

Some remarks on Kipsigis nominalizations

Maria Kouneli, Universität Leipzig

Introduction: In this talk, I investigate the properties of complex event nominalizations (CENs) in Kipsigis (Nilotic; Kenya), and focus on the following: A) The external argument is absent from all CENs, including ‘antipassive’ nominalizations, supporting claims that CENs always embed unaccusative/passive verbal structures (Alexiadou 2001, 2017, Bruening 2013), B) Morphemes that saturate a thematic role without introducing a DP argument (e.g., antipassive) are possible in CENs, unlike morphemes that introduce DP arguments (e.g., applicative); I argue that this supports Alexiadou’s (2017) analysis of the *unaccusativity requirement* (Imanishi 2014 a.o.) of nominalizations in terms of case assignment possibilities in the domain of *n*. **Background:** Most recent work converges on the idea that CENs involve a nominalizer that embeds verbal structure (e.g., Alexiadou 2001, Harley 2009, Bruening 2013, Borer 2014). An important observation is that CENs lack an external argument (Alexiadou 2001, 2017), usually analyzed in terms of nominalizing heads only embedding unaccusative or passive verbal structures (e.g., Alexiadou 2001, 2017, Bruening 2013). [Note: the discussion excludes nominalizations of the English gerund type]. **Kipsigis nominalizations:** Data come from fieldwork with 4 speakers (underlined vowels are [-ATR]). Kipsigis CENs are derived from verbs by the addition of the thematic suffix *-a*, followed by the marker *-it*; regular vowel coalescence results in *-eet*, which for simplicity I gloss as N - nominalizer (see Toweett 1975, Kouneli 2019 for details on the morphological make-up of Kipsigis nouns). If the verbal stem has a short vowel, lengthening occurs in the nominal, as in (1a) where the verbal stem is *sir* ‘write’. In (1a), the noun receives a RN interpretation, which consultants translate as ‘the output of writing’. It has a CEN interpretation only when the theme is present (1b) or when the antipassive suffix *-iis* is present (1c) (in this case, there is no vowel lengthening, and the thematic suffix is *-ya*).

- (1) a. *siir-eet* b. *siir-eet-aap kitabuut* c. *sir-iis-yeet*
 write-N write-N-POSS book write-AP-N
 ‘(output of) writing’ ‘the writing of the book’ ‘writing’

The Kipsigis DP disallows all types of PP modifiers and purpose clauses, and the language has limited adjectival modification (Kouneli 2019), which makes the application of CEN diagnostics difficult, but: 1) The nouns in (1b) and (1c) cannot be pluralized, and 2) The verbal stem inside the nominalization can be reduplicated with the meaning of ‘repeated action’ (reduplication has this meaning in the verbal domain), but only when either the theme (2b) or the antipassive morpheme (2c) are present. I therefore conclude that nominals like (1b) and (1c) are CENs.

- (2) a. **sir-aa-sir-eet* b. *sir-aa-sir-eet-aap kitabuut* c. *sir-aa-sir-iis-yeet*
 write-L-write-N write-L-write-N-POSS book write-L-write-AP-N
 ‘writing’ ‘repeated writing of the book’ ‘repeated writing’

In the verbal domain, the antipassive suffix can only attach to transitive verbs, and it makes the presence of the direct object ungrammatical; it is very productive.

- (3) a. *Kii-a-sir kitabuut.* b. *Kii-a-sir-iis (*kitabuut).*
 PAST-1SG-write book PAST-1SG-write-AP book
 ‘I wrote a/the book.’ ‘I wrote (something).’

Kipsigis DPs only allow one genitive argument, which follows the head noun and the possessive marker *-aap* (1b, 2b). Kipsigis DPs do not allow any PP modifier; moreover, the language lacks passive Voice (and thus by-phrases). This means that a maximum of one argument may be expressed in CENs. The sole argument must be interpreted as the theme (1b, 2b), but in the presence of antipassive morphology (1c, 2c), the presence of the agent is possible (4a). However,

the agent does not behave like a real argument of the verb. First, it is optional (as shown by the grammaticality of 2c) under a CEN interpretation, unlike the non-optionality of the theme (2). Second, the agent can also be expressed as a possessor in a relative clause (4b), retaining the CEN interpretation. This is impossible for the theme (4c vs. 1b, 2b). In Kipsigis, only real possessors show the alternation in (4a) – (4b), and I take these data to show that the agent is generated as a possessor external to the nominalized vP (while the theme is a real argument of the verb, in the vP).

- (4) a. sir-iis-yeet-aap John b. sir-iis-yeet ne pa John c. *siir-eet ne pa kitabuut
 write-AP-N-POSS John write-AP-N REL POSS John write-N REL POSS book
 ‘John’s writing’ ‘John’s writing’ ‘the writing of the book’

Apart from the antipassive morpheme, there are three argument structure-related morphemes that appear inside CENs: the prefix *kaa-* (present in lexical causatives participating in the causative alternation), the suffix *-ta* (obligatory in ditransitive predicates when the goal is unspecified), and the suffix *-u/uun* (obligatory when the goal argument of a class of motion verbs is unspecified). The behavior of *-u/uun* is similar to the antipassive: it saturates the argument of a motion verb, and the external argument (if expressed) behaves in the same way as in (4). The causative prefix is more complicated, but crucially the external argument behaves as in (4) too. The suffix *-ta* deserves more attention: with ditransitive verbs, this suffix is obligatory in the absence of a goal DP (which is introduced by the applicative *-chi*), as in (5). The nominalization of the verb obligatorily involves the suffix *-ta* (6a). Importantly, the applicative is always ungrammatical, even when the theme is saturated by the antipassive, which is possible otherwise (6b).

- (5) a. kii-goi-chi Kiplangat Kibeet kitabuut. b. kii-goi-*(ta) Kibeet kitabuut.
 PAST-give-APPL Kiplangat Kibeet.NOM book PAST-give-TA Kibeet.NOM book
 ‘Kibeet gave Kiplangat a book.’ ‘Kibeet gave a book (away).’
- (6) a. kaa-goi-*(ta)-eet-aap kitabuut b. kaa-goi-iis-ta-eet-aap Kibeet
 CAUS-give-TA-N-POSS book CAUS-give-AP-TA-N-POSS Kibeet
 ‘the giving (away) of the book’ ‘Kibeet’s giving (away)’
- c. *kaa-goi-iis-chi-eet-aap Kiplangat
 CAUS-give-AP-APPL-N-POSS Kiplangat
 ‘the giving (of something) to Kiplangat’

Analysis: We conclude that: A) External arguments are absent even when the nominalization looks antipassive, and B) morphemes that saturate thematic roles are possible in CENs, but morphemes that introduce a full DP (e.g., applicative or instrumental, not shown here) to saturate these same roles are ungrammatical. This shows that the intransitivity of nominalizations (Alexiadou 2017) is not limited to unaccusatives and passives, and is thus not directly tied to the status of agentive Voice. Rather, **nominalizers cannot embed any Voice head that introduces a full DP argument**. This receives an explanation in Alexiadou’s (2017) account of the unaccusativity requirement in terms of case. She argues that *n* defines a case domain, but in most languages only one argument may be assigned case (=genitive) in this domain. Hence, *n* can only embed verbal structures with one full DP argument; additional DPs do not receive case and cannot be licensed. In a Voice system along the lines of Alexiadou et al. (2015), this can be formalized by assuming that *n* can only merge with specifier-less Voice heads. I argue that the antipassive, the suffix *-u/uun*, and the suffix *-ta* in Kipsigis spell out specifier-less Voice heads which semantically saturate the theme, (locative) theme, and goal roles respectively. It is unclear why the presence of the antipassive or *-u/uun* suffix does not allow the expression of agents (since only one DP is present, it could in principle receive structural case). I argue that this can be explained if we take

into account the typologically rare *marked nominative* case system of Kipsigis, which has been analyzed as a prepositional (non-structural) case for the related language Dinka (van Urk 2015).