

Arguments and modifiers in deverbal nominals: Romanian Genitives and *de*-PPs

Elena Soare and Isabelle Roy

elena.soare@univ-paris8.fr

isabelle.roy@univ-nantes.fr

Introduction. Across languages, arguments of deverbal nominals, unlike those of verbs, are expressed either by PPs (*de, of*, etc), or by Genitives. By contrast, modifiers are only expressed by PPs. In a language such as French, *de*-PPs are ambiguous, and realize indiscriminately arguments and modifiers. Roy & Soare (2014) have claimed that, in French, a subclass of individual-denoting deverbal nominals (namely, Agent *-er* nominals; e.g., *le vendeur de cette voiture* ‘the seller of this car’) are syntactically-derived Argument-Structure nominals – AS-Ns. If this is true, at least in this subclass of nominals, *de’of*-PPs should be true arguments. These *de*-PPs would thus contrast with those found with other individual-denoting nominals, like *secrétaire du département* ‘secretary of the department’, which are not syntactically derived AS-Ns (cf. Chomsky 1970), and for which *de*-PPs cannot be arguments and must be analysed as mere modifiers. In other languages, such as Romanian, this ambiguity does not exist: (specific) arguments are realized as a Genitive, while modifiers are expressed by *de*-PPs. Romanian seems thus a good language to test both the argument structure properties of a subclass of individual-denoting deverbal nominals (i.e. Agent AS-Ns), and the validity of such an analysis across Romance languages.

Main claims. (i) The three-way typology developed in Roy & Soare (2014) for French also holds for Romanian – episodic vs. dispositional Agent AS-Ns vs. Instruments. (ii) Genitives are arguments in Romanian episodic Agent *-tor* AS-Ns; (iii) non-specific *de*-PPs are pseudo-incorporated arguments (Knittel 2010) in dispositional Agent *-tor* nominals; (iv) *de*-PPs are modifiers in Instrument nominals. A correlation holds between argumenthood, Genitive, and specificity in *-er* nominals across languages, including those in which the contrast is not morphologically marked, e.g. French.

Argumental Genitives. While *de/of*-PPs in French or English *-er* nominals are ambiguous (arguments or modifiers), in Romanian, only Agent *-tor* nominals, as opposed to Instruments, can take *argumental* Genitive DPs (1a). The meaning of the Genitive in (1a) is restricted to that of an argument of the internal event, as opposed to, e.g., a possessive (1b and 2). By contrast, with Instruments, the only interpretation of the Genitive is that of a possessive (2). Possessive Genitives, however, are not related to internal argumental structure properties.

(1) a. Aducătorul scrisorilor va primi o recompensă.
bring-er letter.GEN will receive a reward
‘the bringer of the letter will receive a reward’.

b. *Copiatorul articolului s-a stricat.
copy-er article.GEN se-has broken
‘the copy-machine of the article is broken’.

(2) Copiatorul catedrei s-a stricat.
copy-er-the department.GEN se-has broken
‘the copy machine of the department is broken’

(≠ ‘the copy machine that copied the department’)

Instrument *-tor* nominals, in turn, take *de*-PP modifiers (3), something that (episodic) Agent *-tor* nominals never allow (4):

(3) transmițătorul de semnale s-a stricat.
transmitter.the of signals se-has broken
‘The transmitter of signals is broken’.

(4) a. *vindecătorul de acest bolnav
healer-the of this sick-person
‘the healer of this sick person’

b. *vindecătorul de un bolnav
healer-the of a sick-person
‘the healer of a sick person’

The distribution of *argumental* Genitives vs. *de*-PP modifiers straightforwardly supports the claim in Roy & Soare (2014) that Agent *-er* nominals, as opposed to Instruments, have argument structure properties, and hence are AS-Ns, and as such syntactically derived.

De-PPs and pseudo-incorporation: the specificity effect. More needs to be said about the Romanian Genitive, however, and particularly with respect to a general restriction on specific DPs that renders Genitives impossible with dispositional Agent *-tor* nominals (which involve non-specific internal arguments). Compare (5) and (1a):

- (5) un vânzător de mașini/ *al mașinilor
 a seller of cars Det.GEN cars-GEN
 ‘a car seller’

The impossibility of the Genitive with dispositional Agent *-tor* nominals mirrors, on the surface at least, the already mentioned impossibility of Genitives with Instruments (compare (5) and (1b)). We will argue, however, that the absence of Genitives with dispositional Agent *-tor* nominals does not stem from the absence of argument structure, but from a more general condition on specific DPs, also found in deverbal event-denoting AS-Ns, cf., 6(a/b), and (c/d):

- (6) a. distrugerea orașelor b. distrugerea de orașe
 destruction-the cities-GEN destruction-the of cities
 i. ‘the destruction of the cities’ i. *the destruction of the cities
 ii. *‘the destruction of cities’ ii. the destruction of cities
 c. *distrugerea de București d. distrugerea Bucureștiului
 destruction-the of Bucharest destruction-the Bucharest-GEN

Following Knittel’s (2010) account of (French) event-denoting deverbal AS-Ns involving non-specific internal arguments as (pseudo-)incorporated, we will argue that (dispositional) Agent *-tor* nominals also combine with a (pseudo-)incorporated argumental PP. Instrument *-tor* nominals, on the other hand, do not take arguments.

More on French. The distinction between the argumental status of *de*-PPs with *-er* nominals and the status of a modifier with Instruments can be demonstrated in French as well, even though in that language arguments and modifiers are realized by the same *de*-PP form. However, while with Agent *-eur* nominals the argumental *de*-PP is obligatory (7a), with Instruments it is impossible (7b). The only interpretation in (7b) is that of a possessive, and thus non-argumental, as it is the case in Romanian. This contrast, already noted by Roy & Soare (2014), is compatible with an analysis which assigns argument structure to Agent nominals (including dispositional ones), and absence of argument structure to Instruments. It also corroborates the view in Knittel (2010), where AS-Ns combine with a Genitive DP.

- (7) a. Le porteur *(de cette lettre/ de lettres) recevra une récompense.
 the bearer of this letter of letters will-receive a reward
 ‘The bearer of this letter will receive a reward’.
 b. Le photocopieur (*de l’article) a vraiment été très efficace.
 the copy-er of the.article has really been very efficient
 ‘The copy-machine (*of the article) has been really efficient.’

Conclusion. Romanian provides new support for argument structure in *-tor* Agent nominals (Genitive, and incorporated arguments) vs. modification in Instruments. It also provides additional motivation for a refined typology of individual-denoting nominals which includes a subclass of syntactically derived AS-Ns (Agent *-er/-tor/-eur* nominals more generally).

References: Chomsky, N. 1970. Remarks on Nominalizations. In: R. Jacobs and P. Rosenbaum (eds.), *Readings in English Transformational Grammar*. Waltham, MA: Blaisdell: 184–221. Knittel, M-L. 2010. Possession vs. pseudo-incorporation in the nominal domain, *Linguistic Review*. Roy & Soare. 2014. On the internal event properties of *-er* nominals. *Lingua*, 141:139-156.