Esa Itkonen: Concerning the role of derivation in grammar, including the possible influence of the diachronic point of view (Turku, October 2015)

Traditionally, morphology has been divided into inflection and word-formation, and the latter has in turn been divided into derivation and compounding. This division of labor is reflected e.g. in the recent volumes of the *Oxford Handbook* series.

There is a sense, however, in which the view of derivation as exclusively a matter of **word**-formation is patently false. **Nominalization** is a prime example of derivation; but **action** (or event) nominalization is a matter not of word, but of **sentence** formation, and even **complex**-sentence formation.

Complex sentences exemplify either co-ordination or subordination. Subordinate sentences have traditionally been divided into three subgroups, namely COMP(lement), REL(ative), and ADV(erbial); and the universal validity of this trichotomy has often been entertained (or at least implied). There are two principal ways to show the falseness of this view. First, there are languages without any formal justification for the trichotomy. This is true of paratactic languages, i.e. languages with no subordination, like Mohawk as well as of languages with a single marker of subordination like Rembarrnga; and a language like Diyari has a formal trichotomy of subordinate sentences which does **not** coincide with the COMP/REL/ADV division, but rather expresses 'past' (> causal) / 'simultaneous' / 'future' (> final). Second, there are languages where different variants of one and the same basic construction perform the COMP/ADV functions, which means that there is no genuine justification for postulating the corresponding distinction. This 'basic construction' is **action nominalization** (= AN), and its different **case forms** (= NOM, ERG, ACC, ABS, DAT, INS, etc) perform the functions of COMP and ADV in languages like Tamil, Ancient Tibetan, and Hua. Besides, the REL in Ancient Tibetan is formally (if not functionally) identical with AN; and the AN construction of Hua is based on REL.

In what follows, examples will be given from these three languages. As for Tamil and Ancient Tibetan, the starting point is a simple sentence, which – transformed into an **AN** construction and presented within square brackets, i.e. [AN] – will then occur as part of complex sentences. The nominalizing affix will be labelled as **NM**. Each AN is followed by a case ending.

This cluster of topics, including all examples given below, has been discussed at great length in Itkonen (2009: Chapters XXIII-XXIV; 2010: Chapters XXV-XXVI; 2011a; Itkonen & Pajunen 2011: 130-136).

Tamil: NM = -at(u)-; [AN] = [… V-at(u)]-case. For instance, [AN]-NOM = [AN]-u; [AN]-ACC = [AN]-e; [AN]-DAT = [AN]-ukku; [AN]-INS = [AN]-naale; etc.

avan   vannaan-ukku   panatt-e   kutu-tt-aan
3SG.M.NOM washerman-DAT   money-ACC give-PRET-3SG.M
'He gave the money to the washerman'

[avan vannaanukku panatte kututtat]-u aacaariyamaa iruntatu   [AN]-NOM = subject COMP
'That he gave the money to the washerman was amazing'
[avan vannaanukku panatte kututtat]-e paatteen   [AN]-ACC = object COMP
'I saw him give the money to the washerman'
[avan vannaanukku panatte kututtat]-ukku inke vanteen   [AN]-DAT = final ADV
'I came here in order for him to give the money to the washerman'
[avan vannaanukku panatte kututtatu]-naale inke vanteen   [AN]-INS = causal ADV
'I came here because he gave the money to the washerman'
etc.

Ancient Tibetan: NM = -ba-; [AN] = [… V-ba]-case. For instance, [AN]-ERG = [AN]-s; [AN]-
　　　　　ABS = [AN]-0; [AN]-LOC = [AN]-la; [AN]-ABL = [AN]-nas; etc.

rgyalpo-s　　　drag-0　　　b-tul (< b-dul-s)
king-ERG　　　enemy-ABS　PRET-defeat
'The king defeated the enemy'

[rgyalpos drag btulba]-s semstsan sgrol　　　　　　　　[AN]-ERG = subject COMP
'That the king defeated the enemy saves the people'
blama-s [rgyalpos drag btulba]-0 mthon　　　　　　　　[AN]-ABS = object COMP
'The lama saw the king defeat the enemy'
[rgyalpos drag btulba]-la semstsan sgrol　　　　　　　[AN]-LOC = local/temporal ADV
'Where/when the king defeated the enemy, the people were saved'
[rgyalpos drag btulba]-nas semstsan grol　　　　　　　[AN]-ABL = causal ADV
'Because the king defeated the enemy, the people were saved'
etc.

In contradistinction to Tamil, in Ancient Tibetan the AN construction (which agrees in case with the head noun) also performs the function of (postnominal) REL:

rgyalpo-s [drag-0 btulba]-s tshos bsad
'The king who defeated the enemy taught dharma'
rgyalpo-s [drag-s btulba]-s tshos bsad
'The king whom the enemy defeated taught dharma'
drag-s [rgyalpo-0 btulba]-s tshos bsad
'The enemy who defeated the king taught dharma'
drag-0 [rgyalpo-s btulba]-0 gyel (= the only obligatory argument of intransitive verbs is in ABS)
'The enemy whom the king defeated fell down'

Hua: NM = -na- (< 'thing'); [AN] = [… V-REL-NM]-case(-TOP); for instance, ebgu-ma-na = hit-
　　　　REL.1SG-thing = 'the thing that I hit' > my hitting; more precisely, [AN]-ERG =
　　　　[AN]-mu; [AN]-ABS = [AN]-0; [AN]-LOC = [AN]-ro; [AN]-ABL = [AN]-roti;
　　　　[AN]-BEN(efactive) = [AN]-hi

[ebgu-ma-na]-mu fri-e　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　[AN]-ERG = subject COMP / causal ADV
[hit-REL.1SG-NM]-ERG die-3SG
'S/he died with my hitting' ~ 'My hitting killed him/her' ~ 'S/he died because I hit him/her'
[oke hi-bai-ma-na]-0-mo havu-e　　　　　　　　　　　[AN]-ABS = object COMP
[song do-CONT-REL.3PL-NM]-ABS-TOP hear-1SG
'I heard them sing a song'
[kgai-mo bai-pa-na]-ro ai'o-e　　　　　　　　　　　　[AN]-LOC = local ADV
[2SG-TOP stay-REL.2SG-NM]-LOC come.up-1SG
'I came up to where you are'
[zu ri-su-ma(-na)]-hi hau-e　　　　　　　　　　　　　[AN]-BEN = final ADV
[work take-FUT-REL.1SG(-NM)]-BEN go.up-1SG
'I went up to work'
[mna-ro ka-ma(-na)]-ro-hi p-vova fgari-e　　　　　　　[AN]-LOC-BEN = causal ADV
[flute-LOC see-REL.3PL(-NM)]-LOC-BEN 3PL-neck cut-3PL
'Because they-1 looked at the flutes they-2 cut their-1 necks'
etc.

Having perused all these examples, we must ask the following question: **Why** is it that the problem posed by the ambivalent (or 'hybrid') nature of AN has been ignored? At least the following three answers come to mind.

First, it may have **not** been ignored, insofar as a specific label, i.e. 'action nominal', has been suggested for it, in order to separate it from other ('regular') types of nominalization that unequivocally belong to (derivational) morphology, and not to (complex-clause) syntax. But as far as I can see, it **wrong** to conceptualize AN in this way.

Second, the ambivalent nature of AN is less evident in the Indo-European languages than it is e.g. in the three languages considered above. This gives rise to the following thought experiment. To put it simply, the root cause of Chomsky's 'lexicalist' reinterpretation of generative grammar was the fact that the English AN (or what Chomsky called "gerundive nominalization") – e.g. *destruct* ➔ *destructing* – behaves more like a word (*X's destruction of Y*) than like a clause (*X destructed Y*) (cf. McCawley 1982). But if Chomsky's native language had been Tamil, he might have preferred the original 'transformationalist' notion of AN proposed by Lees (1960) and others.

Third, according to Hermann Paul, linguistic changes typically undergo the following development, or what he called *Komposition*; and since then, it has been reproduced countless times, in particular in the grammaticalization context (cf. Itkonen 2008: 42; 2011b: 156):

syntactic pattern > compounding > derivation > inflection

From personal experience, I can assure that this neat (in fact, too neat!) succession of stages is apt to subliminally reinforce the view that derivation is just one well-defined 'slice' of grammar squeezed between others.

What is the moral of this story? Things are more complicated than we are innately endowed to think (or hope).

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