

## Book Review

**Jim Wood**, *Icelandic nominalizations and allosemy*, 2023. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 368, £83.00, ISBN 9780198865155.

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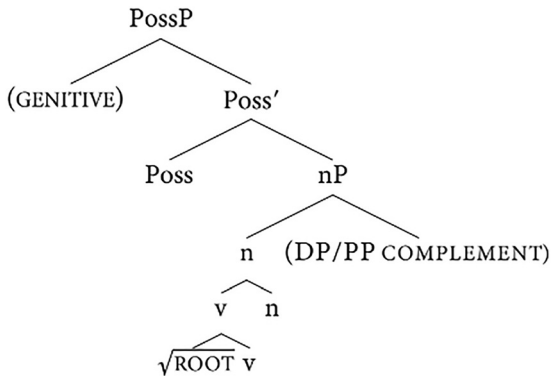
Two major approaches to deverbal nominalizations, which Jim Wood in *Icelandic nominalizations and allosemy* refers to as the ‘Parallel Structures’ and ‘Phrasal Layering’ analyses, were developed to capture the observation that nominalizations are frequently isomorphic to their verbal counterparts. In the Parallel Structures analysis, nominalizations are noun phrases with a structure configurationally identical to that of verb phrases (Chomsky 1970). In the Phrasal Layering analysis, nominalizations are built on top of a full verb phrase (Alexiadou 2001; Borer 1997; Fu et al. 2001). As Wood points out, however, both of these approaches have difficulty accounting for the pervasive ambiguity exhibited by nominalizations cross-linguistically. As illustrated in (1) from Icelandic, the same deverbal nominalization can receive at least three distinct interpretations, known as the Complex Event Nominal (CEN), Simple Event Nominal (SEN) and Result Nominal (RN) readings, which exhibit a host of different properties (Grimshaw 1990).

- (1) a. Eyðilegg-ing borgarinnar var hræðilegur atburður.  
destruc-NMLZ.NOM city.the.GEN was horrible event  
‘The destruction of the city was a horrible event.’ (CEN)
- b. Eyðilegg-ing-in stóð yfir í marga daga.  
destruc-NMLZ-the.NOM lasted over in many days  
‘The destruction lasted many days.’ (SEN)
- c. Jón gekk sorgmæddur í gegnum eyðilegg-ing-una.  
Jón walked aggrieved in through destruc-NMLZ-the.ACC  
‘Jón walked aggrieved through the destruction.’ (RN)

(from Jóhannsdóttir 1995: 63, cited on p. 66)

Taking seriously the morphology of deverbal nominalizations in Icelandic within the framework of Distributed Morphology (DM), Wood proposes a novel Complex Head analysis of nominalization. In this approach, the root is first categorized by a verbal *v* head, a nominal *n* head combines directly with *v*, and any additional material is built on the extended projection of *nP*; this is sketched in (2).

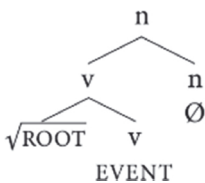
## (2) Complex Head analysis (p. 13)



Wood argues that the properties of Icelandic nominalizations are best accounted for by the above Complex Head analysis and contextual alloemy, which allows the categorizing heads  $v$  and  $n$  to receive different contextual semantic interpretations. *Icelandic nominalizations and alloemy* unfolds an extensive presentation and defense of this proposal.

In Chapter 1 'Introduction', Wood starts by outlining the Parallel Structures and Phrasal Layering analyses of nominalizations and their main areas of weakness, and introduces his Complex Head proposal. By building the nominalization on a verb, the Complex Head analysis allows the argument structure and meaning of the verb to be inherited in CENs. By building the nominalization directly on a verb rather than on a verb *phrase*, the Complex Head analysis admits potential syntactic divergences between the nominalization and its verbal counterpart, such as those we find in Icelandic. Wood proposes to extend the analysis in (2) to all deverbal nominalizations in Icelandic, including SENs and RNs, and shows that an identical syntax for all nominalizations is possible if we assume that categorizing heads are subject to contextual alloemy. As fleshed out in later chapters, Wood proposes that  $v$  is semantically contentful in CENs but semantically null in SENs and RNs, which instead have a semantically contentful  $n$ :

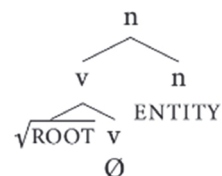
## (3) a. CEN reading



## b. SEN reading



## c. RN reading (p. 27)



Wood adopts much of the internal structure of the Icelandic DP as elucidated by Harðarson (2017), but assumes that it is the categorized root, rather than the root itself, that takes complements. Genitive-marked arguments may be introduced as complements to *n* or above *nP* in a separate projection headed by Poss. Importantly, case assignment within the noun phrase is very regular; there is no evidence of lexical ‘quirky’ case assignment commonly found in Icelandic verb phrases (Ingason 2016).

Chapter 2 ‘Icelandic nominalizations’ provides a general introduction to nominalizations in Icelandic, which display systematic ambiguity between the CEN, SEN and RN readings. Icelandic is particularly instructive as a language of investigation because of the overtness of its verbal and nominal morphology, and the distribution and case marking of DP and PP complements in nominalizations. CENs bear overt verbal morphology and inherit the complex event meaning and argument structure of their corresponding verb, which indicates the presence of a *v* head in the structure. These properties remain unexplained in a Parallel Structures analysis, in which nominalizations contain no verbal layer. As Wood shows, however, that there is no morphological evidence for higher verb phrase structure in a CEN. CENs display the regular case-marking properties of non-derived nominals, taking genitive DP and PP complements, indicating that any arguments that the nominalization takes merge above *n*. Wood provides evidence that Voice is absent in Icelandic nominalizations (see also Alexiadou et al. 2013 on English *-ation*) and argues that compatibility with agentive modifiers does not necessarily diagnose the presence of Voice in the functional structure.

The Phrasal Layering approach, by contrast, assumes nominalization of a full verb phrase rather than just a *v* head; the verb combines with its arguments before the resulting phrase is nominalized. This predicts that the behaviour of internal arguments in nominalizations should be identical to their verbal counterparts. Phrasal Layering would therefore expect lexical case patterns assigned to theme arguments in verbal environments to also be inherited in nominalizations. As Wood demonstrates emphatically in Chapter 3 ‘Phrasal Layering versus Complex Heads’, however, this prediction is not borne out. When verbs that select for dative themes are nominalized, the theme that is inherited in the nominalization cannot be dative-marked – as shown in (4), direct object themes of nominalizations must be marked with genitive case, or in a PP headed by the preposition *á* (Jóhannsdóttir 1995; Maling 2001). Verbs with other lexical case patterns exhibit similar mismatches with their nominalized counterparts.

- (4) a. Guðrún                                      ók      leigubílnum.  
       Guðrún.NOM                                drove taxi.the.DAT  
       ‘Guðrún drove the taxi.’

(p. 112)



phase, and is therefore sufficiently local to the root for the purposes of conditioning allosemy, whereas the P contained with a PP complement, being outside of the phase, is not local to the root and therefore cannot condition allosemy. Finally, the fact that the prefix P can differ from the complement P suggests that the prefix is not derived from the complement P via head movement. The prefixed complex head involved in nominalizations is thus not a product of movement but is built directly in the syntax.

In Chapters 5 and 6, Wood provides a concrete implementation of his Complex Head analysis, in which nominalizations have a uniform syntax but different interpretations due to contextual allosemy. All Icelandic nominalizations are built on a root and categorizing heads *v* and *n*. Ambiguity arises due to the availability of different allosemes for each categorizing head, which can be semantically contentful or null. In Chapter 5 ‘Complex Event Nominals and inheritance’, Wood argues that the CEN reading arises when *v* gets its ordinary verbal interpretation (an event which may require an internal argument) and *n* is semantically null (an identity function), as in (3a). CENs thus appear to inherit the meaning and internal arguments of the verb because the choice of *v* alloseme in CENs and verbs is identical; an argument must merge to saturate the internal argument variable in a CEN, just as it would with the verb. Further structure, however, is built on the extended projection of the *nP*, rather than a *vP*; the set of complements available in nominalizations is thus restricted to the kinds of complements that nouns can take, such as PPs and genitive DPs. External arguments are introduced by Poss, which, in parallel to Voice in the verbal domain, is interpreted as agentive when it combines with an agentive complement.

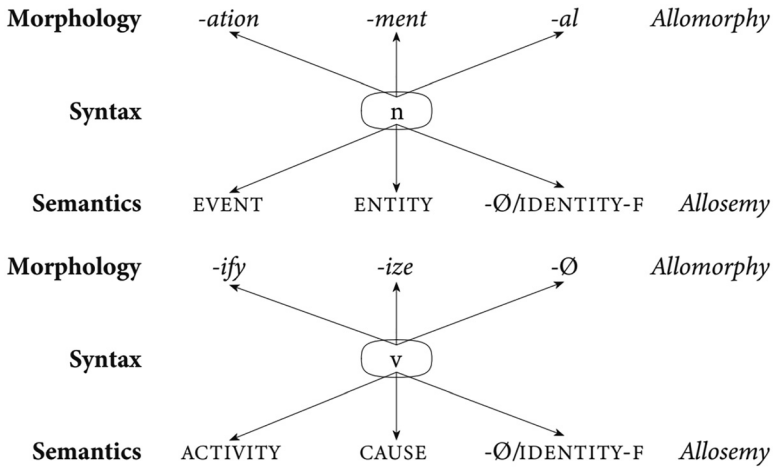
Finally, in Chapter 6 ‘Simple Event Nominals, Referring Nominals, and allosemy’, Wood elaborates on the available readings when *v* is semantically null and *n* is contentful. Being homophonous with CENs, SENs and RNs display overt verbal morphology, indicating that at least some of these nominals contain a *v* head. However, SENs and RNs do not have the same range of meanings as their verbal and CEN counterparts, indicating that the *v* head is semantically null. Instead, the *n* head is contentful, and is event-denoting in SENs and entity-denoting in RNs; this was sketched in (3b) and (3c), respectively. SENs and RNs furthermore display idiosyncratic nominal meanings that are unrelated to their verbal counterparts, suggesting that the root and *n* can condition allosemy on each other, apparently skipping over *v*. To account for this, Wood extends a proposal of Embick’s (2010) for null allomorphs to null allosemes, suggesting that null allosemes are pruned from the structure. In SENs and RNs (Root-*v-n*), *v* is semantically null and thus pruned (Root- $[\emptyset]$ -*n*  $\rightarrow$  Root-*n*), rendering the root and *n* linearly adjacent and therefore local for the purposes of contextual allosemy. The resulting locality at LF allows

SENs and RNs to display idiosyncratic root meanings conditioned by *n*. In CENs, by contrast, *v* is semantically contentful and thus intervenes and blocks any conditioning relationship between the root and *n*.

*Icelandic nominalizations and allosemy* is an impressive piece of work. Wood deftly weaves together theory and data in a conversational, accessible style. The primary syntactic innovation presented in the book is the Complex Head analysis of Icelandic CENs, whereby *n* combines with *v* directly in the syntax, and any dependents are built on a nominal superstructure. This captures the fact that CENs have verbal morphology and meaning but exhibit the syntax of a nominal. While Wood assumes a piece-based approach to morphology, by building the deverbal noun in its entirety before merging further phrasal material, his proposal should appeal to non-lexicalists and lexicalists alike; indeed, he derives much inspiration from Lieber (2017). Wood also shows how the Complex Head analysis can be extended to a host of related constructions in Icelandic, such as agent nominals and synthetic compounds. The Complex Head analysis is a powerful and compelling approach, one which I expect will feature prominently in future research on derivational morphology.

Wood applies the Complex Head analysis not only to CENs, however, but also SENs and RNs. He posits no syntactic difference between these readings. Rather, they differ only in their semantics, which he proposes to capture using contextual allosemy. Practitioners of DM and other late insertion models of morphology are generally comfortable with contextual allomorphy, a one-to-many mapping between syntax and form in a particular context. Both *v* and *n*, for instance, can receive several distinct phonological realizations in Icelandic, conditioned by the root and other functional material. Contextual allomorphy is, for most linguists, uncontroversial. Contextual allosemy, by contrast, may prove much more divisive. Contextual allosemy is a one-to-many mapping between syntax and meaning – Wood argues that both *v* and *n* can receive several distinct semantic realizations depending on their context. Proponents of allosemy have argued that context-sensitive semantic realization at LF is entirely parallel to context-sensitive phonological realization at PF and is therefore expected in an ‘inverted Y’ model like DM (e.g. Marantz 2013; Myler 2016; Wood 2015; Wood and Marantz 2017); Wood indeed suggests that allosemes are subject to similar processes and constraints as allophones, such as phase locality and pruning. Taken together, allomorphy at PF and allosemy at LF results in a potentially many-to-many relation between form and meaning, as illustrated in (6). Wood argues that this is exactly what is needed to capture the behaviour of nominalizations: the same reading can arise across different forms, and the same form is ambiguous between different readings.

(6) Many-to-many relation between form and semantics (p. 24)



For piece-based models of the grammar in which semantics is conceptually prior to structure or form (e.g. the recent Meaning First Approach; Sauerland and Alexiadou 2020), or in which morphemes are viewed as the traditional “minimal units of form and meaning” (e.g. Morphology as Syntax; Collins and Kayne 2023), allosemy will be impossible to accept. Different readings would have to arise from different structures, perhaps exhibiting what we could call ‘radical decomposition’, whereby the presence of distinct semantic concepts or phonological forms indicate a more elaborate underlying functional sequence.

Suppose that we do grant the Y-model architecture. One potential domain of empirical difference between contextual allomorphy and the system of allosemy that Wood characterizes concerns the relative prevalence of ‘doublets’. Morphological doublets of the *curiosity~curiousness* type (Embick and Marantz 2008), where the same head can be realized by two or more distinct forms, seem relatively rare. This can be explained by assuming that allomorphs compete with each other for realization. Wood’s approach to nominalizations, by contrast, assumes pervasive ambiguity; semantic doublets or triplets exist for most nominalizations. This raises questions about the nature of competition and of usage. It may turn out that ‘multiple winners’ are more prevalent in allomorphy than I have suggested (see Embick 2016 on polymorphy). It would nonetheless be interesting to explore any potential asymmetry between allomorphy and allosemy in this regard.

Finally, in considering the allosemes proposed for each reading, an interesting conspiracy appears to emerge. Whereas both *v* and *n* can be phonologically contentful, for any given reading, shown in (3), generally only one of *v* and *n* may be semantically contentful while the other is semantically zero. This could be explained

by semantic well-formedness constraints, such type (in)compatibility. An alternative account may be offered within Nanosyntax, which allows insertion of a single lexical item into a span of multiple contiguous terminal nodes (Svenonius 2012); a single semantically contentful lexical item could be inserted here, spanning both categorizing heads.

Wood's book aims to "(a) argue for a specific characterization of the architecture of grammar, that [he hopes] should serve as a constraint on what a model of grammar should like, and (b) develop the theory of Distributed Morphology in a way that centers on this characterization" (p. 322). I believe the book successfully accomplishes these goals, providing the most extensive development and elaboration of allosemy to date in the DM literature. In addition, while Icelandic has featured prominently in much of the generative literature on argument structure and case, nominalization in Icelandic has been comparatively understudied from a theoretical perspective. This book is thus a welcome contribution to the study of Icelandic syntax and provides a valuable model and reference guide for investigating nominalization in other languages, all while offering theoretical insights which I expect will prove highly influential for future work on nominalization and morphosemantic theory.

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