

On the interpretation of proper temporal adverbs in Italian: the role of P and D.

In Italian, we find a puzzling interpretive difference with a set of ‘proper’ temporal adverbials modifying verbal events, namely *days of the week*. Consider the data in (1):

- (1) a. vado al cinema di lunedì
I.go to.the cinema of Monday
b. vado al cinema il lunedì/i lunedì
I.go to.the cinema the.sg Monday /the.pl Monday
c. vado al cinema lunedì
I.go to.the cinema Monday

Interpretively, according to our native judgements, (1a) and (1b) mean that the event is habitually iterated, namely it takes place on every temporal frame signalled by the proper temporal adverbial (Monday, in the present case). On the contrary, (1c) means that the event is punctual, namely it takes place only on a specific temporal target (here, next Monday). This split seems to be active in irrealis contexts only, motivating a realis/irrealis divide shaped by morphosyntax (Manzini 2018). When the temporal modifier is introduced by a preposition (1a) or a determiner (1b), the event is interpreted as a habitual one, in a given time-frame, while when the proper temporal modifier is ‘bare’, the event is perceived as punctual, non-iterable. We assume that this asymmetry in the interpretation is triggered by the peculiar behaviour of proper temporal adverbs. Consider the data (2).

- (2) a. mangerò la pizza il prossimo lunedì/il lunedì prossimo
i.will.eat the pizza the next Monday/the Monday next
b. mangerò la pizza lunedì prossimo/*prossimo lunedì
I.will.eat the pizza Monday next/next Monday

Like ‘canonical’ proper names in Italian (see Longobardi 1994 and subsequent literature), also proper temporal adverbials can rise to D, as illustrated in (2b). In this case, there are no interpretive differences between (2a) and (2b): the event is perceived as punctual, given the presence of the temporal adjective *prossimo* ‘next’ (cf. also Larson & Cho 2003). What is strictly relevant here is that the proper time adverb can move to a D position. The fact that it bears nominal features is ensured by the fact that it can function as the nominal head of a relative clause, as illustrated in (3a) and can be selected by an indefinite determiner (triggering a non-defined, but punctual, eventive interpretation), as in (3b).

- (3) a. vado al cinema (il) lunedì che viene
I.go to.the cinema (the) Monday that come
b. ho visto il film un lunedì.
I.have seen the movie a Monday

Given the facts roughly illustrated above, we assume that the interpretive asymmetry illustrated in (1) is due to the different morphosyntactic properties of the structures involved.

The (singular) definite determiner in (1b) introduces a generic (plural) reading (cf. Storto, 2001, Zamparelli 2002, Falco & Zamparelli 2019), comparable to the effect highlighted in (4).

- (4) a. Il dodo è estinto (=tutti i dodo sono estinti)
the Dodo is extinct (=All Dodos are extinct)
b. Il cane è fedele. (=tutti i cani sono animali fedeli).
The dog is loyal (=All Dogs are loyal)

Thus, the sentence in (1b) means that the event depicted by the verbal predicates is a habitual one, namely it takes place every Monday, due to the generic meaning encoded by the determiner *il*. Longobardi (1994) accounts for this assuming that the definite construal reflects the presence of a

null D position: when the D superstructure is absent, the generic reading becomes available and the overt definite determiner is an expletive.

The same interpretive effect is obtained with another morphosyntactic tool, namely by use of the adposition *di*, as in (1a). Following Manzini & Savoia (2011), we assume that the item *di* instantiate an ‘inclusion/sub-set’ relator (\subseteq). The relation between the eventive predicate and the proper temporal NP can be syntactically shaped through a sub-set relation between the event and the set of temporal frames, which (are able to) include it. The fact that we are on the right track is confirmed by the use of the preposition *in* for proper ‘month’ modifiers of verbal predicates in Italian, as in (5). Consider that Month adverbs do not allow a ‘bare’ (i.e. punctual) encoding, as well as an accompanying singular D, possibly due to the fact that months are intrinsically interpreted as plural entities, i.e. sets (of days).

- (5) a. vado a Pantelleria in Marzo
I.go to Pantelleria in March
b. ??Vado a Pantelleria il Marzo
I.go to Pantelleria the March
c. *Vado a Pantelleria Marzo
I.go to Pantelleria March

So, the question is: where the set interpretation (i.e. the adpositional embedding) for the days of the week comes from? Notice that the temporal item in structures like (1a) is arguably a simple NP, as in Italian structures like those in (6a), where the proper adverbial embedded under the adposition takes a modifier on its left, are ungrammatical (cf. also (2b)). If the proper adverb raises to D, we have a grammatical punctual reading, as in (6b).

- (6) a. *andrò al cinema di prossimo lunedì
I.will.go to.the cinema of next Monday
b. andrò al cinema di lunedì prossimo
I.will.go to.the cinema of Monday next

Hence, the sub-set interpretation could arise because the NP, following Borer (2005), does not rise to a (Div) position high enough to ensure a countable reading (or when the D superstructure is absent, in Longobardi (1994)’s terms). In essence, the temporal NP in contexts like (1a) is substance/mass-like and can be interpreted only as a whole/set. This fact actually forces a habitual (undefined) interpretation.

Finally, in sentences like (1c) the proper temporal item rises to D. The N-to-D movement/chain crucially triggers an individual-like reference (Longobardi 2008, Roberts 2019), so that the event may be perceived only as punctual.

We provide in (7) the relevant structures for the examples in (1), showing how subtle morphosyntactic differences in the encoding of proper modifying terms can enhance different interpretive facts.

- (7) a. [IP [VP vado [1SG [PP al cinema] [\subseteq di [NP Lunedì]]]]]
b. [IP [VP vado [1SG [PP al cinema] [DP_{generic} il [NP Lunedì]]]]]
c. [IP [VP vado [1SG [PP al cinema] [DP_{individual} Lunedì [NP ~~Lunedì~~]]]]]

Selected References

Larson, R., & S. Cho. 2003. Temporal adjectives and possessive DPs. *Natural Language Semantics* 11: 217-247. – Longobardi, G. 1994. Reference and proper names: A theory of N-movement in syntax and logical form. *Linguistic Inquiry* 25: 609-665. – Manzini, R. & L. Savoia. 2011. Reducing ‘case’ to denotational primitives. *Linguistic Variation* 11: 76-120.