1. Objectives

The present study, aimed at investigating into the semantic proper aspect of little v, takes up two objectives:

1. To argue against Panagiotidis’s (2009, 2011) proposal that a [V] feature on little v imposes an extending-into-time perspective at LF, whereas an [N] feature on little n imposes a sortal perspective at LF, and
2. To show that supralexical causation (and not temporality) is the necessary interpretative perspective encoded in little v (cf. Wechsler 2005; Harley 2009, 2013).

2. No Sortal/Temporal n/v Distinction

Working in the framework of Halle & Marantz’s (1993) Distributed Morphology, Panagiotidis (2009, 2011) points out that the LF-interpretable categorial features [N] and [V], providing sortal and temporal perspectives, respectively, make the categorizers n and v semantically distinct. Here, based on the expression of temporality in nominals and applying Prasad’s (2008) sortal criteria to verials, it is shown that such a semantic distinction between n and v is not tenable.

2.1. Temporality in Nominal Domain

As shown in (1), nominals can be modified by temporal as well as aspectual adjectives. This ensures that nominal meaning has a built-in temporal dimension and may be based on event structure.

(1) a. the former Soviet Union
   b. the gradual/sudden change in the climate

Moreover, according to Lecarme (1996, 2004) and Nordlinger & Sadler (2004a, 2004b), nominals are inflected for tense, aspect and mood in a number of languages (as shown in (2)). Hence, tense (temporal markers) does not exclusively combine with verbs (contra Panagiotidis 2011:373).

(2) che-rä-gà-kue (Guarani)
   1sg-house-inf ‘my former house’ (from Nordlinger & Sadler 2004a)

2.2. Sortality in Verbal Domain


- **Criterion of “application”:** ‘the representation is understood to apply to things of a certain kind, but not others. Thus, the sortal dog allows us to think about dogs, but not tables, trees, wood or any other kind of thing.’ (Prasad 2008:6)
- **Criterion of “identity”:** ‘provides the basis for thoughts like dogs, [which] by virtue of being dogs, remain dogs throughout their existence.’ (Prasad 2008:7)

These criteria, however, can be satisfied by verbal concepts as well. By replacing thing with situation (event/state), the criterion of “application” narrows down the understanding of the representation to situations of certain kind, but not others; GO allows us to think about go, but not run, sleep or any other kind of situation. Also, the criterion of “identity” can provide the basis for the thoughts like go and run, which by virtue of being go and run, remain go and run throughout their occurrence.

3. Supralexical Causation in v

This section shows that supralexical causation is the interpretive perspective encoded in v, but not in n. “Generative” theories of causation are then taken up to define causation in terms of the process by which the effect occurs.

3.1. Cause: Not in n But in v

To argue that v, unlike n, can provide supralexical causation for a root with no inherent (external/internal) cause, this study makes use of Marantz’s (1997) categorization of roots, reiterated in (3).

(3) root class
   -[DESTROY] change of state, not internally caused
   -[GROW] change of state, internally caused

As illustrated in (4)-(5), the [N]grammaticality of the nominal use of these roots (i.e. where IP is the complement of the nominalizer n) reveals that n is not capable of providing the root with supralexical causal meaning; only the arguments involved in the inherent (lexical) causal relation are semantically licensed.

(4) a. the enemy’s destruction of the city
   b. * John’s growth of tomatoes
   c. * John’s break of the glass

(5) a. the city’s destruction by the enemy
   b. the tomatoes’ growth
   c. * the glass’s break

Unlike n, the verbalizer v assigns the interpretive perspective of causation to the category-neutral root; therefore, the necessary causal relation is established for the argument(s) involved in cause (externally or internally), as shown in (6).

(6) a. The enemy destroyed the city.
    b. John grew tomatoes.
    c. John broke the glass.

3.2. What is Causation?

There are two broad theoretical views of causation:

- "Make a difference" theories of causation: ‘A causes B if A’s occurrence makes a difference to B’s occurrence in one way or another.’
  - (Walsh & Slioman 2011:21)
- "Generative" theories of causation: ‘A causes B if some quantity or symbol gets passed in some way from A to B.’
  - (Walsh & Slioman 2011:21)

While "make a difference" theories, based on the idea that a cause is something that makes a difference to the effect, disregard how the effect is brought about, “generative” theories of causation incorporate the notion that a cause involves a process of transmission or exchange of some conserved physical quantity, such as energy, along a causal pathway from the causor to the causee (see Salmon 1984; Dow 2000).

To make the causal distinction between n and v, a theory of causation must be able to elucidate the ungrammaticality of (4b-c) in contrast to the grammaticality of (6b-c).

The causor John and the effect grow/break are the necessary elements for “make a difference” theories to be held. Both of these elements are present in (4b-c), as well as in (6b-c). Thus, causation as defined by these theories can not distinguish n from v.

If causation involves a causal mechanism, as defined by “generative” theories, the causal distinction between n and v will be borne out; v encodes the necessary supralexical causal pathway from cause to effect, hence the grammaticality of (6b-c), while n is not able to provide any causal relation supralexically, hence the ungrammaticality of (4b-c).

4. Conclusions

With reference to the two objectives, this study concludes that:

- The semantic distinction between n and v is not a sortal/temporal distinction. Crucially, the categorial feature [V] on v is not responsible for an extending-into-time perspective at LF, and that
- v, unlike n, encodes supralexical causation, that is, [V] on v lays the causal pathway from cause to effect, whereas [N] on n encodes only the effect (and not the causal relation).

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank E. Povelos Panagiotidis for sending me very useful material and for his thoughtful comments on the abstract of this study. All errors are of course my own.

References


n.ilkhanipour@ut.ac.ir
ms.negin5@gmail.com