



snippets

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2.

Andrew Ryan Dowd - University of California, Santa Cruz ***More on instrumental denominal verbs***

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Some denominal verbs exhibit asymmetry with regard to their semantic relationship with the associated noun. For example, (1a) is acceptable, but (1b) is anomalous.

- (1) a. He hammered the desk with his shoe.
b. # She taped the picture to the wall with pushpins.

Acquaviva (2008) follows Kiparsky (1982, 1997) in attributing the ‘tape/hammer’ asymmetry to a difference in the internal structure of the derived verbs. Verbs like ‘tape’ are denominal verbs, while verbs like ‘hammer’ are derived from a category-free root shared with the noun, as in Hale and Keyser 1992. Thus the noun ‘hammer’ plays no role in the derivation of the verb ‘hammer.’

Harley and Haugen (2007) show some problems with this approach, but attributing the semantic difference between these two classes of verbs to a purely verb-internal structural difference also presents another problem:

- (2) a. He used his shoe as a hammer.
b. # She used pushpins as tape.

Whatever is causing the contrast between (1a) and (1b) cannot be a fact about the internal structure of verbs, or the contrast between (2a) and (2b) would not be predicted.

A fairly consistent difference in the semantics of nouns may account for the contrast. Some nouns are defined by their functions, and some are defined by their forms. ‘Hammer’ will allow formally dissimilar objects (shoes) to exemplify hammers as long as they are used with the appropriate function. The associated denominal verb will do the same. Nouns defined by their forms, on the other hand, like ‘tape,’ will fail to tolerate as exemplars formally dissimilar objects (pushpins, glue) with the same function. Functionally unrelated objects (audiotape, police barrier tape, ticker tape) with similar forms will be acceptable exemplars, but cannot necessarily be used as instruments for the relevant function.

Kiparsky (1997) claims that ‘hammer’-type verbs are manner-of-motion verbs rather than denominals, and supports this by asserting that compounds used as verbs, since they cannot be root-derived, are always denominal, and thus never allow instrumental adjuncts. He provides examples like (3) as support.

- (3) a. # You have to padlock the door with a latch.
b. # He snowplowed the sidewalk with a shovel.

However, this may be an illusion, created because compound nouns are commonly defined by form rather than function. Consider the following attestations:

- (4) a. ... the eternal hour of night that is day searchlit with the fires of hades...
(www.wewrite.org/Articmes/BLACKH.rtf. June 5 2009.)
b. ...And I'm sure it is good criticism -- clear and sharp, cut with a knife, not pitchforked with a rusty old hedge machine. (Rodriguez 2002: 226)

This is completely parallel with the ability of the associated nouns to host instrumental adjuncts, as in (5).

- (5) a. ... the radiation from an HH object can be used as a searchlight ...
(Williams and Viti 2003: 109)
b. Can't I use my wit as a pitchfork and drive the brute off?
(<http://www.yourdictionary.com/pitchfork>. June 5 2009.)

Ultimately, the possibility of instrumental adjuncts is not a diagnostic of root-derived verbs.

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