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# Introduction to RLLT23: Selected papers from LSRL53 in Paris

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The 53<sup>rd</sup> edition of the Linguistic Symposium on Romance Languages (LSRL 53) took place in Paris, on June 27 – 29, 2023, jointly organized by INALCO – Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, Université Paris Cité, Université Paris Saclay, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle. This was the first European edition of LSRL, in its long history since its inception in the United States. It was previously held abroad three times – in Brazil, Mexico, and Canada, respectively. LSRL is one of the oldest and most prestigious international conferences in modern Romance linguistics, recognized as one of the primary venues for international exchange on research dedicated to the Romance language family. LSRL 53 brought together close to 200 participants from four continents: in Europe, not only countries where a Romance language is spoken (Spain, Italy, France, Romania and Portugal), but also non-Romance speaking ones (the UK, Germany, Finland, Sweden, Iceland, Slovenia, Switzerland, the Netherlands); in America, both North-American countries, traditionally closest to this conference (USA and Canada) and South-American, Romance-speaking ones (Peru,

Chile, Uruguay, and Brazil). Asia was represented by authors from Japan and from Taiwan.

In addition to the main conference, two workshops were organized on June 26<sup>th</sup>, and June 30<sup>th</sup>, respectively. Workshop 1, on written and oral technologies dedicated to Romance languages, was motivated by the growing interest in the contribution of large corpora to linguistic research. Workshop 2 focused on research on the phonetics and phonology of Romance languages and its contribution to phonetic and phonological typology.

The present volume contains 15 papers, each selected after one round of double-blind peer-review by two reviewers and the guest editors. We are grateful to the authors and reviewers for their dedicated work which made possible upholding LSRL's high standards of scientific quality. The papers are representative of four main types of approaches: crosslinguistic comparisons, experimental studies, corpus studies, and formal, theory-centered analyses.

Two **crosslinguistic analyses** take advantage of the insights coming from the micro-variation that is found among languages of the same family. Fernández-Salgueiro (*On Tense, agreement, and the syntax of null and overt subjects: Evidence from Romance infinitives*) compares the position and realization of subjects in adverbial non-finite clauses in Galician, Spanish, Italian, and European Portuguese. Based on the careful analysis of syntactic variation exhibited by subjects in non-finite clauses (containing regular and inflected infinitives), the author shows that this comparison allows for new insight into the licensing conditions for pro and postverbal subjects in finite clauses in these pro-drop languages.

Volpato and Lebani (*Possessives with kinship terms in Italian and Italo-Romance dialects: variation and optionality*) compare Italian and six different Italo-Romance varieties spoken in Central, Northern and Southern Italy. Their study investigates the acceptability of constructions containing third-person possessives combined with singular and plural kinship terms in adult bilectal speakers of Italian and another variety. The speakers were asked to judge the acceptability of sentences which vary according to the presence and position (pre- vs. post-nominal) of the possessive and the presence vs. absence of the definite article. Italian results were consistent with the patterns highlighted by previous studies, but for the six dialects, much more variation and optionality were observed. Comparing the current results to data reported in AIS maps (Jaberg and Jud [1928] 1940) revealed cases of the influence of the dialect on Italian, as well as instances of the influence of Italian on the dialect, and cases where the dialects have changed independently of Italian.

The contribution by Volpato and Lebani compares Italian and dialects using experimental methods, specifically by means of a questionnaire. Many of the contributions to this volume indeed adopt an **experimental approach**, which allows them to push forward existing debates in the literature on different phenomena by looking at them from a new perspective. Thus, at the **syntax - prosody interface**, Bocci, Bianchi, & Cruschina (*Mapping focus to prosody in Italian: The case of wh-questions*) investigate the exceptional prosodic pattern of Italian wh-questions with bare wh-elements, attempting to explain one of their previous findings in the production of the nuclear pitch accent (NPA). Based on evidence from production, in previous work they had argued that the NPA assignment was a reflex of the cyclic syntactic derivation, being sensitive to a syntactic [focus] feature born by the wh-

phrase. The data also revealed a dissociation between the NPA and focal interpretation, which raises the question of whether Italian hearers are sensitive to this marked prosodic pattern in understanding a question. Their current study answers this question through a comprehension experiment manipulating the position of the NPA in biclausal wh-questions including two verbs: the verb of the matrix clause and the embedded verb. The results are consistent with the authors' proposed theoretical analysis, suggesting that Italian listeners do exploit prosodic cues to parse the sentence and to assign the correct interpretation to structures that only differ at the surface level with respect to the position of the NPA.

Baunaz, Bocci, & Shlonsky (*French wh in-situ: Where are we and where do we go from here?*) investigate the acceptability of wh in-situ expressions in embedded contexts in French. Two experiments test the acceptability of wh in-situ and ex-situ in embedded clauses of biclausal direct wh-questions and in indirect questions, and how their acceptability is modulated by the presence of the negation in the embedded clause. In Experiment 1, the contexts favored a D-linked interpretation of the wh-element (in the sense of Pesetsky 1987), while the contexts in Experiment 2 disfavored it. The results show that the in-situ strategy is generally more acceptable (or at least equally acceptable) than the ex-situ strategy in direct questions with long construal, regardless of D-linking and negation. By contrast, in indirect questions the in-situ strategy is significantly less acceptable than the ex-situ one, regardless of D-linking and negation. In long construal direct wh-questions, negation fails to selectively block wh in-situ, setting French apart from many other languages (see e.g., Beck & Kim 1997, a.o.). The authors discuss their findings in the context of the current debate between alternative formal analyses of wh in-situ in French.

At the **semantics - pragmatics interface**, Castroviejo & Mayol (*An empirical study on the semantics-pragmatics of two Romance confirmational tags*) provide a fine-grained characterization of two confirmational tags in Catalan, *oi?* and *eh?*, starting with the novel claim that the two tags do not have the same distribution or meaning. While *oi?* is a rather unconstrained confirmational, they show that *eh?* is sensitive to whether the main predicate of the sentence anchor *p* is objective or subjective. The authors propose that confirmational questions with *oi?* make a request for confirmation of the truth of the sentence anchor, whereas a confirmational with *eh?* is a request for the commitment of the addressee to the truth of the sentence anchor. Two predictions emerge from this analysis: *oi?* should be preferred when factual truths instead of opinions are conveyed, while *eh?* should be preferred in contexts where the speaker is not necessarily interested in finding out the truth of *p*. These predictions are tested in three experimental studies, which provide empirical support for the theoretical proposal regarding the different pragmatic contribution of both tags.

In **lexical semantics**, Suozzi & Cardinaletti (*Word- or root-derived? A semantic test for instrumental denominal verbs in Italian*) propose that denominal verbs can be derived from either a noun or a root. In non-morphologically transparent languages, only semantic cues help distinguish the two classes, i.e., the entailment of existence of the corresponding noun (Kiparsky 1982, 1997). The authors present here a novel semantic test as the first attempt at distinguishing noun-derived from root-derived Instrumental Denominal Verbs (IDV) on a purely semantic basis, overcoming the flaws observed in previous syntactic tests. By explicitly asking Italian native speakers to mention the instruments that can be used to perform the action denoted by the verb, they measured the entailment of existence through the number of instrument

nouns produced and the frequency of production of the corresponding instrument noun. The test also contained parasynthetic verbs, whose behavior was influenced by the interaction between their derivation process and their meaning.

In **phonology**, Cossu (*The syllabification of /sw/ in Italian and the phonological status of /w/*) investigates the phonetics and phonology of word-initial /sw/ clusters in Italian, aiming to discern the syllabic parsing of the sequence and the phonological status of the glide /w/. Previous studies have reported a dual status of /w/ in Italian, consonantal in loanwords versus vocalic in native lexemes, apparently dependent on the graphemic form of /w/, i.e. ⟨w⟩ and ⟨u⟩. The /s/-voicing pattern before the glide was used as a diagnostic to determine the glide's status: a consonantal glide should trigger /s/-voicing, like other voiced consonants in Italian, while vocalic glides should pattern like vowels in being unable to trigger the voicing of /s/. Two hypotheses are presented: the Loanword Phonology Hypothesis (LPH), which predicts /w/ to systematically behave as a consonant in loanwords, while the Orthographic Hypothesis (OH) predicts so only when the glide is written ⟨w⟩. The acoustic analysis was based on data originally collected, focusing on the outputs of /s/. Results show that OH better accounts for the pattern observed than LPH. Phonological implications of this finding are discussed.

In **L1 and L2 acquisition** De Paolis (*Accounting for asymmetries in cleft sentence use: syntactic and functional preferences in L1 and L2 Italian and French*) shows that the apparent proximity between Romance languages may hide more profound differences, which are a challenge for the L2 learner. The study aims to clarify the factors influencing the use of cleft constructions among speakers of Italian and French. By analyzing the behaviors of native speakers, hypotheses are formulated regarding the speech of second language (L2) learners of these languages. The findings highlight a difference in how native speakers handle the functional parameter in the use of clefts, with Italian speakers (but not French speakers) distinguishing between identification and correction. The linguistic proximity between Italian and French facilitates the acquisition of this complex structure among learners. However, other factors contribute to differing receptions of asymmetries in L2, such as the predominance of communicative need and the difficulty in incorporating the functional parameter.

The third type of approach represented in the volume relies on **Corpus studies**. Three papers propose an analysis that is either purely or at least partly diachronic. Caudal (*On tenses as speech-act-level functions: Towards a novel analysis of the French 'narrative' imparfait*) aims at demonstrating the validity of a two-pronged hypothesis: (i) that the aspectuo-temporal content of the so-called 'narrative imparfait' (NIMPF) does not have scope over the verb it marks but that (ii) it must operate at a higher, discourse semantic level. To substantiate this hypothesis, the paper examines both diachronic and synchronic evidence suggesting that the NIMPF does not contribute aspectual meaning in the sentence semantics – showing notably that it behaves very much like a 'viewpoint neutral' tense w.r.t. the verb it marks. The synchronic, discursive evidence supports the view that the NIMPF actually indicates a partial, discourse structurally incomplete, 'ongoing' narrative act. The paper concludes that NIMPF utterances constitute a separate conventionalized reading of the *imparfait* at the speech act-level, applying an imperfective viewpoint meaning to relational speech act functions.

Li Destri (*On documenting language change as it happens: the periphrastic construction “motion verb + a + infinitive” in Italian*) examines the grammaticalization of motion verbs within the periphrastic construction “motion verb + a + infinitive”. Verbs such as *andare* ‘to go’, *venire* ‘to come’ and *tornare* ‘to return’ develop functional uses and express aspectual meanings, such as culminative, inchoative-imminential and iterative. The study relies on corpus analysis of both spoken (KIParla) and written (CORIS) data to investigate the distribution of these constructions across formal and informal varieties of Italian. Formal written varieties exhibit higher percentages of aspectual values, while spontaneous speech shows lower percentages. Additionally, the corpus investigation reveals differences in the frequency of aspectual values, with the inchoative-imminential value being more prevalent in spoken language compared to written texts.

Larrivé, Poletto & Pinzin (*Asymmetry as a general cue for V2 loss*) identify a micro-cue correlating to verb second word order (V2) in two closely related Medieval Romance languages, Medieval French and Venetian. As V2 is asymmetrically distributed in main rather than subordinate clauses, an asymmetry would be expected in phenomena assumed to relate to V2, such as subject inversion, null subject and enclisis. The loss of that asymmetry should therefore indicate the loss of the V2 word order rule. These assumptions are tested by a quantitative analysis of a treebank of calibrated data covering the crucial period of change (from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> century) for the two languages. The hard quantitative evidence provided demonstrates that the main versus embedded asymmetry is indeed a micro-cue of V2 structure, and of its loss in one of the two investigated languages.

Liang, Burnett & Donati (*French subject doubling: A third path*) revisits the well studied topic of subject doubling in French in a new, quantitative approach and from a sociolinguistic perspective, highlighting the novel contribution of quantitative studies to long-standing theoretical debates. The study focuses on the status of subject clitics in Spoken French by considering subject doubling as a sociolinguistic variable. Based on new evidence from a corpus study on the large Multicultural Paris French (MPF) corpus, the authors argue for an analysis reconciling two existing competing views of the construction in Spoken (colloquial) French. They provide support for the morphological approach (Auger, 1994; Culbertson, 2010) in which subject clitics are morphological agreement markers on the verb. At the same time, they argue based on new evidence, that lexical subjects are topicalized, as in the dislocation analysis. Furthermore, the authors argue that Spoken French is in a diglossia situation where speakers alternate structures provided by both Standard French and Colloquial French grammars.

**Formal, theory-centered approaches** are represented in the volume, both in **semantics** and in **syntax**. Fleury and Tovena (*The anchor of a modal superlative and the individual vs stage level reading of the adjective*) consider the semantics of quality modal superlatives in predicative function such as Italian *E’ stata il più calma possibile* ‘She was the calmest possible’, with a focus on what is the anchoring of the modal superlative, and how what is being compared is restricted. The study highlights the limitations of single-anchoring in individuals when analysing modal superlatives, following the strategy generally adopted for ordinary absolute and relative superlatives. The authors propose an alternative solution, using a comparison class made of world+individual pairs grouped into equivalence classes defined through the

amount of the gradable property, as proposed by Tovena & Fleury (2023). New data on the stage-level vs. individual-level reading of the gradable adjective provide evidence supporting this form of anchoring. Callegari (*Scaling Counterarguments: The Dynamics of Exclamative Se Constructions*) analyzes the use of Exclamative *Se* Constructions (ESCs) in two Romance languages: the northern Italian dialect of Trevigiano, and Standard Italian. ESCs are used to express shock or surprise at someone's statement and to challenge its accuracy. Although they resemble adverbial clauses, ESCs function autonomously as main clauses. The author identifies four defining properties of ESCs: adverbial clause form, form-function mismatch, main-clausality, and the anchoring of surprise to a preceding assertion rather than to the ESC's own propositional content, and argues that ESCs function as counterarguments, specifically rebutting assumed premises using contextually relevant scales. These rebuttals consistently involve asserting a value that contrasts sharply with some initial statement, often reaching an extreme or unexpected point on the contextually relevant scale.

Suárez-Palma (*On the position of dative DPs in Spanish middle-passive sentences*) examines external possession between a dative possessor and a relational noun in Spanish middle-passive configurations. The dative DP in these contexts must surface preverbally in out-of-the-blue contexts, either by itself or along with the theme containing the possessee. When the dative precedes the theme, it cannot be assumed that the former is left-dislocated while the latter sits in preverbal subject position, for this would imply a violation of locality under a low applicative analysis of dative possessors:  $T^o$  would skip the possessor argument in Spec,ApplP to probe the possessee in Appl<sup>o</sup>'s complement position to its specifier. The author provides data showing that preverbal DPs –dative or otherwise– in Spanish middle-passive contexts are clitic left-dislocations co-referring with empty pronouns in argument position, and offers a biclausal analysis of these configurations that avoids any potential intervention effects, while at the same time accounting for the extra-sentential properties of these constituents.

The diversity of approaches in the main conference and the two workshops, which is also reflected in this volume, well represents the recent developments in linguistic research, and confirms the vitality of the Romance linguistics community. There is no doubt that Romance languages have a lot to offer to linguistic theory, linguistic typology in synchrony and diachrony, and to interfaces with other related fields of research. We believe that LSRL's passage through Europe in 2023 has renewed awareness of and interest in these connections, and has also succeeded in attracting new researchers, in particular a younger generation of students and recent PhDs working in Europe. We hope that future editions of LSRL will continue to be hosted in different countries. In fact, as we write this introduction, the newly created Executive Committee announced that LSRL55 will take place in the Dominican Republic, organized by colleagues at PUCMM. We look forward to new and exciting research emerging from future fruitful exchanges.

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