

The syntax and semantics of anticausativization in Italian:

diachronic insights and synchronic variation

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This paper discusses the role played by the interplay of the *aspectual template of verbs*, the *verb's inherent meaning* (the 'root'), and the *nature of the –P subject* (e.g., animacy and control) in determining the distribution of the different strategies available in contemporary Italian and early Italo-Romance (Old Florentine) to mark anticausativization, the reflexive pattern and the active intransitive.

Two subclasses of anticausative are usually recognised in the literature on the basis of the distribution of the reflexive morpheme *si* (Centineo 1995, Bentley 2006: 131), whilst three subtypes emerge by considering the interplay of the presence, absence and optionality of *si* with auxiliary selection in compound tenses (Folli 2002, Manente 2008, Cennamo & Jezek 2011).

Depending on the perspective taken, which can be labelled, respectively, *thematic* and (*lexico-*)*aspectual*, the presence of the reflexive (*si*) is either viewed as reflecting an externally caused eventuality, with verbs lacking *si* instantiating internally caused events (Centineo 1995, Bentley 2006: 130–4, drawing upon Haspelmath's 1993 typological survey and Levin & Rappaport Hovav 1995: 89–98), or it is described as resulting from the aspectual characteristics of predicates, in particular the presence of a terminal point (either final/result or target state) for *si*-anticausatives (Jezek 2001, 2008, Folli 2002, Cennamo & Jezek 2011). Under the *thematic approach*, only the form with *si* (e.g., *rompersi* 'break') instantiates an anticausative structure, whilst the pattern without *si* (e.g., *affondare* 'sink') realizes an internally caused event (Centineo 1995: 67). Thus, with verbs optionally taking *si* in the anticausative pattern (e.g., *bruciare-bruciarsi* 'burn', *gelare-gelarsi* 'freeze'), only the structure with *si* should be regarded as anticausative, as shown in (1a) vs (1b), which would exemplify instead an intransitive verb, denoting an internally caused event (Bentley 2006: 128–31):

- (1) a. *Il bosco bruciò* (internally caused)
the forest burnt
'The forest burnt'
b. *Il bosco si bruciò* (anticausative)
the forest RFL burnt
'The forest burnt'

We will show that the two views are not mutually exclusive, but represent different diachronic stages in the development of the morphological encoding of anticausatives in Italian.

More specifically, the study of anticausativization in some early Italian vernaculars (e.g., Old Florentine) reveals the alternation of the active intransitive and the reflexive strategies with all verb classes (e.g., degree achievements, *aumentare* 'increase', *le pene ... s'aumentano* - the punishments RFL increase - 'The punishments increase' (Boccaccio, *Esposizioni*, 47, 664.20) vs. *le biade aumenteranno* - the corn will-increase - 'Corn will increase' (Boccaccio, *Filocolo*, 5, 54, 624.2), with hints of the gradual gaining ground of aspectual notions such as telicity in determining the obligatory occurrence/preference of the reflexive form to mark anticausatives (Cennamo 2012).

Thus diachronic data support the hypothesis that the main and original function of the reflexive morpheme in the anticausative alternation is to signal the suppression of the Actor. Its aspectual meaning (whereby it comes to mark telicity) is instead a later development. The diachronic investigation also casts doubts on the non-anticausative status of non-reflexive uses of verbs allowing both strategies.

The Italian data, therefore, offer an interesting contribution to the current debate on the role played by the verb's inherent meaning and its interaction and integration with the event structure template of predicates in determining argument realization, showing the relevance of these notions for the understanding of anticausativization, both synchronically and diachronically.

References

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