Nominalizations and typology in Hellenistic Greek and Turkish

The defining characteristic of nominalizations is their mixed categorial behavior: nominalizations are constructions with nominal external and verbal internal syntax (Alexiadou, 2010a, 2010b; Borsley & Kornfilt, 2000; Grimshaw, 1990). This mixed behavior has been analyzed as following from the internal structure of nominalizations: a variable amount of nominal superstructure can dominate a verbal functional layer which can itself be of different sizes (Alexiadou, 2001; Borer, 2003; Borsley & Kornfilt, 2000; Harley & Noyer, 1998, 1999, 2000). The simultaneous presence of nominal and verbal structure captures the mixed categorial distribution of nominalizations, while differences in the amount and identity of nominal and verbal projections in the nominalizations of different languages explain the variable properties of nominalizations observed cross-linguistically. This approach to the syntax of nominalizations has led to the detailed study of different types of nominalizations across languages (see Kornfilt & Whitman, 2011 for overview). Moreover, attempts have been made to compile structural typologies of nominalizations, either by teasing apart possible and impossible combinations of nominal and verbal layers (Kornfilt & Whitman, 2011; Panagiotidis & Grohmann, 2009), or by assuming that the behavior of all nominalizations can be captured by placing them on a scale from most nominal to most verbal (Alexiadou, Iordachioaia, & Schäfer, 2010).

In this paper, we aim both to contribute to the range of typologically diverse nominalizations described and to inform the wider theoretical debate on the typology of nominalizations. To accomplish the former, we describe and analyze the Hellenistic Greek (HelGr) articular infinitive, a construction that receives close attention here for the first time in the generative literature. To inform the theoretical debate, we compare this construction with the well-studied case of Turkish nominalized embedded clauses.

Adopting a Distributed Morphology perspective, we show that the HelGr articular infinitive is an AspP nominalized only by the presence of a DP layer, while Turkish nominalizations are full TPs dominated by much richer nominal functional structure. Additionally, the HelGr facts motivate the existence of null prepositions (Gehrke & Lekakou, 2013; Ioannidou & den Dikken, 2009; Terzi, 2010), while the accusative marking of Greek infinitival subjects is analyzed as default case in the sense of Schütze (2001).

The comparison of HelGr and Turkish nominalizations has implications for existing typologies of nominalizations. On the one hand, typologies attempting to restrict the range of verbal bases that can be nominalized (Kornfilt & Whitman, 2011; Panagiotidis & Grohmann, 2009) cannot capture the degree of fine variation that this comparison suggests. Instead, it is simpler to assume that verbal bases of any size can be nominalized on a language-particular basis. On the other hand, our findings can be accommodated more easily in the typology of Alexiadou et al. (2010): in terms of this typology, the crucial difference between the HelGr articular infinitive and Turkish nominalizations is that the former is a verbal nominalization and the latter a nominal nominalization. Additionally, comparing the two nominalizations suggests that the factor determining whether a nominalization is nominal or verbal is the amount of nominal superstructure only; the amount of verbal substructure does not determine whether a nominalization is more or less verbal. However, it is ultimately not clear whether the typology of Alexiadou et al. (2010) is anything more than a descriptive tool. As such, a proper theory of the cross-linguistic distribution of nominalizations is yet to be formulated. We question the extent to which formulating such a theory is possible or necessary: given that different languages can nominalize verbal bases of different fashions freely, variation in this domain may not be constrained in any obvious way. Key questions for future research include elucidating how fine the differences in nominalization sites can be (for instance, if we can find differences that can only be modeled in a proper cartographic approach), and specifying why, in spite of the observed freedom in nominalizing verbal bases of different sizes, particular languages seem to disallow nominalizations of particular sizes (for instance, why English lacks nominalizations of CP).

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