Telicity and countability in French action nouns

Richard Huyghe
University of Fribourg
richard.huyghe@unifr.ch

Introduction

This talk deals with the delimitation of events as denoted by action nouns (ANs) in French. It focuses on telicity in the nominal domain, and how it relates to the mass/count distinction.

<u>Lexical aspect and nominalization</u>
The idea of a cross-categorial transfer of lexical aspect in nominalizations (i.e. eventuality-denoting deverbal nouns) is often implicitly assumed in the literature.

(1)   Aspect Preservation Hypothesis (APH)
        "The lexical aspect of a verb is preserved under nominalization if the resulting nominal denotes an eventuality" (Fábregas *et al.* 2012)

The APH is challenged by various data, especially regarding psych verb nominalizations and the preservation of dynamicity. The transfer of other aspectual properties, such as telicity, should also be investigated.

<u>Telicity and countability</u>
How is telicity marked for nouns, and how can it be tested? Does the (a)telicity of nouns pattern with their mass/count status, as expected in most theories?

→ The mass/count distinction does not correspond to (a)telicity, but to a particular form of event delimitation that does not have an equivalent in the verbal domain.

NB: It is assumed here that telicity and countability are lexical features that apply to verbs and nouns. Default values are specified for lexical entries, that may be contextually shifted or coerced, but that also account for the standard uses of nouns and verbs.

1. Telicity in the nominal domain

Telicity is less prominent in the nominal domain than in the verbal domain, and more difficult to test.

1.1. *En* 'in' and *pendant* 'for' modifiers

En 'in' and *pendant* 'for' adverbials usually depend upon sentence predicates, not upon NPs:

(2)   *Ils ont organisé une réunion en deux heures.*
        'They organized a meeting in two hours'

• Out of context, ANs would rather select *en* 'in' and *pendant* 'for' modifiers:

(3)   a. *une démolition {en / ?pendant} trois jours* 'a demolition {in / for} three days'
        b. *un déménagement {en / ?pendant} trois heures* 'a moving {in / for} three hours'
        c. *une liquidation {en / ?pendant} deux jours* 'a liquidation {in / for} two days'

(4)   a. *un chantage {pendant / ?en} deux mois* 'a blackmail {for / in} two months'
        b. *une dispute {pendant / ?en} deux heures* 'an argument {for / in} two hours'
        c. *une conversation {pendant / ?en} dix minutes* 'a conversation {for / in} ten minutes'

• Some ANs with *en* 'in' or *pendant* 'for' modifiers can be found in corpora:

(5)   *« Aconit va connaître son plus haut fait d'armes : la destruction en moins de 24 heures de deux sous-marins allemands. »*
        'Aconit will achieve her greatest deed: the destruction of two German
        U-boats in less than 24 hours.'
        (http://www.ordredelaliberation.fr/fr/compagnons/les-unites-militaires/la-corvette-aconit-1941-1947)

(6)   *« L'implantation d'une base scientifique temporaire sur l'îlot de Clipperton et son fonctionnement pendant plusieurs mois nécessitent la prise en compte de différents facteurs. »*
        'Setting up a temporary scientific base on Clipperton island and running it for several months require several factors to be taken into account.'
        (http://eduscol.education.fr/clipperton/camp/camp0.htm)

→ Nouns derived from accomplishment verbs (3) & (5) / activity verbs (4) & (6) preserve the (a)telic feature of their base verbs.

1.2. Imperfective paradox

The 'imperfective paradox' used in the verbal domain to highlight (a)telicity can be adapted to the nominal domain.

The interruption of atelic events does not prevent them from having occurred (Dowty 1979):

(7)   a. *John stopped painting the picture* DOES NOT ENTAIL *John did paint a picture*.
        b. *John stopped walking* ENTAILS *John did walk*.

The same principle holds for nominal events (Haas *et al*. 2008):

(8)   TELIC EVENT
        L'accouchement a été interrompu DOES NOT ENTAIL *Elle a accouché*.
        'The delivery was interrupted' DOES NOT ENTAIL 'She gave birth'.

(9)   ATELIC EVENT
        La discussion a été interrompue ENTAILS *Ils ont discuté*.
        'The talk was interrupted' ENTAILS 'They talked'.

The actualization of the event implies (8) / does not imply (9) the reaching of a specified endpoint.

1.3. Mass/count distinction

A parallel is generally assumed between (a)telicity in the verbal domain and the mass/count distinction in the nominal domain (see Bach 1986, Krifka 1989, Jackendoff 1991, Brinton 1995, Meinschaefer 2005, *inter alia*):

(10)   UNBOUNDED
        mud   MASS N
        sleep   ATELIC SITUATION TYPE

(11)   BOUNDED
        chair   COUNT N
        give birth   TELIC SITUATION TYPE

If the APH is right, (12) is expected to be true :

(12)   a. Achievement / accomplishment nominalizations → count nouns
         b. Activity nominalizations → mass nouns

The case of French activity nominalizations

French activity verbs derive both count and mass nouns (Flaux & Van de Velde 2000, Heyd & Knittel 2009, Huyghe 2011):

(13)   mass ANs: *jardinage* 'gardening', *natation* 'swimming', *jonglage* 'juggling', *braconnage* 'poaching', *patinage* 'skating', *espionnage* 'spying', *rabâchage* 'harping on'

(14)   count ANs: *manifestation* 'demonstration', *promenade* 'stroll', *discussion* 'discussion', *bombardement* 'bombardment', *bataille* 'battle', *voyage* 'trip', *célébration* 'celebration'

(15)   mass/count ANs: *danse* 'dance/dancing', *recherche* 'research', *randonnée* 'hike/hiking', *chasse* 'hunt/hunting', *marche* 'walk/walking', *pratique* 'practice', *dialogue* 'dialogue'

In their standard use, the nouns in (13)-(15) combine with mass and/or count determiners:

(16)   a. *du jardinage* 'some gardening', *un peu de natation* 'a bit of swimming', *beaucoup de jonglage* 'a lot of juggling'
         b. *??plusieurs jardinages* 'several gardenings', *??trois natations* 'three swimmings', *??quelques jonglages* 'a few juggleries'

(17)   a. *deux manifestations* 'two demonstrations', *quelques promenades* 'a few strolls', *plusieurs bombardements* 'several bombardments'
         b. *#de la manifestation* 'some manifestation', *??beaucoup de promenade* 'a lot of stroll', *??un peu de bombardement* 'a bit of bombardment'

(18)   a. *de la danse* 'some dancing', *beaucoup de recherche* 'a lot of research', *un peu de randonnée* 'a bit of hiking'
         b. *trois danses* 'three dances', *plusieurs recherches* 'several researches', *quelques randonnées* 'a few hikes'

Countability and temporal boundedness

There are two possibilities regarding the lexical aspect of count activity nouns:
  (i)   Count activity nouns do not preserve the aspect of their base verbs → The APH is wrong.
  (ii) Count activity nouns do preserve the aspect of their base verbs → The analogy between mass/count and atelic/telic is wrong.

• Count activity nouns denote durative bounded actions. Only mass activity nouns seem to correspond to activities, as defined in verbal Aktionsart.

	[±dynamic]	[±durative]	[±bounded]
jardiner / manifester	+	+	−
jardinage	+	+	−
manifestation	+	+	+

Table 1. Boundedness as a lexical feature in activity verbs and nominalizations

• Yet, according to the imperfective paradox, count activity nominalizations are atelic :

(19)   a. *La manifestation a été interrompue* ENTAILS *Ils ont manifesté*.
             'The demonstration was interrupted' ENTAILS 'They demonstrated.'
             b. *La promenade a été interrompue* ENTAILS *Ils se sont promenés*.
             'The stroll was interrupted' ENTAILS 'They strolled.'
             c. *La réunion a été interrompue* ENTAILS *Ils se sont réunis*.
             'The meeting was interrupted' ENTAILS 'They met.'

Nouns in (19) indicate a final boundary, but no culmination, i.e. no natural point of completion determining that final boundary.

NB: Nominal homogeneity and boundedness are not contradictory (Mittwoch 1988, Langacker 1991, Zucchi & White 2001, Rothstein 2010).

(20)   a. *line*, *beep*, *fence*, *pond*, *twig*
             b. *tree*, *chair*, *computer*

Count activity nouns are the abstract equivalent of concrete homogeneous count nouns (20a).

→ Count activity nominalizations do inherit the atelic feature of their base verbs. Countability does not correlate with telicity. Nominal boundedness has to be clarified.

2. Telicity and occurrentiality

What is the exact semantic content of the mass/count property for ANs?

2.1. Activity nouns and event denotation

• Mass activity nouns are mostly used in the *faire du N* ('do some N') expression and in generic singular NPs (Heyd & Knittel 2009):

(21)   *faire {du jardinage / de la natation / du patinage / du braconnage / du jonglage}*
             'do {some gardening / some swimming / some skating / some poaching / some juggling}'

(22)   a. *{Le jardinage / la natation / le patinage / le braconnage / le jonglage}, c'est agréable.*
             '{Gardening / swimming / skating / poaching / juggling} is nice.'
             b. *Sylvain aime {le jardinage / la natation / le patinage / le braconnage / le jonglage}.*
             'Sylvain loves {gardening / swimming / skating / poaching / juggling}.'

Faire du N involves an activity reading, even when used with concrete nouns:

(23)   a. *J'ai fait {du jardinage / du cheval} pendant deux heures.*
             'I did {some gardening / some horse riding} for two hours.'
             b. **J'ai fait {du jardinage / du cheval} en deux heures.*
             'I did {some gardening / some horse riding} in two hours.'

Definite singular generics build upon the non-distinction of individuals, and directly refer to types of entities (Corblin 1987, Kleiber 1990). They differ from plural generics, which denote open classes of entities, and are unusable with mass activity nouns:

(24)   **{Les jardinages / les natations / les patinages}, c'est agréable.*
             '{Gardenings / swimmings / skatings} are nice.'

• Unlike mass activity nouns, count activity nouns can denote 'events', i.e. individuated instances of actions that occur in space and time.

They can be the subject of *avoir lieu* ('take place'):

(25)   *{La manifestation / la discussion / la promenade / la célébration / la bataille} a eu lieu dans l'après-midi.*
'{The demonstration / the discussion / the stroll / the celebration / the battle} took place in the afternoon.'

(26)   *{*Le jardinage / *le jonglage / *le braconnage / #le patinage / #la natation} a eu lieu dans l'après-midi.*
'{The gardening / the juggling / the poaching / the skating / the swimming} took place in the afternoon.'

They appear in prototypical eventive constructions (Van de Velde 2006, Bittar 2010, Arnuphy 2012):

(27)   a. *Il y a eu des manifestations violentes à Khartoum le mois dernier.*
'There were violent demonstrations in Khartoum last month.'
b. *La bataille de Valmy a été un événement marquant.*
'The Battle of Valmy was a memorable event.'
c. *Son voyage au Japon a été reporté à l'année prochaine.*
'His trip to Japan was postponed until next year.'

They can be used in generic plural NPs:

(28)   a. *{Les voyages / les promenades / les manifestations}, c'est sympa.*
'{Trips / strolls / demonstrations} are nice.'
b. *Les généraux raffolent {des bombardements / des batailles / des célébrations}.*
'Generals are crazy about {bombardments / battles / celebrations}.'

With respect to their ability to denote events, count activity nouns are similar to accomplishment nominalizations, which are also count nouns:

(29)   *{L'accouchement / le cambriolage / la vente / l'inauguration / la perquisition} a eu lieu dans l'après-midi.*
'{The delivery / the burglary / the sale / the inauguration / the house-search} took place in the afternoon.'

→ The countability of ANs correlates with their ability to denote 'events', i.e. **occurrences** of actions.

2.2. Occurrences in the verbal domain

The ability to denote occurrences (**occurrentiality**) is specified in the nominal lexicon but not in the verbal lexicon.

• Occurrences are denoted in examples (30):

(30)   a. *Pierre {jardine / a jardiné / va jardiner} ce matin.*
'Pierre {is doing some gardening / did some gardening / will do some gardening} this morning.'
b. *Vincent {se promène / s'est promené / va se promener} ce matin.*
'Vincent {is strolling / strolled / will stroll} this morning.'

The denotation of individuated dynamic situations relies upon tense marking and contextual elements such as the specification of a spatio-temporal location.

• Occurrences are not denoted in sentences involving habitual aspect (31) or type interpretation (32):

(31)   a. *Pierre {jardine / jardinait / a l'habitude de jardiner} le matin.*
        'Pierre {does some gardening / used to do some gardening / is used to gardening} in the morning.'
        b. *Vincent {se promène / se promenait / a l'habitude de se promener} le matin.*
        'Vincent {strolls / used to stroll / is used to strolling} in the morning.'

(32)   a. *Sophie aime {jardiner / se promener}.*
        'Sophie loves {to swim / to stroll}.'
        b. *{Jardiner/ se promener}, c'est agréable.*
        '{Gardening / strolling} is nice.'

→ Occurrentiality in the verbal domain is not determined by the semantics of the verb. Verbs, whether they yield mass or count nominalizations, can refer to occurrences and non-occurrences.

The difference between verbal and nominal semantics appears in generic expressions. The uniqueness of the verbal form in (32) contrasts with the two nominal forms in the following paraphrases:

(33)   a. *Sophie aime {le jardinage / les promenades}.*
        'Sophie loves {gardening / strolls}.'
        b. *{Le jardinage / les promenades}, c'est agréable.*
        '{Gardening is nice / Strolls are nice}.'

Verbal / nominal boundedness

In the verbal domain, lexical boundedness is restricted to telicity. In the nominal domain, lexical boundedness is divided between telicity and occurrentiality.

	[±dynamic]	[±durative]	[±telic]	[±occurrential]
accoucher	+	+	+	d.n.a.
jardiner/manifester	+	+	−	d.n.a.
accouchement	+	+	+	+
jardinage	+	+	−	−
manifestation	+	+	−	+

Table 2. Telicity and occurrentiality in verbal and nominal Aktionsarten

→ The verbal aspectual classification does not account for nominal aspect.

2.3. Mass/count distinction and actualization aspect (un)boundedness

It is sometimes argued that the mass/count distinction corresponds to grammatical (*vs*. lexical) aspect boundedness (Mourelatos 1978) or to 'actualization aspect' boundedness (Declerck 2007).

• (Un)boundedness in actualization aspect applies to clauses as opposed to verbs and VPs, and differs from (a)telicity, with which it is compatible (Depraetere 1995):

(34)   UNBOUNDED ACTUALIZATION ASPECT
         John was opening the parcel.   TELIC
         Judith was playing in the garden in the course of the afternoon.   ATELIC

(35)   BOUNDED ACTUALIZATION ASPECT
         John opened the parcel.   TELIC
         Judith played in the garden this afternoon.   ATELIC

Count activity nouns seem to be semantically equivalent to atelic bounded.

• However, the representation of a situation as unbounded does not prevent it from being an occurrence, as in (34).

Count atelic ANs are compatible with unbounded actualization aspect. (36a) can be paraphrased by (36b):

(36)   a. *Les agriculteurs sont en train de manifester à Paris.*
         'The farmers are demonstrating in Paris.'
         b. *Il y a une manifestation des agriculteurs en cours à Paris.*
         'There is an ongoing demonstration of the farmers in Paris.'

→ The analogy between the mass/count distinction and grammatical aspect or actualization aspect (un)boundedness does not hold.

Conclusion

• The mass/count property of ANs does not correlate with the description of (a)telicity, but with the ability to denote occurrences (i.e. individuated instances of actions).

Occurrentiality is a form of event delimitation that is lexically marked for nouns but not for verbs.

• The difference between nominal and verbal event denotations is due to the grammatical properties of each category, such as the absence of tense marking for nouns, or the inability to directly denote situations for verbs.

Whereas verbs are fundamentally predicative units, nouns are reification devices. They include more autonomous elements of description than verbs.

• Nominalizations preserve the (a)telicity of their verbal bases. Nevertheless, the issue of aspectual preservation might be reductive, because different sets of aspectual features apply to nouns and verbs.

The case of activity nominalizations shows that the aspectual classification may change between the verbal and nominal domains.

A theory of cross-categorial lexical aspect will be incomplete if it does not account for the structural differences between nominal and verbal Aktionsarten.

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