

On Nominalizing the Verbal Complex in Dagaare and English

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Abstract

This paper raises a number of issues that result from the interaction between two widely attested phenomena in the generative linguistic literature: nominalization (e.g. Chomsky 1970) and verb serialization (e.g. Baker 1989, Bodomo 1993, Bowerman 2006, Givon 2006). Based on data from Dagaare, a Gur language of West Africa, this paper analyses a type of complex predicate construction in which all the verbs in a series are nominalized, with only one of the verbs carrying the nominalization affix (Bodomo 2004). Such a rare complex predicate construction is then the basis for renewed questions about the nature of complex predicatehood, diathetic syntactic alternations, and lexical categorial differences involving nouns and verbs across languages. The paper proposes a syntactic representation of these nominalized serial verbal predicates in which they are basically interpreted as VPs headed by a nomP functional projection. Semantically, we propose that nominalized serial verbs, like their purely verbal counterparts, express a complex event. It is thus concluded that while verbal and nominal predicates obtain from the same minimal constructs, the difference between pure serial verbs and nominalized serial verbs is due to the fact that a semantic feature, [+nom], parallel to the syntactic functional projection, nomP, imposes nominal features on the whole complex. This analysis is extended to complex verbal constructions in English.

Key words: Syntax, lexical semantics, complex verbal constructions, nominalization, serial verb constructions, Dagaare, English.