *People* [_v *observe* [_{DP} *the aliens*]]]
 - b. [_{VP} *People* [_v [_{FP} [_{DP} *the aliens*] F [_{VP} *observe*]]]
- This restates the problem. Why is (spec,)FP obligatory in vP? It is not for aspectual reasons (object of *observe* doesn't bound event). Why is (spec,)FP optional in nominals?
- Empirical problem: To the extent that (4b) can handle object incorporation, it doesn't predict subjects to be any harder to incorporate, contrary to the facts:
 - (5) *guest eating* (non-vegetarian interpretation)
 - (6) **linguist sermonising*; **audience dancing*; **politician prevaricating*; **girl talking*
- Borer (2003)'s plea for (4b) is based on the false premise that zero-derived nominals can't inherit AS (Harley 2006, Newmeyer 2009).

1.2 Primordial soup for an alternative

- We can at least reduce the non-inheritance problem with nominalisations to an independent problem: Non-heads of morphological structures need not project their arguments. ((8) shows that the constraint is not about category-neutral nonheads.)
 - (7) *Kläranlage, Mischvorgang, Stecknadel, Umhängetasche, Vorführeffekt*
 - (8) *Isoliertechnik, Lackierverfahren, Kopiervorgang, Modellierprozess*
 - (9) *Ausweg* (cf. *ein Weg aus* (**der Situation*)), *Umweg*
- Still unclear why such constructions don't crash.

2 Case study: Agentive and instrumental –er nominals

Literature: Alexiadou/Schäfer (2009), Levin/Rappaport (1988)

2.1 Empirical generalisations

- Standard observation: *of*-insertion entails event, unlike absent/incorporated object. Event entailments are absent with instruments, and less clearly so with professional functions, i.e. in cases where a thing/person has a particular *designated* function (A&S).
 - (10) a. *lifesaver* [needn't have saved lives]
b. *saver of lives* [must have done so]

- (11) a. *pencil sharpener, (coffee) grinder, polish remover, lens cleaner, penholder*
b. *law enforcer, peace keeper, fire fighter, dog catcher*

- Qualification 1: Events are presupposed rather than entailed:
- (12) *Egbert wasn't a winner of the Nobel Prize for Linguistics (since nobody ever won it).*
 - Qualification 2: Presupposition can be enforced with incorporated/omitted objects if designated function interpretation is pragmatically deviant.
- (13) *wine lover, cow worshipper, prize winner, murderer, discoverer*
- Temporal modification ok with events, but not with designated functions.
 - (14) a. Gertrude is a frequent discoverer of interesting data.
b. *The most frequent bottle opener in the kitchen is this one.
c. The bottle opener yesterday was {Eberhard/*this silver one}
- Referent of *of*-insertion –er nominal can be inanimate (e.g. A/S), but must apparently be conceptualised as being at start of causal chain. Manipulated instruments are out, even if a specific event is referred to.
 - (15) ^{www}*pain is a saver of lives*; ^{www}*it is a thriller of the mind*; *adultery is a wrecker of families*; ^{www}*carpet is the main accumulator of dust*; *it is a causer of wars*
 - (16) a. **this key was the opener of the door yesterday* (despite: *this key opened the door*)
b. **this chemical was the cleaner of the stove* (despite: *it cleaned the stove*)

2.2 Critique of the approach of Alexiadou & Schäfer

- Alexiadou/Schäfer on the incompatibility of instruments and *of*-insertion:
 - A. Episodic and instrumental –er-nouns have same structure, but event variable bound by different operators.
 - B. Instrumental –er nominals have dispositional semantics (Lekakou 2005): Referent has properties predisposing it for participation in the event. Cf. middles:
 - (17) *This book reads easily (because of the large print/*thanks to my glasses).*
 - C. Dispositional interpretations are generic.
 - D. Generic interp. disallows *of*-complements because “projection of a specific object in –er nominals would imply the unfolding of an actual event; hence it is incompatible with the generic semantics” (p.14)
- My quibbles concern point D:
 - Specific readings of internal arguments don't preclude generic & dispositional ones:
 - (18) [Mary's dodgy husband:] *This is a device I made called the Mary detector. If she comes near the office, it senses her DNA and rings an alarm. I still need to test it.*
 - (19) *I made this thing specially for cleaning that high window. Let's try it out.*
 - (20) *the most frequent cleaner of these windows*
 - Generic interpretations of *of*-insertion complements aren't excluded:
 - (21) *The meteorite caused the complete extermination of the dinosaur.*

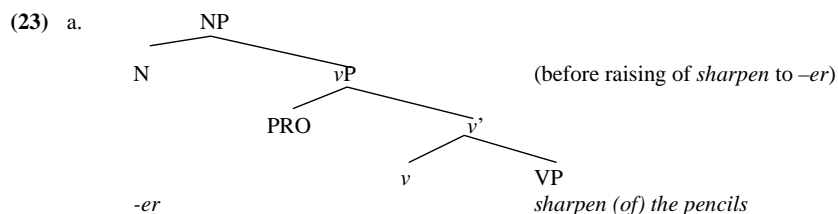
- **Conclusion:** There is room for doubt as to whether the DP inside the *of*-phrase is what makes it incompatible with instrumental/dispositional *-er* nouns.

- **Concession:** Data from verbal domain which seem to support A&S's view:

- (22) a. This chemical cleans stoves. (needn't have done so)
 b. This chemical cleans our stove. (it must have done so)

2.3 Towards an alternative solution

2.3.1 The *of*-insertion nominals

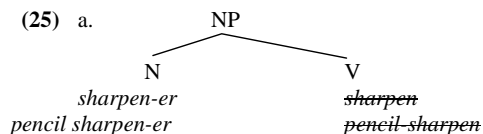


- b. $\lambda x \lambda e$ sharpening(e) & origin(e,x) & patient(e,y) & the_pencils(y)
 c. origin(e,x): a relation between between an event and an entity which is its agent, initiator or causer.

- Not crucial (here): separation of *-er* & *v*; *of*-case assignment by chain N-v-V).
- **How this handles the interpretational facts:**
 - A. *v* forces ext. arg. to be interpreted as an Origin (initial point in causal chain), excluding manipulated instrument subjects from episodic contexts like (16).
 - B. Event variable introduced by *v* is existentially bound, excluding purely dispositional interpretations.
 - What existential binding might follow from (tentative!):
 - It is a default treatment of unbound variables (cf. Diesing on indefinites)
 - It is a default feature setting of *v*. Extra language-specific stipulations are needed to sanction more marked/exotic flavours of *v* (middle, passive).
- See Baker & Vinokurova (2008) on ruling out adverbs. They fail to note that temporal PP modifiers seem ok, but they might be non-intersective modifiers of N:

- (24) the player of this piece {^{??}at the fastest tempo/*most quickly}

2.3.2 The dispositional reading



- b. λx entity(x) & sharpening(e) & rel(e,x)
 c. rel(e,x) an unspecified relation of an entity to an event in which it participates.

- *vP* is absent, so no event entailment.
- Dispositional reading isn't directly stipulated.

- Affix defines no specific thematic relation to event, hence free theta role assignment:

- **Free(-ish) theta-role assignment**

- (26) a. *keeper* 'thing to be kept', *broiler* 'chicken to be broiled', *locker* 'lockable cupboard'
 b. *fixer-upper* 'house to be fixed up'
 c. *foot tapper* "song making one want to tap one's foot"
 d. ^{www}*I always used violent games as a steam-letter-offer* (allows one to let off steam)
 e. *kneeler* (where one kneels), *scribbler*, *jotter*, *counter*, *dresser*,

- Lack of functional structure makes the interpretational possibilities freer, allowing/forcing lexicalisation, recourse to pragmatic construal, drift to noteworthy concepts. (Cf. compounds, denominal verbs, particle verbs, articleless PPs.)

- (27) *watchmaker*, *broiler*, *stinker*

- As A&S note, DM-style attachment to category-neutral roots avails us nothing here, as dispositional *-er* can attach to explicitly verbalised Vs: *moisturiser*, *pencil sharpener*.

- Future research on dispositional nominals: Beyond *-er*:

- Dispositional compounds:

- (28) window-cleaning thing, pool-cleaning device

- (29) defragmentation programme, swimming pool, closing time, wash day

- Zero nominals:

- (30) Instrument: *rattle*, *clip*, *hoist*, *whistle*, *lift*, *drill*, *sting*

- (31) Agent: *coach (of Federer)*, *judge (of all the Earth/of right and wrong/*of petty criminals)*, *cheat*, *bore*, *tease*, *cook*,; *flirt*, *gossip*, *sneak*, *snoop*, *sponge*

- (32) Patient: *discard*, *reject*, (good) *catch*, *supplies*, *produce*, *import*

- (33) Distance: *a 2 metre drop/fall/overlap*; *the 2 week run of the play*

- (34) Location: *dump*, *tip*, *hangout*, *hideout*, *lounge*, *busstop*

- Dispositional structures with *for*-PP (semantically similar to a purpose clause) originally tempted me to assume an implicit FOR relation in dispositional nouns.

- (35) a thing for opening bottles

3 References

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