In the Event of a Nominal

Hagit Borer
USC

This paper embarks upon a detailed comparison of the event structure and properties of Argument Structure Nominals (Grimshaw’s Complex Event Nominals), on the one hand, and the event structure and properties of Synthetic Compounds, traditionally assumed to derive from the incorporation, into a derived nominal, of the internal argument of the verb. Under (preliminary) consideration, then, would be the minimal pairs in (1):

1. **AS-Nominals**
   a. The driving of the truck
   b. The sinking of the ship
   c. the writing of the letter
   d. the growing of the tomato

2. **Synthetic Compounds**
   a. Truck driving
   b. ship sinking
   c. letter writing
   d. tomato growing

Superficial similarities notwithstanding, I will proceed to show that the properties of these two phrases are extremely different. Specifically, while AS-Nominals have the properties of grammatical events, Synthetic Compounds do not; while AS-Nominals are always compositional, Synthetic Compounds need not be; while AS-nominals must have a well-formed clausal VP correlate (or an equivalent thereof), synthetic compounds need not. Finally, while Synthetic Compounds must be transitive (cf. (2b,d)) AS-Nominals need not be (cf. (1b,d)).

In accounts that invest event properties and argument roles in lexical entries, indeed, in accounts that invest event properties and argument roles in verbs or even in roots, these contrasts cannot be captured. Rather, as I will argue, the comparison provides particularly strong argument for the non-lexical nature of argument structure, and for its representation through structural, rather than lexical-semantic means.