When eventual semantics meets nominal form:
plural of Russian event nouns
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This paper discusses plural uses of event nominals in Russian, semantic types of these
uses and conditions a nominal needs to meet to be able to pluralize. We will show that the
range of types of plurality shown by event nominals is more or less the same as the one
attested for “verbal plurality”, whereas the prerequisites for pluralization in verbal and
nominal domains differ strikingly, and propose an explanation for this.

1. Event nominals and plurality in Russian
Before discussing plurality of event nominals, let’s first explain what we will refer to as event
nominals and how they can pluralize in Russian.

1.1. Event nominals
Almost every language has some means to denote a situation by a noun. Russian is no
exception in that it has a vast system of nominalizing suffixes (1) as well as (synchronically)
non-derived nominals that refer to situations (2).

(1) a. productive non-zero deverbal suffixes
   ▪ deverbal suffix -ni(e)/ti(e) (razrušit’ ‘destroy’ — razrušenie ‘destruction’,
     pribyt’ ‘arrive’ — pribytie ‘arrival’);
   ▪ deverbal suffix -k(a) (obrabotat’ ‘process’ — obrabotka ‘processing’);
   ▪ deverbal suffix -cij(a) (evakuirovat’ ‘evacuate’ — evakuacija ‘evacuation’);

b. zero deverbal suffixes
   ▪ deriving nouns of masculine gender (udarit’ ‘to knock’ — udar ‘a knock’);
   ▪ deriving nouns of feminine gender (uplatit’ ‘to pay’ — uplata ‘payment’);

c. mostly denominal and deadjectival suffixes
   ▪ mostly denominal suffix -ij(e) (dejstvovat’ ‘act, function’ — dejstvie ‘action’,
     veselij ‘cheerful’ — veselje ‘being cheerful, fun’);
   ▪ mostly denominal suffix -stv(o) (ručat’sja ‘warrant’ — ručatel’sto ‘warranty’,
     nedovolen ‘discontented’ — nedovol’stvo ‘discontent’).

(2) urok ‘lesson’, svad’ba ‘wedding’, grad ‘hail’, xaos ‘chaos’

All these nominals which can denote situations, whether derived or not and independently of
the type of the situation they denote, will be referred to as event nominals¹. Event nominals in
different languages differ in how many verbal properties they preserve and how close they are

¹ This continues (a little bit extensively) the tradition begun in Grimshaw 1990, Alexiadou 2001, 2004.
Using the term “event nominal” for stative atelic situation-denoting nouns can evoke some misunderstanding,
but I’ll still do it for a lack of better word(s). Its use can be justified as referring not to “event”, but to
“eventuality” (in the sense of Bach 1981, 1986). When speaking about dynamicity and telicity in the sense of e.g.
Krifka 1998, 2001, I’ll use these explicit terms. The use of word “event” here has nothing to do with the fact-
to nouns. The ability to assume nominal morphological categories and, specifically, to pluralize is traditionally one of the diagnostics of “nominalness”.

Deverbal and non-derived event-denoting nouns provide a good possibility to see what happens to eventual semantics when it gets packed into nominal form and assumes nominal categories, such as plurality. Nominals of this kind can help to test our hypotheses about what plurality of situations is and what the crucial preconditions for it look like.

In this paper we’ll look at plurality of event nominals in Russian and decide what determines pluralization of these nouns in this language.

1.2. Plurality
Generally, event nominals in Russian can pluralize just like other Russian nominals; neither of the productive event noun derivational suffixes functions as a blocker for this ability (3).

\[(3)\]
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{razrušenie} \text{ ‘destruction’} & \rightarrow \text{razrušenija} \text{ ‘destructions’} \\
\text{obrabotka} \text{ ‘processing’} & \rightarrow \text{obrabotki} \text{ ‘processings’} \\
\text{evakuacija} \text{ ‘evacuation’} & \rightarrow \text{evakuacii} \text{ ‘evacuations’} \\
\text{udar} \text{ ‘a knock’} & \rightarrow \text{udary} \text{ ‘knocks’} \\
\text{dejstvie} \text{ ‘action’} & \rightarrow \text{dejstvija} \text{ ‘actions’}
\end{align*}
\]

This goes against Grimshaw’s (1990) hypothesis that complex event nominals (CENs) cannot pluralize and against support for this view for Russian in Schoorlemmer 1998. What probably led these authors to this assumption is that Russian nominalizations usually resist attaching NP-adjuncts among which the agentive adjuncts used as test for CENs. Presence of little \(v\) in Russian nominalizations (possibly deficient, as proposed in Alexiadou 2001, 2004) can be proved by (4).

\[(4)\]
\[
\text{vmesto nastupatel’nyx dejstvij prixodilos’ zanimat’sja evakuacijami.}
\]

\(\text{Instead of aggressive campaigns one had to be busy with evacuations (=to evacuate someone).}\)

The verb \text{zanimat’sja} ‘to be busy with’ is here used as a semi-auxiliary semantically empty verb and in this sense obligatorily controls the external argument of the situation denoted by the event noun; therefore this external argument is present.

However, not all the event nominals can be pluralized: one can hardly imagine and find uses of plurals of nouns in (5).

\[(5)\]
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{prikleivanje} \text{ ‘gluing, sticking’} & \rightarrow *\text{prikleivanija} \text{ ‘gluings’} \\
\text{stroitel’stvo} \text{ ‘building’} & \rightarrow *\text{stroitel’stva} \text{ ‘buildings’} \\
\text{uborka} \text{ ‘cleaning’} & \rightarrow *\text{uborki} \text{ ‘cleanings’}
\end{align*}
\]

This difference in behaviour leads to the assumption that event nominals, just like “ordinary” object nominals, can be countable and uncountable and our task is therefore to understand what determines countability of an event nominal.
We will discuss only regular nominal plurality, when an event nominal in plural form denotes several occurrences of the event denoted by the same nominal in singular form, thus excluding nominals without singular form (like pl. *pominki* ‘funeral repast’) or those that have non-eventive plurals (like SG *znanie* ‘knowledge, knowing’ vs. PL *znaniya* ‘attainments, knowledge, information’).

We also exclude all the cases of “internal”, and not “external”, plurality when the plural form is used to denote several phases of the same situation, and not a set of different situations (like pl. *xlopki* ‘claps, a series of claps’; see e.g. Cusic 1981, Parsons 1990, Piñon 1995, Wood 2002).

2. Previous observations

2.1. Aspectual properties
As has been largely assumed, these are primarily the aspectual properties that determine whether a situation can pluralize or not, that is:

- whether it can have plural form if we are considering a noun;
- whether it can refer to several situations, with special grammatical or adverbial markers or without, if it’s a verb.

To be precise, it is telicity that was declared to be the crucial thing: if a situation is telic, it can pluralize, otherwise it cannot — see, e.g., Brinton 1995 about English deverbal nouns, Bonomi 1995, Xrakovskij (ed.) 1997, Dolinin a 1999 for verbs in different languages. Sometimes the same is argued for boundedness: bounded (Jackendoff 1991) events are said to be able to pluralize, while unbounded to lack this possibility (see e.g. Iordachioaia, Soare 2007 for Romanian nominalizations).

2.2. Complications
The situation with Russian deverbal nouns is, however, more complicated. There are clearly atelic nominals that can pluralize (6a) and definitely telic nominals that cannot (6b).

(6) a. *razgovor* ‘conversation’ — *razgovory* ‘conversations’
   b. *prikleivanie* ‘gluing’ — *prikleivanija* ‘int. gluings, sticking different instances of gluing/sticking’

As for the Russian event nominals, for different types of situations different factors were claimed to be in play, e.g. it is shown in Ljashevskaya 2004 that for situations of motion following things can prove important:

(i) nouns derived from result predicates are more likely to pluralize than manner ones (*peremeščenija* ‘displacements’ vs. *ezdy* ‘int. ridings, drivings’);
(ii) if the situation involves a destination point, it is more likely to pluralize (*poezdki* ‘journeys’ vs. *ezdy* ‘int. ridings, drivings’);
(iii) if the situation involves many participants, it is more likely to pluralize (*xoždenija* ‘walkings’ are OK if many situations with its own participant each are meant and almost excluded if consecutive actions of the same person are supposed to be referred to);

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if the situation strongly affects its participants, it is more likely to pluralize (*plavanija kapitana* ‘voyages of a captain’ vs. *plavanija brevna* ‘int. swimmings of a log’).

This list is not exhaustive, and it is clear that for verbs of another thematic group the factors will differ. What we need is more general principle of pluralizing. Let us have a closer look on how event nominals in Russian can pluralize.

3. **Plurality types**

In fact, plural event nominals are not all the same: they differ in what exact semantic type of situation plurality the plural event nominal denotes. Three major types of event plurality that can be found in event nominals:

- associative plurality (e.g. *prigotovlenija* ‘preparations’, *dejstvija* ‘actions’),
- distributive plurality (e.g. *aresty* ‘arrests’, *evakuacii* ‘evacuations’),
- repetitive plurality (e.g. *vozvraščenija* lit. ‘comings back’, *udary* ‘knocks’).

3.1. **Associative plurality**

Associative plurality is opposed to the other two types by that it doesn’t require denotative identity of the situations it names. E.g., *prigotovlenija* ‘preparations’ can refer to many different actions that can be named with the one word only because they all aim to one purpose, namely to get prepared to some event. Similarly, *presledovanija* ‘persecutions’ denotes a series of diverse actions that all lead to making someone’s life more difficult.

This type of event nominal plurality is similar to the associative plurality of object nouns when “Xs” means ‘X and things like X’, e.g. *the Smiths* ‘Smith and his family’.

This is the less constrained type of event nominal plurality, as almost every event nominal in the presence of a pragmatic necessity can be stretched to denote a whole class of similar events. However, nouns which initially have underspecified semantics in that they describe whole classes of events by naming their aims, reasons or consequences are more likely to be found bearing a plural form of this type.

3.2. **Repetitive and distributive plurality**

Distributive and repetitive plural event nominals are used to refer to sets of similar situations, i.e. they say that there have been several occurrences of the situation denoted by the event nominal. The difference between them is that repetitive set is necessarily a chain of non-intersecting (on the time axis) situations that involve at least one the same participant (7). Situations within a distributive set are not organized along the time axis, and each occurrence involves new participants, but these single occurrences should share a time interval they take place in, and/or have some common reason or aim (8).

(7) Posle našej tretjej vstreči ja užel ne udivljalsja tomu, čto ona sdelala.

After our third meeting I wasn’t surprised any more at what she did.
During past day happened two murders and one armed robbery took place.

These two types of event nominal plurality differ with respect to the conditions on the situation that pluralizes. For repetitive situations it is required that different instances of the situation don’t overlap and the result of the previous occurrence is annulled before the beginning of the next one, the key participants of the situation being always the same. Distributive plurality requires different participants in each occurrence of the situation and the same time interval, reason or aim, without saying anything about the distribution of the occurrences along the time axis. Moreover, each occurrence in a distributive set has to be an important event itself, which is trivially satisfied in situations involving or affecting people. Therefore the contrast between *plavanija kapitana ‘voyages of a captain’ vs. *plavanija brevna ‘int. swimmings of a log’ in 2.2 (iv) above.

3.3. Nominal vs. verbal plurality

The same two semantic types of event plurality (distributive and repetitive) have been observed for verbal event plurality in Russian (see Xrakovskij 1989, Dolinina 1999), as well as in other languages (e.g., Matthewson 2000, Kratzer 2005). For instance, (9a) shows an example of verbal distributive plurality while (9b) of repetitive one.

(9) a. Segodnja student razdaet dolgi.
     today student give.out debts
     Today the student pays off his debts.

     b. Každyj god ja priežžaju sjuda.
        every year I come here

Every year I come here.

However, it can be shown that verbal plurality doesn’t meet the restrictions on nominal plurality described above, being rather driven by boundedness constraint. For instance, for prikleivanie (marok) ‘gluing, sticking (of stamps)’ both repetitive and distributive plurality are excluded, since the result of this action is usually irreversible (therefore no repetitive plurality) and it doesn’t affect people (thus no distributive). In the verbal form the same situation can be easily pluralized distributively (10a) and with some contextual support even repetitively (10b).

(10) a. Ja dva časa prikleival marki na konverty.
     I two hours glued stamps on envelopes

     b. Ja dva časa prikleival marku na konvert, no ona postojanno otkleivalas’.
        I two hours glued stamp on envelope but it continually came unstuck

I stuck stamps on the envelopes for two hours, but it continually came unstuck.
These two situations can be easily described with event noun prikleivanie ‘sticking’, but, crucially, not with plural event noun: the situation in (10a) corresponds to (dvućasovoe) prikleivanie marok ‘sticking stamps for two hours’, and (10b) to (dvućasovoe) prikleivanie marki ‘sticking a stamp for two hours’, but *(dvućasovye) prikleivaniaja marok ‘sticking-PL stamps for two hours’ is completely out.

What differentiates event nominals from verbs is the nature of the factors that determine the possibility to pluralize, namely, aspectuality plays almost no role, what is important is the position on the time axis, participants and reasons/aims etc.

4. General constraints on nominal and verbal plurality

One can see that for both repetitive and distributive plurality there are certain constrains which work in opposite directions:

- constraints which aim at differentiating the atomic occurrences of the situation in the set
  - non-overlapping for repetitive plurality
  - different participants for the distributive one
- constraints which require the occurrences to be alike
  - same participants for repetitive situations
  - common time interval/reason/aim for distributive ones.

Moreover, the same holds for the associative event plurality: the situations are intrinsically different (and the differentiality requirement is thus satisfied) but we refer to them as to one single category — if we can find a category they all fit in — thereby making them similar.

This seems to be a reflection of the general constraint on nominal plurality first noticed as early as in Jespersen 1924 (pp. 188-189): “Plurality <…> presupposes difference, but on the other hand if the difference is too great, it is impossible to use words like two or three. A pear and an apple are two fruits, <…> a brick and a musical sound are not two”. For a set to be able to be named with a word in plural form its elements should be enough similar (to be named with one word) and at the same time enough distinguishable from one another (to be able to be named with a plural word and not a mass term).

For object nominals these differences and similarities can be described in terms of their physical properties, such as shape, color, weight, dimensions, their spatial boundaries, their parts and the substance they are maid of. For event nominals we have temporal dimensions instead of spatial ones, participants instead of parts and thematic characteristics instead of stuff, but the role these properties play in determining whether the nominal can pluralize or not is the same.

Several frameworks of verbal meaning description and situation decomposition (Rappaport Hovav&Levin 1998, Ramchand 2002, 2003, a.m.o.) let us suppose that the range of variability of situations is more restricted than that of world objects. This can explain why it has been so easy to classify all the types of event nominal plurality and to attest our three classes.

A possible explanation for the difference in verbal and event nominal plurality is that verbal plurality is an instance of aspect (AspP projection) and therefore it is driven by aspeckual properties of the situations such as boundedness. Event nominal plurality is an instance of nominal plurality and reflects NumP projection which is attached after the verbal stem is
nominalized. That’s why it doesn’t distinguish among deverbal event nominals, non-derived event nominals and object nominals: all of them should denote sets in which the items are at the same time similar and easily distinguishable.

The differences described above make us conclude that in Russian nominal plurality is not parallel to verbal plurality. The latter is determined by the aspectual properties of the situation, the former by its temporal boundaries and its “substance”, that is, its participants and other lexical characteristics, just as for common object nominals their plurality is determined by the spatial boundaries of objects and the stuff they are made of.

References