ITALIAN PARTICLE VERBS IN L1, L2 AND BILINGUAL SPEAKERS

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INTRODUCTION:

Particle verbs (PVs from now on) are verbal constructions formed by a verb followed by a particle with locative meaning. These constructions are typical of Germanic languages but not of Romance languages. However, several studies (Cini, 2008) have shown that in the Italian verbal system there are PVs, used mainly in the spoken language and in informal contexts. Moreover, it has been noted that in the Italian dialects PVs are widely present and commonly used, especially in the northern region. In this work particular reference is made to the Trentino dialect, in which these verbs are commonly used.

However, as highlighted in Cordin (2011), there are important differences in syntax, meaning and frequency of use between the PVs in the Germanic languages, in Italian and in the Trentino dialect:

- **Syntax**: In Italian and Trentino, unlike in the Germanic languages, verb and particle cannot be divided by phrases or nouns. See examples (1), (2), (3):

    (1) a. Irene ha buttato via la bambola
       b. *Irene ha buttato la bambola via
    (2) a. La Irene l'ha trato via la bambola
       b. *La Irene l'ha trato la bambola via
    (3) a. Irene threw away the doll
       b. Irene threw the doll away

- **Meaning**: In Germanic languages and in Trentino dialect, PVs can have compositional and non-compositional meaning and often they also express the *Aktionsart* of the verb. In Italian, the *Aktionsart* is rarely expressed by a PV.
- **Frequency**: In Germanic languages and in dialect the phenomenon of PVs is systematic and frequent, while in Italian it is marginal and PVs are used only in informal oral contexts.

THE STUDY:

- **Participants**: The research was conducted on three groups of eight participants each: a group of native Italian speakers, coming from central and southern Italy with a low dialectal competence (ITL1 henceforth), a group of bilingual Italian speakers from Trentino (IT2L henceforth), a third group of Italian L2 speakers with German mother tongue (ITL2 henceforth), who were in Italy for study or work purposes, with a language level between B1 and C1.

- **Materials and data collection**: The data were elicited in a guided context, but not specific on PVs. The production is therefore semi-spontaneous. The different speakers, in single sessions, were shown the images of the story, *Frog, where are you?* (Mayer, 1969) and, after a few minutes, they were asked to tell the story in Italian, spontaneously, paying attention to the actions of the characters, while telling the story they could see the images again. The narrations were recorded and then transcribed for analysis.

RESULTS:

- **PVs used:** The total PVs, in terms of type, used by the three groups are 49. Among these, many are used only by Trentino speakers, some only by German speakers, while those used by Italians have all been used by one or both groups IT2L and ITL2. Among the 49 PVs used lots have similar meanings or are even synonymous. This is especially true for the IT2L group.
- **χ^2 test**: As shown in Table 1 there is a difference in the percentage of use of PVs by the three groups. To verify if this difference in use was significant the χ^2 test was carried out. The difference <u>is significant</u> comparing the groups ITL2-ITL1 (χ^2= 5,9327, with Yates' correction, significant at p≤ 0.05) (Figure 1) and comparing IT2L-ITL1 (χ^2= 11,9739, with Yates' correction, significant at p≤ 0.05, p≤ 0.01, p≤ 0.005) (Figure 2). It is <u>non-significant</u> when comparing ITL2-IT2L (χ^2= 0.8903 with Yates' correction, n.s.) (Figure 3).

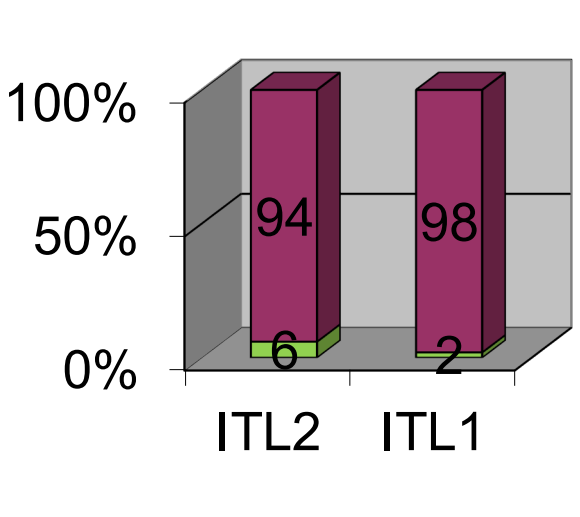| Table 1: PVs used by the three groups			
	Total of sentences	Sentences with PVs	Sentences without PVs	% sentences with PVs
ITL2	445	28	427	6,15
ITL1	402	10	392	2,48
IT2L	625	49	576	7,84

Figure 1: Compairson ITL2-ITL1
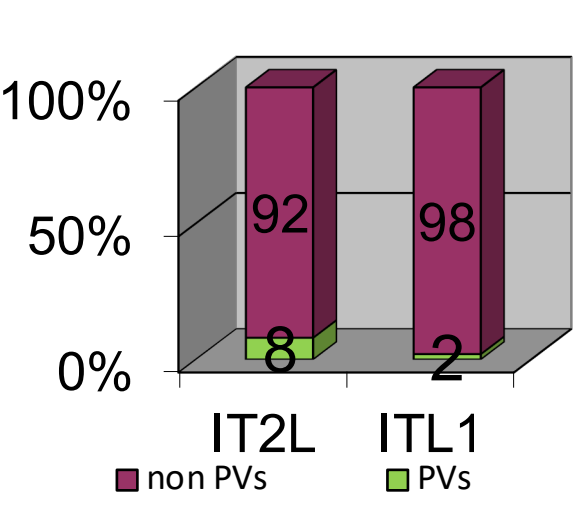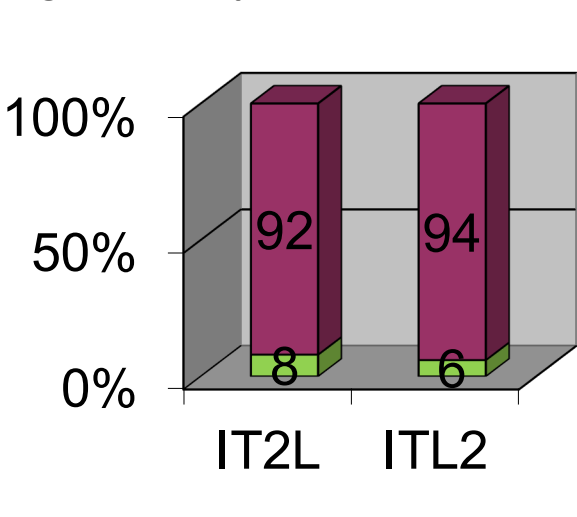Figure 2: Comparison IT2L-ITL1
Figure 3: Compairson IT2L-ITL2

- **B2 as maximum level of expansion:** L2 Italian speakers use PVs at every level of proficiency, as already mentioned in Corino (2012), according to which the use of PVs is widespread from the earliest stages of acquisition and continues steadily throughout the learning process. However, according to the data collected, at B2 level there seems to be the maximum expansion of this strategy, which then seems almost abandoned at a higher linguistic level.
- **Wrong syntax:** some constructions can't fit exactly into the Italian PVs, because of the order in which they were used. In fact, some of the German speakers have divided the verb from the particle with a DP, as in (1).

    (1) a. Poi si blocca il cervo e **getta** Peppe **dentro** in un ponte (in un lago)
       Then, the deer gets stuck and throw Peppe into in a bridge (in a lake)

- **Self-correction:** some of the bilingual speakers, after using a PV, have corrected themselves using a synthetic verb, as in (2). This can be correlated with the fact that these constructions are not felt to be correct in Italian, in line with what was reported by Poletto (2009), according to whom, for this very reason, speakers with good dialectal competence avoid these constructions in Italian.

    (2) a. Dal buco sotto terra <corr> salta fuori </corr> esce una talpa
       From the hole under the ground, <corr> comes out </corr> exit a mole

- **Metaphorical meaning:** The only PVs used, with metaphorical value, is used by ITL1.1 which uses the verb: *saltar fuori* (to jump out) with meaning: *trovare* (to find), as shown in the example (3):

    (3) a. Cominciarono a cercare nelle tane degli altri animali, cercando di trovarla e di farla saltar fuori
       They begun to search in the liars of the other animals, trying to find it and to make it jump out

- *Aktionsart*: Most PVs are used with locative-directional value: the particle therefore specifies the direction of movement. However, in some cases, it adds an *Aktionsart* value; this happens mainly in the IT2L group, as shown in (4):

    (4) a. Il bambino e il cagnolino finiscono in un laghetto, ci cascano dentro. (Telic *Aktionsart*)
       The child and the dog end in a lake, they fell into it.
       b. Il gufo gli corre dietro al bambino, mettendolo in fuga (Continuative *Aktionsart*)
       The owl run after the child, scaring him away.

CONCLUSIONS:

In conclusion, the sample of eight participants, for each group, proved to be sufficient to collect a quantity and a variety of PVs to be analyzed. In fact, this research tries to show that, although PVs are not yet perceived as regular constructions of Italian, as claimed by Artusi (2017), they are actually used in Italian spoken language, even though monolinguals significantly differ from L2ers and bilinguals in this respect. The considerations found on the different verbal bases and particles, used by the different groups are reflected in the study on the PVs of written Italian, conducted by Corino (2012) on two different corpora, one of Italian written by learners and one of Italian written by native speakers.

The use of these constructions by L2 speakers of Italian (with L1 German) Dind Italian-Trentino bilingual speakers, may be due to the multilingual competence of these speakers, in Caloi, Belletti e Poletto's (2018) words, the knowledge of several languages gives access to different linguistic strategies and options compared to those used by the L1 speakers.

The fact that some bilingual speakers corrected themselves when using these constructions, makes it clear how much PVs are perceived, by these speakers, as dialectal constructions, not corrected in Italian, in line with what reported by Poletto (2009).

It can therefore be said that PVs are an established reality of the language spoken by both natives and learners. And that, despite the differences in quantity and use, compared to the PVs of the Germanic languages, they still play an important role in the linguistic economy of Italian. Therefore, it is a phenomenon impossible to ignore, and it should be studied more thoroughly, with particular reference to the relationship between PVs and the expression of *Aktionsart*.

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