

Mismatch at the syntax-semantics interface: object bare nominals in Romance

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In this talk we present a syntactic analysis of bare nominal (BN) objects in Catalan and Spanish (see (1)) within a lexical syntactic approach to argument structure (Hale & Keyser 1993, 2002; Mateu 2002; see Espinal & Mateu 2009 for extensions to sentential syntax). We present arguments for the claim that BNs are licensed only in the structure in (2), which qualifies as unergative-like on Hale & Keyser's understanding of the term.

- (1) Busco pis. (2) [_v V N]
look.for-1SG flat
'I'm looking for a flat.'

On this analysis, the external argument is introduced by a functional projection (see e.g. Kratzer 1996 for an analogous proposal motivated on semantic grounds).

This structure is analogous to two different classes of verbal expressions in Hale & Keyser's theory: on the one hand, the class of denominal verbs such as *laugh*, *cough*, and *cry*, and, on the other, the class of analytic verbal expressions such as *to have luck*. We will point out the similarities and differences between the construction in (1) and these other constructions. We will then contrast our analysis with analyses of alienable possessor-possessum relations in terms of unaccusative-like structures on which a predicator role is assigned to a prepositional element, namely the locative or genitive marker (cf. den Dikken 1995, 1997; Hoekstra 1994), or on which a predication relation holds between two nominal expressions (Ruwet 1982; Kayne 1975, 1982, 1993; Guéron 1986, 1998). We will show that, among other advantages, adopting the structure in (2) for the class of predicates that allow BN objects accounts for the contrast in acceptability of secondary predications, as illustrated in (3).

- (3)a. Tinc cotxe (*al garatge). b. Tinc un cotxe / cotxes al garatge.
have car at-the garage have a car / cars at-the garage
'I have a car in the garage.' 'I have a car / some cars in the garage.'

Finally, we will contextualize our analysis of object BNs in Romance in the context of de Swart & de Hoop's (2007) discussion of types of transitive verbs and argue, in the light of the semantic properties of BNs and of incorporating verbs, that our analysis (Espinal & McNally, in press) supports the claim that transitivity is a gradient phenomenon.

Selected references: Espinal, M.T. & J. Mateu (2009). On bare nominals and argument structure. *Studies in Linguistics-CISCL Working Papers. Proceedings XXXV Incontro di Grammatica Generativa*, pp. 132-143. Siena. Espinal, M.T. & L. McNally (in press). Bare nominals and incorporating verbs in Catalan and Spanish. *Journal of Linguistics*, 47.2. Guéron, J. (1998). Le verbe *avoir* et la possession. In: J. Guéron & A. Zribi-Hertz (eds.), *La grammaire de la possession*, pp. 167-174. Nanterre: Publidix. Kayne, R.S. (1993). Toward a modular theory of auxiliary selection. *Studia Linguistica* 47, 3-31. Hale, K. & S.J. Keyser (2002). *Prolegomenon to a theory of argument structure*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press. Mateu, J. (2002). *Argument structure. Relational construal at the syntax-semantics interface*. PhD dissertation. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. de Swart, Peter and Helen de Hoop. (2007). Semantic aspects of Differential Object Marking. In: E. Puig-Waldmüller (ed.), *Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung 11*. Barcelona: Universitat Pompeu Fabra, 598-611.