

ITALIAN NULL OBJECTS AND RESULTATIVE/DEPICTIVE PREDICATION

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Rizzi (1986) analyzes Italian null objects (1) as arbitrary *pro* that must occur with causative predicates in sentences with generic tense (2).

(1) Il vento rende ___ nervosi.
the wind makes ___ nervous_masc.pl 'The wind makes one nervous'

(2) * Alle cinque, il vento ha reso ___ nervosi.
at five o'clock the wind aux made.perfective ___ nervous_masc.pl

Based on new empirical observations, we revisit both the internal structure and the contextual requirements of null objects. Since the arbitrary interpretation and the distribution of null objects are paralleled by *molti* 'many' constructions (3), what the two have in common cannot be a full pronoun.

(3) Il vento rende molti nervosi.
the wind makes many nervous_masc.pl 'The wind makes many nervous'

We propose that they both contain a silent NP UMANI 'human.pl' and a complex quantificational structure. In this paper we take this analysis as a background assumption and focus on the contextual requirements.

Predication, not causativity. We argue that the critical property of (1a) is not that it is causative, but that the null object is interpreted as the subject of the predicate 'nervous'. The reason is that (4) with non-causative (depictive) predication is equally grammatical.

(4) Un giudice ritiene ___ innocenti fino a prova del contrario.
a judge believes ___ innocent_masc.pl until proven guilty

The predication requirement fits well with (5) and it entails that psych-causative verbs (6) involve the incorporation of a predicate into a causative verbal root, contrary to the standard analysis.

(5) Questo dottore visita ___ *(sedati).
this doctor examines ___ sedate_masc.pl 'This doctor examines one (sedated)'

(6) Il caffè eccita ___ .
the coffee agitates ___ 'Coffee agitates one' = *coffee makes one agitated*

Frequentativity, not just generic (imperfective) tense. Generic (imperfective) tense is neither necessary nor sufficient for null objects. Perfective (2) becomes well-formed with the addition of a frequentative adverb (7). Proportional adverbs generally do not combine with a perfective tense (8a) vs. (8b). On the other hand, null objects are not compatible with an I-level predicate despite imperfective tense (9).

(7) Il vento ha spesso reso ___ nervosi.
the wind aux often made.perfective ___ nervous_masc.pl 'Wind often made one nervous'

(8) a. * Di solito il vento ha reso ___ /i ragazzi nervosi
usually the wind aux made.perfective ___ /the boys sedate_masc.pl
b. Di solito il vento rende ___ /i ragazzi nervosi
usually the wind makes.imperfective ___ /the boys sedate_masc.pl

(9) * Gianni odia ___ (malvestiti)
John hates ___ (badly dressed)

Van Geenhoven (2004) actually equates frequentativity and habituality.

Analysis. To tie all these facts together we propose that the null object introduces a higher order variable that demands the presence of a habitual operator. The silent NP UMANI occurs in the restriction of the habitual operator, the depictive/resultative predicate occurs in its scope. The LF of (5) is (10).

(10) $FREQ_{\langle e, y \rangle} [Agent(e, \text{this doctor}) \wedge Patient(e, y) \wedge Human(y) \wedge visiting(e)] \exists e' [sedated(e') \wedge Theme(e', y) \wedge Overlap(e, e')]$

In the case of psych-causatives like (6) the verb derives from the incorporation of an adjectival predication into a causative verbal root and the natural force subject is coerced into an event (see (11)).

(11) $\text{FREQ}_{\langle e, y \rangle} [\text{Theme } (e, \text{coffee}) \wedge \text{Agent } (e, y) \wedge \text{Human } (y) \wedge \text{drinking } (e)] \exists e' [\text{agitating } (e') \wedge \text{Experiencer } (e', y) \wedge \text{CAUSE } (e, e')]]$

I-level predicates do not take null objects because they do not combine with frequentativity and are incompatible with depictive/resultative predication. Apparent counter-examples with overt direct objects involve post-nominal adjectival modification (12).

- (12) a.* Gianni ama ___ nudi.
John loves ___ naked_masc.pl
- b. Gianni ama i ballerini nudi. (post-nominal adjectival modification)
John loves the dancers naked_masc.pl
'John loves naked dancers'
- c.* Gianni ama Paolo nudo.
John loves Paul naked_masc.sg

Conclusion. The proposed analysis ties together the observations about the internal structure and the contextual requirements of null objects and it entails a novel analysis of psych-causative predicates.

References

- Geenhoven, V. van. 2004. "For-Adverbials, Frequentative Aspect, and Pluractionality". *Natural Language Semantics* 12: 135-190.
- Rizzi, L. 1986. "Null Objects in Italian and the Theory of *pro*". *Linguistic Inquiry*, 17: 501-557.