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On the imperialism of the copula<sup>1</sup>  
Addressing some puzzling properties of reduced structures in Italian  
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In Cecchetto & Donati 2022 (C&D), we propose an analysis of a number of reduced structures in Italian which builds on Chomsky's (2019) claim that sentences can be exocentric, or labeled without a head. The five structures analyzed by C&D all involve the past participle of unaccusative and passive verbs only, which agrees in gender and number with the internal argument. They are clearly reduced: they display no external argument, no case, no tense, no negation, no wh-movement or focus. However, they can have illocutionary force, as they can be interrogative, declarative or exclamative. An example is given in (1). This is the structure C&D labels BARE NOUN REDUCED (C&D analyze two other reduced structures with illocutionary force that in this squib we cannot discuss but the argument that we will develop here can extend to them).

- (1) Problema risolto  
problem-MASC-SING solved-MASC-SING  
'The problem has been solved'

In a nutshell, C&D argue that in all these structures, only a VP is projected, where the unaccusative verb assigns a theta role to its sole argument, which, being a bare NP (as opposed to a DP), does not need case. This NP moves to the edge of the VP as the result of the probing of the past participle. Thanks to agreement, the structure can be labeled by feature sharing (Chomsky 2013/2019), which, as they argue, the interface interprets by default as sentential.<sup>2</sup>

In this squib, we deal with two challenges that C&D's account of reduced structures is confronted with. The first concerns the interpretation of the singular bare noun in BARE NOUN REDUCED. In Italian, bare NPs are exceedingly rare, and when they are possible (as plurals in postverbal positions: Longobardi 1994) they receive an indefinite interpretation. C&D have an explanation based on case theory for why only NPs (as opposed to DPs) are allowed in BARE NOUN REDUCED. However, they do not have a satisfactory explanation for why the argument is interpreted as definite despite being a bare noun. For example why does (1), mean '*the* problem has been fixed' rather than '*a* problem has been fixed'?

We propose that this question can be answered by building on accounts that relate the notion of perfectivity and the notion of definiteness. Filip (2001) and Borer (2005), among others, have argued that the definite article and the perfective aspect convey the same semantic contribution. This allows hypothesizing that the same grammatical category emerges as definiteness in the nominal domain and as perfectivity in the clausal domain. If this is true, we

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<sup>1</sup> Andrea Moro has been arguing for some decades that grammatical theories wrongly neglected copula. Therefore, we are confident that for once he will appreciate a case of copula imperialism! In any case, buon compleanno Andrea!

<sup>2</sup> C&D claim that labeling by feature sharing, i.e. agreement, is a syntactic marker of the subject-predicate relation. This leaves out cases of predication that do not involve agreement, an example being small clauses like 'Ritengo gli scacchi la passione di Andrea' ('I consider chess (to be) Andrea's passion' (Moro 1997). Notice however that these predicative structures, although not nominal, are not sentential either (they have no illocutionary force and cannot stand alone), thus they are not relevant for the argument defended here.

can attribute the definiteness of the bare NP in BARE NOUN REDUCED to the intrinsically perfective nature of the past participle in Italian.

With this in mind, let us move to a second challenge to C&D's account, namely the existence of structures in which the bare NP is followed by a PP rather than by a past participle. An example is the answer in (2).<sup>3</sup> The analogies between (2) and BARE NOUN REDUCED structures like (1) cannot be denied, since neither (1) nor (2) can host a full DP despite the fact that definite bare nouns are not possible elsewhere in Italian.

- (2) Andate al cinema? Sì, bambini dalla nonna!  
Go.2PERS-PLUR to-the movie? Yes children to-the grandma  
'Do you go to watch a movie? Yes, the children stay with grandma'

The problem raised by sentences like (2) for C&D should be apparent. In their analysis, reduced structures can be interpreted as sentences only because they contain an agreeing relationship. For example, in BARE NOUN REDUCED the noun and the past participle agree in gender and number and this allows labeling by feature sharing: the output label is sentential, in analogy with the label resulting when the subject is merged with the T node higher up in the clausal spine in the complete sentence. However, in (2) no agreement whatsoever is observed as no past participle surfaces. Therefore, the resulting N + PP structure should not be labeled at all. Still, it exhibits a sentential reading.

Let us characterize this construction more precisely. Although productive, reduced N + PP structures are restricted to a subset of prepositions in Italian, namely those locative prepositions that express a stable location in a given place X (as opposed to movement to, from or across the place X). These are the cases that Italian descriptive grammars define as "complemento di stato in luogo". For example, (2) can only mean that kids are at grandma's place, although the preposition 'da' in full sentences can also mean movement *to* or movement *from* (the full sentence 'Il bambino sta andando dalla nonna' means that the kid is going to grandma's place). Accordingly, other prepositions that express "stato in luogo" (like *on*, *in*, *inside*, *under*) are allowed in reduced N + PP structures (cf. 3) while prepositions that express movement to or from a location (cf. 3c), purely functional prepositions (cf.4) or prepositions expressing non-locative relations (cf. 5) are not allowed.

- (3) a. Chiavi sul tavolo                    'The keys are on the table'  
      Keys on-the table  
      b. Libro in biblioteca              'The book is in the library'

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<sup>3</sup> We thank Mauro Viganò for pointing out these problematic cases to us. Other cases of reduced structures closely resembling BARE NOUN REDUCED but without a past participle are the following, in which the bare noun is followed by an adjective:

- (i) Tutto tranquillo al lavoro? No, momento delicato  
(ii) E' bello il tempo? Giornate piovose (ma non fa freddo)  
(iii) Com'è quel negozio? Prezzi alti (ma la roba è di qualità)  
(iv) Come ti trovi nel nuovo ufficio? Colleghi antipatici (ma orari rilassati)

For reasons of space, we cannot deal with these cases here but we observe that, unlike the reduced N + PP structures discussed in the text, adjectival reduced structures do not pose a special challenge to C&D's account, given the presence of gender and number agreement between the adjective and the bare noun. This is the agreement configuration that, according to C&D, is critical for the establishment of labeling by feature sharing.

- |        |  |   |
|--------|--|---|
|        | Book in library                                |   |
| c.     | Macchina al parcheggio<br>Car at-the parking   | Actual meaning: 'the car is in the parking lot'<br>*Impossible meaning: 'The car is going to the parking lot' |
| d.     | Gatto sotto il divano<br>Cat under the couch   | 'The cat is under the couch'  |
| (4) a. | Foto di Roma<br>Picture of Rome                | *Impossible meaning: 'The picture is of Rome'<br>Actual meaning: 'a picture of Rome'                          |
| (5) a. | Portafoglio di Gianni<br>Wallet of Gianni      | *Impossible meaning: 'The wallet is of Gianni's'<br>Actual meaning: 'a wallet of Gianni's'                    |
| b.     | Pagamento mediante POS<br>payment through card | *Impossible meaning: 'The payment is by card '<br>Actual meaning: 'payment by card'                           |
| c.     | Regalo per Gianni<br>Gift for Gianni           | *Impossible meaning: 'the gift is for Gianni'<br>Actual meaning: 'a gift for Gianni'                          |

The examples in (4) and (5) are not ungrammatical, but they are not sentences: their meaning does not correspond to the 'stato in luogo' predicative meaning we described so far. Rather, they are simple modified nominals, that can be used as elliptical fragments in a conversation, just like when you say 'lunch' to convey the meaning that it's time for lunch, or lunch is available, or what you see on the table is lunch, etc.

A revealing observation is that all acceptable cases of reduced N + PP structures correspond to full sentences in which the Italian verb *stare* ('to stay') is felicitous (and is required in those varieties that grammaticalize the distinction between *be* and *stay*: Ledgeway 2000). This is shown in (6) vs (7) with an example, but holds for all N +PP structures.

- |     |  |                             |
|-----|--|-----------------------------|
| (6) | Le chiavi stanno sul tavolo<br>The keys stand on the table | 'The keys are on the table' |
| (7) | *Il regalo sta per Gianni<br>The present stands for Gianni | 'The gift is for Gianni'    |

It is only natural to analyze the structures in (2-3) as reduced version of the full *stare*-sentences illustrated in (6). More specifically, we propose that the sentences in (2-3) are BARE NOUN REDUCED containing a phonological null past participle, namely the past participle of *stare*. The structure that we propose is schematically represented in (8), which is the underlying structure of (2):

- |     |   |
|-----|---|
| (8) | [[bambini ] [ <sub>VP</sub> stare-PAST PART [dalla nonna]]] |
|     | Kids                      stay- PAST PART    at-the granma  |

The structure in (8) allows us to explain the puzzle we started with. Remember that the challenge to C&D's account is the absence of a past participle and of the agreement configuration that triggers labeling by feature sharing. However, what we are now saying is that a past participle *is* present after all in reduced N + PP structures, although it is phonologically null.

This account needs to be completed in two respects, though. First, for it to be plausible we need to explain why the past participle is null in reduced N + PP structures like (2-3) but is overt in BARE NOUN REDUCED structures like (1). This question admits a very natural answer. The

form that morphologically corresponds to the past participle of *stare*, namely *stato* (which is inflected for gender and number), is used in Italian as the past participle of the defective copula *essere* ('to be'), as in *Io sono stata* ('I have been'). Since the form *stato* has been "colonized" by the copula 'to be', no morphophonological form is available for the past participle of *stare* and this is why the past participle is null in reduced N + PP structures. The explicit form *stato*, namely the actual past participle of the copula, cannot occur in these reduced structures if the copula is analysed as a T head, which by definition is not projected here.

The remaining issue we have to deal with is a further aspect of the interpretation of reduced N + PP structures. While BARE NOUN REDUCED with an overt past participle have a past reading (1 means that the problem has been fixed), reduced N + PP structures appear to have a present reading (2 means that kids are at grandma's place, not that they have been there). This is *prima facie* puzzling given our hypothesis that these structures are tenseless. This pattern resembles what happens in other tenseless contexts, such as headlines (Stowell 1982), where an eventive predicate is interpreted as past, while a state is interpreted as present. A similar pattern has also been described for tenseless clauses in Haitian (Déchaine 1991).

- (9) a. Pipeline explodes  
b. Experts fear shortages

In all these cases, the past/present alternation depends on the nature of the predicate. In Italian reduced structures, those with an overt past participle involve eventive predicates (e.g. *solve*), while the null "stato" is clearly a type of stative. On this basis, we tentatively propose that the perfective aspect associated with the past participle plays a key role: we assume that the past participle of eventive predicates denotes the state that comes into being when an event occurs (result state analysis of perfective: Katz 2003) and that this is what gives the "past" orientation. What about stative predicates? Here the distinction between stage and individual level predicates becomes relevant. Individual level predicates cannot receive a perfective interpretation since, following the result state analysis, a predicate cannot be perfective if it does not include an eventive component. As a consequence, I-level predicates are impossible in our reduced structures, as shown in (10).

- (10) \*Inglese saputo  
English known

Not surprisingly, inchoative stative predicates, which do include an ingressive subevent, are compatible with the perfective in our reduced structures, as in (11). (11) means that grandma is *now* old (present-orientation), as a result of the ingressive subevent of aging.

- (11) Nonna invecchiata

Crucially, *stare* is not an individual level, but rather a stage level predicate. This is particularly clear in central and southern Italian varieties where *stare* alternates with *essere* ('be'). These Italian varieties replicate the well-known alternation between *ser* and *estar* in Spanish, which is interpreted as a lexicalization of the individual level (*ser*) and stage level (*estar*) distinction (cf. Diesing 1992 among many others).

Being a stage level, and not a permanent state, *stare* presupposes an ingressive subevent as well (the one that leads to the state). Ultimately, this is what makes *stare* compatible with the past participle, with an interpretation that is “present” oriented. Just like in inchoative cases (like 11), the state itself is the result of an ingressive event: In *bambini dalla nonna*, kids are at granma’s place as a result of someone bringing them.

An indirect confirmation of the fact that N+PP structures include a perfective component comes from the interpretation of the bare NP. As we said above, the definiteness of the bare NP in BARE NOUN REDUCED is the manifestation of perfectivity in the nominal domain. If reduced N + PP structures involve perfective *stare*, the definite interpretation of the bare noun is explained.

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