

**The expression of proper locations and beyond:  
the *motion -to* and *state-in* Italian spatial prepositions**

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. We account for their distribution in Italian in terms of differences in the selectional restriction of each locative preposition: while *a* instantiates a terminal coincidence relation and preferentially selects individuals/definite, *in* instantiates a central coincidence relation within a group of individuals or an indefinite entity. Consider the examples in (1) and (2).

- (1) Sono/vado al mare  
I'm at the sea/I go to the sea.  
(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 the a result of a 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. In a nutshell, she proposes that *a* and *in* would 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 differ along a parameter somewhat more plain (and stable) than boundedness: 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 (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 an 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, cf. Cinque 2011). The places in (10) seem to have a definite reading (they do not raise to D), so that the article instantiates a definite operator. When they are without D, as in (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). The D constraint precisely matches the *a* vs. *in* dichotomy illustrated in (7)-(8).

- (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  $\langle e,t \rangle$ ), rather than an entity or a quantifier). This view is consistent with the entities vs. loci divide assumed in Matushansky (2016) for French proper places. Syntactically, we may simply assume that while *a* selects for a DP (with a N to D chain), *in* selects for bare NPs. Evidence that we are on the right track, is given by the fact that *a* (contra *in*) is commonly ungrammatical without an overt determiner in motion to (or state in) environments, whenever an item allows to be selected by either *a* or *in*, as in (12) (cf. (6)).

- (12) a. vado in/all’/\*a ospedale      b. vado in/all’/\*a ufficio  
I.go in/to.the/to hospital              I.go in/to.the/to office

Following our line of analysis, it is possible to assume that *a* instantiates a terminal coincidence relation (Hale, 1986, Hale & Keyser, 1993 2002, cf. Mateu 2002) and select for punctual (individual, definite) places, while *in* shows the definition of a central coincidence relation, that is, it selects a variable interpretation within the space defined by a given place noun. This 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:** Chung, S. & Ladusaw, W. 2004. *Restriction and Saturation*. Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press. / Folli, R. 2008. Complex PPs in Italian. In *Syntax and Semantics of Spatial P*, ed. by A. Asbury, J. Dotlačil, B. Gehrke & R. Nouwen, 197-220, Amsterdam: John Benjamins / Hale, K. & S. Jay Keyser. 1993. On argument structure and the lexical expression of grammatical relations. In Kenneth Hale & S. Jay Keyser (eds.), *The view from building 20*, 53–109. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. / Longobardi, G., 2008 ‘Reference to individuals, person, and the variety of mapping parameters. In *Essays on Nominal Determination: from morphology to discourse*, ed. by Klinge, A. & Müller, H. (eds.), management Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 189-211 / Mateu, J. 2002. *Argument Structure: Relational construal at the Syntax-Semantic Interface*. Barcelona: UAB dissertation. / Renzi, L. & Salvi, G. 1988. *Grande Grammatica Italiana di Consultazione*, Volume II. Bologna: Il Mulino. / Tortora, C. 2005. The preposition’s preposition in Italian: Evidence for boundedness of space. In *Theoretical and Experimental Approaches to Romance Linguistics*, ed by. R. Gess & E. Rubin, 307–327. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.