The anticausative alternation in Italian: constraints and variation

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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 $\rightarrow$ intransitive, or intransitive $\rightarrow$ 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*  
     Luisa has shortened the skirt  
     ‘Luisa shortened the skirt’

   b. *la gonna si è accorciata*  
     the skirt RFL is shortened  
     ‘The skirt has shrunk’

(2) a. *Luisa ha macchiato il vestito*  
     Luisa has stained the dress  
     ‘Luisa stained the dress’

   b. *il vestito si è macchiato*  
     the dress RFL is stained  
     ‘The dress got stained’

(3) *la gonna 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 \textbf{detransitivizer}, a marker of the suppressed causer (Cennamo 1995, Bentley 2006).
  
  - \( si \) is a \textbf{marker of the final state} (Folli 2002)/\textbf{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 (\textbf{target state} in Parson 1990; Jezek 2001, 2003, 2008).
Parameters licencing the alternation and possible constraints (2.3)

• Aspectual

• 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*  
    Luisa has lined the skirt  
    ‘Luisa lined the skirt’  

  b.  *la gonna si è foderato*  
    the skirt RFL is lined  
    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]


(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
[-sì]

• [-sì]: 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]

• [± si]: **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 poco/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* $\rightarrow$ *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) \textit{\textit{Mario sta bruciando la carne} > la carne \textit{\textit{\`e bruciata}}}
\textit{‘Mario is burning the meat’ > ‘The meat burnt’}

obligatory auxiliary BE selection in the pattern with \textit{si}:

(22) \textit{La carne \textit{si \textit{\`e bruciata}}}
The meat RFL is burnt
‘The meat got all burnt’

• Alternation HAVE/BE in the pattern without \textit{si}:

(23) a. \textit{La carne ha bruciato/\`e 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 anch'esa 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 completely 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).
• 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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