Numerous authors have pointed a semantic correspondence between (a)telicity in the verbal domain and the mass/count distinction in the nominal domain, due to homeomery and boundedness (cf. Mourelatos 1978, Bach 1986, Jackendoff 1991, Brinton 1991, Meinschaefer 2005 *inter alia*):

(1) a. bounded
   book                count noun
   eat an apple       telic situation type
b. unbounded
   water               mass noun
   sleep               atelic situation type

Mourelatos in particular assumes that nominalizations inherit the (un)boundedness of their base verbs. Activity verbs are thus supposed to yield mass nouns:

(2) a. John pushed the cart for hours.
   b. For hours there was pushing of the cart by John.
   (Mourelatos 1978: 426-427)

This analogy between mass/count and atelic/telic can be contested as far as French is concerned.

1. French nominalizations of activity verbs [ActNs] may be mass nouns (e.g. *jardinage* ‘gardening’, *natation* ‘swimming’, *jonglage* ‘jugglery’) as well as count nouns (e.g. *manifestation* ‘demonstration’, *promenade* ‘stroll’, *discussion* ‘discussion’) (cf. Flaux & Van de Velde 2000, Haas *et al.* 2008, Heyd & Knittel 2009). Only the latter denote events:

(3) a. (La manifestation / la promenade / la discussion) a eu lieu dans l’après-midi.
   ‘(The demonstration / the stroll / the discussion) took place in the afternoon.’
   b. (*Le jardinage / *la natation / *le jonglage) a eu lieu dans l’après-midi.
   ‘(The gardening / the swimming / the jugglery) took place in the afternoon.’

2. Count ActNs differ from other eventive nominals by denoting homogeneous events. Unlike accomplishment nominalizations, they verify the imperfective paradox which apply to activity verbs (cf. Dowty 1979, Haas & Huyghe to appear):

(4) a. La traversée du fleuve a été interrompue → Ils n’ont pas traversé le fleuve
   ‘The crossing of the river was interrupted’ → ‘They haven’t crossed the river’
   b. La vente du tableau a été interrompue → Ils n’ont pas vendu le tableau
   ‘The selling of the painting was interrupted’ → ‘They haven’t sold the painting’

(5) a. La manifestation a été interrompue → Ils ont manifesté
   ‘The demonstration was interrupted’ → ‘They have demonstrated’
The stroll was interrupted → ‘They have strolled’

Though bounded, count ActNs show no culmination. They don’t have any telos determining the end of the action. They do preserve the atelic feature of their base verbs.

3. The mass/count distinction does not correlate with (a)telicity, but rather with *occurrentiality* (i.e. description of events, as dynamic individuals). Such an aspectual feature may be specified for nouns, while being irrelevant for verbs:

(6)

a. *jardiner* ‘garden’

\begin{array}{ll}
\text{manifeste} & \text{‘demonstrate’} \\
\end{array}

\begin{array}{ll}
[+\text{dyn}] & [+\text{dur}] \\
[–\text{clm}] & \\
\end{array}

b. *jardinage* ‘gardening’

\begin{array}{ll}
\text{manifestation} & \text{‘demonstration’} \\
\end{array}

\begin{array}{ll}
[+\text{dyn}] & [+\text{dur}] \\
[–\text{clm}] & [–\text{occ}] \\
\end{array}

Occurrentiality in the verbal domain depends upon tense and contextual elements, i.e. upon parameters of grammatical and/or actualization aspect (determined by the whole proposition, cf. Declerck 2007). It is assumed that these parameters lexicalize in the nominal domain, because of the grammatical properties of the category.

References


