CRISSP Center for Research in Syntax, Semantics, and Phonology

CRISSP Seminar Series
Derivational Morphology

Beyond inflection and derivation: Italian *-at-* as an elementary relator

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The Italian formative *-at-* is standardly split into several items: deverbal nouns denoting a single episode (*nuotata* 'a swim'), denominal nouns denoting blows and collectives (*bastonata* 'a blow with a stick', *palizzata* 'a palisade'), possessive adjectives (*argentato* 'silver-plated') and the past participle (*mangiato* 'eaten'). A morphomic approach (Aronoff 1994) would take the shared form seriously, but deny that it carries a shared meaning. Adopting a neo-constructionist architecture and the relational theory of adpositions (Manzini & Franco 2016 Franco & Manzini 2017), I propose that Italian has a single invariant *-at-*, which externalizes the relator of Reverse Inclusion ($\supseteq$), the relation also expressed by *con* 'with' in Italian. Merged directly with an acategorial root, *-at-* takes the root as its complement (the part) and includes it in a larger domain (the whole): an event, an entity or a span of time. The apparent polysemy is computed at the interface, from this geometry and from the conceptual content of the root. The category is decided by the outer spine: with an aggregating Class feature, the word closes as a count noun in *-a*; without it, it surfaces in *-o* as an open property, that is, an adjective or a participle. The present participle *-nte* externalizes the mirror relation, Direct Inclusion ($\subseteq$), and in the clause *avere* 'have' is *essere* 'be' plus Reverse Inclusion (cf. Kayne 1993). For *-at-*, then, the divide between inflection and derivation reduces to mereological closure over a constant relational core.