

**Support Nouns and Verbal Features:  
a case study from Italian\***

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**1. ONE MORE SUB-CLASS OF NOUNS**

This paper aims at delimiting and discussing a class of nouns that display a property considered until now as typical to verbs. We call them ‘Support Nouns’ (henceforth SN) on the assumption they share with Support Verbs the property of ‘supporting’ somehow the second component of the Noun Phrase (NP) they are part of by providing it with peculiar grammatical information.

To give some introductory illustration, SNs are of the type of the French *coup* in (1) and of the Italian *attacco* in (2):

- (1) a. *Il m' a donné un coup de fil*  
he me has given a blow of line  
‘He gave me a ring’  
b. *Il a donné un coup d'œil alentour*  
he has given a blow of eye around  
‘He gave a look around’
- (2) a. *Ho un attacco di nervi*  
I.have a attack of nerves  
‘I have the jumps’

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- b. *Ho avuto un attacco di gelosia*  
 I.have had a attack of jealousy  
 ‘I had a fit of jealousy’

In such cases the emphasized Noun has not its literal meaning but indicates a ‘short time-span’ or an ‘almost dot-like’ process into which the *designatum* of the remaining part of the NP is involved. In various languages, within the Romance family and elsewhere, a similar behavior characterizes a relatively small but functionally important set of Nouns (cf. Gross, 1984; Gaeta, 2002; Palancar, 2004).

On the basis of a corpus analysis we shall claim that SNs (a) form a principled sub-class of Nouns, (b) somehow parallel Support Verbs in ‘supporting’ the other element of the phrase, and (c) contain verbal features.

## 2. CLASSES AND SCALES FOR VERBS AND NOUNS

### 2.1. Subclasses and Scales

It is widely accepted that word classes may be internally structured into subclasses, even numerous, each with its own properties. This claim is particularly trustworthy as far as Nouns and Verbs are concerned (Sasse, 2001 for a survey) and has a place in several theoretical positions. A significant part of recent linguistics, indeed, has concentrated precisely on the recognition and justification of such subclasses. Some of them (e.g., factive verbs, psychological verbs, verbs of motion, process nouns, etc.) are so undisputedly recognized as to be by now incorporated into the general theory of language.

According to another generally recognized assumption some word classes may be represented in terms of scales. Some even recognize a ‘scale of scales’, like the one allegedly joining Nouns and Verbs into an overall continuum (Simone, 2004). This is a less widely accepted view, but has produced plenty of research all the same.

### 2.2. Full and light verbs

In latest years great attention has been paid to the class of Support Verbs, their definition and nature (cf. Gross & De Pontonx eds, 2004 for a recent collection of discussions). Support Verbs are claimed to be devoid of strictly ‘lexical’ meaning (or anyway to be not fully predicative) and rather to

contribute verbal grammatical features to the Verb Phrase which they are the head of.

According to the analysis proposed mainly by French linguists,<sup>1</sup> it is typical to such verbs to actualize the nominal predicates that follow by providing them with peculiar grammatical determinations.<sup>2</sup> The French examples in (3) illustrate this function:

- (3) a. *faire un pas*  
make.INF a step  
'to take a step'  
b. *donner une réponse*  
give.INF a answer  
'to give an answer'  
c. *faire un choix*  
make.INF a choice  
'to make a choice'

Various papers (Blanco & Buvet, 2004; Gross, 2004b; Jezek, 2004 among others) have shown that the grammatical information provided by Support Verbs consists of typical verbal features like aspect/*Aktionsart* (4) and voice (5), as well as of some more general properties such as intensification (6). The following examples illustrate this point in Spanish (a), French (b) and Italian (c):

- (4) a. *entablar una conversación*  
begin.INF a conversation  
'to open a conversation'  
b. *entamer des négociations*  
start.INF some negotiations  
'to open talks'  
c. *prendere sonno*  
take.INF sleep  
'to fall asleep'

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<sup>1</sup> The very notion of 'Support Verb' was originally developed by French linguists with reference to the French language. The term 'light verb', instead, was originally coined by Jespersen (1965, Vol. VI: 117) for English expressions such as *have a rest, take a walk, give a shout*.

<sup>2</sup> In this connection, Gross (2004a, 167) claims: "[...] les verbes supports n'ont pas de fonction prédicative, ce ne sont pas eux qui sélectionnent les arguments dans une phrase. Leur fonction est d'actualiser les prédicats nominaux. Ils jouent donc le même rôle que les désinences des prédicats verbaux."

- (5) a. *someterse a una intervención quirúrgica*  
 undergo.INF to a operation surgical  
 ‘to undergo an operation’
- b. *recevoir (vs. donner) une gifle*  
 receive.INF (vs. give.INF) a present  
 ‘to receive (vs. give) a present’
- c. *ricevere (vs. fare) un regalo*  
 receive.INF (vs. make.INF) a present  
 ‘to receive (vs. give) a present’
- (6) a. *colmar de elogios*  
 load.INF of praises  
 ‘to shower with praise’
- b. *déborder de joie*  
 overflow.INF of joy  
 ‘to be full of joy’
- c. *scoppiare di caldo*  
 burst.INF of heat  
 ‘to be too hot’

The case of Support Verbs raises, however, also a more general issue to the effect of the possibility of splitting word classes into finer subclasses. There are indeed various other subclasses of verbs that, without performing any support-function, are not fully lexical but display as it were a ‘bleached’ semantics. A more comprehensive verb scale has been therefore suggested, in terms of their lexical content, or, to put it otherwise, of their ‘weight’. In general a verb scale like (7) can be and actually is widely accepted:<sup>3</sup>

- (7) lexical verb > **support verb** > **copulative verb** > **auxiliary verb**

As many other scales, (7) can be read both as a diachronic prediction and as a gradation of ‘verbiness’. Accordingly, full Lexical Verbs [+Verb] would stay at one extreme and Auxiliary Verbs [-Verb] at the other. The weaker segment of the scale (in bold in (7)) refers to ‘Light Verbs’, a class including as its members not only Support Verbs, but also the other subclasses.

Considering the significant number of affinities unveiled so far between Nouns and Verbs, one may wonder whether it is also possible to postulate something as ‘Light Nouns’, namely Nouns that, in particular

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<sup>3</sup> See Hopper & Traugott (1993: 108) for a slightly different version.

syntactic configurations, would not act as fully referential elements but play some other role within the NP they are part of.

### 2.3. Full and light nouns

Like Verbs, also Nouns may be distributed along a ‘nouniness’ scale, where a [+Noun] extreme is opposed to a [-Noun] one. Such an approach rests on the path-breaking remarks by Lyons (1977), where several ‘orders’ of nouniness were recognized, and on various subsequent statements to the same effect.<sup>4</sup> Our overarching claim here is that a scale similar to that for Verbs can be assumed for Nouns as well, with Full Lexical Nouns on one side and – as it were – ‘Auxiliary’ Nouns at the other, with several intermediate steps.

What drives the derivation from one step to the following one is the set of parameters that are taken into account. In constructing the scale, indeed, several parameters may be relevant. We shall use the following ones: (a) Referential Force (RF) and (b) Response to Topicality, that we comment on below.

2.3.1. *Referential Force.* By ‘Referential Force’ we mean the degree of ‘intensiveness’ of reference of a Noun (Simone, 2004, 2007a). For instance, Nouns referring to definite, countable, physical, ostensible entities (virtually coinciding with Lyons’, 1977 ‘first order nouns’) are [+RF].

From this point on, an entire derivation of Nouns can be proposed as in (8):<sup>5</sup>

- (8) Noun Classes according to RF
  - a. DESIGNATIVE NOUNS occupy the highest position and include Nouns referring to definite, discrete, countable entities. They can be articulated into sub-categories: Nouns designating entities that are also physical and ostensible can

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<sup>4</sup> To quote just one, Blanche-Benveniste (2003) proposed to distinguish “noms ‘plus ou moins noms’”, i.e. the possibility of graduating nouniness levels and distinguishing classes of nouns accordingly.

<sup>5</sup> The scale in (8) (taken from Simone 2003; cf. Simone, 2007b for a more complete list) is not a proper derivation, however. It is rather a list, although it may be of interest to investigate the possible relationship between the elements it includes (cf. also below).

be classified as ULTRA-NOUNS<sup>6</sup>; Nouns referring to processes (see below) are also designative, although to a lesser extent.

- b. CLASSIFIERS pre-signal the class the Noun that follows belongs to, and specify some of their features:<sup>7</sup>
  - (i) *cucchiata* ‘spoonful’, *manciata* ‘fistful’ (refer to physical small objects that are discrete and countable or to Mass Nouns);
  - (ii) *sporta* ‘basket’ > ‘basketful’, *scatola* ‘box’ > ‘boxful’ (refer to discrete, but not necessarily small physical objects);
  - (iii) *bicchiere* ‘glass’ > ‘glassful’, *bottiglia* ‘bottle’ (refer to liquids and fluids);
- c. QUANTIFIERS provide the subsequent Noun with a quantitative framework: *sacco* ‘sack’, *quantità* ‘plenty’, *monte* ‘mountain’, *miseria* ‘minimum amount’;
- d. QUALIFIERS shift the reference of the following Noun from specific (the specific item denoted by the Noun) to generic (the ‘class’ or the set to which it belongs): *tipo* ‘type’, *qualità* ‘quality’, etc.;<sup>8</sup>
- e. APPROXIMATORS modify the subsequent Noun by weakening its belonging to a specific category: *specie* ‘kind, species’, *sorta* ‘sort’, *forma* ‘form’, etc.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The term ‘Ultra-Noun’ was proposed by Barker & Dowty (1993). The category it refers to can be, however, articulated into subclasses, since there is an obvious difference between, for instance, *cat* and *departure* (see for this Simone, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> The term ‘classifier’ we use here complies with the definition given by Aikhenvald (2003) to the effect that classifiers function as classificatory devices for specific noun classes. For instance, Nouns such as *bottiglia* ‘bottle’ and *bicchiere* ‘glass’ are used to quantify liquid substances, whereas *scatola* ‘box’ is used with solid objects that can fit into a box. The same definition, however, also applies to some quantifiers (cf. (8)c): for one, *sacco* ‘sack/bag’ is used for solid medium-size objects. Finally, qualifiers may also give information about the kind of class of the following Noun, although to a lesser extent: Ital. *tipo* ‘type, sort’ is used as a generic ‘class noun’ and can accordingly combine with a vast range of Noun classes; *qualità* ‘quality’, instead, is more typical to artefacts and products (such as wine, paper, and so on).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Denison (2002, 2005) for English.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Blanche-Benveniste (2003) for French, Denison (2002, 2005) for English, Masini (2007) for Italian.

A crucial feature of this list is that almost every higher-level Noun may switch to a lower-level subclass by various kinds of Discourse Operations, i.e. maneuvers that speakers perform in order to produce modifications in languages (adaptations, simplifications, new classes of words, new semantic formats, text effects, etc.).<sup>10</sup> In this paper we take into consideration one of the most crucial ones, i.e., Format Coercion (Simone, 2007a, forthcoming).

Format Coercion is a maneuver affecting the semantic format of a word class that produces two types of output: (a) it switches the original semantic format of a word class into that of another one leaving the signifier intact (so coinciding with what Pustejovsky 1995 calls ‘type coercion’); (b) it brings about a fully new word class by modifying the aspect of the input (for instance, by using a construction), so giving place to both a new semantic format and a new signifier.

The former type acts for instance when Ultra-Nouns are downgraded to Noun classes with lesser RF. In (9) and (10), *bottiglia* ‘bottle’ and *scatola* ‘box’ switch by a Format Coercion from Ultra-Nouns ((9)a and (10)a) to Classifiers ((9)b and (10)b):

- (9) a. *Ho rotto due bottiglie di vino*  
 have.1SG broken two bottles of wine  
 ‘I broke two wine bottles’  
 b. *Ho bevuto due bottiglie di vino*  
 have.1SG drunk two bottles of wine  
 ‘I drank two bottles of wine’
- (10) a. *Ho trasportato scatole di libri*  
 have.1SG carried boxes of books  
 ‘I carried (many) boxes of books’  
 b. *Ho letto scatole di libri*  
 have.1SG read boxes of books  
 ‘I read loads of books’

In (11)a,b *fumo* ‘smoke’ and *bici* ‘bike’ switch from Ultra-Nouns to Process Nouns (i.e., Nouns endowed with verbal features; cf. also (36) below):<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The notion ‘discourse operation’ resumes and develops Culioli’s (1999) idea of ‘opérations énonciatives’.

<sup>11</sup> The migration of a word from one to the other semantic format is possibly due to a classic metonymic process (see for this Koch, 2004; Simone, 2000).

- (11) a. *Il fumo (<il fatto di fumare>) fa male*  
 the smoke (<the fact of smoking>) makes ill  
 ‘Smoke (<the fact of smoking>) hurts’
- b. *Non esagerare con la bici*  
 NEG esagerate.INF with the bike  
 (<il fatto di andare in bici>)  
 (<the fact of going in bike>)  
 ‘Do not overdo the bike (<the fact of riding a bike>)’
- c. *\*La bevanda fa male*  
 the beverage makes bad  
 ‘Beverage hurts’

In the latter type of Format Coercion, on the other hand, a new semantic format is obtained by creating constructions: what one gets then are (a) dedicated constructions that (b) encode the new semantic format obtained by the Format Coercion. This is exactly the case of NP including a SN that we are going to discuss.

The RF is also sensitive to the kind of syntactic slot the Noun goes to fill: when they fill certain positions, Nouns are reduced to non-referential, even if they are [+RF] by their own. This happens in English for Nouns that occupy the first place in [N1 + N2] constructions:

- (12) a. *water spring*  
 b. *book shelf*

This also happens in Italian (as in other Romance languages) when a Noun occurs in N2 position in constructions of the type of (13) and (14):

- (13) N1 *di* N2  
 ‘N1 of N2’
- (14) N1 *da* N2  
 ‘N1 from/at N2’

Normally, the N2 introduced by *di* ‘of’ in ‘trivial’ NPs may keep the feature [+RF], as in (15).

- (15) *il gatto di mamma*  
 the cat of mom  
 ‘mom’s cat’



position with respect to) a [-RF] N1, it may happen that the [-RF] N1 is the syntactic head whereas the N2 [+RF] is the ‘topical head’<sup>12</sup>.

Indeed, if we apply the ISA test to the following examples (including, Classifiers, Quantifiers, Qualifiers and Approximators, in this order) to detect the semantic head of the construction we get the following results:

- (19) a. *una bottiglia di vino* ISA *bottiglia/vino*  
 ‘a bottle of wine’ ‘bottle/wine’  
 b. *un sacco di patate* ISA *sacco/patate*  
 ‘a sack of potatoes’ ‘sack/potatoes’  
 c. *un tipo di carta* ISA *carta*  
 ‘a type of paper’ ‘paper’  
 d. *una sorta di casa* ISA *casa*  
 ‘a sort of house’ ‘house’

Further, by an agreement test, one gets results as in (20).<sup>13</sup>

- (20) a. *La bottiglia<sub>i</sub> di vino<sub>1</sub> si è rotta<sub>i</sub> (\*rotto<sub>1</sub>)*  
 the bottle.F of wine.M REFL is broken.F (\*broken.M)  
 ‘The bottle of wine has broken’  
 a’. *Ha bevuto una bottiglia<sub>i</sub> di vino<sub>1</sub> ma non lo<sub>1</sub> (\*la<sub>i</sub>) regge*  
 has drunk a bottle of wine but NEG it.M (\*it.F) takes  
 ‘He drank a bottle of wine but he can’t take it’  
 b. *Questo sacco<sub>i</sub> di patate<sub>1</sub> è pesantissimo<sub>i</sub>*  
 this sack.M.SG of potatoe.F.PL is very\_heavy.M.SG  
 (\*sono pesantissime<sub>i</sub>)  
 (\*is very\_heavy.F.PL)  
 ‘This sack of potatoes is very heavy (\*are very heavy)’  
 b’. *Hai comprato un sacco<sub>i</sub> di patate<sub>1</sub>.*  
 have.2SG bought a sack.M.SG of potatoe.F.PL  
*Non le<sub>1</sub> (\*lo<sub>i</sub>) mangeremo mai!*  
 NEG them.F (\*it.M) eat.FUT.1PL never  
 ‘You bought loads of potatoes. We’ll never eat them (all)!’  
 c. *Questo tipo<sub>i</sub> di carta<sub>1</sub> è pregiata<sub>1</sub> (?pregiato<sub>i</sub>)*  
 this kind.M of paper.F is excellent.F (?excellent.M)  
 ‘The kind of paper is excellent’

<sup>12</sup> This phenomenon had been noticed already by Tesnière (1959).

<sup>13</sup> In Italian the subject NP assigns agreement in gender and number to the past participle in the predicate (if the auxiliary verb is *essere* ‘to be’ and in other more complex cases). See Loporcaro (1998) for details.

- d. *Questa specie<sub>i</sub> di garage<sub>1</sub> è alto<sub>1</sub> (\*alta<sub>i</sub>) due metri*  
 this species.F of garage.M is high.M (\*high.F) two meters  
 ‘This sort of garage is two meters high’

As results from (20)a-a’ and (20)b-b’, Classifiers and Quantifiers accept a double reading:

- (a) in the literal reading (cf. (20)a,b), N1 is an Ultra-Noun that acts as both the syntactic and the semantic head of the output NP;  
 (b) in the ‘bleached’ one (cf. (20)a’,b’), N1 is not fully referential but is a true Classifier or Quantifier with respect to N2.

Both readings are triggered by contextual clues. The verb *rompersi* ‘to break’ in (20)a obviously refers to the bottle as a breakable glass container (the ‘constitutive quale’ in Pustejovsky’s 1995 terms); the verb *bere* ‘to drink’ in (20)a’ subcategorizes nouns denoting drinks, and accordingly wine. This is why a sentence such as (21) sounds odd:

- (21) <sup>??</sup>*La bottiglia<sub>i</sub> di vino<sub>1</sub> che ha bevuto si è rotta<sub>i</sub>*  
 the bottle.F of wine.M that has drunk REFL is broken.F  
 ‘The bottle of wine that I drank has broken’

As one can see from (20)c and (20)d, Qualifiers and Approximators behave slightly differently: the former do not display a strict double reading, but rather present an everlasting ambiguity as far as the identification of the head is concerned; the latter are still more bleached and present the syntactic and semantic head on N2.

2.3.3. *Hints on Support Nouns.* Let us now resume the notion of RF in order to check whether the same properties apply to SNs. Some instances of SNs are in (22):<sup>14</sup>

- (22) a. *atto di cortesia*  
 act of courtesy  
 ‘kindness, courtesy’

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<sup>14</sup> The composition of this list is not by chance. Apart from these, other nouns (e.g., *stato* ‘state’, *fatto* ‘fact’ and *momento* ‘moment’) seem to behave analogously. However, the nouns in (22) form a coherent and homogeneous class that deserve a separate analysis.

- b. *botta di fortuna*  
blow/slap of luck  
'stroke of luck'
- c. *colpo di telefono*  
blow/hit of phone  
'ring'
- d. *gesto di sfida*  
gesture of defiance  
'gesture of defiance'
- e. *attacco d'ira*  
attack of anger  
'a fit of anger'
- f. *azione di disturbo*  
action of bother  
'harassment'
- g. *scoppio di pianto*  
burst of cry  
'fit of crying'
- h. *scatto d'ira*  
dart/jerk of rage  
'explosion of rage'
- i. *crisi di tosse*  
crisis/fit of cough  
'fit of coughing'
- j. *accesso di risa*  
burst/fit of laugh  
'burst of laughter'

The NPs in (22) show an increase in semantic 'richness' from N1 to N2: N2 is 'richer and more informative' than N1 and has a quite peculiar meaning, anyway different from the literal one. By applying the ISA test to the expressions in (22), for instance, we get variegated results:

- (23) a. *colpo di pistola* ISA *colpo*  
blow of pistol blow  
'pistol shot' 'shot'
- b. *colpo di fortuna* ISA *fortuna*  
blow of luck luck  
'stroke of luck' 'luck'
- c. *colpo di telefono* ISA neither a *colpo* 'blow',  
'ring' nor a *telefono* 'phone'

- (24) a. *attacco di cuore* ISA *attacco*  
 attack of heart attack  
 ‘heart attack’ ‘attack’  
 b. *attacco di febbre* ISA *febbre*  
 attack of temperature temperature  
 ‘sudden temperature’ ‘temperature’

In some cases, N1 acts as the semantic head of the NP (cf. (23)a, (24)a), in other cases N2 plays this role (cf. (23)b, (24)b), whereas in still other cases the whole expression is ‘exocentric’ (cf. (23)c), since neither of the two nouns acts as a semantic head.

This notwithstanding, N1 (i.e., the SN) remains the syntactic head, as illustrated by the following agreement test:

- (25) a. *È un atto<sub>i</sub> di cortesia<sub>1</sub> dovuto<sub>i</sub> (\*dovuta<sub>1</sub>)*  
 is a act.M of courtesy.F due.M (\*due.F)  
 ‘It’s a due courtesy’  
 b. *Il gesto<sub>i</sub> di protesta<sub>1</sub> era indirizzato<sub>i</sub>*  
 the gesture.M of protest.F was addressed.M  
 (\*indirizzata<sub>1</sub>) al ministro  
 (\*addressed.F) to.the minister  
 ‘The complaint was addressed to the minister’

Finally, it is worth noting that the syntactic argument we just used in (17)-(18) is again at issue here, since also SNs may take part in serial configurations involving different types of Light Nouns. It turns out that SNs must occur after both approximators (26) and qualifiers (27):

- (26) a. *È una specie di atto di cortesia*  
 is a species of act of courtesy  
 ‘It has been a sort of act of courtesy’  
 b. \**È un atto di specie di cortesia*  
 is a act of species of courtesy  
 (27) a. *È un tipo di gesto di sfida*  
 is a type of gesture of defiance  
 ‘It’s a type of gesture of defiance’  
 b. \**È un gesto di tipo di sfida*  
 is a gesture of type of defiance

2.3.4. *Response to Topicality.* Response to Topicality is the phenomenon by which some items may be Topic in the clause, and is also another

criterion we will use to test the ‘weight’ of SNs. It is a distinctive nominal property, as already noticed by Croft (2001). What matters more, however, is that Response to Topicality is not associated with a determinate constituent permanently and intrinsically: actually an originally non-topical constituent may become topical by applying a specific Discourse Operation to it.

Level Transposition, for instance, is a Discourse Operation especially designed to convert any type of constituent into a Noun, mainly in order to make it topical:

- (28) *Il tuo “questo non mi piace, quello non mi piace” mi irrita*  
 ‘Your “I don’t like this, I don’t like that” annoys me’

In principle, Nouns rating high in Response to Topicality display the following features:

- (29) Elements with a high Response to Topicality
- a. can be Topic of a clause;
  - b. can bear focus (i.e., be displaced etc.);
  - c. can be resumed by clitics;
  - d. can be replaced by a pronoun.

Not every type of Noun is equally responsive to such prerequisites. Strictly speaking, only Ultra-Nouns comply with the entire list of parameters in (29): they may be part of anaphoric chains, may be resumed by clitics ((30)a,b) and affect government between phrases (20). As for the other Noun classes, the number of parameters they comply with decreases as their RF decreases (cf. the agreement tests in (20) above):

- (30) a. [+RF]  
*Ho ricevuto gli ospiti<sub>i</sub> e li<sub>i</sub> ho fatti*  
 have.1SG received the guests and them have.1SG made  
*entrare in salotto*  
 enter.INF in living\_room  
 ‘I welcomed the guests and led them to the living room’
- b. [±RF]  
<sup>?</sup>*Ha saputo del tuo essere<sub>i</sub> a Parigi e non*  
 has known of.the your be.INF in Paris and NEG  
*li<sub>i</sub> ’ha approvato*  
 it has approved  
 ‘S/he knew of your stay in Paris and didn’t approve it’

The higher the RF, the higher the Response to Topicality. SN behave accordingly, since they cannot be neither replaced by pronouns ((31)a) nor resumed by clitics ((31)b) nor focalized through left dislocation with the typical [*è ... che ...*] ‘it is ... that ...’ cleft-construction ((31)c):

- (31) a. <sup>?</sup>*Il suo atto di protesta non è scusabile.*  
 the his act of protest NEG is forgivable  
*Tanto meno quello di vandalismo!*  
 much less that of vandalism  
 ‘His act of protest is unforgivable. That (the act) of vandalism even less!’
- b. <sup>?</sup>*\*Non darmi un colpo<sub>i</sub> di telefono.*  
 NEG give.INF.me a blow of phone<sup>15</sup>  
*Damme-lo<sub>i</sub> di citofono*  
 give.IMP.me-it of entry-phone
- c. *\*È un gesto quello che ha compiuto di disperazione*  
 is a gesture that that has performed of despair

Furthermore, focus on N2 also leads to ungrammatical or to highly dispreferred solutions:

- (32) a. *\*È d’ira l’ attacco che ha*  
 is of anger the attack that has
- b. *\*È di risa l’ accesso che udimmo*  
 is of laugh the burst that heard.1PL

This property is shared by other Light Noun constructions as well, as illustrated in (33), but not by the ‘regular’ [N1 *di* N2] NPs such as those in (15), which can regularly undergo dislocation (cf. (34)).

- (33) a. <sup>?</sup>*È di vino la bottiglia che tieni in mano*  
 is of win the bottle that take.2SG in hand  
 ‘The bottle you have in your hands is a bottle of wine’
- b. *\*È di carta il tipo che usarono*  
 is of paper the type that used.3PL
- c. *\*È di garage la specie che costruiscono*  
 is of garage the species that build.3PL

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<sup>15</sup> Translation is not given for examples that do not give sense at all. In such cases, the relevant phenomena are indicated in glosses.

- (34) a. *È di mamma il gatto che miagola*  
 is of mum the cat that mews  
 ‘It’s Sara’s the cat that is mewling’  
 b. *È di lana il maglione che indosso*  
 is of wool the sweater that wear.1SG  
 ‘It’s woollen the sweater that my aunt gave me’

#### 2.4. Summing up: Support Nouns

As a conclusion of the above discussion, SNs, although unquestionably part of Light Nouns, stand out for some peculiar properties. First of all, they rate higher in RF than other Light Nouns. As a consequence, they act as syntactic heads for agreement (cf. (25)), whereas the ISA test (cf. (23)-(24)) gives mixed results. In spite of this, however, the semantics of such Nouns is unquestionably ‘light’ and most of the substantive lexical information is carried by N2. This is pointed at by their Response to Topicality (cf. (31)-(32)).

The table in (35) summarizes the properties discussed so far and suggests a scale of [N1 *di* N2] constructions. Incidentally, we note that the scale is compatible with the serialization tests in (17)-(18) and (26)-(27).

(35) A scale of Nouns in [N1 *di* N2] constructions

	TRIVIAL NPS	SUPPORT NOUNS	CLASSIFI- RS	QUANTIFI- ERS	QUALIFIE- RS	APPROXI- MATORS
<b>Syntactic head on N1</b> <sup>16</sup>	+	+	±	±	±	-
<b>Semantic head on N1</b> <sup>17</sup>	+	±	±	±	-	-
<b>Response to Topicality</b> <sup>18</sup>	+	-	-	-	-	-

As a conclusion, it can be claimed that SNs are a proper subclass of Light Nouns and that such a classification is in principle homologous to that concerning Verbs, according to which Support Verbs are a subclass of Light Verbs.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. the agreement tests (number, gender, etc).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. the ISA tests.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. the tests in § 2.3.4 (replacement by pronouns, resumption by clitics, N2 focalization).

What about the peculiar grammatical function of SNs? To answer this question, we now discuss some data from Italian. Before moving on to this, however, we need one more premise. As briefly mentioned above, actually, our hypothesis is that the grammatical role of SN is to detach on Nouns some grammatical features typical to verbs, namely aspectual ones. In this connection, something has to be said on the fact that Noun may carry typically verbal features cross-linguistically.

### 3. ASPECT IN NOUNS

It is well known that Nouns can incorporate verbal features and Verbs can incorporate nominal features. As for the former issue, Simone (2007b)<sup>19</sup>, among others, has documented the rich variety of verbal features that may occur in Nouns (in his own terminology: ‘may be detached on N’). This is the empirical ground for the scale-of-scales claim mentioned at the beginning of this paper.

As far as the current subject is concerned, also aspectual features may be detached on Nouns (Gross & Kiefer, 1995; Simone, 2000, 2007b). In particular, a vast class of Nouns can encode a peculiar ‘process meaning’, so justifying the recognition of the class of ‘Process Nouns’.

One of the current authors (Simone, 2003) has also proposed to set Process Nouns along a scale based on the variation of two parameters: ‘processuality’ and ‘telicity’. The result is a derivation of Process Nouns as in (36). The assumption for this scale is that processuality toggles between the ‘indefinite’ and the ‘null’ pole as a function of the variation of ‘telicity’ between a ‘+’ and a ‘-’. The more processual a Noun is, the less telic it is:<sup>20</sup>

(36) Classes of Process Nouns

1	2	3	4
<b>Nouns of Once</b>	<b>Nouns of Definite Process</b>	<b>Nouns of Indefinite Process</b>	<b>Nominal Infinitive</b>
[- processuality] [+ telicity]	[+processuality] [+telicity]	[+processuality] [-telicity]	[+processuality] [-telicity]

<sup>19</sup> See also Simone & Pompei (forthcoming).

<sup>20</sup> Is interesting that the classic Arabic grammar, endowed as it was with a sharp semantic sensitivity, devised specific terms to indicate some of the Noun types indicated in the diagram: *ismu 'al-marrati* was the term for Noun of Once (the latter expression is actually a translation of the Arabic expression) whereas Nouns of Indefinite Process were described as *maṣḍar*.

Nouns of Indefinite Process code processes with no closing end in view:

- (37) a. *L'invvecchiamento è un fenomeno inevitabile*  
'Ageing is an inescapable process'  
b. *La società fu soggetta a un graduale impoverimento*  
'The society underwent a gradual impoverishment'

Nouns of Definite Process code processes involving a certain time-span and having an end:

- (38) a. *Ogni sera facciamo una lunga bevuta*  
'Every evening we take a long swig'  
b. *Una nuotata al giorno fa bene alla salute*  
'A swim a day is good for health'

Nouns of Once code 'neutralized' processes, i.e. processes temporally so contracted as to be reduced to a point or to an insignificant time-span. In principle, Nouns of Indefinite Process cannot be pluralized, whereas Nouns of Definite Process and Nouns of Once can:

- (39) a. *Un sorso di vino non fa male, più sorsi sì*  
'A sip of wine doesn't hurt, many sips do'  
b. *Raggiunse la spiaggia con poche bracciate*  
'(S)he reached the beach in a few strokes'

In particular, Nouns of Once encode an event that is punctual and bounded at its ends (cf. Desclés, 1989 for a 'topological' discussion of a 'bounded' event), i.e., that is more properly an 'entity'. Accordingly, Nouns of Once admit pluralization, topicalization and all the manoeuvres typical to Designative Nouns. On the other hand, the other sub-classes, as they encode processuality, display two further verbal features: Event Structure and Aspect, and in particular they encode the opposition [+perfective] ~ [-perfective].<sup>21</sup>

What is of interest to us are Nouns of Once and Nouns of Definite Process, i.e., those sections in the scale characterized by the feature [+telic]. They represent the zero or low degree of processuality and in this sense they share some properties with SNs.

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<sup>21</sup> More details on this analysis in Simone (2004), where references are also provided.

#### 4. SNS IN ITALIAN

We now analyse more in detail some SN constructions (SNC) in Italian. We speak of ‘SN constructions’ rather than of mere SNs so as to emphasize that SNs can be defined as such just when they occur in a specific syntactic configuration<sup>22</sup> such as the one in (40).

(40) [N1<sub>SN</sub> di N2]<sub>SNC=N</sub>

Here, a SN combines with a N2 via the preposition *di* ‘of’ so giving place to a SNC that, on its whole, behaves as a Noun. In other contexts, SNs may maintain their literal meaning and full RF, like *colpo* ‘blow’ and *gesto* ‘gesture’ in the following examples:

- (41) *L'avversario assestò un colpo e Luca non lo potè evitare*  
‘The opponent landed a blow and Luca could not avoid it’  
(42) *Lui la chiamò e lei fece uno strano gesto con la mano*  
‘He called her and she made a weird gesture with her hand’

The entire SNC in (40) is a Noun of some sort, where the SN determines somehow the meaning of N2. The aim of what follows is to describe the main properties of SNCs and to assess the nature of this determination.

##### 4.1. Inner properties of SNCs

The SNC in (40) has three constituents:

- (43) a. a noun (N1) belonging to the SN class, which is formed by a (semi-closed and) limited set of items: *azione* ‘action’, *atto* ‘act’, *gesto* ‘gesture’, *botta* ‘blow/slap’, *colpo* ‘blow/hit’, *attacco* ‘attack’, *scoppio* ‘burst’, *crisi* ‘crisis/fit’, *accesso* ‘burst/fit’, *scatto* ‘dart/jerk’<sup>23</sup>;  
b. the preposition *di* ‘of’;

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<sup>22</sup> The same holds for Light Verbs, that are defined as such when occurring in some configurations, but may act as fully predicative verbs in other contexts (cf., among others, Butt, 2003, Gross, 2004b).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. the examples in 2.3.3. This list is not intended to be exhaustive: other items might come up to be part of this class of nouns.

- c. a Bare Noun (N2) selected among a variegated but limited set of ‘classes of objects’.

According to (43)c, N2 has some interesting properties. First of all, normally it does not accept a determiner, as in the following examples:

- (44) a. *gesto di sfida*  
gesture of defiance  
‘gesture of defiance’  
b. \**gesto della sfida*  
gesture of.the defiance  
c. \**gesto di una sfida*  
gesture of a defiance
- (45) a. *botta di fortuna*  
blow of luck  
‘a stroke of luck’  
b. \**botta della fortuna*  
blow of.the luck  
c. \**botta di una fortuna*  
blow of a luck

Secondly, neither of the constituents can be omitted without making the sentence ungrammatical, as in (46)b, or without changing the meaning of the construction, as in (46)c.<sup>24</sup>

- (46) a. *Quel libro suscitò un accesso di entusiasmo*  
that book caused a fit of enthusiasm  
‘That book caused a gush of enthusiasm’  
b. \**Quel libro suscitò un accesso*  
that book cause.PST.3SG a fit  
‘That book caused an attack’

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<sup>24</sup> Under particular conditions, however, N2 may be omitted, as for instance in (1). If the register is colloquial and *telefono* has already been introduced into the discourse, (1)b may be acceptable. This possibility is restricted however to more conventionalized SN sequences such as *colpo di telefono*.

- (1) a. *Dammi un colpo di telefono*  
give.IMP.me a blow of phone  
‘Give me a ring’  
b. *Dammi un colpo*  
give.IMP.me a blow  
‘Give me a ring’

- c. *Quel libro suscitò entusiasmo*  
 that book cause.PST.3SG enthusiasm  
 ‘That book caused enthusiasm’

Finally, N2 may be of various semantic types but not of *any* type: in other terms, N1 selects specific N2. Indeed, the Nouns in this position may belong to a limited set of classes that we define as follows, on the basis of a corpus-based analysis:<sup>25</sup>

- (47) Noun Classes occurring in N2 position
- a. GENERIC INDEFINITE PROCESSES: e.g. *accusa* ‘accusation’, *protesta* ‘complaint’, *coordinazione* ‘coordination’, *spionaggio* ‘spying’;
  - b. HUMAN QUALITIES AND BEHAVIOR: e.g. *coraggio* ‘bravery’, *ipocrisia* ‘hypocrisy’, *sincerità* ‘sincerity’, *orgoglio* ‘pride’, *gentilezza* ‘politeness’, *cinismo* ‘cynicism’;
  - c. PSYCHOLOGICAL STATES AND FEELINGS: e.g. *amore* ‘love’, *depressione* ‘depression’, *speranza* ‘hope’, *rabbia* ‘anger’, *panico* ‘panic’, *gelosia* ‘jealousy’;
  - d. PHYSIOLOGICAL STATES AND EVENTS: e.g. *vomito* ‘vomit’, *tosse* ‘cough’, *gastrite* ‘gastritis’, *sonno* ‘drowsiness/sleep’, *riso/a* ‘laugh’, *pianto* ‘cry’, *disidratazione* ‘dehydration’;
  - e. GENERIC NOUNS: *fortuna* ‘luck’, *successo* ‘success’, *popolarità* ‘popularity’, *verità* ‘truth’;
  - f. WEAPONS, INSTRUMENTS and TOOLS: e.g. *pistola* ‘gun’, *cannone* ‘cannon’, *telefono* ‘phone’, *citofono* ‘entry phone’, *clacson* ‘horn’, *spazzola* ‘(hair)brush’, *martello* ‘hammer’;
  - g. BODY PARTS: e.g. *testa* ‘head’, *occhio* ‘eye’;
  - h. NATURAL FORCES: e.g. *vento* ‘wind’, *sole* ‘sun’, *freddo* ‘cold’.

Therefore, in N2 position we do not find, for instance, Nouns denoting ANIMATE BEINGS (both humans and animals) or PLACES.

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<sup>25</sup> The following list was constructed on the basis of a corpus investigation of Italian SNCs. For this purpose, we used the CORIS corpus of contemporary written Italian (approx. 100 million tokens, [http://corpora.dslo.unibo.it/coris\\_eng.html](http://corpora.dslo.unibo.it/coris_eng.html)), developed at CILTA (Centre for Theoretical and Applied Linguistics, Bologna University), and the *la Repubblica 1985-2000* corpus (approx. 380 million tokens, <http://sslmitdev-online.sslmit.unibo.it/corpora>, cf. Baroni et al. 2004). Occasionally we also checked our results with Google.

More importantly, there seems to be a constraint affecting the class of eventive nouns: only Indefinite Process Nouns can occur in N2 position, whereas Definite Process Nouns (such as derived Nouns in *-ata*: *nuotata* ‘swim’, *bevuta* ‘drink’, *passeggiata* ‘walk’) and Nouns of Once (such as *sorso* ‘sip’, *bracciata* ‘armful’, *passo* ‘step’) cannot. The reasons of this constraint will be discussed shortly below (§ 4.2).

Besides, not any SN may occur with any kind of Noun classes. The table in (48) exemplifies the distribution of the Noun classes in N2 per each SN:

(48) Combinations of SNs and N2<sup>26</sup>

	INDEFINITE PROCESSES	HUMAN QUALITIES AND BEHAVIOR	PSYCHOLOGICAL STATES/FEELINGS	PHYSIOLOGICAL STATES/EVENTS	GENERIC NOUNS	WEAPONS AND INSTRUMENTS	BODY PARTS	NATURAL FORCES
<i>azione</i> ‘action’	+	(+) <sup>27</sup>	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>atto</i> ‘act’	+	+	+	-	(+)	-	-	-
<i>gesto</i> ‘gesture’	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-
<i>colpo</i> ‘blow/hit’	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	+
<i>botta</i> ‘blow/hit’	-	+	+	+	+	(+)	(+)	(+)
<i>attacco</i> ‘attack’	-	+	+	+	-	-	(+)	-
<i>scoppio</i> ‘burst’	(+)	+	+	+	-	-	-	-
<i>accesso</i> ‘burst’	-	+	+	+	-	-	-	-
<i>scatto</i> ‘burst’	(+)	+	+	-	-	(+)	(+)	-
<i>crisi</i> ‘crisis’	-	-	+	+	-	-	(+)	-

<sup>26</sup> One or more examples per each class are given in the Appendix.

<sup>27</sup> The sign ‘(+)’ means that the combination is attested but restricted to very few items (if not one only) with respect to other combinations.

On the basis of such results, three main groups of N2 can be distinguished. The first one includes N2 nouns denoting INDEFINITE PROCESSES, HUMAN INNER QUALITIES and PSYCHOLOGICAL STATES AND FEELINGS. SNs as *atto* and *gesto* are prototypical of this group, whereas *azione* is slightly more marginal.

The second group contains only *colpo*, which can go with Nouns for PHYSIOLOGICAL STATES AND EVENTS, GENERIC NOUNS such as *fortuna* ‘luck’ or *successo* ‘success’, WEAPONS AND INSTRUMENTS, BODY PARTS, and NATURAL FORCES.<sup>28</sup> It is as a consequence the most rich in possibilities of combination with N2.<sup>29</sup>

The third group includes N2 nouns denoting HUMAN INNER QUALITIES, PSYCHOLOGICAL STATES AND FEELINGS and PHYSIOLOGICAL STATES AND EVENTS. *Attacco*, *scoppio* and *accesso* are prototypical of this group, whereas *crisi* and *scatto* lack one ‘fundamental’ class each, but occasionally occur with nouns belonging to other classes.

The SN *botta* seems to belong to this group as well, but it also shares some N2 typical to *colpo*<sup>30</sup>. It is likely that the almost synonymic relation between *colpo* and *botta* gave rise to some analogical processes here.

#### 4.2. Outer properties of SNCs

The SNCs discussed above share a set of features. The main one is that they form an eventive Noun denoting a special kind of process: telic, semelfactive, and in most cases very short or even dot-like. This general semantic format can be represented as follows:

$$(49) [N1_{SN} \text{ di } N2]_{SNC=N}$$

‘every single instantiation of an event semantically

<sup>28</sup> Looking at corpus data, one realizes that *colpo* often occurs with process nouns, but in all those cases another construction is involved, namely [*a colpi di N*] ‘at blows of N’, meaning approximately ‘by dint of N’.

<sup>29</sup> *Coup*, the French etymological equivalent of *colpo*, is also very rich in possibilities of combinations and performs a similar function (Gross, 1984). In this respect, it is worth mentioning that the French expression *coup d'état* is the source for the Italian calque *colpo di stato*.

<sup>30</sup> As for GENERIC NOUNS, the only N2 shared with *colpo* is the above-mentioned *fortuna* ‘luck’. As regards WEAPONS AND INSTRUMENTS, BODY PARTS, and NATURAL FORCES, *botta* occurs with very few items. For instance, the class BODY PARTS only comprises the nouns *sedere/culo* ‘bottom’ and the whole SNC *botta di sedere/culo* has the same meaning as *botta/colpo di fortuna* ‘stroke of luck’.

circumscribed by N2’

This very general formula becomes more specific depending on the kind of SNs and on the semantic class of the N2 involved:

- (50) [*atto di* N2<sub>INDEFINITE PROCESS</sub>]<sub>SNC = N</sub>  
‘every single instantiation of the event N2’
- (51) [*atto di* N2<sub>HUMAN INNER QUALITY</sub>]<sub>SNC = N</sub>  
‘every single instantiation of an event characterized by N2’
- (52) [*colpo di* N2<sub>INSTRUMENT</sub>]<sub>SNC = N</sub>  
‘every single instantiation of an event accomplished by using N2’

Of course, SNCs are not all equally ‘transparent’. Some combinations are more frequent and sound more conventional. For instance, expressions such as those in (53) are more frequent than those in (54), which are nonetheless perfectly interpretable, and examples in (55) are still more conventionalized.

- (53) a. *atto di clemenza*  
act of clemency  
‘act of grace’  
b. *atto di cortesia*  
act of courtesy  
‘courtesy’
- (54) a. *atto di acquisto*  
act of buying  
‘act of buying’  
b. *atto di presunzione*  
act of presumption  
‘act of presumption’
- (55) a. *atto di forza*  
act of force  
‘force action’  
b. *atto di guerra*  
act of war  
‘act of war’

Analogously, in (56) *colpo* has its literal meaning of ‘every single act of hitting with N2’ and the noun that follows specifies the kind of weapon or instrument used in this action. On the other hand, *colpo* also occurs with a

wide range of names of instruments that are not apt at doing physical harm or damage, meaning ‘every single event accomplished by using N2’ (cf. (57)). This latter meaning is an extension of the former literal meaning. However, we might also have some cases with a truly bleached semantics such as those in (58).

- (56) a. *colpo di pistola*  
 blow of pistol  
 ‘pistol shot’  
 b. *colpo di cannone*  
 blow of cannon  
 ‘cannon shot’
- (57) a. *colpo di telefono*  
 blow of phone  
 ‘ring’  
 b. *colpo di freni*  
 blow of brakes  
 ‘sudden and short and act of braking’
- (58) a. *colpo di spugna*  
 blow of sponge  
 ‘act of wiping the slate clean’  
 b. *colpo di testa*  
 blow of head  
 ‘ruch act’  
 c. *colpo di scena*  
 blow of scene  
 ‘(dramatic) turn of events’  
 d. *colpo di fulmine*  
 blow of lightning  
 ‘love at first sight’  
 e. *colpo di grazia*  
 blow of grace  
 ‘final blow’

It is worth noting that, even if their meaning is conventionalized or bleached, SNCs generally maintain their general semantics of ‘every single instantiation of an event semantically circumscribed by N2’.

This definition is comprised of two main elements: (a) a variable one (N2) that has the function of determining the informative content of the construction, and (b) a constant one (referring to the SN) that is more

abstract, since it determines the type of output Noun (an event) plus a set of grammatical features concerning this event.

These grammatical features are aspectual in nature, which brings us back to what we said in § 3, that is to the detachment of aspectual (i.e., verbal) features on Nouns. In particular, referring to the terminology in table (36), the use of SNCs is a dedicated Format Coercion to form either Nouns of Definite Process or Nouns of Once starting from Nouns with a quite different semantics, as in (59) and (60) respectively.

- (59) a. *colpo di telefono*  
 blow of phone  
 ‘ring/call’  
 b. *attacco di gastrite*  
 attack of gastritis  
 ‘gastritis attack’
- (60) a. *colpo di tosse*  
 blow of cough  
 ‘fit of coughing, cough’  
 b. *gesto di stizza*  
 gesture of irritation  
 ‘irritable gesture’

Whereas Nouns of Definite Process imply a duration (cf. (61)), Nouns of Once are non-durative by definition, as illustrated in (62):

- (61) a. *Mi diede un colpo di telefono durante il quale mi chiese di andare lì*  
 ‘He gave me a ring, during which he asked me to go there’  
 b. *L’attacco di gastrite durò alcuni minuti*  
 ‘The gastritis attack lasted some minutes’
- (62) a. *\*Il colpo di tosse durò alcuni minuti*  
 ‘The fit of coughing lasted some minutes’  
 b. *\*Il suo gesto di stizza durò alcuni minuti*  
 ‘The irritable gesture lasted some minutes’

In any case, the duration entailed in Nouns of Definite Process is also a very short time-span (cf. (63)-(64)).

- (63) *\*Mi diede un lungo colpo di telefono*  
 ‘He gave me a long ring’
- (64) a. *\*L’attacco di gastrite durò alcune settimane*

- ‘The gastritis attack lasted some weeks’  
 b. *L’attacco di gastrite durò alcuni minuti*  
 ‘The gastritis attack lasted some minutes’

Many SNCs have, however, a further important aspectual feature, i.e. abruptness. This comes out from the fact that SNCs often occur with adjectives of ‘acuteness’ such as *improvviso* ‘sudden, abrupt’, whereas do not admit adjectives like *lento* ‘slow’ or *gradual* ‘gradual’:

- (65) a. *Diede un improvviso colpo di freni*  
 ‘S/he braked suddenly to avoid the bike’  
 b. \**Diede un lento/graduale colpo di freni*  
 ‘S/he braked slowly/gradually’

Almost dot-like, abrupt events are virtually equivalent to ‘entities’ and as a consequence are eligible to be encoded by Designative Nouns. As a consequence, SNCs can be predicted to make the N2 countable. Actually, most nouns in N2 position cannot be pluralized by their own. This is specially true for abstract Nouns denoting QUALITIES or FEELINGS but also for most Nouns of Indefinite Process. The other way round, the SNC as a whole can be pluralized through a plural marker attached to the SN, that is the syntactic head of the construction.<sup>31</sup>

- (66) a. *un gesto di disperazione > due gesti*  
 one gesture.SG of desperation > two gesture.PL  
*di disperazione*  
 of desperation

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<sup>31</sup> This property of SNCs, as well as their aspectual features, remind of another (morphological) Italian construction, namely derived Action Nouns obtained by the suffix *-ata* (originally a feminine past participle suffix). According to Gaeta (2002), the addition of *-ata* acts as an ‘information packaging’ strategy that turns the event denoted by the base into a bounded and semelfactive one, exactly as SNC does. Also in this case, the boundedness of the event has the effect of making the *-ata* nouns countable, which is also true of SNCs. For instance, we can have *una nuotata* ‘one swim’ or *due nuotate* ‘two swim’, whereas we cannot have \**un nuoto* ‘one swimming’ or \**due nuoti* ‘two swimming’. In § 4.1 we mentioned that derived nouns in *-ata* cannot occur as N2 in SNCs. This restriction becomes clear now. SNs have the function of ‘modelling’ N2 in such a way as to form bounded and semelfactive events. Derived nouns in *-ata* already have such a meaning and therefore cannot be part of a SNC. The function of the Spanish *-azo* suffix seems to be equivalent, as well as the suffix *-ade* in French. However, *-ade* in French is not productive (cf. Gross 1984), whereas Italian *-ata* and Spanish *-azo* are.

- ‘one desperate act > two desperate acts’
- b. *\*una disperazione* > *due disperazioni*  
 one despair.SG > two despair.PL  
 ‘\*one despair > \*two despairs’
- (67) a. *una botta di sonno* > *due botte di sonno*  
 one blow.SG of sleep > two blow.PL of sleep  
 ‘one fit of drowsiness, two fits of drowsiness’
- b. *\*un sonno* > *due sonni*  
 one drowsiness.SG > two drowsiness.PL  
 ‘\*one drowsiness > \*two drowsinesses’

Countability may be a property of N2 on their own. In such cases, though, the plural N2 alone has a quite different semantics, such as in (68)b:

- (68) a. *Ha avuto due attacchi di gastrite*  
 has had two attack.PL of gastritis.SG  
 ‘He had two gastritis attacks’
- b. *Ha avuto due gastriti*  
 has had two gastritis.PL  
 ‘He had two gastritis’

## 5. CONCLUSION: SNS AS ‘ASPECTUALIZERS’

To conclude with, our claim is that SNS are ‘Aspectualizers’: by applying to Nouns describing ‘generic and indefinite events or states’ they turn them into Nouns of Definite Process or Nouns of Once and to do so they detach aspectual features such as BOUNDEDNESS, SHORTNESS and ABRUPTNESS on them. In other terms, as a Format Coercion, they give place to a new semantic format for N2 and they bring about a constructional word class.

As markers of aspectual features, SNS share some features with Light Verb constructions such as those in (69)a and (70)a, as compared to the corresponding activity verbs in (69)b and (70)b<sup>32</sup>:

- (69) a. *fare una passeggiata*  
 make.INF a walk  
 ‘to have a stroll’

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<sup>32</sup> The English counterparts of such Light Verb constructions and their aspectual features are analysed by Wierzbicka (1982) and Dixon (1991).

- b. *passaggiare*  
'to walk'
- (70) a. *prendere un respiro*  
take.INF a breath  
'to take a breath'
- b. *respirare*  
'to breathe'

Other issues remain open for future research. We want to underline some. Firstly, SN seem to be a phenomenon of cross-linguistic relevance, rather than a strictly Italian one, as illustrated by the following examples from French (71) (Gross, 1984), Spanish (72) (Bosque, 2006) and English (73) (Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English, 2002):

- (71) a. *coup de fer*  
blow of iron  
'quick iron'
- b. *coup de fil*  
blow of wire/line  
'ring'
- c. *coup d' accélérateur*  
blow of accelerator  
'sudden speedup'
- (72) a. *golpe de suerte*  
blow of luck  
'stroke of luck'
- b. *arranque de ira*  
fit of anger  
'fit of anger'
- c. *ataque de risa*  
fit of laugh  
'a fit of laughter'
- (73) a. *fit of anger*
- b. *burst of enthusiasm*
- c. *stroke of genius*

A special case is represented by Arabic, where SNCs can have as N1 a 'real' (i.e., morphologically defined) Noun of Once (*'ismu al-marrati*), so giving place to an almost prototypical SNC:

- (74) a. *nawba<sup>t</sup> hummà*  
blow fever  
'bout of fever'  
b. *sawra<sup>t</sup> ġadab*  
blow anger  
'fit of anger'

Secondly, there is a difference between the SNs discussed in this paper and Light Verbs like those in (69) and (70). Light Verb is a strategy of Level Transposition to turn a Noun into a Verb. Accordingly, aspect is just one of the properties it conveys, since it supplies the Noun with other features as well (tense, person, etc.). SN, on the other hand, applies to another Noun out of a selected semantic set and turns it into another class of Noun by detaching some aspectual features on it. In this connection, it would be challenging to inquire whether there are also other types of SNs that turn Verbs into Nouns, and whether other types of SNs supply grammatical features beside aspect.

At the foundational level, finally, it is worth of reflection that both in the verbal and the nominal fields there is a class of 'light' elements that, under certain conditions, perform the function of detaching grammatical features on the accompanying elements.

## Appendix

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### **azione** + INDEFINITE PROCESSES

<i>azione di disturbo</i>	‘harassment’
<i>azione di sciopero</i>	‘strike action’

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### **atto** + INDEFINITE PROCESSES

<i>atto di accusa</i>	‘accusation’
<i>atto di guerra</i>	‘act of war’
<i>atto di risposta</i>	‘answer’

### **atto** + HUMAN INNER QUALITIES

<i>atto di clemenza</i>	‘act of grace’
<i>atto di gentilezza</i>	‘act of kindness’

### **atto** + PSYCHOLOGICAL STATES/FEELINGS

<i>atto d’amore</i>	‘act of love’
<i>atto di fede</i>	‘act of faith’

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### **gesto** + INDEFINITE PROCESSES

<i>gesto di protesta</i>	‘act of protest’
<i>gesto di sfida</i>	‘gesture of defiance’

### **gesto** + HUMAN INNER QUALITIES

<i>gesto di buona volontà</i>	‘goodwill gesture’
<i>gesto di cortesia</i>	‘kindness’

### **gesto** + PSYCHOLOGICAL STATES/FEELINGS

<i>gesto di stizza</i>	‘irritable gesture’
<i>gesto di disperazione</i>	‘act of despair’

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### **colpo** + PHYSIOLOGICAL STATES/EVENTS

<i>colpo di sonno</i>	‘fit of drowsiness’
<i>colpo di tosse</i>	‘fit of coughing’

### **colpo** + GENERIC NOUNS

<i>colpo di fortuna</i>	‘stroke of luck’
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### **colpo** + WEAPONS

<i>colpo di pistola</i>	‘pistol shot’
<i>colpo di cannone</i>	‘cannon shot’

### **colpo** + INSTRUMENTS

<i>colpo di telefono</i>	‘ring’
<i>colpo di clacson</i>	‘honk’
<i>colpo di spazzola</i>	‘brush’

### **colpo** + BODY PARTS

<i>colpo di glottide</i>	‘glottal stop’
<i>colpo di reni</i>	‘oarstroke’
<i>colpo d’occhio</i>	‘glance’

### **colpo** + NATURAL FORCES

<i>colpo di vento</i>	‘gust of wind’
<i>colpo di sole</i>	‘sun-stroke’

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### **botta** + HUMAN INNER QUALITIES

<i>botta di orgoglio</i>	‘moment of pride’
<i>botta di sincerità</i>	‘moment of sincerity’

### **botta** + PSYCHOLOGICAL STATES/FEELINGS

<i>botta di speranza</i>	‘shot of hope’
<i>botta di depressione</i>	‘moment of depression’

### **botta** + PHYSIOLOGICAL STATES/EVENTS

<i>botta di sonno</i>	‘fit of drowsiness’
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### **botta** + GENERIC NOUNS

<i>botta di fortuna</i>	‘stroke of luck’
<i>botta di vita</i>	‘shot of liveliness’

### **botta** + BODY PARTS

<i>botta di culo/sedere</i>	‘stroke of luck’
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### **botta** + NATURAL FORCES

<i>botta di vento</i>	‘rush of wind’
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### **attacco** + HUMAN INNER QUALITIES

<i>attacco di debolezza</i>	‘weak moment’
<i>attacco di loquacità</i>	‘moment of loquacity’

### **attacco** + PSYCHOLOGICAL STATES/FEELINGS

<i>attacco di gelosia</i>	‘fit of jealousy’
<i>attacco di panico</i>	‘panic attack’

### **attacco** + PHYSIOLOGICAL STATES/EVENTS

<i>attacco di gastrite</i>	‘gastritis attack’
<i>attacco di asma</i>	‘asthma attack’

**attacco + BODY PARTS**

*attacco di cuore* 'heart attack'  
*attacco di nervi* 'a fit of hysterics'

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**scoppio + HUMAN INNER QUALITIES**

*scoppio di vitalità* 'sudden liveliness'  
*scoppio di follia* 'sudden madness'

**scoppio + PSYCHOLOGICAL STATES/FEELINGS**

*scoppio di allegria* 'sudden gaiety'  
*scoppio di collera* 'fit of anger'

**scoppio + PHYSIOLOGICAL STATES/EVENTS**

*scoppio di riso* 'outburst of laughter'  
*scoppio di pianto* 'fit of crying'

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**accesso + HUMAN INNER QUALITIES**

*accesso di pudore* 'sudden modesty'  
*accesso di onestà* 'sudden honesty'

**accesso + PSYCHOLOGICAL STATES/FEELINGS**

*accesso di gelosia* 'fit of jealousy'  
*accesso di collera* 'fit of rage'  
*accesso di entusiasmo* 'gush of enthusiasm'

**accesso + PHYSIOLOGICAL STATES/EVENTS**

*accesso di riso* 'fit of laughter'  
*accesso di tosse* 'fit of coughing'

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**scatto + HUMAN INNER QUALITIES**

*scatto di coraggio* 'sudden bravery'  
*scatto di orgoglio* 'sudden pride'

**scatto + PSYCHOLOGICAL STATES/FEELINGS**

*scatto di indignazione* 'explosion of outrage'  
*scatto di ira* 'explosion of rage'

**scatto + BODY PARTS**

*scatto di nervi* 'fit of hysterics'

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**crisi + PSYCHOLOGICAL STATES/FEELINGS**

*crisi di panico* 'fit of jealousy'

**crisi + PHYSIOLOGICAL STATES/EVENTS**

*crisi di pianto* 'fit of crying'  
*crisi di asma* 'asthma attack'

**crisi + BODY PARTS**

*crisi di nervi* 'a fit of hysterics'

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