Definiteness of the Noun Phrase Object in Italian Light Verb Constructions

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This study investigates the alternation of definite/indefinite NPs within Italian light verb constructions (henceforth LVCs) formed by the support verbs *fare* 'make/do'; also under discussion are *dare* 'give' and *prendere* 'take'. See the examples below:

(1)   a.   *Io preferisco fare la doccia.*
                  I prefer   make the shower
                  'I mostly take showers.'
        b.   *Dovresti fare la doccia più spesso.*
                  You should make the shower more often
                  'You should shower more.'
        c.   *Fammi fare una doccia, almeno.*
                  Let me make a   shower at least
                  'Let me at least take a shower.'

(2)   a.   *Doveva fare il bagno continuamente.*
                  He had make the bath   all the time
                  'He had to take/have baths constantly.'
        b.   *Ricorderà di fare il bagno spesso.*
                  He will remember to make the bath   often
                  'He will remember to bath regularly.'
        c.   *Penso che andrò di sopra a fare un bagno.*
                  I think that I will go upstairs to make a bath
                  'I think I'll go upstairs and take/have a bath.'

The definite determiner *il* 'the' in (1a), (1b), (2a), and (2b) brings about a literal meaning, whereas the indefinite *un* 'a' in (1c) and (2c) holds a more natural light verb interpretation. The difference between the literal meaning and the support verb take interpretation also occurs in the following examples:

(3)   a.   *Facciamo il giro ed entriamo da dietro.*
                  We make the walk and come in from behind
                  'We go around and come in from behind.'
        b.   *Andiamo a fare un giro per il reparto.*
                  Let's go to make a walk around the ward
                  'Let's go take a walk around the ward.'

The difference is roughly due to the definite NP in (3a) contributing a specific destination, while the indefinite NP in (3b) contributes no specific destination.

A corpus-based analysis is useful in characterizing the distribution and co-occurrence relations of definite/indefinite NPs and light verbs within LCVs, in order to identify systemic patterns and lexical representations.

The framework adopted to describe LVCs is Role and Reference Grammar (RRG) theory (Van Valin and LaPolla 1997; Van Valin 2005, 2010; Méndez 2005; Nolan 2014). RRG is concerned with the interaction of syntax, semantics and pragmatics in grammatical systems and appeals to the analysis of complex predicates within a consideration of the layered structure of the clause. It is clear that the two nuclei (light verb and noun) are generally either adjacent or separated only by determiners and adjectives, and the argument structure of the complex predicate is not exclusively licensed by the noun, but rather brought about by the entire LVC. When the light verb and the object argument co-occur in the syntax, the semantic interpretive co-composition process combines their representations to yield the appropriate interpretation (Van Valin 2013). Both syntactic and lexical properties for complex predicates or nuclear juncture (i.e. LVCs) are therefore investigated in terms of both their layout and logical structures.

References

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