

# Arguments in nominalisations: a unified approach to postnominal PPs and genitives in German

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Nominalizations across languages  
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# Outline of the talk

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Data and main claims
- 3 The analysis
- 4 Summary and future work

# Main objectives of the talk I

- semantic and syntactic aspects of adnominal genitives and PPs in nominalisations
- two kinds of genitives?
  - syntactic genitive – internal argument
    - (1) die Zerstörung der Stadt  
the destruction the<sub>gen</sub> city<sub>gen</sub>  
'the destruction of the city'
  - semantic genitive – modifier
    - (2) der Garten des Nachbarn  
the garden the<sub>gen</sub> neighbour<sub>gen</sub>  
'the neighbour's garden'

# Main objectives of the talk II

The following claims are made:

- no **syntactic** argument position for genitives
- all postnominal genitives should be treated the same way
- the analysis should preferably also cover postnominal PPs associated with arguments: *von* and *durch*

Assumptions:

- syntax of the modifier case
- underspecified semantics

# Data and claims I

- postnominal genitives, *von* and *durch* phrases in German
- prenominal genitives excluded: restricted to proper names?
- event nominalisations derived by means of *-ung* suffix

## Data and claims II

- (3)
- a. die Beschreibung der Bürgermeisterin  
the description GEN Mayoress  
'the description of the Mayoress' or 'the Mayoress'  
description'
  - b. die Beschreibung durch die Bürgermeisterin  
the description through the mayoress  
'the description by the Mayoress'
  - c. die Beschreibung von Bürgermeisterin Müller  
the description of Mayoress Müller  
'the description of Mayoress Müller' or 'Mayoress  
Müller's description'
  - d. die Lagebeschreibung der Bürgermeisterin  
the situation-description GEN mayoress  
'the description of the situation by the mayoress'

# Data and claims III

- All postnominal PPs and genitives occupy the same syntactic position, i.e. they are adjoined to the level of nP.
- All postnominal PPs and genitives are assigned the same semantic value: they are represented by the underspecified two-place semantic relation  $\rho(x,z)$ .

# Data and claims IV

Two views:

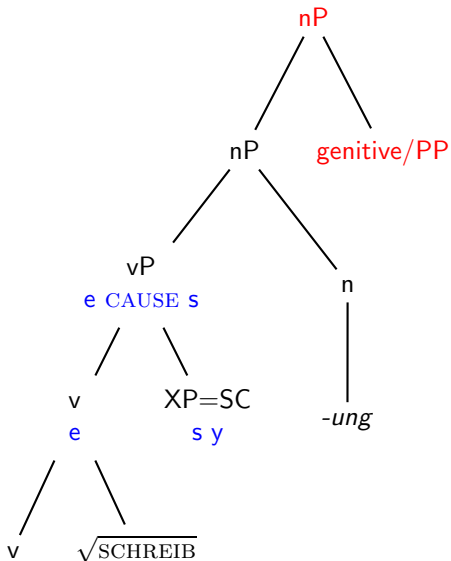
- Semantics/argument structure: as genitives relate differently to the head noun, they must occupy different syntactic positions
- Surface syntax: as there is no syntactic difference, we should assume an underspecified semantics



# The framework

- inspired by distributed morphology: constructing words from roots
- semantics: discourse representation theory including store–content differentiation

# Word-syntactic structure of *Beschreibung* (simplified)

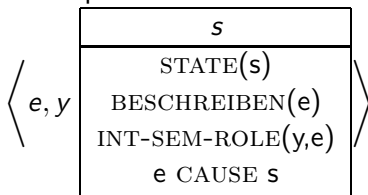


# Word-syntactic (and semantic) assumptions

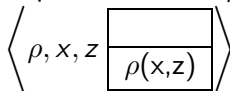
- Assuming the Voice hypothesis, i.e. external arguments are introduced by Voice and not contained in vP.
- The suffix *-ung* operates on the level of vP, but has no semantic effect apart from providing a noun.
- The *-ung* nominalisation does not include a Voice projection.
- The variable introducing what may be termed the internal argument semantically,  $y$ , is not bound before the level at which nominalisation occurs.
- The vP level includes semantic information on the relation between the  $y$  argument and the event in which it is included.

# Semantic construction with genitives and *von* phrases I

(4) The representation of vP and nP:

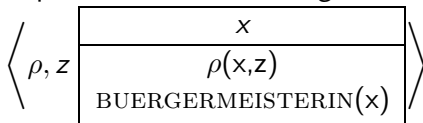


(5) Representation of  $\rho$ :



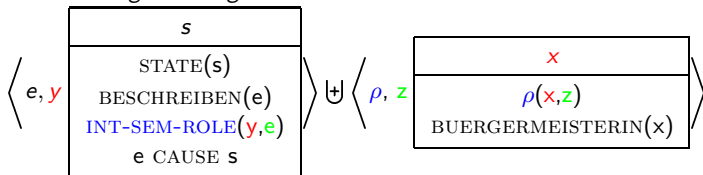
# Semantic construction with genitives and *von* phrases II

- (6) die Beschreibung der Bürgermeisterin  
 the description GEN Mayoress  
 'the description of the Mayoress' or 'the Mayoress's  
 description'
- (7) Representation of *der Bürgermeisterin*:

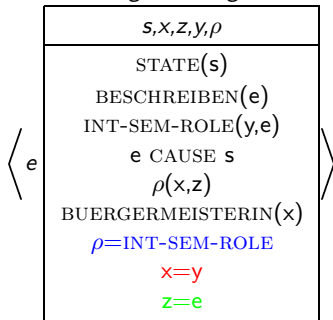


# Semantic construction with genitives and *von* phrases III

(8) *Beschreibung der Bürgermeisterin* before unification:



(9) *Beschreibung der Bürgermeisterin*:



# Preference for object reading

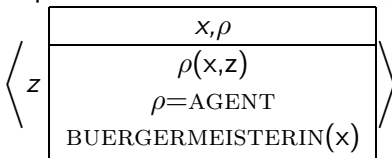
- for variables, entering binding relations is preferred to existential binding
- preference for object/internal argument reading
- if variable is not bound by genitive, a binding has been overlooked,  $\rho$  relation has to be accommodated

# Semantic construction with *durch* phrase I

(10) die Beschreibung durch die Bürgermeisterin  
 the description through the mayoress  
 'the description by the Mayoress'

(11)  $\rho = \text{AGENT}$

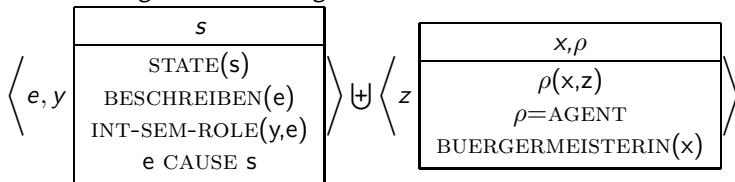
(12) Representation of *durch die Bürgermeisterin*:



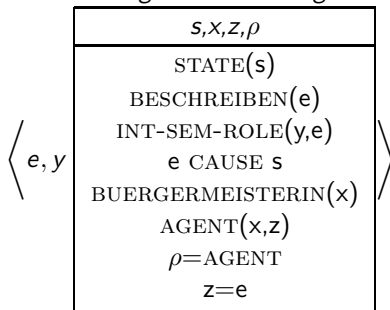


# Semantic construction with *durch* phrase II

(13) *Beschreibung durch die Bürgermeisterin* before unification:



(14) *Beschreibung durch die Bürgermeisterin*:



# Agentive reading of genitives I

No internal argument reading available:

- (15) die Lagebeschreibung der Bürgermeisterin  
the situation-description GEN mayoress  
'the description of the situation by the mayoress'

- Does the noun *Lage* bind *y*?

## Agentive reading of genitives II

Binding of *y* analysis too simple:

- (16) a. die Personenbeschreibung der Täter  
the person-description the delinquent  
'the personal description of the delinquent'
- b. die Strukturbeschreibung des einfachen  
the structure-description the simple  
Arraymodells  
array-model  
'the structural description of the simple array model'

- genitive identified with first noun in the compound (16a)
- genitive modifies the first noun in the compound (bracketing paradox) (16b)

# Conceptualising arguments?

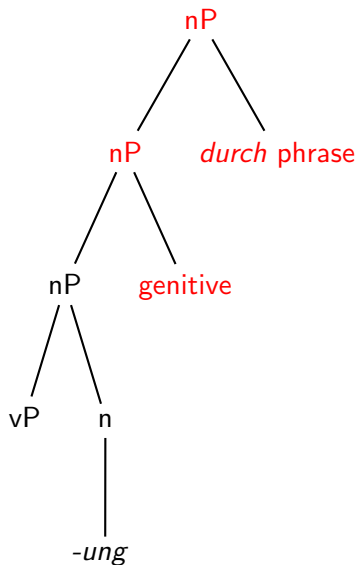
- *durch*: ensures AGENT interpretation
- how does the agentive interpretation of genitives emerge?
- associative relation conceptualised as agent?

## Modification involving genitive and *durch* phrase I

- (17) a. die Beschreibung der Lage durch die  
 the description GEN situation through the  
 Bürgermeisterin  
 mayor  
 'the mayoress' description of the situation'
- b. \*die Beschreibung durch die Bürgermeisterin der  
 the description through the mayoress the  
 Lage  
 situation  
 intended: 'the mayoress' description of the situation'

- additional constraint on genitives and *von* phrases: adjacency

# Modification involving genitive and *durch* phrase II



# Obligatory internal argument interpretation of genitives? I

There seem to be some cases where the genitive is obligatorily interpreted as the internal argument:

(18) die Absetzung des Kanzlers  
the unseating the chancellor  
'The unseating of the chancellor'

- Potentially problematic to the analysis presented here
- Ehrich & Rapp: always internal argument interpretation when change-of-state is present

# Obligatory internal argument interpretation of genitives? II

Possible counterevidence to Ehrich & Rapp:

- (19) a. Die Gruppe “Revolutionärer Kampf” protestierte  
the group “revolutionary struggle” protested  
gegen die todbringende **Umweltzerstörung**  
against the deathly environment-destruction  
des kapitalistischen Systems.  
the capitalistic system  
'The group “revolutionary struggle” protested against  
the deathly destruction of the environment by the  
capitalistic system'



# Obligatory internal argument interpretation of genitives? III

- b. Eine Woche nach der **Leitzinserhöhung** der  
one week after the key-interest-rate-raising the  
Deutschen Bundesbank ...  
German Bundesbank  
'One week after the raising of the key interest rate by  
the German Bundesbank ...
  
- Alternative explanation: particle *ab-* involved?

# General questions

- At which level are semantic entities available for modification?  
Compositionality.
- Are there differences between the semantic roles in the verbal and nominal domain?

## a unified analysis of postnominal genitives and PPs as modifiers of -ung nominalisations in German

- All postnominal genitives and PPs occupy the same syntactic position. They are adjuncts of nP.
- All postnominal genitives and PPs are assigned a underspecified semantic representation which may be specified as being an agent in the case of *durch*, unified with the semantic role of the internal argument in the case of genitives or *von* phrases or specified otherwise according to the selectional and sortal restrictions of the nominalisation.

### Future work:

- all of the above
- compounds consisting of noun--*ung*-nominalisation combinations
- the distribution of *von* and *durch* in passives and nominalisations