Causative Nominalizations: Implications for the Structure of Psych Verbs

We investigate causative nominalizations from object experiencer (OE) verbs that have subject experiencer counterparts (SE) (Belletti & Rizzi 1988, Grimshaw 1990, Pesetsky 1995, Landau 2010) in Greek and Romanian. Causative psych nominalizations (CPNs) have been argued not to be available in English (and Hebrew). We show that Greek and Romanian have CPNs that are derived from the SE counterpart which we analyze as anticausative (Alexiadou, Anagnostopoulou & Schäfer: AAS 2006). By contrast, passive psych nominalizations (English nominalizations) require a Voice projection (like the OE form) and their external argument is by default interpreted as an agent, like in Greek (and Hebrew) passives. Our results suggest a structural difference between Romanian/Greek and English psych nominalizations: the former can nominalize either the SE anticausative with its causer argument or the OE passive form with its agent (Anagnostopoulou 1999), while the latter only nominalize the OE passive, as the base verbs lack the anticausative structure (Pesetsky 1995).

OE verbs are ambiguous between two eventive readings: agentive and causative. English nominalizations derived from OE verbs lack the causative reading and tolerate only agents (Lakoff 1970, Pesetsky 1995, Grimshaw 1990: *the movie's amusement of the children vs. the clown's amusement of the children). This is not the case in Romanian, as shown by the compatibility with the prepositions de la 'from' (1) that introduces causers (Iordachioaia 2008), besides the agentive de catre 'by'. Similar facts hold for Greek, where me 'with' is causative and apo 'by' agentive.

(1) enervarea Mariei de catre Ion/de la joc
'Mary's annoyance by John/Mary's becoming annoyed because of the game'

In both languages OE verbs that lack a SE counterpart don’t form causative nominalizations:

(2) dezamagirea/incurajarea Mariei de catre Ion/*de la joc
disappointment/encouragement Mary.Gen by John/*from game

The SE cognates are analyzed in the literature as anticausative. We analyze (1) with de la as a nominalization of the anticausative SE-variant. We adopt AAS's (2006) structures in (3): (a) for the transitive/OE form and (b) for the anticausative/SE variant. Voice introduces external arguments, and hosts agentive de catre/apo-PPs, while v introduces causation and hosts the causative-only de la/me-PPs.

(3) a. [VoiceP[vPcause[RootP]]] b. [vPcause[RootP]]

OE verbs instantiate (3a) and their SE cognates (3b). In Greek/Romanian, both structures feed nominalization. In CPNs, (3b) is the input, hence they license causer arguments via vPcause, but not 'by'-PPs, which need Voice. In agentive nominalizations, (3a) is the input, so agents are in. The agent-exclusivity in English can be explained as follows: in English OE predicates lack anticausative variants (Pesetsky 1995), i.e. they only have structure (3a): the nominative (agent/causer) is always the external argument. In Greek/Romanian both structures are available. Assuming that nominalization (in English) is akin to passivization (Grimshaw 1990), the ban on causative nominalizations is a ban on interpreting the external argument as a causer, as the default interpretation of the external argument in passivization is agentive. Following Doron (2003), in (3a) the external argument is not required by the root, so it is interpreted as a default agent and causers are ruled out.
References: