

# Exploring the l-syntax/s-syntax divide \*

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## SUMMARY

This paper revisits Travis' (2000, 2010) discussion of a division in the syntactic/combinatorial component into a lexical domain (l-syntax) which is characterized by idiosyncratic properties and syntax-proper (s-syntax) which is not (based on Hale and Keyser, 1993). In her discussion, a specific binding category E(vent) which represents event structure in the verbal syntactic layer marks the boundary between l-syntax and s-syntax. The data supporting this proposal is drawn, among others, from causative verb formation in Malagasy. I show that while at first sight the facts seem to support such a clear boundary between an idiosyncratic/lexical and a transparent/productive structure-building component, evidence from Malagasy nominalizations suggests that this is not actually the case. Nominals formed on structure that is clearly in the s-syntax domain in Travis' account show idiosyncratic, sub-lexical properties. This seems to argue for a relaxed, possibly gradient, boundary between the two domains.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article revisite la discussion de Travis (2000, 2010) qui porte sur une division de la composante syntaxique / combinatoire du domaine lexical (l-syntaxe) caractérisé par des propriétés idiosyncratiques et syntaxiques propres (s-syntaxe) qui ne le serait pas (selon Hale et Keyser, 1993). Dans sa discussion, une catégorie de liaison spécifique E (vènement), qui représente la structure de l'événement dans la strate syntaxique verbale, marque la limite entre la l-syntaxe et la s-syntaxe. Les données soutenant cette proposition sont tirées, entre autres, de la formation de verbes causatifs en Malgache. Nous démontrons que si à première vue les faits semblent soutenir une telle frontière entre un composant idiosyncrasique/lexical et un composant de construction de structure transparent/productif, l'évidence des nominalisations Malgaches suggère que ce n'est pas réellement le cas. Les nominaux formés sur la structure qui est clairement dans le domaine de la s-syntaxe dans le compte de Travis montrent des propriétés idiosyncratiques, sous-lexicales. Cela semble plaider en faveur d'une frontière détendue, éventuellement dégradée, entre les deux domaines.

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\* I consider myself extremely lucky to have interacted with a wonderful group of people who have worked and continue working on such an intriguing and wonderful language as Malagasy. Among these, Lisa Travis has been a great influence in developing my ideas on Malagasy nominalizations and clause structure. I only had the chance to meet her during AFLA conferences, but her work on verbal aspectual projections and especially her insights on the lexicon-syntax divide and the assumption that syntactic processes are operable at the sublexical level have been a catalyst in shaping my proposals for a syntactic derivation of Malagasy nominalizations.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Recent work on the syntax-morphology interface has taken the lexicon to be much more than a mere list of lexical items. The lexicon is seen as a type of syntax which contains syntactic objects (trees) which present a certain degree of abstractness. This is the case in post-syntactic models of morphology such as the Distributed Morphology model of Halle and Marantz (1993), the exoskeletal model of Borer (2005) and the more recent nanosyntax model of Starke (2010). This does not necessarily always mean that morphology and syntax belong to the same structure-building component of grammar but rather more generally that the mechanism that builds lexical and phrasal units is the same, however operating at different levels of grammar controlled by slightly different operating principles, and thus resulting in structures of different types.

This is best captured in the so-called l-syntax/s-syntax division of labour, proposed in Hale and Keyser (1993). They propose that processes such as denominal verbalization are subject to syntactic operations, which however take place in the special sublexical syntactic domain. They call this l(exical)-syntax as opposed to s(yntactic)-syntax which is syntax in the traditional sense. Travis (2000; 2010 Chs. 3 and 6) provides a thorough discussion of the properties of the l-syntax domain and pinpoints a fixed point in the syntactic structure which delimits the domain of l-syntax. This is the E(vent)P, the projection which hosts the operator that binds the event variable of the verb. Everything below EP constitutes part of the lexical entry of the verb and is characterized by lexical, idiosyncratic properties including category changing processes, non-productivity, idiosyncratic sublexical phonology, and so on.

The problem with positing such a fixed point is that one commits to accepting everything above EP as part of s-syntax (i.e. proper syntax) and thus non-subject to idiosyncratic lexical properties any more. However, this does not seem to be the case, at least for causative formation in Malagasy, which together with Tagalog, forms the empirical base for Travis' (2000) arguments. I show here that the s-syntax derived causatives can form the input to further category-changing derivations, such as nominalization, which arguably operate at the l-syntax level, given certain idiosyncratic properties and the fact itself that they are category-changing operations. If this is true, then one must assume that l-syntax is operable again at a higher level above s-syntax, or that category-changing morphology re-introduces the l-syntax domain, deriving a lexical entry that contains a slice of s-syntax.

I argue here that an alternative possible solution to the problem is to abandon a fixed point for the l-syntax/s-syntax division and assume a language-specific (and in fact construction-specific) variable attachment height for such a boundary. The important notion here is gradeability – the higher the attachment of category-changing morphology is, the less lexical-idiosyncratic properties the derived structure exhibits.

The paper is organized as follows: in Section 2, I present briefly the initial motivation for an l-syntax/s-syntax divide in Hale and Keyser's (1993) proposal and discuss Travis' (2000 and later work) proposal for treating EP as the boundary of l-syntax, based on causative formation in Malagasy. In Section 3, I provide data from Malagasy nominalizations that show that the s-syntax domain prefix *amp-* in Malagasy can appear inside nominalizations which, apart from the fact itself that they are the product of a category-changing process, exhibit additional idiosyncratic/lexical properties including restricted productivity and non-transparent semantics. In Section 4, I provide a possible solution to the problem by proposing a variable/gradable

distribution of lexical properties, rather than a fixed point. In such an approach, a category-changing morpheme will derive structures whose idiosyncratic properties will negatively correlate to the amount of syntactic structure below the category-changing morpheme: more syntactic structure translates to less idiosyncratic properties while less syntactic structure exhibits a more “lexical” behaviour. Section 4, provides concluding remarks.

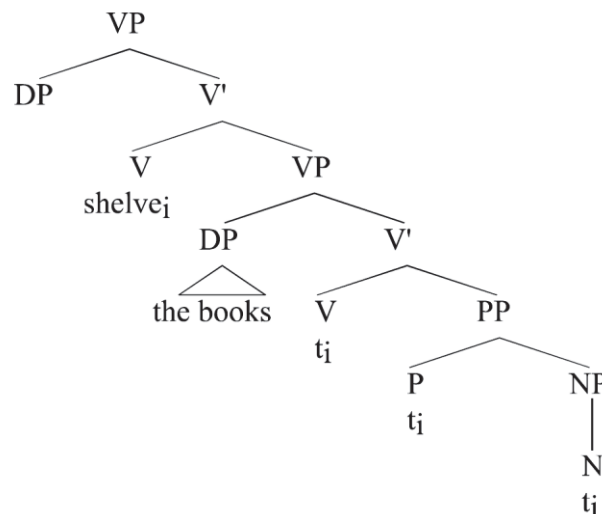
## 2 L-SYNTAX AND S-SYNTAX

The initial motivation for the s-syntax/l-syntax divide comes from Hale and Keyser’s (1993) work. They observe that denominal verbs such as *shelve* can be paraphrased by similar structures containing the source noun:

- (1) a. The librarian put the books on the shelf.  
b. The librarian shelved the books.

Based on such pairs, they propose a syntactic derivation of the denominal verb in (2) from an underlying structure which resembles the example in (1):

(2)



As can be seen from the structure, the derivation of the verb “shelve” involves head movement of the noun “shelf” to a higher verbal projection through the prepositional head. Head movement being clearly a syntactic operation, together with the fact that this results in a lexical item creation forces Hale and Keyser (1993) to introduce a new component of grammar which they label l-syntax, and which allows for syntactic operations similarly to proper s-syntax but retains lexical characteristics such as idiosyncratic phonology and semantics and low productivity.

Travis (2000, 2010) expands the discussion of this division by trying to pinpoint the exact point in the syntactic structure where the division boundary projects. In order to do this, she relies (among other things) on the derivation of two types of causatives in Malagasy and Tagalog. We will restrict the discussion here to the Malagasy facts, but similar facts obtain for the Tagalog data

as well.

For Travis, the boundary between l-syntax and s-syntax is the projection E(vent)P which lies between the higher VP shell and tense. EP has scope over the event denoted by the verb, it interacts with the actuality of that event and in many cases provides realis/irrealis distinctions. Assuming with Travis (2010) that lexical entries cannot introduce more than one CAUSE and since EP binds the higher VP that introduces the external argument/causer, it follows that EP marks the boundary of the lexical domain.

Travis (2000, 2010) supports this proposal with facts from causative verb formation in Malagasy and Tagalog. In Malagasy, verbal morphology contains the prefixes *i-* and *an-*, the former mainly deriving intransitive senses of the verb and the latter acting as a low causative head that appears in the corresponding transitive versions derived from the same root:

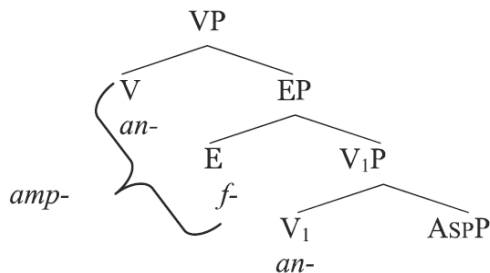
(3)	Root	Gloss	i-form	Gloss	an-FORM	GLOSS
	<i>latsaka</i>	'dirt'	<i>milatsaka</i>	'fall'	<i>andatsaka</i>	'drop'
	<i>sasa</i>	* <i>ill</i>	<i>misasa</i>	'wash self'	<i>manasa</i>	'wash x'
	<i>seho</i>	'fear; terror'	<i>miseho</i>	'appear'	<i>maneho</i>	'show'
	<i>petraka</i>	'illness'	<i>mipetraka</i>	'sit'	<i>mametraka</i>	'put'
	<i>sitrika</i>	'be buried'	<i>misitrika</i>	'hide'	<i>manitrika</i>	'hide x'
	<i>solo</i>	'substitute'	<i>misolo</i>	'be substitute'	<i>manolo</i>	'substitute x'

Travis (2000, 2010) based on this data proposes that *an-* is a low causative head, introducing an external argument for the verbal predicate and thus transitivity of the verb. This is however a lexical causative rule as it exhibits a number of idiosyncratic properties. Firstly, the causativization changes the grammatical category of the root. Thus, while most roots in (3) are adjectival or nominal, the resulting string is always a verb. Secondly, the semantic interpretation of the resulting string is not always transparent. Thus, the root *latsaka* in (3) means "dirt", but the resulting transitive verb means "to drop". In terms of productivity, these forms while relatively productive have numerous exceptions. Thus, there are Malagasy transitive verbs which are formed by adding the prefix *i-*, such as *mividy* "buy x" from the root *vidy* "price, value", in addition to Malagasy *an-* prefixed forms which appear to be intransitive, such as *mandeha* "go" from the root *leha* or *mandixy* "dance" from *dihy* "a dance". Finally, there is a clearly lexical phonological rule which deletes voiceless root-initial consonants after the nasal of the prefix, which undergoes nasal place assimilation: *man-* + *petraka* -> *mametraka* "put". This contrasts with postlexical rules, such as prenasalization of root-initial consonants, observed for example in reduplication.

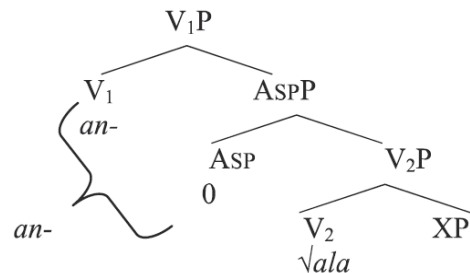
In addition to *an-* prefixing the verbal root in order to transitivity it, Travis (2010, based on Hung 1988) assumes that the causative prefix *amp-* which attaches outside the verbal prefixes *an-* and *i-*, is actually the same causative prefix *an-* attaching higher and phonologically fusing with a prefix *f-* which realizes the head of the aspectual projection EP dominated by the causative, as can be seen in the following trees (from Travis 2010:85):

(4)

a. PRODUCTIVE CAUSATIVE



b. TRANSITIVIZER (LEXICAL CAUSATIVE)



The tree in (b) shows the lower attachment of *an-* as the head of V<sub>1</sub>P which introduces the external argument/causer of the transitive verb. The tree in (a) shows *an-* heading a higher VP projection, dominating EP and thus appearing phonologically as the variant *amp-* prefix. As Travis states in her (2010:187) analysis:

*“The same morpheme may be added both below and above E. Some of the effects of this morpheme addition are the same in both cases: the V1 morpheme may add an extra Case and an extra external argument. Some of the effects of this morpheme addition are different: the productivity, phonology, and meaning of the morpheme may not be predictable below E but are expected to be predictable above E. I want to capture the similarities by saying (i) that it is the same morpheme, and (ii) these morphemes are added in the syntax. And I want to capture the differences by saying that below E we find a syntax that is very lexical in nature—L-syntax.”*

What this means is that the addition of *amp-* constitutes the addition of a different lexical item outside the syntactic projection of E which is the boundary of the verbal lexical domain. In this respect, *amp-* causatives in Malagasy are expected to behave more or less like English causatives derived from the addition of a causative verb like *make* or *cause*:

- (5) a. She made the student learn the Greek alphabet.
- b. He caused the plane's engine to climb after hacking its software.

Since these strings are derived in syntax proper (s-syntax) they are not expected to have any idiosyncratic properties. Their semantics are transparent and compositional, there is no lexical phonological process involved, they are very productive in that *make* and *cause* can select any kind of verbal clause as a complement, and so on. Similarly, *amp-* causatives in Malagasy are very productive as they can select almost all verbal strings prefixed with either the intransitive *i-* or the transitive *an-* prefix (examples from Travis 2010):

- (6) manala           ‘to take X out’
- mampanala   ‘to cause Y to take X out’
- miala        ‘to go out’
- mampiala    ‘to cause Y to go out’

In addition, *amp-* has mostly transparent semantics in that the derived string always means “cause V<sub>1</sub>P” where V<sub>1</sub>P is the transitive or intransitive VP headed by the prefixes *i-* or *an-*.

Summarizing then, in Travis’ (2000, 2010) framework, an aspectual, event-related head E, which binds the event variable of the verb, marks the boundary of a lexical entry and as a result, the edge of the domain of the lexicon. Higher projections necessarily contain independent lexical entries. Therefore, E, and its projection, marks the boundary between l-syntax and s-syntax. The strong prediction that the framework makes is that any syntactic tree which contains E and the higher causative prefix *amp-* in Malagasy must exhibit properties associated with syntax proper (s-syntax), including high productivity, transparent semantics, postlexical phonology, and consistent categorial status. In the following paragraph I will show that this prediction is not borne out, at least for the Malagasy causative *amp-*. The discussion draws heavily from work in Ntelitheos (2012) on Malagasy nominalizations.

### 3 MALAGASY NOMINALIZATIONS OF CAUSATIVE VERBS

Malagasy has a very rich inventory of verbal nominalizations (Paul 1996; Ntelitheos 2012). Most of these nominals are formed by adding a generic nominalizing prefix *f-* to different verbal strings, deriving nominals with different morphosyntactic properties and different interpretations, including manner, instrumental, locative, and agentive nominals.<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I will concentrate on two types of Malagasy deverbal nominals. The first type is formed on the circumstantial voice form of the verb, which is derived by adding a suffix *-an(a)* to the verbal base that hosts one of the verbal prefixes *i-* or *an-*:

(7)	Root	CT-form	<i>f-</i> nominal	Gloss
	hita	ahitana	fahitana	‘sight; a vision’
	valy	amaliana	famaliana	‘revenge, punishment’
	ahy*	anahiana	fanahiana	‘worry, anxiety’
	loaka	andoahana	fandoahana	‘tool for drilling/piercing’
	ady	iadiana	fiadiana	‘weapon’
	pasoka	ipasohana	fipasohana	‘iron’
	anatra	ianarana	fianarana	‘school’
	angona*	angonana	fiangonana	‘church’
	tsara*	itsarana	fitsarana	‘court of law’
	kapa	ikapana	fikapana	‘way of cutting’
	lomano	ilomanosana	filomanosana	‘way of swimming’

As can be seen from the English glosses, these nominals can have a number of different interpretations, and are often ambiguous, disambiguation being possible only from the

<sup>1</sup> Agentive nominals are prefixed with *mp-*, pronounced [p] but see Ntelitheos (2012) for an analysis that treats *mp-* as a fusion of the verbal prefix *m-* and the generic nominalizer *f-*.

morphosyntactic context of the nominal.

The second type of nominals under investigation are agentive nominals, derived by the active/actor-promoting voice in Malagasy, formed on the prefixed verbal base by adding the agentive prefix *mp-*:

(8)	Root	CT-form	Verb Base	<i>f</i> -nominal	Gloss
	halatra	‘theft’	mangalatra	mpangalatra	‘thief’
	soratra	‘writing’	manoratra	mpanoratra	‘writer, an author’
	asa	‘work’	miasa	mpiasa	‘worker, employee’
	valy	‘field’	mampoly	mpampoly	‘farmer’

Before moving to a more detailed discussion of these nominals, it is important to point out the fact that many of these deverbal nominalizations are formed on the verbal base which contains the higher causative prefix *amp-*. Some examples of CT-based nominals are given in (9) and agentive nominals in (10):

(9)	Root	Gloss	<i>f</i> -nominal	Gloss
	akatra	‘lifted’	fampakarana <sup>2</sup>	‘marriage, wedding’
	re	‘heard’	fampandrenesana	‘announcement, notice’
	anatra	‘advice’	fampianarana	‘teaching, instruction’
	ely	‘scattered’	fampielezana	‘scattering, disseminating’
	risika	‘encouragement’	fampirisihana	‘incitement, encouragement’
	onona	‘comfort’	fampiononana	‘comforting those in sorrow’
	seho	‘be shown’	fampisehoana	‘exhibit, display, performance’
	valana	‘water course’	fampivalanana	‘purgative, laxative’
	aika	‘compact, close’	fampoehana	‘a belt buckle’

(10)	Root	Gloss	<i>mp</i> -nominal	Gloss
	akatra	‘lifted’	mpampakatra	‘bridegroom’
	anatra	‘advice’	mpampianatra	‘teacher’
	asa	‘work’	mpampiasa	‘employer’
	velona	‘living’	mpampivelona	‘midwife’
	tohy	‘continuation’	mpampitohy	‘conjunction’
	tombo	‘increase’	mpampitombo	‘multiplier’
	andro	‘be bathed’	mpampandro	‘shower’

Given that all these nominals are formed on the *amp-* prefixed causative form of the verb, which in Travis’ (2000, 2010) account projects in the s-syntax domain, the derived action and agentive nominalizations are expected to exhibit fully productive syntactic properties and none of the idiosyncrasies associated with the lexicon. Let us consider this in light of Travis’ own diagnostics of lexical/idiosyncratic behaviour.

The first lexical property that Travis associates with the lexical causative prefix *an-*, when merging at the lower V<sub>1</sub>P level is of course its category-changing function: *an-* selects nominal or adjectival roots and verbalises them. However, this is also the case with the nominalizers *f-* and

<sup>2</sup> Also *fampakaram bady* from a combination of the roots *akatra* and *vady*.

*mp-* above. Their function is to select a clearly verbal (causative) string and derive a nominal. Thus, the domain containing the causative prefix *amp-* is still subject to category-changing operations, such as nominalization. However, this is not a real problem for Travis' analysis as nominalization can clearly target clausal strings in Malagasy, either in the form of a headless relative clause (11) or as a clausal action nominalization (11):

- (11) a. [ny m-an-galatra akoho] dia Rabe  
 the ASP-AT-steal chicken TOP Rabe  
 'Rabe is the (one who) steals chicken.'
- b. ratsy [ny m-an-galatra akoho]  
 bad the ASP-AT-steal chicken  
 'Stealing chicken is bad.'

In addition, this is not a Malagasy-specific property as similar nominalizations of causative structures are available in English and other languages. Consider for example the nominalizations of the clearly syntactic causativization derived by merging causative verbs in English illustrated in (5), repeated here as (12):

- (12) a. She made the student learn the Greek alphabet.  
 b. He caused the plane's engine to climb after hacking its software.

These strings can also be nominalized in the form of gerundive nominals for example, as in (13):

- (13) a. Her making of the student learn the Greek alphabet annoyed his parents.  
 b. His causing of the plane's engine to climb endangered the passengers.

The nominalizations in (13) exhibit no idiosyncratic properties – they are extremely productive and have transparent compositional semantics (i.e. no new idiosyncratic meaning is added at this level of the derivation). The same is true for the Malagasy clausal nominalizations of (11) (see discussion in Ntelitheos 2012). Thus, one could easily assume that the nominalizations in (9)-(10) are also clausal/syntactic nominalizations of a similar type. The type of evidence then needed to confirm this assumption is whether the nominalizations in (9)-(10) are “lexical” in nature or whether they behave like the clausal nominalizations of (11)-(11), in which case Travis' treatment of *amp-* causativization as syntactic would remain unchallenged.

Let us first consider productivity. This is a very difficult issue to disentangle but syntax-based derivational processes are expected to be highly productive in general, while lexical processes are expected to be restricted to limited numbers of forms. Nominalization of *amp-* forms of both the action and agentive type seem to be quite limited. Available Malagasy dictionaries only list a handful of attested forms (e.g. only four agentive nominals and nine action nominals in Hallanger's (1973) dictionary). This is quite an interesting gap, as one could easily coin hundreds of agentive or action nominals derived from causative verbal forms. Consider for example the root *re* “heard”. Based on this root one has the action nominal *fampandrenesana* “announcement, notice” (see (9)). The same root with the causative prefix also derives the active form verb *mampandre* “to announce, to make known to someone” and one would expect the agentive nominal *mpampandre* “announcer”. However, the agentive nominal is not listed in any



dictionaries and a Google search reveals no available instances online. Another random example would be the agentive *mpampalahelo* “saddener” or the action nominal *fampalahelovina* “saddening” from *alahelo* “sorrow”. Both verbal forms, actor voice *mampalahelo* and circumstantial voice *ampalahelovina* are attested. Given the productivity of clausal/syntactic nominalizations of the sort in (11)-(11), the corresponding clausal nominalization *mampalahelo* is attested online:

- (14) ... amin’ny vehivavy izay fialan-tsasatra talohan’ity mampalahelo ity  
 ... to the woman who vacation before this make.sad this  
 “... to a woman who had a vacation before this sad (occurrence).”

Thus, it seems that agentive and action nominals formed on the causative verb form exhibit restricted productivity.

The semantic transparency expectation is not met either. While clausal nominals of the sort in (11)-(11) are always transparent, the examples in (9)-(10) clearly show that the semantic interpretation of agentive and action nominals built on the causative verbal form is often unpredictable/idiosyncratic. Take for example the action nominal *fampisehoana*. The root is *seho*, which has a passive verbal interpretation “to be shown; to be exhibited”. The causative verb *mampiseho* (and the corresponding circumstantial voice form *ampisehoana*) are derived compositionally from the constituent morphemes of the verbal form as “cause to be exhibited/displayed, i.e. to put on display”. However, the nominalized form *fampisehoana* obtains the non-directly transparent or compositional meaning of a “(theatrical) performance”. In a similar fashion, the agentive nominal *mpampitohy* “conjunction” naming a grammatical category, as derived from the verb *mampitohy* “to connect”, obtains a slightly different sense from the source verb.

It is clear from the data that action and agentive nominals based on the causative form of the verb exhibit lexical properties as listed in Travis’ (2000, 2010) description of the lexical domain. This means that in order to maintain EP as the boundary of the l-syntax/s-syntax divide, one will have to assume a reintroduction of a lexical domain outside the syntactic domain containing the higher causative in Malagasy, i.e. a lexical regeneration at different levels of the syntactic structure. An alternative account would be to assume a lower merging level for *amp-* in the cases of the nominals in (9)-(10). Further support for such an account comes from the fact that EP does not seem to be present in many of these nominals. Thus, the agentive nominal *mpampianatra* “teacher” does not seem to entail an event of teaching. The noun *mpampianatra*, as a professional name, may simply refer to a teacher who has just graduated from a teaching college, and who has never taught, i.e. no event of teaching has occurred (see Ntelitheos 2012 for discussion of the eventive properties of these nominals).

A final alternative approach, and one that was suggested in Ntelitheos (2012), is that lexical properties are not distributed in a polar fashion between the two systems of l-syntax and s-syntax. The data seems to indicate a gradience in their distribution. Thus, within the clausal spine, the lower chunk containing root material and category-establishing morphology is “highly” lexical in that it sets idiomatic interpretations and shows low productivity. This is also implicit in views of this lower domain in Ramchand’s “first-phase syntax”, and Marantz’s (1997) assumption that lexical idiosyncrasies are at the domain below phasal, category-assigning heads. However, the data here clearly shows that levels above this first phase may also exhibit idiosyncratic, lexical properties, which only seem to disappear at the high clausal level. Thus,

nominalizations formed at the  $V_1P$  level of Travis (2010) are highly lexical in nature. Nominalizations of the sort in (9)-(10) are more productive and less semantically opaque than the former but still maintain a certain degree of lexical idiosyncrasy in terms of productivity and semantic opacity. Finally, clausal nominalizations of the sort in (11)-(11) show almost no idiosyncratic behaviour at all (although some traces maybe remain even at that level). Ntelitheos (2012) provides a more extended discussion of these issues.

#### 4 CONCLUSION

I have shown that Travis' (2000, 2010) proposal of E(vent)P, an event related projection between the VP domain and TP, is the boundary between l-syntax and s-syntax cannot be maintained, at least for the formation of causative verbs in Malagasy. Based on evidence from Malagasy nominalizations, I show that what she considers to be derivations within syntax proper (s-syntax) exhibit in fact lexical/idiosyncratic properties, including limited productivity and non-transparent semantics. I propose instead a gradient view of lexicality, where the lexical core's lower syntactic domain is dominated by layers of decreasing lexical properties and increasing core-syntax behaviour.

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