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## Nominalization in Aphasia: A Case Study

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### Introduction and Case History

Deverbal nominals are defined as nouns displaying some verbal properties. All the accounts (e.g. Alexiadou & Grimshaw, 2008) agree in that nominals are not a homogeneous class: complex event-nominals (e.g. ‘examination’) have thematic roles and no plural reading whereas result-nominals (e.g. ‘offer’) show the opposite pattern.

In order to test if nominals involve verbal properties, unlike simple nouns, and are not a homogeneous class, an experimental study has been conducted involving an Italian 76-year-old right-handed aphasic patient (ED) and two control subjects. ED suffered a CVA involving the left frontal lobe. He was administered the AAT and classified as mild Broca’s aphasic; the BADA revealed a noun-verb dissociation, verbs being significantly more impaired than nouns.

### Methods

The screening test highlighted a spared syntax of nouns (determiners, position of adjectives, grammatical gender and number) but problems with the syntax of verbs. ED performed badly with the passives (16,6%) and the unaccusatives (50%) compared to the transitives (100%) and the inergatives (100%), showing an argument structure complexity effect (e.g. Thompson 2003).

In a second test ED had to derive the nominal starting from a neutral verb form in a sentence context. ED’s production was tested of (i) nominals with thematic roles (‘la camminata’, the walking) vs. nominals without thematic roles (‘il cammino’, the walk); (ii) participial nominals (‘la scoperta’, the discovery lit. the discover-ED) vs. derived nominals (‘l’invenzione’, the invention); (iii) nominals + PP argument (‘la raccolta di grano’, the collection of cereals) vs. *infinito sostantivato* + direct argument (‘il raccogliere giochi’, games’ collecting lit. the TO-collect games); (iv) singular nominals (‘la promessa’, the-SING promise) vs. plural nominals (‘le promesse’, the-PL promises).

Each group was made up of nominals derived from transitive, inergative and unaccusative verbs.

### Results

Unexpected results: no argument structure complexity effect; complex event-nominals [+ thematic roles] (50%) better than result-nominals [- thematic roles] (20%); participial nominals (80%) better than derived nominals (30%).

Expected results: nominals involving noun syntax (50%) better than nominals involving verb syntax (0%); singular participial nominals (80%) better than plural participial nominals (10%) (a confirmation that complex

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event-nominals cannot have a plural reading).

### **Conclusion**

These results confirm the hypothesis that deverbal nominals are not a homogeneous class. In particular, ED found it easier to derive nominals associated with an argument structure from a verb stem because they are really verbal in nature. ED's poor performance with nominals without argument structure seems to suggest that argument structure is really a property of verbs but at the same time it is not the crucial property that affects ED's ability to produce verbs. Given these observations, this study confirms only partially Collina, Marangolo & Tabossi's (2001) findings.

### **References**

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