Argument structure, applicatives and Italian -ata complex predicates

We present an analysis of a class of complex predicates illustrating that the v° category encodes the activity/achievement distinction, its spellout determined by the event type of the nominal complement.

The data: Italian forms nominals from the past participle of most verbs by the suffixation of -a (1). These nominals can form a complex predicate in combination with a light verb, as in (2). The light verb in these constructions varies: nominals formed from unergative verbs are embedded under light verb fare ‘make’, while nominals from transitive verbs can generally only be embedded under dare ‘give’:

Samek-Ludovici (2003) argues that these complex predicates are formed by a process of index suppression and transference: the indices of the arguments of the nominalized verb are transferred to the light verb’s indexless arguments, forming a complex predicate. Crucially, the choice of light verb is determined by the transitivity of the nominalized verb: deverbal nominals with two indices to transfer are composed with dare, ‘give’, which has three argument slots, while intransitive deverbal nominals, which have only one index, are composed with fare, ‘make’, which has two argument slots (3). The surplus argument slot in the light verb is required to host the deverbal event-denoting nominalization itself.

The problem: On his analysis, the selectional requirements of dare should remain the same no matter whether it is a lexical verb or a light verb. It should always require three arguments. However, there are cases of deverbal nominals of transitive verbs which require dare but can occur without the dative a-phrase (4). It is puzzling in that lexical dare never permits the omission of the dative DP without heavy contextual support (5).

Even with deverbal nominals which require an a-phrase in the complex predicate form when all arguments are expressed as full DPs, there is a crucial difference with lexical verb dare. Both arguments must be represented with lexical dare, even if simply as pronominal clitics (6). But in complex predicates with transitive ata nominals, the dative clitic may be omitted in the same context (7).

A third contrast between complex predicate dare+ata nominal and the corresponding transitive sentence can be seen with transitive verbs of creation. On one interpretation, the object is understood as coming into being as the result of the action.; on a second interpretation, the pre-existing object is merely affected by the action. Crucially, in the former interpretation, there is no existence presupposition for the object, while in the latter, an existence presupposition exists (8). In the corresponding complex predicate, however, the creation reading is impossible; the only reading is the one in which the object is presupposed and is affected (9). In S-L’s model, this contrast is unexpected— the specific theta-roles associated with the transferred indices shouldn’t be distinguished in terms of creation vs affectedness.

The analysis: There is another structural source of dative arguments in Italian, namely, the dative applicative. We propose that the v° takes the ata-nominalization as its direct complement, and an applicative head introduces the dative DP. This captures the presuppositional effect in dare complex predicates, since applied arguments are well-known to have presuppositional properties. Because applied arguments are also optional, this is consistent with the optionality of the dative arguments in (4) and (7).

The difference between fare and dare, then, is not directly connected with transitivity of the ata-nominal. Rather, it reflects an aspectual distinction: fare, equivalent to English ‘do’, is an activity predicate, hence is compatible with unergative intransitive ata-nominals, as in (2)a, which do not specify any endpoint. In contrast, dare, ‘give’ necessarily encodes a punctual, telic event, and therefore composes with ata-nominals in applicative constructions, which necessarily require an endpoint in Italian (10).

The structures for fare and dare nominals that we propose are given in (11). This approach is consistent with the VP framework of Hale and Keyser (1993, 2002). In this case, the light verb is variously realized as DO or GIVE depending on event structure properties. This is expected within the complex predicate analysis of Folli, Harley and Karimi (2005) in which the v° head is responsible for determining the eventuality subtype of complex predicates. This is also, we claim, the source of a particular meaning subtlety associated with the fare and dare complex predicates: with fare, the -ata nominal conveys an impression of exceptional size or substance, while with dare, the -ata nominal receives a diminutive type of interpretation—the activity, whatever it is, is conceived of as done lightly or in passing, rather than with full commitment (12). This impression of largeness is conveyed by the unbounded activity interpretation associated with fare, and the corresponding impression of smallness with dare complex predicates is conveyed by the punctual achievement interpretation provided by dare.
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(1) Participle *ha camminato* 'has walked' \(\rightarrow\) nominalization *una camminat-a* 'a walking'

(2) a. Gianni ha fatto una risata
   Gianni has made a laughing
   "Gianni laughed"

   b. Gianni ha dato una lavata alle camicie
   Gianni has given a washing to the shirts
   "Gianni washed the shirts"

(3) a. Gianni ha fatto una risata/*una lavata alle camicie
   Gianni has made a laughing/*a cleaning to the shirts

   b. Gianni ha dato una lavata alle camicie/*una risata
   Gianni has given a cleaning to the shirts/*a laughing

(4) Gianni (ha preso il martello e ) ha dato una martellata.
   Gianni (has taken the hammer and ) has given a hammering.
   (Aside: This is generally possible when the nominalized verb is itself based on an instrumental nominal, as with *martellare* 'to hammer', *sforbiciare* 'to scissor', or *pedalare*, 'to pedal'.)

(5) Maria ha dato una bicicletta *(a Gianni)
   Maria has given a bicycle *(to Gianni)

(6) A: Gianni ha dato una bicicletta a Maria?
    Gianni has given a bicycle to Maria

   B: a. *Si, Gianni l’ha data
      *Yes, Gianni it has given

   b. Si, Gianni gliel’ha data
      Yes, Gianni to her it has given

(7) A: Gianni ha dato una letta a Kant?
    Gianni has given a reading to Kant?
    "Gianni has read Kant?"

   B: Si, Gianni l’ha data.
      Yes, Gianni it has given.

(8) Michelangelo ha scolpito il pezzo di marmo / Il Bacio
    Michelangelo has sculpted the piece of marble / The Kiss

(9) Michelangelo ha dato una scolpita al pezzo di marmo / *al Bacio
    Michelangelo has given a sculpting to the piece of marble / *to The Kiss

(10) **No applicative of unergatives in Italian:**
    a. *Gianni ha corso a Mario
       Gianni has run to Mario
       "Gianni has run for Mario"

    b. Gianni ha riparato la macchina a Mario
       Gianni has repaired the car to Mario
       "Gianni has repaired the car for Mario"

(11) \[ \text{DP} \downarrow \text{Gianni} \quad \text{vP} \quad \text{v'} \quad \text{DP} \]
    \[ \text{vP} \quad \text{v'} \quad \text{DP} \quad \text{ApplP} \]
    \[ \text{fare} \quad \text{una camminata} \]
    \[ \text{dare} \quad \text{una letta} \quad \text{a Kant} \]

(12) a. Gianni ha fatto una studiata.
    Gianni has made a studying
    (Presupposes a serious amount of studying)

   b. Gianni ha dato una letta a Kant
    Gianni has given a reading to Kant
    (Presupposes a quick scan).