Crosslinguistic Approaches to Language Analysis

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Edited by

Mihaela Tănase-Dogaru, Alina Tigău
and Ioana Stoicescu

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CHAPTER ONE

A SYNTACTIC ANALYSIS OF THE THREE SPANISH THEME VOWELS

ANTONIO FÁBREGAS

The goal of this article is to provide a nanosyntactic analysis of the existence of three theme vowels in Spanish. The consensus is that the distinction in Spanish between three theme vowels (*-a*, *-e*, *-i*) is lexical in the sense that it has no consequences for the argument structure, Aktionsart or any other syntactic or semantic property of the verb. In my account the three theme vowels spell out different chunks in the functional area that defines an eventuality description as a Davidsonian event with time and world parameters. The three exponents *-a*, *-e* and *-i* are differentiated by the size of the material that the verbal exponent identifies: the alternation is 'lexical' in the sense that it is sensitive to the verbal exponent, but there is no need to propose morphological operations or diacritics in order to explain their distribution.

Keywords: theme vowels, conjugation, inflection, Spanish, nanosyntax

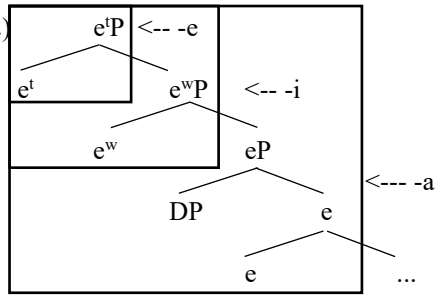
1. Core proposal

Spanish has three theme vowels, exemplified in (1). There are no syntactic, semantic or phonological differences between the verbs that take one or other theme vowel.

(1) a. cant-a
sing-ThV1
b. beb-e
drink-ThV2
c. viv-i
live-ThV3

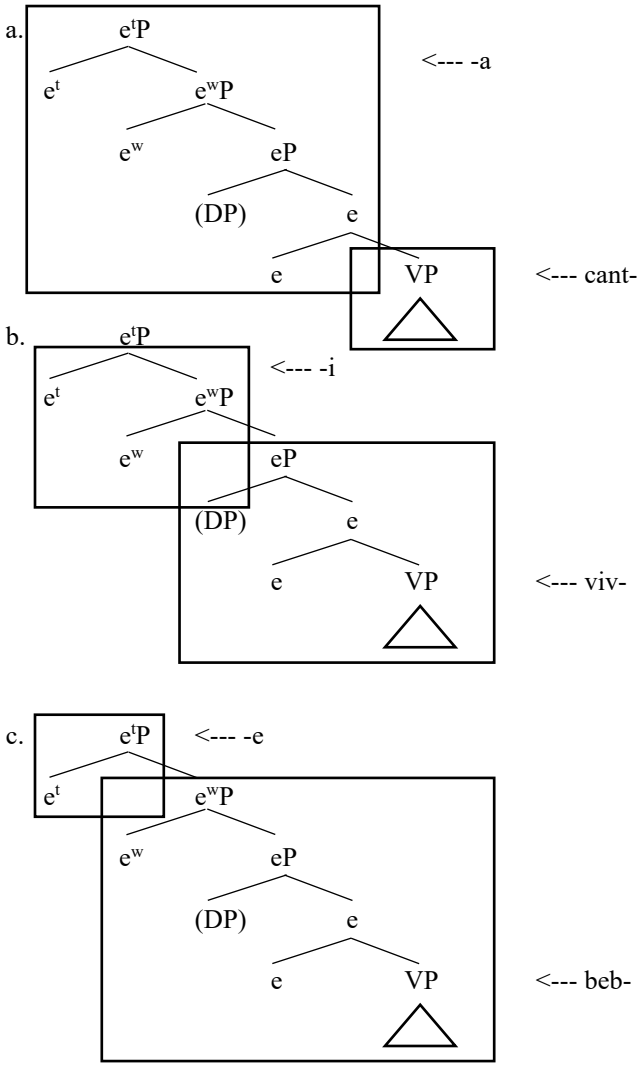
In this paper I will argue in favour of a syntactic analysis of this distinction. My core proposal is that the three theme vowels are exponents that spell out different chunks of the low functional area of the verb. The first conjugation theme vowel (1a) spells out a chunk of structure containing three heads, that I call e, e^w and e^t. The theme vowel in (1c) spells out only e^w and e^t, and the theme vowel in (1b) spells out only e^t (2).

(2)



The difference between verbs that fall in the (1a) class, those in the (1b) class and those in the (1c) class is 'lexical' in the sense that what differentiates them is how many, if any, of the heads e^t, e^w and e their exponent spells out together with the heads that introduce Aktionsart and introduce arguments. A verb belonging to the first conjugation (1a) does not spell any of the heads in (2), which leaves the set e^t-e^w-e available for spell out by *-a* (3a). A verb belonging to the third conjugation (1c) spells out e, together with the Aktionsart heads, which leaves only e^t-$e^w$to spell out, triggering insertion of *-i* (3b). Finally, a verb that belongs to the group in (1b) spells out e-e^w, and this leaves only e^t, which triggers the insertion of *-e* (3c).

(3)



The rest of this chapter is structured as follows: in §2, I will present the main facts about the three conjugation classes in Spanish that are relevant for our purposes (§2.1) and I will briefly present the spell out procedure in Nanosyntax (§2.2). In §3 I present in detail my proposal. In §4 I present the evidence in favour of this proposal, first with respect to its general logic and

then specifically with respect to the heads that I have identified as underlying the three conjugation classes. §5 shows that a Distributed Morphology approach like the one in Oltra-Massuet (1999) cannot explain the facts noted, and concludes.

2. Background

In this section I will present the background for the proposal that I will develop here. In §2.1 I will briefly describe the three Spanish conjugation classes, and in §2.2 I will present the essential components of Nanosyntax, which is the theoretical framework that I will assume here.

For reasons of space, I will not discuss in detail the problematic status of theme vowels within morphological theory, for lexicalist approaches (Kiparsky 1973) or for neoconstructionist approaches (Oltra-Massuet 1999). Suffice it to say that Spanish theme vowels cannot be directly associated to specific grammatical or semantic properties, which has triggered analyses where they are 'ornamental' morphological objects, introduced postsyntactically or devoted to just marking verbiness. In the account that I will present here, their apparent 'empty' status follows from the idea that they spell out (different) chunks of a functional area that any verb, irrespective of its meaning, argument structure or Aktionsart, must have: a set of heads that turn the description of an eventuality into a Davidsonian object with time and world parameters. See Fábregas (2022a) for a detailed discussion of these properties, and Bleotu (2019) for a similar approach, where the theme vowel is located outside the set of heads that define the properties of the eventuality description.

2.1 The three Spanish Conjugation Classes

The four Latin conjugations in Spanish are reflected in Spanish as three morphologically-relevant conjugation classes (Penny 1993). These conjugations, however, do not have the same percentage of members. In Mendoza et al. (2001), the conjugation in *-a* (1a) is estimated as containing 77,5% of all verbs, with the conjugation in *-i* (1c) covering almost 11%, and the conjugation in *-e* (1b) having roughly the same number of tokens. However, many verbs in *-e* belong to this conjugation because of the verbaliser *-ecer* (4), while there is no verbaliser that uses the theme vowel *-i*.

(4) em-blanqu-ec-e
in-white-vbl-ThV[2]

Moreover, in contemporary Spanish many verbs in *-e* are being reanalysed as verbs in *-i*, as it is the case for instance with *verter* 'pour' > *vertir*. The conjugation in -e is therefore receding in Spanish in favour of the conjugation in *-i*, with which it shares many inflectional forms. Verbs from the second and third conjugations (1b, 1c) are indistinguishable from each other in the gerund (5a), participle (5b), all subjunctive forms (5c, 5d), the perfective past (5e) and the imperfective past (5f), and are only differentiated in the 2pl imperative (6a), some forms of the present indicative (6b) and the future and conditional (6c, 6d).

(5) a. {beb- / viv-}-ie-ndo
drink live ThV-ger
b. {beb-/viv-}-i-do
drink live ThV-part
c. {beb-/viv-}-a
drink live-sbj
d. {beb-/viv-}-ie-ra
drink live -ThV-imp.sbj
e. {beb-/viv-}-i-ó
drink live -ThV-pfv.3sg
f. {beb-/viv-}-í-a
drink live -ThV-impf

(6) a.	beb-e-d	viv-i-d
	drink-ThV^{2}-2pl	live-ThV^{3}-2pl
b.	beb-e-mos	viv-i-mos
	drink-ThV^{2}-1pl	live-ThV^{3}-1pl
c.	beb-e-ré	viv-i-ré
	drink-ThV^{2}-fut.1sg	live-ThV^{3}-fut.1sg

Only the first conjugation, in *-a* (1a), is productive in current Spanish in contexts where there is no overt verbaliser. This is the class where neologisms are added and where loanwords are adapted.

(7) a. escrache
'noisy demonstration'

b.	escrach-a	*escrach-{e/i}
	demonstration-ThV^{1}	demonstration-ThV$^{2/3}$

(8) a. format

b.	format-a	*format-{e/i}
	format-ThV^{1}	format-ThV$^{2/3}$

There is total agreement in the literature that, unlike what has been claimed in the case of French (Garet 2021) or many Slavic languages (Medová & Wiland 2019), the three theme vowels in Spanish do not codify syntactic, semantic or phonological properties of the base verbs. I will not go through the negative evidence in detail: I will just mention that each of the three conjugation classes contains verbs of all Aktionsart classes, all argument structure classes, all semantic categories and all phonological patterns. The distinction between the three theme vowels is, then, 'lexical' in the sense that there is no difference in the underlying syntactic heads that they represent. I will reflect this property in my analysis as follows:

(9) The three conjugation classes in Spanish reflect the size of the verbal exponent and do not codify any difference in the syntactic heads present in the structure

2.2 Nanosyntax and spell out

The theoretical framework that I assume is Nanosyntax (Starke 2002, 2009, Fábregas 2007, Caha 2009, DeClercq 2017, Baunaz & Lander 2018, Blix 2020. 2021, among many others). Nanosyntax is a strictly neoconstructionist model where there is only syntax, semantics and phonology. There is no independent morphological module, not even one that is accessed after syntax (contra Distributed Morphology, Halle & Marantz 1993).

Nanosyntax makes the strong proposal that syntax, through Merge, is the only level that can build structures through the combination of primitive objects. This has the immediate consequence that each feature must project as its own syntactic head –if a head contained several features, those features will have to have been combined together before syntax, contra the tenet I just mentioned. Thus, a bundle of features like the one in (10a) is acceptable in many theories, but not in Nanosyntax, where each feature will project as a separate head and syntax will be the only component able to combine them to obtain a 'bundle', which is nothing more than an XP constituent that contains X, Y and Z.

(10) a. [X, Y, Z]
b. [X], [Y], [Z]

Nanosyntax is a pure late insertion theory where exponents (lexical entries from a memorised lexical repertoire that is different for different languages and varieties) spell out syntactic objects. The spell out algorithm in Nanosyntax is characterised by the following two principles:

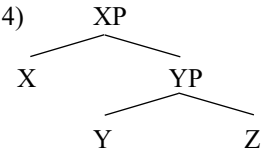
(11) Exhaustive Lexicalisation Principle (Fábregas 2007)
Each syntactic feature must be identified by an exponent
(12) Phrasal Spell Out (Caha 2009)
Exponents spell out syntactic constituents

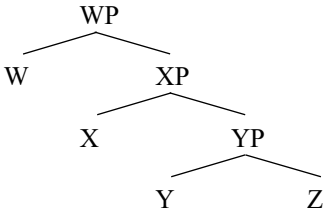
If syntax generates a tree that contains a feature X, X must be part of the lexical entry of the exponent that is used to spell out that structure. Nanosyntax does not have any morphological module, and therefore there is no place for an 'impoverishment' or 'obliteration' operation that erases a syntactic feature from the representation in order to let an exponent materialise it (contra Bonet 1991, Arregi & Nevins 2012, among others). This means that whenever there is a mismatch between the syntactic representation and the information contained in the lexicon, the mismatch will be solved by introducing an exponent that has more, not fewer, features than those present in the syntax, because each feature in the syntax must be identified by an exponent. This is known as the Superset Principle:

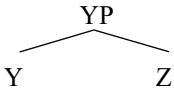
(13) The Superset Principle (Caha 2009: 67)
A lexical tree L matches a syntactic tree S if L is a superset (proper or not)
of S. L matches S if L contains a node that is identical to a node in S and
all the nodes below are also identical.

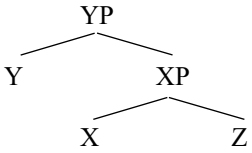
Imagine, as a brief illustration, that syntax generates the tree in (14)–corresponding to S in (13)–, with three heads that carry one feature each, and the lexical repertoire only has the exponents in (15), where the lexical tree L is the diagram the exponent is associated to:

(14)



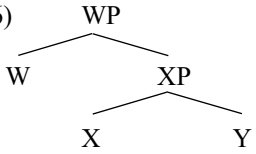
(15) a. /blah/ <----> 

b. /bleh/ <----> 

c. /blih/ <----> 

In this toy example, the exponent in (15b) is eliminated because of Exhaustive Lexicalisation in (11): (15b) does not identify X. (15c) is eliminated by Superset in (13): although (15c) identifies X, Y and Z, the node XP is not identical in its lexical tree L and in S (in the first, XP does not contain YP), and the node YP is also different (in L it contains XP). The winner in the competition will be (15a), because (i) it is the only exponent that identifies X, Y and Z and (ii) it is the only where the three features are organised configurationally as in a subconstituent in its lexical entry: there is a node in its L representation (XP) which is identical to a node in S (XP) and all nodes contained under XP are identical in L and S too.

In other words: given the Superset, when there is a mismatch, an exponent can shrink to a subconstituent in its tree, but it cannot shrink to spell out the higher heads in its L representation and leave the lower heads outside of the constituent. This means that if syntax produces (16) and we only have the three exponents in (15), none of them can be used: (15a) cannot be used now because its WP node in L contains nodes that are not represented in S (specifically, Y is not branching and Z is not present).

(16)


With this background in mind let us now move to my proposal.

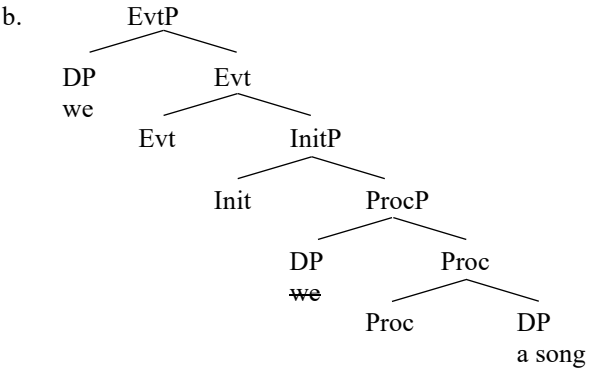
3. Proposal

My proposal has two parts: I will first motivate two areas in the syntactic structure of what we call a 'lexical' verb (§3.1), and then I will propose the expansion of the area where I locate theme vowels in Spanish (§3.2).

3.1 EvtP in Ramchand (2018)

Ramchand (2018) convincingly argues that, within a lexical verb like *sing* (17) one should differentiate two syntactic areas with two distinct roles: eventuality-descriptive heads that (i) assign theta roles, (ii) define Aktionsart and (iii) denote some type of situation involving participants and temporal phases, and a head that is responsible for turning that predication structure into a Davidsonian event with time and world parameters that can, later on, be expanded into a clause with inflection.

(17) a. (we) sing (a song)

b.


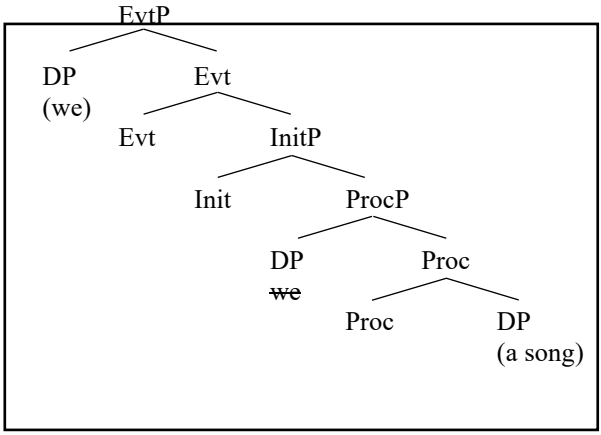
The eventuality descriptive heads are here Init and Proc; each one of them defines a subevent –Proc denotes the dynamic part of an event, and

Init defines the causative stative relationship–. They are also responsible for theta roles: Proc assigns to its complement the incremental theme role, so that the event of singing is delimited by the extension of the song, and the undergoer role to its specifier, which is interpreted as the entity that goes through all the singing process. Init, in turn, defines a theta role of Initiator (roughly, the entity that sets the process in motion, underspecified between causer, instrument and agent).

Evt is the manifestation of the more functional part of the eventuality. The role of the head Evt is to map the eventuality description into a Davidsonian event that has parameters for time and world, turning what we could characterise as an e entity into an $e^{t,w}$ entity. Evt, then, completes the Davidsonian event and adapts the predicate to combine with grammatical aspect, tense and mood. Syntactically, its role is similar to the one of Voice in approaches like Legate (2014) or Alexiadou, Anagnostopoulou & Schäfer (2015), where it is a head that introduces an external argument whose theta role is assigned depending on the information carried by its complement. In this configuration, given that InitP is the complement of Evt, the external argument in spec, EvtP is assigned the initator role.

In English, the whole structure in (17) is spelled out by one single exponent, *sing*, which carries with it conceptual semantics that further specifies the type of eventuality as one where some animate entity produces musical sounds with the oral tract.

(18)

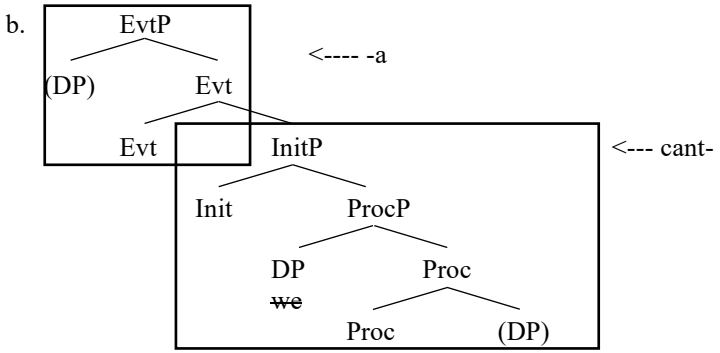


Spanish is structurally like English, and the same heads appear in the same configurations; the difference emerges at the spell out level, because two verbal exponents are used in Spanish: *cant-a*, where the second is a

theme vowel. The proposal developed in Fábregas (2022a: chapter 2) is that the theme vowel spells out Evt and the verbal stem spells out the event descriptive heads.

(19) a. (nosotros) cant-a (una canción)
we sing-ThV a song

b.



Thus, Spanish theme vowels spell out the Evt area. For reasons of space, I will not repeat here the arguments in favour of this analysis that I give in Fábregas (2022a: chapter 2), related to the morphological make up of copulative verbs and the verb *haber* 'have', or in favour of Evt as an independent head that I give in Fábregas & González Rodríguez (2020), related to negative events. See also Ramchand (2018: chapter 1) for evidence in favour of Evt taken from semantic compositionality, morpheme ordering and auxiliary combinations.

3.2 The decomposition of Evt

The approach in Fábregas (2022a: chapter 2), however, could not give an account of the existence of three conjugation classes, which were treated as a case of morphologically-conditioned allomorphy –each verbal stem will specify in its entry which allomorph will be used–. In this contribution I will try to present an approach that integrates the basic patterns through the means available in Nanosyntax, that is, syntax and spell out.

The Evt area is a plausible candidate to explain the alternation between the three conjugation classes in (1). The fact that the conjugations do not represent any difference in Aktionsart or argument structure follows if the alternation is solved at the Evt area, not at the area of eventuality descriptive heads. Moreover, given that there are no systematic syntactic or semantic

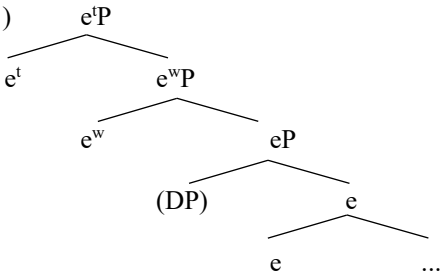
differences among the three conjugation classes, crucially the same heads must be present for the three of them, with differences following merely from spell out.

In order to analyse the three classes, the main claim is that Evt should be decomposed in a series of heads, at least three. There is a theory-internal argument for this: Evt does too many things, and that should mean that it contains a bundle of features. As we saw in §2.2, in Nanosyntax features combine in the syntax, so having a 'bundle' is translated into having a complex XP. Here is my proposal for decomposing Evt:

(20) a. 'Voice'-like head that introduces the last argument in its specifier, e
b. e^{w} head, that adds the world parameter to the eventuality
c. e^{t} head, that adds the time parameter to the eventuality

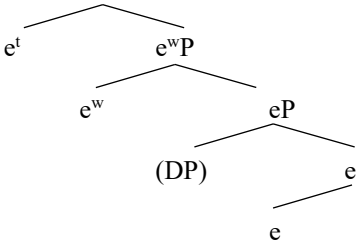
The ordering between these heads is represented in (21). As Voice must be sensitive to the theta role assigned by its complement, I locate this head as the lowest one within the area of Evt. The heads e^{w} and e^{t} are external to it. Admittedly, my evidence for locating e^{w} lower than e^{t} is at this point circumstantial, but it is triggered by the behaviour of the present subjunctive, as we will see in §4.2 below.

(21)

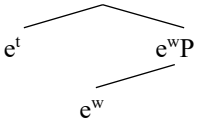


Importantly, verbs of the three conjugations can contain these three heads, which together are the decomposition of what Ramchand (2018) labels 'Evt'. The difference between the three conjugations is lexical: it depends on how much material of the Evt area the verbal exponent spells out. (22) represents the entries for the three theme vowels (not considering the higher clausal heads that they certainly also contain in their L tree).

(22) a. -a <----> e^tP



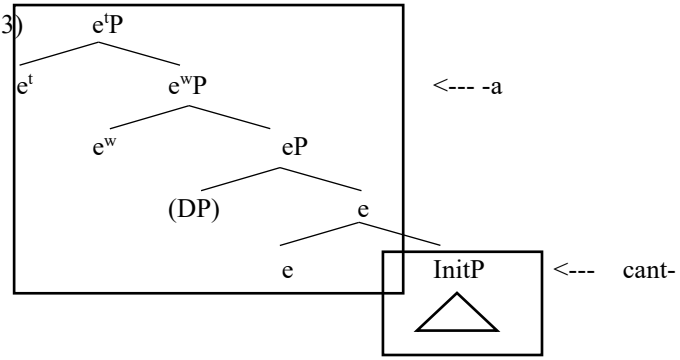
b. -i <-----> e^tP



c. -e <-----> e^t

Therefore, which theme vowel exponent emerges depends on how big the verbal exponent is. The smallest verbal exponents in Spanish spell out only up to InitP (maximally), so the three Evt-area heads e, e^w and e^t are left to spell out, triggering the insertion of *-a* (by the Exhaustive Lexicalisation Principle, as the other two exponents will leave at least e without spell out).

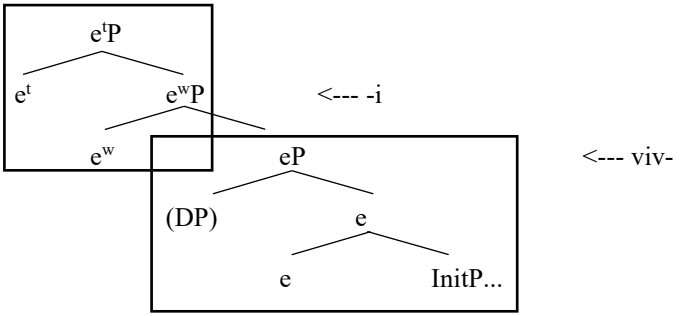
(23)



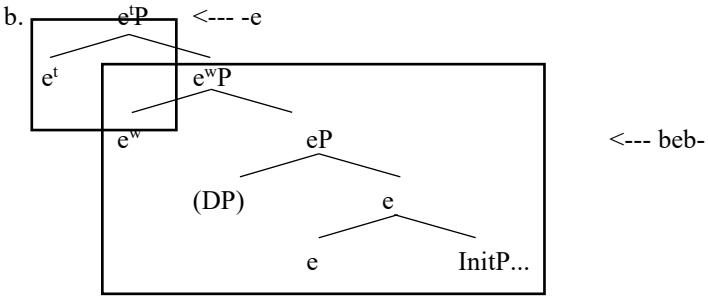
A verb that gets the second or third conjugation assigned is just a verb whose verbal exponent spells out also e and e^w in the first case, and e in the second case. This is, of course, a 'lexical' property because the speaker must memorise the exponent and associate it to the right chunk of structure, and there is no syntactic difference between the trees of the three conjugations.

Note that in (24a), the exponent *-a* in (22a) cannot be used due to the Superset: the node e^wP is not identical to the syntax in *-a*, because in the L tree of (22a) e^wP contains eP and in the syntax eP has already been spelled out by the verbal stem; this forces insertion of *-i* through the L tree in (22b). The same reasoning forces *-e* in (24b).

(24) a.



b.



4. Supporting evidence

While the internal consistency of a theory is no doubt a crucial ingredient of any scientific analysis, I do not want to base my proposal just on the theoretically-internal claim that there are no matrixes of features. In this section, I will therefore propose five pieces of evidence in favour of an analysis where (i) Evt is decomposed in at least three heads and (ii) the three conjugations reflect the spell out of different chunks of that area.

4.1 Irregularity when ThV is absent

Spanish verbs exhibit two types of irregularity: phonologically-conditioned ones, generally depending on stress position (Bermúdez-Otero 2016) and so-called morphologically-conditioned ones (25), where there is no (synchronic) phonological trigger and the description is that the presence of a particular suffix triggers the irregular materialisation of the verbal stem. The present subjunctive, illustrated in (25a), and the 1sg form of the present indicative (25b) are two of these suffixes.

(25) ten-e 'have'
  a. teng-a
     have-sbj
  b. teng-o
     have-1sg

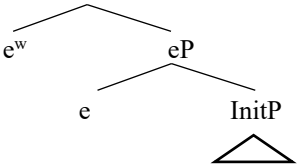
There is a generalisation with respect to these morphologically-conditioned allomorphies:

(26) Only verbs in the second or third conjugation can have morphologically-conditioned irregularities

That is, there is no verb from the 1st conjugation that behaves as the verb in (25). The question is why, and my analysis provides an answer.

In Fábregas (2022b) I noted that what the present subjunctive and the 1sg present indicative morpheme have in common is that they always appear without the Theme Vowel. I treated this property as meaning that these exponents lexicalise a structure whose lowest node is the Evt area –eP, in this revised analysis–. A verb that is irregular in these two forms is a verb which stores two exponents, one that spells out only up to InitP and one that spells out a bigger chunk of structure. Leaving irrelevant details aside, in this analysis 'have' stores the two exponents in (27).

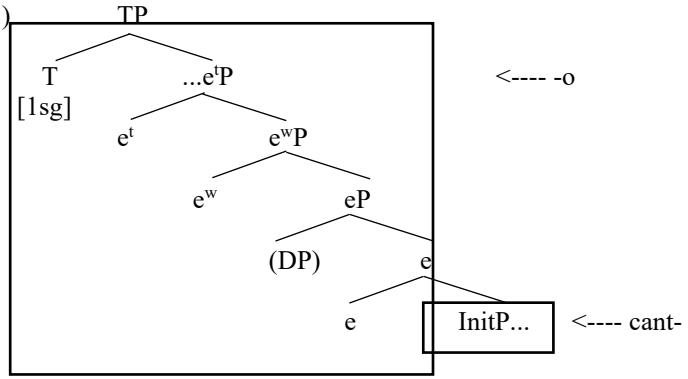
(27) a. ten- <---> e^wP



b. teng- <---> InitP

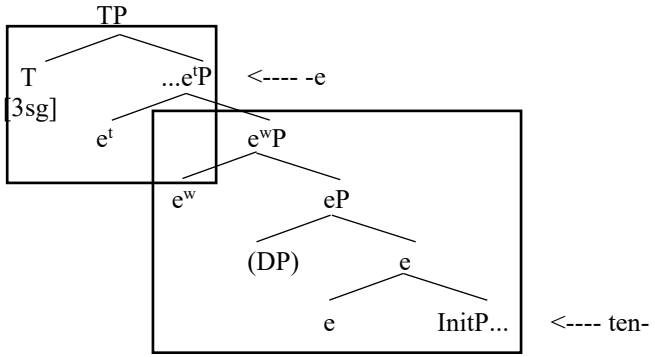
In the 1sg present indicative, or the present subjunctive, the theme vowel exponent is missing even from a verb belonging to the first conjugation, which supports the claim that these exponents spell out down to eP, as represented in (28) for the 1sg form.

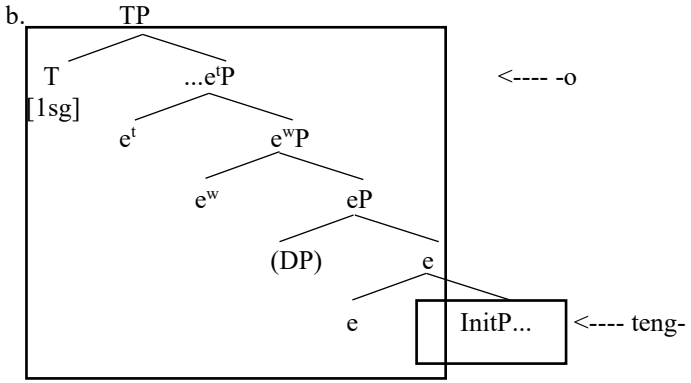
(28)



The same structure explains the choice of the irregular exponent for *ten-e* 'have', given the entries in (27). (29a) represents a case without an exponent that spells out down to eP, such as the theme vowel, and (29b) represents the case equivalent to (28), where *-o* forces the verbal stem exponent to spell out only up to InitP.

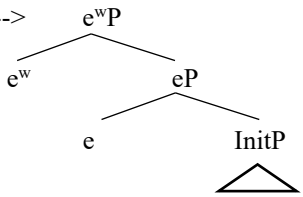
(29) a.





A verb belonging to the first conjugation cannot have this type of irregularity because its verbal stem exponent already spells out up to InitP, without spelling out any material of the Evt area. Only verbs from the second or third conjugation, whose 'regular' verbal exponent spells out part of the Evt area, can display an irregularity triggered by an exponent that reduces the verbal stem to InitP.

Of course, this is not the same thing as predicting that every second or third conjugation verb will be irregular. Being irregular depends on the verb storing, like *ten-e* 'have', two distinct exponents differentiated by their size. In a regular second or third conjugation verb, like *beb-e* 'drink', there will only be one exponent for the verbal stem (as in 30), which by the Superset Principle will be able to shrink to only InitP.

(30) beb- <---> 

Verbs of the first conjugation do not have the chance to be irregulars like (27) because their verbal stem exponent is already restricted to the eventuality descriptive heads without any part of the Evt area.

4.2 Loanwords

As we noted, verbal loanwords are always classified in the first conjugation, and never in the second or third. In my proposal, this can be restated as follows: with loanwords, the exponent is always confined to (maximally) InitP, and the Evt area is always left out for the theme vowel to spell out.

In other words: if one takes a verb from a foreign language, as in (31), and wishes to make it a Spanish verb that will inflect as a Spanish verb, the first conjugation must be used.

(31) format > format-a

I take this to be a reflection of the loanword nature of the exponent: the loanword is related to an exponent that describes some type of eventuality, but the speaker knows that it is not a Spanish verb. I propose that this naturally translates into the speaker's mental representation about that exponent being confined to the event descriptive heads and not include any projection from the Evt area, because these projections already include material that the Spanish verbal inflection will pick (as we just saw in §4.1).

(32) Verbal loanwords are exponents confined to the eventuality descriptive heads

The unmarked nature of the first conjugation, in my analysis, simply reflects that the first conjugation is the only one where the verbal stem is confined to the eventuality descriptive heads and all Evt heads are spelled out by another exponent. This is compulsory with loanwords because Speakers have the consciousness that they do not belong to Spanish and therefore avoid positing Evt-related projections in their lexical entry.

4.3 Frequency

The 'unmarked' nature of the first conjugation, then, is not absence of additional morphological features (contra Oltra-Massuet 1999) but rather the standard spell out situation where the exponent that spells out the verb is confined to the heads that define the lexical aspects of the verb, such as argument structure and Aktionsart.

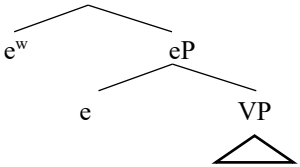
This explains in my proposal that the first conjugation is not only the one without morphologically-conditioned irregularities, but also the overwhelmingly most frequent one, as we already saw. This supports the

view that speakers prefer, all things being equal, to store their verbal exponents associated to entries which do not make reference to Evt heads.

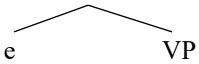
Interestingly, there is a correlation between how many Evt heads the exponent stores in my analysis and how frequent the conjugation class is. The second and the third conjugation include 22% of all lexical verbs, but once we remove the verbs derived with *-ecer*, the second conjugation is significantly less frequent than the third, and verbs from the second conjugation tend to be reinterpreted as verbs from the third conjugation.

This suggests that speakers show a tendency to minimise the quantity of Evt material that the verbal exponent has. The difference between the second conjugation and the third is that the former spells out one extra head (33a vs. 33b); moving from the second to the third means, in actuality, to reduce the L tree with which the verbal exponent is stored, so that the e^t head is not included in it.

(33) a. verb stem 2nd <---> e^wP



b. verb stem 3rd <---> eP



4.4 Theme vowels without verbal bases

The first conjugation is not just the least marked because of its frequency, but also because it is the only one that appears in denominal contexts where a suffix that otherwise attaches to verbs attaches to nouns. There are several significant contexts of this type, involving the agentive suffixes *-dor* (34) and *-nte* (35), the action nominal *-da* (36), the modal adjectivaliser *-ble* (37), among others (38): that is, this is not an exceptional situation restricted to only one or two suffixes in Spanish, and it seems that Spanish allows to build fake deverbal forms with suffixes that share the property that they normally require bases with argument structure:

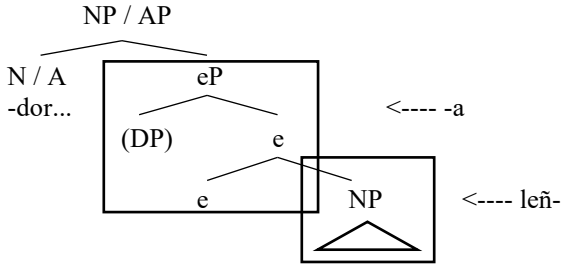
(34) leña 'wood' > leñ-a-dor 'woodsman'
wood-ThV-er
(35) comedia 'comedy' > comedi-a-nte 'comediant'
comedy-ThV-nt
(36) payaso 'clown' > payas-a-da 'action typical of a clown'
clown-ThV-act
(37) ministro 'minister' > ministr-a-ble 'that can become a minister'
minister-ThV-able
(38) intención 'intention' > intencion-a-do 'willing'
intention-ThV-ed

Despite the presence of a theme vowel, the bases of the suffixes cannot be used as verbs, that is, they never combine with grammatical aspect, tense or mood.

That these denominal formations must take the first conjugation theme vowel follows from two facts: (i) the base is a noun and therefore it cannot spell out any Evt head as part of its domain, (ii) the only thing that is relevant for the suffix is to establish an argument relation that involves an external argument. The nominalisers in (34), (35) and (36) either select agents / instruments or denote actions that must have an agent, and the adjectivaliser in (37) has a meaning similar to the passive voice (see Oltra-Massuet 2014 for an overview) and is also built over verbs that have an external argument. The agentive meaning is also obvious in (38).

My claim is that these formations always take the theme vowel corresponding to the 1st conjugation because the only structural aspect that is relevant for the formations is that an external argument should be present. This forces the projection of eP, as in (39), but, I argue, e^w and e^t are not projected. The consequence of the lack of e^w and e^t is that the base will never be used as a verb, despite the presence of a theme vowel, because there is no Davidsonian event with world and time parameters.

(39)



The spell out effect of only projecting eP in these structures is that only *-a* can be used, as neither *-i* nor *-e* have eP in their stored L tree.

4.5 Neutralisation in subjunctive

The previous property supports an analysis where the head that introduces the external argument should be differentiated from other properties in the Evt area, and moreover that head is characteristic of the *-a* exponent; now let me discuss a property that supports the claim that e^{w} is dissociated from the e^{t} head.

There are two important properties of subjunctive in Spanish. The first one has already been mentioned, and it is that the three conjugations become two conjugations in subjunctive, because the 2nd and the 3rd conjugation neutralise in subjunctive (40).

(40) a.	cant-a	beb-e	viv-i	Indicative
	sing-ThV^{1}	drink-ThV^{2}	live-ThV^{3}	
b.	cant-e	beb-a	viv-a	Present subjunctive
	sing-sbj^{1}	drink-sbj^{2}	live-sbj^{2}	

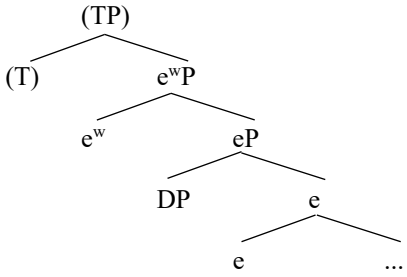
The second property is that temporal relations are, at best, weakened in the subjunctive mood (see Picallo 1985, Suñer & Padilla Ribera 1990, Uribe Etxebarria 1994). Significantly, the so-called 'imperfective subjunctive' is not necessarily a past form, as it can be used for present or future hypotheses (41); the 'present subjunctive' is, as it is well-known, ambiguous between present and future (42), as there is no real 'future subjunctive'.

(41) Ojalá vin-ie-ra mañana.
hopefully come-ThV-imp.sbj tomorrow
'She'll hopefully come tomorrow'

(42) Ojalá esté mejor {hoy / mañana}.
hopefully be.sbj better today / tomorrow
'I hope she is better now / will be better tomorrow'

My proposal is that this weakening is a reflection of subjunctive not projecting e^{t} in the Evt structure. As Wiltschko (2014) does for some German varieties, I propose that Spanish subjunctive uses modal (and not temporal) anchoring. (43) represents the subjunctive, where e^{w} –which tags the event with a world parameter– is projected, but e^{t} –which tags it with time– is not.

(43)



The immediate effect of the absence of e^t in the structure projected is that the distinction between the second and the third conjugation cannot be expressed, because these two are precisely differentiated by e^t. Therefore, the two conjugations become neutralised, while the presence of e^w and e guarantee that the first conjugation will be differentiated from the other two.

5. Conclusions

In this brief article, I have presented a preliminary analysis of the three conjugation classes in Spanish that captures, without morphology, the intuition that they describe a 'lexical' organisation in classes without any consequences for the argument structure, lexical aspect or other properties of the eventuality described. The way in which I have done this is through the proposal that (i) Ramchand's (2018) Evt head is actually a complex syntactic constituent and (ii) the three conjugation classes indirectly reflect the size of the verbal constituent they combine with, spelling out the Evt heads that have not been covered by the verbal exponent.

In this final section I will briefly show why this approach is better than Oltra-Massuet's (1999), the competitor theory within Neoconstructionist approaches, and I will mention some potential extensions of the analysis.

5.1 Against Oltra-Massuet (1999)

The most extended theory about Theme Vowels in languages like Catalan or Spanish, where the conjugation classes have no impact on semantics is Oltra-Massuet (1999). In her theory, Theme Vowels are ornamental morphemes that are inserted after syntax in morphological positions created ex nihilo and therefore not present as syntactic heads. Specifically, Oltra-Massuet (1999) proposes that Romance verbs may have more than one theme vowel, as any functional verbal head will undergo the process in (44), represented here for the head little v: what is a terminal node in syntax is