Degrees of nominalizations

0. Introduction
What are nominalizations? a) a word-formation process: nominalization as an instance of derivation; b) the output of this process (deverbal/deadjectival nominals).

Most nouns are not simple nouns but are derived from other parts of speech – according to Mihatsch (2009), nouns are conceptually more flexible, thus better open-class words than verbs or adjectives. This may be related to the fact that they can express all kinds of concepts; they are thus more open to innovation by borrowing than verbs or adjectives (which is correlated with the fact that there is a higher number of nominalization affixes than of verbalization affixes). How do nominalizations differ from non-derived nouns? How nominal are deverbal or deadjectival nominalizations, i.e. how relevant are their verbal/adjectival origins in the analysis of their (morphological,) syntactic and semantic properties? Is a uniform approach of all derived nouns possible? It will be argued that a gradient among deverbal/deadjectival nouns can be defined, subcategories of nouns can be distinguished based on their more or less nominal features. As Langacker (1987:44) notes, “the picture offered by nominalizations is not one of total chaos and idiosyncrasy – there are indeed patterns to be discerned and characterized” (patterns that have varying degrees of productivity)

Note that both derived Nouns (involving suffixation) & conversions, but not gerunds, will be considered here¹.

¹ Reminder on different categories of –ing forms: -ing forms illustrate, according to Aarts 2007:143, “the most often cited instance of categorial indeterminacy in English”, between verbs and nouns.

Different terms have been used to refer to different subcategories of –ing forms that can be associated with different positions on a gradient from purely nominal to purely verbal elements (gerunds, gerundive nominal, gerundial noun, verbal gerund, nominal gerund…) cf. Quirk et al. 1985:1290-1 gradient from some paintings of Brown’s, Brown’s paintings of his daughters; Brown’s deft painting of his daughter: clearly nominal, as various Determiners, plural, take PP complements / Brown’s deftly painting his daughter, Brown (deftly) painting his daughter: gerunds are more verbal. Gerundive nominals are not as nominal as deverbal nouns: The complement possibilities of the gerundive match the cognate verb, whether transitive (his destroying the city) / ditransitive (his giving the girl a rose), or patterns involving obliques, infinitives, or clausal complements. Gerunds can involve the same sequence of Auxiliaries as clauses (his having seen her; his being seen). Gerunds take Adverbial rather than adjectival modifiers (his having recently fled). They can be preceded by not. They do not allow all Determiners (restricted range of Determiners), cannot be in the plural. Regular semantic relation to the proposition denoted by the corresponding clause. So, apart from the genitive specifier & nominal-like distribution of the NP as a whole, the internal structure of the gerund is entirely clause-like. + Cf. Wechsler (2015:121) gerundive nominals can be formed with every verb in the language (except modals which do not inflect, hence lack the necessary –ing form).

Which is the reason why gerundive nominals have been argued to be syntactically derived (cf. Chomsky 1970: involve “a grammatical transformation from an underlying sentence-like structure”).

Gerunds display “nominal properties in their external distribution, but verbal properties in the internal syntactic make-up”.

Many more verbal properties, which is why Aarts argues that they should not be analysed as nominal elements: the ability to occur in NP position is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for positing an NP shell (other constituent types can be in canonical nominal positions: clauses: Painting his daughter; Brown noticed that his hand was shaking. PPs: under the bed is a good place to hide). It is possible for elements/phrases to occur in non-canonical positions elsewhere in the grammar (boy actor).

So gerunds not considered here, but only lexicalized deverbal N.

Note on a 3rd type of nominal: between gerundive & derived Nouns, i.e. John’s refusing of the offer. Not clear whether lexicalist hypothesis can be extended to them: maybe they should as these have the same structure as NPs (can have Determiners). Yet adjective insertion is quite unnatural, and their production quite limited (?the feeling sad, ?? the trying to win)
1. Different categories of event nouns based on the (partial) inheritance of verbal/adjectival properties

1.1. Inheritance of syntactic properties
Nominalizations differ from (simplex), prototypical nouns in that they can easily have complements - like relational nouns, but unlike many ‘simple’ nouns like chair, tree, etc. It could then be assumed that derived nouns have the same number and types of complements as the corresponding verbs (he relied on her // his reliance on her, nominalizations of direct transitive verbs taking of complements: the enemy destroyed the city // the enemy’s destruction of the city). According to Rappaport (1983), what the noun inherits from the verb in the lexical derivation is not its syntactic subcategorisation frame (e.g. destroy _ NP), but its argument structure (e.g. destroy <agent, theme>). The prepositions selected to mark arguments of the deverbal nominal are largely predictable from the thematic role type, but not from the subcategorisation. Goal arguments can be direct objects of verbs, but in nominals they are marked by to-PPs: Herbie promised Louise to write / Herbie’s promise to/*of Louise to write (Rappaport 1983:119). Herbst (1988:284) also notes that the subcategorization frames associated with nominalizations differ from those of the corresponding verbs: some verbs require the realization of their complement (the omission of an obligatory complement makes the whole sentence ungrammatical: *I rely, *she is fond, *We perused) while the corresponding nominalizations do not require complements. Therefore, argument structures, but not subcategorisation frames, provide the necessary information to the syntactic rules for argument expression within nominals.

Even though some differences can be noted, the hypothesis that nominalizations inherit some syntactic properties is well-supported, as maintained by Wechsler (2015:255-257): assuming that nouns inherit the lexical argument structure of the verbs allows for a synthetic explanation of many parallels between verbs and nouns, e.g. explains why both *the mailman arrived the letter and *the mailman’s arrival of the letter are ungrammatical.

Though parallels between sentences and noun phrases have often been emphasized, no direct, simple inheritance of complements can be assumed. Instead of assuming that the realization of arguments in NPs was optional, Grimshaw (1990) & Zucchi (1993) defined different classes of nominalizations, based on whether they had the argument structure of the corresponding verb or not. Grimshaw (1990) thus argued against the idea that nouns and verbs are governed by the same principles of argument realization and differ only in case-assignment (against the traditional view that as verbs assign case, their arguments have to be realized, while the arguments of nouns do not assign case, hence do not require the realization of their complements – the complements of nouns being optional).

Grimshaw draws a basic distinction between nouns that take arguments and nouns that do not: some nominalizations have a verbal event structure (Complex Event Nominals, or Argument-Supporting Nominals such as the enemy’s destruction of the city), others do not (Simple Event Nominals such as trip, race, exam & Result Nominals such as this translation). Argument structure realization is then correlated with the presence of event structure.

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2 Transformationalists’/generative semanticists’ approach to nominalizations, as Lees’ 1960, or Lakoff’s 1965 assumed that NPs are nominalizations of Sentences – but their analyses involved very complex & otherwise unmotivated transformations/rules. Chomsky 1970: in reaction to Lees 1960, argued that there are restrictions on the formation of derived nominal (*John’s amusement of the children with his stories, *John’s easiness to please vs. John’s eagerness to please). Some subregularities can be defined, but the variation & accidental character of some nominalizations seem typical of lexical structure. Hence the hypothesis that nominalizations do not involve syntactic derivation.

3 Some nouns can belong to several classes, can be used as a CEN, as a SEN or as a Result Noun
(Note that arguments can realized as PPs, or AdjPs: parental leave / the bacterial spread / a Papal promise, or NN wage freeze, drug abuse, air chase, battle plan)

These distinct subclasses of nominalizations are then associated with differing syntactic properties:

- CENs obligatorily take internal arguments (the constant assignment of unsolvable pbs is to be avoided/*the constant assignment is to be avoided – but as RN ok: the assignment is to be avoided);
- CENs compatible with aspectual modifiers (e.g. in 2 days);
- with CENs prenominal genitives interpreted as agents (& not possessives);
- by-phrases, if interpreted as related to the argument structure, make internal arguments obligatory (Hornstein 1977: the examination *(of the cat) by the vet);
- CENs can take agent-oriented modifiers (e.g. intentional) while result N can’t; implicit argument control is possible with CENs (not with result nominals): the assignment of easy problems in order to pass all the students vs. *the exam in order to pass all the students);
- CENs can only be definite;
- CENs, like mass N, cannot pluralize (while result N, like count N, can), like mass Ns reject one & a (*a/*one shooting of rabbits is illegal);
- CENS do not allow temporal expressions as prenominal genitives (*this term’s examination of 2 problems / this term’s exam is difficult);
- CENs can’t appear as predicates, while result N can (this is a new exam/assignment vs. *this is the vet’s examination of the cat);
- CENs do not allow postnominal genitives (I have read an assignment of Bill’s / *I object to the examination of the cat’s)

This distinction, which has been very influential (though criticized), relies on the assumption that some nouns inherit argument structure from the verbs, hence have some verbal properties, while others are more clearly nominal.

(A link between morphology and syntax can be made: most V-N conversions are CENs (*John’s drive of his car, *Mary’s walk of her dog – but the rare release of prisoners by this government))

The idea that some nouns / noun phrases involve some verbal syntactic structure, so that some NPs have a VP base, has been developed further by Van Hout & Roeper (1998) inter alia. They claim that nominalization structures contain not only a VP, but also a VP/eventP, an AspP & a TP, hence manner adjuncts (the destruction of the city quickly), purpose clauses (the consumption of drugs to go to sleep) & aspectual PPs (the mowing of the lawn in an hour).

A similar approach can be adopted in the analysis of deadjeclival nouns, as shown by Roy: (some) deadjectival nominals keep core semantic features and the argument structure of the adjective they derive from (the holder of the state being realized as an external argument: Tom’s kindness towards his mother).

Thus, among “fully lexicalized nouns” (not gerunds nor partial conversions), a distinction can be made between nominals which inherit some (syntactic) verbal/adjectival properties (hence closer to the verbal pole), and those which lack inherited properties (more prototypical nouns).

1.2. Inheritance of semantic properties

Many nominalizations can be assumed to inherit not only syntactic properties (argument structure), but also semantic, and in particular aspectual, properties from their base (the aspect
preservation hypothesis being often implicitly accepted). Adopting a Vendlerian classification, it seems that parallels can often be drawn between verbs and nouns:

- Nouns derived from activity verbs tend to denote activities: *swimming, running, sleep, talk*
- N derived from accomplishment verbs tend to denote accomplishments (or results – see below): *translation, repairs*
- N derived from achievement verbs tend to denote achievements: *admission, move, defeat, shrug*
- N derived from state V or from stative adjectives tend to be stative: *enjoyment, cleverness, desire, love*

A closer examination of the data shows that there are no strict parallels between aspectual properties of verbs and related nouns (there are in fact many examples of partial inheritance, or mismatches). Some mismatches or cases of partial inheritance can be noted: *amusement* is a state noun derived from a potentially dynamic verb (*the clown’s amusement of the children*), *subscription* is not an achievement N (unlike *subscribe*), *alarm (N)* is stative while the V is dynamic, *drink (N)* does not denote an activity (unlike *drink (V))*... Langacker mentions “episodic nominalizations”: *take a walk, do an imitation, have an argument*, which designate “a single episode of the process profiled by a perfective verb”, thus differing from the activity verbs they derive from. (this type of nominalization is further examined in section 3)

Besides, lexical aspect is not necessarily inherited from a verbal base: Huyghe et al. (2017) show that underived event nouns also belong to different aspectual classes (these aspectual properties cannot be inherited).

Aspectual properties may not be the only derived/inherited semantic features: degree readings (related to state readings) of nouns are plausible when the initial verb/adjective is gradable: *Her disgust with her husband surprised me/ increased/diminished/is greater than I expected*

But not all the readings of derived nouns can be accounted for thanks to verbal semantics - some event readings of nouns are related to manner readings (potential ambiguity of *John’s performance of the song or John’s performing the song*) which cannot easily be derived from the verb’s lexical semantics.

The preceding sections have shown that a subclass of derived nouns denoting eventualities can be assumed to inherit (syntactic and semantic) verbal properties, thus differing from ‘prototypical’ or more ‘nouny’ nouns. These nouns can be assumed to be more nominal than gerunds, but less nominal than result nominals (examined in the following section).

2. Result nominals / entity-denoting Ns

2.1. Nouns derived from V

Result nouns do not involve an aspectual or event structure, and in this respect could be considered to be “more nominal”, or more prototypical nouns, denoting simple individual (1st order entities).

These nouns differ from event nouns in that they are supposed to lack an argument structure: Van Hout & Roep (1998) argue that some deverbalizing affixes prohibit projection of arguments, and also block manner adjuncts (*an employee by Mary / *a trainee with great effort*). Yet in some cases arguments of the corresponding verb can be realized, as dependents of the nominalization: *he sold watercolours and drawings of strategic sites / Sarles retires as Metro’s general manager*. Besides, these nouns can also be assumed to partially inherit the semantics of the verb: unlike simplex roots (like *book*), which have a lexical semantics that is
not built up from a verb or of another lexical category, the meaning of such nouns is built up from a verb.

Now, different subclasses of entity-denoting nominals can be defined, based on the inherited semantics: this can be described in cognitive terms, as in Langacker’s (1991:23) discussion of the profiled element in the nominalization (trajector, landmark, instrument, product, location...). Subclasses of entity-denoting or result nominals can also be defined based on the argument they realize:

(i) Subject: nominalizations in –er (talker). –er nominalization is highly productive for subject arguments: agents (writer, driver, speaker), experiencers (hearer), instruments (opener, paper-cutter) - groups that V (government, congregation) // conversions corresponding to the subject: one who carries out the activity gossip, grind, cheat, bore / sth that brings about the process hit, bait, delight, insult, challenge

(ii) object/complement arguments: –ee N (employee...), a few –er N (not productive) fryers, keepers // conversions: one who is/has been V-en: convert, discard, pervert, suspect / that which is/has been V-en award, burn, catch, kill, offer, promise, glitter, smile, print... // ‘the amount V-en’: a pull of beer, a sip of whisky, a swallow of vodka…

(iii) an adverbial associated with the process (bend, stand, probe), result (bruise, painting, mark), instrument (goggles, pull, whistle), time (start, spring, kickoff), location diners (places where one dines), sleeper (train car where one sleeps)

Semantically, the class of result (or entity-denoting) nouns also differs from the preceding class. These non-eventive nouns are more noun-like, as they denote 1st order entities. Now concepts representing concrete objects tend to be expressed by nouns (while actions & processes tend to be expressed by verbs & properties by Adjectives (Croft 2000:89 inter alia)). Among nouns, concrete nouns are often assumed to be typical; conceptually stable & autonomous 1st order nouns – cf. Rosch & al (1976:388): prototypical nouns are based on maximally simple gestalts with distinctive shapes. Morphologically simple, concrete nouns are more easily recognized & memorized than atypical nouns. Less typical nouns are often conceptually (and morphologically) derived from basic-level nouns via metaphor, metonymy, generalization, specification… Relational nouns, dejectival & deverbal, as well as abstract nouns are then be assumed to be less typical members of the class.

On the possible reference to 3rd order entities, or abstract objects: factive, propositional readings of nouns: cf. N. Ballier.

2.2. (Partial) Conversion of Adjectives

Entity-denoting dejectival nouns do not form a uniform class: some dejectival nouns are clearly more noun-like than others. The need a distinction between partial and total conversions has often been pointed out: the poor, the wealthy, the ignorant, the wicked differ from other nouns in that they are not fully nominal. They are nominal in that they function as heads of NPs, have some types of dependents (e.g. are introduced by a determiner4), can be postmodified by Relative clauses (the old who resist change) & by PPs (the young in spirit), they can be modified by adjectives the humble poor). But they have lack other nominal properties: many can be premodified by adverbs (the extremely old, the very wise); they do not inflect for number or for genitive case, take a definite determiner, some can be inflected for comparison (the younger). These nouns are closer to the adjectival pole than another group of dejectival nouns.

4 Note that the definite determiner is not always required: He is acceptable to both young & old / Britain’s 3 million unemployed may soon start to protest / There were 28 dead in the accident / The issue is of interest to most French
The other set of deadjectival nouns correspond to total conversions (e.g. *Americans, blonds, a major*), which have all the relevant nominal properties: they have both singular & plural forms (*the regulars*), can have a genitive form (*the regular’s habit*), and can be modified by adjectives. Adjectives that undergo (full) conversion into N are frequently denominal or deverbal (*a daily, a facial, adhesive, explosive, perishables, variable, weekly*) – still can find morphologically simple N (*red, calm, slow…*)

Semantically, deadjectival nouns can be assumed to inherit some semantic features, like gradability (*a great enthusiast*). Yet the semantics of the noun is often assumed to be richer than that of the adjective, as discussed by Wierzbicka (nouns being multidimensional – cf. Cornilescu 2010). In cognitive approaches it has been assumed that semantic extension operates by means of profile shift: in de-adjectival nominalizations, some facet of the relational predication is reified (i.e. construed as a thing) & put in profile, while the relational profile of the adjective gets demoted to the unprofiled base of predication.

So far two classes of nominalizations have been examined: eventuality denoting nouns (which appear less clearly nominal than entity-denoting nominals), and entity-denoting nominals (the latter class being closer to the nominal end of the gradient, though rather heterogeneous). In the following section, a few properties of items that are not (fully) lexicalized nouns are examined – though analyzed as verbs by some authors, they can be argued to be a subcategory of derived nouns.

3. Construction-specific nominalizations - support verb “have a X”

Structures such as *have a swim, a lie-down, a look, a cry, a wash, a drink, a sip, a cuddle, a chat, a try, a scribble* are analyzed by Wierzbicka (1982) as involving a Verb (*‘Have a V’*). Contra Wierzbicka (1982), many authors analyzed this construction as verbo-nominal, so involving a Noun (introduced by a support verb): cf. Jespersen 1954:117 ff., Cattell 1984 *inter alia*.

Various syntactic arguments motivate their analysis as Nouns:

- they are introduced by a Determiner (not only the indefinite determiner *a: have another guess, take a second look, give sth a few kicks*);
- they can take the plural form (*He takes longs swims at the end of the day / Things you could not guess if you had a thousand tries / Can I have two guesses?*);
- they are modifiable by Adjectives & not Adverbs (*scrub the floor well! vs. give it a good scrub, give a narrow glare of hate*);
- they do not allow purpose clauses (modifying V);
- if a complement is overt, it is introduced by a Preposition & not direct: *have a drink of water / have a smell (of the cake)*.

Hence these have the same formal properties as (fully lexicalized) nouns. Besides, they can have the same (syntactic) functions: as mentioned by Cetnarowska (1993) *catch, grin, grunt, kiss, shout, sweep, swim, try…* can be subjects (a good throw was answered by a good catch), subject complements (*It was a good try*), objects (*he heard a shout*), object complements (*I considered it a very good throw, even though it didn’t score a point*), prepositional complements (*let’s go for a swim*). Therefore these items, though not (yet) lexicalized as nouns, have the syntactic properties of typical nouns.

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5 Cetnarowska (1993) discusses all the arguments in favour of the “have a N” (rather than “have a V”) analysis. She also mentions the problematic status of these complex predicates: are these syntactically regular phrases or idioms? (less idiomatic than the expressions *on the move, on the boil & on the burn*)
They may not be fully lexicalized, as shown by the fact that there are restrictions on the distribution of such bare nominalisations: nouns like choose, clean, listen, read, think, wipe can be found in complex predicates (have a N), but not in many other contexts: *what she was expected to do was a clean of the lab twice a day. In other words, these nouns can be found in a limited set of contexts (if both a bare nominalization & a suffixal action noun can have the action reading, the bare noun tends to be more restricted and more marked (compare remove / removal, try / trial, quote / quotation, reserve / reservation).

The nouns that can appear in “have a N” can be found in a limited number of structures: as complements of intensional verbs (e.g. the room needs a good clean, the car needs an overhaul); in the pattern go for a N; in headlines: (A bathe in the Baltic sea); or in elliptic clauses containing the numeral one: One good pull and you’ll take the cork out. In all these contexts the category of the noun is clear, just as its intended meaning (as denoting an action): there is no ambiguity between the action or the product readings for polish, smoke, brush, shampoo, air… (This action reading can these terms be modified by adjectives of manner (like quick, good)

To conclude, these items are clearly nominal, yet (like the nominalizations in (1)) they inherit some verbal properties (some syntactic properties, e.g. they have same type of PPs as their verbal base: Let's have a listen to his new LP / She took delight in tormenting her admirers / I had a good browse through your book)

Wierzbicka’s (1982) semantic analysis: the nouns in “have a N” must involve a durative (“continuous” in A.W.’s terms), agentive V, with no external purpose/goal (? She had a walk to the post office), repeatable (hence ??have an eat), enjoyable by the agent (she had a lick of Mary’s ice-cream / ? Fido had a lick of his master’s hand), defocalization of the patient. With have a X, action/process limited in time, conceived of as repeatable.

Final remarks

Different classes of derived nouns have been defined based on their relative ‘nominality’. These subclasses of nominalizations can be characterized as more or less nominal/protopypical (more or less deadjectival or deverbal), depending on how many of their syntactic or semantic properties are derived, or inherited, from an adjectival or verbal base. The definition of a cline of nominality then seems particularly relevant to the analysis of nominalizations.

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