snippets

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Are there really two different classes of instrumental denominal verbs
 in English?

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Kiparsky (1982) proposes two different classes of instrumental denominal verbs in English: the *hammer*-type (1) and the *tape*-type (2). These are distinguished by whether an adjunct PP can introduce a distinct instrument argument, different from that named by the verb, to the clause:

(1)   Lola hammered the metal / hammered the metal with her shoes.
(2)   Lola taped pictures to the wall / *taped pictures to the wall with pushpins.

Kiparsky's analysis of these purported classes is that *tape*-type verbs derive from nouns in the lexicon, with resulting meanings based on the meaning of the underlying nouns. *Hammer*-type verbs are not derived from underlying nouns so their meanings are not tied to specific noun roots. Arad (2003) integrates this idea into a non-lexicalist analysis, wherein *hammer*-type roots become verbs by merging directly with *v* (hence denoting actions which need not involve actual hammers), whereas *tape*-type roots acquire a nominal interpretation by merging with the functional head *n* prior to merging with *v* (hence denoting actions requiring actual tape).
We suggest that no account of this distinction is necessary, as the distinction is spurious. Verbs of the *tape*-type do not necessarily entail use of the conflated root:

(3)   Lola taped the poster to the wall with band-aids / mailing-labels.

(3) suggests that it is the manner of use associated with the conflated root, rather than the specifically "nominal" character of the verb derived from that root, that is at issue. In (2), the characteristic manner of use of pushpins is quite distinct from the characteristic manner of use of tape. Similarly, Kiparsky (1982) presents the following as ungrammatical:

(4)   ?Screw the fixture on the wall with nails.   (Kiparsky 1982: 12 [16])

We find this example to be perfectly acceptable, *iff* the action of affixing the fixture onto the wall involves twisting nails into the wall, in the manner associated with driving in screws.
Further, both classes of instrumental denominal verbs uniformly impose a particular constraint on instrumental PPs co-occurring with them. When a cognate nominal is

used in the PP, it is much more felicitous with additional specificational modifiers than without:

(5)   Lola hammered the metal with a ball-peen hammer / ? with a hammer.
(6)   Lola taped pictures to the wall with duct-tape / ? with tape.

The identical redundancy of (5) and (6) would be surprising if *tape*-type verbs are derived from "nominals" but *hammer*-type verbs are not.
We resolve the issue by rejecting any syntactic distinction between the two classes. English instrumental denominal verbs always involve roots conflating directly with *v*, indicating *manner* (Harley 2005). The apparent distinction between *hammer*-type and *tape*-type denominal verbs involves the level of semantic/encyclopedic generality associated with the different roots. The semantic neighborhood for *tape*-type roots is sparse: there are few distinctly named items usable in the manner specified by these roots. When such items can be identified (cf. 3), there is no syntactic difference between the *hammer*-type and the *tape*-type. We conclude that the ill-formedness in (2) is pragmatic rather than syntactic.

References

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