Psych Verbs and Nominalization

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Psych-verbs show a peculiar behavior with the verb-participle-nominal triplet, which has been a long-standing puzzle; Morphologically the nominal is derived from the verb. In terms of the subcategorization frame, however, the nominal is parallel to the adjectival passive (3), not to the verb (1b).

(1) a. John amused the children with his stories.

 b. *John's amusement of the children with his stories

(2) the children's amusement at John's stories

(3) The children were amused at John's stories

Thus it looks as though the nominal were to be derived from the adjectival passive, contradictory to the morphology.

But the contradiction is only superficial, which is revealed by the representations in terms of conceptual structure in the sense of Jackendoff. The adjectival passive has the representation (4), just parallel to ordinary adjectives. The verb, on the other hand, will be represented as in (5), which is just the causative of (4).

(4) John was surprised at the news.

 [BE([JOHN],[AT SURPRISE([AT([NEWS])])])]

(5) The news surprised John.

 [CAUSE([NEWS],[INCH[BE([JOHN],
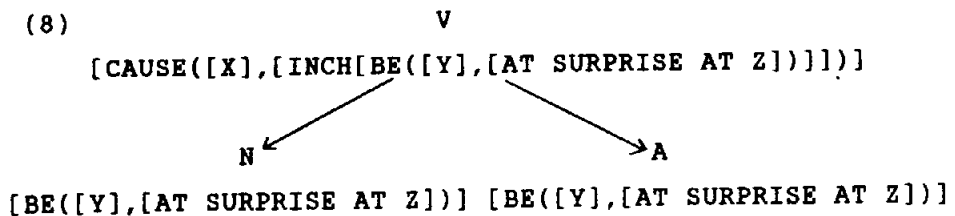
    [AT SURPRISE([AT([])])])])])]

What is crucial is that the verb has three arguments in conceptual structure, although only two of them can appear in syntactic structure. The syntactic-conceptual correspondence can be illustrated as follows:

(6)   [CAUSE([X],[INCH[BE([Y],[AT SURPRISE([AT Z])])])])]

    a.   X surprise Y.

    b.   Y is surprised by X.

    c.   Y is surprised at Z.

Among the three arguments, the verb realizes X and Y as in (6a). On the other hand, Y and Z appear with the adjectival passive as in (6c). Thus the adjectival passive is to be distinguished from the (verbal) passive, which realizes X and Y as shown in (6b). Seen in this light, it turns out that the derived nominal allows Y and Z, but never X.

(7) a.   John's surprise at the result

    b.   *the result's surprise of John

    c.   *John's surprise by the result

Now the derivational processes can be illustrated as follows in terms of conceptual structure:

(8)   V

   [CAUSE([X],[INCH[BE([Y],[AT SURPRISE AT Z])])])]

                N ⬋   ⬊A

[BE([Y],[AT SURPRISE AT Z])] [BE([Y],[AT SURPRISE AT Z])]

The nominal is derived from the verbal base in accordance with the morphology. But the X argument is suppressed (decausativization) in the course of deverbalization, and only Y and Z arguments are left. In consequence, the nominal can realize Y and Z, but not X, which is not present in its argument structure. This argument structure happens to be identical to that of the adjectival passive, which likewise undergoes the suppression of the X argument.