“NOMINALIZATION” AS PREDICATIVIZATION IN LILLOOET AND THE NOMINAL MAPPING PARAMETER

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1. Introduction. This paper argues for a re-conceptualization of the Nominal Mapping Parameter (NMP) of Chierchia (1998) in terms of the application of type-shifting operations, rather than the mapping between syntactic categories and semantic types. Empirical evidence for this claim comes from the Salish language Lillooet (St’át’imcets) which redundantly mark both common and proper nouns with what has previously been termed a “nominalizer”, but which I re-interpret as an overt marker of predicativizing type-shifting operations. The result is that even in ‘radically’ [-arg, +pred] languages such as Salish, nouns are always fundamentally of type e, but are subject to across-the-board predicativization.

2. Background: Lillooet as a ‘radically’ [-arg, +pred] system. In terms of the semantic typology put forward by Chierchia (1998) as part of the NMP, Lillooet, like other Salish languages, counts as an extreme case of a [-arg, + pred] languages. Any lexical category can serve as a predicate without the need for a predicative copula, and conversely, an argument can be freely created from any predicate via the addition of a determiner.

(1) ƛák
ta=s-wúw=a
go along DET=NMLZ-cougar=EXIS
‘A cougar was going along.’

(2) s-wúwa
ta=ƛák=a
NMLZ-cougar DET=go.along=EXIS
‘The one going along was a cougar.’

Possible predicates even include proper names (3) and independent (strong) pronouns (4).

(3) s-John
ta=ƛák=a
NMLZ-John DET=go.along=EXIS
‘The one going along was John.’

(4) s-ʔone
ta=ƛák=a
NMLZ-1SG.IND DET=go.along=EXIS
‘The one going along was me.’

There are no bare NP arguments (5) nor DP predicates (6); cf. (1-2).

(5) * ƛák
ts-wúwa
NMLZ-cougar DET=NMLZ-cougar=EXIS DET=go.along=EXIS
‘The one going along was a cougar.’

Other [-arg, +pred] characteristics include a count-mass distinction, a singular-plural distinction, the absence of ‘true’ generics, and the presence of various types of predicate modifiers.

3. The problem: why are nouns “nominalized”? Like all other Salish languages, Lillooet has reflexes of a morpheme *s- traditionally known as the nominalizer. The nominalizer has several syntactic functions, including as a clausal subordinator and an argument structure adjuster, but it is also present on a significant proportion (about 30%) of otherwise underived common nouns (7). (Note that the N-V distinction is well-established in Lillooet irrespective of the presence of the nominalizer: see e.g., Demirdache and Matthewson 1995, Davis and Matthewson 1999).


There is strong evidence that the lexical nominalizer is not part of the root: like other prefixes, such as locative *n- (and unlike root-initial [s]), it is never included in processes which target the root, such as plural and diminutive reduplication (8):

(8) root basic noun plural diminutive
‘woman’ ɬú mplac ɬúmplac ɬúmplac ɬúmplac
‘pool’ ɬúʔakʷ n̓ɛʔakʷ n̓ɛʔakʷ n̓ɛʔakʷ n̓ɛʔakʷ
‘slave’ ɬúʃàʔ t̓saw̓t t̓saw̓t t̓saw̓t t̓saw̓t

In Lillooet, lexical nominalization is taken a step further: all proper nouns are nominalized. The nominalizer is present on proper nouns whether in predicate (3) or argument (9) position, but is absent where proper nouns are not integrated into the semantic composition, as in e.g., vocative contexts (10):

(9) ɬúʔak
d̓s=t(ʔ-s-)John
NMLZ-cougar DET=NMLZ-cougar=EXIS DET=go.along=EXIS
‘The one going along was John.’

(10) s̓imaʔ?
t̓a=ʔaʔ, (ʔ-s-)John
come to=here (ʔ-s-)John
‘Come here, John!’
Now, given that Lillooet is a radically [-arg, +pred] language, nominalization poses a particular problem for Chierchia’s system. In Chierchia’s framework, nominalization is conceived of as the ‘down’ operator (\(^{\downarrow}\)), which creates the individual (type e) counterpart of a predicate (Chierchia 1984): but ‘nominalized’ nouns (including proper nouns) in Lillooet are still predicative (and can only be converted into arguments via the addition of a determiner). Nominalization appears to be doing the exact opposite of what we want.

3. A solution: the nominalizer points ‘up’, not ‘down’. I suggest that Chierchia’s framework does in fact provide an elegant solution, but only if we turn the problem upside down, and treat the Lillooet “nominalizer” as a predicativizer. In that case, we can say that nouns (both common and proper) enter the derivation as type e (or \(<s,e>\)), and are obligatorily type-shifted by the ‘nominalizer’ into \(<e,t>\) (or \(<<s,e>,<s,t>>\)) when they enter the composition. For proper nouns, we use the operation \(\text{Ident} (\text{Partee} \ 1986), \ j \rightarrow \lambda x[x=j]\), which converts an individual \(x\) of type e to its predicative counterpart of type \(<e,t>\).

For common nouns, we adopt the neo-Carlsonian view of Chierchia (1998), where they refer to \(\text{kinds}\). We then adopt Chierchia’s (1998) version of ‘up’; \(^{\uparrow}\) \(d = \lambda x [x \leq d]\), if \(d\) is defined, where \(d\) is a kind and \(s\) is a world/situation. However, since nouns in Salish may be either mass or count, we do not subscribe to the idea that \(^{\uparrow}\) necessarily neutralizes the singular-plural distinction: while we maintain Chierchia’s formula for mass nouns, we add a condition for count nouns that restricts \(x\) to the set of atoms. The overall result is that both proper and common nouns in Lillooet are predicativized via the lexical “nominalizer” \(s\). The advantages of this approach are that (a) it provides a semantic value for the ‘nominalizer’, whose role otherwise appears to be completely redundant; (b) it permits a standard account of the semantics of proper names in Lillooet as individual-denoting, rather than set- or property denoting, and of basic common nouns as kind-denoting; (c) it maintains a uniform account of argument-creating determiners as functions from predicates to individuals of type \(<<e,t>\ \ e>\) (Matthewson 1999), or \(<<s,e> <s,t>> <s,e>>\) (Matthewson 2008).

4. Cross-linguistic implications. On the perspective taken here, even ‘radically’ [-arg, +pred] languages treat core nouns as fundamentally argumental (of type e). This means that they are not as far from ‘radically’ [+arg, -pred] languages as might initially appear, even though their syntax looks vermakerly makes different. Wilhelm (2015), for example, makes a strong case for the Northern Athabaskan language Dëne Sulínê as radically [+arg, -pred]. Dëne Sulínê lacks determiners; nouns are freely interpreted as definite/specific, generic, or existential; predicate modifiers such as adjectives, restrictive relative clauses, and NP-internal PPs are absent; and all non-verbal predicates require a copula. She accounts for these properties by postulating that common nouns refer to kinds, and proper nouns to individuals (both of type e), and verbs come lexically equipped with Carlson’s (1977) ‘realization relation’ \(R\) which maps kinds into their instances (and applies vacuously to individuals). In other words, Dëne Sulínê represents the polar opposite value of the NMP to that of Salish languages. However, on the view taken here, at a fundamental level of semantic ontology, the two systems are identical: in both, proper as well as common nouns start out life as type e, with the NMP now reduced to the application of type-shifting operations: Ident and \(^{\uparrow}\) apply across the board in Salish to produce a [-arg, +pred] system, while they fail to apply altogether in Dëne Sulínê, yielding a [+arg, -pred] system. As for ‘intermediate’ [+arg, +pred] languages such as English and Russian, here \(^{\uparrow}\) applies freely, with local syntactic configurations constraining the distribution of bare (type e) arguments.

5. The Nominal Mapping Parameter and category matching. Whereas for Chierchia, the NMP is expressed in terms of a matching between lexical category and semantic type (\(N\) and its projections being alternatively realized as e, \(<e,t>\), or both), on the view taken here, it is the availability of type-shifting operations (more specifically, predicativizing operations such as Ident and \(^{\uparrow}\)) which is the source of the variation. Thus, at a fundamental level, nouns are always of type e, even in ‘radically’ [-arg, +pred] languages such as Salish where they never surface as such, yielding a universal semantic grounding for the syntactic category of ‘noun’.