The $a/di/\emptyset$ alternation in Italian complex Ps: P selection or C selection?

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1. In our talk we take into consideration the well-known phenomenon of simple-P selection under lexical Ps in Italian in cases like *sopra al tavolo* ‘lit. on to the table’. In particular, we investigate the distributional properties of the functional/grammatical Ps $a/di$ ‘to/of’, and show that the selection of $a$, $di$ or no preposition at all is syntactically driven. More precisely we argue that in complex P structures there is an $a/\emptyset$ alternation based on the internal structure of the PP and at the same time a $di/\emptyset$ alternation dependant on the structural status of the DP object of P. We subsequently extend our analysis to $a/di$ used as prepositional complementizers.

2. Rizzi (1988) notices that Italian presents three groups of lexical Ps: group 1 Ps which obligatorily require a simple P (e. g. *davanti a* ‘in front of’); group 2 Ps which optionally require $a$ (*dietro (a) ‘behind (of)’); and group 3 Ps which never require a simple P (*verso ‘towards’). With this classification in mind, we concentrate on the following minimal pairs:

- (1) a. Andate *dietro alla macchina*  
  go behind *to. the car* ‘Go after the car’

- (1) b. Andate *dietro la macchina*  
  go behind $\emptyset$ the car ‘Go and place yourself behind the car’

- (2) a. La macchina si muoveva *verso di noi*  
  The car refl move towards of us ‘The car was moving towards us’

- (2) b. La macchina si muoveva *verso il muro*  
  The car refl moved towards $\emptyset$ the wall ‘The car was moving towards the wall’

The two alternations of (1)-(2) are blurred in a case like (3), where $a$ seems to alternate with $di$:

- (3) a. L’aereo volava *sopra di noi*  
  The plane flew above of us ‘The plane was flying above us’

- (3) b. L’aereo volava *sopra alla chiesa*  
  The plane flew above to. the church ‘The plane was flying above the church’

However, since *sopra $\emptyset$ noi* is ungrammatical in Italian, we argue that lexical Ps like *sopra* can appear in two different structures, one in which its complement is introduced by $a$, and another in which it selects a DP. In the latter case, some DPs require $di$, which we take to be the prepositional complementizer observable, for instance, with infinitives:

- (4) a. L’aereo volava sopra la chiesa  
  The plane flew above to. the church ‘The plane was flying above the church’

- (4) b. *L’aereo volava sopra noi*  
  
Accordingly, Rizzi’s (1988) group 3 Ps never show a $a$ vs. $di$ alternation.

3. The $di/\emptyset$ alternation is based on a bare/complex alternation of the noun selected by P. Rizzi (1988) points out that $di$ is required by personal and reflexive pronouns (6a-b). Our data show that this property is shared also by demonstratives (6c), proper nouns (6d) and *wh* items (6e):

- (5) a. *L’aereo volava sopra [XP $a/\emptyset$ [YP $\emptyset/di$ [DP]]]]*  
  
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3. The $di/\emptyset$ alternation is based on a bare/complex alternation of the noun selected by P. Rizzi (1988) points out that $di$ is required by personal and reflexive pronouns (6a-b). Our data show that this property is shared also by demonstratives (6c), proper nouns (6d) and *wh* items (6e):

- (6) a. Correvo verso *(di) lui*  
  run towards of him ‘I was running towards him’

- (6) b. Rivolse l’arma verso *(di) sé*  
  turned the weapon towards of refl ‘He turned the weapon against himself’

- (6) c. Rivolse l’arma verso (di) quelli  
  turned the weapon towards of those ‘He turned the weapon against those’

- (6) d. Correvo verso (di) Mario  
  run towards of Mario ‘I was running towards M.

- (6) e. Verso (di) chi ha rivolto l’arma?  
  towards of who has turned the weapon ‘Against whom did he turn the weapon?’
There is variation in the acceptability of the cases (6c-e), but for all speakers the presence of *di* is ungrammatical with a complex DP:

(7) a. Rivolse l’arma verso (*di sé stesso) towards of refl himself
di/Ø
b. Verso (*di quale persona ha rivolto l’arma?) towards of which person

We propose that *di* is the same prepositional complementizer observable with infinitives and that it is present when the DP selected by P lacks a restrictor. More precisely, following Szabolcsi (1994) and Aboh (2010) (in particular the idea that D is simply a C that has a nominal complement), and taking into account *di/Ø* alternations with infinitives, we propose that *di* is a subordination marker in both the CP and DP domains required when verbal Tense and nominal Reference are interpreted deictically:

(8) [SubP *di [DP / IP]]

4. As for the *a vs. di/Ø* alternation, we follow Cinque (2010) and take the simple P *a* of Italian to be either a case marker lexicalizing a lower functional head within the DPPlace in (9), P°, or a proper stative/directional P, lexicalizing the heads of PPdir or PPstat.

(9) [PPdir a [PPstat a [DPPlace …. [AxPartP [PP/KP a [Ground PLACE]…]]

In the light of this, the interpretative differences associated with the alternation *a vs. di/Ø* in Rizzi’s group 2 Ps can be derived from the lexicalization possibilities of these heads together with the internal syntactic workings of the fine structure of PPs. In particular, as shown in Tortora (2008), *a vs. Ø/di* after lexical Ps may reflect a difference in the *unbounded vs. bounded* nature of the object of P. In such case, we assume that this interpretative difference depends on whether the K/P head is moved to AspPlace, the projection encoding spatial aspect or not. The difference between *dietro all’albero* and *dietro l’albero* ‘behind (to) the tree’ is to be captured by the following minimally different structures:

(10) a. [PPdir/stat *dietro* [AspPlaceP all’albero PLACE [DPPlace …. [AxPartP *dietro* [P/K [all’albero PLACE]...]] = *dietro all’albero* (all’albero as unbounded space)]
b. [PPdir/stat *dietro* [AspPlaceP l’albero PLACE [DPPlace …. [AxPartP *dietro* [P/K [l’albero PLACE] = (l’albero as bounded space)]

Moreover, in group 2 Ps, the alternation *a vs. di/Ø* may reflect a difference in the locative vs. directional interpretation of the Ground, cf. (1). In such cases, *a* is to be considered a proper Goal P, lexicalizing the PPdir head.

5. The strong hypothesis we make is that *di*, unlike *a*, is neither a real P nor a case marker but rather a prepositional complementizer required by the *bare* nature of the DP object of P—a complementizer which is not required when the DP object of P has a complex nature (this in turn could be related to a deictic vs. referential opposition at the interpretative level). As regards the alternation with *a*, we claim that this is to be captured exclusively PP-internally, i.e., in terms of different movement and/or lexicalization possibilities of the PP structure.

References