

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.

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| (1) POSITIONALS | (2) DERIVED POSITIONALS |
| a. kōt ‘twisted’ | a. x-kot-e’ ‘It twisted.’ |
| b. ch’eq ‘wet’ | b. ri ch’eq-ech’ik che’ ‘the very wet tree’ |
| c. sēt ‘circular’ | c. set-ël ‘It’s circular.’ |

Core Proposal: Positional roots denote measure functions of type $\langle e, d \rangle$ (from individuals to degrees on a scale)
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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.