A scalar account of Mayan positional roots

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This talk investigates an enigmatic root class in Mayan languages, called *positional* in the descriptive literature, and argues that these roots should receive a scalar semantics. Example (1) presents some instances of positional roots in Kaqchikel, while (2) shows a few of their canonical derivations.

(1) **Positionals**
   a. köt ‘twisted’
   b. ch’eq ‘wet’
   c. sët ‘circular’

(2) **Derived Positionals**
   a. x-kot-e’ ‘It twisted.’
   b. ri ch’eq-ech’tik che’ ‘the very wet tree’
   c. set-ël ‘It’s circular.’

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<th>Core Proposal: Positional roots denote measure functions of type (⟨e, d⟩) (from individuals to degrees on a scale)</th>
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After mustering distributional arguments for a degree-based account of positional roots, I then expand the analysis along three routes. First, I show how a series of positional-specific morphological facts can be explained when positional derivations are reanalyzed as degree morphology. Second, given the cross-categorial distribution of scalar items, I show how the analysis lets us understand why positionals are so category neutral: **They lexicalize the scalar core underlying gradable predicates across categories.** Finally, I consider how to integrate derived positionals into clause-level degree constructions like the comparative. All along the way there will be tension between giving positionals a scalar semantics and preventing them from collapsing on bona fide root adjectives. This will open up a way to think about different sources of gradability.