Diachronic paths to reduction and maintenance of overabundancy in Italian verb paradigms
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Italian is a language that, for historical reasons (cf. De Mauro 1963: 30-31), presents many cases of overabundancy, i.e., two or more forms realizing the same cell in an inflectional paradigm (cf. Thornton in press, 2009).¹ Such forms often go under the label of doubles, but Thornton (in press, 2009), following a suggestion by Michele Loporcaro, proposes the more general term cell-mates, because there are cases in which the forms realizing the same cell of a paradigm are more than two, as in the examples in (1):

(1) Latin fecērunt / fēcērunt / fēcere 'do':3PL_PRF.IND
    Italian apparve / apparse / appari 'appear':3SG_PRF.IND

This talk addresses the relationship between maintenance or reduction of overabundancy and frequency. The main body of data is represented by the Italian cases already investigated in Thornton (in press, 2009), following a suggestion by Michele Loporcaro, proposes the more general term cell-mates, because there are cases in which the forms realizing the same cell of a paradigm are more than two, as in the examples in (1):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VEDERE 'see', CHIEDERE 'ask'</th>
<th>/d/ forms and their frequency</th>
<th>/gg/ forms and their frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1SG_PRS_IND</td>
<td>vedo &gt; 10.000</td>
<td>veggo 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3PL_PRS_IND</td>
<td>vedono &gt; 10.000</td>
<td>veggono 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG_PRS_SBJV</td>
<td>veda 1944</td>
<td>vegga 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3PL_PRS_SBJV</td>
<td>vedano 685</td>
<td>veggano 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ The term overabundancy is inspired by the Italian meta-grammatical term sovrabbondanza.
² The cases investigated were the following:
  vado / vo 'go':1SG_PRS_IND'; faccio / fo 'do':1SG_PRS_IND';
  -bb-/-vb- forms of Dovere 'must' (e.g., devo / debbo 'must':1SG_PRS_IND');
  -gg-/-vg- forms of Sedere, Possedere, Vedere, Chiedere 'sit, possess, see, ask' (e.g., vego / veggo 'see':1SG_PRS_IND');
  [tf] / [tʃf] forms of 1PL_PRS_IND of Piacere, Tacere (e.g., taciamo / tacciamo 'be_quiet':1PL_PRS_IND');
  syncopated / unsyncopated Future and Conditional forms of Andare, Godere, Udire, Morire 'go, enjoy, hear, die' (e.g., morrò / morirò 'die':1SG_FUT.IND');
  Strong / weak forms of Passato Remoto of Aprire 'open', Offrire 'offer', and many -ere verbs (e.g., perse / perdir è:lose':3SG_PRF.IND');
  Strong / weak forms of Past Participle of -ere verbs (e.g., perso / perduto 'lose':PST.PTCP') and of Seppellire 'bury';
  Forms with / without diphthong ('dittongo mobile') in Sedere (e.g., siederò / sederò 'sit':1SG_FUT.IND');
  Imperative singular of Andare, Fare, Dare, Stare 'go, do, give, stay' (e.g., và / vai 'go':2SG_IMP);
  -et-/-et- forms in Passato Remoto of -ere verbs (e.g., temeti / temettì 'fear':1SG_PRF');
  forms with and without -isc- in -ire verbs (e.g., appaio / apparisco 'appear':1SG_PRS_IND').
Table 2 /d/ vs. /gg/ forms of SEDERE 'sit' and POSSEDERE 'possess'

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<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1SG.PRS.IND</td>
<td>siedo 118</td>
<td>possiedo 140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3PL.PRS.IND</td>
<td>siedono 2008</td>
<td>possiedono 1236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG.PRS.SBJV</td>
<td>sieda 156</td>
<td>possieda 174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3PL.PRS.SBJV</td>
<td>siedano 113</td>
<td>possiedano 46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It appears from the data in Tables 1 and 2 that while the /gg/ forms of VEDERE and CHIEDERE are extinct in contemporary usage, the /gg/ forms of SEDERE and POSSEDERE are in good health, and sometimes more frequent than their /d/ cell-mates.

The question then arises what factors have caused such a synchronic situation. Why were the /gg/ forms of VEDERE and CHIEDERE eliminated, while those of SEDERE and POSSEDERE were retained?

The present contribution addresses this problem by looking at the frequency and the distribution of both the retained and the eliminated cell-mates in previous stages of the language.

Other studies have shown that frequency and distributional properties of certain forms in past stages of a language can be useful to explain present synchronic situations (e.g., Baerman 2008 on Russian defective verbs).

The diachronic investigation of cell-mates in Italian verb paradigms will be conducted using the LIZ corpus (containing an extremely large selection of Italian literary texts from the 13th to the early 20th century; cfr. Stoppelli & Picchi (eds.) 2001) and the DiaCORIS corpus, containing written Italian texts of several registers, produced between 1861 and 1945 (Onelli et al.).

References


