

‘Remain’ verbs in Romance. A case of state / transition polysemy

Main Sessions

Subdomains: theoretical perspectives; actionality/Aktionsart

As a first step toward a larger comparative study, I propose a survey on Romance verbs of ‘remaining’ that show a state / transition polysemy, with a focus on Italian *rimanere* (<lat. *remanēre*). *Rimanere* typically means permanence in a state (1a) or place (1b). However, it also shows a change of state meaning, as in (1c):

- (1) a. *Anna è rimasta bellissima* (‘Anna remained beautiful’)
- b. *Anna è rimasta sul divano* (‘Anna remained on the sofa’)
- c. *Anna è rimasta orfana* (‘Anna was left an orphan’)

A similar polysemy is found in other Romance languages, in etymologically unrelated verbs, e.g., Sp. *quedar(se)* (<lat. *quietāre*), Port. *ficar* (<lat. *figere*). The corresponding causatives, showing a ‘cause permanence in a state’ / ‘cause change of state’ polysemy, will also be considered, e.g. Spanish *dejar*:

- (2) a. *El no me deja tranquilo ni un momento* (‘He never leaves me in peace’)
- b. *Lo dejaron huérfano* (‘They left him an orphan’)

Comparable cases of actional enantiosem, where the same verb can function both as a state and as a transition, are also found in other languages, including Swedish *bli* (Schmitt 2005), Portuguese *ficar* (Schmitt 1999), German *bleiben* (Schlücker 2004), Estonian *jääma* (Tommola 1995), Finnish *jäämä* (Huomo 2007). Most of these independent studies provide diverse theoretical perspectives and varied conclusions (e.g., Schlücker argues that “*bleiben* always denotes a state”, while according to Schmitt Port. “*Ficar* [...] stands for a transition in both its ‘stay’ and its ‘become’ readings”).

The analysis, based both on previous studies on the topic and on corpus data, aims at describing the different readings available for these verbs in relation with the properties of arguments, predicative complements and other contextual elements. Although the verbs found in the languages under analysis do not display the same sense distribution, nor an identical combinatorial behaviour, it is here proposed that they can all be described according to the following three main criteria:

- Event type. E.g., It. *rimanere* can be both a state and a transition, more specifically an achievement. The achievement reading is available with a small group of nouns and stage-level adjectives as well as specific subclasses of resultant-state past participles.
- Presence vs absence and type of presupposed event. E.g., in It. *Anna è rimasta bellissima* (‘Anna remained beautiful’), the state *bellissima* is asserted, but it is also presupposed that this same state did hold before the time of speaking (cf. Pustejovsky’s 2000 opposition structure).
- Presence vs absence of reference to a counterstate (cf. Schlücker) (e.g., Port. *Todos foram viajar, mas eu fiquei na cidade* ‘Everybody went traveling, but I remained in town’: the state of staying in town is asserted, but the counterstate, i.e. leaving, was expected, or more likely to occur).

The criteria above are shown to be useful also to account for the alternative readings in ambiguous instances. E.g., It. *È rimasto fuori*, ‘He remained outside’ is a state, but it can be characterised either by a same-state presupposition (he was outside before, and continued to be) or, as a phrasal verb, by the reference to an expected counterstate (he did not go inside).

References

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