Romance VN compounds, Phrasal Spell-Out and *Rebooting*.

1. Introduction

In this brief paper, I will provide a new account of the structure of (allegedly exocentric) Romance VN compounds[1] of the type *limpiabotas* (Spanish), *lustrascarpe* (Italian) (both: shoeshine) based on the mechanism of Phrasal Spell-Out. Phrasal Spell-Out states that Spell-Out applies to syntactic phrases and that more than mere terminals are stored in the lexicon (Starke 2009, 2011). This leads to the consequence that there can't be any pre-syntactic lexicon. Specifically, Phrasal Spell-Out admits lexical insertion to target non-terminal nodes, namely, phrasal nodes (see e.g. Neeleman and Szendroi 2007, Caha 2009, Pantcheva 2011, Franco 2012). If morphemes and words are able to target phrasal nodes, this implies that lexical items potentially correspond to syntactic structures and not (exclusively) single heads (Fabregas 2009:165-166).[2]

I will show that a mechanism of this sort can account in a principled way all the puzzling aspects of VN compounds *unheeded* by previous syntactic approaches,[3] in which either a (variably declined) process of nominalization of V and its sister node (see e.g. Di Sciullo and Williams 1987), more layered derivations involving *v* (Bok-Bennema and Kampers Mahne 2005, Schroten 2010) and the Inflectional field (Ferrari-Bridgers 2005) or a structure involving a covert agentive suffix on V (Bisetto 1999, 2004) are assumed. These

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[1] For comprehensive descriptions of VN formations in Romance languages the interested reader may refer to Gather (2001) or to the works collected in Scalise and Masini (2012).

[2] The idea that a lexical item can be inserted straight into a phrasal node has been originally proposed by McCawley (1968) in the framework of Generative Semantics.

[3] A syntactic (or, at least, a *sub-lexical*) analysis of VN words is empirically motivated by neurolinguistic studies on impaired populations (see e.g. Semenza, Luzzatti and Carabelli 1997 or Mondini et al. 2004).

problematic or *peripheral* (Magni 2010) issues include: a) their (huge) productivity as *modifiers*; b) their *idiomatic* reading when used as modifiers of V; c) the behaviour of a (broad) set of VN compounds, where the N involved *is not* the internal argument of V. We will show below that these puzzling issues can be elegantly solved by interpreting VN words as spelling-out full clauses in the nominal (and, marginally, in the verbal) domain.

2. VN Puzzles

2.1 The inner modifying nature of VN compounds

Scalise (1992:191) states that in Italian: "*one type of highly productive compound is the [V + N] compound which is always a noun*". Nevertheless, clear evidence for a modifying nature of a set of Italian VN items is reported in Ricca (2005), who showed that, while there are many instances of VN compounds alternating between a nominal and an adjectival reading (1a,c), there are also many purely adjectival VN words (1b,d) (i.e. they cannot *host* a nominal projection on their own).[4]

(1) a. *aiuola spartitraffico*   *vano portabagagli;*   ;

flower.bed traffic divider;   compartment car trunk

pistola sparachiodi.

nail gun/dummy pistol

b. *mozzafiato;*   *strappalacrime;*   *spaccatimpani*

breath-taking;   tear-jerking;   eardrum-breaking

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[4] Modifying VN compounds are common in all Romance languages. Consider the VN words below from French and Spanish, taken from Magni (2010:6):

(i) a. casse-cou 'reckless' lit. break.neck

b. tronchamozas 'seducing' lit. break.girls

c. [DP lo spartitraffico]

the traffic divider

d. [DP *il/la mozzafiato], [*lo/la strappalacrime]; [*lo/la spaccatimpani].

These formations represent a problem for those proposals that (in various ways) postulate zero derivations (since Marchand 1969), light nouns (see e.g. Bok-Bennema and Kampers-Mahne 2005, Ferrari-Bridgers 2005) or covert nominalizers in a parasynthetic construction of the type *[[V N] Ø N]N* (see e.g. Bisetto and Melloni 2008, Bisetto 2004, Scalise, Bisetto and Guevara 2005; see also Lieber 1992 and Ackema and Neeleman 2004). Indeed, it is difficult to assume that a covert suffix in a derivational process can be both a nominalizer and an adjectivizer at the same time and, additionally, it is costly to argue for a *dual route* model involving two different processes of word formation (see Rainer 1993: 274-75).

Interestingly, as shown in Ricca (2005:475), who based his analysis on a corpus of Italian journalistic writing, neologisms in VN formation are mostly *pure* adjectives of the type of (1b) above (see also Tóth 2010:525).

2.2. *The* idiomatic *reading of VN as modifiers of V*

There is a set of Italian VN compounds that can be used only as *locuzioni avverbiali* (adverbial phrases, see Ramaglia 2011), preceded by a preposition.[5] Again, these items cannot be used in *independent* nominal phrases:

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[5] As shown by Magni (2010:7) the idiomatic use of VN items as adverbials is not restricted to Italian. Consider the examples below:

(i)   (crier) à tue-tête 'shout at the top of one's voice' lit. kill.head. *French*

(ii)   (pagar) a tocateja 'pay cash' lit. touch.tile. *Spanish*

(2) a. Gianni sa   storia   a   mena$_V$dito$_N$.

         Gianni know.PRS.3SG history   P   inside.out (lit. *wallop.finger*)

         'Gianni knows history inside out.'

     b. Gianni corre   a   perdi$_V$fiato$_N$.

         Gianni run.PRS.3SG   P   like.hell (lit. *lose.breath*)

         'Gianni runs like hell.'

     c. Gianni ride   a   crepa$_V$pelle$_N$.

         Gianni laugh.PRS.3SG P   fit.to.burst (lit. *die.skin*)

         'Gianni laughs fit to burst.'

     d. Gianni canta   a   squarcia$_V$gola$_N$.

         Gianni sing.PRS.3SG   P   the.top.of.one's.voice (lit. *slash.throat*)

         'Gianni sings at the top of his voice.'

     e. Gianni arrivò   in   un   batti$_V$baleno$_N$

         Gianni arrive.PST.3SG   P   ART   twinkling.of.an.eye (lit. *beat.lightning*)

         'Gianni has arrived in the twinkling.of.an.eye.'

     f. *il menadito; *il perdifiato; *la crepapelle; *la scarciagola; *il battibaleno.

The nominal nature of the items in (2) can be gathered from the fact that they are

selected by a preposition (see Mateu 2002) and by the fact that the example in (2e)

displays the indefinite determiner *un* before the VN item, but strangely they cannot host

nominal phrases on their own. Thus, it is arguable for them a *frozen/*idiomatic nature in

adverbial expressions. To our knowledge, no formal account has taken them into

consideration so far. Actually, their status of 'frozen nouns' represents a problem for

those accounts that assume that the output category of compounds is *underspecified* (Ricca

2005:484).[6] In the adverbial VNs in (2), the categorial features are determined (inferred) by the syntactic environment, but at the same time, these VNs do not behave as nouns (e.g. they cannot be modified, they cannot enter a Determiner Phrase, they do not properly *denote* (see Kayne 2009:7-8)). Adverbial VNs are idiomatic constructions.

2.3 *When N is not the* sister node *of V*

Rainer and Varela (1992:129) say that in Spanish VN words "*the noun has to satisfy the internal argument position of the verb*" and Scalise (1992:191) states that in Italian VNs "*only the direct internal arguments of the verb can appear*", while "*the external argument of the verb does not appear to play any role in compounds*". Nevertheless, the syntactic architecture underlying VN words and the 'thematic' relation between the constituents are far more puzzling. First, we can find VN words where the N is the subject of V as in the Italian examples in (3) (see Dardano 2009, Magni 2010):

(3)   marciapiedi 'sidewalk' lit. walk.feet;   batticuore 'anxiety' lit. hit.heart

Second, we can find VN items in which N is the prepositional object, as shown in (4)[7]:

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[6] For arguments in favour of the psychological reality of *underspecification* see Barner and Bale (2002). Against this view, see the empirical evidence for categorial features on roots collected by Don (2004). See also Panagiotidis (2005) for arguments against category-less roots in syntax.

[7] On the topic of oblique N in VN compounds, Magni (2010) has performed an extensive empirical survey among Romance languages. In particular, she found that VN items of the type '*protect from N*' (e.g. It. parafango 'mudguard' lit. protect.mud; Sp. guarda-brisa 'windshield' lit. protect.breeze; Fr. protège-soleil 'parasol' lit. protect.sun) are very productive and imply an underlying architecture with a prepositional phrase assigning an 'oblique object role' for the N involved in the compound.

(4)   girasole (Italian)/ tournesol (French) 'sunflower', lit. turn.sun; mangiaufo (Italian),

        'scrounger', lit. eat.without.paying; pissenlit (French), 'dandelion' lit. piss.in.bed;

        réveille-matin (French) 'alarm clock' lit. 'awake.morning'.

Third, we can find VN items in which the noun appears to be 'the sister node' of an

unergative verbs (namely, formations that would lead to ungrammaticality in syntax) as in

(5), unaccusative verbs (*pace* Bok-Bennema and Kampers Mahne 2005:15) as in (6) (for

both types cf. also (3) above), or is an *object experiencer* (see Belletti and Rizzi 1988, see also

Arad 1998) as in (7). The examples below in (5-7) are from Italian.

(5)   a. tremacuore, trepidation, lit. tremble.heart; tremare, to tremble - *unergative*;

        b. corrimano, handrail, lit. 'run.hand'; correre, to run - *unergative*;

        c. sputasentenze, clever dick, lit. 'spit.verdicts'; sputare, to spit - *unergative*;

(6)   a. scendiletto, bedside rug, lit. 'get.down.bed'; scendere, to get down - *unaccusative*;

        b. tornaconto, 'profit' lit. 'come.back.count'; tornare, to come back - *unaccusative*;

        c. caschimpetto,[8] necklace, lit. 'fall.in.chest'; cascare, to fall - *unaccusative*;

(7)   a. spaventapasseri, scarecrow, lit. 'frighten.crows'; spaventare, to frighten - *psych-

        verb of the* 'preoccupare' *class* (see Belletti and Rizzi 1988).

        b. attirallocchi, fake, lit. 'attract.tawny.owl', attira, to attract - *psych-verb*.

Again, no previous formal (i.e. syntactic) account of VN formations in Romance

languages has taken into account these *prima facie* peripheral cases.

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[8] This item has also the peculiarity of selecting a prepositional N object, matching the examples in (4).

3. VN words as modifying clauses: phrasal spell-out and rebooting

Given the puzzling facts sketched above, I advance the proposal that VN items originate in *modifying* full clauses in the nominal (and marginally in the verbal) domain. Indeed, we have seen that we have a huge set of adjectival VN and also some adverbials 'idiomatic' VN. Actually, the idiomatic reading of adverbial VNs is the 'embryonic engine' for a Phrasal spell-out account. Indeed, as argued in Starke (2011:6): "*Within the traditional approach, there is no easy way to handle multi-word idiomatic expressions, as witnessed by the clunkiness of the existing attempts at handling idioms while at the same time confining spellout to terminals. Under phrasal spellout, idioms are natural: they are cases in which a relatively high-level constituent has been stored. The traditional example of "kick the bucket" can now be rendered as the lexicon storing an entire VP, or the modern-day equivalent of a VP (e.g. a syntactic layer above AspP)*".

Notice that a non-compositional (idiomatic) reading of VN compounds is widely attested *beyond* the peripheral adverbial formations introduced in (2). See for instance the Italian nouns *coprifuoco* (curfew, lit. cover.fire) or *beccamorto* (undertaker, lit. peck.dead), among many other possible examples. These facts show that it is possible to consider Romance VN words as multi-terminal expressions stored in the lexicon such as they are, matching Starke's (2009, 2011) *Phrasal Spell-Out* account of verbal idioms of the 'kick the bucket' type (see also Fillmore, Kay and O'Connor 1988). Further, proceeding *from the periphery to the core* (see Magni 2010) the most reasonable/inexpensive proposal to account for the great productivity of VN compounds as adjectives, is to consider that they are lexically stored constituents resuming full relative (or to some extent adverbial, given the examples in (2)) clauses. I will show below the reason why it is a welcome solution to lexicalize VN structures (phrases) by the mean of a Phrasal Spell-Out mechanism right in the highest node, namely in CP:[9] a (relative) clause analysis of VN compounds can elegantly account for those formations in which N is not the direct object/patient of V.

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[9] Notice that a 'relative clause' origin for VN words has also been advanced in classic descriptive works on the topic. See e.g. Tollemache (1945), Coseriu (1978), Dardano (1978).

As said before, VN items as been previously treated as lexicalizations of VP/vP/AspP

(see Di Sciullo and Williams 1987, Bok Bennema and Kampers Mahne 2005, Schroten

2010, among others). Their CP nature has been *obliterated* by the fact that, being

inherently modifying clauses, one of their arguments shares the same referent with the

'matrix' noun phrase and is therefore implicit. This is the reason that we do not have

knowledge of *NVN words. It is arguable that, in such a model, the primacy of N in the

direct object position of VN formations is due to processing constraints. Indeed, many

psycholinguistic works (see Friedmann, Belletti and Rizzi 2009, and references cited

there) have found that children (and adults) find (at least a set of) object relative clauses

as in (8) far much harder to understand (and produce) than subject relatives as in (9)

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(8)   il ragazzo che la formica ha schiacciato ~~il ragazzo~~

         'the boy that the ant squashed.'

(9)   il ragazzo che ha ~~il ragazzo~~ schiacciato la formica.

         'the boy that squashed the ant.'

Hence, assuming that lexicalization processes matches preferentially unmarked

constructions we have a reasonable explanation for the greater than chance frequency of

VN items in which N is the object of V (namely, they represent *lexicalized* subject relative

clauses). Nothing prevents, however, from the realization of marked constructions, and

this is the reason that we find *subject* VN compounds (see the presence of many

unergative and unaccusative V in VNs),[10] such as the Spanish *andaniño* ('baby-walker', lit. go.baby) or the Italian *battiscopa* ('skirting board', lit. hit.broom) and the quite productive type of oblique object VNs (e.g. French *garde-boue*, 'mudguard', lit protect.mud or Portuguese *guarda-chuva* 'umbrella' lit. protect.rain). For the purpose of this work, we can remain agnostic about the precise nature (e.g. restrictive *vs.* appositive) or the exact underlying syntactic configuration (e.g. matching *vs.* raising) of these lexicalized relative clauses.[11] Nevertheless, I will assume here the unifying analysis of Cinque (2003, and following works), who considers relative clauses as prenominal modifiers in the extended projection of the noun. Cinque's proposal is roughly sketched in (10) and, as I will show below, it can lead to interesting possible interpretations of the behaviour of VN items. A representation of the Phrasal Spell-Out mechanism of VN words in such a model is given in (11).

(10) $[Q_{univ} \ldots [Dem \ldots [Num_{ord} \ldots [R_{el}C \ldots [Num_{card} \ldots [Cl \ldots [A \ldots [NP]]]]]]]]$

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[10] A question arises about the behaviour of *subject N* in VN items. Why do they not have the shape of *NV* compounds? Actually, subjects in post-verbal position in Romance languages are quite common. Standardly, they have been assumed to be in an in situ Spec VP position in their VSO order (see Ordóñez 1998, Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou 2001, Cardinaletti 2004, among others), whereas verbs rise to T. Thus, it is possible to consider that V rises to T (or following Ferrari Bridgers 2005:68-69 in a *generic aspect* position in a layered IP *a là* Cinque 1999) before lexicalization applies, while the subject remains in its SpecVP position.

[11] Interestingly, on typological grounds, the lexicalization of *full* relative clauses is a widespread phenomenon. Just to give an example, in Divenhi, a Indo-Aryan language of the Maldives, lexicalized *adjectival* relative clauses are quite common. Examples are *nasību dera* 'unlucky' (from 'luck is bad') or *biru кибa* 'brave' (from 'fear is small'). Also, some *verbal* relative clauses are lexicalized as adjectives: *agu huri* 'valuable' (from 'there is value'), *nan huri* 'famous' (from 'there is the name')(see Cain and Gair 2000:30).

(11) DP

CP > ~Phrasal Spell-Out~ *VN compounds*

IP

NP

VP
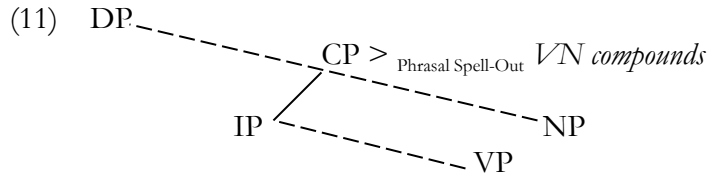
The lexicalization of VN *clauses* implies that all functional material is erased.[12] This is possibly an economy driven process to allow full clauses to be stored in the lexicon. Notice that, interestingly, also many idioms of the *kick the bucket* type in Italian erase functional material in the VP as shown in (12).

(12)   a.   I ragazzi hanno fatto il fuoco > *compositional reading*

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[12] Two issues arise at this point. First, what is the nature of the verbal element in VN compounds? For instance in Italian, it has been considered an imperative form (see Rohlfs 1968, Floricic 2008, Progovac and Locke 2009), an indicative third person singular (Di Sciullo 1992), a linker (Ralli 2008), a deverbal nominal form (Zuffi 1981, Bisetto 2004); a root plus a thematic vowel (Scalise 1992). All these hypotheses have weak points (see Ferrari Bridgres 2005, Floricic 2008). We propose here, following Vogel and Napoli (1995, see also Pagliaro 1930), that the verbal constituent of VNs is an uninflected stem form (or the *smallest processable unit*, Maria Rita Manzini p.c.), due to the erosion of functional material triggered by Phrasal Spell-Out. Second, why is gender variably assigned to VN items (e.g It- *il giradischi*, the.~masculine~ record-player, *la lavastoviglie*, the.~feminine~ dishwasher) and not set to a default value, if we do have to erase functional materials to phrasally store them? Actually, Barrie (2011:169) notes that VN words "*are nearly universally masculine across all Romance languages*". This is very close to a default value. Notice that our proposal is not in contrast with Gracanin-Yuksek (2005)'s idea of a higher 'nominalizing' node in which gender is computed. Concerning this, consider that a possibility is that that gender inflection is not, in fact, a syntactic object but a *dissociated morpheme* along the lines of Embick and Noyer (2001). Approximately, the same pattern holds for number features: VN's nominal side is either plural or mass (cf. Dardano 1978, Barrie 2011). As for gender, we have counterexamples (e.g. Fr. *tire-bouchon*, 'corkscrew~sing~'), but the pattern *plural/mass* is respected in most cases and again we are close to a default (possibly post-syntactic) value.

'The boys lit the fire.' lit. 'made the fire'

b.   I ragazzi hanno fatto i̶l̶ fuoco > *idiomatic reading*

       'The boys shot.' lit. 'made fire'

c.   Gianni vuole attaccare il bottone > *compositional reading*

       'Gianni wants to sew the button.'

d.   Gianni vuole attaccare i̶l̶ bottone > *idiomatic reading*

       'Gianni wants to pick up.'

Furthermore, the *clausal* proposal can be elegantly extended to other (allegedly exocentric) Romance compounds of the PN (e.g. It. *fuoristrada*, all-terrein vehicle, lit. out.road), NA (e.g. It. *pellerossa*, American Indian, lit. red.skin) or AN (e.g. It. *purosangue* thoroughbred, lit. pure.blood) type. Here the verbs of the Phrasally spelled-out clauses turned into compounds are erased being functional items: *be*, *have* or also *causatives*. Notice, indeed, that causatives are 'slight productive' in VN constructions (cf. Fradin 2009:426-27). See for instance the French *pisse-chien*, 'plant which makes the dog pee', lit. 'pee dog'. Clauses involving causative structures may be the underlying source of some *subject* VN compounds (cf. for instance examples (3) and (5a,b) above).

We have seen that our idea appealingly explain the great productivity of modifying VN items, but what about VN nouns in a model such the one in (11)? An immediate explanation can be that such VNs modify a silent (light) noun along the lines of e.g. Kayne (2003) or Cinque (2011), but there are empirical facts that go against this idea on cross-linguistic grounds as shown by Dryer (2004).[13] A tentative alternative explanation is

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[13] Dreyer (2004:49) argues that it is not clear that all natural languages "*have a general noun for 'thing' that can be used not only for concrete things but for any abstract thing as well*". He cites Kutenai, an isolate language spoken in

that VN nominalization is associated to the *reboot* of an extended projection. This idea can be sketched as a principle as follows:

(13) Extended Projection Reboot Principle: *If a modifier, hosted in Spec of an X° in an extended projection (exP; e.g. NP, VP etc.), happens to be phrasally spelled-out as XP, the aforementioned exP can freeze (be pruned), so that XP can inherit exP (e.g. NP/VP etc.) categorial status. Iff the (phrasal) modifier inherits categorial status in XP, the exP reset/reboot up from there.*

This idea might seem utterly speculative at first sight, but actually has many advantages: a) it does not need to resort to empty (postulated) elements in syntax; b) specifically concerning VN items, we do not need to resort to arbitrary (ad hoc) XP to X° conversion/*recycling* (see Bok Bennema and Kampers Mahne 2005:24-25, see also Di Sciullo and Williams 1987), because here we move straight 'phrasally'; c) we do not need to resort to categorial underspecification or double routes to word formation to account for the ambiguous nature of VN words (manifesting themselves either as nouns or modifiers). Notice that, for what concerns the latter point, a possibility could be also to parameterize the height of Phrasal Spell-out (along the lines of Starke 2011). In our case, considering the model sketched above in (11) and applying rebooting as introduced in (13), VN *modifiers* would be spelled-out in IP, while VN *nouns* would be spelled-out in CP. Empirical facts support the rebooting idea. Indeed, many genetically not-interrelated languages allow noun phrases with relative clauses and without nouns (e.g. headless

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western Canada as an example. Further, he provides interesting data from Cebuano (an Austronesian language of the Philippines), where a silent noun account of 'noun phrases missing nouns' is ruled by the fact that Cebuano allows noun phrases consisting of just an article plus a clause, and there is very little motivation for positing a silent head noun (see the discussion in Dryer 2004:49-51).

relatives) (cf. Dryer 2011). For example, (14a) from Miya, a Chadic language spoken in Nigeria, is a noun phrase consisting of *just* a relative clause, with exactly the same form as the relative clause modifying a noun in (14b) (cf. Dryer 2004: 46).

(14) a. má   ráɗaza

    REL.FEM.SG wet

    'the one [*feminine, singular*] that is wet' (Schuh 1998: 266)

  b. kàba [ráɗaza]

    gown [REL.FEM.SG wet]

    'the gown that is wet' (Schuh 1998: 263)

Moreover, some Romance languages allow noun phrases consisting of a determiner plus a relative clause. Consider the Spanish example in (15) (cf. Dryer 2004: 47).

(15) el   [que pasa]

  the._M [REL pass]

  'the one who is passing.'

Additionally, rebooting seems to be marginally available also in the verbal domain, as shown by the examples in (16), where the Italian adverbial VN *squarciagola* has originated the verb *squarciagolare* (to scream, who can *shift back* into the nominal domain as in (16b)).

(16) a. Non avete sentito come ho squarciagolato *Strada Facendo.*

    'You have not heard as I screamed *Strada Facendo* (title of a pop song).'

Retrieved from *Google.*

b.   Non ci importa nulla dello squarciagolare di Al Bano…

        'We do not care anything about the screaming of Al Bano.'

La Repubblica 08/12/2004, retrieved from *Enciclopedia Treccani On-line.*

4. Conclusion

In this brief paper, I have shown that an account based on the idea of Phrasal Spell-out

can elegantly account for some puzzles regarding VN compounds in Romance languages,

interpreted here as lexicalized modifying clauses. I have also advanced the hypothesis of

a *rebooting* mechanism in extended projections as an alternative to the postulation of silent

items to account for the ambiguous nature of VN words that can appear either as noun

or adjectives/adverbials. With such an approach no *compounding rules* are involved and we

do not need to resort to *categorial underpecification* to account for the 'VN facts'.

(*word count*: 3778)

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