Synthetic compounds pose a prima facie challenge to any theory which attempts to do away with lexical specification of ‘internal’ arguments. If, as suggested in Borer (2005), inter alia, functional structure, rather than a verbal lexical entry, is responsible for the emergence of the internal argument, then insofar as synthetic compounds such as truck driving and truck driver appear to have an internal argument, they could not involve a ‘lexical’ word formation operation (assuming such operations exist), nor could they involve a syntactic merger of two N nodes. Rather, they must involve a syntactic incorporation of the internal argument from within the functional structure licensing it. While this in and of itself is not necessarily problematic, more problematic is the fact that synthetic compounds do not have properties of AS nominals (Complex Event Nominals, in the terminology of Grimshaw, 1990), a crucial hallmark of the functional structure which typically licenses the direct internal argument.

In this presentation, I will explore in detail the properties of synthetic compounds and compare them to those of derived nominals (both AS nominals and R-nominals), derived with –ing (e.g. the driving of the truck) as well as with –ation and like suffixes (e.g. the manipulation of the truck). The conclusion reached would be that synthetic compounds are not derived from AS nominals, but rather are R-nominals, and that there is, in actuality, little reason to believe that they involve the incorporation of an internal argument. While important generalizations concerning the interpretation and the properties of synthetic compounds will emerge, they will turn out to be associated with derivational functors (=derivational category-changing suffixes such as –ing and -ation), rather than with the syntactic structure of synthetic compounds as such.