

## On meaning construction of nominalised infinitives

This paper examines the specific contribution of the meaning of nominalised infinitives (*das Reisen*) in German, compared to verbal infinitives (*(zu) reisen*) on the one hand, and nominalisations on the basis of derivations (*die Reise*) on the other. Based on the assumption that a nominalised infinitive (NI) constitutes a situation nominalisation generated through conversion and, in comparison to derivatives, is not subject to systematic blocking effects or limited formation, we investigate the significant difference in meaning between these two types of word formation in the case of situation nominalisations. We argue that the difference is situated in the area of nominal aspectuality: Due to their different perspectivities, the respectively corresponding nominalisations (*das Fahren* vs. *die Fahrt*, *das Springen* vs. *der Sprung*, *das Wandern* vs. *die Wanderung*) can, depending on the base verb's semantics, form a nominal aspect pair and therefore exhibit a complementary relationship.

In a first step, various options of potential differences in meaning between conversion and derivation will be discussed which transpire, however, to rather be common differences between all situation nominalisations and the verbal infinitive: Both products of word formation preserve the base verb's type of situation but can also denote facts and objects in addition to situations; (in terms of syntax) both products nominal-typically and facultatively realise the deverbal arguments and modifiers; and both have the same potential in regard to particular or generic reference. The common difference between situation nominalisations and verbal infinitives is that the former is focused more strongly on typification while the latter focuses predominantly on individuation.

In a second step, the semantic and grammatical features of NIs will be comprehensively described and contrasted with the derivational situation nominalisations. It will be shown that derivation on the basis of the verbal stem (*die Reise*) generally results in countable nouns (such as *das Meer*) and that conversion on the basis of verbal infinitives always leads to mass nouns (such as *die See*). In this case, derivation can be used to form nouns that are conceptualised as discrete and limited entities while conversion only generates nouns that are denoted as indiscrete and unlimited entities.

The distinct properties of mass nouns will be applied to the NIs to show that NIs are continuative nouns. These criteria refer to the types of pluralisation, countability and definiteness. If NIs do not denote discrete unities, then

- (i) it also becomes impossible to form discrete multities. The grammatical reflex is a defective category of grammatical number in NIs (*das Tanzen*/\**die Tanzen*). While from a morphological perspective they are in the singular, they can be semantically classified as neither a singular nor a plural. It is therefore possible to anaphorically refer to singular as well as plural situations with the help of NIs while a differentiation according to grammatical number is mandatory in the case of corresponding derivations (*der Tanz*/*die Tänze*).

- (ii) NIs cannot be counted and therefore not directly combined with numerals (*\*das drei Tanzen*). An explicit quantity with which to measure NIs must first be introduced in order to make them accessible to an amount (*das dreistündige/dreimalige Tanzen*). By contrast, and similar to genuinely individuated nouns, the complementary derivations themselves possess an inherent measure and can therefore readily be counted and combined with numerals (*die drei Tänze*).
- (iii) NIs cannot simply be combined with an indefinite determiner (*\*ein Tanzen*) as this always presupposes countability. It can therefore refer to both a quantitative ‘many’ as well as to the qualitative ‘of many kinds’. Individuated nouns (*ein Tanz*) are also always interpreted quantitatively, which is not possible for continuative nouns. They can merely be quantitatively subclassified with the help of measure words (*die drei Arten des Tanzens*) or with an additional modifier (*ein wildes Tanzen*).

A significant difference in meaning between the situation nominalisations is that, due to their conceptualisations as limited entities, the (individuated) derivatives can denote both a quality and a quantity. They possess an inherent measure and exist as singulars with a certain amount in DPs. By contrast, (continuative) conversions always denote only a quality due to their conceptualisation as unlimited entities. They do not possess an inherent measure and exist as (default) singulars with neither a certain nor an uncertain amount in DPs. Due to the (lacking) differentiation of grammatical number as well as (lacking) countability, this semantic distinction has two clear grammatical reflexes: NIs are singularia tantum and can be combined with neither numerals nor indefinite determiners.

In the third step, we examine in which sense and under which conditions both types of nominalisations form a nominal aspect pair. Based on the nominalisations of verbs of movement (*fahren, springen*) and positional verbs (*liegen, sitzen*), we examine the question whether the fundamental feature of limitedness of (verbal and nominal) aspectuality is created through derivation or repealed through conversion. The result is that the decision about whether it is possible to form an aspect pair with the nominalisation is exclusively contingent on the base verb:

If, as is the case for verbs of movement or all telic verbs, it has the potential for limitation due to its arguments, conversion will result in a mass noun (*das Fahren, das Springen*) and derivation will lead to a countable noun (*die Fahrt, der Sprung*). As the argumentative structure is a component of the lexico-semantic structure of the verb, it is, however, irrelevant whether the deverbal arguments are truly realised or remain implicit considering that the aspectual difference takes effect in both cases. Similar to the distinction between perfective and imperfective in the verbal domain, one aspect partner (the derivative) accepts the potential limitation due to the base verb’s arguments while the other aspect partner (the conversion) ignores this limitation.

If the base verb, as is the case for positional verbs and all atelic verbs, does not have the potential for limitation due to its arguments, it is therefore not possible to change the perspective or create an aspectual opposition between the nominalisations. In these cases, conversions regularly occur (*das Liegen, das Suchen*). By contrast, occupied derivatives also denote mass nouns (*die Suche*) or switch to one of the object interpretations. They then establish a different contrast, namely between situation and object denotations (*das Liegen vs. die Liege*).

In regard to the verbal base, this approach can help to explain why conversion of the infinitive has no influence on the type of situation and therefore places no particular demands on the base verb. Interestingly, it is precisely the verbs which do not allow for conversion (*\*das Heißen des Oskars*, *\*das Kosten der zehn Euro*) that reject any kind of change of perspective, i.e. even the verbal bases allow neither aspectualisation nor passivation. Additionally, it becomes clear why NIs are often classed as ‘closer to the verb’ than the complementary derivations. Therefore, this does not specifically apply to the respective verbal base but generally to the entire grammar in the sense that all mass nouns (be they deverbal as NIs or genuinely nominal) are ‘closer to the verb’ as they – as is the case for all verbs – merely denote quality and not quantity.

In regard to nominal derivatives, this approach can help to explain why conversions – in contrast to derivations – are not affected by any kind of blocking effects: As nominal aspect partners, they do not appear with synonyms but with complements; conversions and derivatives therefore exhibit a ‘cooperative’ as opposed to a ‘competing’ relationship. NIs certainly fill paradigmatic gaps but not only if the respective derivative is not available, lexicalised or ambiguous. Instead, this mainly occurs in the sense of an aspectual complement.

While the NI is more frequent and productive than other situation nominalisations, it is nonetheless not always or equally acceptable. This is to be expected as the NI forms the marked pole of a nominal aspect pair. In a final outlook, hypotheses are outlined that enable predictions about specific contributions of meaning and the associated types of NI use, or in other words, where and how the aspectual difference between the NI and its derivatives may be particularly relevant or useful, e.g. with the “*am*-progressive” (*am Lesen sein*). In general, it is not possible to explain the occurrence or acceptability of NIs with just the help of a base verb’s syntax and semantics. Instead, they are also always subject to conditions that take into account their syntactic and pragmatic functions.