

Correlating morphosyntactic properties with interpretation in English deverbal compounds

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I present a corpus-based study on the interpretation of deverbal compounds such as *border protection* and *police protection*, whose non-heads (i.e., *border*, *police*) are understood as internal/object or external/subject arguments of the original verb (cf. *to protect the border*; *the police protect us*). I will call the former OBJ-DCs (i.e., OBJect Deverbal Compounds) and the latter SUBJ-DCs. The hypothesis I defend here is that the non-heads of OBJ-DCs are structural internal arguments directly inherited from the base verbs (e.g., *protect*), while the non-heads of SUBJ-DCs are modifiers, and their external/ subject argument-like interpretation comes from context or world knowledge, much like in root compounds headed by underived nouns (e.g., *expert job*, *court verdict*; cf. *chocolate box*, *firemen*). This hypothesis is a compromise between two previously proposed extremes: namely, Grimshaw (1990) argues that deverbal compounds (her 'synthetic compounds') are all OBJ-DCs, which inherit the hierarchically lowest thematic argument of the base verb, while Borer (2013) argues that deverbal compounds never inherit arguments of the base verb but freely get interpreted by means of a modifier-head relationship, just like root compounds.

In order to test these hypotheses, I will evaluate how the interpretation of deverbal compounds relates to various morphosyntactic properties of their deverbal head nouns (i.e., *protection*), which have been argued in previous literature to attest the inheritance of verbal argument structure in such derived nouns. My study relies on a database of 1477 deverbal compounds whose interpretation has been annotated by three native speakers and for which we collected corpus frequencies with respect to the different morphosyntactic properties (Iordachioaia, van der Plas & Jagfeld to appear). I will evaluate the predictive power of each of these corpus-based features in telling whether the non-head of a compound receives an internal/object or external/subject argument reading with generalized mixed effects models. The direction of prediction of some of these features will provide support for my current hypothesis -- namely, that OBJ-DCs are more likely to involve an argumental relation between the base verb and the non-head noun, while SUBJ-DCs rely on a modifier-head relationship that is freely interpreted in context or by means of world knowledge.

References:

- Borer, Hagit. 2013. *Taking Form*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Grimshaw, Jane. 1990. *Argument Structure*. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Iordăchioaia, Gianina, Lonneke van der Plas & Glorianna Jagfeld. To appear. *Compositionality in English Deverbal Compounds: The Role of the Head*. In Sabine Schulte im Walde & Eva Smolka, eds., *The Role of Constituents in Multiword Expressions: An Interdisciplinary, Cross-lingual Perspective*, book series *Phraseology and Multiword Expressions*, Language Science Press.