

## Lexically open idioms. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the “non fare che” construction in Italian

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This investigation proposes a corpus-driven description of lexically open idioms (Fillmore *et al.* 1988), a subtype of constructions characterized by a low degree of lexical specification and a high degree of semantic predictability. Lexically open idioms contain both lexically fixed and empty slots and may be associated with different syntactic structures (either at the phrase-level or at the sentence-level). In particular, this contribution proposes a qualitative/quantitative corpus-based analysis of the (sentence-level) construction *non fare che* in Italian (cf. examples 2-3-4):

- (1)  $X_{NP} + non\ fare\ che + Y_{VP}$
- (2) sono al limite di una crisi nervosa, **non faccio che** piangere  
 (I) am at.the limit of a crisis nervous, not do.1SG that cry.INF  
 ‘I’m on the verge of a nervous breakdown, *all I do is crying*’
- (3) noi **non faremo che** accennare poche idee senza dilungarci su di  
 we not do.1PL that hint at few ideas without dwelling on of  
 un argomento ampiamente trattato da grandissimi ingegni  
 a subject amply covered by great minds  
 ‘we will *only* hint at a few ideas without dwelling on a subject that has been amply covered by great minds’
- (4) Offrire ai bambini biscotti per colazione **non fa che**  
 Offering to.the children biscuits for breakfast not do.3SG that  
 appesantire la digestione  
 burdens the digestion  
 ‘Offering children biscuits at breakfast *only* burdens their digestion’

From the structural point of view, the construction is composed of three main parts:

- i) X: the lexically empty position, that can be filled by a NP playing the function of the subject of the verb *fare* ‘do’;
- ii) *non fare che*: the lexically invariable portion, obligatory requiring the generic verb *fare* ‘do’, the negation marker *non* ‘not’ and the conjunction *che* ‘that’;
- iii) Y: the second empty position, that can be filled by a verb, necessarily expressed in the infinitive.

On a lexical-semantic level, the construction i) shows a non-compositional but conventional meaning, ii) has a medium degree of lexical saturation (due to the presence of a fixed portion and variable slots), iii) has a pragmatic-communicative connotation. The construction acquires different meanings, depending on its distributional features: for instance, whereas in (2) it intensifies the continuative aspect of the action expressed by the lexical verb (*piangere* ‘cry’), in (3) and (4) it emphasizes and intensifies the limiting semantics and the causal relationship, respectively:

- (i) intensive-continuative value: ‘ $X_{NP} Y_{VP}$  *a lot and continuously*’
- (ii) limiting value: ‘ $X_{NP}$  *limits himself doing*  $Y_{VP}$ ’
- (iii) causal value: ‘ $X_{NP}$  *causes*  $Y_{VP}$ ’

The three sub-types show clear formal similarities. However, they are characterized by a different semantic value, respond to different lexical restrictions, and show different degrees of productivity. The same pattern may show different pragmatic implications, depending on the lexical fillers and on the context of use. Moreover, the three subtypes are distributed differently in terms of number of occurrences.

For the purpose of this analysis, data are extracted from a corpus of written Italian (*itTen2016 sample*) resorting to specific CQL queries, and the quantitative analysis is provided by means of software for statistical computing (e.g. R). First, data are classified on the basis of i) structural and functional properties, i.e. number/type of lexemes admitted in the empty slots of each individual instantiation of the construction, as well as the specific function of the construction, ii) strength of association between lexical fillers and construction. Secondly, the frequency information of the construction and of its fillers is taken into account. The quantitative analysis of the construction will

consider type/token ratio, log-likelihood, semantic word clustering (Gries/Stefanowitsch 2010) and collocation features (Stefanowitsch/Gries 2003) in order to assess the co-occurrence of words and constructions in terms of attraction/repulsion. Frequency data and association measures will be finally accompanied by a further qualitative analysis through which similarities and hierarchical relationships between the different patterns are identified.

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