

## On the Nature of Theme Vowels: A View from Catalan and Spanish

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In Romance languages, theme vowels instantiate conjugation classes as purely morphological markers, i.e. they determine the verb's morphophonological surface shape but not their syntactic or semantic properties. The bond between verbs and their conjugational marking is idiosyncratic, and cannot be established on semantic, syntactic or phonological grounds, although there have been serious attempts at finding a systematic correlation.

In Oltra-Massuet (1999, 2000) for Catalan and Oltra-Massuet & Arregi (2005) for Spanish, it was argued that theme vowels cannot be analyzed as exponents of *v* heads, since a *v* head can be realized e.g. as a causative suffix *-itz*, as in *agud-itz-a-r* 'to sharpen', followed by the theme vowel. It was proposed that a dissociated morpheme (Embick 1997) position is projected post-syntactically, as a result of a language-specific well-formedness constraint on functional heads, where theme vowels are spelled out. This analysis has been challenged in nanosyntactic approaches to Spanish theme vowels, where morphological items completely devoid of morphosyntactic and semantic properties have no place. Specifically, the claim in Svenonius (2007) that the Slavic theme vowel is a direct spellout of *v* has been developed for Spanish in Fábregas (2017a, b), who entertains the hypothesis that theme vowels instantiate a light verb *v* position, following Kayne's (2016) proposal that English has theme vowels and that they are light verbs. More recently, Fábregas (2021) further elaborates this proposal to suggest that the root theme vowel is in fact the spell out of Event Phrase (Ramchand 2018).

In this talk, I will mainly review Fábregas (2021) and explore its potential application to Catalan.

### References

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