In this talk, I analyze some argument structure patterns associated to denominal verbs. A first pattern is the one exemplified by so-called ‘location verbs’ (He shelved the book) and ‘locatum verbs’ (He saddled the horse). In my previous l-syntactic work on shelve verbs and saddle verbs (Mateu 2001), I argued that these transitive denominal verbs must be regarded as causative change of state verbs, whose telicity is determined by the presence of an abstract terminal coincidence relation, while transitive denominal verbs like push are activity verbs whose atelicity is determined by the presence of a central coincidence relation (cf. Hale (1986), Hale & Keyser (1993), and Demirdache & Uribe-Etxebarria (2000, 2003), for the distinction between terminal and central coincidence relations and their grammatical significance; see also Harley (1999, 2005), Acedo Matellán & Real Puigdollers (2005), MacDonald (2008), for interesting discussion on the aspect of these denominal verbs). Basing on grammatical tests like middle formation and resultative participle formation, I argue that telic locatum verbs of the saddle type and location verbs like shelve behave similarly (vs. push verbs), whereby telic locatum verbs can be claimed to involve a terminal rather than a central coincidence relation (contra Hale & Keyser (1993, 2002), who claim that both saddle verbs and push verbs involve a central coincidence relation). Furthermore, unlike Harley (1999, 2005), I argue that the telicity of locatum verbs like saddle is not due to the nature of their bounded nominal root, but rather to the terminal coincidence relation involved: the following two structural facts -i) their inner state can be modified by a durative adverbial (cf. He saddled the horse for an hour; cf. ‘he saddled the horse and left him saddled for an hour’) and ii) saddle verbs enter into the middle construction (cf. These horses saddle easily)- cannot be claimed to be attributed to a conceptual factor (e.g., the bounded nature of their root) but to a grammatical factor. Accordingly, as predicted, transitive verbs with a bounded root like saddle but rather like atelic push verbs wrt some grammatical processes that involve lexical aspect (e.g., cf. the middle formation (Rapoport 1993, 1999): *These horses kick easily). Concerning the atelicity of locatum verbs like water (cf. He watered the plants for two hours), I do not follow Harley’s (1999, 2005) proposal that this is related to the unboundedness of the nominal root water. Rather I claim that atelic locatum verbs involve a central coincidence relation. All in all, I conclude that the often noted distinction between location verbs like shelve and telic locatum verbs like saddle is not grammatically relevant (e.g., contra Rappaport Hovav & Levin (1998), who provide them with different event structure templates).

As noted, a second pattern of denominal verbs is the one exemplified by push verbs which are known to cause non-trivial problems to aspectual approaches to argument realization (Tenny 1987, 1994; Borer 1994, 2005; van Hout 1993, 2004; i.a.). Their atelicity can be claimed to be related to their involving a central coincidence relation rather than a terminal coincidence one. Moreover, unlike Harley (2005), I do not assume that the nominal roots involved in these verbs can take complements (cf. John pushed the cart: ‘John [DID [IN push the cart]].) Rather, following Hale & Keyser (2002), I claim that their underlying structure is more similar to the one posited for ditransitives (cf. ‘John gave the cart a push’; John [PROVIDED [the cart WITH push]], with successive conflation of push into WITH and of this complex complement into the light verb.

Finally, a third pattern of denominal verbs is the unergative one which involves conflation of a bare nominal root into a light verb (Hale & Keyser 1993): The cow calved (cf. The cow had a calf) or The boy danced (cf. The boy did a dance). Concerning these verbs, I assume Harley’s (2005) hypothesis that their grammatically irrelevant (a)telicity depends on the conceptual (un)boundedness of the root: the telicity of the former example can be claimed to be related to the bounded root calf, while the atelicity of the latter can be related to the unbounded root dance. Time permitting, I will also address the complex pattern of denominal verbs involving so-called ‘manner conflation’, which are often taken as examples of the well-known elasticity of verb
meaning in English (Clark & Clark 1979; Borer 2005, i.a.): e.g., The factory horns siren ed throughout the raid; The factory horns siren ed midday; The police car siren ed the Porsche to a stop; The police car siren ed up to the accident site. The police car siren ed the daylight out of me. Similar examples are analyzed in Mateu (2002) as involving a ‘lexical subordination’ process (Levin & Rapoport 1988) that conflates a subordinate unergative/unergativized denominal verb into a main light {transitive/unaccusative} verb at l-syntax (see Mateu & Rigau (2002), McIntyre (2004), Real Puigdollers (2007), Zubizarreta & Oh (2007), den Dikken (2008), Acedo Matellán & Mateu (2008), Mateu (2008), i.a., for different revisions of this l-syntactic analysis).