

## Aspecual classes in event nouns: plurality and unity of events

*Main session: aspect, Aktionsart, formal semantic approach*

The issue of the internal complexity of events has become relevant for the definition of aspectual classes. While achievements and accomplishments are generally viewed as denoting bounded and well defined events by themselves, a consistent line of analysis considers activities as internally complex events whose atomic structure, although relevant, is not accessible to speakers (Dowty 1979, Landman 2008, a.o.). Within this picture, semelfactive predicates in their processive reading may be seen as a problematic case: they are similar to activities in their being atelic, while differing from them for the presence of naturally atomic subcomponents in their internal structure (Rothstein 2008). The question is: are semelfactives instances of activities or are they built as pluralities of (telic) events? In this talk, we approach the issue starting from the aspectual properties of nominalizations such as Italian *bastonata*, which denotes events of beating up or hitting once with a stick.

**ATA-nominalizations** Italian nominalizations ending in *-ata* (ATA-nom) that can occur in light-*v* constructions denote events and can take as a base both an activity verb, e.g. *camminare* (walk) (1), or a noun, e.g. *cuscino* (pillow) (2) (Scalise 1984, Ippolito 1999, Gaeta 2000, Acquaviva 2005).

- (1) Mario ha fatto una camminata in montagna  
M. has made a walk in mountain      ‘M. went hiking on the mountains’
- (2) Mario ha dato una cuscinata a Luca  
M. has given a pillow-blow to Luca      ‘M. hit Luca with a pillow’

ATA-nom denote one instance of event, but the choice of the base used in the derivation correlates with a major interpretive difference. In verb-based ATA-nom, the criterion for delimiting the event unit is not provided by the verb, since the base must be atelic and durative, with some exceptions such as *entrata* that are analysable as cases of coercion. A *camminata* is an instance of the activity of walking, whose minimal instantiation cannot be reduced to a singular step. It is to be defined in terms of saliency and not of structural atomicity of the minimal event. N-based ATA-nom, e.g. *cuscinata*, on the other hand, have a semel reading (a single blow), where the event may be seen as the manifestation of an action performed using the N as an instrument, and the action is made complete by the contact of the instrument with a goal.

- (3) Mario ha dato una cuscinata a Luca, # ma dopo qualche colpo il cuscino si è aperto.  
‘M. hit Luca with a pillow, but after a few blows the pillow split open’

**Semelfactive nominalizations** Next, there are cases such as *bastonata*, *frustata*, *martellata* where the ATA-nom can in principle be formed on a N (*bastone* ‘stick’) or on a V (*bastonare*, ‘to beat with a stick’). The verb itself denotes an action performed with an instrument. If one considers its interpretation, then, *bastonare* may be subsumed under the class of semelfactive predicates, together with *to knock* or *to drip*, as discussed by (Rothstein 2004, 2008). The interesting fact is that with *bastonata* both readings in (1) and (2) are possible: the ATA-nom may denote either a single blow (4) or an instance of the processive verb *bastonare*, that is, a succession of blows (5).

- (4) Mario ha dato una bastonata al fantoccio e il colpo ha tranciato di netto la gamba.  
‘M. hit the puppet with a stick and the blow cut the leg clean off’
- (5) M. ha dato una bastonata al fantoccio, ma dopo qualche colpo il bastone si è rotto.  
‘M. beat the puppet with a stick, but after a few blows the stick broke’

The question we address is thus the following : is the non-semel reading a case of plurality or is *bastonare* an activity on a par with *camminare* in (1)?

**Plurality and sentience** A first observation is that, while *bastonata* may denote a plurality of events also in its singular form (5), N-based *cuscinata* must bear a morphological mark of plurality in order to be interpreted as denoting plural events, cf. (3) vs.(6).

(6) Mario ha dato delle cuscinate<sub>PL</sub> a Luca, e dopo qualche colpo il cuscino s'è aperto.  
'M. gave/beated L. with a pillow, and after a few blows the pillow split open'

The plural ATA-nom in (6) seems a better candidate for denoting a plurality of events than the singular ATA-nom *bastonata*. But of course *bastonata* can also be pluralized and have non-semel interpretation (7).

(7) Mario ha dato delle bastonate<sub>PL</sub> al fantoccio #e il colpo ha tranciato di netto la gamba/<sup>OK</sup>e dopo qualche colpo il bastone si è rotto.  
'M. gave several blows to the puppet with a stick #and the blow cut the leg clean off/but after a few blows the stick broke '

A second set of data supporting the analysis of the nominalization as denoting a singular event, then, comes from thematic differences. In the case of nominalizations with activity readings, the agent must be *sentient* (Dowty 1991), i.e. she must be aware of her participation in the whole event. The processive reading of a verb like *frustare* ('whip'), for example, is not available with an inanimate agent/causer, which nevertheless can be involved in a plurality of events (8). Similarly, only the semel reading of singular *bastonata* is accessible with a non-sentient agent, contrast (5) with (9), where sentience is suspended by the subject-oriented modifier. The morphologically plural form denotes the pluralization of the N-based single event nominalization, as expected.

(8) Il cavo si è rotto e [#ha frustato il muro/<sup>ok</sup>ha dato frustate al muro] fino al mattino.  
The cable broke and whipped the wall/gave lashes against the wall until morning.

(9) Mario ha dato #una bastonata/<sup>OK</sup>delle bastonate<sub>PL</sub> al fantoccio senza accorgersene, e dopo qualche colpo il bastone s'è rotto  
Mario gave #one/several blows to the puppet with a stick without noticing, and after a few blows the stick broke

The agent's commitment is taken into consideration in conceptualizing as a unitary event what could otherwise look like a plurality of subevents, as confirmed by the necessity of sentience for the felicity of (5). A mere plurality of events can be expressed by pluralizing the nominalization that has a semel reading and is built on the nominal base, cf. (8).

**Summing up** By assuming a double derivation for ata-nominalizations based on instrument verbs, we are able to preserve the assumption that nominalizations inherit their aspectual properties from the base. The examination of their semel reading also contributes also to the discussion about the characterization of events as individual units. Processive verbs such as *bastonare* are thus complex individuals that cannot be considered only the sum of their internal parts, but rather need an intensional component, such as the agent's will or intention, in order to be understood as *bona fide* activities.

**Selected references** Acquaviva (2005) Significati delle nominalizzazioni in ATA in Italiano e loro correlati morfologici. In Grossmann & Thornton (eds) *37 congresso della SLI* • Dowty (1991) Thematic proto-roles and argument selection. *Language* 67, 547-619 • Gaeta (2002) *Quando i verbi compaiono come nomi* Franco Angeli Editore • Landman (2008) 1066. On the aspectual differences between English and Dutch. *Theoretical and Crosslinguistic Approaches to the Semantics of Aspect*, John Benjamins • Rothstein(2004) *Structuring events*. Blackwell • Rothstein(2008) Two puzzles for a theory of lexical aspect: the case of semelfactives and degree adverbials. *Event Structures in Linguistic Form and Interpretation* Mouton De Gruyter, 175-198