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LEXICOGRAPHY AND PHRASEOLOGY OF ROMANCE LANGUAGES

The case of procomplement verbs

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The *Grande Dizionario dell’Uso* edited by Tullio De Mauro in 1999 has brought about a revolution in Italian lexicography, especially for its focus on phraseology. Multiword expressions are listed as lemmas and a new class of verbs is introduced and given for the first time a proper metalinguistic label, i. e. *procomplement verbs* (PV). In the preface it is explained that these verbs display “a meaning of their own which either cannot be linked to the main verb or which is already steadily lexicalized: *avercela/avere* (En. ‘bear a grudge’/‘have’), *cavarsela/cavare* (‘get by’/‘pull out’), *fregarsene/fregare* (‘not to care about’/‘rub’)”. The clitic pronouns *la* and *ne* added to the main verbs in the examples (*avere, cavare, fregare*) are anaphoric to a hidden argument which is difficult to retrieve and causes idiosyncrasy. This might have inspired the label ‘procomplement’ used by De Mauro, with *pro-* meaning ‘in place of’ (see *pro-* in *Nuovo De Mauro*).

Indeed, *procomplement* verbs allow for a better characterization of the lexicalised clitics to be found in Romance languages and are considered to be typical of contemporary spoken Italian (D’Achille 2003; Russi 2008). More recently, a few types of PVs are gaining some attention in research carried out on the Spanish language (Arellano 2020; Bibis/Roberge 2004; Espinal 2009) though De Mauro’s classification is still unacknowledged and more systematic analyses should be carried out (Russi 2008). In the *RAE dictionary*, for example, *pagarla* (‘to pay for an offence’) is given as an instance of “locuciones verbales coloquiales” (‘colloquial verbal idiom’) and in the *Le Grand Robert* procomplement verbs are frequently listed as example sentences. Furthermore, in bilingual lexicography reversibility from one language to another is scant and suitable morphosyntactic descriptions for foreign speakers are still missing (Viviani 2007). As an example, dictionaries should point out that PVs generally have fixed pronouns, such as in *finiscila, altrimenti le prendi!* (‘stop it or you’ll get a beating/spanking!’), whereas in compositional verb-clitic constructions the clitic is inflected to agree with a discourse topic: *finiscila/le, la pasta/le verdure!* (eat the pasta/vegetables!).

Aiming at identifying relevant features to be added as microstructural items (Wiegand/Smit 2013) in bilingual dictionaries, *procomplement* verbs belonging to three Romance languages were collected from existing lexicographic resources: 86 lexical units for French, 259 for Italian and 137 for Spanish.

The inventory also counts *procomplement verb constructions* (PVC) of the type described by Espinal (2009): “V+Cl+XP”, such as Fr. *en faire de belles*, It. *combinarle/farla grosse*, Sp. *hacer-la buena/bonita/menuda* (‘to blunder’). These units undeniably represent missing fragments to be added to the phraseological spectrum, such as *procomplement* phrasal verbs (see 3, V+CL+ADV), light verbs (IT, *farla lunga/breve*, ‘drug on’/‘cut something short’) or idioms

with free slots (Mellado Blanco 2015, p. 113, IT. “*rimetterci X*”: rimetterci i polmoni/la camicia/la pelle/le cuoia...).

Starting from De Mauro’s description, the inventoried PVs were classified according to different degrees of semantic opacity. For most of the inventoried lexical units (Fr 79%; It 71%; Sp 82%) the hidden argument proves to be retrievable (1), whereas in a small group (Fr 2%; It 5%; Sp 1%) an emphatic meaning emerges (3), and all the others (Fr 20%, It 24%, Sp 18%) display full pronominal semantic bleaching and are completely opaque (2). Some of these features also have morphosyntactic correlates. Subject retrievability, for example, tends to be matched by instances of change of meaning when different clitics are added to the same base verb (1.b), by contrast, clitic variation to convey the same meaning highlights semantic opacity (2.b):

- (1) Fr. *la sauter* (*la*= *nourriture*), ‘to be on the breadline’,
- (1.b) Sp. *buscársela* (*la* *plea*, ‘the fight’) ‘to ask for trouble’, and *buscárselas* (*Las soluciones*, ‘the remedies’) ‘to make do’,
- (2) It. *farci* as in *ma ci fa o ci è?*, ‘to play dumb’, ‘to take advantage of something’,
- (2.b) Fr. *en* *écosser/les écosser*, ‘to shell out’, it. *aversene/aversela*, take offence’,
- (3) It. *darci dentro*, ‘knuckle down’.

Issues in machine translation will be exemplified only on purpose of soliciting more thorough investigations on this class of verbs.

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