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Action Nouns in Romance

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Abstract

Action nouns in Romance will be investigated with particular regard to (i) the format of the deverbal noun and of its morphosyntactic environment with respect to the corresponding verb-centered sentence, (ii) the range of meaning – and more in general of semantic properties – passing from the verbal input to the final noun, and finally (iii) the morphological processes of word-formation involved, namely suffixation and conversion.

1. Introduction

Action nouns (henceforth ANs) are traditionally defined as nouns derived from verbs referring to the event described by the base predicate, i.e. *Namen für Satzinhalte* ‘lit. nouns for sentence contents’ according to Porzig’s (1930–31) classical definition. Porzig emphasizes the role played by the sentence serving as a reference. This is so because of the essential properties of the ANs which involve not only the predicate but also its arguments, as they surface in the corresponding sentences. In this light, a number of interesting questions arise relating (i) to the format of the deverbal noun and of its morphosyntactic environment with respect to the corresponding verb-centered sentence, (ii) to the range of meaning – and more in general of semantic properties – passing from the verbal input to the final noun, and finally (iii) to the morphological processes of word-formation in contrast with other processes of nominalization typically regarding the verbal infinitive. In what follows these three aspects will be discussed to the extent that they concern the Romance languages as a unitary domain of investigation. In this regard, it should not be forgotten that our perspective takes word-formation as its main object of analysis. Accordingly, the focus will be on those cases which are likely to be assigned to this domain.

2. The verb-noun continuum and the morphosyntactic environment

As demonstrated by Koptjevskaja-Tamm (1993), action nominalizations, intended in a broad sense as the results of the transposition of a sentence into the syntactic role of a noun phrase, usually display a syntactic behavior mirroring their corresponding morpho-syntactic prototypes (see article 68 on action nouns). Accordingly, they mark their syntactic dependencies adopting respectively a sentential or a nominal type, or a mixture of the two types often with its own special properties. The Romance languages generally select the nominal option for the deverbal nouns resulting from word-formation, while the sentential type commonly occurs with nominalized infinitives. In what follows, Italian will be used for exemplification (cf. Gaeta 2002, 2004), but similar examples can be found in the other Romance languages as well, unless differently specified (cf. Riegel, Pellat and Rioul 2006: 187–188 for French, Picallo 1999 for Spanish, Martí i Girbau 2002 for Catalan, Sleeman and Brito 2010 for Portuguese and Camacho and Santana 2004 for Brazilian Portuguese; for Romanian see Cornilescu 2001 and below).

The nominal type directly mirrors the nominal phrases encoding possession. This is true both for the way in which the corresponding arguments are encoded using genitive-like phrases (1a) and for their anaphorical reference which is normally accomplished with the help of possessive pronouns (1b):

- (1) a. *Il rifiuto di Gianni_i della verità_j*
 the refusal of Gianni of:DET truth
 ‘Gianni’s refusal of the truth’

- b. *Il suo_{i/j} rifiuto*
the his/its refusal
'his/its refusal'
- c. *Il suo_i rifiuto della verità*
'his refusal of the truth'
- d. **Il suo_j rifiuto di Gianni*
the its refusal of Gianni

Notice the asymmetry between subject and object reference, which favors the former over the latter when the respective counterparts are explicitly present (1c–d). A different coding for the subject is also common which normally marks the agentive complement in passive clauses (corresponding to Koptjevskaja-Tamm's 1993 ergative-possessive type):

- (2) a. *Il rifiuto della verità da parte di Gianni*
the refusal of:DET truth from part of Gianni
'Gianni's refusal of the truth'
- b. *Il suo rifiuto da parte di Gianni*
the its refusal from part of Gianni
'Gianni's refusal of it'

In contrast to the nominal type, in the ergative-possessive type a possessive pronoun may be used for the object reference (cf. 1d vs. 2b). Furthermore, although it has often been claimed that the ergative-possessive type generally requires the subject complement to occur after the object complement (3a), both orders are actually possible depending on several factors, not the least of which is the length of the constituents involved (3b). A similar variation also regards the strictly nominal type (3c–d) (the examples are from a Google search of the Internet):

- (3) a. *?? Il rifiuto da parte di Gianni della verità*
the refusal from part of Gianni of:DET truth
'Gianni's refusal of the truth'
- b. *Il rifiuto da parte Gianni della verità riguardo a suo padre*
the refusal from part of Gianni of:DET truth regard to his father
'Gianni's refusal of the truth concerning his father'
- c. *ho iniziato a sbloccarmi dall'atavico rifiuto dei bambini*
have begun to become free from:DEF atavistic refusal of:DEF children
dei vegetali
of:DEF vegetables
'I've begun to become free from children's atavistic refusal of vegetables'
- d. *È stato valutato il tasso di rifiuto dei genitori dei bambini*
is been estimated the rate of refusal of:DEF parents of:DEF children
campionati
sampled
'The rate of the sampled children's refusal of the parents has been estimated'

On the other hand, the entirely nominal type is often avoided, being really available only with predicates displaying an object which remains unaffected by the consequences of the event (or, in other terms, a comparatively weaker agentive subject). In the other cases, the ergative-possessive type has to be used:

- (4) a *La distruzione della città da parte dei Romani*
 the destruction of:DEF town from part of:DET Romans
 ‘the Romans’ destruction of the town’
 b. **La distruzione dei Romani della città*
 the destruction of:DEF Romans of:DEF town

It must be added that both complements can be normally dropped while in the presence of only one complement the genitive-like construction is generally preferred (but see Veland 2011: 71 for a contrasting view based on Italian data), even though it gives rise to ambiguous readings:

- (5) a. *?La distruzione da parte dei Romani*
 ‘the destruction by the Romans’
 b. *?La distruzione dei Romani*
 ‘the Romans’ destruction/the destruction of the Romans’

In contrast to this, Koptjevskaja-Tamm’s (1993) sentential type characterizes the nominalized infinitives, in which the sentential marking is directly mirrored:

- (6) a. *L’aver Gianni rifiutato la verità*
 the have:INF Gianni refuse:PSTPTCP the truth
 ‘Gianni’s having refused the truth’
 b. *L’aver rifiutato la verità da parte di Gianni*
 the have:INF refuse:PSTPTCP the truth from part of Gianni
 ‘Gianni’s having refused the truth’
 c. **L’aver Gianni rifiutato della verità*
 the have:INF Gianni refuse:PSTPTCP of:DEF truth

Furthermore, the subject can be referred to by means of the agentive complement corresponding to Koptjevskaja-Tamm’s (1993) ergative-accusative type (6b), while the possessive marking of the object in the presence of the sentential marking of the subject is excluded (6c).

The difference between the AN and the nominalized infinitive is also expressed by the latter’s more pronounced verbal character given by the occurrence of verbal inflectional properties (see the past inflection in 6a–b) or the absence of nominal inflectional properties like pluralization (**i rifiutari* vs. *i rifiuti* ‘the refusals’).

Although the details may slightly vary, the picture is uniform throughout the Romance languages insofar as an AN corresponding to the nominal (or to the ergative-possessive) type is opposed to a nominalized infinitive corresponding to the sentential (or to the ergative-accusative) type and displaying verbal properties. This used to be true also for

Old French, but in modern times the usage of the nominalized infinitive is far more restricted (see Kerleroux 1996: 66–85). Finally, in Romanian the so-called long infinitive has undergone a process of detachment from the verbal paradigm and has lost the typical syntactic properties of the verbal infinitives. Correspondingly, it has acquired nominal properties becoming a true AN and – similarly to its Romance counterparts – displays the purely nominal type (cf. Mallinson 1986: 214; see also [article 150 on Romanian](#)):

- (7) *învățare-a limbilor străine de către englezi*
 learning-DEF languages:DEF:GEN foreign:PL of towards English:PL
 ‘the acquisition of the foreign languages by the English’

A similar process of detachment from the verbal paradigm has also affected several types of earlier Latin present and past participles, which in their new status as ANs may have also become productive (see section 5). Furthermore, given that the Latin supine, i.e. the verbal noun, has expired in the passage to Romance, its position has radically changed having only survived in the form of (masculine) ANs. Remarkably, the Latin gerund(ive), which also was originally part of the inflectional paradigm of the verbal noun, has not left any trace in the domain of ANs, except for sparse nominals like It./Sp. *reprimenda*/Fr. *réprimande* ‘reprimand’, Sp. *contienda* ‘conflict’, Fr. *offrande*/Sp. *ofrenda* ‘offering’, etc.

3. Meaning and meaning extensions in Romance action nouns

The range of meanings displayed by the Romance ANs varies considerably. In the face of a basic eventive meaning, more or less mirroring the meaning of the verbal base in a sense to be further specified in section 4., a number of other, more “concrete” meanings are usually found. They are traditionally taken to result from a process of semantic extension, whereby the AN turns out to be adapted to the “concrete” meaning displayed by prototypical nouns. This process usually gives rise to a synchronic polysemy, in which the same noun may or may not display a concrete meaning and accordingly be used in a certain context. Related to this, there is also the question of the occurrence of further prototypical nominal properties like pluralization. Given the importance of the question, it will be treated before entering into the more specific issues concerning the word-formation categories and meanings occurring in the Romance ANs as word-formation patterns.

The first aspect of the question concerns the origin of the polysemy. Clearly, the range of meanings to be associated with a word directly increases with the increase of its frequency, and in this sense ANs are not exceptional (cf. Thornton 1991: 86–90 and Gaeta 2002: 216–221 for first attempts to assess the question relying on Italian ANs). The traditional idea explains the polysemy by making reference to the abstract meaning carried by ANs, which renders them unfit with regard to the nominal prototype. Accordingly, a number of concrete meaning extensions come about which have the effect of improving the categorial status of the ANs from the semantic point of view. The extensions follow a metonymic path, insofar as the AN turns out to express the (abstract, i.e. FACT/STATE, or concrete) RESULT of an activity, or the PLACE where it’s supposed to generally take place, or the TIME or MANNER of its unwinding, or the MEANS used to

carry it out, or the PERSON who normally carries it out, etc. (cf. Rainer 1996 for a historical reconstruction of the question).

An open question is whether the most extensively found RESULT meaning is due to an inner ambiguity of the derivative, i.e. as an ambiguity available by virtue of the semantics inherent in the noun itself, which may accordingly exhibit either the EVENT or the RESULT meaning (Spanish examples taken from Picallo 1999: 369):

- (8) a. *La evaluación de los datos de la encuesta tuvo lugar ayer.*
 ‘The evaluation of the data of the investigation took place yesterday.’
 b. *La evaluación de los datos de la encuesta se consideró incorrecta.*
 ‘The evaluation of the data of the investigation was considered uncorrect.’

In the last years, several attempts have been made to characterize the polysemy in these terms, namely as a semantic shift inherent in the ANs *qua* semantically complex types of nouns, in the sense of Pustejovsky’s (1995) dot nouns (cf. Jacquy 2006 for French; Jezek and Melloni 2011 for Italian). The latter are introduced to account for the fact (also common to other nouns, see below) that ANs may display more than one meaning at the same time, and in particular the eventive and the resultative:

- (9) *La evaluación de los datos de la encuesta que tuvo lugar ayer se consideró incorrecta.*
 ‘The evaluation of the data of the investigation which took place yesterday was considered uncorrect.’

In this regard, it has to be observed that the word-formation patterns to be surveyed below are not inherently bound to a certain meaning. In other words, the polysemy observed in (8a–b) is not suffix-specific but affects ANs as a whole, although it may be that single suffixes display some of the meaning extensions more frequently than others.

Furthermore, the polysemy pattern observed in (9) is not essentially different from those observed in other morphologically complex words (see article 72 on agent and instrument nouns) and even in simplexes (e.g., a word like It. *articolo* ‘paper’ in *L’articolo che non capisco è sul tavolo* ‘The paper that I don’t understand is on the table’). If the EVENT/RESULT polysemy is considered inherent, basically relating to the availability of a direct (affected or effected) object in the argument structure of the verbal base (cf. Picallo 1999: 382–383), then the question arises as to whether this has consequences for the format of the single derivational processes forming ANs or rather is a general feature characterizing natural languages. A similar question concerns the abstract result of an event, namely the FACT/STATE shift, which is also identified by means of a passive(-like) meaning: *agitazione* ‘act of shaking / fact of being agitated, unrest’ (cf. Fradin 2011 on French; Fábregas and Marín 2012 on Spanish).

Probably, the issue will have to be settled empirically. On the one hand, cases can be mentioned of ANs going back to transitive verbs including a potentially effected object, which don’t display any RESULT meaning: *acaparamiento* ‘act of hoarding’, but *‘what is hoarded’, and similarly *desmantelamiento* ‘dismantling’ (cf. Rainer 1993: 215). On the other, it has been suggested that the inherent shift might be valid only for specific subclasses of verbs, and in particular verbs of creation, redescription, mental action,

emission, appearance and change of state or place (cf. Melloni 2011 for Italian; the NGL 2009: 357 for Spanish). However, counterexamples like It. *edificazione*/Fr. *édification* ‘act of building’, but *‘what is built’, etc., should make us leery of strong generalizations (cf. Gaeta 2002: 206 for Italian and Defrancq and Willems 1996 for French). The same applies to the FACT/STATE shift, for which conceivable extensions are not attested like *maltrattamento* ‘act of ill-treating’, but *‘fact of being ill-treated’.

A further question relates to how the polysemy should be conceived. Namely, whether the process of meaning extension takes place at the lexical level or at the more general level of the conceptual representation of the word. In this sense, one could think that the lexical status of a complement might be of relevance, whether of argumental or of circumstantial nature. Unfortunately, this question must be answered in negative terms, because on the one hand there are cases like It. *semina* ‘sowing season’, *affitto* ‘rent (cost)’, etc., in which the meaning extension refers to circumstantial information, and on the other there are derivatives like It. *segatura* ‘sawdust’, which does not refer to any argumental or circumstantial complement of the verbal base *segare* ‘to saw’. The specific meaning can only become available if the complete narrative frame of the event of sawing is accessed including the waste produced by the process. This evidence speaks in favor of a (holistic) model of meaning which also includes our world knowledge about the single event and its narrative frame (cf. Rainer 1993: 215 for a discussion on the basis of Spanish examples). Whether this can be done by models inspired by the detailed level of encyclopaedic information included into Pustejovsky’s (1995) *qualia* structure has to remain an open question (cf. Jezek 2008 for a discussion based on Italian).

When the eventive meaning is lost, the reference to the argument structure of the basic verb becomes opaque, as shown by the Italian example in (10a):

- (10) a. ??*La dichiarazione di innocenza da parte di Berlusconi che trovi sulla mia scrivania è ridicola.*
 ‘The declaration of innocence by Berlusconi that you find on my desk is ridiculous.’
- b. *La dichiarazione di innocenza di Berlusconi che trovi sulla mia scrivania è ridicola.*
 ‘The declaration of innocence of/by Berlusconi that you find on my desk is ridiculous.’

However, this is not necessarily the case when the nominal type is used as shown by (10b), in which Berlusconi can be the author of the declaration as well as simply its object. This clearly derives from the property of showing simultaneously the eventive and the resultative meaning observed above. In this light, the adoption of the ergative-possessive type in (10a) renders the construction containing the AN incompatible with a predicate requiring the resultative meaning.

It has been repeatedly claimed that in Spanish, only the AN with an eventive meaning may be directly modified by temporal adverbs, while its resultative counterpart needs genitive-like modifiers (cf. Rainer 1993: 214; Picallo 1999: 370):

- (11) a. *La demostración del teorema de Pitágoras (de) ayer por la tarde nos sorprendió.*
 ‘The demonstration of Pitágoras’ theorem of yesterday evening surprised us.’

- b. *La demostración del teorema de Pitágoras *(de) ayer por la tarde es incorrecta.*
 ‘The demonstration of Pitágoras’ theorem of yesterday evening is incorrect.’

At any rate, similar examples are also found in Italian and French, which clearly refer to the eventive meaning of the AN (from a Google search on the Internet):

- (12) a. *il Ministro ... ha commentato la pubblicazione oggi sulla Gazzetta ufficiale dell’Unione europea della domanda per il riconoscimento della Vastedda ... un formaggio di pecora prodotto in alcune zone della Sicilia*
 ‘the minister has commented upon the publication today on the official journal of the EU of the application for the acknowledgement of the Vastedda ... a sheep cheese produced in Sicily’
- b. *Celle-ci a abouti à la publication aujourd’hui de critères pour la conduite du diagnostic et de la protection des enfants*
 ‘This has led to the publication today of criteria for the attitude towards the diagnostics and the protection of children’
- c. *en attestent les publications aujourd’hui à intervalles réguliers de nombreuses “pièces de jeunesse”*
 ‘this is attested by the publications today at regular intervals of several “youthful plays”’

Notice that the last example shows that an eventive meaning is also available when the AN is pluralized. The pluralization of an eventive AN is generally possible throughout the Romance languages in contrast with what happens with a nominalized infinitive (the Italian examples are from Google):

- (13) a. *Numerose furono quindi le uccisioni di partigiani, ma anche di persone indifese come donne, vecchi e bambini.*
 ‘Numerous were then the killings of partisans, but also of helpless people, like women, old persons and children.’
- b. *Le uccisioni di Bob Kennedy e Martin Luther King da parte di fanatici destrorsi aprirono la strada all’elezione di Nixon.*
 ‘The killings of Bob Kennedy and Martin Luther King by rightist fanatics opened the way to the election of Nixon.’
- c. *Per fattori “interni”, si intendono gli indebolimenti delle difese dell’organismo, come l’indebolimento della razza per inseguire selezioni genetiche spinte a perseguire record di produzione.*
 ‘By “internal” factors are meant the weakenings of the body’s defences, as for instance the weakening of the race in order to go after genetic selections aiming at pursuing a production record.’

This operation has different properties depending on the semantic profile of the verbal bases involved as well as of the syntactic environment surrounding the ANs (cf. Lombard 1930: 96–105; Lüdtke 1978: 75–77; Roodenburg 2010; Knittel 2011). In general, its

semantic effect normally consists in multiplying the number of the events described by the base predicate with an effect of iterativity or habituality (13a), i.e., it behaves like a pluractional operator (cf. in general Laca 2006 and Iordăchioaia and Soare 2008 on Romanian). A second possible interpretation of a pluralized AN is distributive in the sense that it refers to an action taking place independently with respect to several distinct individuals explicitly mentioned in the text (13b), and finally a pluralized AN can refer to different instantiations of the same action which is decomposed on a scale of nuances (13c).

4. Semantic types and word-formation meaning in Romance action nouns

It has been mentioned above that the ANs normally display a basic eventive meaning, more or less mirroring the meaning of the verbal base (cf. Kiefer 1998). The latter varies in a multi-faceted way but can be well tailored adopting Vendler's (1967) four actional classes, namely states, activities, accomplishments and achievements. They are generally characterized by making reference to three semantic features: [\pm dynamic], [\pm durative] and [\pm telic]: these features define the actionality or *Aktionsart* of the verbal bases, not to be confounded with the aspect, which is its discourse-framed representation. Accordingly, a telic predicate like an accomplishment may be represented as imperfective (and in this sense: detelicized, unbounded) in a given context: *Mary was painting her room when her grandfather died*. Given its lexical nature, it is not surprising that actionality will be of particular relevance for word-formation. At any rate, it has been pointed out that actionality cannot be measured out exclusively at the lexical level, but requires calling into play the syntactic level, namely the level of argument realization. This is so because the presence of arguments, and typically of objects, may provide a telic value to an activity, especially when they are explicitly 'quantized' (cf. Krifka 1992), as in *to smoke a cigarette* in contrast to *to smoke (cigarettes)*. This opens the still hotly debated question of the so-called optional arguments. For our purposes, in the light of what has been observed above concerning the encyclopaedic knowledge necessary to interpret ANs like It. *segatura* 'sawdust', it will be sufficient to consider whether an argument has to be present or not in the common interpretation of a predicate, and in the latter case, adopting Pustejovsky's (1995: 62–67) terminology, it has to be considered a default argument which participates in the logical expression but is not necessarily expressed syntactically.

The three actional features can help us to better specify what eventive meaning really means when applied to the Romance ANs. In fact, the three features enter both into the selection of the possible verbal bases with regard to the individual suffixes and into the determination of the final meaning of the AN. With their help, the selectional properties of Romance suffixes can be nicely isolated, insofar as the features may either carve out a set of verbal bases sharing the same property which is subsequently inherited by the AN, or form ANs showing sensible shifts of the values displayed by their verbal bases. In the first case, I will speak of the inner actionality of the word-formation pattern which selects a specific set of verbs, and in the second case of the outer actionality which is different from the verbal base (cf. Brinton 1995; Gaeta 2000, 2002, 2005a; Alexiadou 2010).

Correspondingly, there are in principle four possibilities in as much as a word-formation pattern can be (i) quite selective as for the inner actionality but neutral with regard to its effect on the outer actionality; or (ii) neutral with regard to its effect on the inner actionality (i.e. non-selective of a specific verbal set) but feature-shifting with regard to the outer actionality; or (iii) both selective and feature-shifting; or (iv) finally completely neutral in both regards. The Romance languages reflect this complex typology in as much as they display a rich set of word-formation patterns largely exploiting the actional features of the verbal bases. Especially when more word-formation patterns give rise to ANs on the basis of the same verb, their semantic profile can be neatly observed. Furthermore, the latter is particularly evident when syntactic tests are employed relating to their possible modifiers or to the predicates they can be combined with (container-predicates, cf. Bartsch 1986, Gaeta 2002: 114–126 for Italian and Huyghe and Marín 2007 for French and Spanish). In spite of a recent increase of attention, this domain remains largely to be explored. Therefore, the quick survey presented below can only constitute the premise of a future systematic investigation.

Starting with the first case in which a word-formation pattern displays a specific inner actionality, the stative verbs, characterized by the feature [–dynamic], stand in contrast to the dynamic bases insofar as their corresponding ANs are mostly selected in Italian, French and Spanish by the cognate suffixes *-anza/-enza*, *-ance/-ence* and *-ancia/-encia* (cf. respectively Gaeta 2002: chap. 4, Dal and Namer 2010, and the NGLE 2009: 405): It. *abbondare*/Fr. *abonder*/Sp. *abundar* ‘to abound’ → *abbondanza/abondance/abundancia*, Fr./It. *preferire/préférer*/Sp. *preferir* ‘to prefer’ → *preferenza/préférence/preferencia*. Although deviations from this generalization are attested (cf. for instance It. *partenza* ‘departure’, Fr. *délivrance* ‘relief, issue’, Sp. *influencia* ‘influence’), in the case that two homonymous verbs displaying different actional values occur, only the stative ones form the ANs by means of this suffix, while the others select another word-formation pattern:

- (14) a. *competenza* ‘competence’ vs. *competizione* ‘competition’, *conseguenza* ‘consequence’ vs. *conseguimento* ‘attainment’, *discendenza* ‘descent, offspring’ vs. *discesa* ‘drop’, etc.
- b. *A Mario compete il posto di direttore.*
‘The place as director comes under Mario.’
- c. *Mario e Andrea competono per il posto di direttore.*
‘Mario and Andrea are competing for the place as director.’
- d. *La competenza/*competizione a Mario del posto di direttore è fuori discussione.*
‘Mario’s entitlement to the post as director is out of discussion.’
- e. *La *competenza/competizione di Mario e Andrea per il posto di direttore è molto forte.*
‘The competition between Mario and Andrea for the place as director is very hard.’

In these pairs of Italian ANs, the former is based on the stative meaning of the verb (14b), while the latter on the dynamic one (14c). The corresponding AN reflects the

opposition between the stative meaning selecting *-enza* (14d) and the dynamic one selecting *-zione* (14e).

Moreover, the ANs inherit the stative actionality of the base verbs insofar as they are only compatible with those (imperfective) container predicates which don't focus on a telic state of affairs:

- (15) a. *La prevalenza del male sul bene è stata interrotta.*
 'The prevalence of evil over good has been interrupted.'
 b. **La permanenza di Gianni a Roma si compì in due anni.*
 'The permanence of Gianni in Rome took place in two years.'

In the latter example, the perfective container predicate has to focus on a final state which cannot be brought about by the AN. Clearly, when in this case one speaks of an "eventive" meaning of the AN, one roughly means that the ANs inherit the inner nondynamic actionality of their verbal bases. This has to be kept distinct from what has been said above about the possible semantic shift EVENT > FACT/STATE characterizing ANs that are not necessarily built on stative verbs.

The weakness of this generalization is partly due to the low degree of productivity of this suffix with verbal bases. In this regard, it has to be added that many adjectives that go back to a Latin present participle normally form their abstract noun with the help of the same suffix: It. *arrogante/arroganza*, Sp. *arrogante/arrogancia*, Fr. *arrogant/arrogance*, etc. In this light, a double motivation lurks here because of the adjectival nature of the present participle which is at the heart of the derivational process (see section 5). Thus, the emergence of this selective preference may be seen (also in diachronic terms) as resulting from the equivalence of the full verb and the periphrasis formed by the present participle and the copula: *Mario dipende/è dipendente da sua madre* 'Mario depends on his mother', which explains the deadjectival/deverbal bivalence of many such abstracts (cf. Rainer 1989: 211).

A similar impact of the inner actionality has been suggested for the so-called Romanian long infinitive which selects only telic verbal bases to form an AN while the atelic bases have to resort to the so-called supine (cf. Cornilescu 2001):

- (16) *a călători* 'to travel' → **călătorirea/călătoritul*
a locui 'to live' → **locuirea/locuitul*
a munci 'to work' → **muncirea/muncitul*
a râde 'to laugh' → **rîdere/rîsul*

The second case may be illustrated by means of the second set of ANs contrasting with the stative ones in (14a) above, namely those formed with the suffixes *-zione* and *-mento*. While they don't seem to be sensible to the actionality of the verbal bases – i.e. in our terms: their inner actionality is un(der)specified – they generally bring about a shift in the outer actionality insofar as they are positively specified for telicity. Clearly, this effect is only visible with ANs derived from atelic verbal bases, because in the other cases telicity may be said to be inherited from the base. The contrast is particularly well enhanced when ANs based on atelic verbs and combined with a perfective container predicate are compared to their corresponding nominalized infinitives (17a–b), which

generally show the opposite effect of enhancing the inner dynamic of an event while the final change of state is backgrounded. In fact, the contrast in (17c–d) shows that the nominalized infinitive of the telic verb *affondare* ‘to sink’ is not compatible with a perfective container predicate:

- (17) a. *L'insegnamento del latino è stato completato.*
 ‘The teaching of Latin has been completed.’
 b. **L'insegnare il latino è stato completato*
 the teaching:INF the Latin has been completed
 c. *L'affondamento della nave si compì in mezz'ora.*
 ‘The sinking of the ship took place in half an hour.’
 d. **L'affondare la nave si compì in mezz'ora.*
 the sinking:INF the ship took place in half an hour

A further case is given again by Romanian, in which the supine can be shown to provide telic verbal bases with a habitual reading which make them compatible with a prepositional phrase normally focusing on the unbounded character of the event like *timp de* ‘for (X time)’ (cf. Alexiadou, Iordăchioaia and Schäfer 2011):

- (18) a. *sositul lui Ion cu întârziere*
 arrive:SUP:DEF his John with delay
 ‘John’s (habit of) arriving late’
 b. *sositul lui Ion cu întârziere timp de 3 ani*
 arrive:SUP:DEF his John with delay for 3 years
 ‘John’s (habit of) arriving late for 3 years’
 c. ?? *sosirea lui Ion cu întârziere timp de 3 ani*
 arrive:INF:DEF his John with delay for 3 years

This stands in contrast to the ANs formed by means of the so-called long infinitive which do not have a habitual reading and accordingly do not admit the prepositional phrase (18b–c).

The French suffix *-age* has been recently analyzed as sensitive not only to the actional property of the verbal base but also to its argument structure, insofar as the prominence of the agent is relevant (cf. Kelling 2003; Martin 2010):

- (19) a. *Le décolllement des tuiles par le vent/l'ouvrier*
 ‘The unsticking/removal of the tiles by the wind/the worker’
 b. *Le décollage des tuiles par ??le vent/l'ouvrier*
 ‘The unsticking/removing of the tiles by the wind/the worker’

In contrast with the ANs formed with *-ment*, the ones with *-age* “are more agentive [...] because they systematically signal the existence of an (intentional) action”, either at the beginning of the denoted eventive chain, or upstream” (Martin 2010: 124), and in fact they are not compatible with an impersonal agent in (19b).

(20) a. *dormire* ‘to sleep’ → *dormita*
lavare ‘to wash’ → *lavata*
costruire ‘to build’ → **costruita*
formare ‘to form’ → **formata*

b. *Le perçage/?? la percée* *du tunnel a progressé.*
the drilling the drill:FEM:PSTPTCP of:DEF tunnel has made progress

c. *après ?? le pesage/ la pesée* *du bébé*
after the weighing the weigh FEM:PSTPTCP of:DEF child

This semantic nuance is particularly evident when these ANs are used in combination with light verbs, typically Fr. *faire*/It. *fare*/Port. *fazer*/Sp. *hacer* ‘to do’ etc. for intransitive bases and Fr. *donner*/It. *dare*/Port. *dar*/Sp. *dar* ~ *pegar* etc. ‘to give’ for transitive

bases; cf. the Italian pair in (21) (example from Google), in which the periphrastic structure characterizes the event as imprecise:

- (21) a. *Io gli dò una piegata veloce e le butto nel cassetto.*
 I them:DAT give a fold:AN quick and them throw in:DEF drawer
 'I give them a quick fold and I throw them into the drawer.'
- b. ?? *Io gli dò una piegata accurata e le butto nel cassetto.*
 I them:DAT give a fold:AN accurate and them throw in:DEF drawer
 drawer

One important side-effect of the use of these ANs in verbal periphrases containing light verbs like DO and GIVE is that the ANs can be easily modified by means of alterative suffixes, very productive at least in Italian, Spanish, Catalan and Portuguese, in this way contributing to the expressive character of the utterance (cf. article 63 on the pragmatics of word-formation): *Gianni stava facendo una bella dormit-ina, ma sua moglie lo costrinse a una levat-accia* 'Gianni was having a nice sleep-DIM, but his wife forced him to getting-PEJ up'.

In combination with achievements the semelfactive meaning might be seen as directly coming from the base given its punctual nature, but observe that the AN formed in these cases is generally not flanked by other ANs formed with other suffixes, while this is normally possible with the other bases as in the following Spanish examples (cf. Gaeta 2002: 174–176 for Italian examples):

- (22) a. *caer* 'to fall' → *caída*/**caimiento*/**caición*
llegar 'to arrive' → *llegada*/**llegamiento*/**llegación*
salir 'to leave' → *salida*/**salimiento*/**salición*
venir 'to come' → *venida*/**venimiento*/**venición*
- b. *calentar* 'to heat' → *calentamiento/calentada*
investigar 'to investigate' → *investigación/investigada*
llamar 'to call' → *llamamiento/llamada*
mirar 'to look' → *miramiento/mirada*

It has to be added that the achievements often are also associated with an unaccusative argument structure, which is mirrored in these derivatives when the verbal bases allow an unaccusative alternation, as in the following examples from French (cf. Ferret, Soare and Villoing 2010):

- (23) a. *Marie a percé son abcès.* → *le perçage de l'abcès*
 'Marie burst her abscess.'
- b. *Son abcès a percé.* → *la percée*/**le perçage de l'abcès*
 'Her abscess burst.'
- c. *L'arrivage*/?*l'arrivée des ouvriers a été interrompu(e) par un convoi de police.*
 'The arrival of the workers has been interrupted by a police crew.'

Moreover, the unbounded value of the French suffix *-age*, already observed above in (20b–c), makes it compatible with punctual verbs but only on the condition that the event is seen as in progress and pluractional: in fact, in (23c) the imperfective container predicate *interrompre* presupposes an unbounded AN while the plural-dependent genitive requires a pluractional interpretation of the AN, in which several arrivals are understood.

The salience of the semelfactive meaning is supported in Spanish by other ANs formed by a number of suffixes, which in general are extremely productive with nominal bases, and in particular *-azo*: *frenar* ‘to brake’/*freno* ‘brake’ → *frenada/frenazo* ‘sudden braking’, *pinchar* ‘to prick’/*pincho* ‘prickle’ → *pinchada/pinchazo* ‘prick, shot (colloq.)’ (cf. the NGL 2009: 398), the suffix *-ón*: *acelerada/acelerón* ‘burst of acceleration’, *atraca/atracaón* ‘blowout (meal)’, etc. (cf. the NGL 2009: 397).

Furthermore, extensions to nominal bases with the form of the participial ending of the 1st verbal class (Cat./Sp./Port. *-ada*, It. *-ata*, Fr. *-ée*, etc.) are common and productive (cf. Acquaviva 2005 on Italian; Cabré 2002: 745–746 on Catalan; Dubois and Dubois-Charlier 1999: 207–209 on French; the NGL 2009: 390–394 on Spanish). They generally share a basic meaning ‘single instantiation typical of N’: thus, ‘a blow of N’ with typical blowing objects (Cat. *martell*/Sp. *martillo* ‘hammer’ → *martellada/martillada*), or body parts (Cat. *colze*/It. *gomito* ‘elbow’ → *colzada/gomitata*), etc.

From a comparative point of view, it is interesting to observe that, even though the two word-formation patterns are cognate, the so-called Romanian supine, which goes back to the masculine form of the Latin past participle, also manipulates inner and outer actionality as seen above in (18), but in the opposite way, namely with the supine giving rise to an unbounded AN while the long infinitive forms a bounded AN (cf. Gaeta 2009).

A final word has to be added with regard to the fourth type described above, in which the AN is completely neutral with regard to both the inner and the outer actionality. In this respect, the nominalized infinitive was already mentioned above which is generally possible with any verbal base, while it does not seem to force any shift in its semantic properties, except for a certain effect of backgrounding of the telic component if the container predicate focuses on the inner dynamics of the event (Gaeta 2002: 123–124):

- (24) a. *L’ottenere il rimborso ci portò via due ore.*
 the-obtain:INF the reimbursement us brought away two hours
 ‘Obtaining the reimbursement took us two hours.’
 b. ?? *L’ottenimento del rimborso ci portò via due ore.*
 the-obtain:AN of:DEF reimbursement us brought away two hours

This can be observed fairly well with achievements, which combine with the nominalized infinitive emphasizing the duration of the events leading to the resultant state, while the AN, in contrast, is odd.

Besides the actional content of the verbal bases, there are other factors tailoring the selective properties of the ANs. One such factor is the denotative or ontological domain normally associated with a specific word-formation pattern. Thus, for instance in Italian the suffix *-aggio* seems to cover the technical domain while *-tura* rather expresses the manual/craftsmanship one. Similarly, it has been assumed that part of the diffusion of the French *-age* (for instance in contrast with *-ment*) is due to a similar specialization. This has not precluded *-age* from developing a special actional profile, as was briefly discussed above (cf. Uth 2011: chap. 5 for a diachronic perspective). To this it should

be added that the suffix *-age* is opposed to the other suffixes also because of the selected ontological domain insofar as it generally combines only with verbs referring to physical events as we have seen above, thus excluding psychological verbs: *penser* ‘to think’ → ??*pensage*, *préoccuper* ‘to worry’ → ??*préoccupage*, *effrayer* ‘to frighten’ → ??*effrayage*, *imaginer* ‘to imagine’ → ??*imaginage*, etc. (cf. Martin 2010).

Clearly, this factor has effects also on the frequency of the ANs in certain text types and registers, especially under the influence of foreign (English) models. Thus, the French suffix *-ance/-ence*, as well as its Sp. *-ancia/-encia* and It. *-anza/-enza* cognates, apparently show a significant expansion among verbal bases as a consequence of its usage in certain special contexts (physics: Fr. *résistance* ‘electric resistance’, *perditance* ‘leakance’, music: It. *cadenza*, Sp. *cadencia* ‘rhythm’, etc.), giving also rise to interesting cases of blending, as in Fr. *varistance* ‘resistance to electric (varying) tension’, *thermistance* ‘resistance to temperature’, etc. (cf. Dubois and Dubois-Charlier 1999: 268).

Other word-formation meanings are more idiosyncratic. In this regard, the Catalan suffix *-era* as well as its Occitan cognate are worth mentioning because they normally select unergative verbs of the 1st inflectional class and form a desiderative AN: Cat. *plorar* ‘to cry’ → *plorera* ‘desire to cry’, *fumar* ‘to smoke’ → *fumera* ‘desire to smoke’, Occ. *badalhar* ‘to dance’ → *badalhèra* ‘desire to dance’, *parlar* ‘to speak’ → *parlèra* ‘desire to speak’, etc. (cf. Gràcia and Riera 2003).

5. Word-formation types in Romance action nouns

Let us now turn to the formal part of the word-formation patterns employed to form ANs in the Romance languages. Generally, suffixation and conversion are used, with the addition of a few (and partly controversial) instances of compounds (see [article 41 on VN compounds in Romance](#)), and especially reduplicative compounds like Fr. *cache-cache* ‘hide and seek, lit. hide-hide’, It. *fuggifuggi* ‘stampede, lit. run away-run away’, etc. (cf. Thornton 2008).

Suffixations can be grouped into three further subtypes: (i) suffixes clearly selecting the verbal stem to form the AN; (ii) suffixes selecting another morpheme, i.e. a purely morphologically conditioned alternant devoid of any but morphological function (cf. Aronoff 1994: 25); and (iii) derivatives based on participial morphemes diachronically evolved into some sort of suffix-like formative. The last subtype has also been interpreted as a conversion. Let us discuss the three subtypes in a more detailed way.

As for the first subtype, the verbal stem, i.e. the verbal root plus the so-called thematic vowel, is selected by the It./Port. *-mento*, Sp. *-miento* suffixes to productively form ANs: It. *reclutare*/Port. *recrutar*/Sp. *reclutar* ‘to recruit’ → *reclutamento*/*recrutamento*/*reclutamiento*, It. *muovere*/Port./Sp. *mover* ‘to move’ → It./Port. *movimento*/Sp. *movimiento*, It. *accudire* ‘to attend’/Port./Sp. *seguir* ‘to follow’ → It. *accudimento*/Port. *seguimento*/Sp. *seguimiento*, etc. The thematic vowel varies depending on the verb’s inflectional class: verbs belonging to the 1st class select *-a-* while the others select *-i-*.

The second subtype gives rise to different allomorphic patterns depending on the morpheme selected by the suffix. In general, two main morphemes are at stake, namely those underlying respectively the present and the past participle of the verbs (see [article 45 on paradigmatically determined allomorphy](#)).

The third subtype generally underlies the cases of ANs going back to the feminine form of the past participle briefly discussed in section 4. These types might be considered cases of conversion from the past participle, and in fact there is no binding argument speaking against this interpretation, because many ANs can be shown to rely on the morpheme of the past participle instead of the Latinate morpheme (e.g., It. *comparire* ‘to appear’/part. *comparso* → *comparsa*, Sp. *poner* ‘to pose’/part. *puesto* → *puesta*, but Sp. *ofender* ‘to offend’/part. *ofendido*, AN *ofensa*). At any rate, the overwhelming productivity of these types with verbs of the 1st class in Catalan, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish makes it possible to isolate a suffix *-ada/-ata*, which also underlies its denominal cognate briefly seen in section 4.

As for the conversions, a masculine and a feminine pattern generally occur, which also display different degrees of productivity (cf. respectively Fr. *rêver* ‘to dream’ → *rêve*, It. *saltare* ‘to jump’ → *salto*, *chorar* ‘to cry’ → *choro*, Sp. *incendiar* ‘to burn’ → *incendio*, and Fr. *annoncer* ‘to announce’ → *annonce*, It. *deliberare* ‘to deliberate’ → *delibera*, Port. *perder* ‘to lose’ → *perda*, Sp. *comprare* ‘to buy’ → *compra*). Different interpretations have been provided for these types. Supporters of the suffixal treatment simply assume two different suffixes *-a* and *-o* for Italian and Spanish (and a zero suffix for French), in which however a systematic collapse of the inflectional (the gender and inflectional class assignment) and derivational (word class change) properties is observed. To cope with this collapse two different processes of conversion have been assumed which are overtly manifested by the different vowels expressing gender and inflectional values: *saltare* ‘to jump’ → $[[salt]_{V \rightarrow NMasc} -o]$, *deliberare* ‘to deliberate’ → $[[deliber]_{V \rightarrow NFem} -a]$. An intermediate approach suggested for Italian (cf. Thornton 2004: 516–520, 525, and the discussion in Kerleroux 1996: 235–236 for French) distinguishes a process of root-based conversion (or suffixation), cf. *saltare* ‘to jump’ → $[salt]_{Root} -o$, from a process of stem-based conversion which results from truncation: *deliberare* ‘to deliberate’ → $[[deliber-a]_{Stem} + zione] \rightarrow [deliber-a]_{Stem}$.

A final word must be added with regard to ANs as bases for further derivation. Clearly, ANs can normally be further derived into (relational) adjectives (although single patterns may be recalcitrant like the derivatives formed by Fr. *-age*, It. *-aggio*, Port. *-agem*, Sp. *-aje*: Fr. *aborder*/It. *abbordare*/Port./Sp. *abordar* ‘to board’ → *abordage/abbordaggio/abordagem/abordaje*, Fr. *recycler*/It. *riciclare*/Port./Sp. *reciclar* ‘to recycle’ → *recyclage/riciclaggio/reciclagem/reciclaje*, etc. which qualify as “closing” suffixes, cf. Gaeta 2005b). More interesting is the issue of the ANs as bases for further verbalization processes, and in particular conversions (cf. Iacobini 2005 on Italian). In fact, ANs are possible bases for verbalizations only on the condition that the semantic relation with the extant base has become opaque or bleached: It. *sancire* ‘to sanction, establish’ → *sanzione* ‘sanction’ → *sanzionare* ‘to sanction, punish’, Sp. *sugerir* ‘to suggest’ → *sugestión* ‘suggestion’ → *sugestionar* ‘to influence’, etc. The limited conversion possibilities of ANs have clearly to do with lexical blocking: their expected meaning would be too similar to the meaning of the verbal base.

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