

Bare nominals and argument structure. A contrastive study of Catalan, Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese

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In this talk, following previous work with J. Mateu (UAB) and recent work with S. Cyrino (UNICAMP) (Espinal & Mateu 2011, Cyrino & Espinal 2011), I would like to focus on a set of phenomena related to the syntax and semantics of bare count nominals. The novelty of this study is to relate the occurrence of bare nominals (BNs; i.e., bare count nouns unmarked for number and definiteness) in three Romance languages with the argument structure position in which they may occur at a syntactic level of representation, and to explain the relationship between argument structure and the interpretation of bare nominals.

I will show that BNs can occur in Romance both in object argument position and in predicate position, and can form denominal verbs because in syntax BNs can only occur as internal arguments of relational categories (V, P) to which bare nouns can move and conflate at some point during the syntactic derivation (Hale & Keyser 2002). On the other hand, BNs – being property denoting expressions – can neither occur as internal arguments of unaccusative and complex transitive verbs nor as external arguments due to a structural constraint on subjects / specifiers (Kallulli 1999): they must be properly licensed by appropriate functional categories.

I will also show that BNs in Brazilian Portuguese (BrP) come in two shapes. Real BNs can only occur as objects of HAVE-predicates and are interpreted as property-type expressions (Espinal 2010, Espinal & McNally 2011). Other BNs, although not overtly morphologically marked for number, are, in fact, DPs with null determiners that carry number specification and are interpreted as entity-type expressions. For BrP Bare Plurals, a DP structure enriched with an operator that cancels the definiteness of the null determiner will be proposed.

References

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