

The Italian motion verb *passare* in a typological perspective

El verbo de movimiento italiano *passare* en una perspectiva tipológica

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Abstract: *The present paper will focus on the main syntactic constructions of Italian verb *passare* “pass, cross” in its not-causative usage. Such a study does not yet exist for this specific verb. *Passare* is a generic Path verb, and it can take a direct object, one or more prepositional complements and directional or locative particles. This is a corpus-based study. After an introduction on encoding of motion events in various languages, we discuss the various constructions we have found in our corpus subdividing it according to Goal, Source and Locative meanings.*

Keywords: motion verbs, Path verbs, syntax, typology

Resumen: *Este artículo va a investigar los principales esquemas sintácticos del verbo italiano *passare* “pasar, cruzar” en su uso no causativo. De hecho, no existe un trabajo todavía sobre este verbo específico. *Passare* es un verbo genérico de Path, y puede tomar un objeto directo, uno o más complementos preposicionales y partículas direccionales y locativas. Este es un estudio basado sobre un corpus. Después de una introducción sobre la codificación de eventos de movimiento en varios idiomas, vamos a discutir las diversas construcciones que hemos encontrado en nuestro corpus subdividiéndolo de acuerdo con los significados de Meta, Fuente y Ubicación.*

Palabras clave: verbos de movimiento, verbos de Path, sintaxis, tipología

1. Introduction and theoretical backgrounds

1.1. Motion events in a typological perspective

The present research starts from a previous study where we analyzed concrete and metaphoric usages of the Italian verb *passare* “pass, cross” (Basile and Sesoldi, 2021). In the present study, working on the same corpus, we will show various syntactic constructions of the verb. To our knowledge, no similar study exists yet for this Italian verb, contrary to the Spanish equivalent *pasar* (cf. Alarcón Hernández, 2004). Often Italian seems to express Path in relatively high

details and this verb can be a good example of this.

According to Talmy's (1985, 1991, 2000) typology of motion events, languages can be divided in two types, satellite-framed (SF) and verb-framed (VF). In a SF pattern typically the main verb of a clause encodes a Manner, while Path is expressed by *satellites* (including Latin and Slavic inseparable verbal prefixes, German inseparable and separable prefixes, English phrasal verbs and complex prepositions, etc.), as in the following English example (1a); in a VF pattern on the contrary the main verb encodes Path (or simply motion), Manner being omitted or expressed by an adverbial (including romance gerunds), as in the Spanish example (1b).

- (1) (a) The bottle floated *into* the cave.
 (b) La botella *entró a* la cueva (flotando).
 (lit.) "The bottle entered the cave (in floating)."

According to Talmy, all Indo-European languages (except for Romance) and Chinese pertain to the SF type, Romance and Semitic languages pertain to the VF type. Thanks also to many criticisms, the theory has been improved over years. Slobin (2004) adds a third type –equipollent-framed (EF)– for serial-verb languages which admit two or more verbs per-clause, for example, this is the case of Thai (cf. Zlatev and Yangklang 2004: 165, in the same volume) exemplified in (2).

- (2) Chán dǎn (paj)
 I walk (go)
 "I am walking (away, towards s.t.)"

Chinese also, being previously considered to be a SF language by Talmy, is now classified as EF. Although the main issue of the work is Manner salience, Slobin observes also that some VF languages, such as Mayan may have a very rich expression of Path, at some extent this is also the case for Italian (using verb-particle constructions, using verb- particle constructions, e.g. *salta fuori* "jump out, come out", *fuggir via* "flee away", etc.), and maybe other Romance languages (or varieties) as well (Slobin, 2004, p. 251). The notion of Path salience has been widely developed among others by Ibarretxe-Antuñano (2009). Also Beavers et al. (2010) observe that many languages can hardly be classified and pay some attention to the third EF type. What is of some interest in their work is the consideration that the preference for a SF or VF pattern for a given language is motivated (and so at some extent at least predictable) by language-specific properties, for example in both French and Japanese, all locative complements being ambiguous between a static and a motion reading, the only unambiguous expression of a Path will be either to express it by *until*- clauses or to encode it in the main verb. However, according to Ibarretxe-Antuñano (2009), the

richness of grammatical sources available in a language (e.g., the presence of six locative cases in Basque) has been related not directly to a preference for a SF pattern, rather to the elaboration of Path¹. Beavers and al. (2010, p. 357) assume also that a lexical root may lexicalize either Path or Manner but not both, at the same time. However, this is not correct, as observed by Beavers and Koontz-Garboden (2017). According to them, the English verb *climb* involves both a Manner and a “scalar change”² (i.e., a Path) in all its uses, as also other verbs like *ski* and *roll* do (Beavers and Koontz-Garboden, 2017, p. 865).

1.2. Motion events in Italian

As observed in many studies, Italian shows some features somewhat unexpected in a typical VF language. According to Iacobini (2010), the lexicon of Manner of motion verbs is richer in Italian than usual for other VF languages and Folli and Ramchand (2005) observe that some verbs, such as *irrompere* “break in”, *sfuggire* “escape” etc., have the tendency to encode both Path and Manner at the same time, but in fact this is also the case in other Romance languages³. As also in other Romance languages such as Spanish and French, some Manner of motion verbs (3), but not others (4), admit a Goal:

- (3) Gianni è corso in camera.
“John ran into the room.”
- (4) *Gianni è camminato in camera.
“John walked into the room.”

Unlike in French, however, the presence of a Goal causes the change of the auxiliary from *avere* “have” (used with unergative verbs) to *essere* “be” (used with unaccusative verbs).

In Italian directional particles are often combined with both Path and Manner verbs (but with lexical restrictions), so resembling satellites. Simone (1996, 2008) calls these verb-particle constructions *verbi sintagmatici* (calqued from English *phrasal verbs*); for the author these constructions, though limited in number, are very frequent in usage. As Iacobini and Masini (2006) observe satellite-like particles such as *fuori* “outside”, *via* “away” often occur with

¹ The situation is probably more complex than this. Italian suffers the same ambiguity of French (and other Romance languages) for near all locative expressions, but it seems to behave more like Basque than French. According to Cardini (2012), grammatical and lexical constrains are more relevant than ambiguity (in most cases however, resolved by the context); all other conditions being equal, a complement of *correre* “to run” will be more probably understood as a Goal than a complement of *camminare* “to walk”, simply because the latter does not normally allow boundary-crossing complements.

² The authors introduce this expression as a broader term including both a change of state and a change of location, expressed by the narrower *Path*.

³ However, this feature is not unknown to SF languages such as English, as observed by Beavers and Koontz-Garboden (2017).

Manner verbs, modifying their meaning and rendering them telic and so causing the change of the auxiliary:

- (5) (a) Il piccione *ha volato* da Roma a Pisa.
"The pigeon flew from Rome to Pisa."
(b) Il piccione *è volato* via.
"The pigeon flew away."

According to them, Italian would be in a transitional phase in which the inherited system of inseparable verbal prefixes inherited from Latin (cf. Stolova 2011) has been largely dismissed and a new system of verb-particle constructions is emerging, these constructions being in competition with synthetic roots. For Iacobini and Masini verbal particles are to be considered as true satellites, while Hijazo-Gascón and Ibarretxe-Antuñano (2013) prefer to call them *pseudo-satellites*, because their versatility and productivity is not comparable to that of true SF languages such as German or English.

In conclusion, Italian remains a VF language: as other studies have shown, Italian speakers do not differ from speakers of other VF languages in the expression of Manner, but just in the richer and more detailed expression of Path (cf. among others Cardini, 2008, 2012; Hijazo-Gascón and Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 2013), the use of particles and several complements improve the semantic of the main verb, that nevertheless usually encodes a Path. This is not just a matter of behavior, but also of grammatical constraints (Cardini, 2012): on one side, many of these satellite-like particles (*dentro* "inside", *fuori* "outside") remain ambiguous between a Goal and a Locative reading, whilst, on the other, boundary-crossing complements are not allowed or sound at least odd with many other Manner verbs (*nuotare*, *camminare*, etc.).

1.3. Purpose and methodology of the research

The paper discusses the synchronic relationship between verbal base, directional particles, and complements.

Our data come from PAISÀ, a large open access on-line corpus of contemporary written Italian, of about 250 million tokens, from web Italian and digitalized texts. For our previous research we extracted random 250 samples for concrete meaning and other 250 for metaphoric usage. We will use the same corpus in the present study. The data will be divided according to the core argument of the verb:

- Expression of a Goal
- Expression of both Source and Goal
- (Expression of Source only)
- Locative
- Locative expressed by a direct object

We did not consider passive voice, grammatical aspect, and the transitive causative construction, consisting of an agent causing motion and a patient undergoing a change of location (in the table at the end of the paper instances of this construction are listed as *other*).

2. Case study

2.1. Prepositions/satellites with goal meaning

The first group of occurrences we selected is formed from cases in which the verb has a prepositional complement or an adverb expressing a Goal. This is by far the most frequent usage (in our corpus 114 times with concrete meaning, i.e., 45,6% of the total, 135 times with metaphorical meaning, i.e., 54% of the total, not including cases in which also a Source is expressed, s. below). We can find adverbs that look like satellites of a SL language, such as English. It happens both with concrete motion meaning (6, 7) or metaphorical meaning (8).

- (6) Alcune auto stanno in divieto di sosta proprio sotto il comando. Ma lo sceriffo non ci fa troppo caso e fa segno di *passare avanti* (lit. “pass [inf.] ahead”).
“Some cars are parked in a no parking area right under the command station, but the sheriff doesn’t pay too much attention to it and makes gesture *to go forth*.”
- (7) Arrivato a me ha fatto *per passare oltre* (lit. “for pass [inf.] beyond”), poi si è fermato ed è tornato indietro.
“When he arrived at me, he was about *to pass on*, then he stopped and came back to me.”
- (8) Una dozzina di consiglieri municipali e due comunali (Rizzo, Bafundi) hanno lasciato la bandiera tricolore *per passare altrove* (lit. “for pass [inf.] elsewhere”).
“A dozen municipal councilors and two city councilors (Rizzo, Bafundi) left the tricolor flag *to move elsewhere*.”

We find prepositional complements expressing a Goal, and sometimes the same word can function either as an adverb or a preposition (e.g., *oltre* “beyond”, as in (11), with a clearly metaphorical usage).

- (9) Che stava sopra il fiume che separa i mondi e che ci aiutò *a passare di là* (lit. “to pass [inf.] of there”).
“Who stood above the river that separates the Worlds and helped us to move beyond.”
- (10) Ho attraversato a ovest dell’aeroporto *per poi passare a est* (lit. “for pass [inf.] to East”) del lago di Allos, dove ho iniziato il planatone finale al limite della zona perturbata.

"I crossed the Airport by the westside and then *I moved to the East* of Lake Allos. There, I started my final big-glide at the edge of the disturbed area."

- (11) Solo chi è *passato oltre il dolore* (lit. "has passed [3rd ps.] beyond the pain") potrà conoscere il volto vero dell'amore.
"Just those who *have known pain* will be able to know the true face of love."

There are also some idiomatic constructions, such as *passare in eredità a* "to be inherited by sb." (but also transitive "to reserve something as sb.'s heritage", the latter not considered here):

- (12) I boschi *erano passati in eredità* (lit. "have passed [3rd pp.] in heritage") ai nipoti del conte.
"The woods *have been inherited* by the Count's grandsons."

2.2. Prepositions expressing both a Source and a Goal

We have included here relatively few cases in which both a source and a goal is expressed (in our original corpus 15 times – just 8,4% – with concrete meaning and 33 times with metaphorical meaning, 12,8%). Typically, both the Source and the Goal are expressed by simple prepositions (*da, di... a, in*).

- (13) Si era sempre opposto all'Assistente Sociale, che *passava di casa in casa* (lit. "passed [iprf. 3rd ps.] from house to house") per acchiappare i bambini nascosti tra i cespugli dell'orto o sotto il tetto.
"He had always been opposing the Social Worker, who *passed from house to house* to catch the children hidden in the bushes of the garden and under the roofs."
- (14) La fattoria [...] *era passata di padre in figlio* (lit. "had passed [3rd ps.] from father to son") per quattro generazioni, fino dal tempo delle scorribande degli Indios.
"The farm [...] *had passed from father to son* for four generations, since the time of Indians' raids."

Here too we find an idiom *passare di proprietà* ("to change ownership"):

- (15) Da quando Nuovo Pignone è *passata di proprietà* (lit. "has passed [3rd ps.] of ownership") *dall'Eni a General Electric*, sono state assunte circa 300 persone nel '95 e 518 nel 1996.
"Since Nuovo Pignone *changed ownership from Eni to General Electric*, about 300 people were hired in 1995 and 518 in 1996."

Of course, idioms such as this are found in metaphorical senses and do not refer to any motion event at all.

2.3. Prepositions/ satellites with (metaphoric) Source meaning

The expression of a Source as the only core argument is rare with *passare*, being practically limited to idioms, in which case the Source expressed is not a material location, but an abstract entity or a concept. Such idioms did not occur in our original corpus. We selected from the same on-line corpus PAISÀ four samples that better illustrate this usage, just to show the existence of these constructions. The first two examples (16, 17) show the idiom *passare di mente* “to forget”, and the third one (18) the idiom *passare di moda* “get out of fashion”:

- (16) EMMA: Vuoi prendere i conti? MARTA: Ora? EMMA: Se no, *mi passa di mente* (lit. “to-me [dat.] passes [3rd ps.] of mind”).
“EMMA: Do you want to take the bills? MARTA: Now?
EMMA: If not, *I shall forget it.*”
- (17) Visconti Venosta, salutato da non so chi in non so quale festa con parole significative che *mi sono passate di mente* (lit. “to-me [dat.] have passed [3rd pp.] of mind”).
“Visconti Venosta [was] greeted by I don’t know who in I don’t know what party with meaningful *words I forgot.*”
- (18) Lontano ormai dal clamore suscitato, dal continuo dire ed esibire, anche l’AIDS è *passata di moda* (lit. “has passed [3rd ps.] of fashion”), chi ci pensa più, nonostante si pratichi sesso in rapporti non stabili?
“Now far from the aroused clamor, far from fear, far from the continuous saying and exhibiting, even AIDS *has gone out of fashion.* Who thinks about it anymore, although we have sex in unstable relationships?”

We also find the verb associated to *via* “way” (hence “away”), that is in the process of being grammaticalized as a satellite in modern Italian (and this is the only directional adverb lacking an equivalent in other Romance languages)⁴.

- (19) Se la vostra pubblicità non è costruita su una solida idea, *passerà via* (lit. “will pass [fut. 3rd psg.] away”), come una nave nella notte.

⁴ *Via* in the meaning “away” is probably one of the most productive locative particles (cf. also Simone, 1996), and it is the only particle in Italian that can be added to Activity verbs, turning them into Accomplishments, or Activity/Accomplishment verbs, stressing the successfulness of the process (e.g., *lavare* “to wash” and *lavare via* “to wash off”, *raschiare* “scrape” and *raschiare via*; cf. Iacobini and Masini, 2006, pp. 178-182).

“If your advertising is not built on a strong idea, *it will go away*, like a ship in the night.”

Surely, this verb is not the best candidate to illustrate the increasing usage of this particle *via* “away”, for which see among others the already cited Iacobini and Masini (2006, pp. 178-182).

2.4. Locative meaning

The verb can be used for expressing a Path with various prepositions or adverbs (66 times with concrete meaning, i.e., 26,4% of the total, and 22 times with metaphorical one, i.e., 8.8% of the total). In some cases, adverbs, or complex prepositions (*accanto* “next to”, *davanti* “in front of”, *fuori* “outside”, etc.) are used to convey a reciprocal location, often associated with an *a* (“to”) complement or a clitic pronoun.

- (20) Quando Kilgore *gli passò accanto* (lit. “him [dat.] passed [3rd ps] next-to”), Charlie Fowler, un ingegnere della Nasa, disse.
“When Kilgore *passed by him*, Charlie Fowler, a NASA engineer, said.”
- (21) Il professore *ci passa davanti* (lit. “us [dat.] passes [3rd ps.] in-front-of”), camminando con le mani dietro la schiena.
“The professor *passed by us*, walking with hands behind his back.”
- (22) La Morte si annunciò con il suono di un treno che *passava fuori* (lit. “passed [3rd ps.] outside”).
“Death announced itself with the sound of a train *rattling outside*.”
- (23) E l’arrotino che *passava giù* (lit. “passed [iprf. 3rd ps.] below”) in strada e chiamava per farsi sentire.
“And the knife-grinder *was walking* in the street *below* calling to be heard.”

Note in (21) that, as typical for VF behavior, the manner of motion (walking) is expressed by an adverbial, a gerund in most Romance languages. In other cases, we find simple prepositional complements:

- (24) Sentivamo gli elicotteri che *ci passavano sopra la testa* (lit. “us [dat.] passed [3rd pp.] over the head”).
“And we heard the helicopters that *were passing over our head*.”
- (25) *Passiamo per Assisi* (lit. “pass [1st pp.] through Assisi”) che merita una sosta lunga.

“*Shall we pass through Assisi, which deserves a long stop.*”

In other cases, an adverb or complex preposition gets the meaning of crossing a bound, or in the case of *intorno* “around” may express either the encirclement of an obstacle (27) or circular movement with coincidence of source and goal (28).

- (26) Carlo *passò in mezzo a quella calca* (lit. “passed [3rd ps.] in midst to that crowd”), non riconoscendo e non essendo riconosciuto da nessuno.

“Carlo *passed through that crowd*, not recognizing anyone, nor being recognized by anyone.”

- (27) Il decano *passò intorno alla scrivania* (lit. “passed [3rd ps.] around to-the desk”) per venire a stringermi la mano.

“The dean *passed around the desk* to shake my hand.”

- (28) Per tagliarli in due parti uguali senza far danni, basta *far passare intorno al perimetro* (lit. “make [inf.] pass [inf.] around to-the perimeter”) un filo da cucito, legarlo e poi stringere accuratamente il nodo.

“To cut it into two equal parts with no damage, it is sufficient to *pass* a sewing thread *around the perimeter*, tie it up and then carefully tighten the knot.”

Finally, an important variant of a locative construction is the transitive one: the Locative can be promoted to the role of direct object (in our corpus 27 times with concrete meaning and 31 with metaphorical meaning⁵, for a total of 58 cases, 11,6%). This kind of construction is not to be confused with the transitive causative construction, where there is an agent causing motion and a patient undergoing a change of location.

- (29) E tu stai progettando di *passare il fiume* (lit. “pass [inf.] the river”) al buio e poi attaccarli sull'altra sponda prima del sorgere del sole.

“And you are planning to *cross the river* by night, to attack them on the other side before sunrise.”

- (30) Arrivano addirittura spesso con auto scortate, perché Fede ha la scorta, Berlusconi ha la scorta, a volte *passano il cancello principale*

⁵ In our corpus all but one occurrences of metaphorical usage show the temporal meaning “to spend some time”. As it is often the case with this verb, this transitive meaning is also related to an intransitive usage indicating the passing of time, that nevertheless is less common (8x). This is one of the absolute constructions of the verb, lacking any core argument but the subject, and like the other absolute constructions, we did not consider it here.

(lit. “pass [3rd pp.] the main gate”) a bordo del SUV di Lele Mora.

“Often, they arrive by escorted cars: in fact, Fede has the escort, Berlusconi has the escort. Sometimes *they cross the main gate* on Lele Mora’s SUV.”

It is important to note that, when the Path is expressed by a direct object, the verb always acquires the meaning of crossing a bound and is inherently telic. This is also the case for English *pass* and *cross*, Spanish *pasar*, etc.

3. Conclusions

In this study we showed how the verb *passare* can be inserted into a great variety of constructions that specify the basic meaning of the verb. In the following table we list the frequency of syntactic constructions we discussed above. Because our corpus was originally selected to contrast the incidence and meaning of various syntactic constructions between concrete motion usage and metaphorical usage, no information can be extracted about the relative frequency of these two usages: they must be treated separately.

	Concrete motion event	Metaphoric meaning	Average percentage
Goal	114 45,6%	135 54%	49,8%
(Of which with pseudo-satellites)	52 20,8%	8 3%	12%
Source+Goal	21 8,4%	32 12,8%	10,6%
Prep. Locative	66 26,4%	22 8,8%	17,6%
Transitive Locative	27 10,8%	31 12,4%	11,6%
Other	22 8,8%	30 12%	10,4%
Total	250 100%	250 100%	100%

Figure 1: Results of the study

We focused in particular on the presence of particles which can either form a complex preposition (*intorno a* “around”) introducing a following complement, or functioning as adverbs that form a syntactic and semantic unite with the verb. This would look like a SF pattern, except for the fact that in most cases

directional particles are combined with generic Motion verbs (*andare* “go”, *venire* “come”) or with verbs of Path (e.g., *entrare* (*dentro*) “go in”, *uscire* (*fuori*) “go out” and of course *passare*), as shown among others by Cardini (2008), but cf. also Simone (1996, p. 52), who offers a list of 131 *verbi sintagmatici*. These directional particles are not completely unknown to other Romance languages, but Italian probably uses them to an extent unusual in other Romance languages. As stated above, according to Iacobini and Masini (2006), directional particles are to be considered as true satellites, but Hijazo-Gascón and Ibarretxe-Antuñano (2013) prefer to call them *pseudo-satellites*, because their productivity is not comparable to that of true SF languages such as German or English. According to them, Italian is just a VF language with a high Path salience. Although we are considering just one verb the data at least do not contradict this view. Directional particles (whatever their nature is) are currently used, especially when encoding a Goal and with concrete motion meaning. We can also find the expression of both a Source and a Goal. The expression of more than one locative complement again seems to be unusual in Spanish or French, but common in Italian. Of course, we can get little information about the real extent of this strategy in Italian, not only because we are analyzing just one verb, but also because the frequency can in principle be influenced by the meaning of this verb.

The construction only encoding Source is very rare, did not occur in our original corpus and is mainly used in idioms. Here we can find the particle *via* “away”, which is grammaticalized as a (pseudo-)satellite in Modern Italian (s. Iacobini and Masini, 2006). The verb can also be used in isolation or with a locative complement. It can be expressed either by a prepositional phrase or by a direct object, in the latter case implying the crossing of a bound, so rendering the verb inherently telic. In the transitive and absolute construction is very spread the temporal metaphorical usage of the verb (cf. Basile and Sesoldi, 2021).

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