

## Bare PPs are definite: Lexicalization as a source of form-meaning mismatches

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This talk sheds new light on the syntactic and semantic properties of 'bare PPs' in Italian and advances the proposal that the absence of a determiner in the construction is licensed by the head noun via Phrasal Lexicalization (Caha, 2009; Starke, 2009). This represents a deviation from existing approaches in the literature, which is supported by two novel empirical generalizations: 1) the bare noun has the semantic behavior of regular definite nominals, and 2) its bareness imposes a systematic ban on nominal modification, which is independent of any semantic alternation. It is argued that these are straightforwardly captured by the proposed Lexicalization-based analysis, and are instead problematic for both lexico-semantic analyses (Carlson et al., 2006; De Swart, 2015; Stvan, 2009, a.o.) or syntactic approaches proposing a structural account in terms of bare NPs and/or N-to-D movements (Franco et al., 2019; Longobardi, 1997). More in general, the fundamental idea defended in the talk is that Phrasal Lexicalization provides a way to model how the bareness of the noun, its restricted morphosyntactic distribution, and its interpretation are connected by reducing the behavior of bare PPs to more general properties of the nominal structure and how different lexical items realize it.

Bare PPs are characterized by three fundamental properties which make up a coherent and recurrent grammatical pattern across languages: a specific class of 'locative' singular count nouns, typically referring to institutionalized locations, rooms of the house, *etc.* (Lexical selectivity) can exceptionally appear without a determiner (Bareness), but only in the context of a PP, in which case they do not tolerate pluralization or modification (Morphosyntactic restrictions). The lexically restricted nature of the construction is exemplified in (1a), showing that bareness is not simply available to any count noun in Italian. As shown in (1b), the bare form of a 'locative' noun like *ospedale* 'hospital' does not tolerate modification, an observation that can be replicated for virtually all structural types of nominal modifiers, including pre- and post-nominal adjectives, relative clauses, and PP modifiers.

- (1) a. sono           **in ospedale** vs. sono           **\*in libro**  
      be.PRS.3PL **in hospital**      be.PRS.3PL **\*in book**  
      "They are in (the) hospital / in the book"
- b. sono   **\*in stesso** ospedale / **\*in ospedale vicino**  
      be.3PL **\*in same** hospital / **\*in hospital nearby**  
      "They're in the same/nearby hospital"

The core claim of the analysis is that the structure of these bare nominals contains the regular featural ingredients of definiteness, which are exceptionally licensed without the need for a definite article. Building on independent proposals about the mechanism of Phrasal Lexicalization in nanosyntax (Starke, 2009, and ff.), all lexical items are paired with a stored syntactic tree ('L-tree') defining the amount of structure they can lexicalize. The match between the syntactic structure and lexical material is regulated by the Superset Principle: a lexical item can only target for Lexicalization proper syntactic constituents that are subtrees of its L-tree. The only element specific to the proposal is the postulate that the lexical entry of 'locative' nouns encodes their partially idiosyncratic nature in the form of a richer 'L-tree', which includes the regular feature(s) encoding definiteness. Representing

this as a DEF feature encoding (plain) uniqueness (Jenks, 2018; Schwarz, 2009), the proposal amounts to ascribing to ‘locative’ nouns lexical entries as in (2a). In turn, this allows one such noun to lexicalize the DEF-marked nominal phrase without the need for an article in a configuration like (2b):



This approach has two basic advantages. First, it directly captures the observation that the bare noun has the semantic behavior of regular definite nominals. Three independent diagnostics indicate that regular definite readings are possible too: i) the bare noun can introduce existence and uniqueness presuppositions, ii) it can take wide scope over negation and other operators (3), and iii) when the sentence involves a non-prototypical event for the location denoted by the PP, the weak reading is excluded, and only the strong one surfaces.

- (3) *avevo il turno di riposo, per cui non sono andato in ospedale*  
 have.IPFV.1SG the turn of rest for which not be.1SG gone in hospital  
 “It was my free day, so I didn’t go to the hospital” **OSPEDALE > NON**

In the present analysis, the bare noun can receive the regular definite interpretations licensed by the feature DEF, including both ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ definite readings. This correctly captures the semantic flexibility of bare PPs, which is instead left unexplained in lexico-semantic approaches that connect bareness to the inherently weakly-referential lexical semantics of ‘locative’ nouns (Carlson et al., 2006; De Swart, 2015). Second, if bareness is licensed via Phrasal Lexicalization, its distribution must be subject to general structural conditions like the Superset Principle. Specifically, any additional structural node intervening between DEF and the lower components of the nominal projection will prevent the noun from targeting the full nominal phrase for lexicalization. As shown by examples like those in (1b), this is the case: the presence of modifiers implies additional nodes along the nominal structure, which structurally block the licensing of bareness and make an overt determiner necessary. A Lexicalization-based analysis thus directly captures the recurrent correlation between this and similar instances of ‘bareness’ and the ban on free nominal modification. This is instead unaccounted for in analyses in which strong definite bare forms are licensed via N-to-D movement (Longobardi, 1997), which can apply independently of the presence of intervening modifiers. Finally, the same line of reasoning provides a way to model the unavailability of bare ‘locative’ nouns in subject or object position: the latter require the lexicalization of Case features (Caha, 2009), which however are not part of the L-tree of a noun like *ospedale*, and can only be licensed by overt determiners.

## References

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