

*Variation and change in transitivity alternations
and argument realization in Italo-Romance*
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This paper discusses lexico-aspectual, thematic and discourse-pragmatic factors determining variation and change in the marking of the S argument in some (northern and southern) Italo-Romance varieties, focussing on two (in)transitivity alternations, auxiliary selection and postverbal subjects with one-argument verbs (and related agreement patterns), building on the insights from current analyses and discussion (Ledgeway 2019; 2023; Manzini & Savoia 2005; Cennamo 2010, Loporcaro 2016, among others for auxiliary selection; Parry 2000; 2013; Bentley 2018; 2020; Bentley & Cruschina 2018; Poletto & Tortora 2016, Cennamo 2023, among others for postverbal S) and from a gradient model of the lexico-aspectual and thematic effects on argument realization as instantiated by the S(plit) I(ntransitivity) H(ierarchy) put forward by Sorace (2000; 2010; 2015).

It will be shown that the same parameters affecting uniformity and variation in the selection of perfective auxiliaries with one-argument verbs in some northern (Biellese, Paduan) and southern (Campanian) Italo-Romance varieties (namely the degree of aspectual specification of verbs and of thematic specification of the S argument), also mold variation in another (in)transitivity alternation, postverbal subjects with monadic verbs with the S argument in a number of northern Italo-Romance dialects (eg, Ligurian, Piedmontese, Emilian-Romagnol), interacting with an additional feature, the (in)definiteness of the S argument, instantiated also by its lexical vs pronominal realization, in determining agreement options of the finite verb with the postverbal S (Bentley 2018; Bentley & Cennamo 2022). In the latter domain, however, in other dialects (e.g., inner Cilentano) semantic constraints appear to play no role in the distribution of agreement in VS patterns and there is instead a neat divide between unergative verbs (displaying \pm AGR of the finite V with S, the past participle always occurring in the non-agreeing form (e.g., *kiru ana/a abballatu tutti* ‘All the people danced’) and unaccusatives (exhibiting a three-way contrast, involving both the finite verb and the past participle), with the agreeing forms reflecting the d-link status of the postverbal S (*kiru a ffenuata la farina* vs *kiru a ffenu tu la farina* ‘We have run out of flour’), as in two varieties of Veneto Lagunare (*ze finia a farina* vs *ze finio a farina* ‘We have run out of flour’) (Schaefer 2020: 7).

In areas where variation is very unstable, patterns of change in progress may be detected in both types of alternations, concerning the introduction and cancellation of a split intransitive system marked through auxiliary selection (as in some Campanian and north eastern Piedmontese areas) and the spread of agreement with postverbal S, with the ensuing retrenchment/loss of the non-agreement pattern, sensitive to gradient lexico-aspectual, thematic and pragmatic features, as in some Ligurian, Piedmontese and Emilian – Romagnol varieties) (Parry 2000; 2005; 2013; Bentley 2018; Bentley & Cennamo 2022).

The data analysed therefore, show both categoriality and gradience in argument realization in the domains investigated, at times coexisting. The principled variation displayed by the data appear to be insightfully accounted for by empirical generalizations such as the SIH proposed by Sorace (2000) and the typology of S(ubject) of P(redication) put forward by Bentley & Cruschina (2018).

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