Participant realization and the simple/complex event nominal distinction

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It is widely claimed that there are two kinds of eventuality-denoting nominals: Those with arguments that must be syntactically realized (so-called complex event nominals or argument structure nominals, Grimshaw 1990, Alexiadou 2001, a.m.o.), and those that lack such arguments (so-called simple event nominals). In this talk, we present the results of two corpus studies whose goal was to dig deeper into the nature of this distinction. The first study shows that there is no statistical support for distinguishing two kinds (or uses) of derived nominals based on whether their participants are expressed or not. The second study supports the generalization that the conditions on participant realization of derived nominals apply only to the first instantiation of tokens eventualities using such nominals. Specifically, a newly introduced discourse referent for a token eventuality described by a derived nominal must be anchored to a discourse referent corresponding to at least one of its participants. (This is similar in spirit, if not detail, to Levin & Rappaport-Hovav's 2001 Argument-per-Subevent Condition, as we will discuss in the talk.) The results of our corpus study and some preliminary comparison of derived vs. underived nominals will lead us to close with some speculative thoughts about the cognitive underpinnings of the notion of argument structure nominal, which we take to reflect an important insight despite the empirical challenges we will present.