

Agent Exclusivity in Nominalization

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What might the restrictions on causativization in nominalization tell us about the syntactic representation of Agents? Nominalizations place much tighter restrictions than clauses on the realization of causes, making them a good testing ground for the representation of causes and agents. The empirical picture, however, is by no means settled. Marantz (1997) has taken the absence of causers in nominalization (the famous *the farmer's growth of tomatoes) to imply that Agents are always introduced as part of the 'root'; Alexiadou (2001) considers both agent and cause arguments to be missing in nominalization, further developed in Alexiadou & Schaefer (2006); the 'full vP within process nominals' of Fu, Roeper, Borer (2001) implies that both cause and agent arguments are present in nominalizations. Marantz's structural distinction between causers and agents has been disputed by Harley & Noyer (2000) who argue for a 'world knowledge' approach to external causation in nominalizations ('john's accumulation of wealth' vs. *the table's accumulation of dust'). The talk presents two new sets of data bearing on the realization of verbal external arguments in their counterpart nominalizations: (1) new evidence from the binding potential of implicit agents in nominalizations which points to their structural realization as empty categories, i.e. 'pro'; and (2) nominalization of Obj-Experiencer psych-predicates in Hebrew, a language which includes 'simple' and 'complex' psych-predicates in nominalization. Differences between the patterns argues against a purely encyclopedic approach à la Harley and Noyer (2000) and provides independent evidence for the VP-within-nominalization approach.

The combination of these conclusions leads to a theory of nominalization in which the VP component is always an impersonal passive which includes an implicit agent 'pro'. Following Doron (2003), Doron & Alexiadou (2007), I take the implicit agent in verbal passive to be restricted to agents, further supported in the talk by the ban on understood experiencer subjects in German impersonal passive and in Italian impersonal SE. Impersonal passive VP is associated also with transitive nominalizations of the sort observed in English and Hebrew. While the overt genitive is not itself an argument, it is interpreted as agent due to its identification of the implicit argument in VP recalling the analysis of verbal by-phrases in Baker, Johnson, and Roberts (1989). This derives agent exclusivity in nominalization from agent exclusivity in passive VP. It also explains the absence of nominalization of morphologically passive verbs by assimilating it to the absence of passivization of passives, unaccusatives, and raising verbs (Postal & Perlmutter, 1984), all of which would require a double application of passive.