Paths of change in the diachrony of anticausatives in Romance:
the rise and fall of lability

This paper investigates the diachrony of anticausativization in some Romance languages, namely Italian, French and Brazilian Portuguese, in relation to the labile vs reflexive marking of this type of intransitive alternation across the different lexico-aspectual classes of verbs.

More specifically, it explores the role played by the interplay of the *aspectual template of verbs*, the *verb's inherent meaning* (the 'root'), and the *nature of the subject* (e.g., animacy and control) in determining the distribution of the different strategies available to mark anticausativization — the active intransitive (i.e., lability) and the reflexive (SE) —, in Old French, Old Italian and contemporary Brazilian Portuguese, where anticausative SE is receding, as part and parcel of its demise as a voice marker (Cyrino 2013).

It is shown that in Old Italian, although functioning as a marker of thematic reduction, the reflexive tends to occur most prominently with verbs lexicalizing change, alternating with the active intransitive (1), with hints of the gradual gaining ground of aspectual notions such as telicity in determining the preference of SE to mark anticausatives, interacting with the restructuring of the voice system in compound tenses (Cennamo 2012: 407).

(1) a. *lo   mio ... sonno ... **si**   **ruppe***   (Dante, *Vita Nuova*, 3,1-9, p.14.9)
       the   my   sleep   RFL   break.PST.3SG
       'My sleep was interrupted'
    b. (*la   terra*) **ruppe**…   (Bono Giamboni, *Vizi e Virtudi*, 59, p. 98.6-7)
        the   earth   break.PST.3SG
        '(The earth) opened up …'

The role played by aspectual notions in the diachrony of this type of intransitive alternation is also apparent in the retrenching and loss of lability for some verbs in Old French, in favour of the reflexive morpheme, most typically alternating with the active intransitive, the sole/most widespread strategy in Old French (2) (Heidinger 2010: 73-86; 2014: 1018-1020; Cennamo 2021: 284-285):

(2) … *li   maz   **froisse***   (*Guillaume d'Angleterre*, verse 239) (Heidinger 2010: 34)
       the   mast   crush.PRS.3SG
    '…the mast breaks into pieces'

A different picture obtains from the ongoing loss of SE as a voice marker in Brazilian Portuguese, whereby lability occurs also with achievements, i.e., with telic, punctual verbs in anticausative patterns (3):

(3) *o   vaso   **quebrou***   (Carvalho 2016: 77)
      the   vase   break.PST.3SG
    'The vase broke'

Two paths of change emerge in the diachrony of anticausatives in the Romance languages investigated: (i), the gradual association of SE with verbs lexicalizing telic change in Italian and French, starting from the alternation between the reflexive and the active intransitive in Old Italian, and lability as the sole/main anticausative strategy in Old French, (ii), the loss of SE and the use of the active intransitive as the sole anticausativization strategy in Brazilian Portuguese. In both types of change, i.e., the loss and rise of lability, the aspectual properties of verbs appear to play a key-role, interacting with the voice domain in Italian and Brazilian Portuguese.

The Romance data investigated, therefore, appear to offer an interesting contribution to the current debate on the role played by the verb's inherent meaning and its interaction and integration with the event structure template of predicates in determining argument realization, showing the relevance of these notions for a better understanding of the diachrony of anticausativization.

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