

Periphrastic Passives and Aspect in Italian
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Introduction

Italian *essere* (*be*) and *venire* (*come*) passives differ in their aspectual properties, both lexical and grammatical. Squartini's (1999) analysis of *venire* passives accounts for their incompatibility with perfect aspect. In the present study, I account for this property as well as passive *venire*'s incompatibility with statives and its behavior with event structural modifiers by analyzing passive *venire* as a light verb.

Background

Squartini (1999) observes that *essere* passives are compatible with perfect aspect, as in (1), while *venire* passives are not, as in (2).

(1) L' edificio è stato costruito
The building be.PRES.3 be.PTCP.MASC build.PTCP.MASC
'The building has been built'

(2) *L' edificio è venuto costruito
The building be.PRES.3 come.PTCP.MASC build.PTCP.MASC
'The building has been built'

Additionally, Volpato et al. (2016) observes that *essere* passives are ambiguous between verbal and adjectival passives, as in (3) and (4).

(3) La gara è aperta da Maria
The race be.PRES.3 open.PTCP.FEM by Maria
'The race is opened by Maria'

(4) La gara è apert-issima a tutti (*da Maria)
The race be.PRES.3 open-SPRL.FEM to everyone (*da Maria)
'The race is very open to everybody'

The *by*-phrase in (3) indicates that it is a verbal passive (Frigeni, 2004). Conversely, the suffix *-issima* and the ungrammaticality of the *by*-phrase in (4), indicates that it is an adjectival passive.

Venire passives, however, admit only verbal passives, as in (5) and (6).

(5) La gara viene aperta da Maria
The race come.PRES.3 open.PTCP.FEM by Maria
'The race is opened by Maria'

(6) *La gara viene apert-issima a tutti
The race comes.PRES.3 open-SPRL.FEM to everybody
'The race is open to everybody' (Volpato et al., 2016)

Finally, I observe that *essere* and *venire* show differences in terms of lexical aspect. *Essere* passives are compatible with all classes, but *venire* passives are ungrammatical with statives as in (7).

(7) *La verità viene conosciuta da tutti
The truth come.PRES.3 know.PTCP.FEM by everyone
'The truth is known by everyone'

Proposal

In order to account for *venire* passives, I propose the structure in (8), in which passive *venire* realizes *v*.

(8) [vP [\bar{A} v [v AspP [Asp PartP [Part VP [V \bar{A}]]]]]]

I begin from the observation that lexical *venire* is compatible with perfect aspect, as in (9).

(9) Il traditore è venuto dall' Inghilterra.

The traitor be.PRES.3 come.PTCP.MASC from England
'The traitor came from England'

Assuming passive *venire* is a light verb accounts for its incompatibility with perfect aspect, as light verbs in Italian cannot form passive participles (Folli & Harley, 2013). This is because Italian passive participles are derived via movement of the lexical verb in V to a higher participial projection, Part. Therefore, elements located above V cannot derive participles.

To account for the stative incompatibility, I follow MacDonald (2009) in assuming an aspectual projection (AspP) between vP and VP, which is projected for all aspectual classes except for statives. I further assume passive *venire* realizes a *v* which selects for eventivity. The existence of functional elements which select for eventivity has been independently established, such as the *do* of *do so* replacement, as in (10).

(10) ?John owes money to the bank and Frank does so too (Hallman, 2004).

Finally, I consider similarities between Italian *venire* and English *get* passives in light of the analysis of *get* passives developed by Biggs and Embick (2020). Pursuing these similarities predicts that *get* passives and *venire* passives may share event structural properties. This prediction is shown to hold for differences with *for X* modification (Dowty, 1979), which is ambiguous between a period of events and a repetition of events reading. Biggs and Embick show that this ambiguity holds for *be* but not *get* passives as in (11) and (12).

(11) The door was opened by the test robot (for three hours)

Readings: three hours of opening events; door maintained in an open state for three hours

(12) The door got opened by the test robot (for three hours)

Readings: three hours of opening events

Similarly, this ambiguity holds for *essere* but not *venire* passives as in (13) and (14), suggesting there are event structural similarities between *get* and *venire* passives.

(13) La porta è aperta dal robot per tre ore
The door is.PRES.3 open.PTCP.FEM by.the robot for three hours

'The door is opened by the robot for three hours'

Readings: three hours of opening events; door maintained in an open state for three hours

(14) La porta viene aperta dal robot per tre ore
The door come.PRES.3 open.PTCP.FEM by.the robot for three hours

'The door is opened by the robot for three hours'

Readings: three hours of opening events

Conclusion

This study accounted for the aspectual properties of *venire* passives by analyzing passive *venire* as a light verb. By assuming an aspectual projection and event structural differences, the present study surpassed the empirical coverage of the previous analysis, while also identifying interesting crosslinguistic similarities to be pursued in future work on passives.

References

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