

Italian goes creative too: a closer look at creative *via* ‘away’ verb-particle constructions

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Constructional creativity is a widespread phenomenon in English (Goldberg 1995), whereas it is deemed to be less active and pervasive in Romance languages, which are thought to have a lower “constructional tolerance” (Perek & Hilpert 2014). In this paper, we explore constructional creativity in Romance by investigating particle verbs (PVs) in Italian (Masini 2005), specifically those featuring the particle *via* ‘away’. *Via* PVs are common in Italian and normally convey directional motion (e.g. *andare via* ‘go away’, *portare via* ‘take/bring away’, *buttare via* ‘throw away’, *mandare via* ‘send away’, *volare via* ‘fly away’, *scappare via* ‘escape away/run off’). However, they also developed an actional resultative meaning with verbs of removal (Iacobini & Masini 2006), as illustrated in (1). In addition, Busso (2021) observed creative examples like (2):

- (1) *Fate attenzione a non graffiare via la vernice*
make attention to not scratch away the paint
‘Be careful not to scratch off the paint’
- (2) *Colora via l’ ansia*
color away the anxiety
‘Color away anxiety’

Whereas (1) contains a caused-motion expression where the action of scratching results in the removal of the paint (this resultative reading is not necessarily activated without the particle: *graffiare la vernice* ‘scratch the paint’ does not imply that the paint is removed), example (2) shows a more abstract resultative expression that describes the vanishing of an unwanted psychological state (anxiety) by the activity of coloring (it’s the title of an anti-stress book).

But what is the actual spread of these creative uses in contemporary Italian? Is (2) just an ephemeral, isolate expression with no consequences? Or is it just the tip of an iceberg still to be unveiled?

To answer this question, we carried out an empirical corpus-based analysis of *via* PVs. We employed the *itTenTen16* corpus (searched through the SketchEngine), mainly due to its very large size (4.9B words). All sequences of V+*via* were extracted, then filtered in various ways to reduce the (high) number of hits and finally manually checked. By this procedure, we detected 113 creative uses corresponding to 66 V+*via* lexemes, which were subsequently analysed and classified into four types, exemplified by examples (3)-(6):

- (3) *Hai baciato via tutto il mio dolore*
have.2SG kissed away all the my pain
‘You kissed all my pain away’
- (4) *Un elicottero ruggisce via*
a helicopter roars away
‘A helicopter roars away’
- (5) *Do il mazzo di fiori a una ragazza che [...] sorride via, maliziosa*
give.1SG the bunch of flowers to a girl who [...] smiles away, sly
‘I give the bunch of flowers to a girl who [...] smiles away, sly’
- (6) *l’ unica cosa [...] sarebbe afferrare un amico qualsiasi e bersi via la notte*
the only thing [...] would_be grab a friend any and drink.REFL away the night
‘the only thing [...] would be to grab any friend and drink the night away’

In (3), *baciare via* ‘kiss away’ means ‘remove (metaphorically) by way of kissing’, where the act of kissing depicts the way in which the metaphorical removal is achieved; in (4) the union of a sound emission verb (*ruggire* ‘roar’) and *via* ‘away’ conveys a motion event of departure that is accompanied by a roaring noise; (5) also expresses a motion event, by means of adding *via* ‘away’ to *sorride* ‘smiles’, a verb of nonverbal expression; finally, the example in (6) is reminiscent of Jackendoff’s (1997) ‘time-away’ construction (e.g., *twistin’ the night away*). In the full paper, these four types will be extensively described and analysed.

Overall, our results point to an admittedly not large but significant amount of creative uses. These can be classified into well-recognizable subtypes, some of which – we will argue – qualify as emerging PV (sub)constructions, given their consistent form-meaning mapping through a fair number of examples. We will also claim that, although some types may have been influenced by English (see (5)-(6)), others seem independent developments due to coercion effects (see (3)-(4)), which prove that constructional creativity applies to Italian too.

References

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