

Verb-particle Constructions and Prefixed Verbs in Italian: Typology, Diachrony and Semantics*

Claudio Iacobini
Università di Salerno
ciacobini@unisa.it

Francesca Masini
Università Roma Tre
fmasini@uniroma3.it

Abstract

Verb-particle constructions are generally regarded as a peculiar property of Germanic languages. In this paper we show that verb-particle constructions also exist in Italian. The presence of verb-particle constructions in Romance languages seems to contradict Talmy's generalization about "frame-based languages" and "satellite-based languages", which makes these constructions a rather interesting typological issue. Further, the typological perspective raises the question of the development of these complex verbs in the Italian language. The paper briefly deals with these typological and diachronic issues and then focuses on the semantic properties of these constructions in present-day Italian. In particular, we will analyse the actional properties of Italian post-verbal particles. The results of the analysis allow us to outline the diachronic and synchronic relationship between verbal prefixes and post-verbal particles, which turn out to cooperate in the expression of locative and aspectual meanings.

1. Introduction

The paper deals with verb-particle constructions (hereinafter VPC), i.e. complex predicates formed by a verbal base and a modifying particle. In recent years, a lot of interest has been devoted to these constructions, and investigation has been focusing mostly on the structure of VPCs in the Germanic languages, where the pattern is very productive and widespread in use.

Recently, some studies have showed that similar constructions also exist in Italian (cf. e.g. Schwarze 1985, Venier 1996, Simone 1997, Antelmi 2002, Jezek 2002, Iacobini 2003, Jansen 2004, Masini 2006, Cini, in press). Some examples of Italian VPCs are given in (1).

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|-----|----------------------|----------------|---|
| (1) | <i>venire giù</i> | lit. come down | ‘to come down, to descend’ |
| | <i>portare via</i> | lit. take away | ‘to take away’ |
| | <i>mettere sotto</i> | lit. put under | ‘to put (something) under, to run over’ |

Besides confirming the existence of VPCs in this language, our contribution aims at improving our knowledge of the semantic and aspectual properties of VPCs in Italian and, possibly, in general. In particular, we will provide new data that show that Italian post-verbal particles contribute to the *Aktionsart* of VPCs, which may be regarded as a further evidence of their establishment in the system. In the light of these results, we will take into consideration the diachronic and synchronic relationship between verbal prefixes and post-verbal particles in the expression of locative and aspectual meanings.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides an overview of the phenomenon of VPCs in Italian and in general. In particular, section 2.1 summarizes the previous studies on VPCs in general and clarifies our theoretical position and goals, whereas section 2.2 outlines the typological and diachronic background of VPCs in Italian. In section 3 we offer a brief structural and semantic description of Italian VPCs. Section 4 contains the actional analysis. After introducing the framework and the criteria adopted here, we will illustrate the findings of the analysis, which was carried out on a corpus of 165 Italian VPCs. Particular attention will be devoted to the telicity feature. Finally, section 5 faces the question of the relationship between VPCs and verbal prefixation, whereas section 6 contains some conclusive remarks.

2. Verb-particle Constructions: An Overview

In this section, we will offer an overview of VPCs, from both a theoretical and a typological standpoint. In section 2.1 we will offer a brief account of previous studies on VPCs. Further, we will outline the theoretical assumptions adopted here, as well as the main goal of our contribution, i.e. the investigation of the actional properties of Italian VPCs. Section 2.2 will add some typological remarks on the distribution of VPCs among Indo-European languages and will advance some diachronic considerations about their development in Italian. This will set the discussion for the secondary goal of the paper, i.e. the comparison between VPCs and verbal prefixation (cf. section 5).

2.1. Theoretical Background

VPCs in English (also known as *phrasal verbs* or *particle verbs*), have been largely studied, suffice it to mention the contributions by Bolinger (1971), Fraser (1976), Dixon (1982), and, more lately, den Dikken (1995) and Dehé (2002). As for the other Germanic languages, cf. e.g. Booij (2002a,b) and Blom (2005) for Dutch, Stiebels & Wunderlich (1994), Lüdeling (2001) and Müller (2002) for German, Toivonen (2003) for Swedish and Jansen (2002) for Danish¹. Further, VPCs have been also identified in

¹ Cf. Haiden (2002) for a comparative overview of the phenomenon in the various Germanic languages.

Ugro-Finnic languages such as Estonian and Hungarian (cf. e.g. Ackerman & Webelhuth 1998, Ackerman 2003).

Over the last decade, in Generative Grammar there has been an increasing interest in VPCs in the Germanic languages, which was mainly due to their ambiguous structural status between words and phrases (cf. the introductory chapter in Dehé *et alii* 2002). Indeed, the big question was: do they belong to morphology or syntax? This demarcation problem of course refers to a modular architecture of the grammar in which the components are autonomous and distinct from each other. Consequently, the different proposals to unravel the puzzle were based on a series of syntactic and semantic criteria that pointed at demonstrating the word-like or phrase-like status of these constructions. Of course, a number of different technical solutions were put forward to account for the properties of VPCs, from the Small-Clause analysis (cf., among the others, den Dikken 1995) to the “non-projecting word” proposal for particles (cf. Toivonen 2003). However, until today, generative grammarians have not reached a general agreement on the kind of structure to assign to VPCs.

A new perspective on the issue, which we will adopt here, was introduced by Booij (2002a,b). In his contributions, Booij claims that VPCs in Dutch (i.e. so-called *Separable Complex Verbs*) are a case of “periphrastic word formation”, i.e. lexical items that behave functionally as complex words but display a phrasal structure. Technically speaking, these complex verbs are regarded as *constructional idioms*², i.e. semi-specified syntactic structures with a (partially) noncompositional meaning that are stored in the lexicon and display a limited productivity. As Booij states, his proposal is in line with the basic tenets of Construction Grammar (cf. Fillmore, Kay & O’Connor 1988, Goldberg 1995, 2003), which claims that language consists in a network of constructions, i.e. form-meaning pairings differing in size and complexity. Of course, this implies a non-modular view of language and the presence of a syntax-morphology-lexicon *continuum*³.

This scalar vision of grammar allows us to leave the demarcation problem in the background, due to the non-strict separation between what we traditionally refer to as the modules of the grammar. Given this, VPCs are no longer an anomaly from the point of view of the structure, but rather an expected case. Of course, this does not mean that the demarcation of phenomena is not relevant. Indeed, it is important for the individuation of the links between the different constructions. However, a lot of play is also made about the construction itself, its meaning or function, and the interaction between the constituting elements.

The constructionist standpoint just envisaged encouraged us to face an important though nowadays overshadowed issue, i.e. the semantics of VPCs, and in particular their actional properties with respect to the verbal bases and the kind of particles used. Indeed, whereas earliest contributions reflected the importance of the semantic properties of VPCs (cf. e.g. Bolinger 1971, Dixon 1982, Lindner 1983, Brinton 1988), recent works have devoted less attention to semantics, with some notable exceptions (cf. Jackendoff 2002a for English, McIntyre 2001, 2002 for German, Blom 2005 for Dutch).

The literature on Germanic VPCs usually describes their semantics according to the following tripartite classification (cf. in particular Dehé *et alii* 2002):

² The notion of *constructional idiom* can be found both in Goldberg (1995) and in Jackendoff (1997, 2002b).

³ Cf. Booij (2005a) for a constructionist approach to morphology and Booij (2005b) for considerations about the interaction and interdependency of morphology and syntax.

- i. *locative meanings*, due to the fact that VPCs originate from the combination of motion verbs and locative particles;
- ii. *idiomatic meanings*, due to semantic bleaching;
- iii. *aspectual and/or actional meanings*, with particular reference to telicity and duration.

While points *i* and *ii* can be easily applied to the Italian situation (Simone 1997, Masini 2005; cf. also section 3.2), point *iii* has not been investigated yet and will be the topic of our discussion.

In conclusion, the goal of this paper is twofold. On the one hand, we aim at contributing to the study of VPCs in general by extending the research to a new language, i.e. Italian. On the other hand, we decided to focus on semantics rather than on structure, in order to investigate a so far unknown area: the *Aktionsart* of these constructions in Italian.

2.2. Typological Background and Diachronic Development

Italian VPCs constitute an interesting case also from a typological viewpoint. According to the well-known study on lexicalization patterns found in Talmy (1985), the motion event consists of four internal components (*Figure*, *Ground*, *Path* and *Motion*) and some external components such as *Manner/Cause*⁴. Talmy identifies two main lexicalization patterns for verbal roots in Indo-European languages, i.e. *Motion+Manner/Cause* and *Motion+Path*. These two patterns typically correspond to Germanic and Romance languages respectively⁵. As a consequence, Germanic languages are defined as *satellite framed languages*, as they lexicalize the Manner/Cause of the motion event and specify the directional values by means of external particles, while Romance languages would be an example of *verb framed languages*, as they lexicalize the Path and leave the Manner/Cause specification to adjuncts. This situation is illustrated in Table 1.

LANGUAGE FAMILY	THE COMPONENTS OF A MOTION EVENT TYPICALLY REPRESENTED IN THE VERB	
	<i>Verb Root</i>	<i>Satellite</i>
Romance languages	Motion + Path (e.g. Spanish <i>poner</i> , <i>meter</i> , <i>subir</i>)	Ø
Other Indo-European languages (mainly Germanic)	Motion + Manner/Cause (e.g. English <i>to roll</i> , <i>to blow</i> , <i>to throw</i>)	Path (e.g. English <i>to run out</i>)

Table 1. Typology of verbs of motion and satellites in Indo-European languages
(adapted from Talmy 1985)

⁴ In the terminology of Talmy (2000b), these external components are defined as *co-events*.

⁵ Talmy uses English and Spanish as sample languages for the Germanic and Romance types.

However, if we take into consideration Italian VPCs such as those exemplified in (1), it will be clear that present-day Italian differs from other major Romance languages, and in particular from Spanish, as regards Talmy's generalization. Indeed, the primary function of Italian post-verbal particles seems to be the addition of directional values to the verbal root. Hence, they function as true satellites, just as in the Germanic languages. Of course, this does not mean that Italian lacks verbal roots of the "Romance type". Rather, we would say that they are no longer the *only* or the *privileged* way of realizing the Path feature in Italian⁶. In fact Table 2, which contains some examples of English VPCs with the verbal base *to go* and their Italian counterparts, illustrates that, in current use, Italian can employ both the "Romance type" (central column) and the "Germanic type" (right column).

English <i>to go</i>	Italian <i>andare</i>	
VERB ROOT + SATELLITE	VERB ROOT	VERB ROOT + SATELLITE
<i>to go after</i>	<i>seguire</i>	<i>andare/correre dietro</i>
<i>to go ahead</i>	<i>procedere/continuare</i>	<i>andare avanti</i>
<i>to go away</i>	<i>andarsene</i>	<i>andare via</i>
<i>to go back</i>	<i>(ri)tornare</i>	<i>andare/tornare indietro</i>
<i>to go down</i>	<i>scendere</i>	<i>andare giù</i>
<i>to go for</i>	<i>avventarsi</i>	<i>andare/lanciarsi contro</i>
<i>to go in</i>	<i>entrare</i>	<i>andare dentro</i>
<i>to go on</i>	<i>continuare</i>	<i>andare avanti</i>
<i>to go out</i>	<i>uscire</i>	<i>andare fuori</i>
<i>to go (a)round</i>	<i>girare</i>	<i>andare attorno</i>
<i>to go up</i>	<i>salire</i>	<i>andare su</i>

Table 2. Some English VPCs with to go compared with their Italian counterparts

It is worth noting that also Latin belongs to the satellite framed family. In fact, Latin had a very productive system of verbal prefixes that functioned as satellites. This is quite interesting in diachronic terms, as it means that, in the passage from Latin to Italian, there was a change in the kind of satellites used for the expression of the Path in verbal constructions (from prefixes to particles). This induces us to advance some considerations concerning the development of VPCs in Italian (cf. Iacobini 2003, Masini 2005, 2006).

In our view, three major factors can be identified that contributed to the development of Italian VPCs. First of all, the passage to a more diagrammatic technique of overt locative marking, due to the morphosemantic bleaching of the Latin prefixed motion verbs in the Romance languages (cf. Schwarze 1985). As you can see from Table 3, Italian has both synthetic forms, which derive directly from Latin and are no

⁶ For typological considerations about the way Italian lexicalizes Path and Manner verbs cf. Wienold & Schwarze (2002).

longer morphologically analysable, and analytic forms, which can be considered as a true Italian formation⁷.

LATIN transparent locative prefixation		ITALIAN synthetic forms inherited from Latin		ITALIAN analytic forms (VPCs)	
<i>ascendere</i> 'to ascend'	<i>discendere</i> 'to descend'	<i>salire</i>	<i>scendere</i>	<i>andare su</i>	<i>andare giù</i>
<i>inire</i> 'to enter'	<i>exire</i> 'to go away'	<i>entrare</i>	<i>uscire</i>	<i>andare dentro</i>	<i>andare fuori</i>

Table 3. Synthetic and analytic verbs of motion in Latin and Italian

Secondly, a crucial role was played by the weakening of Italian verbal prefixation to express locative meanings (cf. Iacobini 2005), which also contributed to the morphosemantic bleaching of Latin prefixed verbs. Contrary to Latin, Italian verbal prefixes do not seem to be very productive for the expression of locative meanings, as Table 4 illustrates⁸.

LATIN transparent locative prefixation		ITALIAN weakness of verbal prefixation	ITALIAN VPC
<i>inocere</i>	'to throw into'	* <i>inbuttare</i>	<i>buttare dentro</i>
<i>euocere</i>	'to throw out'	* <i>sbuttare</i>	<i>buttare fuori</i>
<i>subocere</i>	'to throw under'	* <i>sottobuttare</i>	<i>buttare sotto</i>
<i>deocere</i>	'to throw down'	* <i>debuttare</i> ⁹	<i>buttare giù</i>

Table 4. Verbal prefixation and verb-particle formations in Latin and Italian

Thirdly, Italian presents a higher degree of analyticity with respect to Latin. In particular, it developed a quite elaborate set of prepositions that are used very efficiently. Of course, the rise of prepositions in Italian (and the other Romance languages) is related to the loss of the Latin morphological case for the expression of syntactic relations. In this respect, Jansen (2004) remarks that the widespread use of a network of different constructions built around a locative element (which the author calls *particle*) might be seen as a factor that fosters the entrenchment of the scheme for VPCs.

In conclusion, Italian VPCs are an interesting typological and diachronic issue. On the one hand, they do not conform to the typological classification in Talmy (1985,

⁷ Apart from *salire* 'to ascend', which is of Indo-European origin and constitutes a good example of lexicalization of the Path into the verbal root, *scendere* 'to descend' and *uscire* 'to exit' depend on the bleaching of the prefix, whereas *entrare* 'to enter' derives from the Latin *intrare* 'to go inside', which is formed from the preposition *intra* 'inside'. This word formation pattern is no longer productive in Italian, therefore, even if *entrare* presents striking similarities with the preposition *entro* 'by', it cannot derive synchronically from the latter.

⁸ We will come back to this point in section 5.

⁹ Of course the verb *debuttare* exists in Italian, but it is a loan from French meaning 'to debut'.

2000b), thus setting Italian apart from the other major Romance languages. On the other hand, they allow to trace a diachronic opposition between prefixes and particles as different possible realizations of the satellite category. This of course testifies to the interaction between morphological and phrasal constructions, which is in line with and predicted by a constructionist view of language. In section 5 we will expand on this subject. In particular, we will study the interaction between particles and prefixes, or better between VPCs and prefixed verbs, in contemporary Italian. Before passing on to the analysis, we will have a closer look at the formal and semantic properties of Italian VPCs.

3. Italian Verb-particle Constructions

Traditionally, Italian VPCs are quite a neglected topic in Italian linguistics. In recent years, however, they succeeded in catching the attention of the scholars. After the seminal articles by Schwarze (1985) and Simone (1997), a number of studies emerged on the matter (cf. Venier 1996, Antelmi 2002, Jezek 2002, Iacobini 2003, Jansen 2004, Masini 2005, 2006).

However, although the attention on Italian VPCs is relatively recent, the phenomenon is not a recent innovation in this language, as it was already attested in Ancient Italian texts (cf. Jansen 2004, Masini 2005, 2006). Actually, some traces can be detected also in late Latin (e.g. *ire via*, documented by Prisciano, V/VI cent. AD). Vicario (1997), who gives an interesting diachronic account of VPCs in Friulian (a Romance variety spoken in the North-Eastern part of Italy)¹⁰, traces back the phenomenon to the XIV century. The author studies its increasing diffusion until the present days and compares the Friulian situation with the one to be found in Standard Italian.

Nowadays, VPCs seem to be an ever more widespread lexical resource in Standard Italian, especially, though not only, in the spoken language and in less formal texts. Some VPCs have synthetic synonyms, e.g. *entrare – andare dentro* ‘to enter’, *introdurre/immettere – mettere dentro* ‘to put in(side)’, while others represent original lexicalizations of certain concepts, like e.g. *restare fuori* ‘to stay outside/to be excluded’.

In this paper we will not further discuss about the diachronic origin of these constructions and we will rather concentrate on their place and role in present-day Standard Italian. In the following sections, we will give a brief description of Italian VPCs, in terms of structure (3.1) and semantics (3.2).

3.1. Structure

As Brinton (1988: 163-64) rightly notices, one might classify as VPCs quite different constructions depending on the criteria used, since particles may form more or less cohesive units with the verbal bases. In particular, VPCs are quite similar to combinations of verb plus a prepositional or adverbial phrase. Of course, distinguishing VPCs from similar constructions with prepositions and adverbs is “closely related to the

¹⁰ Cf. Cini (2002) for an account of VPCs in some dialects spoken in the alpine valleys between Piedmont and France. Cf. also the dialectal section in Cini (ed.) (in press)

problem of classifying the particles in respect to part of speech” Brinton (1988: 165). Besides this, within the VPC itself one can recognize a series of different – though closely related – configurations.

In this paper we will refer to the minimal VPC configuration exemplified in (2). This structure consists of a simple (non-pronominal, non-reflexive) verbal base (V), which can be both intransitive (2a) and transitive (2b,c), and a post-verbal modifying particle (P), which corresponds to a locative adverb. The VPC itself may be both intransitive (2a) and transitive (2b,c)¹¹.

- (2) [[]_V []_P]_{VPC} P = LOCATIVE ADVERB
- a. [[andare]_V [su]_P]_{VPC} lit. go up ‘to go up, to ascend’
- b. [[mettere]_V [giù]_P]_{VPC} lit. put down ‘to put down’
- c. [[mandare]_V [avanti]_P]_{VPC} lit. send forward ‘to run’ (e.g. a business)

Besides this minimal configuration, a number of other possibilities can be found. For instance, apart from reflexive forms, one may find different kinds of pronominal verbs in V position, as (3) illustrates (cf. Simone 1997)¹².

- (3) a. *far-se-la sotto*
do-reflexive.PRT-pronominal.PRT under
‘to quake in one’s boots’
- b. *ber-ci sopra*
drink-locative.PRT up
‘to drink to forget something’

Moreover, the P position may be filled by elements other than simple locative elements. For instance, we can find temporal (e.g. *fare presto* lit. do early ‘to hurry up’) or manner (e.g. *finire male* lit. finish bad ‘to come to a bad end’) adverbs.

Finally, some VPCs including a locative adverb obligatorily occur with a prepositional phrase, usually introduced by the preposition *a* ‘to’ (cf. 4 below).

- (4) a. *andare dietro a qualcuno*
go behind to someone
‘to follow, to imitate, to like/court’
- b. *passare sopra a qualcosa*
pass on to something
‘to pass/transit, to forgive, to let something pass’

¹¹ The VPC does not necessarily maintain the syntactic properties of the verbal base. One of the most notable changes in this sense is the passage from a transitive and/or unergative V to an unaccusative VPC (cf. note 27).

¹² In the examples that follow we will make use of the following abbreviations (in alphabetical order): 3=third person; FUT=future; PART.PAST=past participle; PRT=particle; SG=singular.

The examples in (4) are structurally ambiguous, since they can be interpreted either as VPCs that govern a prepositional phrase, or as VPCs with complex prepositions in P position (here *dietro a* and *sopra a*).

In our analysis we limited ourselves to the minimal configuration in (2), mainly due to two reasons. First, the VPC configuration in (2) is by far the most common. Second, we wanted to carry out the analysis on a coherent corpus in terms of type of verbal bases and particles. In particular, it was important to include in the list of particles only locative adverbs, for reasons that will become clearer.

As regards their syntactic behaviour, Italian VPCs display a particular cohesion that distinguishes them from sequences formed by a verb followed by a prepositional or an adverbial phrase¹³.

First of all, it seems that VPCs can be separated only by light non-argumental constituents (such as light adverbs and clitics), as (5) illustrates¹⁴.

- (5) a. *Irene ha buttato via la bambola*
Irene have.3SG throw.PART.PAST away the doll
'Irene threw the doll away'
- b. ??*Irene ha buttato la bambola via*
Irene have.3SG throw.PART.PAST the doll away

Secondly, Ps cannot be topicalized or left-dislocated with the construction *è... che* 'it is... that'.

- (6) a. *Luigi è saltato fuori all'improvviso*
Luigi be.3SG jump.PART.PAST out suddenly
'Luigi suddenly popped up'
- b. **Fuori Luigi è saltato all'improvviso*
Out Luigi be.3SG jump.PART.PAST suddenly
- c. **È fuori che Luigi è saltato all'improvviso*
be.3SG out that Luigi be.3SG jump.PART.PAST suddenly

Thirdly, in coordinating structures VPCs behave as constituents (7a,b), contrary to verbs followed by a prepositional phrase (7c,d).

¹³ For details on the syntactic diagnostics cf. also Simone (1997: 163-166), Antelmi (2002: 101-102) and Masini (2005).

¹⁴ Actually, in the spoken language one may find occasional examples of interposition of the direct object between V and P, like in the following case: *Spero che non mandino le pagine indietro* 'I hope they won't send the pages back'. Such examples are comparable with object shift phenomena in English. As is known, object shift was a later innovation in English with respect to the rise of post-verbal particles, which were originally more bound to the verb. The choice of the particle position in current English is highly influenced by information structure (cf. Dehé 2002). For an analysis of the phenomenon in Italian cf. Masini (in press).

- (7) a. *Max porterà su la scacchiera e Yuri ___ i pezzi*
 Max bring.FUT up the chessboard and Yuri ___ the pieces
 ‘Max will bring the chessboard and Yuri the pieces’
- b. **Max porterà su la scacchiera e Yuri su i pezzi*
 Max bring.FUT up the chessboard and Yuri up the pieces
- c. *Max gioca sulla scacchiera nuova e Yuri su quella vecchia*
 Max play.3SG on.the chessboard new and Yuri on that old
 ‘Max plays on the new chessboard and Yuri on the old one’
- d. **Max gioca sulla scacchiera nuova e Yuri ___ quella vecchia*
 Max play.3SG on.the chessboard new and Yuri ___ that old

Of course, there is a gradient in the acceptability of the examples, mostly depending on the transparent vs. opaque semantics of the VPC. However, we can say that, generally speaking, Italian VPCs display a peculiar syntactic behaviour that sets them apart from other free syntactic structures.

3.2. The Semantics of Italian VPCs

From a semantic point of view, we may distinguish two main scenarios, in which the VPCs have either a **locative** or an **idiomatic** meaning.

In the first case, the particle may function as a direction marker, as in (8):

- (8) *andare dentro* lit. go in ‘to enter’
saltare fuori lit. jump out ‘to jump out, to pop up’

Further, it may strengthen the locative information already present in the verb root, as in (9):

- (9) *entrare dentro* lit. enter in ‘to enter’
uscire fuori lit. exit out ‘to exit’

Besides these transparent cases, Italian VPCs also display more idiomatic meanings, like those exemplified in (10):

- (10) *buttare giù* lit. throw down ‘to throw down, to write down, to demoralize’
fare fuori lit. do out ‘to kill’

Examples like those in (10) are to be regarded as individual, non-systematic cases of semantic bleaching. These of course testify to the high degree of establishment of the construction in Italian. However, it should be pointed out that the original and primary function of post-verbal particles remains the indication of locative meanings. In this paper we aim to demonstrate that Italian VPCs underwent a further semantic development. In particular, we would like to show that some post-verbal particles,

besides maintaining their basic locative function, contribute to the *Aktionsart* of VPCs, adding actional information to the whole construction, like e.g. in (11).

- (11) a. *lavare* ‘to wash’ [±telic] vs. *lavare via* ‘to clean off’ [+telic]
b. *portare* ‘to take’ [±telic] vs. *portare appresso* ‘to take with oneself’ [-telic]

In section 4 below, we will provide evidence for this assumption.

4. In Search of Actional Traces

This section deals with the actional analysis of Italian VPCs. First, we will outline the view of *Aktionsart* adopted in the analysis. Second, we will pass on to a brief description of the corpus and, finally, to the illustration of the results of the analysis.

4.1. *Aktionsart, Aspect and Telicity: Assumptions and Methodology*

It is well-known that aspectuality is a hotly debated domain. In fact, the numerous current theoretical proposals are quite conflicting with each other: they radically differ with respect to both basic issues and terminological choices¹⁵. Our study of the actional properties of Italian VPCs does not want to add to this theoretical debate. Rather, it is meant as an empirical contribution. The main goal is to show that, with respect to verbal bases, VPCs display not only different locative values, but also different actional properties. This notwithstanding, we will spend some words to spell out the conceptual framework and the criteria adopted in the analysis (largely based on Bertinetto 1986, 1997), as well as our terminological choices, for the sake of explicitness and comprehension:

- **Bidimensional approach**: the bidimensional approach implies a strict distinction between aspect and *Aktionsart*. Generally speaking, **aspect** is a matter of viewpoint distinctions (of the perfective/imperfective type) on an event on behalf of the speaker. The latter may choose to portray an event as ongoing (imperfective aspect) or completed (perfective aspect). Structurally, aspect is normally expressed morphologically by means of verbal inflection. To the contrary, *Aktionsart* is essentially rooted in the lexical semantics of verbs and concerns the intrinsic temporal nature of the event according to a limited number of relevant binary features: *telic* vs. *atelic*, *durative* vs. *non-durative*, *static* vs. *dynamic* events. In sum, whereas *Aktionsart* expresses inherent characteristics, the chief task of aspect is to outline the contextual reclassification of the event (e.g. the expression of the attainment of the goal in telic events). However, even though aspect and *Aktionsart* are independent and express distinct semantic characteristics, their intersection nevertheless contributes to determine the general aspectual properties of a sentence.

¹⁵ For a comprehensive review cf. Sasse (2002), who points out that the conflicting positions on almost any of the basic issues have as a consequence a tremendous gap between descriptive and theoretical works.

- Non-holistic representation of the event: the representation of the event is set up in terms of Vendler’s time-schemata. The classification adopted here, which is the refinement of Vendler’s (1967) classification put forward by Bertinetto (1986), lays on underlying binary semantic features such as [\pm durative], [\pm telic], [\pm dynamic], and distinguishes five classes¹⁶ (cf. Table 5).

Vendler (1967)	Bertinetto (1986)	durative	telic	dynamic
ACCOMPLISHMENT	RISULTATIVO	+	+	+
ACTIVITY	CONTINUATIVO	+	-	+
ACHIEVEMENT	TRASFORMATIVO	-	+	+
ACHIEVEMENT	PUNTUALE	-	-	-
STATES	STATIVO	+	-	-

Table 5. Actional classifications by Vendler (1967) and Bertinetto (1986)

- Diagnostic tests: in order to assign each verb to one of the five classes above mentioned, we used diagnostics tests based on both the compatibility with different kinds of adverbials (e.g., *in X time* or *for X time*), and on semantic compatibility, such as the ones worked out by Klein (1969)¹⁷.
- Terminology: from a terminological point of view, and in accordance with the bidimensional approach, we distinguish between *aspect* and *Aktionsart*. In order to make reference to the aspectual domain in general (aspect and *Aktionsart* together) we use *aspectual* and *aspectuality*, whereas *actional* refers to *Aktionsart* only. Finally, we chose *event* as a cover term to encompass both dynamic and static delimitations in the aspectual domain (other authors use *state-of-affair*, *situation*, etc.).

In what follows, we will add some considerations about the compositional nature of *Aktionsart*, and in particular about the telicity feature, which is especially relevant for the discussion that follows.

¹⁶ The choice to adopt Bertinetto’s classification was due to two basic reasons. First, it was elaborated on Italian data. Second, it proposes to split the Achievement class on the basis of the telicity (and dynamicity) feature, which is the most relevant in our analysis. Starting from the three binary oppositions, other combinatorial possibilities are allowed. For example, Smith (1991) identifies a class with the features [$-$ durative] [$-$ telic] [$+$ dynamic], while other scholars advocate for the adoption of other, new features. We agree with Boogaart’s (2004: 1169) view that “[e]xactly how many, and which, *Aktionsart* classes one distinguishes is determined partly by the particular language one is dealing with, as well as by the specific linguistic phenomenon one is investigating”.

¹⁷ For a detailed survey of aspectual tests cf. Dowty (1979). An enlightening critical analysis of these tests can be found in Behrens (1998: 289-302).

4.1.1. A Compositional View of Aktionsart

In current aspectual studies there is a general agreement that actional classifications do not exclusively depend on verb semantics. Although there might be some differences regarding the mechanisms of interrelation between the actional value of the verb lexeme and the other elements in the verbal phrase, the scholars agree in saying that *Aktionsart* results from many interacting factors at both the lexical and the clausal level¹⁸. Of course, this picture implies some difficulties at a descriptive and theoretical level, especially with respect to the reciprocal role among the elements contributing to the compositional aspectual configuration. Incidentally, the twilight of the traditional notion of *Aktionsart* as a purely lexical property of verbs and the success of the compositional view among contemporary approaches to aspectuality lead to another important theoretical consequence. Indeed, the compositionality of *Aktionsart* undermines the strict distinction between lexicon and phrasal units, and therefore between the lexical/morphological level and the syntactic level.

A typical example of recategorization of the actional value of a verb lexeme is the passage from Activity to Accomplishment by the addition of a nominal phrase in direct object position. For instance, while *to draw* is categorized as an Activity, *to draw a circle* is an Accomplishment. In these cases, time-schemata are not expressed by a verb lexeme, but rather by “abstract verb phrases or constructions [...] called “terms” by Vendler” (Sasse 2002: 216). In our view, these “terms” could be easily interpreted as abstract *constructions* (in the specific sense of Construction Grammar) in which the actional interpretation is not to be ascribed to the presence of a direct object by itself, nor to the denotative meaning of the word *circle*, but rather to the value of the element in direct object position in terms of features such as [\pm determinate] and [\pm singular] (cf. Bertinetto 2001: 182). In this view, the interpretation of a phrase like *to draw a circle* as an Accomplishment does not depend on the presence of the direct object *a circle*, but on the value of the direct object itself, i.e. [+determinate] and [+singular]. This is supported by the fact that a phrase like *draw circles* is an Activity, despite the presence of the direct object. This is due to the properties of *circles*: [-determinate] and [-singular]. In sum, it seems that arguments which express a quantified reference (e.g. count nouns with a specifier) induce a telic reading, while arguments with cumulative reference (e.g. bare plurals and mass nouns) induce a durative reading.

Among the underlying semantic features that concur to determine actional classes, **telicity** is one of the most sensitive to the context of occurrence. For example, quite often the presence of an object may contribute to make the predicate telic by indicating the endpoint of the activity. The very same function can be played by prefixes (e.g. Dutch *schrijven* ‘to write’ [-telic], *op-schrijven* lit. up-write ‘to write down’ [+telic], *over-schrijven* lit. over-write ‘to copy’ [+telic]) or post-verbal particles (e.g. English *to write* [-telic], *to write down* [+telic], *to write up* [+telic])¹⁹. As observed by Boogaart (2004: 1172), “none of the prefixes or particles mentioned marks telicity *per se*”, since *Aktionsart* is a property that refers to the whole construction and therefore

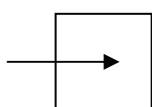
¹⁸ In some cases, it is not only the verbal phrase that is involved, but the whole argument structure of the verb. For example, in constructions with unaccusative verbs, also the subject may affect the *Aktionsart*. Therefore, at least in these cases, *Aktionsart* is a property to be assigned at a clause rather than at a phrase level.

¹⁹ Examples taken from Boogaart (2004: 1172).

results from the interaction between verb and prefix/particle. On the other hand, as we will see, the meaning of the particle plays an important role.

Following Brinton (1988: 26), we define telic a situation which has a necessary endpoint, “which necessarily includes a goal, aim, or conclusion. The goal is an inherent part of the situation”. In this perspective, the semantic feature that may contribute to the telic reading of the verb is the indication of the endpoint of an event, which can be easily conveyed by locative particles. Actually, the locative particles that indicate movement oriented towards a specific goal may come to imply attainment of the goal (telic events), whereas particles that express stasis, location or a movement without a specific endpoint contribute to indicate atelic events (cf. Figure 1)²⁰.

andare dentro lit. go in ‘to enter’



andare attorno lit. go around ‘to wander about’

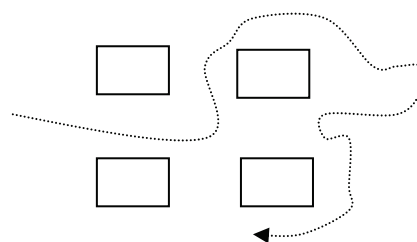


Figure 1. From locative to aspectual meanings

The actional values expressed by particles might be explained in terms of metonymic extension (cf. Brinton 1988: 191-199). Differently from interpretations based on metaphorical semantic shift, the metonymic explanation accounts for the simultaneous presence of locative and actional meanings in one and the same particle or VPC. The actional change is motivated by an iconic principle, i.e. a structural analogy between two similarly structured and conceptually related domains: spatial movement and event structure²¹. In this sense, we may speak of *tendentially telic particles* and *tendentially atelic particles*, as a consequence of their bounded or unbounded spatial meaning.

In the following pages we will present the results of our analysis on Italian VPCs. As we will see, the expectations about the parallels between the semantics of particles and the kind of telicity changes involved will be matched.

²⁰ This is at the basis of the distinction between *goal* and *direction*. For instance, an expression such as *moving towards the North Pole* indicates a direction, but not a necessary goal (cf. Brinton 1988: 26). Brinton also notes that Declerck (1977: 320) argues for a contrast between ‘goal’ expressions (e.g. *walk into the house*) and ‘directional’ (e.g. *walk toward the house*) or ‘locative’ expressions (*be in the house*); therefore, it is “crucial to distinguish purely directional expressions, which are Activities, from goal expressions, which are Accomplishments” (Brinton 1988: 278).

²¹ In this respect cf. also Talmy (2000b: 231), that identifies a conceptual correlation between motion events and other kinds of events such as the temporal one: “This conceptual analogy motivates a syntactic and lexical analogy: to a great extent in a language, aspect is expressed in the same constituent type as Path (+Ground), and often by homophonous forms. Thus, in accordance with the general typology, the core schema of an event of temporal contouring appears in the main verb in verb-framed languages, while it appears in the satellite in satellite-framed languages”.

4.2. *The Corpus*

The corpus on which we carried out the analysis consists in a group of 165 VPCs listed in two major Italian dictionaries, i.e. GRADIT and DISC. We chose to base our observations on a dictionary corpus because we wanted to take into account only acknowledged items. In fact, despite the recent interest of scholars, Italian VPCs are still a rather neglected topic in lexicographical practice, since Italian dictionaries, apart from some notable exceptions, are not very ready to register multi-word expressions. In this sense, those that are actually listed in the dictionaries are likely to be among the most established in current use.

The verbal bases in the corpus amount to 54. Some of them occur with only one particle (e.g. *entrare* ‘to enter’), while others combine with ten or even more particles (e.g. *andare* ‘to go’, *mettere* ‘to put’). Most verbal bases are verbs of motion or location, though not all of them can be ascribed to this macro-class (cf. section 4.3 for more details). The particles involved, which correspond to the requirements mentioned in section 3.1, amount to 19. A complete list is provided in (12).

- (12) *accanto* ‘next to’, *addosso* ‘on’, *appresso* ‘nearby’, *attorno* ‘around’, *avanti* ‘forward’, *contro* ‘against’, *dentro* ‘in(side)’, *dietro* ‘behind’, *fuori* ‘out(side)’, *giù* ‘down’, *indietro* ‘back(wards)’, *intorno* ‘around’, *lontano* ‘far away’, *oltre* ‘beyond’, *sopra* ‘on’, *sotto* ‘under’, *su* ‘up’, *via* ‘away’, *vicino* ‘near’

The whole corpus was analysed according to the basic assumptions outlined in the previous section. In what follows one may find the results of our investigation.

4.3. *Results*

The main results of the analysis are reported in Table 6, which illustrates the percentages concerning the kinds of telicity shifts that occur in the passage from verbal bases to VPCs. The Table also details the numbers of VPCs involved in each kind of shift according to the semantic class of the verbal base.

Following the typology of motion events in Talmy (1985, 2000b), we distinguished between verbs expressing Location (BE_L) (e.g. *essere* ‘to be’, *stare* ‘to stay’) and verbs expressing Motion. The latter are further divided into three subgroups, all of whom contain both Non-Agentive (NA) and Agentive (A) verbs²²:

- Path verbs (e.g. *entrare* ‘to enter’, *uscire* ‘to exit’): these form the most homogeneous class; only a limited number of Italian Path verbs are involved in VPCs and, as we will see, most of them combine with only one particle (which strengthens the meaning of the verbal root);
- Manner/Cause verbs (e.g. *correre* ‘to run’, *saltare* ‘to jump’): Manner verbs are a more composite class; apart from Non-Agentive motion verbs like *correre* ‘to run’ or *volare* ‘to fly’, it includes two sub-groups of Agentive verbs, i.e. verbs of

²² Talmy (2000a) defines agentivity in terms of causation and intentionality. With respect to motion events, this means that something/someone causes the Figure to move. In actual fact, in most cases the Agentive/Non-Agentive distinction corresponds to the transitive/intransitive distinction.

throwing (e.g. *gettare* ‘to throw’, *buttare* ‘to throw’) and verbs of removing (e.g. *tagliare* ‘to cut’, *grattare* ‘to scrape’);

- Generic verbs (e.g. *andare* ‘to go’, *mettere* ‘to put’)²³: this class presents only two Non-Agentive verbs (*andare* ‘to go’ and *venire* ‘to come’), which anyway combine with quite a number of particles, and a series of Agentive verbs including, among the others, verbs of putting (e.g. *mettere* ‘to put’, *porre* ‘to put’; cf. also footnote 23), and verbs of sending and carrying (e.g. *mandare* ‘to send’, *portare* ‘to bring/take’).

In addition to Motion and Location verbs, one may find verbs belonging to the category Other. This includes non-motion verbs of various kinds and is therefore the most heterogeneous class.

In section 4.3.1 we will discuss the telicity changes in VPCs in more detail. In section 4.3.2 we will focus on the relationship between telicity changes and semantic classes.

<i>V</i> → <i>VPC</i>	%	<i>Motion and Location verbs</i>					<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>	
		<i>Path</i>	<i>Manner</i>	<i>Generic</i>	<i>BE_L</i>				
+TEL → +TEL	42.8%	no changes 71.1%	10	12	30	-	13	65	108
-TEL → -TEL	28.3%		1	2	1	26	13	43	
-TEL → +TEL	11.2%	telicization 21%	4	8	3	-	2	17	32
±TEL → +TEL	9.8%		-	2	13	-	-	15	
±TEL → -TEL	6.6%	detelicization 7.9%	-	-	5	-	5	10	12
+TEL → -TEL	1.3%		-	-	-	-	2	2	
<i>Total</i>	100%		15	24	52	26	35	152	

Table 6. Telicity changes

4.3.1. Telicity Changes from *V* to VPCs

The first column in Table 6 illustrates the telicity changes in the passage from the verbal base to the VPC. We assigned three values to both verbal bases and VPCs: +TEL, -TEL, ±TEL. The presence of the latter value is in line with the “aspectual multivalence” proposed by Brinton (1988: 31), i.e. “the ability of a single lexical verb to name different situation types depending upon the structures with which it combines”²⁴. In

²³ Since Talmy (1985, 2000b) focuses on the kinds of lexicalization patterns for verbal roots, he does not explicitly speak of Generic verbs. However, this category is quite implicit in his work. Indeed, he speaks of “generic verbs” with reference to the English verbs *to put* and *to go* (cf. Talmy 2000b: 284) and defines the English verbs *to put* and *to take* as “suppletive forms of a single more general and non-directional ‘putting’ notion, where the specific form that is to appear at the surface is determined completely by the particular Path particle and/or preposition present” (Talmy 1985: 71).

²⁴ Cf. also Bertinetto (2001: 182): “[...] most predicates may have more than one actional classification”.

order to make the results clearer, we excluded the cases in which the VPC was a \pm TEL item (which is why the total number of VPCs in Table 6 is 152 instead of 165). The data missing, however, would not change the overall picture. Given this, we could identify three main types of telicity changes:

- *absence of telicity change*
- *telicization*
- *detelicization*

As one may notice from the data in the percentage column, in the great majority of cases **telicity does not change** (71.1%). Over 40% of VPCs (out of the total) have telic bases that remain telic, whereas atelic bases that remain atelic are almost 30%.

Within the $+TEL \rightarrow +TEL$ group most verbal bases are Motion verbs (Path/Manner/Generic). Here we can distinguish two main functions of the post-verbal particles with respect to the semantics of the verbal base, namely:

- *directional marking*: mainly with Manner and Generic verbs, e.g. *buttare via* ‘to throw away’, *mettere su* ‘to put on’;
- *explicitation of the telos*: with Path verbs, in which the directional information is already encoded in the verbal base (e.g. *salire su* lit. ascend up ‘to ascend’, *scendere giù* lit. descend down ‘to descend’).

This last strengthening operation might be due to the opacity of the base (which is no longer morphologically analysable) or to some communicative need of explicitness²⁵.

As easily expected, in the $-TEL \rightarrow -TEL$ group almost all verbal bases belong to the BE_L group, which typically contains stative verbs. Here the particles do not affect telicity, rather their main function is to specify the location of the event, like in *essere via* ‘to be away, out of town’²⁶.

In the light of these first data, we might be induced to say that, generally speaking, the presence of particles does not affect the verbal bases in a systematic way, since the vast majority of VPCs display no telicity changes. However, there are also quite a number of verbs that do change their telicity. Here we have both telicizing and detelicizing cases.

As for the **telicization** cases (21%), the verbal bases mainly belong to Manner and Generic motion verbs. This seems to suggest that the particle here may function both as a direction (or Path) marker and as a telos indicator. See e.g. the VPCs in (13)²⁷:

²⁵ For similar considerations, see Traugott (1982: 252), who suggests that the particle serves to make a “covert” endpoint “overt”, and Lindner (1983: 169 ff.), who says that the particle serves to “profile” the goal. Antelmi (2002: 107, footnote 14) speaks of “rideterminazione [redetermination]”.

²⁶ Further, many of these verbs have metaphorical meanings, e.g. *essere giù* lit. be down ‘to be depressed’.

²⁷ A quite convincing syntactic clue of this telicization process is the fact that some verbs, after turning into VPCs, become unaccusative (cf. the example below). In fact, many scholars argue for a connection between unaccusativity and telicity.

(i) *volare* (intransitive, aux. *avere* ‘have’) \rightarrow *volare via* (intransitive, aux. *essere* ‘be’)
a. L’uccello ha volato per due ore ‘The bird flew for two hours’ (-TEL)

- | | | |
|--|---|--------------------------------------|
| (13) <i>tirare</i> ‘to pull’ (Generic, Agentive) | → | <i>tirare fuori</i> ‘to take out’ |
| <i>andare</i> ‘to go’ (Generic, Non-Agentive) | → | <i>andare via</i> ‘to go away’ |
| <i>sbattere</i> ‘to dash/throw’ (Manner, Agentive) | → | <i>sbattere fuori</i> ‘to throw out’ |
| <i>saltare</i> ‘to jump’ (Manner, Non-Agentive) | → | <i>saltare giù</i> ‘to jump down’ |

Almost all of these VPCs contain *telic particles* (cf. section 4.1.1), i.e. particles that inherently refer to a specific spatial endpoint and thus contribute to the overall telic meaning of the VPC. Here follow the most represented *telic particles* in our corpus (in decreasing order): *via* ‘away’, *dentro* ‘in(side)’, *fuori* ‘out(side)’, *su* ‘up’. This seems to confirm the expectations outlined in 4.1.1: telicization cases do actually present *telic particles*.

Finally, we may find also few **detelicization** cases (7.9%). Interestingly enough, most of the verbs involved in this process are non-motion verbs (they are included in the class Other) and have metaphorical or idiomatic meanings: *crescere dentro* ‘to grow as a person’, *dare giù* ‘to beat’, *ridare fuori* ‘to vomit’. However, there are also few cases with Generic verbal bases. Here, the particles used are actually of the *atelic* type (cf. section 4.1.1), i.e. particles that denote a direction without specifying any endpoint, e.g. *addosso* ‘on’, *appresso* ‘nearby’, *attorno* ‘around’. However, the examples of this kind are too few to draw any serious generalization regarding the interaction between the detelicizing process and the type of particles involved²⁸.

4.3.2. *Telicity Changes and Semantic Classes*

In the previous section, we described the types of telicity changes that can be observed in our corpus and the overall role and presence of the different semantic classes in these changes. Now we will focus our attention on the telicity changes occurring within each single class, in order to understand better the role of the semantics of verbal bases in these changes. Table 7 shows the percentages of changes within each semantic class.

First of all, as the percentages clearly show, most **Path** verbs are telic and remain telic after they combine with the particle. As we already noticed in the previous section, in these cases the particle has the function to make the telos overt (e.g. *fuggire via* lit. escape away ‘to escape’). There is also a significant percentage (26.7%) of telicization cases. However, this percentage is overrated, since it regards four VPCs with the same verbal base, i.e. *passare* ‘to pass’ (e.g. *passare via* ‘to fade away’).

b. L’uccello è volato via ‘The bird flew away’ (+TEL)

Our corpus displays a number of cases like the one in (i).

²⁸ Here we will limit ourselves to note that the supposed atelic character of some particles seems to hold also with non-motion verbs. Consider for example the following set of VPCs formed with the base *guardare* ‘to look, see, watch’: *guardare avanti* ‘to look forward’, *guardare indietro* ‘to look backwards’, *guardare lontano* ‘to foresee’. Here we have a verbal base (*guardare*) that can express both an Activity (e.g. *guardare la TV* ‘to watch TV’) and an Accomplishment when accompanied by a specific, bound object (e.g. *guardare un film* ‘to watch a movie’). Since the particles *avanti/indietro/lontano* only denote a direction, and not an endpoint, they cannot be interpreted as a specific, bound object to look at and, consequently, cannot stress the potential telicity of the verbal base.

<i>Telicity changes</i> <i>V → VPC</i>		<i>Motion and Location verbs</i>				<i>Other</i>
		<i>Path</i>	<i>Manner</i>	<i>Generic</i>	<i>BE_L</i>	
no changes	+TEL → +TEL	66.6%	50%	57.7%	-	37.2%
	-TEL → -TEL	6.7%	8.4%	1.9%	100%	37.2%
telicization	-TEL/±TEL → +TEL	26.7%	41.6%	30.8%	-	5.7%
detelicization	+TEL/±TEL → -TEL	-	-	9.6%	-	19.9%
<i>Total</i>		<i>100%</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>100%</i>

Table 7. *Semantic classes and telicity changes*

Manner verbs are more interesting: in percentage terms, they telicize more than others. Indeed, Manner verbs constitute an optimal base for the creation of new VPCs, as they denote events that might require the specification of a Path (e.g. *buttare fuori* ‘to throw out’) and/or endpoint (e.g. *grattare via* ‘to scrape away’). In some cases particles may have a double function (direction markers and telic markers together), such as e.g. in *volare via* ‘to fly away’, *correre via* ‘to run away’, *saltare fuori* ‘to jump out’.

In order to confirm the hypothesis that Manner verbs are especially prone to combine with post-verbal particles, and since VPCs originating from Manner verbs are highly underrepresented in our corpus, we carried out an informal Google search. Here follow some examples we found that are not included in the corpus.

(14) a. Non-Agentive

- gocciolare giù* ‘to drip down’ (“*..il suo sangue sarebbe **gocciolato giù** fino a sporcare le tende del panificio...*”)
- sgorgare fuori* ‘to gush out’ (“*Con le lacrime che coltavano tutta la parte inferiore dei miei occhi in attesa di **sgorgare fuori** a mo’ di fontana*”)
- scivolare via* ‘to slide off’ (“***Scivolò via** nel corridoio e scomparve*”)
- rotolare giù* ‘to roll down’ (“*Mentre procedeva in bicicletta sull’argine del fiume Runco, perdeva il controllo e **rotolava giù***”)
- strisciare via* ‘to crawl away’ (“*..riuscì a **strisciare via** di soppiatto e a salvarsi*”)

b. Agentive

- trascinare giù* ‘to drag down’ (“*Letizia era svenuta e l’ho **trascinata giù***”);
- trascinare via* ‘to pull away by dragging’ (“*L’ho **trascinata via** per i pantaloni*”)
- spostare via* ‘to shift away’ (“*sarà mica mio padre che si è messo a remare per **spostare via** la Sicilia per non farmi tornare sul continente*”)

Further comes the class of **Generic** verbs of motion, which includes all verbs of motion that do not lexicalize the Path, nor any *co-event* such as Manner or Cause (cf. footnotes 4 and 23). Particles seem to be especially prone to combine with this class. Indeed, it contains some of the verbal bases that combine with the highest number of particles, i.e. *andare* ‘to go’, *venire* ‘to come’, *mettere* ‘to put’, *portare* ‘to take/bring’. As with Manner verbs, particles function either as pure direction markers when the verbal base is telic (e.g. *porre giù* ‘to put down’), or as a direction and/or telicity marker when the base is \pm TEL (e.g. *andare su* ‘to go up(wards), *portare via* ‘to take away’).

As already mentioned above, Location verbs (**BE_L**) appear to be rather insensitive to the presence of particles. This is of course due to the fact that Location verbs are stative and therefore cannot delineate a process. Within this group, all outputs are atelic VPCs, which often have metaphorical meanings, e.g. *essere giù* ‘to be depressed’ and *stare/essere fuori* ‘to be mad’.

Finally, the corpus displays a rather conspicuous number of VPCs with bases belonging to the **Other** class, i.e. to non-motion verbs. The combination of particles with non-motion verbs implies that the construction extended beyond the domain of spatiality, and therefore testifies to the productivity and pervasiveness of the construction in present-day Italian. However, it appears to be difficult to identify any noticeable regularity within this heterogeneous group, apart from the fact that, like for other classes, most examples do not display any telicity changes and that, as already noticed, many have non-literal meanings, e.g. *mangiare fuori* ‘to have a meal out’, *vedere lontano* ‘to foresee’. They also represent the majority of the detelicizing cases.

In the following section we will try to draw some generalizations from the results presented here.

4.4. *The Moral of the Story*

The most important fact that emerged from the above investigation seems to be that most VPCs do not change telicity with respect to their verbal bases. This leads us to think that Italian particles, though clearly playing a role in determining the *Aktionsart* of the VPC (with particular reference to the telicity feature) are **not** proper aspectual markers, or rather not yet²⁹.

However, if we exclude the unvaried telicity group, we have quite a number of telicity changes, most of which figure a passage towards telicity. Telicization cases depend largely on *telic particles*, which add an endpoint to the event. To a much lesser extent, also *atelic particles* seem to play a role in detelicization cases. Therefore, we can identify two ways in which particles may contribute to the *Aktionsart* of the verbal bases (cf. Table 8). The main actional effect is the indication of telicity performed by *telic particles* such as *fuori* ‘out’, *giù* ‘down’, *su* ‘up’, *via* ‘away/off’. In a minority of cases, and in a rather unsystematic way, *atelic particles* may also contribute to convey atelicity (e.g. *appresso* ‘along/nearby’, *indietro* ‘backwards’, *attorno* ‘around’).

²⁹ However, there seem to be some traces of subregularities. For instance, all verbs of removing (such as *tagliare*, *grattare*, *strappare*, *lavare*, *raschiare*) may combine with the particle *via* ‘away’ (cf. also Masini 2005), thus making the event telic.

Telicization	Generic	<i>tirare</i> ‘to pull’	-TEL	<i>tirare fuori</i> ‘to pull out’	+TEL
		<i>tirare</i> ‘to pull’	-TEL	<i>tirare giù</i> ‘to pull down’	+TEL
	Manner	<i>saltare</i> ‘to jump’	-TEL	<i>saltare dentro</i> ‘to jump in’	+TEL
		<i>volare</i> ‘to fly’	-TEL	<i>volare via</i> ‘to fly away’	+TEL
	Path	<i>passare</i> ‘to pass’	-TEL	<i>passare via</i> ‘to fade away’	+TEL
		<i>passare</i> ‘to pass’	-TEL	<i>passare su</i> ‘to drop by’	+TEL
Detelicization	Generic	<i>portare</i> ‘to bring’	±TEL	<i>portare appresso</i> ‘to take with one’	-TEL
	Generic	<i>andare</i> ‘to go’	-TEL	<i>andare attorno</i> ‘to wander about’	-TEL
	Manner	<i>correre</i> ‘to run’	-TEL	<i>correre indietro</i> ‘to come back by running’	-TEL

Table 8. Actional contribution of particles

A second relevant generalization can be drawn from the data presented in section 4.3.2. It is quite clear that the Italian particle system seems to be particularly productive with Manner and Generic verbs of motion (both Agentive and Non-Agentive). Also changes in telicity are mostly connected with these two classes (as well as with non-motion verbal bases). Of course, particles also occur with Path and BE_L verbs, though telicity changes are less frequent (or even absent) here.

When added to telic bases, particles either denote direction (with non-Path verbs), or make the telos explicit (with Path verbs). In these cases, particles generally do not affect the telicity of the verbal base. When they combine with atelic bases, they may either indicate the endpoint of the event, or function as direction markers.

The fact that Italian VPCs mostly involve Manner and Generic verbs of motion (as well as BE_L verbs) stresses the primary locative function of particles. Of course, we also have a lot of metaphorical examples, but the original spatial motivation behind the formation of VPCs is still totally productive (cf. section 2.2). We will come back to this issue in the next section, in which we will deal with the comparison between particles and prefixes in Italian.

5. VPCs and Verbal Prefixation

It is well known that both post-verbal particles and verbal prefixes may express locative meanings and may function as satellites in motion events. Here we will deal with the relationship between particles and prefixes in Italian. In particular, we would like to answer the following question: what kind of interaction does it exist between VPCs and prefixed verbs in contemporary Italian from a semantic point of view? Do they cooperate or compete?

Let us start from some diachronic considerations. As already mentioned in section 2.2, Italian verbal prefixes with locative meanings are rather limited in number compared to Latin. Table 9 puts side by side the rich system of verbal prefixes with

locative meanings in Latin (exemplified by the derivatives of the verbal bases *duco* ‘to pull’ and *mitto* ‘to send’) and the Italian prefixed derivatives of the verb *portare* ‘to bring/take’.

Prefixed		Latin		Italian
		<i>duco</i> ‘to pull’	<i>mitto</i> ‘to send’	<i>portare</i> ‘to bring/take’ (XII c.)
<i>ab-</i>	‘away’	<i>abduco</i>	<i>amitto</i>	<i>asportare</i> ‘to remove’ (XIV c.)
<i>ad-</i>	‘to, toward’	<i>adduco</i>	<i>admitto</i>	<i>apportare</i> ‘to produce’ (XIII c.)
<i>ante-</i>	‘ahead, forward’	-	<i>antemitto</i>	-
<i>circum-</i>	‘around, on all sides’	<i>circumduco</i>	<i>circummitto</i>	-
<i>de-</i>	‘from, down’	<i>deduco</i>	<i>demitto</i>	<i>deportare</i> ‘to deport’ (XIV c.)
<i>dis-</i>	‘apart’	<i>disduco</i>	-	-
<i>ex-</i>	‘out’	<i>educo</i>	<i>emitto</i>	<i>esportare</i> ‘to export’ (XV c.)
<i>in-</i>	‘in, on, against’	<i>induco</i>	<i>immitto</i>	<i>importare</i> ‘to import’ ‘to be important’ (XIV c.)
<i>inter-</i>	‘between’	-	<i>intermitto</i>	-
<i>intro-</i>	‘internally’	<i>introduco</i>	<i>intromitto</i>	-
<i>ob-</i>	‘toward, against’	<i>obduco</i>	<i>omitto</i>	-
<i>per-</i>	‘through, thoroughly’	<i>perduco</i>	<i>permitto</i>	-
<i>prae-</i>	‘before’	-	<i>praemitto</i>	-
<i>praeter-</i>	‘beyond’	<i>praeterduco</i>	<i>praetermitto</i>	-
<i>pro-</i>	‘in front of, forth’	<i>produco</i>	<i>promitto</i>	-
<i>retro-</i>	‘backwards’	<i>retroduco</i>	-	-
<i>se-</i>	‘aside’	<i>seduco</i>	-	-
<i>sub-</i>	‘under’	<i>subduco</i>	<i>submitto</i>	<i>sopportare</i> ‘to tolerate’ (XIII c.)
<i>super-</i>	‘above’	<i>superduco</i>	-	
<i>trans-</i>	‘across’	<i>traduco</i>	<i>transmitto</i>	<i>trasportare</i> ‘to transport’ (XIV c.)

Table 9. Latin and Italian verbs with locative prefixes

On the one hand, it is interesting to see that the number of empty cells in the *portare* column is rather high. This testifies to the unproductivity of such prefixes. At the same time it is interesting to point out that most unattested prefixed verbs could be interpreted as semantically transparent possible words. Moreover, all derivatives from *portare* are of Latin origin and their first recordings in Italian date back to several centuries ago, which is also testified by their largely non compositional meanings. Finally, none of the prefixes in combination with *portare* are productively used in preverbal position in the Italian language.

On the other hand, it is worth noting that the verb *portare* is involved in a series of VPCs (e.g., from our corpus, *portare addosso* ‘to wear’, *portare appresso* ‘to take with one’, *portare avanti* ‘to further/bring upfront’, *portare giù* ‘to bring down(stairs)’, *portare indietro* ‘to bring back’, *portare sopra* ‘to put up’, *portare sotto* ‘to put down’,

portare su ‘to bring up(stairs)’, *portare via* ‘to take away’), that incidentally fill some of the empty spaces in Table 9.

The decline of both the number of verbal prefixes and their possible meanings in the passage from Latin to Romance languages (and until present days; cf. Lüdtke 1996) has been in part overshadowed by the high frequency of many prefixed verbs of Latin origin that play an important role in the basic Italian vocabulary. However, in a recent study on the productivity of verbal prefixes in Italian, Iacobini (2005) shows that about the 70% of existing prefixed verbs that are attested for the first time in the XX century are derived by means of only four prefixes, i.e. *ri-*, *de-*, *dis-* and *s-*. These convey iterative (*ri-*), opposite (*dis-*), privative and reversative (*de-*, *dis-*, *s-*) meanings. What’s more, Iacobini (2005) shows that only the 8% of prefixed verbs coined in the XX century are formed by prefixes that express locative meanings.

Table 10 lists the locative meanings that can be conveyed by verbal prefixes and by the nineteen particles of our corpus when used in combination with verbs of motion.

Prefixes and prefixed verbs	Locative meanings	Particles and VPCs
ante-, pre-, pro- <i>anteporre, premettere, progredire</i>	ANTERIOR, BEFORE	avanti <i>andare a.</i>
<u>retro-</u> , <u>re-/ri-</u> (?) <i>retrocedere, rifluire</i>	BACK	indietro <i>andare i.</i>
	BEHIND	appresso, dietro <i>andare a./d.</i>
contra-/contro-, ob- <i>contrapporre, occludere</i>	OPPOSITE SIDE, AGAINST	addosso, contro <i>andare a./c.</i>
giusta- <i>giustapporre</i>	NEAR	accanto, vicino <i>andare a. /v.</i>
	FAR	lontano <i>andare l.</i>
fra-, infra-, <u>inter-</u> , <u>intro-</u> , tra- <i>frammischiare, inframmettere, interporre, introdurre, trascegliere</i>	BETWEEN, INWARDS	dentro <i>andare d.</i>
ab-, <u>de-</u> (?), <u>dis-</u> , e-/es-, estra-, <u>estro-</u> (?), <u>s-</u> , se- <i>abdurre, deportare, disperdere, emergere, espatriare, estrapolare, estromettere, sbarcare, separare</i>	OUTSIDE, AWAY	fuori, via <i>andare f./v.</i>
<u>sopra-/sovra-</u> , sor- <i>sopraelevare, sovrapporre, sorpassare</i>	ON, ABOVE, UP, OVER	sopra, su <i>andare s./s.</i>
<u>sotto-</u> (?) <i>sottoscrivere</i>	UNDER, BELOW	sotto, giù <i>andare s./g.</i>
per-, trans- <i>trasferire, perforare</i>	ACROSS, BEYOND	oltre <i>andare o.</i>
circum-/circom- <i>circumnavigare, circondare</i>	AROUND	intorno, attorno <i>andare i./a.</i>

Table 10. Locative meanings expressed by verbal prefixes and post-verbal particles³⁰

The first observation that can be drawn from Table 10 is that all the locative meanings that can be expressed by verbal prefixes can also be expressed by post-verbal particles. On the contrary, post-verbal particles can convey some additional meanings

³⁰ Table 10 distinguishes between productive and unproductive prefixes: underscored prefixes are the productive ones. Question marks (?) indicate doubtfully productive prefixes.

with respect to prefixes, i.e. ‘behind’ and ‘far’. Moreover, half of the meanings (those in grey cells) are no longer productively expressed by verbal prefixation, and only approximately one third of prefixes (signaled through underscore) currently used in Italian complex verbs can be employed in productive word formation processes. Further, for some prefixes the locative meaning is not the only – and in some cases not even the main – value: e.g. *sopra-/sovra-* and *sotto-* may also express evaluation, *re-/ri-* almost exclusively convey iteration, and finally *de-*, *dis-*, *s-* are mainly employed with privative and reversative meanings.

As regards the comparison between prefixes and particles, we will focus on three observations. First of all, many Italian motion verbs already present a large family of prefixed verbs of Latin origin (e.g. the *mettere* ‘to put’ family, that counts, among others: *ammettere* ‘to admit’, *immettere* ‘to put in’, *sottomettere* ‘to subdue’, etc.). This represents a strong **restriction on available bases** for prefixes, since (differently from what happened in Late Latin) it is exceptional for Italian to have two spatial prefixes on the same verb. Instead, post-verbal particles are much freer to combine with prefixed verbs.

Secondly, post-verbal particles are preferred to the few left productive prefixes because they constitute a more articulated and **systematic** way of expressing spatial indications.

Thirdly, there seems to be a diaphasic difference between prefixed verbs and VPCs. In fact, many prefixed verbs developed a non-literal meaning (that became the most common in use), while the original locative meaning came to be confined to technical or bureaucratic registers. For instance, the verb *introdurre* is commonly used in the meaning ‘to bring something into use for the first time’. Of course, it could also be employed with the original meaning ‘to insert’, but this is stylistically marked. Surely, nobody would use *introdurre* to say ‘to put the car into the garage’. Rather, anyone would make use of the VPC *mettere dentro* ‘to put inside’.

To sum up, nowadays particles fill most of the gaps left by verbal prefixes with respect to the expression of locative meanings. This was made possible thanks to both the range of meanings they can convey (as well as the systematic way in which they are conveyed), and to their less unmarked register.

Since now, we discussed the relationship between verbal prefixes and post-verbal particles with reference to the expression of locative meanings. But what about the expression of *Aktionsart*? It seems to us that, in this respect, the relationship is even clearer: verbal prefixes do not constitute a means for actional marking³¹.

Diachronically, the rich and complex system of prefixes used in Early and Classical Latin to render verbs telic broke down already in the Latin language, in the very first centuries of the Christian era³². This can be taken as a crucial difference

³¹ Ingressive change of state is expressed in Italian by parasynthetic verb formation (cf. Iacobini 2004). It is important to note that the two prefixes that take part to this process (*ad-* and *in-*) cannot be preposed to verbs, and therefore cannot be considered preverbal prefixes. Further, they have lost their original locative meaning from which they developed the aspectual one. Egressive meaning may be expressed by the prefixes *de-*, *dis-*, *s-* (which are normally used with privative and reversative values) through a reinterpretation of their ablative meaning. Some linguists include the iterative meaning among the aspectual ones. In Italian, this meaning can be productively expressed by the preverbal prefix *ri-*, and not by VPCs.

³² Classical Latin did not employ aspectual particles: preverbs were joined to verbs as prefixes (cf. Vincent 1999). Haverling (2003) studies the role of prefixes in *Aktionsart* changes in the Latin verbal

between the development of actional values in Italian VPCs and what happened in Germanic languages. In Germanic languages there was a long period of overlapping (and thus competition) between the fading system of native prefixes (that expressed both locative and aspectual meanings), and the new particle system, which, starting from locative meanings in combination with motion verbs, also came to express *Aktionsart*, even with non-motion verbs (cf. Brinton 1988, Hiltunen 1983 for the English language). A significant temporal gap separates the emergence of VPCs in Italian from the collapse of Latin aspectual prefixes. As a consequence, Italian VPCs cannot be considered a way to replace prefixes in the expression of *Aktionsart*. Rather, the overt (though not – or not yet – consistent) expression of *Aktionsart* by means of VPCs, which develops quite naturally from a reinterpretation of the locative meanings of particles, is an Italian innovative feature. This lead us to think that the establishment of VPCs in Italian depends on a general typological restructuring of the Italian language that implies a greater degree of analyticity and a tendency towards post-modification.

In conclusion, we can say that there is no competition between VPCs and prefixed verbs in contemporary Italian. As regards the expression of locative meanings, VPCs, which form a coherent system of spatial indication, compete with prefixed verbs, but not with verbal prefixation, which is mainly used to express iterative and negative/privative meanings. Therefore, VPCs and verbal prefixation perform different functions within the language. What's more, the actional analysis carried out above showed that post-verbal particles are on the right track to become actional markers, thereby displaying a dynamism that was not to be found among Italian verbal prefixes.

6. Conclusions

The original drive behind our research was to contribute to the study of Italian VPCs, and in particular to their semantics. Traditional difficulties concerning the intermediate structure between syntax and the lexicon, the compositional view of *Aktionsart* and phenomena of semi-productivity were overcome by adopting a constructionist approach. Further, we pointed out that Italian VPCs are also an interesting typological issue, as they do not fit the Germanic vs. Romance opposition about the realization of motion events to be found in Talmy (1985, 2000b).

The main goal of the paper was to look for possible actional properties of particles within VPCs. In order to pursue this goal, we carried out an investigation on the *Aktionsart* of Italian VPCs with respect to their verbal bases and found out that, besides specifying locative information, Italian post-verbal particles do contribute to the *Aktionsart* of verbal bases by virtue of a metonymic re-interpretation of their locative meaning. In particular, there seems to be a set of *telic particles* whose actional value is rather coherent (we never find a *telic* particle that detelicizes a verbal base), but not (or not yet) so systematic as to be referred to as proper *Aktionsart* markers.

Lastly, we compared VPCs to verbal prefixation. The comparison showed that there is no competition between these two types of constructions. Rather, today VPCs in Italian *cooperate* with verbal prefixation by performing different functions in the language.

system and gives an account of their decline. Cf. also Romagno (2003) for the interplay of actional prefixes and thematic structure in Latin.

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