

John Beavers, Andrew Koontz-Garboden, *The Roots of Verbal Meaning*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2020, xviii + 270 p.

There is a very rich literature on various aspects of (English) verbs, which contributes to our better understanding of their argument structure, syntactic behaviour, semantic classification or distribution in different constructions and alternations. However, less attention has been devoted to the interplay between the template and the root of a verbal meaning. The book under review here, one of the latest additions to the *Oxford Studies in Theoretical Linguistics* series, proposes to fill this void by offering an investigation into the roots of verbal meaning. The material presented in the book is organized around five chapters, with the three major chapters addressing the interaction between those elements of the event structure of a verb that are responsible for its broad meaning (i.e. the template) and those that are responsible for its idiosyncratic nature (i.e. the root). The originality of the research is shown not only in the strong counterarguments offered to two recent proposals about root meaning, namely the Bifurcation Thesis of Roots (Embick 2009) and the Manner/Result Complementarity (Rappaport Hovav & Levin 2010), but also in a closer look at, and a better understanding of, root and template meanings. Whereas the former hypothesis claims that there is a clear delimitation between the kinds of templatic meanings (e.g. cause, change) that can only be introduced by the template and the kinds of idiosyncratic meanings (e.g. particular states, actions) that can only be introduced by the root, without the complexity of the root meanings leading to a total disregard of templates; the latter constraint argues that roots can only describe either manner (that is, actions) or result (that is, states that denote the result of a template-related change of state) but not both at the same time. The authors of the book under review take a close look at change-of-state verbs (Chapter 2), ditransitive verbs of caused possession (Chapter 3) and manner-result verbs (Chapter 4) to argue against these two proposals.

The introductory chapter (*Introduction*, pp. 1-55), preceded by *Contents* (v-vii), *General preface* (ix), *Acknowledgments* (xi-xiv), *List of abbreviations* (xv) and *Glossing conventions* (xvii), provides the theoretical background necessary for understanding the book. The authors set out the main aims and objectives of the research, introduce the key notions with which they will operate in later chapters, present the core properties of the adopted theory of verb meaning and the semantics of event structures more generally. They also highlight the conceptual superiority of event structural approaches to verb meaning over thematic role theories and shed light on the fact that fully syntactic

event structure approaches can capture several phenomena that non-syntactic or not fully syntactic event structure analyses cannot.

The point of departure in the next chapter, entitled *Entailments of change in the roots of change-of-state verbs* (pp. 57-105), is the observation that entailment of change in the root of canonical change-of-state verbs subcategorizes these verbs into two: the ones where the entailment of change is introduced only by the template, and the ones where the entailment of change is also present in the root. The authors show that, inconsistently with the Bifurcation Thesis of Roots, adjectives formed from result roots cannot be found in contexts lacking inference of change. That the denial of an inference of change leads to contradiction with these adjectives due to the fact that in this case the roots themselves carry an entailment of change of state (along a certain dimension), hence the above thesis should be abandoned. Irrespective of the event structural framework adopted (non-lexicalist, lexicalist or hybrid), the present proposal proves to be more successful and it has more explanatory power than any alternative analysis that tries to preserve Bifurcation.

Chapter 3 (*The roots of ditransitive verbs of caused possession*, pp. 107-158) extends the Bifurcation Thesis of Roots to English ditransitive verbs of caused possession and shows, once again, that it is not and cannot be plausible. These verbs are associated with two distinct event templates, where the ditransitive structure typically represents caused motion; and the double object structure, caused possession. As per Bifurcation, in the latter construction caused possession is a templatic notion and roots are not expected to contribute such a meaning to the overall interpretation of the construction. However, these templates are shown to be highly underspecified for certain templatic information, therefore, it must be the case that it is the roots themselves occurring in a given template that contribute such meanings. Similarly, in the former construction caused motion and caused change of location are indeed entailed by the underlying template but only in most – and not all – cases. The puzzle that the result states represented by the templates of ditransitives are not necessarily entailed to obtain is solved by relying on the fact that the telicity of these verbs is derived by a root-specific non-cancellable change of state in addition to the template-specific cancellable result. The fact that ditransitive roots entail and contribute templatic information is further supported by the observation that they contribute information about the scalar non-gradability of the predicate and they also make predictions about argument realization. All these provide a solid foundation for rejecting the Bifurcation Thesis of Roots.

The following chapter (*Manner/Result Complementarity and causation in verbal roots*, pp. 159-211) focuses on the possible limits on the number of idiosyncratic meanings a root can entail. More precisely, the basic question revolves around the possibility of a single verb to

entail not either manner or result, but both of them simultaneously. The diagnostic tests clearly indicate the existence of (at least) three well-defined subclasses of verbs that can be classified as neither typical manner nor classic result verbs but verbs that show a mixed, manner-result behaviour. The existence of these verbs violating the Manner/Result Complementarity lend further support to the fact that not only templates but also roots can introduce templatic meaning and, consequently, root meanings can be richer than previously thought and discussed in the literature. On the basis of several diagnostics, verbs entailing both manner and result are argued to have only one single root and not two separate roots in their event structures. The authors elegantly round off the discussion and connect it to the presentation in the previous two chapters with the justification that the semantic notion of causation, which relates manner and result in these verbs, is generally considered a templatic meaning but it is part of the root meaning, hence it provides another strong argument against the Bifurcation Thesis of Roots.

The final chapter (*Conclusion*, pp. 213-234) is a brief summary, which also illustrates two avenues by which both the Bifurcation Thesis of Roots and the Manner/Result Complementarity may be violated.

The book closes with *References* (pp. 235-249) and *Index* (pp. 251-255).

The study summarized and presented here brings forward a large amount of verb-related information and takes a scientific approach to the interplay between the template and the root of a verbal meaning. The entire work is based on a solid theoretical foundation, the gathered data are examined very cautiously, the results are based on careful observations and the conclusions are drawn from a body of evidence. Another point involves the carefully selected examples – from English and other, unrelated languages, some of them culled from the Internet – which are completed with judgements from native speakers and diverse case studies. Special mention must be made of the analysis of some new verb classes, which, to the best of our knowledge, have not been investigated before.

The last chapter mentions several issues left for future research. One additional issue that will deserve a deeper explanation and will surely attract attention and stimulate further investigations into verbs is related to manner-result verbs, which obliterate the clear-cut binary distinction between manner and result verbs. It is a widely-known fact that, according to the Talmian generalization (see Talmy 1985, 2000), in satellite-framed languages resultative constructions can either be built on manner or on result verbs but in verb-framed languages these structures can only be built on result verbs, with the result predicate only lexicalizing or further specifying the result state encoded in the meaning of the verb, rendering the vague endpoint of the event more precise, highlighting the degree of the outcome of the event or emphasizing the

extent to which the action of the verb progressed or was carried out. It will be interesting to see how the existence of manner-result verbs affects the above typology and the event structure of resultatives more generally (Rappaport Hovav & Levin 2001), and if verb-framed languages do or do not allow them in resultative configurations.

There are two minor observations that I would like to make. Overall, the book is well-organized; the main claims, the novel generalizations and proposals are presented explicitly enough in the introductory subchapters and they are also summarized at the end of each chapter. However, several readers might find the ordering within some chapters rather confusing. For instance, subchapter 1.5, which discusses the structure of the book, would ideally close this chapter and make a smooth transition to the next one but it is followed by subchapter 1.6, which turns to some background assumptions and offers a rather lengthy explanation of some of the terms that will prove to be useful in later chapters.

In addition, more attention should have been devoted to proofreading the final version of the manuscript as there are some grammar mistakes and several typos related, for instance, to subject-verb agreement (“in terms of how they takes their arguments...”, p. 7), co-occurrence restrictions (“it is has become common in much work on lexical semantics to assume that...”, p. 36), repetition (“It must also be the case that...”, p. 206) or spelling (“no attachment point of *again* clearly separates out either the root-supplied manner or the root-supplied result separate from the other...”, p. 210).

Needless to say, the merits of the book outweigh these two minor observations as the book remains a valuable contribution to the study of verbal meaning in English.

References

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