

Chapter 4

The antipassive as a Romance phenomenon: A case study of Italian

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This study focuses on the Italian pronominal verbs *lamentarsi* ‘lament/complain’, *ricordarsi* ‘remember/remind’, *vantarsi* ‘praise/boast’ and their transitive counterparts and analyzes their distribution from the 13th to the 21st century across different syntactic environments, with particular attention to logical object expressions. It explores the possibility of an antipassive (AP) analysis, thereby adding a Romance perspective to the growing research of the historical development of the AP. The pronominal constructions of the sample that select an oblique complement display structural characteristics typical of the AP. Namely, they contain a demoted logical object, are structurally intransitive and semantically transitive, mark the oblique using the preposition *di*, display a detransitivizing “AP morpheme” *si*, and have a transitive counterpart. For all three verb pairs, there is initially a high frequency of AP constructions (13th-15th centuries), followed by a decrease in favor of transitive constructions with a direct object complement.

1 Introduction

This study examines the distribution of a particular class of pronominal verbs and their transitive counterparts in Italian from the 13th to 21st centuries and explores diachronic and synchronic evidence for the antipassive (AP) construction. The verbs in question are *lamentare/lamentarsi* ‘lament, complain, moan’, *ricordare/ricordarsi* ‘remember, remind’, and *vantare/vantarsi* ‘praise, boast’.



As shown in (1a), the pronominal verb is semantically transitive and is characterized by the realization of the logical object¹ as an oblique complement, while its transitive form in (1b) selects a direct object complement.²

- (1) a. Dopo aver cercato dappertutto si
 after have.AUX.INF search.PST.PTCP everywhere SE.3SG
ricordò del sogno e
 remember.PFV.PST.3SG of.DEF.DET.MSG dream.MSG and
 corse in giardino, vicino al fiume,
 run.PFV.PST.3SG in garden.MSG near to.DEF.DET.M.SG river.MSG
 dove dormendo l' aveva veduta.
 where sleeping her have.AUX.IPFV.PST.3SG see.PST.PTCP
 (*I racconti delle fate*, 1876)

'After having searched everywhere, he remembered the dream and ran into the garden, near the river where sleeping, he had seen her.'³

- b. Chiunque ricordi la vita italiana
 whoever remember.SBJV.PRS.3SG DEF.DET.FSG life.FSG Italian.FSG
al principio del secolo non
 to.DEF.DET.MSG beginning.MSG of.DEF.DET.MSG century.MSG NEG
 potrà non sottoscrivere a questo apprezzamento.
 can.FUT.3SG NEG subscribe.INF to this.MSG comment.MSG
 (*Pensiero e azione del risorgimento*, 1943)

'Whoever remembers the Italian life at the start of the century, cannot not subscribe to this comment.'

The effect in (1a) is a change in the valency of the verb, as the number of arguments is reduced. A similar type of valency-reducing strategy called the AP has been studied in ergative languages and increasingly, in accusative languages. In AP constructions, the logical object is realized as a non-core argument or is omitted (but remains presupposed).

This paper analyzes how such semantically-related transitive and pronominal verbs pattern diachronically and if the diachronic perspective provides evidence for the AP construction.

¹I am using the term "logical object" following Polinsky (2017). Others, such as Creissels (2012), Janic (2013), and Sansò (2017, 2019), refer to it as 'patient'.

²It is also possible to find *ricordarsi* followed by a direct object as an alternative to the construction in (1a). The use of this particular construction increases over time and is more frequent than the construction in (1a) in the 21st century. Examples of this construction are found in (5) and (9c) and are further examined in the Discussion.

³Unless otherwise indicated, all translations in this paper are my own.

The organization of the paper is as follows. In §2, I first discuss current research about Romance pronominal verbs and the Romance clitic *SE*, as well as typological and historical work on the AP. In §3, I describe the data sources, the data collection and coding process. In §4, I present my findings. In §5, I relate these to a discussion of the AP and examine the possibility of an AP analysis and the mechanisms of diachronic change. Finally, I conclude with some remarks about the main findings and ideas for future research.

2 Romance *SE* and previous analyses

The pronominal verbs of this study attest to the heterogeneous nature of Romance *SE*, which is traditionally labeled reflexive. Accounts from the prescriptive tradition struggle to find a classification of pronominal verbs that captures the polyfunctionality of this clitic. Analyses have been proposed to describe different uses of Romance *SE*. For instance, Melis (1985, 1990a,b) expanded on the classical grouping for French pronominals, while Nishida (1994) identified uses of Spanish *se* as an overt aspectual class marker. For Italian, Cennamo's extensive work sheds light on several phenomena regarding the diachronic development of the Late Latin/Early Romance reflexive *se/sibi*. Among others, she identified the use of the pleonastic reflexives *se/sibi* with intransitive verbs as markers for Split Intransitivity (1999) and studied the expansion of the domain of reference (1993) and the continuum of prototypical and less prototypical/grammaticalized uses of *se*, *sibi*, *suus* in Late Latin Christian inscriptions (1991).

Evidence has been discovered that suggests the existence of the AP construction in Romance. For Spanish, Masullo (1992) proposes the derivation of an AP *se* as a direct object in the deep structure, which is then incorporated into the verb; for Slavic and Romance, Medová (2009: vii) argues that “the reflexive clitic *se* is an AP morpheme of the sort known from the ergative languages” and proposes a parallel derivation for inherent reflexives and APs.

Typological studies of the AP, such as Polinsky (2017), present and discuss various manifestations of this construction and weave together characteristics shared across ergative and accusative languages, which can serve as a set of diagnostics to identify the AP. To date, the historical work on the AP has been limited to non-Romance languages; for instance, Terrill (1997), Creissels (2012), Janic (2013), and Sansò (2017, 2019) identified the reflexive construction as one of several sources of the AP marker. These studies, however, do not look for supporting evidence from Romance; moreover, the current research on the Romance AP does not adopt a diachronic perspective.

3 Data and methods

The data of this study is drawn from online databases and annotated corpora, as well as collections of texts that are accessible online. The sources include the corpus *Opera del Vocabolario della lingua italiana* (OVI), *Tesoro della Lingua Italiana delle Origini* (TLIO), the *Biblioteca dei Classici Italiani, IntraText*, the *Corpus Diacronico dell'Italiano Scritto* (DiaCORIS), and the *Corpus di Italiano Scritto* (CORIS/CODIS). Together they cover a period from the 13th until the 21st century and include literary (e.g., novels, poems, plays, operas) and non-literary texts (e.g., religious texts, journalistic writings, essays, and correspondence).

For each verb pair I randomly selected 60 tokens per century or if there were not sufficient data, I included all occurrences available. This was the case for *vantar*(*si*), which records only 40 tokens for the 13th century. Finite and non-finite verb forms are equally included in the dataset. I excluded passive forms and a handful of tokens that had prominent non-Tuscan characteristics, which is illustrated in (2), an excerpt in the Venetian dialect from Carlo Goldoni's comedy, *I Rusteghi*.

- (2) Cossa songio? un tartaro? una bestia? De
 what be.PRS.1SG INDF.DET.MSG Tartar.MSG INDF.DET.FSG beast.FSG of
 cossa ve podeu lamentar? Le cosse oneste
 what SE.2PL can.PRS.2PL lament.INF DEF.DET.FPL thing.FPL honest.FPL
 le me piase anca a mi. (*I Rusteghi*, 1760)
 they.F me please.PRS.3SG also to me
 'What do you think of me? A Tartar? A brute? What have you to
 complain of? I don't object to honest pleasures.' (from Goldoni 1961: 109)

The queries resulted in a total of 1600 tokens. In order to isolate and study the distribution of the verb pairs in general and the verbs with a logical object, I grouped the data into two large categories based on the presence or absence of the clitic *si*. These categories I labeled TR, referring to verbs without *si* (e.g., *lamentare*), and PRO, referring to verbs with *si* (e.g., *lamentarsi*). In addition to author, title, and date, I also coded transitivity (Intrans/AP/Trans), type of phrasal complement (NP, CP, PP, Null), meaning, and type of logical object (IO/DO).⁴

⁴I also coded auxiliary selection for compound tenses. However, the pattern was exceptionless: PRO verbs selected the auxiliary *essere* 'to be' (like reflexive verbs), while TR verbs selected the auxiliary *avere* 'to have' (like transitive verbs).

4 Analysis

In the dataset, PRO forms are more common overall at 72% (1153 tokens) compared with TR forms at 28% (447 tokens). The overall distribution is heavily influenced by the fact that the PRO forms represent 73%–91% of the data for six centuries, from the 13th–18th centuries, but decline thereafter. Figure 1 shows the trends over time for the three verb pairs. For each verb pair, the solid line represents the PRO form and the dotted line represents the TR form and together total to 100%. In addition, the shadowed area displays the mean percent TR for all verbs over time.

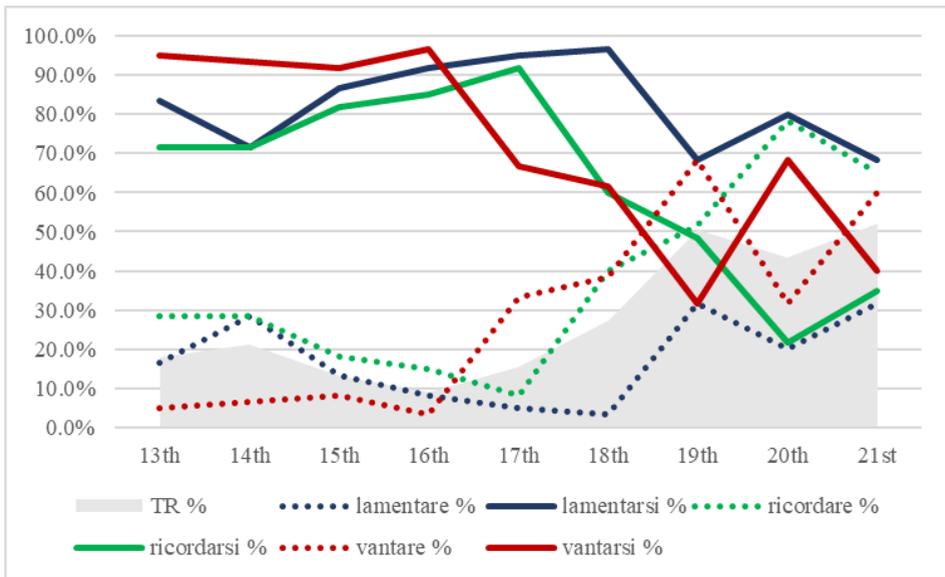


Figure 1: Distribution across time

Starting from the 16th through the 18th century, the trendline documents an increase in the TR construction and a decrease in the PRO construction until they reach almost equal distribution in the 19th century. The individual verb pairs differ slightly with respect to their distribution across time. In the 19th century, *vantare* becomes more frequent than *vantarsi* (TR = 68.3%), *ricordare* barely surpasses *ricordarsi* (TR = 51.7%), and *lamentarsi* drops in frequency but continues to be more common than *lamentare* (PRO = 68.3%). This trend continues into the 21st century.⁵

⁵The unexpected dip in the trendline for *vantare*, which occurs in 20th century, may be due to noise in the data.

4.1 *Lamentar(si)*

As represented in Table 1, *lamentare* most frequently occurs in constructions involving a direct object complement (43.16%) and intransitive constructions with a null object complement (37.89%), while *lamentarsi* most often selects a null object complement (40.67%) or an indirect object complement (37.08%).

Table 1: Syntactic environments of *lamentar(si)* (13th–21st c.)

| | NP | PP | Null | Finite CP | Non-finite CP | Other | Total |
|-------------------|--------|--------|--------|-----------|---------------|-------|-------|
| <i>lamentare</i> | 43.16% | 3.16% | 37.89% | 15.79% | – | – | 100% |
| <i>lamentarsi</i> | 0.67% | 37.08% | 40.67% | 17.53% | 2.70% | 1.35% | 100% |

Over time, there is an increase in the selection of a finite CP for both verbs. The most frequent TR construction in the 13th century is the intransitive construction with a null object complement (70%), which is surpassed by the direct object complement in the 21st century (78.95%). *Lamentarsi* most commonly selects an indirect object or a null object complement in the 13th century, at 44% and 46% respectively. By the 21st century, the frequency of the PP complement has decreased considerably (21.95%), while that of the null construction has increased (58.54%). The PRO and TR verbs overlap significantly in meaning. With or without an object, they most commonly have the meaning ‘mourn, lament, complain (about)’, as in (3a) for PRO and (3b) for TR. As in (3a), the object is introduced mostly by the preposition *di* ‘of’ or less often by *per* ‘for’. As an intransitive, the non-pronominal form can also refer to the act of emitting sound while lamenting or suffering, that is, ‘wail, moan’. This latter meaning is not shared with the PRO verb.

- (3) a. E molto **si** **lamentava** **di** Guerrino, cioè,
 and much SE.3SG lament.IPFV.PST.3SG of Guerrino that.is
della sua morte e di Bernardo suo
 of.DEF.DET.MSG his.FSG death.FSG and of Bernardo his.MSG
fratello, ch’ era preso, ma non
 brother.MSG who be.AUX.IPFV.PST.3SG take.PST.PTCP but NEG
sapeva dove s’ era, s’ egli
 know.IPFV.PST.3SG where SE.3SG be.AUX.IPFV.PST.3SG if he
era preso o morto.
 be.AUX.IPFV.PST.3SG take.PST.PTCP or dead.MSG

(*I reali di Francia*, 1491)

‘And much did he [i.e., Gherardo] mourn Guerrino, that is, his death, and Bernard his brother, who was taken captive, but he did not know where he was, if he had been taken captive or was dead.’

- b. *Quella dispicca un vol sopra il*
 that.FSG take.off.PRS.3SG INDF.DET.MSG flight.MSG on DEF.DET.MSG
pollone D’ un vecchio salcio, e colassù
 shoot.MSG of INDF.DET.MSG old.MSG willow.MSG and up.there
lamenta il suo timor pe’ tenerelli
 lament.PRS.3SG DET.DET.MSG his.MSG dread.MSG for tender.MPL
aspetti: (Il primo bacio, 18th c.)
 aspect.MPL

‘And she [i.e., the hen] flies off up to the branch of the old willow and from there laments her dread for her tender little ones.’

These examples document the most common environments of *lamentar(si)* involving a logical object. As indicated in Table 1, less common constructions include ones where the PRO verb selects an NP complement as in (4a) and the TR verb occurs with an PP complement as in (4b), as well as constructions with the impersonal *si*, reflexive *si*, and adjectival phrase complements.

(4) a. PRO + NP

- Udite tucti comunamente come Dio onnipotente si*
 hear.PRS.2PL all.MPL together how God almighty.MSG SE.3SG
lamenta chi l’ ofende, et duramente li
 lament.PRS.3SG who him offend.PRS.3SG and harshly them.M
riprende di ciò che tucte criature, secondo
 reprimand.PRS.3SG of that which all.FPL creature.FPL according.to
le loro nature, connosceno lo lor
 DEF.DET.FPL their nature.FPL know.PRS.3PL DEF.DET.MSG their
criatore meglio che l’ omo a tucte hore;
 creator.MSG better than DEF.DET.MSG man.MSG at all.FPL hour.FPL
 (Quindici segni del giudizio, 1270)

‘Hear all together how God Almighty laments those who offend him and harshly reprimands them with respect to the fact that all creatures according to their nature know their creator better than man at any hour;’

b. TR + PP

Vedro=gli in un voler tutti
 see.FUT.1SG=him/them.M in INDF.DET.MSG want all.MPL
 dispor=si con meco a lamentar della mie⁶
 arrange.INF=si with with.me to lament.INF of.DEF.DET.FSG my.FSG
 pena, fin che' pianeti aràn fatti
 trouble.FSG until that planet.MPL have.AUX.FUT.3PL make.PST.PTCP
 lor corsi, [...]. (Rime varie, 15th c.)
 their course.MPL [...]
 'I will see him/them all wanting to prepare themselves to lament my
 trouble/s with me, as long as the planets are running their course [...]'

The sentences in (4a) and (4b) illustrate the diversity of constructions in the dataset, particularly in texts before the 16th century. The variability suggests that this is a period of change.

4.2 Ricordar(si)

This verb pair has the meaning 'remember/remind'. Generally, with a null object complement, *ricordarsi* and *ricordare* have the definition of 'remember'. This use appears to have become a fixed expression, similar to the English 'as far as I remember'. With an indirect object (the addressee of the act of reminding) and a direct object, *ricordare* means 'remind/recall'. With only the direct object, it can also have the meaning 'recount, record', as for example in the context of historical events.

The general distribution for *ricordar(si)* is represented in Table 2. While both verbs select a finite complementizer phrase (usually introduced by *che* 'that') at similar frequencies, the most frequent complements of the TR and PRO verbs are the direct object and the indirect object, respectively.

Table 2: Syntactic environments of *ricordar(si)* (13th–21st)

| | NP | PP | Null | Finite CP | Non-finite CP | Other | Total |
|-------------------|--------|--------|--------|-----------|---------------|-------|-------|
| <i>ricordare</i> | 65.00% | 2.00% | 8.00% | 21.00% | 3.50% | 0.50% | 100% |
| <i>ricordarsi</i> | 7.94% | 45.59% | 12.35% | 23.82% | 9.71% | 0.59% | 100% |

⁶[sic]

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Already the earliest data from the 13th show a similar pattern. The data records few cases of the intransitive construction with a null object complement for *ricordare* until the 19th century. The construction accounts for 23% of the TR constructions in the 21st century, however. The most notable change for *ricordarsi* is the increase in frequency of the NP complement, as seen in (5).

(5) PRO + NP

Ogni volta che si ricorda quel nome
 each time.FSG that SE.3SG remember.PRS.3SG that.MSG name.MSG
glorioso, pieghi i ginocchi del
 glorious.MSG bend.PRS.SBJV.3SG DEF.DET.MPL knee.MPL of.DEF.DET.MSG
 suo cuore; (Il Concilio di Lione II, 1274)
 his.MSG heart.MSG

‘Each time that one remembers that glorious name, one bends the knees of one’s heart.’

In contrast to the PRO + PP construction, the PRO construction in (5) maps onto the transitive construction *ricordare qualcosa a qualcuno*, meaning that the logical object is realized as an NP. It is already present in 13th-century data with two occurrences (4.65%) and increases gradually until it represents 38.1% of PRO constructions in the 21st century. It appears to be in competition with the PRO + PP construction, which decreases significantly in the last two centuries of the data and only represents 33.33% of PRO.

Some cases of *ricordare* selecting an indirect object complement are recorded in the earlier periods of the data, as seen in (6). The indirect object complement is marked in (6) by the partitive clitic *ne*, which refers to a PP headed by the preposition *di* ‘of’.

(6) Ma vendichi alle molte volte grandemente,
 but avenge.PRS.SBJV.3SG to.DEF.DET.FPL many.FPL time.FPL greatly
 a tal otta che a pena ne ricorda a chi l’
 at such time.FSG that to trouble.FSG of.it remind.PRS.3SG to who it.M
 ha fatto- ma a noi non esce di
 have.AUX.PRS.3SG do.PST.PTCP but to us NEG leave.PRS.3SG from
 mente mai. (Il Libro de’ Vizî e delle Virtudi, 1292)
 mind.FSG never

‘But he [i.e., God] punishes harshly many times, at such a time that he who did it hardly remembers it, but we never forget.’

4.3 *Vantar(si)*

In most cases, the PRO and TR verbs mean ‘boast, praise’. In early texts, during the period of medieval courts and chivalry, *vantarsi* can have the meaning ‘pledge (oneself)’, which refers to a future exploit rather than a current or past one. As a pledge made to a person (or being), it follows the schema *vantarsi a* + person/being. This meaning is unique to the PRO verb, which underlines its close relationship with the reflexive use of SE. An example is given in (7).

(7) PRO + NP

Ma Parmenione che d’ adestrare Biancifiore a casa
 but Parmenione that to ride.beside.INF Biancifiore to house.FSG
del novello sposo s’ era
 of.DEF.DET.MSG new.MSG bridegroom.MSG SE.3SG be.AUX.IPFV.PST.3SG
 al paone **vantato**, [...] con Alcibiades [...], e
 to.DEF.DET.MSG peacock.MSG boast.PST.PTCP [...] with Alcibiades [...] and
 con alcuni altri giovani nobili della città,
 with some.MPL other.MPL young.MPL noble.MPL of.DEF.DET.FSG city.FSG
 [...], al freno di Biancifiore vennero, [...].
 [...] to.DEF.DET.MSG rein.MSG of Biancifiore come.PFV.PST.3PL [...]
 (*Filocolo* 4.163, 1336)

‘but Parmenione, who had pledged before the peacock to ride beside Biancifiore to the bridegroom’s house, [...], and so along with Alcibiades, [...], and other young nobles of the city, [...], he came up to Biancifiore’s reins, [...].’ (from Boccaccio 1985: 370)

The most common complements of *vantar(si)* are found in Table 3. In 90% of TR occurrences, *vantare* selects an NP complement, while *vantarsi* displays an array of complements. The most frequent is the non-finite complementizer phrase (40.60%), as in the expression *vantarsi di fare qualcosa* ‘boast about doing something’. This is followed by the PP complement at 33.51%.

Table 3: Syntactic environments of *vantar(si)* (13th–21st c.)

| | NP | PP | Null | Finite CP | Non-finite CP | Other | Total |
|-----------------|--------|--------|--------|-----------|---------------|-------|-------|
| <i>vantare</i> | 90.20% | - | 2.61% | 1.96% | 3.92% | 1.31% | 100% |
| <i>vantarsi</i> | 1.63% | 33.51% | 13.62% | 8.17% | 40.60% | 2.00% | 100% |

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For both *vantare* and *vantarsi*, the dataset also revealed copula constructions, which are included in Table 3 in the category “Other”. The attributes introduced in these constructions are nouns (e.g., *inventore del poema eroicomico* ‘inventor of mock-heroic poetry’), past participles (e.g., *nato* ‘born’), and adjectives (e.g., *opportuno* ‘timely, ready’), as in (8). They appear to derive from elliptical constructions meaning ‘boast about being’ or ‘pridefully claim to be’.

- (8) Ecco I' astuccio, Di pelli rilucenti ornato
here.it.is DEF.DET.MSG case.MSG of skin.FPL shining.FPL adorn.PST.PTCP
e d' oro, Sdegnar la turba, e gli
and of gold.MSG disdain.INF DEF.DET.FSG throng.FSG and DEF.DET.MSG
occhi tuoi primiero Occupar di sua mole: esso a cent
eye.MPL your.MPL first.MSG hold.INF of its.F bulk.FSG it.M to one.hundred
usi Opportuno si vanta; e ad esso in grembo,
usage.MPL appropriate.MSG SE.3SG boast.PRS.3SG and to it.M in lap.MSG
Atta agli orecchi, ai denti, ai peli, all' ugne,
apt.FSG to.MPL ear.MPL to.MPL tooth.MPL to.MPL hair.MPL to.FPL nail.FPL
Vien forbita famiglia. (Il giorno, 1763)
come.PRS.3SG polished.FSG family.FSG

‘I see, the throng disdain with bulk that catches first thine eye, the case adorn’d with glossy skin and gold, whose boast is to be ready for a thousand needs, for in its lap a polish’d family it bears; apt are they for the ears, the teeth, the hair, the nails.’ (from Parini 1977: 68)

From the 13th century on, the direct object is the most common complement of TR forms. There are some cases of finite and non-finite complementizer phrases throughout the dataset, but they are not frequent in general. By contrast, the indirect object and the null object are the most frequent PRO complements in the 13th century. The PRO construction involving the non-finite complementizer increases over time, from 15.79% in the 13th century to 37.50% in the 21st century. Interestingly, *vantarsi* is the verb most consistently used across centuries in the intransitive + null object construction.

5 Discussion

Constructions involving a logical object complement are an area of significant change between the 13th and 21st centuries and account for 49% of the dataset. There are two main ways that a logical object is encoded by these verbs, namely

as an oblique or as a direct object. In the former case, the PRO verb selects a PP, introduced by *di* ‘of’, as in (9a). In the latter case, the TR verb selects an NP complement, as in (9b). For one verb, *ricordarsi*, there is a third option, in which the PRO form selects an NP, as in (9c).

(9) a. PRO + PP

Il Signor Chiari si vantava d'
 DEF.DET.MSG Mr.MSG Chiari SE.3SG boast.IPFV.PST.3SG of
uno stile pindarico e sublime;
 INDF.DET.MSG style.MSG Pindaric.MSG and sublime.MSG
 (*L'amore delle tre Melarance colle alusioni al Goldoni e al Chiari*, 1835)
 ‘Mr. Chiari boasted of a Pindaric and sublime style.’

b. TR + NP

Una volta almeno gli Italiani
 INDF.DET.FSG timeFSG at.least DEF.DET.MPL Italian.MPL
 potevano vantare il bel cielo d'
 can.IPFV.PST.3PL praise.INF DEF.DET.MSG beautiful.MSG sky.MSG of
Italia. (*L'umiltà nazionale*, 1871)
 Italy
 ‘At least one time, the Italians were able to praise the beautiful sky of Italy.’

c. PRO + NP

e benché molti intendano meglio di me
 and although many.MPL understand.SBJV.PRS.3PL better of me
 questa materia, penso non di meno di poter=ne
 this.FSG matter.FSG think.PRS.1SG NEG of less of can.INF=of.it
 significar il mio parere, e tanto più
 express.INF DEF.DET.MSG my.MSG opinion.MSG and so.much more
 quanto **mi ricordo** il danno
 as.much.as SE.1SG remember.PRS.1SG DEF.DET.MSG damage.MSG
 che avrebbe potuto far=mi lo
 OBJ.REL have.AUX.COND.3SG can.PST.PTCP do.INF=me DEF.DET.MSG
 sfrenato amor di dir il vero, di che non
 wild.MSG love.MSG of say.INF DEF.DET.MSG truth.MSG of that NEG
 mi son pentito;
 SE.1SG be.AUX.PRS.1SG repent.PST.PTCP
 (*Della dissimulazione onesta*, 1641)

‘And although many understand this matter better than me, I think at least that I am able to express my point of view, and even more so since I remember the damage that the/my wild love for speaking the truth could have caused me, of which I have not repented.’

In (9a), the clitic *si* does not fit into the classifications offered by previous prescriptive and descriptive accounts. Its use is close to the “inherent *se*” or “inherently reflexive *se*”, as described by Nishida (1994: 426) and by Medová (2009: 8), respectively, which are illustrated in (10) and (11):

- (10) “Inherent *se*”: Spanish *arrepentirse* – **arrepentir*
 Juan **se** arrepintió de haber=lo hecho.
 Juan SE.3SG repent.PFV.PST.3SG of have.INF=OBJ.3MSG have.PST.PTCP
 ‘John repented (himself) having done it.’ (Nishida 1994: 426)
- (11) “Inherently reflexive *se*”: Italian *accorgersi* – **accorgere*
 Paolo non **si** è accorto di niente.
 Paolo NEG SE.3SG be.AUX.PRS.3SG notice.PST.PTCP of nothing
 ‘Paolo hasn’t noticed anything.’ (Sorace 1993: 76)
- (12) Italian *ricordarsi di* – *ricordare*
 [...] **si** ricordò del sogno e
 [...] SE.3SG remember.PFV.PST.3SG of.DEF.DET.MSG dream.MSG and
 corse in giardino, vicino al fiume, dove
 run.PFV.PST.3SG in garden.MSG near to.DEF.DET.MSG river.MSG where
 dormendo l’ aveva veduta.
 sleeping her have.AUX.IPFV.PST.3SG see.PST.PTCP
(*I racconti delle fate*, 1876)
 ‘[...] he remembered the dream and ran into the garden, near the river where sleeping, he had seen her.’

Similar to *ricordarsi* in (12), the pronominal verbs in (10) and (11) display a pronoun *se/si* that cannot be interpreted as the object of the verb, direct or indirect. The difference between (10), (11) and (12) lies in the existence of a transitive counterpart for *ricordarsi*, i.e., *ricordare*. According to Medová (2009: 8), the inherently reflexive *se* distinguishes itself from the true reflexive by the absence of a corresponding transitive form. However, the expression in (12) cannot be interpreted as a true reflexive nor does it correspond to the characteristics of an inherently reflexive verb, with out a transitive counterpart. The process observed in (12) is

the demotion of the logical object to a non-core argument along the hierarchy of grammatical roles. This is a characteristic of the AP construction, which may also entirely suppress the logical object. Examples of this may be found in the intransitive PRO constructions that are not true reflexives and do not select an overt complement.⁷ Interestingly, the use of intransitive TR constructions decreases over time for *lamentare* and *vantare*, while the corresponding PRO constructions increase or stay consistent across time. While *ricordar(si)* features the intransitive construction less frequently overall, its frequency declines for *ricordarsi* and increases for *ricordare* in recent centuries.

Additional diagnostics, as described by Polinsky (2017), serve to better examine evidence for the AP. As is the case for AP constructions, the PRO verbs of this study are transitive in meaning, although they are syntactically intransitive (through the presence of *si*). In terms of morphology, the AP has bearings on case-marking, whereby the non-core status of the object is signaled by case inflection, e.g., an oblique case. Romance case inflection is greatly depleted since Classical Latin, but the use of prepositions increased and their functions were extended to cover functions previously fulfilled by the case system. As seen for (12), the non-core argument status is thus marked by the preposition *di*. Evidence from Chukchi (Chukotka-Kamchatka: Russia) suggests that the logical object can also be left unexpressed without a great loss in meaning (Polinsky 2017: 7), which may explain the presence of PRO constructions in the dataset that follow the pattern PRO + Null and that are not true reflexives. As observed for other languages that exhibit an AP, it displays a type of “verbal affixation” (Polinsky 2017: 7), which may serve as a more general detransitivizing affix, found in other contexts marking reflexive/reciprocal, middle, passive, and aspect, among others. These characteristics are reflected in Romance *SE*, which is similarly polyfunctional. It also functions as a marker of the anticausative, reflexive/reciprocal, etc. and detransitivizes transitive constructions.

The AP has a pragmatic effect in that it places the subject in a position of prominence, while demoting the object to a place of less prominence. This is called “subject prominence” or “agent foregrounding” (Polinsky 2017: 9). The prominence of the subject in the Italian pronominal verbs of this study is indicated not only by the demotion of the logical object, but also by the presence of the clitic *si*, which refers back to the subject, therefore highlighting its position. This concept is further analyzed below with respect to the mechanisms underlying the development of AP morphology.

⁷Such cases are coded to have a null object complement.

The historical perspective of this phenomenon is represented in Figure 2, which traces the distribution of the logical object for seven constructions across time.⁸

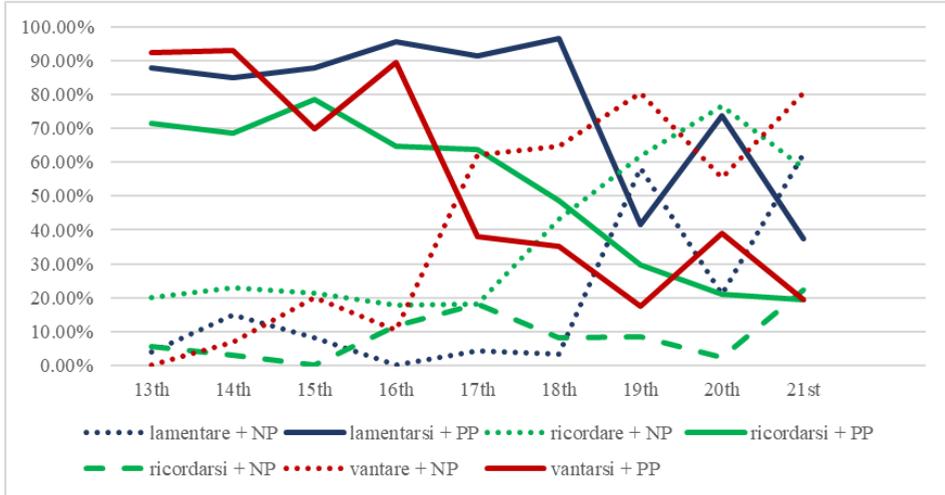


Figure 2: Distribution of logical object across time

The earliest periods of the corpus denote a stark contrast between the frequencies of the PRO verbs and the TR verbs. According to Figure 2, the PRO or AP construction is strongly preferred until at least the 17th century, when *vantare* + NP surpasses *vantarsi* + PP. In the same period, *lamentarsi* + PP continues to dominate at >90% and *ricordarsi* + PP, while still more frequent than *ricordare* + NP, continues its gradual decline that had started in the 15th century. This decrease of *ricordarsi* + PP is accompanied by an increase in *ricordarsi* + NP, which surpasses the AP construction in the 21st century, however. *Ricordare* + NP and *ricordarsi* + PP are at close to equal distribution in the 18th century and the TR verb stabilizes as the preferred construction. There is a sharp decline in *lamentarsi* + PP from the 18th to the 19th century, which consequently is less frequent than *lamentare* + NP for the first time. From the 19th until the 21st century, the abrupt changes in the trendlines point towards noisy or insufficient data; nonetheless, the trend started in earlier centuries continues – TR constructions are preferred for expressing logical objects. This is a considerable change from the 13th century, when the PRO constructions dominated at >70% of logical object expressions.

⁸Cases such as *lamentare* + PP, *lamentarsi* + NP, *ricordare* + PP, and *vantarsi* + NP are excluded from Figure 2, as they account for only 2% of the data. Also, the construction *vantare* + PP does not appear in the data.

While the data convincingly display this change, it is harder to pinpoint the period in which these AP constructions may have developed. The AP constructions are already represented in the earliest stages of the corpus. However, the presence of the detransitivizing *si* signals a connection with the reflexive/reciprocal construction, which is a well-studied source of AP markers. Sansò (2017, 2019) identified the reflexive/reciprocal construction as one of four sources of the AP marker across a 120-language sample and terms it the “best-documented polysemy pattern involving AP constructions” (2017: 193). Creissels (2012) reconstructed the Proto-West-Mande suffix *-i as the source of a detransitivizing suffix that grammaticalized into the reflexive pronoun *í* for Mandinka, among other Mande languages, and functions as an AP marker for some verbs (2012: 15). This is also observed and studied by Janic (2013) for Slavonic (specifically, Polish and Russian). An earlier paper by Terrill (1997), focusing on the development of AP in Australian languages, examined the diachronic processes by which the verbal morphology of reflexive constructions is reanalyzed and extended to AP constructions, first to a pragmatic AP and then to a structural AP. Her proposal sheds light on a sequence of mechanisms that underlie this change, which could account for the development found in this paper’s Italian data.

As with the AP constructions in the Pama-Nyungan languages described by (Terrill 1997), the PRO verbs of this sample share verbal morphology with the reflexive construction. Terrill suggests that AP constructions develop from reflexive constructions via extension of their pragmatic function. Reflexive constructions display low transitivity; not only are they semantically and syntactically less transitive than the corresponding non-reflexive verbs, they also tend to have low-transitivity verbs, non-agent subjects, and “non-distinct” objects (Terrill 1997: 81), and their agent and object are coreferential. In AP constructions, the patient similarly has low prominence and the verbs display lowered transitivity, but the agent and object are not coreferential. By extending the verbal morphology from the reflexive environment to the AP environment, a similar pragmatic situation is maintained, although the agent and object are no longer coreferential. It is plausible that a similar mechanism operated in the extension of the function of reflexive *si* to the AP construction. Support for this is found in the dataset, as seen in (13), where there is an ambiguous reading between a reflexive – a woman (*ella*) bemoaning herself – or an AP – a woman grieving [someone]:

- (13) [...] onde io veggendo ritornare alquante donne da lei,
[...] so.that I see.GER return.INF some.FPL woman.FPL from her
udio dicere loro parole di questa gentilissima, com’
hear.PFV.PST.ISG say.INF them word.FPL of this.FSG gracious.SUP.FSG how

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ella si lamentava; (La vita nuova, 1292)
she SE.3SG lament.IPFV.PST.3SG
'Seeing some ladies come away from her I heard them describe Beatrice's lamentations [lit. how she grieved].' (from Alighieri 1964: 71)

The context of this excerpt reveals that the woman is grieving the death of her father and therefore provides evidence for an AP reading. Terrill also suggests that after a first extension of the reflexive to the similar pragmatic situation of the AP construction, its function is reanalyzed as both reflexive and AP. This is considered a pragmatic AP. In a third stage, a new construction emerges, the syntactic AP. It maintains the pragmatic AP's structure, but its pragmatic function becomes secondary, demoted by the structural function.

In this account of the development of the AP, the transition from one stage to another is facilitated by one or more shared characteristics—first pragmatic/semantic, then structural. The data appear to mirror this development. However, it does not explain the decrease in frequency of the AP construction with a logical object. This may be due to the loss of the pragmatic function, and the syntactic AP may have subsequently competed with the transitive construction. Despite this development, the constructions in which *lamentarsi* and *vantarsi* select a null object complement, as in (13), represent a significant percentage of each verb pair's occurrences in the 21st century, at 58% and 20.83% respectively. They may be remnants of AP constructions, which have been lexicalized. I also propose that *ricordarsi* + NP, which is already present in the 13th-century data and becomes more frequent than *ricordarsi* + PP in the 21st century, existed as a competitor to the AP construction. As the pragmatic function receded, the AP morpheme *si* may have been reanalyzed as a dative reflexive, a function which was already present at this point. This developed into the dominant PRO construction in the 21st century. However, this is an initial, tentative explanation of the diachronic processes triggering change in this dataset, which would require further data to answer more definitively.

The changing and at times ambiguous meanings of the verbs provide another perspective in this historical narrative. It is possible to find contexts in which the reading of *lamentar(si)* is ambiguous, as the boundary between lamenting oneself (implies inner torment or other suffering) and complaining (implies dissatisfaction) can be vague. Also, the act of remembering is almost inextricable from the (unconscious) act of reminding oneself of something. As for *vantarsi*, the more reflexive meaning of 'pledge (oneself)' in the 13th century may have provided the starting point from which the pragmatic AP construction developed. With

the presence of the reflexive meaning and the AP construction in the 13th c., it is at least possible to suggest that the emergence of the AP was underway.

6 Conclusion

In response to the questions laid out in the introduction, the PRO verbs and their TR counterparts display a great deal of variation in terms of their distribution across time and syntactic environments. The overall distribution reveals an important trend: the PRO forms are more frequent overall, but experience a decline starting in the 16th century for *vantarsi*. This development is reflected in the distribution of the logical object constructions, where constructions with PRO forms were preferred early on as well. However, the TR forms start to dominate from the 17th century onwards, which suggests a decline of the AP construction.

I propose three lines of inquiry that could deepen and broaden this study: analyzing the diachronic relationship between the semantic roles of these verbs and their argument structure, examining dialectal variation in Italo-Romance, and determining if there are similar patterns across Romance languages.

As suggested in §5, the low transitivity of *lamentar(si)*, *ricordar(si)*, and *vantar(si)* facilitated the extension of reflexive verbal morphology to the AP construction. This is reflected in the semantic roles of these verbs: Experiencer subjects with low agentivity (and volition) and Theme objects that are little or not affected by the action. Change over time of semantic roles could account for diachronic variation of constructions and support the proposal for the emergence of the AP construction.

For the purpose of this study, I excluded data that presented prominent non-Tuscan features. A further study could include these data and examine the extent to which interdialectal contact shapes the use and distribution of the AP construction. The presence of verb pairs with similar characteristics in other Romance languages, such as French *(se) vanter (de)* ‘praise, boast’, suggests that a similar pattern might exist more broadly in Romance. It remains to be examined if the AP construction affects the same classes of verbs and if its distribution follows a comparable trajectory across time. Additional diachronic studies in other Romance languages examining these constructions could provide further evidence in favor of the AP construction as a Romance phenomenon, while also tracing its emergence back to a common source. This would be a valuable contribution to the historical research of the AP, which has tended to focus on ergative languages and other accusative languages.

Abbreviations

| | | | |
|------|-----------------------|------|----------------------|
| 1 | first person | IPFV | imperfective |
| 2 | second person | M | masculine |
| 3 | third person | MSG | masculine singular |
| AP | antipassive | NEG | negation, negative |
| ART | article | NP | noun phrase |
| AUX | auxiliary | PFV | perfective |
| COND | conditional | PL | plural |
| CP | complementizer phrase | PP | prepositional phrase |
| DEF | definite | PRO | pronominal |
| DET | determiner | PRS | present |
| GER | gerund | PST | past |
| F | feminine | PTCP | participle |
| FSG | feminine singular | SBJV | subjunctive |
| FUT | future | SG | singular |
| INDF | indefinite | SUP | superlative |
| INF | infinitive | TR | transitive |

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Corpora

Opera del Vocabolario della lingua Italiana (OVI, <https://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/content/ovi>).

Corpus Tesoro della lingua Italiana delle Origini (TLIO, [http://tlioweb.ovi.cnr.it/\(S\(nir13gk3cbh0jfugkf2xow3a\)\)/CatForm01.aspx](http://tlioweb.ovi.cnr.it/(S(nir13gk3cbh0jfugkf2xow3a))/CatForm01.aspx)).

Corpus di italiano scritto (CORIS/CODIS, http://corpora.dslo.unibo.it/coris_ita.html).

Biblioteca dei Classici Italiani (<http://www.classicitaliani.it/>).

IntraText Digital Library (IntraText, <http://www.intratext.com/>).

Corpus Diacronico dell'Italiano Scritto (DiaCORIS, <http://corpora.dslo.unibo.it/DiaCORIS/>).

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