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Event and Result Nominals

A Morpho-semantic Approach



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In this research, I survey a significant pattern of deverbal word-formation in Italian, and integrate the data analysis into a recently developed theoretical model of derivational semantics. In particular, the main goal of this study is to analyze the range of semantic interpretations and the corresponding morpho-syntactic behavior displayed by the class of deverbal nouns usually acknowledged as “action nominals” (henceforth, ANs).

While Chapter 2 contains an overview of the relevant literature on the subject in the generative tradition, the body of this book is composed of Chapters 3 to 5, where I work out a theoretical proposal aimed at accounting for the lexical meaning of a range of deverbal nominals in a framework of compositional lexical semantics. Specifically, this research, which is placed against the theoretical background of generative morphology, rests on groundwork laid over the last fifteen years by Lieber and Baayen (1997; 1999), Lieber (2003), Booij and Lieber (2004) and, in a more comprehensive version, by Lieber (2004).

Nominalizations are nominal structures that are derived from other syntactic categories, especially from verbs. Several types of deverbal nominals have been distinguished and explored in the linguistic literature: for instance, “agent” and “instrument nouns” (e.g. En. *worker*, *printer*), “patient nouns” (e.g. *employee*), etc. Among them, however, ANs (e.g. *election*, *refusal*, etc.) represent the most frequent and challenging pattern of nominal structure. Like the aforementioned deverbal nouns, ANs are morphologically complex lexemes obtained by merging a nominalizing affix with a base verb. Specifically, ANs are headed by suffixes conventionally named as “transpositional” in the linguistic literature (see Beard, 1995 for such definition), because they simply transpose the verbal meaning into a semantically equivalent lexeme of category N.

According to Comrie (1976-b: 178), ANs are ‘nouns derived from verbs (verbal nouns) with the general meaning of an action or process’. However, it is worth noting that this definition is too narrow, since the transpositional affixes employed to derive ANs from dynamic verbs can be combined with state verbs too, and accordingly they form *state* nominals.