snippets

Contents

1.

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On the role of gemination in passives: the case of Abruzzese

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In his crosslinguistic survey of passive constructions, Keenan (1985:251) observes that reduplication and gemination are not possible morphological expressions of the passive voice. That this is not true of reduplication has since been shown i.a. for Older Egyptian (Reintges 2003) and Hanis Coos (Coosan, Oregon Coast; Keenan and Dryer 2007). As far as we know, the accepted wisdom regarding the role of gemination in passive formation, however, remains that passives cannot be realised via this mechanism.

Here we show that this is also not universally true: Abruzzese, a central Italian variety, features an active/passive distinction which is signalled solely by means of *Raddoppiamento fonosintattico* (RF), a sandhi phenomenon involving the gemination of initial consonants (cf. Nespor and Vogel 1986, Loporcaro 1997):

(1) a. ACTIVE: So   viste   Si   viste
                 am-1S seen   are-2S seen
                 'I have seen'   'You (s) have seen'

   b. PASSIVE: So   [v]viste   Si   [v]viste
                 am-1S   seen   are-2S seen
                 'I am seen'   'You(s) are seen'

As (1) shows, active and passive structures in Abruzzese involve the same auxiliary (a form of BE) and differ only in respect of the presence vs absence of RF on the element immediately following the auxiliary. That (1) in fact entails a productive gemination process, involving an RF trigger, and not simply a lexically encoded morphophonological difference between active and passive participles is shown by (2):

(2) So   [s]sembre viste   allà
       am-1S always   seen   there
    'I am always seen there'

Here the adverb immediately adjacent to the auxiliary, *sembre*, undergoes RF, while the participle does not; the structure, however, receives a passive interpretation and contrasts with the corresponding RF-lacking active.

(1) and (2), then, suggest that languages can productively harness gemination as a means of realising the active/passive distinction. What remains to be explained is what the gemination trigger is. Biberauer and D'Alessandro (2006) show that it is the auxiliary, which, being an oxytone, fits the phonological profile of RF triggers. More specifically, they propose, adopting Chomsky's (2001) Derivation by Phase model, that when the auxiliary is sent to Spellout as part of the same spellout domain as adjacent material, as it is where (defective) passive vP is present, it is able to induce RF on the immediately adjacent element; where it is sent to Spellout separately, as with active vPs, where the contents of VP are sent to Spellout independently of the contents of the vP and TP, this is not possible. The relevant difference is schematised in (3) (outline indicates material sent to Spellout upon completion of the vP-phase):

(3) a. [$_{TP}$ *so* [$_{vP}$ *so* [$_{VP}$ *viste*]]] (active)

      viste and *so* sent to PF separately → no RF

   b. [$_{TP}$ *so* [$_{vP}$ *so* [$_{VP}$ *viste*]]] (passive)

      so viste sent to PF together → RF: *viste* → ***vviste***

What led to Abruzzese employing gemination in passives, when this appears to be a crosslinguistically otherwise unattested phenomenon, remains a question for future research. Here we conclude simply that this option exists alongside reduplication, internal vowel change and various types of affixation.

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