The selectional properties of motion-to and state-in adpositions in Italian
Paolo Lorusso (Università di Firenze) - Ludovico Franco (CLUNL / Universidade Nova de Lisboa)

Italian commonly introduces motion-to and state-in with two different adpositions, respectively *a* (at, to) and *in* (in) that can convey different locative flavours. Consider the examples in (1) and (2).

(1) Sono/vado al mare
   I’m at the sea/I go to the see.

(2) Sono/vado in mare
   I’m in the sea/I go in the sea.

Broadly speaking, (1) means that the sea defines a vicinity including me; on the contrary, (2) says that I’m properly contained by the sea (cf. Luraghi 2011). However, this basic characterization cannot be freely replicated for all lexical items. For instance in (3) *a* and *in* mean exactly the same, namely that as a result of the motion process, I’m properly contained in the house.

(3) Sono/vado in/a casa
   ‘I am/go home’

Folli (2008: 209) points out that *a* and *in* can be disentangled with motion verbs in structures involving a resultative entailment (cf. Higginbotham 2000, Folli and Ramchand 2005), as shown by the examples in (4)-(5).

(4) a. Gianni è corso a casa/a scuola/al parco/all’ufficio postale
    Gianni is run to home/to school/to the park/to the post office

b. *?Gianni è corso all’ufficio/alla camera/alla cucina
    Gianni is run to the office/to the room/to the kitchen

(5) Gianni è corso in ufficio/in camera/in cucina
    Gianni is run in office/in room/in kitchen

Building on Tortora (2005), Folli assumes that *a* combines with NPs expressing a Ground which can be interpreted as extended, or unbounded (4a), while, as illustrated in (5), *in* combines with items expressing a bounded location. *A* and *in* would then be recruited from the lexicon to introduce different flavours of Place (cf. Svenonius 2006, 2008), where the relevant parameter is an aspectual one, namely the +/- boundedness of the location. However, such approach is undermined by those items, which freely accept both adpositions, without any substantial difference in meaning, as illustrated in (6).

(6) Gianni è corso in ospedale/all’ospedale
    Gianni is run in the hospital/at the hospital

As acknowledged by the same Folli, a further potential counterexample to her analysis is provided by the way Italian encodes ‘proper’ locations. In fact, locative PPs introduced by *a* can be used in Italian together with DPs referring to cities, villages and small islands (7), while *in* is required with DPs referring to countries, continents or big islands (8).

(7) Gianni è/ va *a*/in Pantelleria/Conversano/Siena
    Gianni is/goes *at*/in Pantelleria/Conversano/Siena

(8) Gianni è va *a*/in Italia/Africa/Sicilia
    Gianni is/goes *at*/in Italy/Africa/Sicily

The generalization provided by Renzi & Salvi (1988: 513, cf. Folli 2008: 210) to account for this pattern is that “*a* is required with locations which can be conceived of as ‘pointed’ in our mental representation of their geographical nature.” This state of affairs clearly contrasts with Folli’s idea that *a* is linked to unbounded locations. To overcome this problem, Folli (2008: 217) does not revise the +/- boundedness hypothesis and simply assumes that the contrast must be due to an idiosyncratic property of ‘proper’ locations.

We propose here a novel account on the distribution of the adpositional items *a* and *in* in Italian.
based on the observation that the items in (7) and (8) clearly differs from a parameter somewhat more plain (and stable) than boundedness, namely a parameter on the availability of the D head with ‘proper’ places. In fact, in Italian, proper names of locations allow D with a well-defined set of items, as illustrated in (9)-(10).

(9)  
*La/*Il Pantelleria/Milano/Firenze
the Pantelleria/Milan/Florence

(10)  
Il Portogallo/L’Italia/ L’Europa/La Sardegna
The Portugal/the Italy /The Europe/the Sardinia

The places in (9) work like proper names in referring to individuals and imply a N to D chain (as in Longobardi 2008). We assume that those (very few) cities whose name includes a determiner such as Il Cairo (Cairo) are computed as a single item in the Italian lexicon (i.e. it is impossible to insert a modifier between D and N, obtaining something like *Il bel Cairo, ‘the beautiful Cairo’, while la bella il Cairo ‘The beautiful the Cairo’ is possible). The places in (10) seem to have a definite reading (they do not raise to D), so that the article in (10) instantiates a definite operator, however, when they are without D (8) they express the property that is shared by all the individuals that are included in the place. In fact, there seems to be a crucial link between those items that are introduced by a and do not allow for a D item, and those that are introduced by in and require a D item. A representation of this state of affairs is sketched in (11).

(11)  
a {small island, cities, villages} > *D
in {countries, continents, big islands} > D

The preposition a and in show different selectional restriction: a selects only places that work like individuals (as proper names), in selects places that share the same ‘spatial’ property (as indefinite in the predicate restriction proposed by Chung & Ladusaw (2005), whereby the indefinite is interpreted as denoting a property (type ⟨e,t⟩), rather than an entity or a quantifier). Following this line of analysis a instantiates a terminal coincidence relation (Hale, 1986, Hale & Keyser, 1993 2002, cf. Mateu 2002) and select for punctual (individual) places, while the in shows the definition of a central coincidence relation, that is, it selects a variable interpretation within the space defined by a given place nouns. This analysis is in line with the empirical generalization in Renzi & Salvi 1988). In conclusion, the different referentiality of the name of places and their mapping into syntax (N to D chain or not) as individuals or properties interact with the selectional restriction of the locative preposition (in and a, respectively): while a instantiates a terminal coincidence relation and preferentially selects individuals/definite, in instantiates a central coincidence relation within a group of individuals (i.e. a state may be conceived as a group of individual cities) or an indefinite entity defined by a property.

Selected References