

Diachronic paths to reduction and maintenance of overabundancy in Italian verb paradigms

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Italian is a language that, for historical reasons (cf. De Mauro 1963: 30-31), presents many cases of *overabundancy*, i.e., two or more forms realizing the same cell in an inflectional paradigm (cf. Thornton in press, 2009).¹ Such forms often go under the label of *doublets*, but Thornton (in press, 2009), following a suggestion by Michele Loporcaro, proposes the more general term *cell-mates*, because there are cases in which the forms realizing the same cell of a paradigm are more than two, as in the examples in (1):

- (1) Latin *fecērunt / fecērun̄t / fecēre* 'do:3PL.PRF.IND'
 Italian *apparve / apparse / apparì* 'appear:3SG.PRF.IND'

This talk addresses the relationship between maintenance or reduction of overabundancy and frequency. The main body of data is represented by the Italian cases already investigated in Thornton (in press, 2009).² These papers investigated the presence of overabundancy in contemporary standard written Italian, as represented by a corpus containing 16 years (1985-2000) of issues of the daily newspaper *la Repubblica*, available online at <http://dev.sslmit.unibo.it/corpora/corpus.php?path=&name=Repubblica>. This analysis showed that in certain cases overabundant cells containing phonologically and morphologically parallel forms have a different synchronic status. For example, the forms realizing the overabundant cells in 1SG and 3PL of the Present Indicative and Present Subjunctive of *VEDERE* 'see', *CHIEDERE* 'ask', *SEDERE* 'sit' and *POSSEDERE* 'possess' in the *Repubblica* corpus have the frequencies shown in Tables 1 and 2 respectively:

Table 1 /d/ vs. /gg/ forms of *VEDERE* 'see' and *CHIEDERE* 'ask'

<i>VEDERE</i> 'see', <i>CHIEDERE</i> 'ask' /d/ forms and their frequency	/gg/ forms and their frequency			
1SG.PRS.IND	vedo > 10.000	chiedo 7402	veggo 9	chieggo 1
3PL.PRS.IND	vedono > 10.000	chiedono > 10.000	veggono 4	chieggono 0
SG. PRS.SBJV	veda 1944	chieda 1675	vegga 2	chiegga 0
3PL. PRS.SBJV	vedano 685	chiedano 464	veggano 0	chieggano 0

¹ The term *overabundancy* is inspired by the Italian meta-grammatical term *sovraabbondanza*.

² The cases investigated were the following:

vado / vo 'go:1SG.PRS.IND', *faccio / fo* 'do:1SG.PRS.IND';

-bb- / *-v-* forms of *DOVERE* 'must' (e.g., *devo / debbo* 'must:1SG.PRS.IND');

-gg- / *-d-* forms of *SEDERE*, *POSSEDERE*, *VEDERE*, *CHIEDERE* 'sit, possess, see, ask' (e.g., *vedo / veggo* 'see:1SG.PRS.IND');

[tʃ] / [ttʃ] forms of 1PL.PRS.IND of *PIACERE*, *TACERE* (e.g., *taciamo / tacciamo* 'be_quiet:1PL.PRS.IND');

syncopated / unsyncopated Future and Conditional forms of *ANDARE*, *GODERE*, *UDIRE*, *MORIRE* 'go, enjoy, hear, die' (e.g., *morirò / morirò* 'die:1SG.FUT.IND');

Strong / weak forms of Passato Remoto of *APRIRE* 'open', *OFFRIRE* 'offer', and many *-ere* verbs (e.g., *perse / perdé* 'lose:3SG.PRF');

Strong / weak forms of Past Participle of *-ere* verbs (e.g., *perso / perduto* 'lose:PST.PTCP') and of *SEPPELLIRE* 'bury';

Forms with / without diphthong ('*dittongo mobile*') in *SEDERE* (e.g., *siederò / sederò* 'sit:1SG.FUT');

Imperative singular of *ANDARE*, *FARE*, *DARE*, *STARE* 'go, do, give, stay' (e.g., *và / vai* 'go:2SG.IMP');

-ei / *-etti* forms in Passato Remoto of *-ere* verbs (e.g., *temei / temetti* 'fear:1SG.PRF');

forms with and without *-isc-* in *-ire* verbs (e.g., *appaio / apparisco* 'appear:1SG.PRS.IND').

Table 2 /d/ vs. /gg/ forms of SEDERE 'sit' and POSSEDERE 'possess'

SEDERE 'sit', POSSEDERE 'possess'	/d/ forms and their frequency		/gg/ forms and their frequency	
1 SG. PRS. IND	siedo 118	possiedo 140	seggo 6	posseggo 95
3 PL. PRS. IND	siedono 2008	possiedono 1236	seggono 47	posseggono 755
SG. PRS. SBJV	sieda 156	possieda 174	segga 8	possegga 132
3 PL. PRS. SBJV	siedano 113	possiedano 46	seggano 12	posseggano 65

It appears from the data in Tables 1 and 2 that while the /gg/ forms of VEDERE and CHIEDERE are extinct in contemporary usage, the /gg/ forms of SEDERE and POSSEDERE are in good health, and sometimes more frequent than their /d/ cell-mates.

The question then arises what factors have caused such a synchronic situation. Why were the /gg/ forms of VEDERE and CHIEDERE eliminated, while those of SEDERE and POSSEDERE were retained?

The present contribution addresses this problem by looking at the frequency and the distribution of both the retained and the eliminated cell-mates in previous stages of the language.

Other studies have shown that frequency and distributional properties of certain forms in past stages of a language can be useful to explain present synchronic situations (e.g., Baerman 2008 on Russian defective verbs).

The diachronic investigation of cell-mates in Italian verb paradigms will be conducted using the LIZ corpus (containing an extremely large selection of Italian literary texts from the 13th to the early 20th century; cfr. Stoppelli & Picchi (eds.) 2001) and the DiaCORIS corpus, containing written Italian texts of several registers, produced between 1861 and 1945 (Onelli et al.).

References

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