Auxiliary selection in Romance and inflectional classes

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1 Introductory remarks

In this paper, we start out from the premise that alternating auxiliary selection, such as the well-known HABERE/ESSE (H/E) distinction in some Romance languages, could also be viewed in terms of partially arbitrary lexical stipulation, giving rise to two different inflectional classes (see, e.g., Bonami 2015: 97; Baerman, Brown & Corbett 2017: 28-29).

Such a view is relatively novel; it has only been touched upon in recent work (see, e.g., Bonami, 2015, Bach 2018, Štichauer 2019) where the general process of grammaticalization is invoked: auxiliary selection may become grammaticalized and may thus give rise to - more or less - arbitrary inflectional classes. This might have been a problematic view for various reasons. First, the two classes of lexemes selecting one or the other auxiliary are widely held to be well motivated (and, indeed, to a large extent it is the case in Romance, but see Sorace 2000, Bonami 2015), while the canonical inflection classes are entirely unmotivated (Corbett 2009). Second, auxiliary verb constructions were not considered to be genuinely inflectional. But recent work in inflectional periphrasis has clearly demonstrated that they are to be taken as exponence strategies (see, e.g. Ackerman & Stump 2004, Brown et al. 2012, Spencer & Popova 2015)

2 Mixed perfective auxiliation systems as IC

We intend to demonstrate that grammaticalization of auxiliary selection – giving rise to partially unmotivated inflectional classes – can be seen on the example of mixed auxiliary perfective systems, attested in some Italo-Romance varieties, where we find a more intricate alternation of the two auxiliaries H/E within one and the same TAM paradigm (see, e.g., Loporcaro 2007; 2014; 2016), as in examples (1) and (2) (cf. Torcolacci 2015: 52; Manzini & Savoia 2005: 682, respectively):
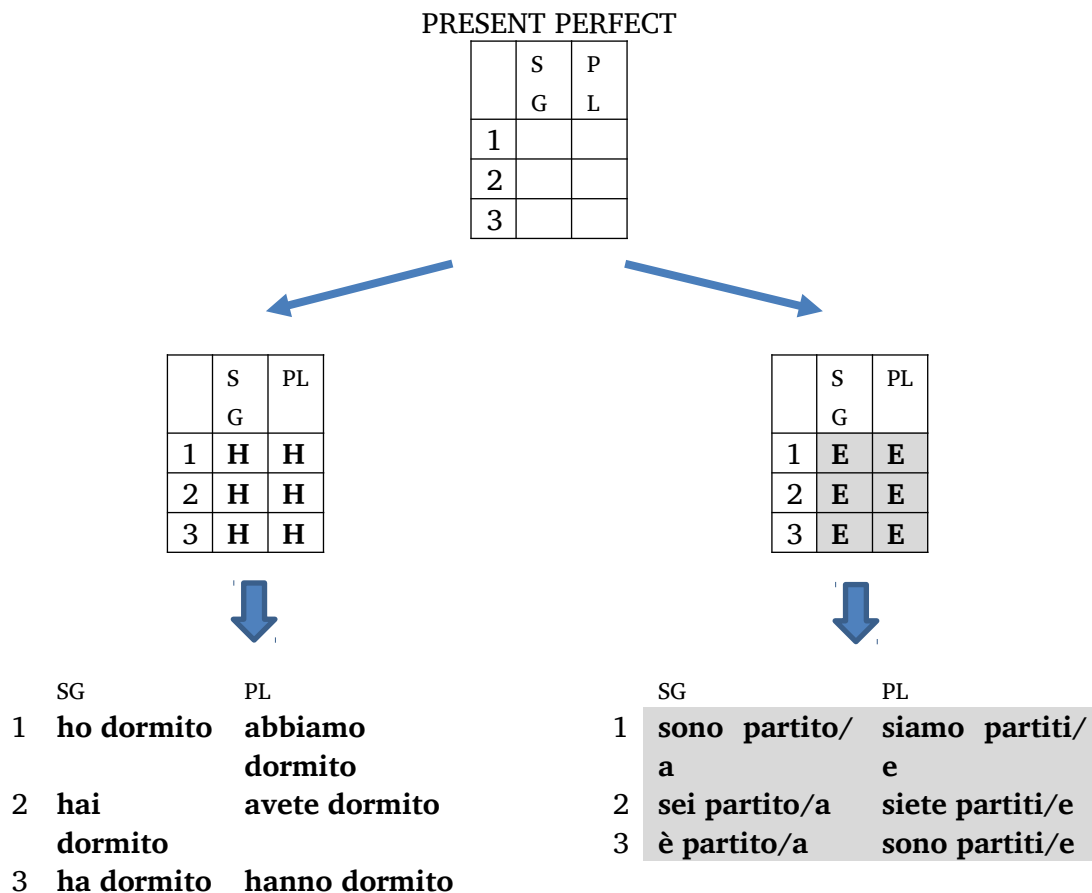
(1)

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
1	**sɔ fˈfatt** I.am done.PTCP	**am ˈfatt** we.have done.PTCP
2	**a ˈfatt** you.have.SG done.PTCP	**avet ˈfatt** you.have.PL done.PTCP
3	**a fˈfatt** he/she.has done.PTCP	**an ˈfatt** they.have done.PTCP

(2)

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
1	**sɔ durˈmito** I.am slept.PTCP	**semo durˈmito** we.are slept.PTCP
2	**si durˈmito** you.are.SG slept.PTCP	**sete durˈmito** you.are.PL slept.PTCP
3	**a durˈmito** he/she.has slept.PTCP	**a durˈmito** they.have slept.PTCP

In particular, we intend to discuss those interesting cases where one coherent class of lexemes, such as reflexives, is split between the two auxiliaries giving rise to *mixed paradigms which seem to be canonical instances of heteroclisis in a system where we have non-canonical inflectional classes* (see, e.g., Stump 2006, Kaye 2015, Bach 2018). But before, we lay out the notion of inflectional classes that we adopt.

3   Content *versus* form paradigms

We espouse Stump's (2016) distinction between content paradigms and form paradigms, positing that in the case of only one auxiliary, as in Spanish (and also in some Italian dialects), we have one content paradigm and one form paradigm for all perfective inflection (i.e. within the periphrastic screeve); in the case of two auxiliaries we would thus have two form paradigms (and, accordingly, two different realizations), as in the following scheme (inspired by Baerman, Brown & Corbett 2017: 77):

(3)

PRESENT PERFECT

	SG	PL
1		
2		
3		

	SG	PL
1	H	H
2	H	H
3	H	H

	SG	PL
1	E	E
2	E	E
3	E	E

	SG	PL
1	**ho dormito**	**abbiamo dormito**
2	**hai dormito**	**avete dormito**
3	**ha dormito**	**hanno dormito**

	SG	PL
1	**sono partito/a**	**siamo partiti/e**
2	**sei partito/a**	**siete partiti/e**
3	**è partito/a**	**sono partiti/e**

Of course, to adopt this view for the standard auxiliary selection in Romance is problematic since, as can be seen in (3), the lexemes selecting ESSE do not realize, strictly speaking, the same morphosyntatic property set (the gender and number of the subject is overtly expressed here, while this is not the case with HABERE). As we shall see, there are cases, within the mixed auxiliation systems, where exactly the same morphosyntactic set is realized regardless of the auxiliary selected (much as in example (2) above). In such cases, we do have two different form paradigms with distinct realizations corresponding to one content paradigm. It is best to treat instances such as (3) as a case of non-canonical inflectional class: one of the classes realizes an additional feature with respect to the other class. In synchrony, it would also be possible to treat such instances uniformly, with a system of syncretism; in such a system one would posit that the HABERE class also realizes the gender of the subject but that the realization for both genders is syncretic. In diachrony though, we know that it is not what happened and that the features involved were different.

However, we also find much more intricate cases where heteroclisis is at play involving unexpected mismatches that will turn out to be relevant for the content/form paradigm distinction. In many varieties we find a standard split between transitives/unergatives and unaccusatives selecting one or the other auxiliary (as in the scheme above), but within the class of reflexives a heteroclite system of periphrastic exponence can be found, as shown in example (4), reconstructed after Manzini & Savoia 2005, II, 652–653, and consulted with native speakers of the dialect:

(4)

	TRANSITIVES		*REFLEXIVES*		UNACCUSATIVES
1 sg.	aju laˈvatu	⟸	*m aju laˈvatu*		sugnu viˈnutu/a
2 sg.	a laˈvatu		*ti si llaˈvatu/a*	⟹	si vviˈnutu/a
3 sg.	a llaˈvatu		*s ɛ llaˈvatu/a*	⟹	ghɛ vviˈnutu/a
1 pl.	amu laˈvatu	⟸	*n amu laˈvatu*		simu viˈnuti/e
2 pl.	ati laˈvatu	⟸	*v ati laˈvatu*		siti viˈnuti/e
3 pl.	anu laˈvatu		*si su llaˈvati/e*	⟹	su vviˈnuti/e

In this variety (Altomonte, reg. Calabria, southern Italy), transitives (*lavare* 'to wash') select H throughout the paradigm, and unaccusatives (*viniri* 'to come') consistently require E (as in Standard Italian or French). However, reflexives (*lavarsi* 'to wash oneself') are curiously split between the two auxiliaries and thus give rise to a third class of lexemes (reflexives), where the intraparadigmatic distribution of the two auxiliaries does not seem to be motivated.

Under the notion of inflectional classes that we are adopting, we could say that we have here two main IC, while the third class is heteroclite taking over part of the realisations from the two main classes. If we adopt Stump's (2016) approach, we could say that to one content paradigm (broadly defined as PRESENT PERFECT, see (3) above) correspond two different form paradigms (with H and E, respectively), as seen above in (3), and the third is a heteroclite class. Yet there is again the problem that we have just touched upon, namely the fact that the classes of periphrastic realizations do not correspond to only one content paradigm as the two paradigms realize different morphosyntactic property sets (with E, as already remarked, the gender and number of the subject are overtly marked).

But there is more to say about this particular situation. In fact, if we subscribe to this view, we face here an interesting and unexpected mismatch: part of the paradigm with H realise one property set, while the rest of the paradigm with E realise a different property set. This is at odds with how content paradigms are defined. In general, in fact, reflexives seem to be the locus of such mismatches in the Romance languages. In Occitan, reflexives seem to involve a mixture of the features of both auxiliaries, in that, in cases where reflexives have a direct object, they use an ESSE auxiliary but the past participle agrees in gender and number with the object, which is normally the agreement pattern of the HABERE auxiliary.

On the basis of the example of such mixed paradigms, as well as the Occitan example, we attempt not only to redefine the relationship between content and form paradigms, but also to put forward a more elaborate typology of inflectional classes induced by such intraparadigmatic auxiliary alternations.

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