The determiner restriction in nominalizations
Gianina Iordâchioaia¹
University of Stuttgart

1. Introduction

It has been noted, at least as early as Lees (1960), that some nominalizations in English are fully flexible with respect to determiner selection, while others are restricted (see (1)).

(1) a. John's/the/that/a performing/performance of the song
   b. John's/*the/*that/*a performing the song

(Zucchi 1993)

The question to answer is what properties of these two types of nominalizations create this contrast and how we can explain it theoretically.

In this talk I contribute the following observations:

1. Full (1a) vs. defective (1b) nominalizations
   On the basis of a comparison to German, Romanian and Spanish I show that the contrast in (1) correlates with a distinction between nominalizations with full vs. defective nominal structure, where the former pattern with (1a) and the latter with (1b).

2. Presence/absence of the nP layer and feature valuation between D and n
   In a syntactic approach to nominalization (e.g., van Hout & Roeper 1998, Borsley & Kornfilt 2000, Alexiadou 2001, Borer 2005), I take the fully nominal structure to be introduced by the categorizing nP layer and argue that the restriction on determiners is due to unvalued gender and number features on D which can only be valued via Agree with the corresponding lexically valued features of n. Determiners that appear in defective nominalizations (without an nP) receive a 'default' value for the two features.

The languages I discuss here are particularly illuminating in this respect, as they mark gender morphologically and one can see that syntactic gender features (see Picallo 2006) are available in full nominals, but not in defective ones.

3. 'Default' and 'expletive' determiners
   The distinction among determiners that appear with full or defective nominalizations seems to corroborates previous conclusions concerning the expletive use of definite articles in English vs. Romance languages and German.

Overview of the talk
   • Section 2: Full vs. defective nominalizations
   • Section 3: Feature valuation between DP and nP
   • Section 4: Default/Expletive determiners
   • Conclusions

¹ Thanks to Artemis Alexiadou and the audience of NELS 43 for useful comments and suggestions, and to Mariangeles Cano, Antonio Fábregas, Matias Jaque, Amanda Kahrsch, Susanne Lohrmann, Rafael Marin, Paula Menendez-Benítez, Sabine Mohr, Neil Myler, Christopher Piñón, Marcel Pitteroff, Florian Schäfer, Soledad Varela and Jim Wood for help on the data.
2. Full vs. defective nominalizations

The contrast in (1) can be replicated in German, Spanish and Romanian deverbal nominals, where the fully nominal pattern is flexible, while the more verbal one only allows the definite determiner.

**Spanish nominal vs. verbal infinitive** (Plann 1981, Miguel 1996, Ramirez 2003)

(2) a. **el/eese/aquel/un** lamentar de dos pastores
   the/this/that/a lament.Inf of two shepherds
   'the/this/that/a lamenation of the two shepherds'

b. **el/*ese/*aquel/*un** haber él escrito esa carta
   the/this/that/a have.Inf he.Nom written that letter
   'his having written this letter'

**Romanian infinitive vs. supine** (Cornilescu 2001, Iordachioaia & Soare 2008, 2009)

(3) a. **o/acea încălcare a/încălcarea** drepturilor omului de către ministru
   a/that violate.Inf of/violate.Inf the rights.Gen man.Gen by minister
   'a/that/the violation of the human rights by the minister'

b. ***un/*acel spălat al rufelor/spălatul rufelor** de către Ion
   a/that/wash.Sup of laundry.Gen/wash.Sup.the laundry.Gen by John
   'John's washing the laundry'

**German nominal vs. verbal infinitive** (Ehrich 1977, 1991, Alexiadou, Iordachioaia & Schäfer 2011)

(4) a. **das/jenes/ein** nächtliche(s) Beobachten der Sterne
   the/that/a nightly-adj observe.Inf the.Gen stars
   'the/that/an observation of the stars at night'

b. **das/*jenes/*ein** ständig (nachts) die Sterne Beobachten
   the/that/a constantly at-night the stars observe.Inf
   'the/*that/*an observing the stars at night'

In addition, German also has two deadjectival nominalizations that display a similar contrast: the suffix-based one is flexible (5a), while the bare one is not (5b) (see Alexiadou, Iordachioaia, Marzo & Umbreit 2012).

(5) a. **die/jene/eine** Schönheit des Herzens
   'the/that/a beauty of the heart'

b. **das/*jenes/*ein** Schöne(s) an der Sache
   'the/that/a beautiful thing about the business'

Previous literature has already argued for a contrast in terms of nominal properties with respect to the above nominalizations, which is best illustrated by modification tests. While nominals in (1a) - (5a) allow adjectives, the ones in (1b) - (5b) disallow them in favor of adverbs (see English (5a) vs. (5b), Romanian (6a) vs. (6b)).

2 Depending on the complexity of the verbal layers in the nominal form, adverbs may be possible, but the contrast important to us is that these nominalizations have a nominal enough structure to allow adjectives, while the more verbal ones do not and take adverbs instead.
Workshop Languages with and without articles
Paris, 28 February - 1 March

(6) a. the constant growing of tomatoes
b. John’s constantly/*constant growing tomatoes
c. the beautiful performance/performing of the song
d. John’s beautifully/*beautiful performing the song

(7) a. El duke/*dulcemente lamentar (*dulcemente) de dos pastores the sweet/sweetly lament:Inf (sweetly) of two shepherds
b. El eterno/*eternamente murmurar (*eternamente) de las fuentes the eternal/eternally murmur:Inf (eternally) of the fountains
c. El (*constante) criticar a los vecinos constantemente/*constante the (constant) criticize:Inf Acc the neighbors constantly/constant

(8) a. o spălare bună a rufelor
a wash:Inf good of laundry:Gen
b. spălatul bine/*bun al rufelor
wash:Sup the well/good of laundry:Gen
c. citirea constantă/constantă citire a cărților3 read:Inf the constant/constant the read:Inf of books:Gen
b. cititul constant/*constantul citit al cărților
read:Sup the constant/constant the read:Sup of books:Gen

(9) a. die/eine besonders Schönheit des Herzens ‘the/a special beauty of the heart’
b. das besonders/*besondere Schöne an der Sache ‘the especially/*special beautiful thing about the business’

In German, the correlation between adjectival modification and flexibility with determiners is supported by the observation that the verbal infinitive in (4b) builds a minimal pair with a more nominal version solely based on adjectival vs. adverbial modification. The flexibility of determiners shows up with the adjective (10a) and is blocked with the adverb (10b).

(10) a. das/jenes/ein ständige(s) (die) Sterne Beobachten the/that/a constant the stars observe:Inf
b. das/*jenes/*ein ständig (die) Sterne Beobachten the/that/a constantly the stars observe:Inf

Given that adjectival modification is a property intrinsic to nominal categories, I follow Alexiadou, Iordăchioaia & Schäfer (2011) and take it to indicate the presence of the categorizer level nP (see Marantz 1997, 2000, Panagiotidis 2011), which must be missing in nominalizations that disallow adjectives. The relevant levels of structure in the two kinds of nominalizations are given in (11).

(11) a. [DP ... [nP ([... ExtP...]) [orig-catP [Root full nominals (1a-10a)]
    b. [DP [... ExtP... [orig-catP [Root defective nominals (1-10b)]]

3 In Romanian, most adverbs have the same form as the corresponding masculine/neuter singular adjective, so the form in (8d) could be ambiguous. However, the impossibility of constant to be fronted indicates that it cannot be an adjective, by contrast to (8c).
• All the nominals in (1) to (9) share an external nominal syntax, i.e., they have the distribution of nouns. This is uniformly accounted for by the presence of the DP layer.

• Only the fully nominal ones also have an internal nominal syntax, which is introduced by the nP layer. The main property that I consider here to be relevant is adjectival modification.4

• In addition, various (external) projections can be inherited from the original category (i.e., vP or aP).

3. Feature valuation between DP and nP

I explain the determiner restriction in the nominalizations that follow the pattern in (11b) through the lack of the nP layer. Gender and number features are lexically carried by nouns, while determiners receive them via agreement with a noun head. Pesetsky & Torrego (2007) suggest a technical formulation as follows: number/gender come valued from the lexicon only on nouns, determiners (and adjectives) carry unvalued features which become valued via agreement with the corresponding features on the noun.

Since nP is the categorizing layer in (11), it carries the valued number and gender features. The lack of it in (11b) must be responsible for the inflexibility of the corresponding nominalizations with respect to determiners. In the absence of n, determiners cannot value their number and gender features. The determiners that are possible in (11b) will be argued to be expletive so that their unvalued features receive a default value.

Two pieces of evidence support the distinction in (11) between valued and unvalued number and gender features: the nominalizations in (11a) exhibit gender like nouns, while the ones in (11b) have a default gender value similar to that of sentences. In addition, where plural marking can be tested, it only appears in the pattern in (11a).

• Gender marking

It has already been shown for some of the nominalizations in (1) to (10) that the nominal ones have full gender, while the defective ones have a default gender value, similar to that of clauses.

In Spanish, Plann (1981) and Miguel (1996) show that the sentential anaphor ello is excluded with nominal infinitives (12a), but fine with the verbal ones (12b).5 For Romanian, Iordachioaia & Soare (2008, 2009) show a similar contrast between infinitives and supines illustrated in (13), and the same can be seen with respect to the German nominalizations in (14) (see also Alexiadou, Iordachioaia & Schäfer 2011 for infinitives).

(12) a. Accostumbrado al dulce mirar de su amada, ya no podía vivir sin él/*ello.
     ‘Used to the sweet gaze of his loved one, he could no longer live without it.’

---

4 Genitive case assignment does not seem to be related to the nominal property that is responsible for the flexibility wrt determiners: e.g., German (10a) is a nominal enough infinitive to allow determiners, despite accusative case on the object, while the Romanian supine in (3b) is less nominal in this respect, despite the genitive case on the object.

5 Plann (1981) has several other tests that tell the two nominalizations apart, including the contrast between the relative pronouns el cual and lo cual, which are employed in non-restrictive relative clauses.
b. **El comer carne** no es tan importante que no se puede prescindir de **ello/él**.

'Eating meat is not so important as not being able to do without it.'

(13) a. [Că Ion a venit], **asta/aceasta știu**.

'That John came, I know it.'

b. Am vorbit despre **interpretarea rolului Hamlet** în general.

'We spoke about the interpretation. INF of Hamlet in general.'

Se pare ca **aceasta/asta** îi consacra indubitabil pe actorii tineri. ⁶

'Apparently, this.F/??it undoubtedly validates the young actors.'

c. Am vorbit despre **interpretatul rolului Hamlet** în general.

'We spoke about the interpretation. SUP of Hamlet in general.'

Se pare ca *acesta/asta* îi atrage pe toți actorii tineri.

'Apparently *this.M.N/it attracts all the young actors.'

(14) a. Dass Hans gekommen ist, **das/dieses** weiss ich.

'That Hans came, I know it.N/this.N.'

a. **Nächtliches Beobachten der Sterne** ist sein Lieblingshobby.

at.night.Adj observe.Inf the.G stars is his favorite hobby

**Dieses/Das** entspannt ihn.

this.N/it.N relaxes him

b. **Nachts die Sterne Beobachten** ist sein Lieblingshobby.

at.night.Adv the.Acc stars observe.Inf is his favorite hobby

**Das/Dieses** entspannt ihn.

it.N/this.N relaxes him


'I was actually impressed by the beauty of his heart. I always admired it.F/this.F.'

d. Ich verstehe jetzt **das Schöne an diesem Spiel. Das/Dieses** hält mich auch weiter dabei.

'I understand now the beautiful thing about this game. It.N/*This.N also keeps me further in the game.'

- **Number marking: plural**

Nominalizations with argument structure have been argued in Grimshaw (1990) to block plural. However, Roodenburg (2006), Iordachioaia & Soare (2008, 2009), Alexiadou, Iordachioaia & Soare (2010, 2011) provide substantial counterevidence and argue that plural marking depends on the aspectual properties of the event within the nominalization and its nominal properties. Plural marking is thus only possible in the (11a) pattern, provided the aspectual criteria are met. This would be the marginal case of the English gerunds, for which we have the contrast in (15): ⁷

---

⁶ The sentential anaphor in (13b) with the infinitive is not completely out, because it is an anaphor for facts and infinitives easily allow a factive interpretation, besides the eventive one.

⁷ The Romanian supine and the Spanish nominal infinitive block plural for aspectual reasons (see Plann 1981, Miguel 1996, for the aspectual discussion in Spanish, and Iordachioaia & Soare 2009, for this particular point in both languages), while the German infinitive lacks plural altogether, possibly for phonological reasons.
(15) a. In my many readings of this book I failed to see its structure.
   b. My (often) reading(s) this book says nothing about its quality.

Despite the availability of plural in the nominal gerund in (15a), the verbal gerund only has a default singular form, just like the sentential argument in (16).

(16) [That John left the party] bothers Mary.

• A side remark on number

Coordination of defective nominalizations, unlike coordination of sentences, triggers plural number agreement with the verb, just like coordination of full nominals:

(17) a. [That John came] and [that Mary left] bothers/*bother me.
   b. John’s reading the poem and Mary’s humming a song bother/*bothers me.
   c. Cititul de poezii si colectionatul de timbre pot/*poate sa-ti ocupe tot timpul.
   Reading poems and collecting stamps can.Pl/*Sg occupy all your time.
   d. Das ständig Sterne Beobachten und das laut Lieder Singen halten/*hält ihn die ganze Zeit beschäftigt.
   Constantly watching stars and loudly singing songs keep/*keeps him busy all the time.

This, however, does not indicate that the number value in defective nominalizations is not a default one. The explanation for the picture in (17) is the following: while sentences carry no (valued or unvalued) number feature, DPs carry a valued number feature, and verbs an unvalued one (i.e., on T) that has to be valued by their subject. Each of the DPs in (17b, c, d) carry a valued singular number feature, albeit a defective one. Coordination of two singular DP builds a plural value which also appears on the verb (T) in (17b, c, d), via Agree. Coordination of two sentences, which have no number feature, will determine a default valuation of the number feature on T as singular.

• Gender and number feature valuation

In full nominals, like in lexical nouns, given that we have an nP layer, the gender and number features on D get valued via Agree with n:

(17) [DP ... [n ... [ExP ... [orig-catP] [Root


If some of the determiners that appear in full nominals and are blocked in defective ones have the status of a maximal projection (see, for instance, Giusti 1997, 2002 for demonstratives), I assume that they carry unvalued number and gender features just like D and value them via Agree with n, in a similar fashion to what Pesetsky & Torrego (2007) discuss in relation with the tense feature on V, T and the subject DP: the unvalued corresponding features agree without valuation and eventually agree with the ones on n with valuation, the result being that all the instances of the feature(s) acquire the same value.
In defective nominals, the two features receive a default value that is fixed in a principled way in each language, similarly to the sentential cases above. Languages seem to have particular determiners that are compatible with such a default number and gender value and use them as a default nominalizer for otherwise complex verbal/adjectival structures.

- **Consequences**

There are two syntactic layers that are responsible for nominalization: nP and DP. The former introduces an internal nominal syntax, while the latter is a default nominalizer introducing the external nominal syntax. The presence of the nP triggers the presence of the DP, but not the other way around.

Explaining the restriction on determiners via an Agree relation between D and n also allows a better understanding of its correlation with adjectival modification. Like determiners, adjectives also have unvalued gender and number features that must be valued via agreement with the valued features on n. They are thus fine in the nominalizations that have nP, but not in those that lack nP.

Genitive case seems to be independent of the determiner flexibility and adjectival modification, at least in Romanian, where the supine nominal employs genitive case. Genitive case may have different sources across languages: while in Spanish and, possibly, also German it may be related to the presence of n, in Romanian genitive case might be related to D, or it may be a default nominal case (see more recently Baker and Vinokurova 2010 on the coexistence of various ways to realize case).

4. 'Default'/Expletive determiners

A further question that arises is why languages differ in terms of the default determiner that they employ in defective nominalizations: in English only possessives are allowed, while in German, Spanish and Romanian it is the definite determiner.

Question: Why is the definite determiner in English not possible in defective nominalizations?

Previous literature has already observed a difference in the status of the definite determiner in English by comparison to other languages: see Vergnaud & Zubizarreta (1992), for French and English inalienable constructions, Brugger (1993), Longobardi (1994). The baseline of these works is that the definite determiner in Italian, French and German may sometimes be used expletively, a possibility that is not available in English.

---

8 I assume that default valuation takes place at Spell-Out, during the mapping to the phonological interface.
9 We might speculate that a reason why adjectives are not allowed in defective nominalizations is also that they are incompatible with default number and gender features.
Thus in German, Spanish and Romanian, the expletive definite determiner allows a quantificational adverb to take scope over the nominal in (18b, c, d). English *the* cannot be used expletively, it is fully referential so the Q-adverb in (18a) has no free variable to quantify over in the presence of an i-level predicate.10

(18) a. Beavers/*The beavers are often intelligent.  
    c. Castoriî/*Castori sunt adesea inteligenţi.  
    d. Los castores/*Castores son a menudo inteligentes.

This contrast is also observed in nominalizations below.

I use the verb guarantee to test nominalizations, because it fits well the wide denotational spectrum of the various patterns of nominalizations. As can be seen in (19), guarantee triggers the same effects with bare plurals/definite determiners and Q-adverbs like *be intelligent* in (18). In addition, it lacks s-level uses in (19’), as discussed in Kratzer (1995).

(19) a. Good papers often guarantee their acceptance for publication.  
    b. *The good papers often guarantee their acceptance for publication.

(19’) When *a/this* paper is good, it guarantees (its) acceptance for publication.

In English, the definite determiner on the derived nominal in (20a) blocks the Q-adverb on a generic reading (like in (18a)), while the presence of the possessive in (20b) allows the Q-adverb both with the verbal gerund and the derived nominal (like the definite determiner in German, Spanish and Romanian in (18b, c, d)). This confirms that the possessive in English behaves like expletive definite determiners in the other languages, while the definite determiner is referential.

(20) a. The performance of the Traviata by John (*often) guarantees the full attention of the others.  
    b. John’s performing/(performance of) the Traviata often guarantees the full attention of the others.

The definite determiner in the other languages allows the Q-adverb both in the full and the defective nominalizations. This means that the determiner is interpreted in its expletive use like in (18b, c, d).11

(21) a. Interpretarea Traviatei de către Ion adesea garantează atenția totală a celor din jur.

10 A similar case has been made for constructions like (i) below, where we have a similar split:

(i)  
    a. The children raised a/#the hand  
    b. Les enfants ont levé la main. (French, Vergnaud & Zubizarreta 1992)  
    c. Die Kinder haben die Hand gehoben. (German)  
    d. Los niños levantaron la mano. (Spanish)  
    e. Copiii au ridicat mâna. (Romanian)

11 Note that the presence/absence of *n* in nominalizations does not predict any effect with respect to whether the definite determiner is expletive or not, since in lexical nouns, which have *n*, the definite determiner can be used expletively as well.
b. **Interpretatul** Traviatei de către Ion adesea garantează atenția totală a celor din jur.

(22) a. **Das laut die Marseillaise Singen** garantiert oft die ganze Aufmerksamkeit der Zuhörer. Singing the Marseillaise loudly often guarantees the full attention of the audience.

b. **Das laute Singen der Marseillaise** garantiert oft die ganze Aufmerksamkeit der Zuhörer. The loud singing of the Marseillaise often guarantees the full attention of the audience.

(23) a. **El cantar de Juan a menudo** garantiza la total atención de los otros. John's singing often guarantees the full attention of the others.

b. **El cantar Juan a menudo** garantiza la total atención de los otros. John singing often guarantees the full attention of the others.

- **Singular definites**

The next question to address is whether the generalization about the expletive character of the determiner holds in nominalizations given that they are singular in form and the above examples involve plurals.

First, in English there seems to exist a contrast between singular and plural nouns with definite determiners (see also the discussion on kinds in Vergnaud & Zubizarreta 1992): cf. (24a, b) with (18a).

(24) a. The Bengal tiger is dangerous.
   
   b. The wounded tiger is dangerous.
   
   = #Any tiger, when it is wounded, is dangerous.

Vergnaud & Zubizarreta explain this by arguing that the grammaticality in (24a) is due to a prototype [+species] interpretation of the DP; the wounded tiger does not count as a prototype and for this reason (24b) does not have a generic reading.

In German, Spanish and Romanian, the equivalent of (24b) easily allows a generic reading, so in these languages the singular definite can also be used expletively:

(25) a. **Tigrul ranit e adesea** periculos.

   b. **Der verwundete Tiger** ist oft gefährlich

   c. **El tigre herido es a menudo** peligroso.\(^{12}\)

   The wounded tiger is often dangerous.

Some English speakers, however, seem to be able to attribute a prototype reading to the wounded tiger (see also the discussion in Dayal 2004), and then the contrast weakens. In contexts that are less prone to being interpreted as prototypes, these readings are harder.

---

\(^{12}\) For some Spanish speakers (25c) is somewhat marked. Interestingly, the same speakers report a preference for the verbal infinitive in (23b) over the nominal one in (23a). This suggests that the singular definite determiner may have less potential to be used expletively in this language.
to obtain, but they improve in a film industry context or a discussion about professions. The contrast again is not too strong among the languages.

(26) a. *The actor is often famous.
    b. ??Der Schauspieler ist oft berühmt.
    c. ??Actorul este adesea renunțat.
    d. ??El actor es a menudo famoso.

- The mass-count distinction

Second, it is not clear what the status of the defective nominalizations is in terms of the count-mass distinction. English verbal gerunds seem to disallow both mass and count quantifiers, which may have to do with the blocking of other determiners:

(27) (John's) *much/*little/*some/??a little of/*every reading this book ...

The Romanian supine is non-uniform in this respect: it allows some mass quantifiers (28a), but also some count ones (28b) with both definite and indefinite objects, but it also allows some more mass quantifiers with indefinite objects only (28c):

(28) a. prea mult spălat al rufelor/de rufe
too much wash.Sup of.the laundry.Gen/of laundry
    b. fiecare spălat al rufelor/de rufe
every wash.Sup of.the laundry.Gen/of laundry
    c. niste/un pic de spălat de rufe/*al rufelor
some/a little of wash.Sup of laundry/of the laundry.Gen

(29) a. mult/??fiecare orez
much/every rice
    b. fiecare/*mult student
every/much student

This may indicate that the Romanian supine involves some more nominal functional projections than other defective nominalizations, which are also responsible for genitive case marking (along the lines of Dobrovie-Sorin 2005). To explain the variation in (28), we would need to assume that these quantifiers occupy different positions among these functional projections.

The German verbal infinitive seems to disallow mass quantifiers, but to function better with jedes 'every', which would make it count:

(30) a. *weniges/*vieles/??jedes ständig (die) Sterne Beobachten
    b. *weniges/*vieles/jedes laut die Marseillaise Singen

If defective nominalizations were to systematically behave like mass nouns, the singular-plural problem above would disappear, since mass nouns in English have been argued to differ from German and Romance languages in a similar way to plural nouns: in generic contexts, the latter may/must employ a definite determiner:
(31) a. (*The) Gold is rare.
   b. (Das) Gold steigt im Preis.
      'The) Gold is getting more expensive.
   c. Aurul/*aur este galben.
      gold.the is yellow
   d. *(El) oro es amarillo.
      the gold is yellow

- As a final point in this respect, note that even if the nominalization data were not perfectly parallel to the ones on singular (mass or count) nouns, this doesn't exclude the possibility for a language that has an expletive determiner in some contexts to use it in another slightly different context as well. After all, the defective nominalizations discussed above are usually marked mixed categories that are obviously not part of the lexicon like common nouns and we expect them to diverge from the latter. In addition, we saw in (i) (fn. 10) that German, Spanish and Romanian, unlike English, do employ the definite determiner expletively at least in constructions with inalienable possession.

5. Conclusion and some open questions

- The determiner restriction in nominalizations seems to be related the presence/absence of an nP layer, which brings in internal nominal structure;
- In the absence of nP (in defective nominalizations), the unvalued gender and number features on D fail to be valued by n and receive a default value which is only compatible with expletive determiners;
- Languages differ with respect to the determiner they may employ expletively: while English uses the possessive, German, Romanian and Spanish use the definite determiner;
- The correlation between default determiners and expletive determiners indicates that a determiner with default features cannot contribute referentiality, i.e. nominalizations with default features are non-referential (which is what one would expect), but the opposite does not hold: non-referentiality does not entail default feature valuation, since nouns with valued features can be non-referential (e.g., in generic contexts):
  
  default features \ implies \ non-referentiality
  non-referentiality \ does not imply \ default features

5.1. The possessive: open questions

Given that English uses the possessive where the other languages employ expletive definite determiners, a further question arises as to the status of the possessive. The picture of the possessive, however, is much less unitary than the one for definite determiners. In what follows I present a first impression of the use of possessives in full and defective nominalizations.

In English, the possessive is known to accommodate a wide range of semantic relations with the noun (e.g., Marantz 1997, (32a-c)), although the verbal gerund does not allow this flexibility (33) and probably uses the possessive as a means to mark the agent for case (Alexiadou 2001).
Workshop Languages with and without articks
Paris, 28 February - 1 March

(32) a. yesterday's destruction of the city/yesterday's reading of the book
    b. John's destruction of the city/John's reading of the book
    c. the city's destruction

(33) a. John's reading the book yesterday
    b. *Yesterday's (John) reading the book

In Spanish, we cannot create minimal pairs with possessives in infinitival nominalizations, because the verbal infinitive usually has nominative case for the external argument and if the latter is missing, we get a nominal infinitive which disallows accusative case on the object (34a). We thus obtain a possessive construction only with the nominal infinitive when it takes a bare direct object as in (34a, b).

(34) a. Su cantar (*estas) baladas lo hizo famoso.
    b. Su cantar (*de) baladas lo hizo famoso.

For German, Ehrich (1977) argues that the possessive is only allowed with nominal infinitives (35a, b). The presence of the possessive, however, doesn't seem to correspond directly to the postnominal genitive case assignment, since nominal infinitives with accusative objects also allow possessives as in (35c):

(35) a. Peters Ablehnen des Angebots
    b. *Peters (ständig) das Angebot Ablehnen
    c. Peters nächtliches die Sterne Beobachten

In Romanian, the presence of the possessive seems to correlate with postnominal genitive case assignment and thus makes no difference between the two nominalizations:

(36) a. Interpretatul sau de melodii vechi l-a facut celebru.
    b. Interpretarea sa de melodii vechi l-a facut celebru.

We may conclude that English and Romanian possessives are similar in being compatible with default number and gender values, unlike the German ones, but Romance languages also differ from Germanic in only allowing pronominal possessives.

References


