The morphosyntactic sources of bareness: bare 'locative' nouns in Ladin

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This talk discusses novel evidence on the little-known article-drop construction in spatial PPs in Ladin (Rhaeto-Romance) varieties, where articles are otherwise obligatory. This phenomenon provides new insights on the behavior of lexical classes of 'locative' nouns across languages, which tend to show peculiar grammatical properties in spatial expressions (Haspelmath, 2019 a.o.). More precisely, it suggests that the lexical properties of specific classes of nouns can have a blocking effect on different types of modification, giving rise to a reduced / 'slim' DP structure. The main proposal is that an approach building on phrasal Spell Out (Starke, 2009, and ff.) allows to reduce the lack of a determiner as well as the syntactic distribution and semantic interpretation of the construction to the amount of structure that nouns licensing article-drop can lexicalize. The talk also discusses how this approach might be extended to similar cases of 'reduction' of nominal structures in 'bare PPs' (De Swart, 2015) and P-drop (Terzi, 2010), supporting the idea that not all functional layers must always be realized in extended projections (Giorgi and Pianesi, 1997; Cinque, 1999; Cardinaletti and Giusti, 2015).

Ladin varieties allow the omission of the definite article in spatial PPs with a specific set of singular count nouns, whose referent is a spatially salient object in either the domestic space (e.g. rooms of the house, pieces of furniture, etc.) or the outdoor space (1a). On the other hand, overt articles are necessary with definite nominal arguments (1b), as is generally the case in Romance (Longobardi, 1994, and ff.):
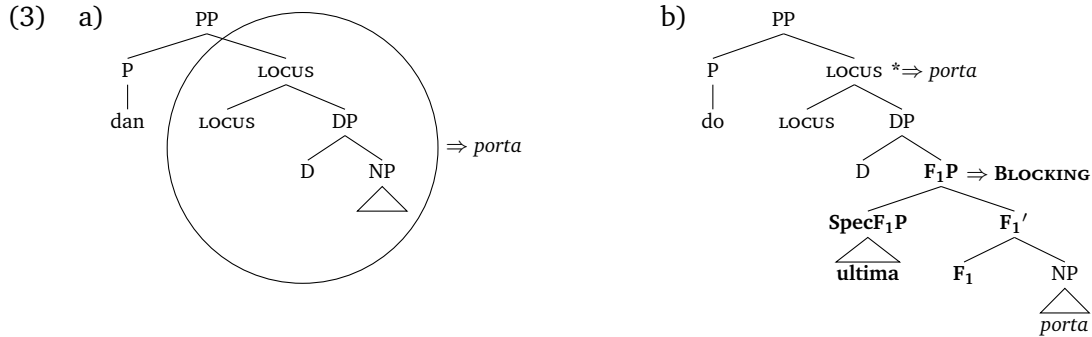
(1) a. tol   l   stuel che ie **dan   porta** (**de mi majon**)   Gherdëina Ladin
         take.IMP the chair that be.3 **in.front.of door** (**of my room**)
         "Grab the chair in front of the door of my room"

     b. ne son   nia bon de giaurì   *(**la**) **porta**
         NEG be.1SG NEG good of open.INF *(**the**) **door**
         "I can't open the door"

Ladin article-drop is compatible with all kinds of spatial PPs, but is subject to morpho-syntactic restrictions on the internal nominal structure. Specifically, the head noun cannot be pluralized and cannot be freely modified. Thus, the article can only be dropped with a singular 'locative' noun, either non-modified or combining with an argumental PP (cf. 1a above). With plural morphology (2a) and almost any DP-internal element (e.g. prenominal adjectives (2b), as well as postnominal adjectives, non-argumental PPs, numerals and relative clauses), the article must be realized:

(2) a. i   se   à   ascundù **do   *(i)   ujes**   Gherdëina Ladin
         3PL REFL have.3 hidden **behind *(the) doors**
         "They hid behind the doors"

     b. ti   tascia ie **do   *(l') ultima porta**
         your bag be.3   **behind *(the) last   door**
         "Your bag is behind the last door"

The approach argued for in the talk builds on the idea that the ability to license article-drop in Ladin is a lexical property of the relevant class of nouns. Adopting phrasal Spell Out as in use in Nanosyntax (Starke, 2009 and ff.), this lexical information can be explicitly encoded in terms of the amount of syntactic structure the nominal head can lexicalize, providing a fully syntactic characterization of the distribution of the phenomenon. Specifically, the hypothesis

is that 'locative' nouns in Ladin license 'bareness' and their semantic reading by lexicalizing a larger amount of structure than regular common nouns. This additional stretch includes two components: D, which has the same semantic contribution as *unique*-definite articles (Schwarz, 2009), and LOCUS, which shifts the denotation of the nominal from the domain of objects to the spatial domain (cf. Kracht, 2008; Svenonius, 2010; Matushansky, 2019, a.o.), as required by the semantic computation of the spatial PP. Article-drop is only possible when the lexicalization properties of the noun are matched. The upshot is that under the required lexicalization the DP structure is frozen into a 'slim DP', i.e. the minimal configuration in (3a). Assuming plural features and other DP-internal elements involve additional layers in the DP spine (Cinque, 2010; Caha, 2019), their presence disrupts this 'slim DP' configuration, thus capturing the generalization that they require the article (3b):

(3) a)

b)

Under this approach, the fact that argumental PPs do not block article-drop can be reduced to the fact that they are either moved or base-generated above the nominal functional spine, as independently proposed in the literature (cf. respectively Cinque, 2005 and Adger, 2013; Baggio, 2021). Moreover, assuming a structural representation of Case in terms of layered KPs (Caha, 2009), we argue that these nouns cannot be bare as verbal arguments is tied to the lack of the K encoding direct cases, which are instead contributed by the overt determiner (or inflectional suffixes in bare mass/plurals, cf. Delfitto and Schroten, 1991). Thus, the correlation between lexical restrictions, the structurally-dependent distribution of article-drop, and the interpretation of the noun is reduced to the same source, namely the ability of Ladin 'locative' nouns to lexicalize a DP structure under the configuration in (3a). The approach is compared to potential syntactic or semantic alternatives (cf. e.g. Longobardi, 2001; Collins, 2007; De Swart, 2015 on parallel phenomena), arguing that these all face problems. An account in terms of N-to-D (or analogous) movement incorrectly predicts bareness to be generally compatible with restrictive modifiers, since noun-movement to D could safely cross them (Longobardi, 1994). On the other hand, an analysis in terms of 'abstract' lexical denotations and/or pseudo-incorporation does not account for the possibility of strong-definite readings of bare 'locative' nouns in Ladin and the availability of possessor PPs. Generalizing, the present analysis predicts that whenever a language/variety has a class of nominals with analogous lexicalization properties, this will have syntactic reflexes, manifested by restrictions on the internal structure of the nominals involved. We argue that this is the case for instances of P-drop (Longobardi, 2001; Terzi, 2010) and bare PPs (De Swart, 2015) in several languages.

Selected References: Giuseppe Longobardi (1994). "Reference and Proper Names: A Theory of N-movement in Syntax and Logical Form". In: *Linguistic inquiry,* pp. 609–665 ● Ora Matushansky (2019). "The Case of Restricted Locatives". In: *Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung*, Vol 23 No 2 (2019) ● Michal Starke (2009). "Nanosyntax: A Short Primer to a New Approach to Language, Ms."