A clausal embedding argument for small syntax of Russian nominalizations*
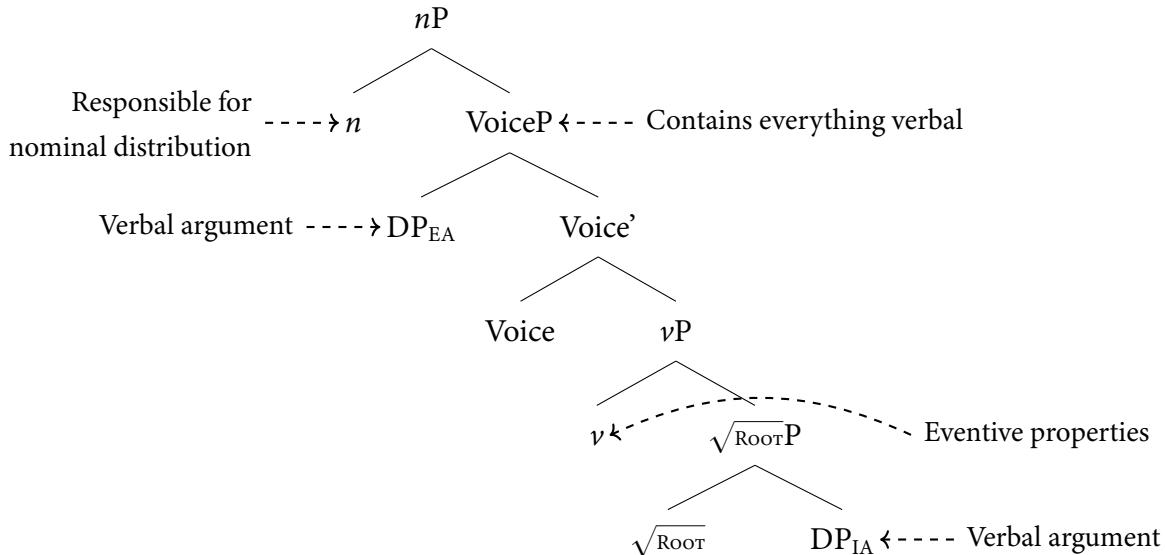
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Ongoing work

1 Phrasal layering and how to argue against it

The dominant approach to nominalizations is the phrasal layering approach: a verbal projection is embedded under a categorizing head *n* (Hazout 1991; Borer 1997; Fu, Roeper & Borer 2001; Alexiadou 2001; Borer 2013; Bruening 2013 i.a.). The idea is that such structures account for verb-like argument structure, eventive interpretation, and external distribution of a nominal. The core property of the phrasal layering approach is *inheritance*: whatever is allowed in the verbal XP should be allowed in the nominalization. Any failure of inheritance is thus an argument against the phrasal layering approach.
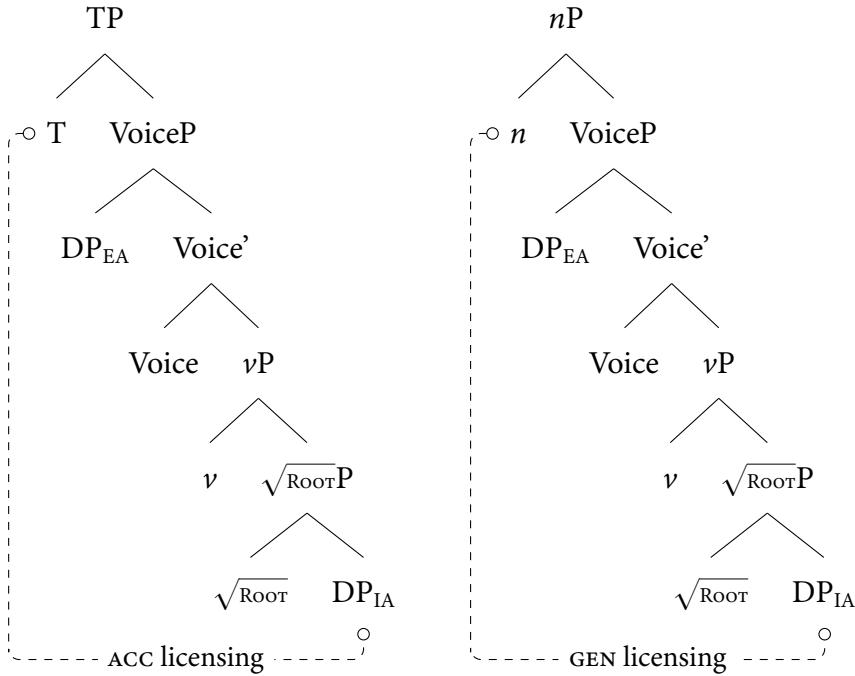
(1) A phrasal layering structure for deverbal nominalizations

It's not that easy to find a failure of inheritance! Here's a non-argument: one finds ACC-marked DPs inside VPs but not inside nominalizations. Hence, phrasal layering is wrong. It's a non-argument because ACC-marked DPs are *licensed* by a higher functional head, absent in the nominalization.

(2) Case assignment in clausal and nominal domain assuming phrasal layering

This is instructive: we should look for failure of inheritance for properties of verbal phrases that do not require licensing by higher functional heads. One of the strongest arguments against the phrasal layering approach in Wood (2023) concerns lexical case in Icelandic: DAT-marked themes of unaccusative verbs surface as GEN-marked arguments of nominalizations.

(3) a. *Menningunni hefur hnig-na-ð.*
culture.the.DAT has declined-VBLZ-PTCP
'The culture has declined.'

b. *hnig-n-un   menningarinnar*
decline-VBLZ-NMLZ culture.the.GEN
'the decline of the culture'

c. *Vélinni   sein-ka-ði.*
plane.the.DAT late-VBLZ-PST
'The plane delayed.'

d. *sein-k-un   vélarinnar*
late-VBLZ-NMLZ plane.the.GEN
'the delay of the plane'

e. *Sjúklingum   hefur fæ-kka-ð.*
patients.the.DAT have decrease-VBLZ-PTCP
'The number of patients has decreased.'

f. *fæ-kk-un   sjúklinga*
decrease-VBLZ-NMLZ patients.the.GEN
'the decrease of patients'
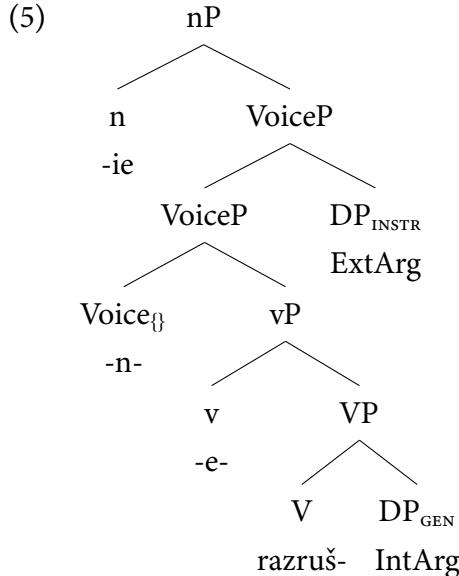
Today, I present another argument of the same schema. My focus is on clause-embedding predicates: the upshot is that, I think, it is harder to come up with a licensing story for clausal embedding inheritance failure than for case assignment inheritance failures (not in the least due to a lesser range of theoretical machinery). The claim: there is a class of clause-embedding predicates in Russian that either cannot form eventive nominalizations or cannot embed a clause when nominalized. Embedded clauses require no licensing by a higher functional heads, if any selection at all. We then have a failure of inheritance. Here are the details & complications.

2   The argument

Russian eventive nominalizations are morphologically derived from passive participles (4a-b), even when the verb is unaccusative and lacks a passive participles (4c-d). The point is, formation of eventive nominalizations is rather general.

(4)   a.   *razruš-e-n-ie   goroda   vragom*
            destroy-TH-PASS-NMLZ city.GEN enemy.INSTR
            'Destruction of the city by the enemy.'

    b.   *gorod razruš-e-n   vragom*
            cit   destroy-TH-PASS enemy.INSTR
            'The city is destroyed by the enemy.'

    c.   *pad-e-n-ie   snega   zimoj*
            fall-TH-PASS-NMLZ snow.GEN winter.INSTR
            'Falling of the snow during winter.'

    d.   **pad-e-n*
            fall-TH-PASS

The morphologically supported view: a Voice$_{Pass}$P is nominalized (Rudnev & Volkova 2020; see 5 in a phrasal layering spirit, following Pazel'skaya & Tatevosov 2008).

(5)

```
                nP
          ┌─────┴─────┐
          n        VoiceP
         -ie     ┌────┴────┐
             VoiceP      DP_INSTR
           ┌───┴───┐     ExtArg
      Voice_{}    vP
        -n-    ┌───┴───┐
               v       VP
              -e-   ┌───┴───┐
                    V     DP_GEN
                 razruš-  IntArg
```

Now, consider the verb *načatj* 'to begin' (6a). Its eventive nominalization is severly degraded (6b). I consider mere proclamation of a paradigm gap to be unsatisfactory—why does this verb lack a nominalization? Some related verbs with the same root do have one: *zač-a-tj* 'conceive-TH-INF' ~ *zač-a-t-ie* 'conceive-TH-PASS-NMLZ'.

(6)   a.   *ja nača-l   kur-i-tj*
            I   start-PST.M.SG smoke-TH-INF
            'I started smoking.'

    b.   **nača-t-ie   kur-i-tj*
            start-PASS-NMLZ smoke-TH-INF
            Int: 'Starting to smoke.'

It seems that the embedded clause is partially the culprit: consider the verb *prekratitj* 'to stop'. It can take embed an eventive nominalization or an infinitival clause (7a-b). When embedding an infinitival clause, nominalization formation is impossible (7c-d).

(7) a. *ja prekrat-i-l obšč-e-n-ie s nej* b. *prekrašč-e-n-ie obšč-e-n-ija*
      I stop-TH-PST.M.SG talk-TH-PASS-NMLZ with her   stop-TH-PASS-NMLZ talk-TH-PASS-NMLZ
      'I stopped talking to her.'   'Stopping to talk.'

    c. *ja prekrat-i-l obšč-a-tj-sja s nej* d. **prekrašč-e-n-ie obšč-a-tj-sja*
      I stop-TH-PST.M.SG talk-TH-INF-REFL with her   stop-TH-PASS-NMLZ talk-TH-INF-REFL
      'I stopped talking to her.'   Int.: 'Stopping to talk.'

Some speakers accept (7d) in sentences like (8a) but they reject it under a clear eventive construal (8b) while accepting a nominalization embedded by nominalization. I will return to construals like (8a) towards the end.

(8) a. *Trebuju prekrašč-e-n-ija obsužd-a-tj sluxi*
      demand.PRES.1SG stop-TH-PASS-NMLZ.GEN discuss-TH-INF-REFL rumours
      'I demand that you stop discussing rumours.'

    b. **prekrašč-e-n-ie Vasi/Vasej obsužd-a-tj sluxi vsex udivilo*
      stop-TH-PASS-NMLZ.GEN Vasja.GEN/INST discuss-TH-INF-REFL rumours all surprised
      Int: 'Everyone was surprised that Vasja stopped discussing rumours.'

    c. *prekrašč-e-n-ie Vasej obsužd-e-n-ija sluxov vsex*
      stop-TH-PASS-NMLZ.GEN Vasja.GEN/INST discuss-TH-PASS-NMLZ.GEN rumours all

        udivilo
        surprised
      'Everyone was surprised that Vasja stopped discussing rumours.'

The verb *prodolžitj* 'to continue' presents a similar pattern: it can embed both nominalizations and non-finite clauses but can't embed a non-finite clause as a nominalization (9). While some speakers report accepting (9d), the contrast in (10) seems more robust.

(9) a. *ja prodolž-i-l obšč-e-n-ie* b. *prodolž-e-n-ie obšč-e-n-ija*
      I continue-TH-PST.MSG talk-TH-PASS-NMLZ   continue-TH-PASS-NMLZ talk-TH-PASS-NMLZ
      'I continued to talk.'   'Continuing to talk.'

    c. *ja prodolž-i-l obšč-a-tj-sja* d. **prodolž-e-n-ie obšč-a-tj-sja*
      I continue-TH-PST.MSG talk-TH-INF-REFL   continue-TH-PASS-NMLZ talk-TH-INF-REFL
      'I continued to talk.'   Int.: 'Continuing to talk.'

(10) a. **prodolž-e-n-ie Vasi/Vasej obsužd-a-tj sluxi vsex*
      continue-TH-PASS-NMLZ.GEN Vasja.GEN/INST discuss-TH-INF-REFL rumours all

        udivilo
        surprised
      Int: 'Everyone was surprised that Vasja continued discussing rumours.'

4

b. *prodolž-e-n-ie*   *Vasej*   *obsužd-e-n-ija*   *sluxov*

    continue-TH-PASS-NMLZ.GEN Vasja.GEN/INST discuss-TH-PASS-NMLZ.GEN rumours

      vsex udivilo

      all   surprised

    'Everyone was surprised that Vasja stopped discussing rumours.'

Clausal embedding on its own is insufficient to account for the pattern: other verbs retain their clause-embedding powers as eventive nominalizations: *rešitj* 'to decide' embeds non-finite clauses (11a-b), *utverždatj* 'to claim' embeds finite clauses (11c-d).

(11) a. *ja reš-i-l*   *pitj*   *toljko pivo*   b. *reš-e-n-ije*   *pitj*   *toljko pivo*

      I decide-TH-PST.M.SG drink.inf only beer   decide-TH-PASS-NMLZ drink.inf only   beer

      'I decided to only drink beer.'   'Decision to only drink beer.'

      c. *ja utveržd-a-l*   *čto on durak*   d. *utveržd-e-n-ije*   *čto on durak*

        I claim-TH-PST.M.SG that he moron   claim-TH-PASS-NMLZ that he moron

        'I claimed that he is a moron.'   'The claim that he is a moron.'

To make sure, eventive construals are available for *rešenie* 'decision' and *utverždenie* 'claim'.

(12) a. *reš-e-n-ije*   *Vasi*   *pitj*   *toljko pivo vsex udivilo*

      decide-TH-PASS-NMLZ Vasja.GEN drink.inf only beer all   surprised

      'Vasja's decision to only drink beer surprised everyone.'

      b. *utveržd-e-n-ije*   *Maši*   *čto on durak vsex udivilo*

       claim-TH-PASS-NMLZ Masha.GEN that he moron all   surprised

       'Masha's claim that he is a moron surprised everyone.'

Non-deverbal nominals can embed non-finite clauses too! Therefore, the relevant generalization is fine-grained and can't be stated using coarse categories like nominals and non-finite clauses. This is an inability of a certain class of clause-embedding predicates to embed clauses as deverbal nominalizations.

(13) a. *strastj vypiv-a-tj*   *po utram*   b. *pravo prodav-a-tj sigarety*

      passion drink.-TH-INF in mornings   right sell.-TH-INF cigarettes

      'The passion for drinking in the morning.'   'The right to sell cigarettes.'

The observations are enough for me to make my case against the phrasal layering approach. The problem lies in the fact that not all clause-embedding verbs embed clauses as nominalizations.

(14) The inheritance failure argument:

     a. Verbs like *prekratitj* 'to stop' embed non-finite clauses

     b. Nominalizations of verbs like *prekratitj* can't embed non-finite clauses

     c. There is no ban on embedding non-finite clauses by nominals

     d. (Non-finite) clauses require no licensing by verbal functional structure

The last premise is based on the assumption that it is *nominal* arguments that need licensing: clausal arguments are largely thought to only be constrained by s-selection (Grimshaw 1979; Pesetsky 1982), as supported by the recent work on clausal embedding (Elliott 2020; Bondarenko 2022; Wurmbrand & Lohninger 2023 i.a.). One might pursue the analysis that clausal arguments are embedded under DP shells—Bondarenko (2022, p.296–297), however, shows that DP shells of embedded clauses must be overtly realized. The *explanans-explanandum* ambiguity, analysed as structural by Elliott and Bondarenko, is resolved in nominalizations. I therefore take any embedded clause attached to a nominalization to be bare, not embedded in any DP shell.

(15) Context: I was not satisfied by him blaming cold weather for his car's breaking down.
      (*explanandum* reading)

      *Menja ne udovletvorilo objasn-e-n-ie   *(togo) čto u   nego slomalasj*
      me   not satisfied   explain-TH-PASS-NMLZ D.GEN   that PREP him   broke.down

        mašina
        car

      'I was not satisfied by his explanation of the fact that his car broke down.'

The final resort could be to rely on matrix verbal functional structure to determine the argument structure of embedded clause (e.g., Wurmbrand & Shimamura 2017). For my purposes, it matters that embedded clauses require no further licensing by functional structure that is absent from Russian deverbal nominalizations: Asp, T, C and whatnot (with some reservations about Asp; see Pazel'skaya & Tatevosov 2008).

The observation already presents a major issue for the phrasal layering approach. What's my account? As clear from my endorsement of Wood (2023), I think that the small syntax approach to nominalizations is a better fit for the data—the gist is that attachment of phrasal arguments and modifiers to nominalizations happens at the *n*P level. There are two questions to answer then. First, what is the correct generalization about clauses that cannot be embedded by nominalizations? My answer is clause size: heavily reduced, VoiceP-sized clauses can't be embedded by nominalizations (the very same VoicePs known to syntactic theory from the literature on restructuring)—I discuss this claim and counterexamples in Sections 3.1 and 3.2. The second question is why VoicePs cannot attach at the *n*P level. My view is that the reason is semantics: *n*P-level attachment of VoicePs leads to non-sensical truth-conditions. Since oddness in every context is indistinguishable from ungrammaticality (at least, using acceptability judgements), the observed ban is derived. This claim and its capability to dismiss apparent counterexamples are given in Section 3.3 and 3.4.

3 Analyzing the pattern

3.1 The size of clauses lost: VoiceP

The argument relies on there being a distinction between non-finite clauses embedded by verbs like *prekratitj* 'to stop' and the non-finite clauses embedded by nominalizations like *rešenie* 'decision'. In other words, what unifies the clauses that can't occur with nominalizations? An observation: verbs that can't embed clauses as nominalizations are verbs that allow cross-clausal negative concord licensing and genitive of negation licensing (see Lyutikova & Gerasimova 2023 for experimental evidence that cross clausal negative concord licensing is possible in Russian— by the way, none of the verbs they test allow clause-embedding nominalizations, see Appendix I).

(16) a. *Maša ešče ne načala ni-čego delatj*
         M   yet not started NC-what do.INF
         'Masha hasn't started doing anything yet.'

      b. **Maša ešče ne rešila ni-čego delatj*
         M   yet not decided NC-what do.INF
         'Masha hasn't decided to do anything yet.'

      c. *Anton ešče ne načal tratitj svoix deneg*
         Anton yet not started spend.INF his.own money.GEN
         'Anton hasn't yet started spending his own money.'

      d. **Anton ešče ne rešil tratitj svoix deneg*
         Anton yet not decided spend.INF his.own money.GEN
         'Anton hasn't yet decided to spend his own money.'

Negative concord, as an AGREE dependency (see Zeijlstra 2022 for an overview), is sensitive to the TP boundary. Hence, smaller clauses are transparent for inter-clausal licensing, while larger clauses are not (*modulo* covert scrambling: overt scrambling feeds negative concord licensing in Russian, even across a finite clause boundary, as shown by Rudnev 2024).

(17) a. [Neg V ₍VoiceP₎[*ni* -wh ...]]   b. *[Neg V ₍TP₎[*ni* -wh ...]]

Similar conclusion can be drawn from possibility of cross-clausal inverse scope. As suggested by Grano (2012), the less bi-clausal a structure is (the less functional heads the embedded clause has), the easier is QR from the embedded clause (ibid.: 62). Grano takes the pattern to diagnose restructuring.

(18) a. At least one person tried to solve every problem. $\forall > \exists$
      b. At least one person claimed to have solved every problem. $?\forall > \exists$
      c. At least one person said that Bill solved every problem. $*\forall > \exists$

Russian presents a similar contrast. To ensure inverse scope I use distributed numeral quantifier *po dva X* 'two X per Y'.

(19) Context: well, our seminar series has got off the ground! Students A and B attend seminar 1, students C and D attend seminar 2, . . .

    a. *Po dva studenta načalo xoditj na každyj seminar*
        PO 2   students started go   to each   seminar
        'Each seminar has started getting attended by two students.'

    b. ?*Po dva studenta rešilo xoditj na každyj seminar*
        PO 2   students decided go   to each   seminar
        'For every seminar, two students have decided to attend it.'

The conjecture, then, is that the clauses that can't be embedded by nominalizations are less than TP—VoiceP-size, perhaps. Two issues: (i) I am both unaware of and have been unable to come up with other diagnostics for clause size in Russian; (ii) making the VoiceP cut still leaves it mysterious why they should be unable to occur in nominalizations under the small syntax analysis. Re: (ii), the part of the explanation must be the claim that VoiceP-size clauses cannot be embedded by nominals. There are counterexamples.

3.2   Apparent VoicePs embedded by verb related nominals

Consider the verb *pytatjsja* 'to try' (20a). According to the negative concord diagnostic, it embeds a VoiceP (20b). While it is unable to form a regular *-nie/-tie* nominalization, a morphologically related nominal *popytka* 'an attempt' can embed non-finite clauses (20c).

(20) a. *Ja pytalsja bros-i-tj kur-i-tj*
       I tried   stop.TH-INF smoke-TH-INF
       'I tried to quit smoking.'

    b. *Ja ne pytalsja ni-kogo obidetj*
       I not tried   NI-who offend
       'I didn't try to offend anyone.'

    c. *Eto moja vtoraja popytka brositj kuritj*
       this my   second attempt stop.TH-INF smoke-TH-INF
       'This is my second attempt at quitting smoking.'

I don't think this is a problem—as Wurmbrand et al. (2020) and Wurmbrand & Lohninger (2023) show, there is no guaranteed inference from the semantics of the embedding item to the size of the embedded clause. That is to say, I do not think there is a guarantee that the root-derived nominal *popytka* 'an attempt' must embed the same type of clause as the verb *pytatjsja* 'to try'.

We can diagnose this.[1] Russian permits the clausal negation to license a negative concord item embedded in multiple DPs (21). Therefore, neither *n*P nor DP are a boundary for negative concord licensing (see Baykov 2023 for experimental confirmation).

(21)   *On   ne   osparival zakonnostj pričin-e-n-ija   ni-kem   uvečij*
        he   not disputed legality   cause-TH-PASS-NMLZ.GEN NC-who.INST injuries.GEN
        'He did not challenge the legality of anyone causing injuries.'

Negative concord item found in the embedded clause of the nominal *popytka* 'attempt', however, cannot be licensed by matrix negation (22). Since them being embedded in a DP doesn't prevent licensing, the only remaining explanation is that the embedded clause itself is a boundary for negative concord licensing—thus, a TP-sized embedded clause.

(22)   *⋆Menja ne   udivila ego   popytka   ni-kogo   obid-e-tj*
        me   not surprise stop.TH-INF NC-who.GEN offend-TH-INF
        Int.: 'I wasn't surprised by his attempt to offend anyone'
        = 'For no x, I was surprised by his attempt to offend x'

Schematically, (23) shows the observation: doubly embedded DP does not disrupt negative concord licensing. TP embedded in a DP, however, does, by the virtue of TP being a boundary—just like observed in (21-22).

(23)   a. ^{OK}[Neg V $_{DP_1}$[... $_{DP_2}$[... *ni* -wh ...]]]   b.   *[Neg V $_{DP}$ [... $_{TP}$[*ni* -wh ...]]]
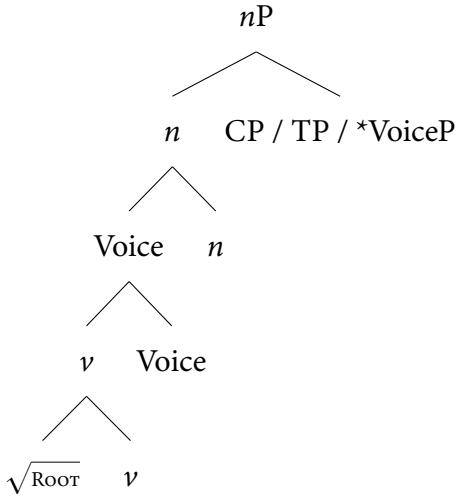
While the clause size generalization is left intact, it barely helps. Now, the question is what determines compatibility of a given root with non-finite clauses of different sizes (and/or of different status regarding presence of a bound varaible). I wish to propose a sketch of a semantic account of the impossibility of nominals to occur with smaller, VoiceP-sized, clauses. From the sketch, the property that determines a root's compatibility with TPs arises.

3.3   In direction of a semantic account

To recap: a phrasal layering account cannot in principle account for inability of nominalizations to embed VoiceP-size clauses. Can a small syntax analysis do so? In line with a small syntax account (Wood 2023), all clauses must attach at the *n*P level. Therefore, as mentioned earlier, the account must rely on nominals being unable to embed VoicePs.

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[1] I'm grateful to Ka-Fai Yip for pointing this out to me.

(24) What small syntax predicts about clausal embedding

nP
├── n
└── CP / TP / *VoiceP
    ├── Voice
    │   ├── v
    │   └── Voice
    │   ├── $\sqrt{\text{Root}}$
    │   └── v
    └── n

Why should that be the case? I suggest that semantic composition plays a role here. Recent work on finite CP embedding (Elliott 2020; Bondarenko 2022 with precedents in Kratzer 2006, Moulton 2009, and Moulton 2015) has defended the view that denotation of a *that*-CP is a predicate over contentful entities and eventualities.

(25) $[\![$ that p $]\!] = \lambda x.\ \text{CONTENT}(x) = \lambda w.p(w)$ (simplified)[2]

For nominals, the upshot is a straightforward account of constructions like *the rumour that p* using Predicate Modification. The account can be extended to locutions like *my decision that p* (see Portner & Rubinstein 2020 for mood-related complications). Plugging in one's favorite semantics for control, *my decision to p* gets done in a similar way. I minimally commit to a centered-worlds denotation for control complements, necessary to derive their *de se* requirement (Chierchia 1989).

(26) a. $[\![$ rumour that p $]\!] = \lambda x.\ rumour(x) \wedge \text{CONTENT}(x) = \lambda w.p(w)$
      b. $[\![$ decision that p $]\!] = \lambda x.\ decide(x) \wedge \text{CONTENT}(x) = \lambda w.p(w)$
      c. $[\![$ decision to p $]\!] = \lambda x.\ decide(x) \wedge \text{CONTENT}(x) = \{\lambda y.\lambda w.y\ p\text{'s in } w\}$

The point is, CP-sized clauses have received plausible analyses as content-specifying predicates (presumably, by the virtue of some functional material: Bondarenko 2022) and a similar idea is applicable to TP-sized clauses. Both are analysed as one-place predicates. In contrast, whatever semantics one assigns to the VoiceP domain, it has to denote an eventuality. Given that VoiceP has a gap/PRO, it's a two-place predicate.

(27) a. $[\![$ PRO smoke.NFIN $]\!] = \lambda x.\text{CONTENT}(x) = \{\lambda y.\lambda w.y\text{ smokes in } w\}$ (TP-size)
      b. $[\![$ PRO smoke.NFIN $]\!] = \lambda y.\lambda e.smoke(e) \wedge \text{AG}(e) = y$ (VoiceP-size)

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[2]This is a denotation defended by Elliott whose main innovation was the equality semantics, which I adopt. Bondarenko's denotation is similar, with the exception of assuming a different view of propositions (namely, situation semantics).

Here is a semantics for a 'restructuring' verb that is able to compose with a two-place denotation given for VoiceP-sized clauses (loosely in the spirit of Grano 2012).
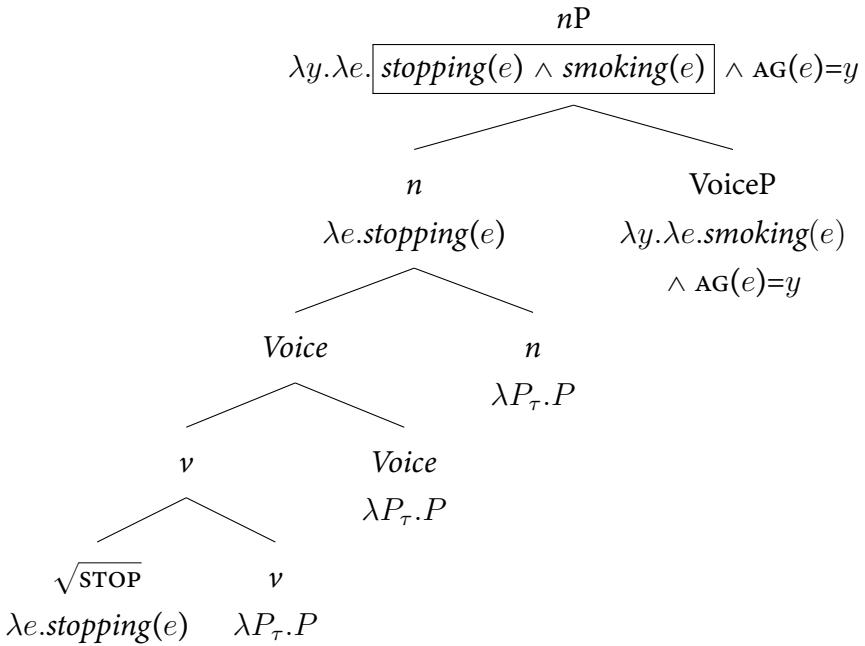
(28) $[\![\sqrt{\text{STOP}}]\!] = \lambda P_{e,vt}.\lambda e_1.\exists e_2 \; stopping(e_1) \wedge \text{THEME}(e_1) = e_2 \wedge P(\text{AGENT}(e_1), e_2)$

What makes a restructuring verb a restructuring verb? I suggest that a semantics like (28) is only available near a local VoiceP (allosemy, then).

(29) a. $[\![\sqrt{\text{STOP}}]\!] = \lambda P_{e,vt}.\lambda e_1.\exists e_2. \; stopping(e_1) \wedge \text{THEME}(e_1) = e_2 \wedge P(\text{AGENT}(e_1), e_2) \, / \underline{\quad}\text{VoiceP}$
   b. $[\![\sqrt{\text{STOP}}]\!] = \lambda e. \; stopping(e)$

Unless VoiceP is merged to the root, an interpretation that does not take a e, vt argument is default (cf. Levinson 2014). The result is an interpretation where the same event is recognized as an event of stopping and an event of smoking. Its incoherency, however, is not that obvious. Plus, it's unclear that intuitive incompatibility of stopping and whatever it is that is stopped generalizes to contiuning, starting, trying, and other verbs that take a VoiceP-sized embedded clause.[3]

(30)

nP
$\lambda y.\lambda e.\boxed{stopping(e) \wedge smoking(e)} \wedge \text{AG}(e)=y$

- n : $\lambda e.stopping(e)$
  - Voice : (no label)
    - v
      - $\sqrt{\text{STOP}}$: $\lambda e.stopping(e)$
      - v : $\lambda P_\tau.P$
    - Voice : $\lambda P_\tau.P$
  - n : $\lambda P_\tau.P$
- VoiceP : $\lambda y.\lambda e.smoking(e) \wedge \text{AG}(e)=y$
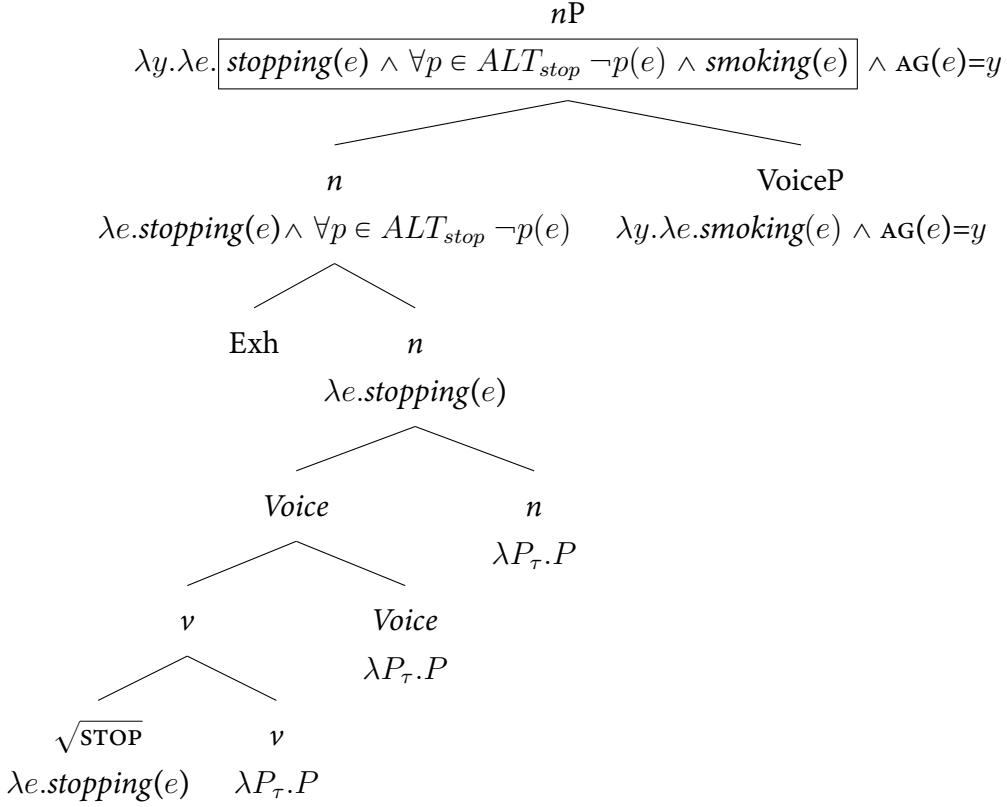
I suggest that the effect arises via predicate strengthening (Paillé 2022; Paillé 2025a; Paillé 2025b): simplifying, the idea being that the predicate $\lambda e.stopping(e)$ is strengthened into $\lambda e.stopping(e) \wedge \forall p \in ALT_{stop} \; \neg p(e)$ via application of Exh. In prose, *stopping* is strengthened into *stopping and nothing except stopping* (where the domain of *nothing* is partially determined by alternative v-root combinations). The idea is actually a generalization of the intuition behind thematic uniqueness, see Paillé (2025b) for an exposition.

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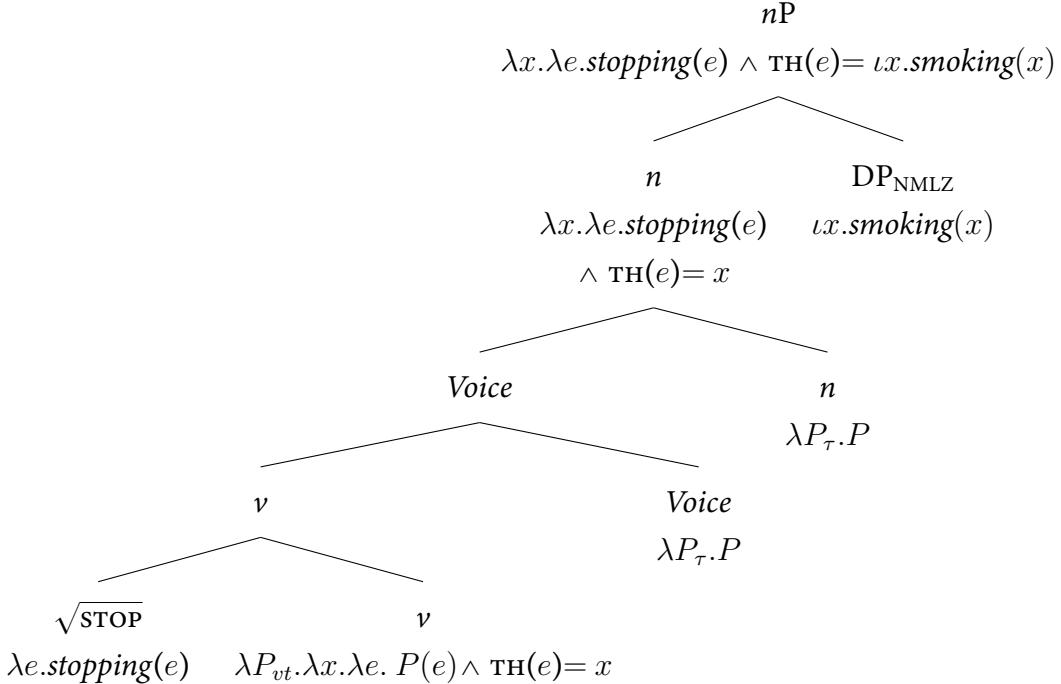
[3] I thank Sreekar Raghotham for pressing me on this point.

(31)

nP

$\lambda y.\lambda e.\boxed{stopping(e) \wedge \forall p \in ALT_{stop} \ \neg p(e) \wedge smoking(e)} \wedge \text{AG}(e)=y$

n
$\lambda e.stopping(e) \wedge \forall p \in ALT_{stop} \ \neg p(e)$

VoiceP
$\lambda y.\lambda e.smoking(e) \wedge \text{AG}(e)=y$

Exh

n
$\lambda e.stopping(e)$

Voice

n
$\lambda P_\tau.P$

v

Voice
$\lambda P_\tau.P$

$\sqrt{\text{STOP}}$
$\lambda e.stopping(e)$

v
$\lambda P_\tau.P$
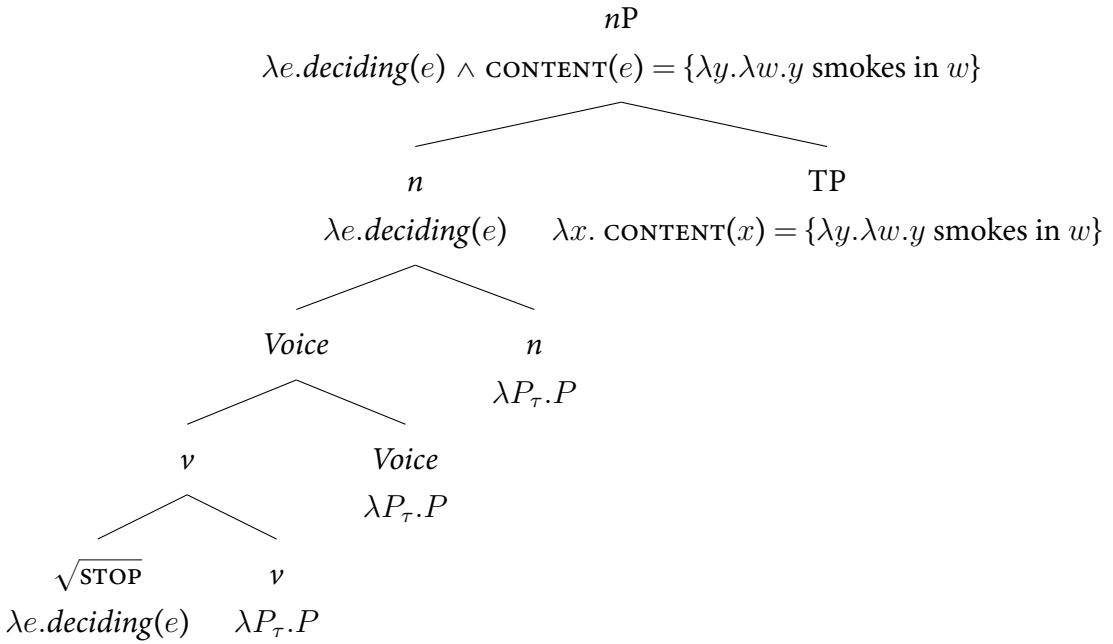
On the other hand, composing a nominalization of a verb like *stop* with another nominalization as its theme argument leads to no problems (I omit exhaustification from now on, since thematic role functions do not contradict predicate strengthening).

(32)

nP
$\lambda x.\lambda e.stopping(e) \wedge \text{TH}(e)= \iota x.smoking(x)$

n
$\lambda x.\lambda e.stopping(e)$
$\wedge \ \text{TH}(e)= x$

DP_{NMLZ}
$\iota x.smoking(x)$

Voice

n
$\lambda P_\tau.P$

v

Voice
$\lambda P_\tau.P$

$\sqrt{\text{STOP}}$
$\lambda e.stopping(e)$

v
$\lambda P_{vt}.\lambda x.\lambda e. \ P(e) \wedge \text{TH}(e)= x$

Composing a nominalization like *rešenie* with a TP is not problematic for the same reason: thematic role specification does not conflict with predicate strengthening.

(33)

nP
$\lambda e.deciding(e) \wedge \text{CONTENT}(e) = \{\lambda y.\lambda w.y \text{ smokes in } w\}$

n
$\lambda e.deciding(e)$

TP
$\lambda x. \text{CONTENT}(x) = \{\lambda y.\lambda w.y \text{ smokes in } w\}$

Voice

n
$\lambda P_\tau.P$

v

Voice
$\lambda P_\tau.P$

$\sqrt{\text{STOP}}$
$\lambda e.deciding(e)$

v
$\lambda P_\tau.P$

The semantic explanation leaves the problem of lexical gaps: verbs that simply cannot form a nominalization (like *načatj* 'to begin' or verbs in Appendix I)? In the spirit of Mendes & Nevins (2022), I suggest that those verbs require a VoiceP near them—they lack an elsewhere alloseme. Hence, the small syntax structure of a nominalization is uninterpretable, leading to a lexical gap (as Appendix I shows, *načatj* is far from the only one, showing generality of the account).

(34) a. $[\![\sqrt{\text{BEGIN}}]\!] = \lambda P_{e,vt}.\lambda e_1.\exists e_2. \, beginning(e_1) \wedge \text{THEME}(e_1) = e_2 \wedge P(\text{AGENT}(e_1), e_2) \, / \underline{\quad}\text{VoiceP}$
       b. No elsewhere!

A neat point of this analysis is that it generalizes to the semelfactive nominalization gap in Russian: verbs with the semelfactive affix *-nu-* do not form nominalizations. For example, the verb *stuk-nu-tj* 'knock-NU-INF' does not form the nominalization **stuk-nu-t-ie* 'knock-NU-PASS-NMLZ' even though the participle *stuk-nu-t* 'knock-NU-PASS' is perfectly possible. If the semelfactive affix is a light verb (see Taraldsen Medová & Wiland 2019 for such a suggestion for a related affix in Polish and Czech), the same allosemy account applies. Although I leave the semantics of the semelfactive open.[4]

(35) a. $[\![\text{NU}]\!] = \text{smth} \, / \underline{\quad}\text{VoiceP}$
       b. No elsewhere!

Finally, the material in this section makes an prediction for the counterexamples of the sort discussed in Section 3.2: if there is a reading of nominalizations that depends on specification of CONTENT by a TP, we predict it to arise in counterexamples.

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[4]I thank Christine Gu and Maria Gouskova for making me aware of the semelfactive nominalization gap.

3.4 Apparent VoicePs embedded by nominalizations: content reading

Consider the verb *obeščatj* 'to promise' (36a). According to the negative concord diagnostic, it embeds a VoiceP (36b). And yet, its nominalization is clause-embedding (36c).

(36) a. *Ja obeščaju   bros-i-tj   kur-i-tj*
      I   promise.PRES.1SG stop.TH-INF smoke-TH-INF
      'I promise to quit smoking.'

    b. *Ja ne obeščal   ni-čego delatj*
      I   not promise.PST.MSG NI-what do
      'I didn't promise to do anything.'

    c. *Obešč-a-n-ie   Vasi   bros-i-tj   kur-i-tj   fuflo*
      promise-TH-PASS-NMLZ Vasja.GEN stop.TH-INF smoke-TH-INF rubbish
      'Vasja's promise to stop smoking is rubbish.'

In line with Sections 3.2-3.3, I maitain that (36c) involves TP-embedding (3.2) that specifies the content of an entity (3.3). There's a way to show this. Benz (2023; 2025) discusses a content reading of nominalizations: a non-eventive clause embedding reading (37).
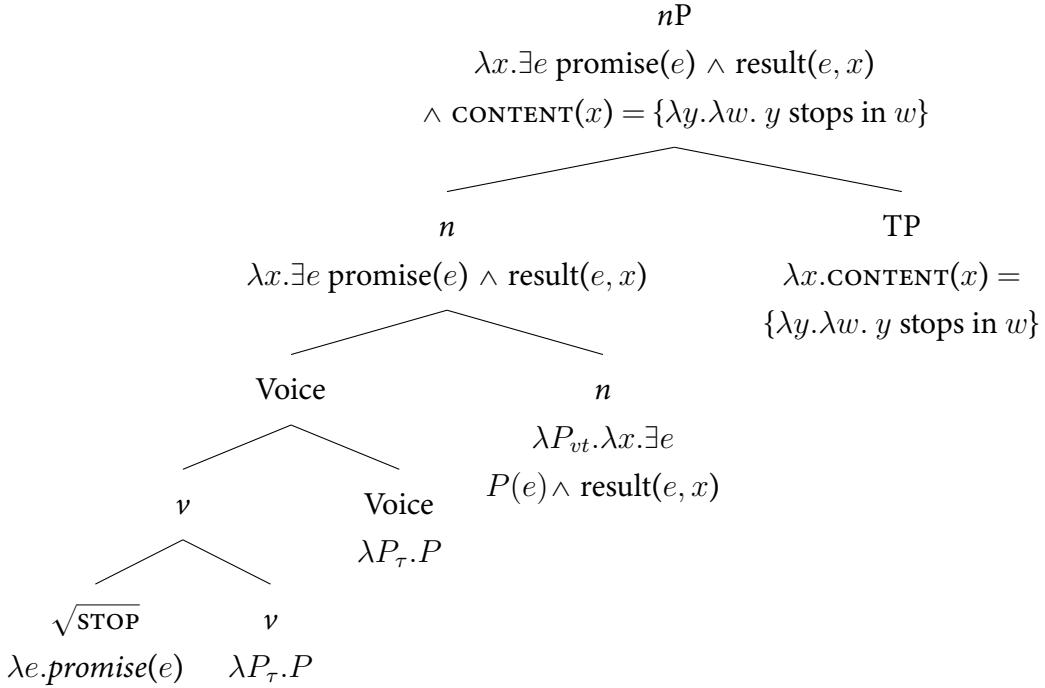
(37) Content reading (Benz 2025:73)

    a. His observation that the Earth is round changed the science forever.

    b. ?The thorough observation that the Earth is round is correct

This reading is a plausible candidate for (36c). Example (38a) shows incompatibility of clause-embedding *obešč-a-n-ie* 'promise-TH-PASS-NMLZ' with eventive modification. Clause-embedding nominalization of *rešitj* 'decide' is perfectly grammatical in that frame (38b), suggesting that ungrammaticality of (38a) is due to inability to compose with a VoiceP which a promising eventuality requires.

(38) a. **obešč-a-n-ie   bros-i-tj   kur-i-tj   zanjalo u menja tri časa*
      promise-TH-PASS-NMLZ stop.TH-INF smoke-TH-INF took   PREP me   three hours
      Int: 'It took me three hours to promise to stop smoking.'

    b. *reš-e-n-ie   bros-i-tj   kur-i-tj   zanjalo u menja tri časa*
      decide-TH-PASS-NMLZ stop.TH-INF smoke-TH-INF took   PREP me   three hours
      'It took me three hours to decide to stop smoking.'

Diverging from Benz, I consider content reading to be a subtype of a result nominal (where the result is a contentful entity). For a verb like *promise*, I consider a result entity to be something akin to a public commitment, a proclamation 'I will do X' where X is the content of the proclamation.

14

$$nP$$
$$\lambda x.\exists e\ \text{promise}(e) \wedge \text{result}(e, x)$$
$$\wedge\ \textsc{content}(x) = \{\lambda y.\lambda w.\ y \text{ stops in } w\}$$

n
$$\lambda x.\exists e\ \text{promise}(e) \wedge \text{result}(e, x)$$

TP
$$\lambda x.\textsc{content}(x) =$$
$$\{\lambda y.\lambda w.\ y \text{ stops in } w\}$$

Voice

n
$$\lambda P_{vt}.\lambda x.\exists e$$
$$P(e)\wedge \text{result}(e, x)$$

v

Voice
$$\lambda P_\tau.P$$

$\sqrt{\textsc{STOP}}$
$$\lambda e.promise(e)$$

v
$$\lambda P_\tau.P$$

The theoretical move here is to show that an embedded clause is compatible with a result-like interpretation of the nominalization (following Benz 2023). What I am yet to figure out is an extension of the result/content analysis to initial counterexamples for verbs like *prekratitj* 'to stop' that fail on eventive construals for speakers who allow it.

(39) *?Trebuju*　　　　*prekrašč-e-n-ija*　　　　*obsužd-a-tj*　　　　*sluxi*
　　　demand.PRES.1SG stop-TH-PASS-NMLZ.GEN discuss-TH-INF-REFL rumours
　　　'I demand that you stop discussing rumours.'

4　Summary

The starting point of this talk was a rather simple observation: in Russian, clausal embedding properties of verbs are not always inherited by deverbal nominalizations (Section 2). The *why* part of the talk took longer. My claim was that the clauses that exhibit the pattern are VoiceP-sized (Section 3.1) and the pattern occurs due to semantic composition and predicat strengthening (Section 3.3). The apparent counterexamples were explained away by positing that TP-modification of nominals is unrestricted (Section 3.2). Available readings of counterexamples provide indirect support for this move (Section 3.4). Appendix II presents two reasons to support of phrasal layering for Russian that I can't account for yet: adverbials and aspectual prefixes.

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Appendix I: "subject control" verbs of Lyutikova & Gerasimova (2023)

Lyutikova & Gerasimova (2023) establish that the following verbs allow cross-clausal negative concord licensing: *načinat'* 'begin', *probovat'* 'try', *toropit'sya* 'hurry', *riskovat'* 'risk', *starat'sya* 'endeavor', *pytat'sya* 'seek', *perestavat'* 'cease'. For me, every verb except *starat'sya* 'endeavor' does not form a nominalization to begin with. The verb *starat'sya* 'endeavor' does not allow a clause-embedding nominalization.

(40) a. *Ego star-a-n-ie zametili professora*
          his endeavor-TH-PASS-NMLZ noticed professors
          'Professors noticed his eagerness.'

  b. **Ego star-a-n-ie preuspetj zametili professora*
        his endeavor-TH-PASS-NMLZ succeed.INF noticed professors
        Int: 'Professors noticed his eagerness to succeed.'

It's worthwhile to mention that they consider all these verbs to involve subject control. Their diagnostics are inconclusive, however. Lyutikova & Gerasimova (2023) rely on: (i) availability of negation as a TP diagnostic (despite negation being available Russian eventive nominalizations: Gerasimova 2019); (ii) availability of modification by *zavtra* 'tommorrow' (which is available in root-derived nominalizations: *vstrecha zavtra* 'meeting tommorrow'); (iii) availability of the matrix subject corresponding to embedded internal argument of passive / unaccusative sentences (ibid.:40). I take (iii) to be uninformative: while Lyutikova and Gerasimova equate the presence of PRO with presence of Spec,TP, I am unaware of independent arguments for this based on Russian. It's a bound zero subject. Bound subjects are found in Russian embedded CPs (Shushurin 2017). I fail to see why VoicePs should be left out. Another theoretical possibility is making use of Delayed Gratification (a CCG-like machinery to saturate a semantic argument later in the syntactic derivation: Wood 2015; Myler 2016).

Appendix II: reasons to support phrasal layering

Adverbs: Pazel'skaya & Tatevosov (2008) provide examples that Russian nominalizations are compatible with adverbials, suggesting verbal phrasal structure (Fu, Roeper & Borer 2001 report the same for English; Wood 2023 reports full impossibility of such modification in Icelandic).

(41) *Poluč-e-n-ie   licensii bystro   nevozmožno*
get-TH-PASS-NMLZ license **quickly** impossible
'Getting one's license quickly is impossible'

I have no good response yet. A possible response could be that the small syntax is enforced by the participial morphology embedded in the nominalization, to which an adverbial can attach (since Russian adjectives tolerate manner adverbials). Although it does not generalize to the English observations of Fu, Roeper & Borer (2001) and adverbials are still a problem for the small syntax analysis.

(42) *Kakoy namerenno   glupyj filjm!*
what **intentionally** stupid movie
'What an intentionally stupid movie!'

Various aspectual morphology: Russian, famously, expresses aspectual operators via prefixal and suffixal morphology (see Tatevosov 2020 for a recent treatment). Most of that morphology can appear in the nominalization. I leave it for further work how to accommodate it in a small syntax system (see Benz 2025, ch. 5, for discussion of some issues German prefixal nominalizations raise).

(43) a. *pere-na-pis-a-n-ie*
RE-PFV-write-TH-PASS-NMLZ
'Writing from scratch again.'

b. *pere-pis-yva-n-ie*
RE-write-YVA-PASS-NMLZ
'Writing again.' (*-yva-* is an imperfectivizing suffix)