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# The spontaneous causativity of directed motion verbs in Southern Italian

## 1. Introduction & Background

The present study addresses the widely discussed topic of causative/inchoative alternations from the perspective of Italian and its regional varieties, which are the result of language contact between Standard Italian (SI) and the local minority languages, also called "dialects" (Berruto 1989, Cerruti 2011). Specifically, the different coding strategies used in causative/inchoative alternations in a subclass of unaccusatives, namely directed motion verbs, are analyzed here. Both SI and Southern Regional Italian (SRI) resort to three (anti-)causativization strategies, namely the incausative *si*, labile pairs, and the causativizer *fare* (Pescarini 2015, Schäfer 2008). However, with directed motion verbs, SI makes recourse to the analytic morpheme *fare* while SRI employs uncoded labile pairs.

The main aim of this study is to determine why two varieties of the same language, which coexist within the same community, display such a difference in coding strategies. To do this, I first discuss Haspelmath's (2017) spontaneity scale for causative/inchoative alternations. When applying the scale to SI and SRI, it becomes clear that it is necessary to add a new, language-specific, category, named "strict unaccusatives", indispensable in order to describe the different behaviors of SI and SRI. I then compare SI, SRI and Neapolitan and suggest that directed motion verbs are ranked higher on the spontaneity scale than automatic unaccusative verbs, but lower than strict unaccusatives. Ultimately, I argue that they occur at the borderline of the two categories.

## 2. Methods

Not being a native speaker of SRI, I had the help of two informants, native speakers of the Southern variety. They participated in semi-structured interviews, both in person and via phone call. Their answers mostly agreed with each other and with the literature. Examples in SI are produced by me, unless stated otherwise, while examples in SRI are either approved by native speakers, or taken from the literature.

## 3. Haspelmath's (2017) Spontaneity Scale

Haspelmath's (2017) work proposes two universals, which are derived from the grammatical form-frequency correspondence principle (Haspelmath 2014, 2017), which are reported below. From these universals, a spontaneity scale is derived. Verbs are ranked on it based on the likelihood of their spontaneous occurrence, in which the higher ranked (transitive verbs) tend to have causal meaning, while the lower ranked (agentful verbs) tend to have noncausal meaning.

**Universal 1 (Haspelmath 2017: 5)**

 "The higher the noncausal meaning of a causal-noncausal pair is on the spontaneity scale, the longer and the more analytic any causative marker on the causal verb form will be."

**Universal 2 (Haspelmath 2017: 5)**

"The lower the noncausal meaning of a causal-noncausal pair is on the spontaneity scale, the longer and the more analytic any anticausative marker on the noncausal verb form will be."

The scale is shown in (1) (Haspelmath 2017: 2)

(1) Transitive > unergative  >  automatic (unacc.)  >  costly (unacc.)  >  agentful

     (CUT)      (TALK)        (FREEZE (intr.))     (BREAK (intr.))      (BE CUT)

While the labels transitive and unergative are understandable and thus do not need further explanation, unaccusative verbs are divided into "automatic" and "costly". He defines automatic unaccusatives as

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those referring to a "process that is easily construed as occurring on its own, without any external energy input" (Haspelmath 2017: 3), and costly unaccusatives as those referring to a "process that does not so easily occur on its own, but typically involves some energy input" (Haspelmath 2017: 3).

Following the universals, verbal forms at the extremes of the scale will be the most explicitly marked, while basic non-derived verbs will be less marked and thus are more likely to appear in the middle of the scale (Haspelmath 2017: 2). (2) (Haspelmath 2017: 6) explicates this other coding scale, that can be paired with (1).

(2) Analytic causative > long c.  >  short  c.  >  labile  >  anticausative  >  analytic a.

AnaC                >   lgC   >    sC    >   labile >      A        >    AnaA

## 4. Haspelmath's (2017) scale and SI

Italian employs three different strategies (Table 1) to causativize unaccusatives, with there are only two categories belonging to unaccusative verbs. It can be argued that different (anti-)causativization strategies correspond to different (language specific) categories. In Italian, the difference between costly and automatic unaccusatives is quite clear: costly verbs are derived from transitive ones by the addition of the analytic anticausative *si*, while automatic verbs participate in labile alternations (Schäfer 2008: 13). On the other hand, from Table 1 it seems that automatic unaccusatives accept two strategies for causativization. This is, in fact, not true: verbs can clearly be divided into those that participate in the labile alternation and those that can only be causativized with *fare*. The first include verbs such as *affondare* "sink", *cambiare* "change", "improve", (Schäfer 2008), among others. Verbs that can only be causativized with *fare* include verbs such as directed motion verbs, verbs like *arrivare* "arrive", *morire* "die", *rimanere* "remain", and many others. This difference in coding strategies suggests that labile automatic verbs and unaccusative verbs that must be causativized with *fare* (henceforth "strict unaccusatives") can be considered different categories. This implies that, for Italian, another category must be added to the Spontaneity Scale.

| | Transitive | Unergative | Automatic unacc. | Costly unacc. | Agentful |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Italian** | AnaC | AnaC | AnaC/Labile | AnaA | AnaA |

**Table 1**

Strict unaccusatives are placed between unergative and automatic unaccusative verbs, since this is the only position in which the coding scale in (2) and the universals would be respected.

Table 2 zooms in on the borderline between strict and automatic unaccusatives and compares SI, SRI and Neapolitan (Ledgeway 2009: 850-852) coding strategies. What becomes clear is that the directed motion verbs subclass in RSI is the only one that survived the shift from labile strategy (Neapolitan) to analytic causative (SI). This suggests that directed motion verbs are more resilient to change than other (stricter) unaccusative verbs such as *arrivare* and *andare*. This is evidence in favor  of directed motion verbs being more spontaneously noncausal than automatic unaccusatives, but less so than strict unaccusatives. This means that directed motion verbs are higher on the Spontaneity Scale than automatic unaccusatives, but lower than strict ones. Moreover, it appears clear that between strict unaccusatives and automatic unaccusatives there is a continuum, and that directed motion verbs are in the borderline between the two categories.

| | Strct Unaccusatives | | Automatic Unaccusatives | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Rimanere* (remain) | Directed motion verbs | *Crescere* (raise) | *Affondare* (sink) |
| **SI** | AnaC | AnaC | Labile | Labile |
| **SRI** | AnaC | Labile | Labile | Labile |
| **Neapolitan** | Labile | Labile | Labile | Labile |

Ref **Table 2**

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