Analytical lexical strategies denoting agency and causativity.
A synchronic and diachronic investigation in Italian and other Romance languages

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Despite the growing interest in the notions of agency and causativity (Cruse 1973; Shibatani 1976; Comrie 1976; DeLancey 1984; Song 1996; Dixon 2000; Talmy 2000; Haspelmath & Müller-Bardey 2001; Wolff & Song 2003; Lehmann 2017), the contribution of lexical (analytical) strategies concerning the use of complex prepositions to the designation of agentive and causative relations is still neglected. In particular, this paper aims at analyzing the set of Agentive Complex Prepositions, i.e. fixed word combinations having a prepositional function and signaling the Agent of a predicate (e.g. *by the hands of*), as well as the causer of a causative construction (e.g. *at the request of*), cf. the following example from Italian:

(1) IT   L'uomo fu ucciso   **su mandato del** cugino   **per mano   di** un killer
         the man was murdered on order   of.the cousin for hand of a killer
         'The man was murdered by a killer, as his cousin ordered'

While in the example (1) the Complex Preposition *su mandato di* 'on mandate of' introduces the participant who conceives and plans an action, and has a coercive power on the actual performer, the Complex Preposition *per mano di* 'by the hands of' introduces the participant who intentionally and directly performs the action, being its originator.

This investigation experiments a synchronic and diachronic cross-linguistic approach. On the one hand, the synchronic perspective aims at i) identifying different types of Complex Prepositions denoting the Agent in Italian and at comparing them to two Romance languages (i.e. Spanish and French), ii) at distinguishing them according to the degree of agency, and at iii) correlating the various Complex Prepositions to the different types of causativity that can be represented in the causativity scale. On the other hand, the diachronic investigation takes into account the evolution of Romance Complex Prepositions across different historical phases, and puts into relation synchronic restrictions with the original syntactic environment within the grammaticalization contexts.

A set of Agentive Complex Prepositions of Romance languages will be collected by means of a corpus-based investigation[1]. Then, Complex Prepositions will be classified on the basis of specific agentive semantic traits, as well as according to their meaning/function. Thus, they will be assigned a specific agentive class on the basis of the degree of control they express, and, in particular, according to the following agentive traits:

  i. intentionality: the volitional involvement of the participant (Dowty 1991), who "intends to let the situation happen" (Lehmann 2017, p.36),
  ii. coercive power: the authority of coercing someone to do something,
  iii. monitoring: the authority of control over the performing of the action (Lehmann 2017).
At least the following classes of Agentive Complex Prepositions will be considered:

  (2) IT   PERFORMER
             sia stato   ucciso **per mano di** qualche   boss mafioso
             (he) be   killed for hand of some   boss criminal
             'he was killed at the hands of some mafia boss'
  (3) IT   CONCEIVER
             Il killer   ha ucciso   l'uomo   **su suggerimento di**   John
             the killer   has murdered   the man   on suggestion   of   John
             'Upon suggestion of John, the killer murdered the man'

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[1] The synchronic analysis will be based on the *TenTen* corpora *Italian Web 2016*, the *Spanish Web 2018*, and the *French Web 2017* (Jakubíček *et al.* 2013), which will be used to extract the examples and their contexts of occurrence. For the diachronic investigation, the following corpora and dictionaries will be used: i) for Italian, *OVI Corpus* and *MIDIA corpus*, as well as the *TLIO dictionary*; ii) for French, the *Dictionnaire du Moyen Francais* and the *Base textuelle Old FRANTEXT*; iii) for Spanish, the *CORDE corpus*.

(4) IT   INSTIGATOR

i carabinieri, **su mandato di** un magistrato hanno sequestrato la casa
the policemen upon mandate of a magistrate have seized the house
'Upon the mandate of a magistrate, policemen seized the house'

While *per mano di* in (2) introduces the PERFORMER of the action (i.e. the participant who intentionally performs the action, being at the same time its originator and instigator), the CP *su suggerimento di* (3) introduces a CONCEIVER (i.e. the participant who conceives the action, but does not perform it and has no control over its development nor over someone else performing it), while the CP *su mandato di* (4) introduces the INSTIGATOR (i.e. the participant who conceives and plans an action, and has a coercive power on the actual performer).

The distinction between INSTIGATOR and CONCEIVER in terms of the presence of the trait <± coercive power> recalls the dichotomy *between direct* and *indirect causation* (Comrie, 1981). As causative constructions, Romance Agentive Complex Prepositions are able to:

(a) assign a new agentive slot to the verbal unit (Lehmann 1996),
(b) give rise to the distinction between two agentive participants in a sentence, sharing the involvement in the action, but being characterized by different agentive features.

Furthermore, there is a peculiar hierarchical relation between the different Agents (*scale of causative force*, cf. Comrie 1981). This analysis also aims at correlating the various Agentive Complex Prepositions to the different types of causativity that can be represented in the causativity scale.

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Corpora and dictionaries

Base textuelle *Old FRANTEXT*:   https://www.frantext.fr
Corpus diacrónico del español (CORDE):   https://www.rae.es/banco-de-datos/corde
Dictionnaire du Moyen Français (DMF):   http://www.atilf.fr/dmf
Opera del Vocabolario Italiano (OVI) corpus: http://www.ovi.cnr.it/index.php/it/
TenTen corpora: https://auth.sketchengine.eu
TLIO (Tesoro della Lingua Italiana delle Origini):   http://tlio.ovi.cnr.it/TLIO/