Bare PPs and the general ban on modification. Quantitative evidence from Italian corpus data
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My research project investigates the grammar of bare 'locative' nouns, i.e. singular common nouns exceptionally appearing without a determiner in PPs. In this talk, I focus on a specific instantiation of this general pattern, namely Italian bare PPs, and provide quantitative evidence supporting the morphosyntactic approach pursued in my thesis. The fundamental hypothesis underlying my analysis of the 'locative' pattern amounts to the idea that this crosslinguistic regularity can be reduced to more general properties of nominal structure and how these nouns lexicalize it under Phrasal Lexicalization (Starke, 2009, and ff.). After a qualitative review of the fundamental properties of Italian bare PPs, the talk shows how this lexicalization-based approach makes opposite predictions with respect to other available theories about the status of nominal modification in bareness contexts. Namely, both lexical-semantic (Carlson et al., 2006; De Swart, 2015; Stvan, 2009, a.o.) and syntactic approaches based on movement and/or structural reduction (Collins, 2007; Franco et al., 2019; Longobardi, 1997, a.o.) connect the freedom of nominal modification to the semantic interpretation of the bare noun, which can receive both 'weak' and 'strong' definite readings. On the other hand, if bareness in contexts like bare PPs is licensed via Phrasal Lexicalization, the ban on productive nominal modification is predicted to be purely structural, and independent from the semantics of the nominal. Specifically, nominal modification should always be degraded in the relevant construction, and any apparent case of violation should involve fixed, lexicalized Noun - Modifier units. The talk discusses two quantitative studies on Italian corpus data extracted from the iTenTen20 corpus (Jakubíček et al., 2013) that aim at providing independent support for this conclusion. To establish a baseline, the first study compares both prenominal and postnominal modifiers to contexts where the noun is not modified, showing that the probability of article omission significantly drops, regardless of the relative position of the modifier. The second study evaluates the rate of article omission with pre- or post-nominal adjectives by taking into account the degree of lexical association between the modifier and the specific noun it combines with, as measured by the LogDice coefficient (Rychlý, 2008). It is shown that the output of the model aligns with the qualitative intuitions: an adjective is tolerated in bareness contexts only when it forms a lexicalized phrase with the noun.

References

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