

Denominal verbs, bare nouns, and the Canonical Use Constraint revisited

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The main goal of this paper is to work out some interesting connections between Espinal & Mateu's (2008) syntactic analysis of bare singulars and argument structure and Harley's (2008) syntactically-oriented discussion on bare roots and the so-called *Canonical Use Constraint* (CUC; cf. Kiparsky 1997). Kiparsky's (1997) well-known remark on Hale & Keyser's (1993, 1997) analysis of denominal verbs was that all meanings of these verbs reflect "canonical" uses of the things denoted by the noun, whereby the meanings of locatum and location verbs (e.g., *saddle*; *shelve*, etc) appear to be fixed by statements like (i) *putting x in y is a canonical use of x* (locatum verbs) and (ii) *putting x in y is a canonical use of y* (location verbs). E.g., *I shelved the book* (cf. *I put the book on the shelf*) vs. *#I bushed some fertilizer* (cf. *I put some fertilizer on the bush*). However, Harley (2008) has shown that the CUC cannot be taken as an argument against forming denominal verbs at l-syntax. As pointed out by her, the CUC seems to apply in another class of cases in English that are derived syntactically: e.g., "John is going to *school* (e.g., for education)" / "John is going to *the school* (e.g., to deliver something, a dance, a concert)"; "The pastor wants everyone to come to *church* once a week (e.g., for services)" / "The pastor wants everyone to come to *the church* once a week (e.g., to pick up aid supplies)". Cf. Cat. "En Joan ha anat a *escola* {a aprendre a escriure / # a veure el seu germà} lit. 'John went to school to learn writing / to see his brother'; "En Joan ha anat a *l'escola* (a veure el seu germà)". According to Harley (2008), the relevant generalization seems to be that "at least in English, when an NP is genuinely bare –as with these bare singular NPs– it is subject to the *Canonical Use Constraint* (CUC)" and its logical steps associated are: "(i) If you are a bare N, you are subject to the CUC (*school*, *prison*, etc); (ii) You must be a bare N to incorporate; (iii) Therefore, incorporated Ns are subject to the CUC." Accordingly, Harley (2008) takes pains to show that the existence of the CUC is NOT an argument against Hale & Keyser's syntactic analysis of denominal verbs (as argued by Kiparsky 1997) but rather can in fact be taken as an argument for it since it applies in s(entential)-syntax ("normal" syntax) as well. Given this background, I will elaborate on these issues starting from Espinal & Mateu's (2008) hypotheses that (i) bare nouns occupying complement positions can conflate, whereas full NPs cannot, and (ii) bare singulars cannot occupy specifier positions (cf. Hale & Keyser's (2002) important claim that specifiers do not conflate at l-syntax).

References

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