Argument inheritance without phrasal affixation

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A common assumption in non-lexica list circles is that arguments inherited after category-changing processes, for instance the of-phrase in the nominalisation in (1a), are to be captured in terms of phrasal affixation, by which I mean that the affix merges with (a constituent containing) a VP (rootP, or comparable projection), and the derived nominal is created by head-moving V/root to the affix. (1b) gives one variant of such an approach. This idea seems particularly reasonable for certain types of nominalisations, notably adverb-licensing nominals like (1) and gerunds.

(1) a. his announcement of their conversion publically
   b. [DP his [NP [N announce-ment] [FP of their conversion F [VP publically [VP t announce
   ttheir.conv.]]]]]

However, I will argue that phrasal affixation cannot be the only way of handling argument inheritance with category-changing operations. Certain types of nominalisations and adjectival participles require an analysis where Themes/Patients and other internal arguments of V are not initially merged inside a V-projection below the category-changing affix, but after the affix. For instance, I will argue that the of-phrase in writer of the book is merged outside a base-generated nominal [N° [V° write]-er]. This idea is familiar from lexicalist analyses, but will be expressed in an approach which does not make use of merger in a non-syntactic lexical or morphological component.

Nominalisations: My argument against an across-the-board application of phrasal affixation to nominalisations rests on its inability to predict constraints on the types of arguments that can be inherited, constraints which can be made sense of if inherited arguments in a nominalisation are arguments of nouns. I discuss two case studies:

(i) English argument-inheriting –er-nominals, which allow PP and of-insertion arguments, but for many speakers disallow CP or AP arguments: %the discoverers that the world is round; %a hammerer of metal flat. I suggest that there is a dialect split where speakers accepting these constructions use phrasal affixation, while for other speakers -er has a selection restriction forcing it to attach to V°. Arguments of V are merged after affixation as arguments of nouns, which results in interpretation problems with CP and AP arguments.

(ii) In certain German event nominals, PPs and genitives, but not e.g. AP predicates, may appear postnominally. APs are possible only in a prenominal position, which I show to be an incorporated position (das Flachhämmern des Metalls vs. *das Hämmern des Metalls flach). I argue that the best account of the German facts is that postnominal material is initially merged after the nominalisation affix. In this case also, the trigger for this late merger of arguments is that the affix is constrained to attach to V° (with or without incorporated material).

Adjectival participles: I produce various types of evidence showing that an analysis of (English) resultative adjectival participles in which Themes/Patients are initially merged in a VP or comparable projection below the participle morphology is problematic, and that any theory should try to mimic the effects of ‘externalisation’ of V’s internal argument known from lexicalist accounts. Part of the argument commits me to the view that the participles involve Voice morphology, a position which is controversial but which I will show to be empirically necessary.

The final part of the talk discusses some general implications of my analyses. I sketch a view of argument structure in which the types of long-distance argument realisation, and the violations of the Uniformity of Theta Assignment Hypothesis, are shown not to pose more conceptual problems than more standard accounts, and perhaps lead towards a better understanding of why e.g. Theme/Patients but not e.g. Agents can merge directly with lexical roots in normal clausal syntax.