The head of Verb+Noun compounds in the Romance languages

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Abstract: Verb+Noun compounds in Spanish and the other Romance languages have well-known curious properties: (i) lack of nominalizing affix on the Verb; (ii) obligatory presence of the Noun, interpreted as the direct object of the Verb; (iii) interpretation as referring to persons or instruments able to perform the action expressed by the transitive verb. Compounds are uncommon in the Romance languages, whereas they are common and very productive in the Germanic languages. Verb+Noun compounds, however, are hardly found in the Germanic languages. The "Minimalist" model adopted in the analysis will provide the basic explanation: Verb+Noun compounds reflect the most "basic" syntactic structure, which can be used by default as a lexical process in the Romance languages, where "real compounding", namely, the incorporation of the noun into the verb, does not occur. The basic syntactic-lexical process is completed by another default process: the Verb+Noun is a lexical predicate in need of a subject, which is, again, provided "by default": [+HUMAN] or, by extension, [+INSTRUMENT] interpretation.

Keywords: Verb+Noun compounds; Minimalism; Germanic compounding, compounding, Spanish

Resumen: Los compuestos de verbo+sustantivo en español y el resto de lenguas románicas presentan unas propiedades particulares bien conocidas: (i) la falta de afijo sustantivante en el Verbo; (ii) la presencia obligatoria del Sustantivo, que se interpreta como objeto directo del Verbo ; (iii) su interpretación como referente de personas o instrumentos que pueden realizar la acción expresada por el verbo transitivo. Mientras que los compuestos no son muy comunes en las lenguas románicas, sí son muy comunes y productivos, en las lenguas germánicas. Los compuestos de Verbo+Sustantivo, en cambio, son muy escasos en las lenguas románicas. El modelo "Minimista" adoptado en el análisis proporciona la explicación básica a este contraste: los compuestos de Verbo+Sustantivo reflejan la estructura sintáctica más "básica" que se usa como proceso léxico 'por defecto' en las lenguas románicas, donde la 'verdadera composición', es decir, la incorporación del sustantivo al verbo, no es una opción. El proceso sintáctico-léxico básico se completa mediante otro proceso defectivo: los compuestos de Verbo+Sustantivo son predicados léxicos que necesitan un sujeto, el cual se asigna, de nuevo, 'por defecto': la interpretación de [+HUMANO] o, por extensión, de [+INSTRUMENTO].

Palabras clave: compuestos de Verbo+Sustantivo, Minimismo, composición en lenguas germánicas, composición, español

Resumo: Os compostos Verbo+Nome em Espanhol e em outras línguas românicas apresentam propriedades curiosas já conhecidas: (i) ausência de afixo de nominalização no Verbo; (ii) presença obrigatória do Nome, interpretado como o objecto directo do Verbo; (iii) interpretação como referindo-se a pessoas ou instrumentos capazes de desempenhar a acção expressa pelo verbo transitivo. Enquanto os compostos são pouco comuns nas línguas românicas, estes são muito comuns e muito produtivos nas línguas germânicas. Os compostos Verbo+Nome, contudo, são dificilmente encontrados nas línguas germânicas. O modelo «Minimalista» adoptado na análise permitirá a explicação básica: os compostos Verbo+Nome reflectem a estrutura sintáctica mais «básica», que pode ser usada, por padrão, como um processo lexical nas línguas românicas, nas quais a «verdadeira composição», incorporação do nome no verbo, não ocorre. O processo sintáctico-lexical básico é completo por um outro processo padrão: o Verbo+Nome é um predicado lexical que necessita de um sujeito, que é, novamente, fornecido por padrão: interpretação [+Humano] ou, por extensão, [+Instrumento].

Palavras-chave: Compostos Verbo+Nome; Minimalismo; composição em línguas germânicas; composição; espanhol

1. Introduction

Spanish Verb+Noun compounds are Nouns which have two parts: a verbal part followed by a nominal part interpreted as its direct object. Thus, in *cazatalentos* (lit.: hunt(s) talents: 'head hunter') the verbal part *caza* ('hunt(s)') is followed by the nominal part *talentos* ('talents') and in *abrecartas* (lit.: open(s) letters: 'letter opener'), the verbal part *abre* ('open(s)') is followed by the nominal part *cartas* ('letters'). The verbal part is homophonous with an independent word with verbal meaning: *caza* ('(he / she / you(sg./pol.)) hunt(s)') and *abre* ('(he / she / you(sg./pol.) open(s)') or *¡caza!* ('hunt! (you(sg./fam.))') and *¡abre!* ('open! (you(sg./fam.))').

The verbal part heading the Verb+Noun compound is interpreted as a deverbal Noun with Agent or Instrument interpretation. The meaning of the Verb+Noun compound is similar to the meaning of a phrase headed by a deverbal Noun, with a nominalizing affix added to the verbal part and followed by *de* + Noun, that is, the "genitive" preposition *de* ('of') which provides the direct object Noun with Case. This is sketched in (1):

(1) *Spanish Verb+Noun compounds and syntactic phrases*

  (a) (i) [*Compound*] caza-talentos (hunt(s).talentos='talent hunter')
       (ii) [*Phrase*] caza-dor de talentos ('hunt.er of talents')

  (b) (i) [*Compound*] abre-cartas (open(s).letters='letter opener')
       (ii) [*Phrase*] abri-dor de cartas ('open.er of letters')

In the Spanish Verb+Noun compounds, the verbal part is not nominalized by a nominal suffix like –*dor* ('-er'), which is used in the syntactic phrases (1(a)(ii)/(1(b)(ii)). Instead, it seems to be nominalized by the presence of the direct object noun, which cannot be omitted without the verbal part losing its deverbal nominal status (cf. Bisetto 1994). In the syntactic phrases, the omission of the genitive direct object does not produce loss of nominal status.

In (2), the effects of the omission of the noun with direct object value in the compounds and in the syntactic phrases given in (1) are shown:

(2) *Omission of the direct object in the Verb+Noun compound and the syntactic phrase*

(a)   caza-talentos ('talent hunter') => *caza ('hunter') /
      caza-dor de talentos ('hunter of talents') =>caza-dor ('hunter')
(b)   abre-cartas ('letter opener') = *abre ('opener') /abri-dor de cartas ('opener of letters')
      => abri-dor ('opener')

The hypothesis that will be explored in this paper is that the operations forming Verb+Noun compounds in Spanish and the other Romance languages generate lexical predicates with minimal derivation. By a default rule of predicate interpretation, a nominal interpretation is derived with Agent/Instrument interpretation. The hypothesis is stated in (3):

(3) *Hypothesis on the structure of Romance Verb+Noun compounds*

(i)   Verb+Noun compounds are lexical predicates formed with minimal derivation, that is, headed by a transitive verb form and followed by its direct object noun;

(ii) The nominal value of the compound headed by a verb form is due to the null subject, which is added to give the lexical predicate proposition-like lexical value with default, basically [+HUMAN], interpretation.

Verb+Noun compounds are common in Spanish (cf. Bustos Gisbert 1986; Rainer & Varela 1992; Val Álvaro 1999) and the other Romance languages (cf. Giurescu 1975; Bok-Bennema & Kampers-Manhe 2005), in which other compounds are not numerous. In the Germanic languages (cf. Booij 2002), in which compounds are numerous, this type of compound is hardly found. One of the few English Verb+Noun compounds is *pickpocket*.

The comparison of the Spanish Verb+Noun compounds with the English equivalents, as can be seen in (1) and (2), shows another difference, which is that the noun interpreted as the direct object of the verb follows the verbal part in Spanish, and that it precedes the deverbal nominal part in English. A further comparison of the Spanish Verb+Noun compounds with their English equivalents, illustrated in (1) and (2), highlights another difference; while the noun interpreted as the direct object of the verb follows the verbal part in Spanish, it precedes the deverbal noun in English. In syntax, the order verb + direct object is common in both languages. In other words, the famous

Righthand Head Rule of English and other Germanic languages is not active in the Romance Verb+Noun compounds.

These will be the aspects of Verb+Noun compounds in Spanish that will be analyzed, taking a "minimalist view" and proposing a "minimalist" solution.

In section 2, a brief description of Spanish Verb+Noun compounds will be given, while section 3 will discuss the most characteristic properties of these compounds.

In section 4, the variant of the minimalist theory and its extension to account for the characteristic properties of Verb+Noun compounds will be presented.

In the final section, a brief summary will be given.

2. Some properties of Spanish Verb + Noun compounds

Spanish Verb+Noun compounds have two parts, a verbal part with final vowel *–a* (with verbs of the 1st conjugation, with infinitives in *–ar*) or *–e* (with verbs of the 2nd and 3rd conjugation, with infinitives in *–er* and *–ir*), and a nominal part, with singular or plural form.

The verbal part of the Verb+Noun compound, with final vowel *–a* or *–e,* is the form that expresses, if used as an independent word, the third person singular present indicative or the familiar singular imperative. The analysis of the verbal part in the Verb+Noun compound that will be followed in this study is that it is the root + thematic vowel of the verb.

The noun in the Verb+Noun compounds is usually singular with mass nouns and plural with count nouns.

The Verb+Noun compound usually has masculine gender. When it refers to one or more persons, acting as an Agent performing some action or operation, or producing some effect on an object, it has common masculine gender. With exclusively female referents, the Verb+Noun compound has feminine gender (cf. NGRALE 2009, ch. 2). When it refers to an Instrument with which a person is able to perform some action or operation, it has – presumably default – masculine gender.

The number of Verb+Noun compounds that have been incorporated in large bilingual dictionaries, such as Van Dale (1992) and Collins (1988) is not very high: between 200 and 300. In the most detailed study on the use of Verb+Noun compounds in the history of Spanish (Lloyd 1968)), more than 1000 compounds are mentioned. Other recently-formed Verb+Noun compounds are easy to find.

Some verb forms take many different nouns. Pérez Lagos (1986) gives the following information on the Verb+Noun compounds that have been

incorporated in DRAE (1984). More than 50% of the compounds have one of the following verbs, taking the number of different nouns that is given in brackets:

(3) *Verbs found in more than 50% of the Verb+Noun compounds in DRAE (1984) (and the number of different nouns with which they combine)*

(i) guardar (56); (ii) matar (32); (iii) portar (32); (iv) sacar (30); (v) saltar (17); (vi) tirar; (17); (vii) cortar (17); (viii) pasar (13); (ix) tapar (13); (x) romper (12); (xi) tragar (12); (xii) picar (11); (xiii) quitar (11); (xiv) parar (10); (xv) tornar (10)

(Pérez Lagos 1986:27)

There are more than 500 Verb+Noun compounds incorporated in DRAE (1984), according to the numerical data given by Pérez Lagos.

In (4), a few apparent exceptions to the observation that omission of the noun of the Verb+Noun compound does not produce a deverbal Noun are given:

(4) *Verb+Noun compounds and short forms*
(i) limpiabotas ('bootblack') => limpia ('bootblack')
(ii) pinchadiscos ('disc jockey') => pincha ('disc jockey')
(iii) guardabosque ('gamekeeper') => guarda ('gamekeeper')

It is easy to see that the "omission" of the noun in the lefthand Verb+Noun compounds in (4) produces a bisyllabic word with exactly the same meaning. In these cases, there is no omission of the noun, but reduction to a bisyllabic word. This kind of reduction is common in a number of Spanish words like *profe* ('teacher') (the bisyllabic form of *profesor(a)* ('teacher')) and *cole* ('(secondary) school') (the bisyllabic form of *colegio* ('secondary school')).

The main properties of Spanish Verb+Noun compounds are:

(5) *Characteristic properties of Spanish Verb+Noun compounds*

(i)   Verb+Noun compounds are gendered Nouns;
(ii) Verb+Noun compounds have Agent or Instrument interpretation;
(iii) The first part of a Verb+Noun compound is a verbal root or stem with final conjugation class vowel –*a* or –*e*;
(iv) The second part of a Verb+Noun compound is a noun in singular or plural form.
(v)   The verbal part of a Verb+Noun compound does not have deverbal nominal meaning without the presence of the nominal part with direct object interpretation.

In the next section, observations will be made on some of these properties and how to account for them.

3. Some aspects of Verb + Noun compounds and how to account for them

In the first part of this section, the compound status of Verb+Noun compounds will be considered, with special attention to the interpretation of the noun.

In the second part, a comparison with English compounds will be made, with special attention to the position of the verbal head and its direct object in morphology and syntax.

3.1. Interpreting the Noun in Verb+Noun compounds

A characteristic property of non-head nouns, which are part of a compound, and one of the defining criteria of compoundhood, is that they cannot be accessed by pronouns. The same noun can be accessed if it is an "independent" word, that is, not part of a compound.

The compoundhood of *botas* in *limpiabotas* is shown in (6)a., while in (6)b. the same noun *botas* is used as a non-compound noun. The same contrast is shown in (7), the English translation of (6), with a similar contrast in English *boot(s)*:

(6)   a. *Este señor es limpia*botas*$_i$ y *las*$_i$ trata bien
       b. Este señor limpia *botas*$_i$ y *las*$_i$ trata bien

(7)   a. *This gentleman is a *boot*$_i$black and he handles *them*$_i$ well
       b. This gentleman cleans *boots*$_i$ and he handles *them*$_i$ well

In the compounds *limpiabotas* in (6)a. and *bootblack* in (7)a., the non-head noun *botas* in (6)a. and *boot* in (7)a. has no discourse referent, which is why the pronoun *las* in (6)a. and *them* in (7)a. cannot take the noun as its antecedent. In (6)b. and (7)b., the noun has a discourse referent, which is why it can be interpreted as the antecedent of the pronoun.

The question now is how the non-head noun, which is part of a compound, is interpreted. The answer is that it has lexical meaning: it defines a class of persons, objects or events, without making reference to "individuals", that is, discourse referents. The gender feature of the noun is inactive, since there is no agreement of any kind; its only function is to identify the lexical item and its lexical meaning.

The number feature of the Noun is visible: *botas* ('boots') and *cartas* ('letters') in *limpiabotas* ('bootblack') and *abrecartas* ('ltter opener') are plural nominal forms. In other cases, the noun that forms part of a Verb + Noun compound is singular, as in *guardavía* ('linesman'). In both cases, the number has no interpretive effect; it functions as some kind of identifier of the lexical noun.

The Verb + Noun compound noun can be used as a singular or a plural noun, taking the appropriate form. If its noun has plural form, the noun compound will have the same singular and plural form: *el abrecartas*, *los abrecartas*; if its noun has singular form, the plural affix –(*e)s* will be used: *el guardavía*, *los guardavías*.

Thus, the nonhead noun which is interpreted as a direct object of the Verb form in the Verb+Noun compound has singular or plural form, but no number interpretation.

3.2. The position of the head of the compound and its relation with the noun

It is a well-known fact that Germanic, hence English, compounds have righthand heads. The Verb+Noun compound *pickpocket* is exceptional, not only in the lack of nominal affix to the verb, but also in the lefthand position of the verb *pick* which heads the direct object noun *pocket*. In normal compounds such as *window cleaner* and *headhunter*, the head, *cleaner* and *hunter*, is to the right. The lefthand parts are the nouns *window* and *head*, which are direct objects which follow the verb in syntactic phrases like *clean windows* and *hunt heads*. In some sense, the syntactic direct object is incorporated in the verb and takes the lefthand position. Another way of dealing with such English compounds is to analyze the nonhead noun as some kind of modifier, giving a pragmatic interpretation by which it obtains the direct object status. This two-step analysis is presented in (8):

(8)   *Two-step analysis of English compounds*
       Basic form: [N window] + [N[V clean] -er]
       (i) *Lexical interpretation*: "*cleaner* with respect to windows"
       (ii) *Pragmatic interpretation*: "*person* who cleans windows"

In this way, different interpretations of English [NN+[N[V]-*er*]] compounds can be accounted for, in which the incorporated noun is interpreted as a modifier of the head, a modifier that obtains a more direct interpretation by taking into account selectional properties of the head. The incorporated noun is not always the direct object of the verb. For example, the incorporated noun *school* in the compound *schoolteacher* has locative interpretation, as is the case with the noun *party*, incorporated in *party drinker*.

This two-step interpretation has two advantages. In the first place, it accounts for the variety of relationships between the head and the non-head that we find in the Germanic languages. In the second place, the typical modifier position in English is the adjective position, which is located to the left of the noun it modifies. Thus, morphology and syntax share the modifier-modifiee order. The same order is found in the other Germanic languages, in which compounding is common with righthand heads.

In other Romance languages, as in Spanish, the adjective interpreted as a modifier follows the noun. This may be part of the reason why compounds are uncommon and, why they have lefthand heads in the Romance languages.

Now, if the position of the adjective, with respect to the noun it modifies, is on the left in languages that form compounds freely and if the righthand

position blocks compounding of the free type, the question once more is how the Verb + Noun compounds of the Romance languages should be analyzed.

3.3. On the semantics of Lefthand Headed Compounds in the Romance languages

It is a wellknown fact that the great majority of Verb+Noun compounds in the Romance languages refer to persons or objects performing certain actions, or producing certain effects. This limited range of possible meanings suggests that the combination is the most basic or transparent structure of the lexical predicate headed by the verb. Outside the range of possible meanings are actions: Verb+Noun compounds do not refer to actions. This suggests that the fusion of the verb and its complement occurs when no Event or Tense feature is available. Given the transitive status of the verb, little v can be assumed to be part of the Verb + Noun compound. (cf. Chomsky 1995, 2001)

The basic parts of the structure and their properties that will be taken to account for the Verb+Noun compounds are given in (10):

(10)   *Basic parts of the structure of Verb + Noun compound and their properties*
          Structure: v + V + N
          Properties:
                  (i) v is the "light verb" position;
                  (ii) V is the root + thematic vowel of a verbal lexical item;
                  (iii) N has gender and number specification.

Let us take a look at the properties of this structure.

Little v introduces transitive Verbs. In syntax, V raises to v-position and raises from there to obtain Tense, Mood and Aspect, that is, TMA-interpretation. Since no TMA-values are at stake, no raising beyond little v is needed for the verb in the Verb + Noun compound. In fact, the direct object N and the verb V do not need to move. Therefore, it will be assumed that there is no movement of N and V in the structure given in (10).

The head of the Verb+Noun compound, then, is little v, which is needed to license N, the direct object of V, since little v assigns to the root of V its verbal value, presumably expressed by the thematic vowel. In syntax, the verbal root and its thematic vowel are part of an independent verb form, which is completed by an affix expressing TMA-values, that is, a form of the verbal paradigm, and it combines with an appropriate subject.

In the lexicon, the Verb+Noun compound is a predicate when the Verb merges with the Noun. A syntactic predicate needs a subject to have full interpretation. In syntax, predicates headed by an infinitive and lacking a controller of the null subject, obtain a propositional interpretation by the addition of a null subject which has default interpretation (cf. Schroten 2007). In syntax, the semantic value that is assigned to a "default subject", that is, a

subject supplied by the rules of logic, is [+HUMAN]. In the syntactic derivation, only the subject can be supplied and obtain this interpretation. Direct objects and other parts of speech are unable to obtain interpretation this way.

Now note that Verb+Noun compounds are nouns that are interpreted as lexical items, which, when obtaining reference, refer to an Agent or an Instrument used by an Agent performing the action described by the Verb+Noun predicate. This Verb+Noun predicate, the Verb+Noun compound, is lacking a subject, that is, it has no suitable nominalizing affix on the verb root. The verbal root has obtained citizenship as a transitive verb by selecting a direct object which checks little v, the functional element which gives the root verbal value. This way of analyzing the compounds suggests the hypothesis which is formulated and supported in the next section.

4. A minimalist approach to Verb + Noun compounds

In this section, some issues with respect to the "minimalist" analysis of Verb+ Noun compounds will be taken up.

Note that there is no standard minimalist theory. The analysis will be based on tenets of the minimalist theory, as proposed and described in Chomsky (1995, 2001).

The first issue that will be discussed is that the Verb+Noun compound reflects the most transparent syntactic structure of VP. The limited range of types of referents can be accounted for if we assume that these compounds are basic verbal constructions, lexical V+N predicates, completed by a default rule of subject interpretation which supplies its missing nominal head.

The second issue is related: why is the N in Verb + Noun compounds a necessary element. That is, why do not we find unergative or ergative "deverbal nouns" without any suffix?

The third issue is the number of the noun. If number has no numerical interpretation in the Verb+Noun compound, the question is why it is there.

4.1. Basic verbal properties of Verb + Noun compounds

A basic observation of the verbs that are found in Verb + Noun compounds is that they are, in some sense, prototypical: they express activities, not states. Furthermore, transitive verbs are the most transparent type of verbs. The transitive verbs that are used in Verb+Noun compounds usually imply prototypical subjects, human Agents or non-human Instruments requiring participation of a human being. The direct object Noun of the the compound is usually non-human, concrete and objectlike.

A clear statement of prototypical transitive verb constructions is given by Naess (2007: 181): "… the clause [expressing a transitive construction] should have an active, volitional agent participant and a concrete, specific, affected patient".

A now common analysis, which follows from Hale&Keyser (1993), of ergative and unergative intransitive verbs is that their derivation is less transparent than the derivation of transitive verbs. Transitive verbs, or rather, VPs containing a transitive verb and its direct object, then, are analyzed as the most basic or transparent ones.

Thus, the lexical items that can be merged in the first step of the derivation of the Verb+Noun compound are the transitive verbal stem and its object Noun. This syntactic step, which generates Verb + Noun compounds, can be hypothesized to be possible in the lexicon: the verbal root merges with the nominal root. Two other lexical operations must also be performed combining the Noun with a number affix and combining the Verb with little v, which might be analyzed as expressed by the thematic vowel. In this way, both units, v+V and N+Af/number, have lexical properties which are basic to the meaning of the Verb+Noun compound.

With these operations, a lexical predicate is generated. Predicates have incomplete meaning: they need a subject to have full meaning in syntax and logic. The absence of a suitable subject is remedied by adding a zero nominal element with default meaning [+HUMAN] which heads the compound. Thus, many Verb+Noun compounds refer to human beings.

In a number of Verb+Noun compounds, the default meaning of the added subject is [+ANIMATE]: the referents are animals and plants and the Verb+Noun compound mentions qualities or functions the animal or plant is supposed to have. Thus, *abre+ojos* (lit.: open(s)+eyes:'thistle') refers to a plant which is characterized as an eye-opener(!), and *chupa+flor* (lit.:suck(s)+flower: 'hummingbird') refers to a bird characterized as a flowersucker. These compounds have obtained a special meaning, with specific referential value which cannot be deduced from the literal meaning. (cf. NGRALE 2009, ch. 11).

Thus, a great number of Verb+Noun compounds have been lexicalized, that is, their literal meaning has been lost or backgrounded, and they have obtained special meaning, with specific reference. For example, *guardarropa* (lit.: watch(es)-clothes= 'cloakroom (attendant)') still can still have the original meaning of "cloakroom attendant", and it has also been lexicalized with the meaning "cloakroom" or "wardrobe". Still, the types of referents are limited.

This approach to the structure of Verb+Noun compounds accounts for the limited range of meanings that Verb + Noun compounds have. As has been said before, they cannot refer to actions or activities, since the verb has not been

combined with Tense or a functional event category. Furthermore, they are Agents or Instruments, directly interpreted or lexicalized on the basis of a metaphorical Agent or Instrument interpretation. The referents are not Patients or Goals.

To give a clear example, *talent hunters* are people active in *talent hunting*, as in Dutch which is able to express the activities of a *talentenjager* ('talent hunter') as *(het) talentenjagen* or *(de) talentenjacht*. The Spanish Verb + Noun compound *cazatalentos* ('talent hunter') cannot be transformed this way: there are no compounds like: *(el) *cazartalentos* ('('the') talent hunting') or appositive **las actividades cazatalentos* ('the talenthunting activities').

In short, the approach makes it possible to account for the limited range of lexical meanings, which has been noted in many studies, like Lloyd (1968), and has been implicit in studies like Herrero Ingelmo (2000).

4.2. Unergative and ergative deverbal nouns

The second issue that requires attention is related to the first issue, the prototypicality of transitive verbs. It just has been stated that Verb+Noun compounds are formed in the lexicon with a minimal number of steps, or rather, with a basic, transparent structure. The issue that remains is why unergative verbs do not follow the route of transitive verbs.

Now, the unergative, intransitive verb *trabajar* ('(to) work') is derived, in the theory of Hale&Keyser (1993), from *hacer trabajo* ('(to) do work') in the sense that the light verb *hacer* ('(to) do/make') has zero form, incorporating the Noun and transforming it into an intransitive verb. Now, why is it impossible to take the form *trabaja* ('(to) work') as a predicate, adding to it a zero nominal element with the value [+HUMAN], deriving the nominal meaning of **trabaja* ('worker')?

The answer is that the stem *trabaj-*, as part of VP, that is, before raising to little v, is a Noun, unsuitable to head and close a predicate looking for a subject. Therefore, no subject having [+HUMAN] interpretation is added. A suitable nominal affix, which is *–dor*, must be used to form the deverbal Noun *trabajador* ('worker').

Ergative verbs do not depend of little v and require a special route that will not be described in this paper. The basic thing is that the object raises to subject position, which does not produce a subjectless predicate.

4.3. The interpretation of the number of the Noun in Verb+ Noun compounds

The Noun of the compound is not only a lexical root, but it is a lexical Noun that is marked for gender and number –(e)s or -Ø. In fact, the nominal root obtains full nominal status, taking an affix which completes Nouns as independent lexical items. The meaning of the Nouns are the possible referents,

that is, the class of persons, objects, properties or events to which the Noun can make reference. By itself, gender has meaning when the possible referents are living beings: females and males; otherwise, it has zero meaning and simply gives more visibility or formal content to the lexical item.

The number of the Noun has no numerical interpretation properties, in the sense that there are no pairs such as *limpiacristal* ('lit. clean window: 'windowcleaner') / *limpiacristales* ('lit. clean windows: window cleaner') to refer to a cleaner of one window / a cleaner of more than one window. In the same sense, *limpiabarros* ('scraper; doormat'), with a plural Noun, is unusual in that the Noun *barro* ('mud') is a mass Noun which is hardly used in plural form. The Noun of the Verb+Noun compound tends to take plural form in count nouns and singular form in mass nouns, but the interpretation is not numerical, but something else like [ANY NUMBER/QUANTITY].

The verbal root, furthermore, does not have event-interpretation, but it has a "habitual" interpretation, or an interpretation like [ANY TIME/MOMENT].

Let us take a look at some instances of Verb+Noun compounds. A *cazatalentos* ('talent hunter') is a person having the function of hunting talents, and an *abrecartas* has the function of opening letters. No reference is made to specific activities involving specific persons, objects, properties or events. Of course, this is a general property of a nominal lexical item: they define persons, objects, properties or events that can be referred to by using a suitable syntactic construction by which it can be interpreted as referential.

5. Summary

Romance Verb+Noun compounds consist of two parts, a verbal part and a nominal part, although three elements are needed to obtain the structure and interpretation that they have. The three elements are: a nominalizing element that converts the verb+noun sequence into a noun with basically [+HUMAN] meaning, a verbal root and a noun interpretable as the direct object of the verbal part. The nominalizing element needs both the verbal root and its object noun to obtain interpretation.

It has been argued that the predicate with Verb+Noun structure is the minimal predicate in the sense that they can merge "in situ", if little v is permitted to have effect at minimal distance. Predicates headed by intransitive verbs are more complex. Ergative verbs have another complicating property.

This minimal predicate can be formed in the lexicon, where they add a null subject and its default interpretation: [+HUMAN]. By extension,

Verb+Noun compounds can refer to Instruments and to plants or animals, as "objects" performing human-like actions.

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