The anticausative alternation in Italian: constraints and variation

Michela Cennamo - Elisabetta Jezek

University of Naples - University of Pavia

Verb Typologies Revisited: a Cross-linguistic Reflection on Verbs and Verb Classes

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Introduction

- Discussion of **anticausative alternation in Italian**, in relation to:

  - the role played by the **aspectual template** of verbs and the (inherent and relational) **semantic properties of their arguments** (e.g., their animacy / control / affectedness) in licencing this alternation;

  - the contribution of the **verb's inherent meaning** (the root) to the different morphosyntactic realizations of this construction.

Some current views

- The anticausative alternation in Italian has been studied with respect to four main issues:

  - the **status of the anticausative** pattern (2.1);
  - the **function of the reflexive morpheme si**: (2.2);
  - the **parameters** licencing the alternation (2.3);
  - the **number of subclasses** identifiable and the **criteria** adopted (2.4).

Status of the anticausative pattern (2.1)

- Five different types of possible derivations:

1. **two entries listed separately in the lexicon** for the transitive and intransitive variant of a verb;

2. anticausative **derived from transitive** through suppression of the Causer, with the original object surfacing as subject (*detransitivization rule*) (Levin & Rappaport Hovav 1995: 82-133);

3. anticausative as the **basic form** (*causativization rule*) (Parson 1990, Van Valin & La Polla 1977, Kratzer 2003) for some subclasses of anticausatives (Centineo 1995, Folli 2002);

Status of the anticausative pattern (2.1)

4. **single underspecified entry** in the lexicon from which both forms are derived by foregrounding different components (subevents) of the event structure of the predicate in composition (Pustejovsky & Busa 1995).

5. **alternating stem** from which both forms are derived by means of a general **lexical rule**: neither form is regarded as basic (Van Valin forthc).

No unitary account is feasible

- The five types may be all represented in the lexicon.

- No unitary account of the **direction of the derivation** of the anticausative pattern is feasible (transitive > intransitive, or intransitive > transitive) for all/some subclasses of anticausatives in Italian, owing to:

  - the **co-compositional processes** between **inherent semantic properties of the verbal root and of the argument**(s) associated with it in event structure.

  - These often contrast with the **synchronic analysis** of verbs belonging to the same aspectual class and showing identical morphosyntactic behaviour.

- In (1b) the anticausative pattern cannot be regarded as the corresponding intransitive (i.e., anticausative) form of (1a), unlike in (2b), the anticausative of (2a) :

(1) a. *Luisa ha accorciato la gonna*   b. *la gonna si è accorciata*
     Luisa has shortened the skirt   the skirt RFL is shortened
     'Luisa shortened the skirt'   'The skirt has shrunk'

(2) a. *Luisa ha macchiato il vestito*   b. *il vestito si è macchiato*
     Luisa has stained the dress   the dress RFL is stained
     'Luisa stained the dress'   'The dress got stained'

(3)   *la gonna è/è stata accorciata*
     the skirt is/is been shortened
     'The skirt was shortened/has been shortened'

(4)   *le giornate si sono accorciate*
     the days RFL are shortened
     'Days have become shorter'

Function of the reflexive morpheme *si* (2.2)

- Two main views:

    - *si* is a **detransitivizer**, a marker of the suppressed causer (Cennamo 1995, Bentley 2006).

    - *si* is a **marker of the final state** *(*Folli 2002)/**result state** (Manente 2008). Its presence signals that the focus of the interpretation is on the (new) state the object is in after the culmination (**target state** in Parson 1990; Jezek 2001, 2003, 2008).

Parameters licencing the alternation and possible constraints (2.3)

- Aspectual
  - Verbs falling into the anticausative alternation denote **inherently telic events**. **Activity verbs do not enter** the alternation (Cennamo 1995, 2001, Centineo 1995, Sorace 2000, Folli 2002, Jezek 2003, but see remarks inVan Valin forth.);

- Inherent/relational properties of the subject
  - e.g., its **animacy** (Cennamo 1995) and **degree of control** (Folli 2002).

Parameters (cont'd)

- General constraint on anticausativization

    – only transitive causative verbs denoting events which may
      come about spontaneously, without the overt expression of a
      wilful animate causer may occur in the anticausative
      alternation (Levin & Rappaport Hovav 1995: 102, Bentley
      2006, int. al., also Haspelmath 1987, 1993, Siewierska 1984,
      in a crosslinguistic perspective).

    –   *Luisa ha foderato la gonna*   b. **la gonna si è foderato*
         Luisa has lined the skirt   the skirt RFL is lined
         'Luisa lined the skirt'   the skirt has lined

Parameters (cont'd)

- Animacy
  - only the inanimate object of a highly transitive, telic verb can become the subject of a corresponding anticausative form.

(5) a. *i   ragazzi si   sono nutriti*
        the boys   RFL are   nourished
        'The boys nourished themselves'

   b. *il   giovane   si   è ucciso*
        the young-man RFL is killed
        'The young man committed suicide'

Number of subclasses and criteria for their identification (2.4)

- **Three subclasses of anticausatives (two subclasses** according to Centineo 1995).

  - identified on the basis of the **distribution of the reflexive morpheme** *si* (i.e., its presence, absence and optionality).

[+*si*]

- [+*si*] with inherently telic predicates, [± punctual] (
  accomplishments / achievements), e.g., *romper(si)* 'break',
  spezzars(si) 'crack', *spegner*(*si*) 'turn off', *svuotarsi* 'empty'.
  - Final state/result state is lexically encoded ((Folli 2002, Jezek
    2001, 2008, Manente 2008):

(6) *rompere* 'break'

Mario rompe il bicchiere	'Mario breaks the glass'
*Il bicchiere rompe	The glass breaks
Il bicchiere si rompe	The glass REFL breaks

[-*si*]

- [-*si*]: with **gradual completion verbs / degree achievements** (e.g., *aumentare*, 'increase', *migliorare* 'improve')(Centineo 1995; Sorace 2000: 864); also with **accomplishments / achievement** verbs (e.g. *affondare* 'sink', *guarire* 'heal')

    – according to Bertinetto & Squartini 1995 GCV share properties of both **atelic predicates** (durativity and possibility of quantification with adverbials such as *molto* 'a lot') and **telic predicates**, in that they denote a succession of changes along a scale (see also Rappaport Hovav 2008 and references therein).

(7) *aumentare* 'increase'
i negozianti aumentano i prezzi 'the shopkeepers increase the prices'
i prezzi aumentano 'the prices increase'
**i prezzi si aumentano* the prices REFL increase

[±*si*]

- [± s*i*]: **optionality of *si*** for some verbs *(fondere/fondersi* 'melt', *bruciare* 'burn')*, with focus on the **attainment of a final state** in the pattern with *si*, and **focus on the process** if *si* is lacking, and ensuing **telic/atelic interpretation** with related BE/HAVE selection (Sorace 2000: 874-875).

(8) *bruciare* 'burn'
   Il fuoco ha bruciato la casa   'the fire burned the house'
   *la casa ha bruciato per/*in un ora*   'the house HAS burnt for hours'
   la casa è bruciata in un'ora   'the house IS burnt in an hour'
   *la casa si è bruciata in/*per un'ora*   'the house REFL IS burnt'

Fine-grained classification

- **Six subclasses of anticausatives** (Jezek 2003):

  - Class 1: [+si] [BE] (*rompere/rsi* 'break', *svuotare/rsi* 'empty', *accorciare/rsi* 'shorten')
  - Class 2: [-si] [BE] (*affondare* 'sink', *guarire* 'heal', *aumentare* 'raise')
  - Class 3: [-si] [BE] / [+si] [BE] (*sbiadire/rsi* 'fade', *ingiallire/rsi* 'jellow')
  - Class 4: [HAVE] / [+si] [BE] (*cuocere/rsi* 'cook', *chiudere/rsi* 'close')
  - Class 5: [HAVE] / [BE] (*continuare* 'continue', *saltare* 'jump')
  - Class 6: [HAVE] / [BE] / [±si] (*bruciare/rsi* 'burn')

- By crossclassifying verbs for the **interplay of the distribution of *si*** with **auxiliary selection**, a different, more fine-grained picture emerges, whereby **gradual completion verbs also occur in all subclasses of anticausatives**, not just in class 2 (Jezek 2003, 168-170).

Some diagnostic tests

- Some diagnostic tests for **telicity/atelicity**, **gradual/total completion**, **final/result state** (*Folli 2002: ch.2, Jezek 2003):*

  – occurrence with ***for X time/in X time – at time X*** adverbials;
  – entailment of the predicate by the progressive form;
  – occurrence with the adverbial expression ***di parecchio*** 'by a lot';
  – negation of the final end/state by means of an additional phrase;
  – interpretation with quantificational adverbs such as ***un po'*** 'a bit', ***completamente*** 'completely';
  – occurrence of the **past participle** of a verb (e.g. *rotto* 'broken') in **adjectival function**.

- occurrence with in X time – at time X adverbials:
  (9) Le luci   si   sono spente   alle 8
       the lights RFL are   gone-off at 8p.m.
       'The lights went off at 8p.m.'

- the progressive form does not entail the past form (Dowty 1979, Folli 2002: 88):
  (10)   a. Mario sta rompendo la finestra --/→ M.   ha rotto   la finestra
            Mario is breaking   the window   Mario has broken the window
            'Mario is breaking the window   ---/> Mario has broken the window'

         b. Mario sta spegnendo le luci --/→ Mario ha spento   le luci
            Mario is turning-off the lights   Mario has turned-off the lights
            'Mario is turning the lights off --/> Mario has turned the lights off'

- occurrence with the comparative adverbial *di parecchio* is ruled out:
  (11)   a. ?le luci si   sono spente di parecchio
            the lights RFL are gone-out by a lot
            'The lights a went out by a lot'

- Negation of the final end-state by means of an additional phrase is infelicitous (i.e., final end-state cannot be denied, in that it is inherently present, it is encoded in the lexical root)

(12) a. *Mario ha spento   le luci,   ?ma non sono spente*
Mario has turned-off the lights but not are   turned off
'Mario has turned the lights off,? but they are not out'

   b. *le luci   si   sono spente,   ?ma non sono spente*
the lights RFL are   turned off, ?but not are turned off
'The lights have turned off, ?but they are not turned off'

(13) a. *Mario ha rotto la sedia,? ma non è rotta*
Mario has broken the chair   but not is broken
'Mario has broken the chair, ?but it is not broken'

b. *la sedia si è rotta, ?ma non è rotta*
the chair RFL is broken but not is broken
'The chair is broken, ?but it is not broken'

- occurrence with both *for* and *in* adverbials

  (14) a. *la temperatura è diminuita per un'ora/in un'ora*
    the temperature is decreased for an hour
    'The temperature has gone down for an hour'

       b. *la situazione è migliorata per un pò/in un'ora*
    the situation is improved for a while
    'The situation has improved for a while'

  (15) *la nave è affondata *per un' ora/in un'ora*
    the ship is sunk for an hour (vs. in an hour)
    'The ship has sunk *for an hour'

- occurrence with comparative adverbial *di parecchio*:

(16) a. *la temperatura è diminuita di parecchio*
        the temperature is decreased by a lot
        'The temperature has gone down by a lot'

      b. **la nave è affondata di parecchio*
        the boat is sunk by a lot
        'The boat sank by a lot'

      c. **La ferita/il paziente è guarito/a di parecchio*
        the injury/the patient IS healed by a lot
        'The injury/the patient healed by a lot'

- Sensitivity to outer aspectual coercion and contextual entailments:

(17) *La temperatura è diminuita di cinque gradi*

  the temperature is decreased of five degrees

  'The temperature decreased of five degrees'

- Use in the progressive entails use in the past form:

(18) a. *la temperatura sta diminuendo* → *la temperatura è diminuita*

       the temperature is decreasing   the temperature is decreased

       'The temperature is decreasing > the temperature has decreased'

- Aspectual ambiguity of these verbs in the intransitive form without *si* (as well as in their corresponding transitive form), as shown by the co-occurrence with *in/for* X time adverbials:

(19) a. *Il   cioccolato fuse/ha   fuso   per pochi secondi/in pochi secondi*
        the chocolate   melted/has melted for few   seconds/in few seconds
        'The chocolate melted in a few seconds'

      b. *Il bosco   bruciò/ha bruciato per tutta la notte/in poche ore*
        the woods burnt   for   whole night/in few hours
        'The woods burnt for the whole night/in a few hours'

- The final state cannot be negated in the form with *si*:

(20) a. *La casa si è bruciata, *ma non è bruciata* vs
  the house RFL is burnt but not is bunt
  'The house burnt down, *but it is not burnt

 b. *La casa è bruciata, ma non si è bruciata*
  the house is burnt   but not RFL is burnt
  'The house burnt, but it did not burn down'

- Use in the progressive entails use in the past form, so the process component of the event can be modified by a progressive operator:

(21)   *Mario sta bruciando la carne > la carne è bruciata*
     'Mario is burning the meat' > 'The meant burnt'
     obligatory auxiliary BE selection in the pattern with *si*:

(22)   *La carne si è bruciata*
     The meat RFL is burnt
     'The meat got all burnt'

- Alternation HAVE/BE in the pattern without *si*:

(23)   a. *La carne ha bruciato/è bruciata*
        the meat has burnt/is burnt
        'The meat has burnt'

- Aspectual constraint on auxiliary selection in the anticausative pattern without *si*: **HAVE** focuses on the **processual component** of the event of change, **BE focuses on the result/final state**:

(24) a. *La casa   ha bruciato per un'ora/*in un'ora*
   the house has burnt for an hour/in an hour
   'The house has burnt for an hour'

  b. *La casa è bruciata in un'ora*
   the house is burnt in an hour
   'The house has burnt in an hour'

  c. *La casa è bruciata *di parecchio*
   the house is burnt by a lot
   'The house has burnt by a lot

- the pattern with *si* necessarily encodes a final state and it always correlates with the auxiliary BE.

Difficulties with current accounts

- The three subclasses identified in the literature **are not aspectually homogeneous**. Within each class there are verbs which do not fit well, passing tests for both telicity and atelicity.

- Virtually **all aspectual classes** may occur in the anticausative pattern with obligatory presence of *si* (i.e., class 1): **achievements**, **accomplishments**, **gradual completion verbs** (e.g., ((*s*)*vuotare,* 'empty' (25-26), *gonfiare*'swell' (27), **activities** (*esprimere* 'express, *ispirare* 'inspire' (28) and **states** (*basare* 'be based' (29) (Cennamo 1995; Jezek 2001, Jezek 2003 168-170):

- Gradual completion verbs*:*
  (25) a. *Il serbatoio si è vuotato in pochi minuti/*per tre ore*
        the tank RFL is emptied in few minutes/for three hours
        'The tank emptied in a few minutes/*for three hours'

- The verb *(s)vuotare*, 'empty', derived from the closed-scale adjective *vuoto* 'empty', behaves like a telic predicate according to the test for durativity (*for* X time) (26a), but the negation of the final state of the event seems to be felicitous :

(26) a. *Mario ha (s)vuotato il servatoio per ore, ma non è (ancora) vuoto*
   Mario has emptied the tank for hours, but not is (yet) empty
   'Mario has kept emptying the tank for hours, but ii is still not empty (not empty yet)'

   b. *il serbatoio si è (s)vuotato di parecchio, ma non è (completamente / ancora) vuoto*
   the tank RFL is emptied by a lot   but not is (completely/yet) empty
   'The tank emptied by a lot, but is is not (completely) empty, not empty yet'

- Conversely, *gonfiare* 'swell', a de-adjectival verb derived from an open scale adjective, although obligatorily occurring with *si* in the anticausative pattern, can occur with a durational adverbial phrase (27a):

(27) a. *I piedi si sono gonfiati per alcune ore*

      the feet RFL are swollen for some hours

      'The feet swelled up for some hours'

- ***Activities***

(28) *Per ora il malumore si esprime in lettere ai giornali*

For now the dissatisfaction RFL manifests in letters to-the
newspapers

'For the time being dissatisfaction manifests itself in letters to
newspapers'

- ***States***

(29) *una comunità omogenea   si   basa anchesu una mediocrità di fondo*
    a community homogeneous RFL bases also   on a   mediocrity of
    background
    'A homogeneous community is based also on some sort of mediocrity'

- Class 2 comprises not only **gradual completion verbs** (e.g., *aumentare* 'increase', but also **accomplishments** such as *cambiare* 'change', *affondare* 'sink', *guarire* 'heal') (Folli 2002) and **activities** (e.g. *continue* 'continuare')

(30) a. *la   nave è affondata *per un'ora   /in un'ora*
        the ship is sank   *for an hour/in   an hour
        'The ship sunk *for an hour/in an hour'
    b. *la situazione è cambiata per alcune ore/in un'ora*
        the situation is changed for some hours/in an hour
        'The situation changed for some hours/in an hour
    c. *la nave è affondata completamente*
        the ship is sunk completely
        'The ship sank completely'
    d. *la situazione è cambiata completamente*
        the situation is changed completely
        'The situation changed completely'

- *Cambiare* 'change' (31b) does not encode a final state, unlike *affondare* 'sink' (31a).

(31) e. *la nave sta affondando* ≠> *la nave è affondata*
　　　 'The ship is sinking'　　　 'The ship sank'
　　 f. *il tempo sta cambiando* → *il tempo è cambiato*
　　　 'The weather is changing'　 'The weather changed'

- **Activities**

(32) *la lezione è continuata per tre ore/*in pochi minuti*
　　 the lecture is continued for three hours/*in few minutes
　　 'The lecture has continued for three hours/*in three hours'

- Class 3 comprises **accomplishments** and **gradual completion verbs** (several verbs alternating the form with/without *si* are de-adjectival).

    – Although in the variant without *si* the pattern with the auxiliary BE tends to have a telic interpretation and the structure with HAVE tends to trigger an atelic reading, with some verbs (e.g., *bruciare* 'burn', *stingere* 'fade'), BE is not completed excluded from an atelic context and HAVE is not completely excluded from a telic one (Manente 2008: 212, Lo Cascio & Jezek 1999):

bruciare 'burn'

(33) a. Il bosco è bruciato/ha bruciato per giorni/completamente
      the wood is burnt/has burnt for days   (eventive/processual interpretation)
       'The wood burnt for days'

    b. Il bosco si è bruciato *per giorni
      the wood RFL is burnt for days
      'The wood burnt for days'

    c. Il bosco si è bruciato in poco tempo/completamente
      the wood RFL is burnt in short time/completely
      'The wood burnt in a short time'

    d. Il bosco è bruciato   (stative interpretation)
      'The wood is burnt down'

cuocere 'cook'

- The verb *cuocere* 'cook', instead, allows the auxiliary BE only in the pattern with *si*, in which the reflexive morpheme marks the completion of the event/degree of affectedness of the subject (the interpretation of the sentence implies that the meat cooked thoroughly). Without *si*, instead the pattern with BE has a stative reading.

cuocere 'cook'

(34) a.   *La carne ha cotto a lungo/in pochi minuti*
       the meat has cooked at length/in few minutes
       'The meat cooked for a long time/in a few minute'

   b.   *La carne è cotta *subito/*in pochi minuti*
       The meat is cooked*at-once/*in few minutes
       'The meat cooked immediately/in a few minutes'

   c.   *La carne si è cotta subito/in pochi minuti*
       The meat RFL is cooked at-once/in few minutes
       'The meat cooked immediately/at once'

   d.   *La carne è cotta*
       the meat is cooked
       'The meat is cooked'

- it is not clear why *cuocere* behaves differently from *bruciare*.
  - both verbs allow a **stative**, an **eventive**, a **resultative stative** interpretation, and yet *cuocere* does not allow the pattern without *si* and the auxiliary BE with an eventive/processual interpretation (**for* X time), unlike *bruciare*, with which both HAVE and BE are allowed in the pattern without the reflexive, both in the atelic and telic interpretation.

Possible answers

- the **lexical root of verbs** receiving varying aspectual interpretations, depending on the syntactic context in which they occur, such as *bruciare* 'burn', *fondere* 'melt', *gelare* 'ice', *bollire* 'boil', **is aspectually underspecified** (i.e., *same* lexical root, but different aspectual interpretations) (Manente (2008: 205-212).

- the **range of event schemas** in which a verb may occur **reflects the properties lexically encoded in its root** (Levin & Rappaport Hovav 2005, 2008, Rappaport Hovav 2008 and references therein).

Aspectually relevant lexical properties of verbs and Italian anticausatives (4)

- The traditional four-way Vendler classification does not fully account for the aspectual variability and the different morphosyntactic behaviour of verbs entering the anticausative alternation in Italian

- Variation in the morphosyntactic encoding and behaviour of anticausatives in Italian appears to reflect the **non-homogeneity of the class of accomplishments**.

A scale-based classification of verbs (4.1)

- Following a recent proposal concerning the classification of verbs on the basis of their aspectually relevant lexical properties (Beavers 2008, Rappaport Hovav 2008), **dynamic verbs** can be viewed as (potentially) involving the notion of change, and can be classified accordingly, in relation to the type of change, as **scalar/non-scalar change verbs**.

A scale-based classification of verbs (cont'd)

- The change lexicalized by **activities** such as *jog, run, waltz* is **nonscalar** (Rappaport Hovav 2008).
  - (controversial point)

- The change lexicalized by **change of state** verbs (i.e., a property scale) is **scalar**, involving a set of ordered values for a particular attribute, as with *widen, open*.

A scale-based classification of verbs (cont'd)

- Verbs which lexically specify a scalar change, may be further distinguished, in relation to the nature of the scale, as associated with a binary, **two-point scale**, or a polar, **multi-point scale** (Beavers 2008)
  - **binary** and **polar opposition** in Pustejovsky (2000).

Verb classification proposed (Rappaport Hovav 2008)

- **States** (*resemble, have, know*) encode no change; **achievements** encode a two-point scalar change (e.g., *crack*); **accomplishments** (e.g., *open, swell*), encode a multi-point scalar change.

Relevance of a scale-based verb classification for Italian anticausatives

- The notion of **scalar change**, in particular the distinction between a **two-point** and a **multi-point scalar change**, seems to offer an **interesting generalization** for capturing some uses of the reflexive morpheme *si* with anticausatives.

Hypothesis

- The reflexive morpheme *si* in some of its anticausative uses, may be regarded as a marker of *the presence of* a final state/result state in the lexical meaning of a verb, occurring with verbs *lexically encoding a scalar change*

  - either in all their uses — achievements such as (*romper(si)* 'break', and de-adjectival verbs such as s *(s)vuotar(si)* 'empty' and *gonfiar*(si) 'swell/inflate'
  - or in some of them, as with (accomplishment) verbs such as *bruciar(si)* 'burn', *cuocer(si)* 'cook', *gelar(si)* 'freeze', *fonder(si)* 'melt'), which appear instead in the intransitive form without *si* under their activity/processual reading, i.e., when they lexicalize a nonscalar change.

Unsolved problems

- This generalization does not account for the lack of *si* with verbs which lexicalize a final state such as *affondare* 'sink', *guarire* 'heal', and for other accomplishments such as *cambiare* 'change'.

- It remains to be investigated why verbs such as *cuocere* 'cook', only allow the stative interpretation of a pattern without *si* with BE (*la carne è cotta* 'the meat is cooked'), whereas other verbs such as *bruciare* 'burn', *gelare* 'ice' allow both HAVE and BE in the eventive/processual interpretation of the pattern without *si* (e.g., *il bosco ha bruciato/è bruciato per ore* 'The wood has burnt for hours').

Conclusions

- The anticausative alternation in Italian lies at the heart of the issue of the non-homogeneous internal temporal properties of accomplishments and of how particular components of lexicalised meaning may determine the aspectual properties of predicates and argument realization.

Claims

- Although the reflexive morpheme *si* in some of its anticausative uses seems to function as a general marker of detransitivization, **no unitary treatment of the direction of the derivation** of this construction **seems to be feasible**.

Claims (cont'd)

- The use of this structure also with activities and states, and its restriction to inanimates, points to the **need for a refinement of widely accepted general constraints**, such as "spontaneous manifestation of an eventuality, without the wilful intervention of a causer".

- This constraint applies only to the uses of the pattern involving **change of state/location verbs** (i.e., achievements/accomplishments), the core of the category in several languages (and in Italian as well).

Claims (cont'd)

- In some anticausative uses the reflexive marker *si* can be interpreted as a marker of *the presence of* a final state/result state in the lexical meaning of a verb, occurring with verbs *lexically encoding a scalar change*, either in all their uses, or in some of them.

Concluding observation

- Need for a deeper investigation of the factors determining the 'quirky' behaviour of verbs which escape the generalization proposed.

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