CHAPTER FOUR

THE SEMANTIC REPRESENTATION FOR
SENTENTIAL NOMINALS

In chapter 1, I introduced several tasks for any linguistically sensitive, semantic theory of abstract entities. One was to provide a semantics of the variety of constructions that make up the class of sentential nominals, by which I mean all those constructions which have an intuitive, semantic connection to an associated sentence. These include: derived nominals, a variety of gerund phrases (of-ing gerunds, ACC-ing gerunds and POSS-ing gerunds), that clauses, for infinitival phrases, naked infinitive phrases and noun phrases involving a variety of common nouns that may combine with that clauses or gerund phrases. The class of common nouns itself divides into three: nouns that are nominalizations of some propositional attitude verb, nouns that are nominalizations of other complemented verbs, and nouns that are not nominalizations of any verb.

This chapter and the next develop a semantics for sentential nominals using the DRT framework. My semantics for nominals follows the characteristic two level analysis of DRT—one relevant to DRS construction and the other relevant to DRS interpretation. The next two chapters elaborate the construction procedures and DRT-theoretic structures for sentential nominals and their constituents. Because of the complexity of the construction procedure for nominals, I will concentrate on sentence interpretation. Questions of discourse interpretation will come in chapter 7, where an account that integrates DRT semantics and discourse structure, and which is much more sophisticated than the multisentential interpretation of chapter two, will be introduced. In chapter 10, I describe the truth conditional interpretation of these conditions and structures and discuss some of the logical difficulties that they introduce.

The construction procedure for sentential nominals is complicated, because the syntactic structure of some of the nominals, in particular the gerunds, is unclear. I will spend the first part of this chapter laying out my syntactic assumptions and their semantic consequences. I will then turn to a DRS construction procedure for event denoting nominals—derived nominals and the so called of-ing gerunds and some abstract nominals—that clauses and infinitivals. Chapter five will investigate the more problematic POSS-ing and ACC-ing nominals and return to look at the problems described in this chapter.

Before getting started with the analysis, let us first investigate three problems that a semantics for sentential nominals should solve.

First Problem: The Semantic Correlation between Nominals and Sentences. A first criterion of adequacy for a semantics is to get right the relations between
nominals and semantically correlated sentences. The theory should predict the synonymy of the a-b pairs in (1) - (4) while avoiding that prediction for the pair in (5) and (2.c-d).

(1.a) The army's destruction of the city was bloody.
(1.b) The army destroyed the city. It was bloody.

(2.a) Fred's shooting of Bill led to his imprisonment.
(2.b) Fred shot Bill, and that led to his imprisonment.

(2.c) Bill's hitting of that policeman will land him in prison.
(2.d) Bill hit that policeman. It will land him in prison.

(3.a) John's hitting Bill caused Bill to yell.
(3.b) John hit Bill. That caused Bill to yell.

(4.a) John sprinting past Bill was a welcome sight.
(4.b) John sprinted past Bill. It was a welcome sight.

(5.a) Mary doubted that John was unhappy.
(5.b) John was unhappy. Mary doubted that.

In designing the appropriate DRS construction procedure to account for these data, we will also perforce make other predictions concerning other anaphoric data, such as anaphoric reference to indefinite NPs occurring within the context of sentential nominals. This will test the adequacy of our constructions. Capturing this anaphoric data is a principal reason to use the framework of DRT.

Second Problem: Spectra of Nouniness and World Immanence. Derived nominal and gerund constructions exhibit a varied range of syntactic forms and a correlated range among their semantic denotations. Ross, Quirk, and others have spoken of a spectrum of "nouniness." Derived nominal constructions are true nominals like noun phrases; they may contain determiners, be pluralized, and may take adjectival, but not adverbial, modification. At the other end of the spectrum of nouniness are that clauses; they do not take determiners, cannot be pluralized and may take adverbial, but not adjectival, modification. In the middle are various gerund constructions. Some gerund constructions may come with determiners; others prohibit them. Some gerund constructions take adjectival modification only, while others take adverbial modification only in English. In languages like German and Italian, both adjectival and adverbial modifications together are allowed on some infinitival constructions, which makes them fall in the middle of the scale of nouniness. The nouniness of a nominal also affects the argument structure it inherits from the verb from which it derives. The argument structure of very "nouny" result nominals may drift substantially from the argument structure of the verb.1 Other derived nominal constructions and all gerund constructions have an argument structure very close to