

Expressing (not only) concessivity: constructional idioms with reduplication of the verbal element in Italian and Czech

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Spitzer (1918; 1951) was among the first to identify a structure based on reduplicated imperatives. Such schematic structures are widespread above all in the Romance languages, but present also elsewhere. In these structures the imperative is used “in metaphorical transposition” instead of the indicative (or the gerund) in adverbial function, as in the sentence *Gira e rigira siamo sempre allo stesso punto*. Thornton (2009) develops the topic, proposing the hypothesis that double imperatives constitute converbs in Italian.

These structures often have a concessive value (more precisely they are concessive conditionals) although this type is only rarely mentioned in traditional grammars. Nor does the literature mention constructions with a similar meaning, formed by double subjunctives such as *costi quel che costi* or *piaccia o non piaccia*, perhaps due to their low productivity.

In this paper, based on the data extracted from corpora, we will describe these structures from a formal, morphosyntactic, semantic and pragmatic perspective, according to the usage-based constructionist model (Bybee, 2006), focusing on syntactic and semantic constraints and on the degree of idiomaticity and productivity of these constructions.

A cross-linguistic comparison with analogous constructions in a Slavic language, Czech, turns out to be an interesting challenge. Even in Czech we find highly lexicalized structures, considered to be idiomatic expressions with a (mainly) concessive meaning, made up of double imperatives, e.g., *stůj co stůj* (‘no matter what the cost’). These structures do not have a consensual interpretation: they are classified either as binomials (Kopřivová, 2021) or as “grammatical idioms” (Čermák, 2007: 310). In the class of grammatical idioms we can find other concessive structures as well which are more productive and only partially lexically filled, featuring double indicatives such as [Ať V1, co V1] (*ať dělá, co dělá*, ‘no matter what he/she does’).

Besides identifying analogies and differences, the cross-linguistic comparison could also shed light on some aspects of the theoretical description and lexicographic treatment of these schematic idioms in typologically different languages.

References

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