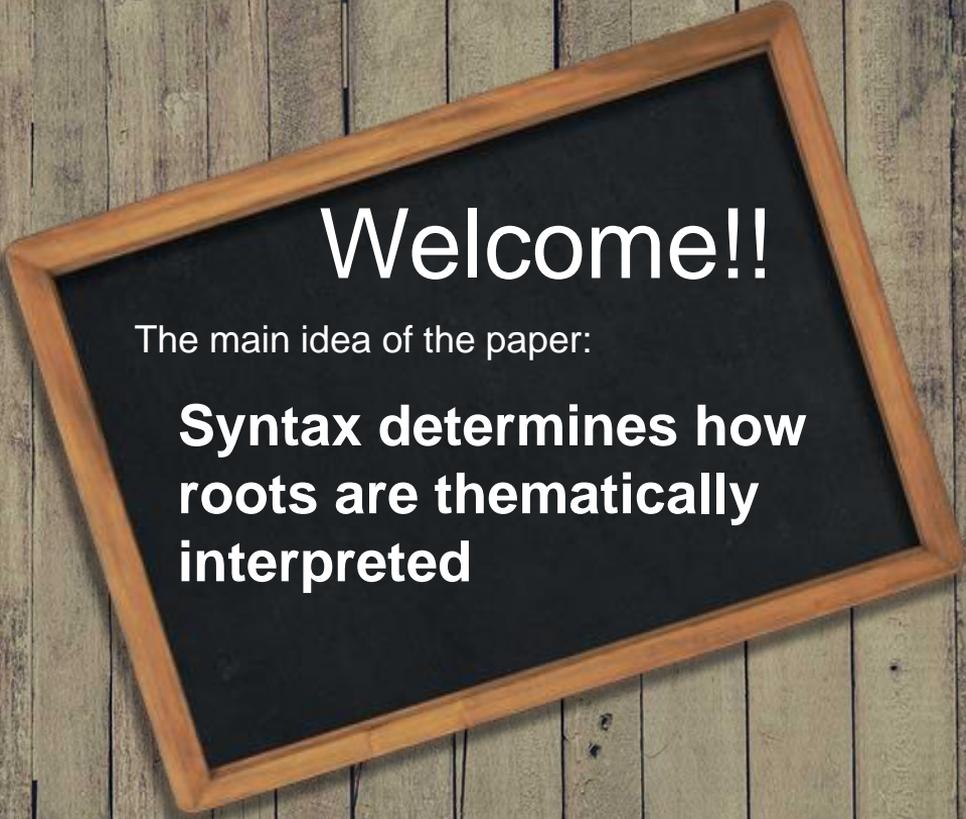**From Syntax to roots: A syntactic approach to root interpretation**
(based on the Victor Acedo-Matellan and Jaume Mateu's paper, 2014)

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Outline

From syntax to roots

1

Introduction

Introductory part is about the idea that the interpretation of arguments takes place on the basis of their syntactic position in event structure. This idea is extended to the interpretation of roots.

2

Theoretical Framework

The research is based on a neoconstructionist view of argument structure.

4

Against a uniform treatment of instrument verbs

Syntactic properties of instrument verbs are discussed to prove that the root's merging place determines its thematic interpretation.

3

A syntactic approach to Manner/Result complementarity

Manner/Result Complementarity and *the Lexicalization Constraint* are discussed from the neoconsturctionist view.

5

Conclusion

The structural position of the root in the syntactic event/argument structure determines its interpretation.

1

Introduction

1 Introduction

The main claim of the authors: The lexical-semantic classification/ontology of the root is not what predetermines the syntactic variation, on the contrary it is the structural position the root occupies in the syntactic argument structure which determines its thematic interpretation.

The authors present two case studies to argument their claim: First is a syntactic approach to Manner/Result complementarity and second, the syntactic properties of instrument-naming verbs.

2

Theoretical Framework

Neoconstuctionist approach

2 Theoretical framework

Neoconstructionist approach

The basic assumptions:

➤ argument structure is syntactically built: it is brought about the application of the operation Merge to primitive *relational* and *non-relational* elements.

➤ Relational elements alone can project structure, while non-relational cannot.

➤ There are two relational elements which are significant for the building of argument structure: v, an event-encoding relational element, and p, an adpositional like element.

    (1)

RELATIONAL ELEMENTS	
v (eventive head)	p (adpositional head)

➤ The non-relational elements may be either roots or DPs.

Theoretical framework

Neoconstructionist approach

The structures projected by relational elements yield the *structural semantics* of the linguistic expressions.
Examples of syntactic argument structures given in the paper are as follows:

➢ Unergative creation/consumption event
  Sue danced: [$_{vP}$[$_{DP}$ Sue] [$_{v'}$ v √ *DANCE*]]

➢ Transitive event of surface-contact
  He pushed the cart: [$_{vP}$[$_{DP}$ He] [$_{v'}$ v [$_{pP}$ [$_{DP}$ the cart] [$_{p'}$ p √ *PUSH*]]]]

➢ Transitive event of change of state/location
  The strong winds cleared the sky: [$_{vP}$[$_{DP}$ The strong winds] [$_{v'}$ v [$_{pP}$ [$_{DP}$ the sky] [$_{p'}$ p [$_{pP}$ p √ *CLEAR*]]]]]

➢ Unaccusative event of change of state/location
  The sky cleared: [$_{vP}$ v [$_{pP}$ [$_{DP}$ The sky] [$_{p'}$ p [$_{pP}$ p √ *CLEAR*]]]]

Non-relational elements are assigned a particular interpretation depending on the position they occupy in the stuctures, as either specifier, complement or adjunct of a v head, a single p or a double p projection.

2 Theoretical framework

Neoconstructionist approach

Nature of roots are constituted of two sets of properties: *C* and *F,* where *F* is a set of *phonological* properties, *C* is a set of *conceptual* properties.

(2)

NATURE OF ROOTS	
F (phonological properties)	**C (conceptual properties)**

C is unable to determine the syntactic computation. The nature of *C* corresponds to the *semantic properties* given in the following quote:

(3)   "word (really, root) meanings don't decompose; the semantic **properties** of words (=roots) are different from the compositional / decompositional semantic **features** expressed through syntactic combination"

(Marantz 2001:8).

Semantic features are the same as the *structural semantics* of a linguistic expression. So, the meaning of the expression is structural semantics + the semantic properties of the roots.

Roots receive a semantic interpretation according to the syntactic position where they are merged.

3

A syntactic approach to Manner/Result complementarity

First case-study

3

A syntactic approach to Manner/Result complementarity

First case study

The authors present Rappaport Hovav and Levin's (2010) and Levin and Rappaport Hovav's (2011) claims about *Manner/Result Complementarity* and *the Lexicalization Constraint* and in comparison with the lexicalist approach show that the lexicalization constraint and its associated Manner/Result complementarity follow from how primitive elements of argument structure are composed in the syntax.

➢ *Manner/Result Complementarity:* "Manner and result meaning components are in complementary distribution: a verb may lexicalize only ONE"

➢ *The Lexicalization Constraint:* "A root can only be associated with one position in an event schema, as either an argument or a modifier"

(Levin and Rappaport Hovav 2011)

3

A syntactic approach to Manner/Result complementarity

First case study

According to *the Lexicalization Constraint* the root can be associated as a modifier in the event structure pattern of manner verbs (see 4a) or as an argument in the pattern of causative change of state predicates, (see 4b). As a result, it is predicted that the root in a single verb cannot be associated to both modifier and argument positions, (see 4c)

(4) a. [x ACT $_{<ROOT>}$]

b. [x CAUSE [y BECOME *<ROOT>*]]

c. *[[x ACT $_{<ROOT>}$] CAUSE [y BECOME *<ROOT>*]] (*in a single verb)

(Acedo-Matellan and Mateu 2014)

A syntactic approach to Manner/Result complementarity

3

First case study

According to Acedo-Matellan and Mateu (2012, 2014) notions like Manner and Result are grammatically relevant, and Manner refers to the adjunction relation to v, whereas Result to the complement of the double p-structure. As a result, lexicalization constraint is derived from the **syntactic** fact, that a single (monomorphemic) root cannot act both as a v modifier and as a complement to a double p projection at the same time.

The authors use terms **Manner** and **Result** with capital letters to refer that these notions are not meaning components of the root, but derived from the position the root occupies in the syntactic structure. On the contrary, they use terms **manner** and **result** with lowercase letters to refer to the conceptual content of the root.
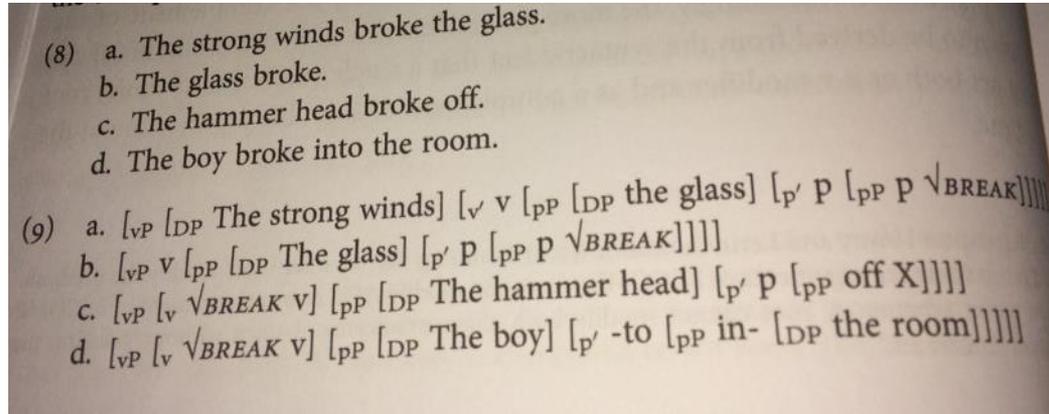
In neoconstructionist approach there are not used lexicalist labels like *Manner verbs* and *Result verbs,* but rather *Manner constructions* and *Result constructions.*

A syntactic approach to Manner/Result complementarity

First case study

In the lexicalist approach Rappaport Hovav and Levin (1998, 2010) claim that **result verbs** like *break* are less elastic (i.e. appear in fewer syntactic argument structure conditions) than **manner verbs** like *wipe*. However, the authors of this paper present counterexamples that verbs like *break* can be used both to denote result and manner and consider the Rappaport Hovav and Levin's descriptive terms like "the grammar of *break* is different from grammar of *wipe*" misleading.

(8) a. The strong winds broke the glass.
b. The glass broke.
c. The hammer head broke off.
d. The boy broke into the room.

(9) a. [$_{vP}$ [$_{DP}$ The strong winds] [$_{v'}$ v [$_{pP}$ [$_{DP}$ the glass] [$_{p'}$ p [$_{pP}$ p √BREAK]]]]]
b. [$_{vP}$ v [$_{pP}$ [$_{DP}$ The glass] [$_{p'}$ p [$_{pP}$ p √BREAK]]]]
c. [$_{vP}$ [$_{v}$ √BREAK v] [$_{pP}$ [$_{DP}$ The hammer head] [$_{p'}$ p [$_{pP}$ off X]]]]
d. [$_{vP}$ [$_{v}$ √BREAK v] [$_{pP}$ [$_{DP}$ The boy] [$_{p'}$ -to [$_{pP}$ in- [$_{DP}$ the room]]]]]

A syntactic approach to Manner/Result complementarity

3

First case study

According to neoconstructionist approach, *the Lexicalization Constraint* should not be regarded as an inescapable stipulation on the formation of event structures, but can be shown to be derived from the more general formal fact that a root cannot be **incorporated** and **conflated** *at the same time.*

Koontz-Garboden and Beavers (2010) claim that Rappaport Hovav and Levin's (2010) generalization with respect to *Manner/Result Complementarity* does not hold as such in semantic theory and that there are examples of verbs which have both meanings, like manner-of-death verbs. This conclusion is compatible with authors' approach.

Acedo-Matellan and Mateu (2012, 2014) claim that when Manner and Result are understood in syntactic terms, there is a validity in the *Manner/Result Complementarity* constraint.

3

A syntactic approach to Manner/Result complementarity

First case study

A syntactic approach to Manner/Result complementarity is valid only in cases where a *monomorphemic* verb, that is, a single root, is involved. It does not hold for complex resultative constructions, like

John wiped the table clean

or to the *out-prefixation* constructions, where the prefix encodes Result and the verb Manner, like

John outdanced Mary.

4

Against a uniform treatment of instrument verbs

Second case-study

4 Against a uniform treatment of instrument verbs

Second case study

In this section the authors discuss the syntactic properties of so-called *instrument verbs* on the example of denominal verbs like *hammer, brush,* or *rake,* where the incorporated root refers to an object understood as the instrument. They use these properties to show that it is the root's merging place that must be claimed to determine its thematic interpretation.

The discussion begins with the Harley's (2005) proposal to derive the Aktionsart properties of a verb from combination of both the (un)boundedness of the root it incorporates and place in the syntactic configuration where the root is to be found.

Harley (2005) shows that the (a)telicity of the unergative denominal verbs like *drool* or *foal* depends on the semantic feature of boundedness and unboudedness of the root they incorporate (see 5 & 6), however this is not the case for instrument verbs, like *hammer.*

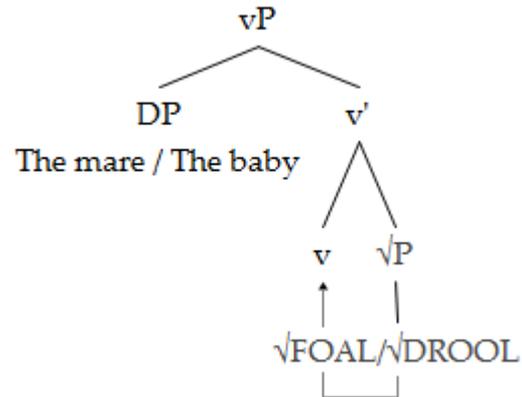# Against a uniform treatment of instrument verbs

Second case study

4

(5) a. The mare foaled {in two hours/#for two hours} (bounded √*FOAL*)
b. The baby drooled {for two hours/#in two hours} (unbounded √*DROOL*)

(6)

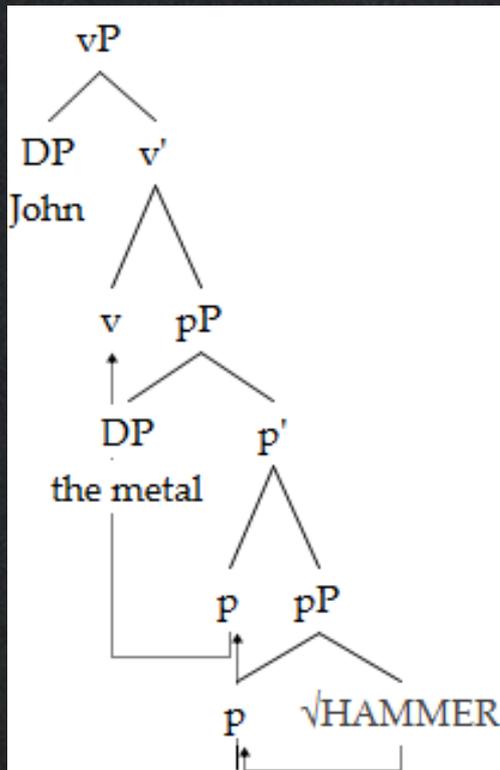# 4 Against a uniform treatment of instrument verbs

Second case study

The authors claim that the instrument verbs like *hammer* can be analyzed as structurally ambiguous. On the one hand, the telic *hammer* involves a structure hosting a preposition of terminal coincidence (a double p-projection), on the other, the atelic *hammer* involves a structure hosting a preposition of central coincidence (one p-projection), see (7) & (8)
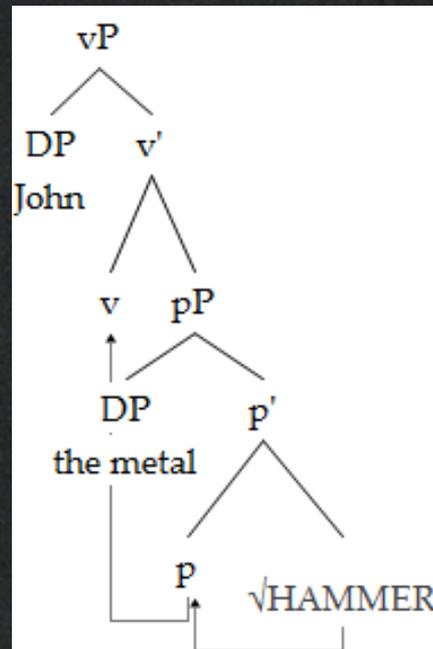
.

John hammered the metal (in five minutes)

John hammered the metal (for five minutes)

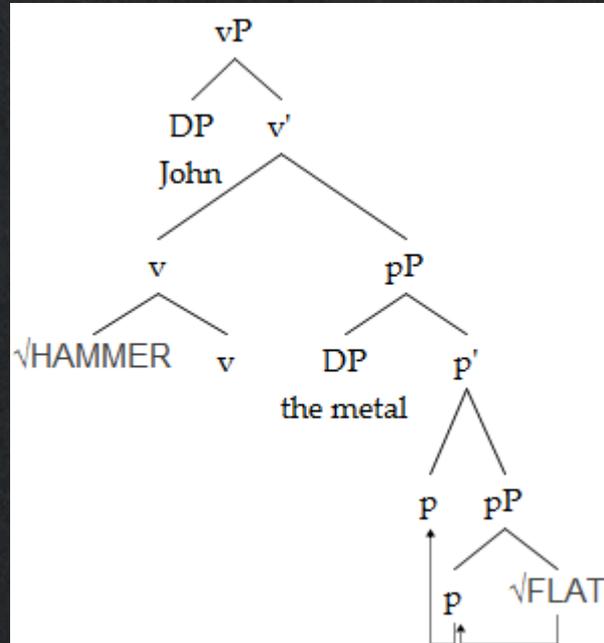# **Against a uniform treatment of instrument verbs**

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Second case study

The claim of the authors is that telic *hammer*-predicates are change-of-state predicates, while atelic *hammer*-predicates are atelic transitive predicates. To support this idea, authors give additional arguments:

➢ telic *hammer*-predicates allow a restitutive reading of the adverb *again* and are combinable with the prefix *re-*;

➢ telic *hammer*-predicates admit depictive secondary predication;

➢ the same situation is observed in the case of other verbs naming the instrument with which someone is killed, like *guillotine* or with which household activity is carried out, like Catalan *escombrar* 'sweep'.

When the root is embedded within a single p projection it is interpreted as a Central Ground, when it is embedded in within a double p projection, it is interpreted as a Terminal Ground (i.e. Result). Crucially, in neither case it is interpreted as an instrument (i.e. Manner). However, it can be found in a resultative construction, such as in (9), where another root occupies the place encoding state`.

John hammered the metal flat.

4

Against a uniform treatment of instrument verbs

Second case study

From the mentioned examples it follows that the same root may be inserted in two different positions in the syntactic structure (not simultaneously: either in an argumental position, e.g. as a complement to a p head – which can form single or double p projection (see 7 and 8) or in a non-argumental position, as an adjunct to the v head (see 9). So, the root receives different interpretation depending on the position where it is freely merged: Terminal Ground, Central Ground or Manner.

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Conclusion

5 **Conclusion**

What in lexicalist approach is regarded as features of the root, i.e. Result, Manner etc., are in fact properties of the structure: Result is the interpretation of a root merged as the complement of a double-p projection and Manner is the interpretation of a root adjoined to v.

It is the structural position occupied by the root in the syntactic event/argument structure that determines its interpretation.

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References

Source:

Acedo-Matellán, V., Mateau, J. 2014. From syntax to roots: A syntactic approach to root interpretation. In Artemis Alexiadou, Hagit Borer, Florian Schäfer (eds.). *The Syntax of Roots and the Roots of Syntax*, Oxford University Press,14-32.

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Thank you

Any questions?

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