SOMETIMES, CONCESSION IS (ANTI-)PURPOSE: SOME OBSERVATIONS ON *PER*+INFINITIVE CONCESSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN ITALIAN[*]

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1. INTRODUCTION

Concessive constructions have been analysed as expressing a relation in which an expected causal link is blocked or overridden (König 1985, 1994, König and Siemund 2000). Concessive clauses can therefore be understood as negative counterparts to causal sentences, where the usual roles of presupposition and assertion are reversed between the subordinate and main clauses. This squib focuses on a less discussed type of concessive construction in Italian, which does not involve a dedicated concessive marker and instead relies on the preposition *per* plus a verb in the infinitive, as exemplified in (1).

(1)   Per essere tuo amico, non ti dà molta confidenza.   (Salvi and Vanelli 1994:166)
         For be.INF your friend NEG you.DAT gives much trust
         'For a friend of yours, he does not confide in you that much.'

The aim of this squib is threefold. First, it contrasts concessive *per* + infinitive constructions with their purposive and causal counterparts, identifying the syntactic and semantic characteristics which contribute to their interpretation. Second, it investigates the properties that license a concessive interpretation: genericity, gradability, and the nature of the concepts involved. Third, it proposes an analysis of these constructions as instances of inoperant purpose rather than inoperant cause. In this view, *per*-concessives introduce a stereotyped role or kind that carries an implicit set of normative expectations, which are then denied or subverted in the main clause.

The structure of the squib is as follows. Section 2 outlines the three interpretations of *per* + infinitive clauses: purposive, causal and concessive. Section 3 focuses on the concessive reading and discusses the conditions under which it arises: it explores the role of genericity, gradability, and concept type in licensing the construction. Section 4 argues for an analysis in terms of anti-purpose.

2. *PER* + INFINITIVE: PURPOSE, CAUSE AND CONCESSION

Per + infinitive concessive clauses share some structural similarities with other adverbial clauses in Italian, notably purpose and causal clauses. Comparing concessive clauses to their purposive and causal counterparts helps to reveal their semantic and syntactic properties. This section highlights the main differences in form and interpretation between purpose, causal, and concessive clauses introduced by *per* + infinitive.

2.1. Purpose clauses

The most productive use of the *per* + infinitive construction in Italian is to express purpose, as shown in (2).

(2)   Gianni si è alzato per andare a scuola.
             Gianni refl.pro is get.up.PST. PTCP for go. INF to school
             'Gianni got up to go to school.'

These constructions typically involve an agentive subject, as the purposive reading presupposes intentionality. Even when the subject is non-animate, the purposive interpretation remains, though it results in a semantically odd sentence:

(3)   ? La pietra è rotolata giù dal precipizio per arrivare al fiume
                The stone is rolled down from-the cliff to arrive at-the river
                'The stone rolled down the cliff to get to the river.'

The same effect is present in English, where *to* also forces a purposive interpretation. In (3), the sentence is semantically infelicitous unless the stone is reinterpreted as animate. This suggests that the purposive interpretation is contributed by the semantics of the preposition itself, and is secondarily supported by the semantics and pragmatics of the main clause. Because purpose clauses are prototypically future-oriented and *irrealis* (cf. Schmidtke-Bode 2009), the event denoted by the verb in the infinitive cannot precede the event in the main clause. As a result, past infinitives are not allowed. They do, however, appear in some restrictive causal constructions, which will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

2.2. Causal clauses

Per + infinitive can be used to express cause in constructions characterised by (i) an auxiliary verb in the infinitive plus a past participle (ii) a matrix clause which only includes a non-agent subject (recipient, patient or experiencer), as shown in (4).

(4)   a.   Anneli ha ricevuto una medaglia per avere salvato un bambino in mare.
             Anneli has received a medal for have. INF save.PST.PTCP a child in sea
             'Anneli received a medal for saving a child at sea'
      b.   Wenli è stata arrestata per aver commesso un crimine.
             Wenli is been arrested for have.INF commit. PST.PTCP a crime
             'Wenli was arrested for committing a crime.'
      c.   Genoveva ha gioito per essere finalmente arrivata alla pensione.
             Genoveva has rejoiced for be. INF finally arrived to-the pension
             'Genoveva rejoiced for having finally retired'

Agentive subjects result in ungrammatical sentences, as shown by (5).

(5)   * Gioia ha cantato per esser-si divertita.
                Gioia has sung for be.INF = REFL.PRO have.fun.PST.PTCP
                Intended: 'Gioia sang for having had fun'

The examples in (4) seem to pattern more closely with explanatory constructions, rather than strictly causal ones. That is, they do not necessarily describe what brings about an event in the

world, but rather what makes it intelligible or justifiable from a discourse or evaluative perspective (cf. Davidson 1963, Dancygier and Sweetser 2000).

These constructions have received little to no attention in the literature. Although they will not be addressed in detail here, their syntactic and semantic restrictions appear to follow from two main factors. The first, that is, the requirement for a completed event, relates to the semantics of causation: one event can cause another only if it temporally precedes it. The second requirement, the restriction to non-agentive subjects, likely arises from the structural similarity to purpose clauses. Since purposive readings depend on intentionality, blocking any potential for an intentional reading is a straightforward way to prevent ambiguity. The use of a past infinitive together with a non-agent subject may thus serve to disambiguate *per* as expressing explanatory cause rather than purpose.

Cross-linguistic evidence has shown that cause and purpose are oftentimes encoded by the same morphological marker (Croft 1991, Aikhenvald 2008). Cause and purpose are very closely related concepts; it is therefore not surprising that they have overlapping morphology.[1]

2.3. Concessive clauses

Sections 2.1. and 2.2. have shown the syntactic and semantic characteristics of purposive and causal constructions expressed by *per* + infinitive. While purpose clauses require an agentive subject in the matrix clause, causal ones occur exclusively after a main clause involving a non-agent subject and require a verb in the past infinitive to indicate a completed event. Concessive clauses with *per* + infinitive tend to appear in a specific configuration involving a copular verb, usually *be* + a noun or adjective. Typically, they involve a simple infinitive, but in some instances non-copular predicates in the past infinitive are also allowed, as shown by the contrast in (6).

(6)   a.   Per essere inverno, fa <u>davvero</u> caldo.
            For be.INF winter does truly warm
            'It's really cold, for winter.'
    b.   Per essere brutta, ha un sacco di spasimanti
            for be.INF ugly has a bag of suitors
            'For an ugly woman, she has a lot of suitors.'
    c.   Per avere viaggiato all' estero <u>così</u> spesso, non parla molte lingue[2]
            for have.INF travel.PST.PTCP at.the abroad so often NEG speaks many languages
            'For someone who has travelled abroad so often, (s)he doesn't speak many
            languages.'

These concessive constructions often involve some form of degree marking either in the main clause, as in (6a), or in the subordinate clause, as in (6c). This is because these constructions must involve inherently gradable concepts to achieve the concessive interpretation; more on

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[1] For more information on the connection between cause and purpose, see Baunaz and Puskás (to appear) and Sæbø (1991).

[2] A sentence like (6b), although possible, is more naturally expressed via a relativisation with an indefinite NP, as in (1).

(1)   Per uno che ha viaggiato così tanto, non parla molte lingue.
       For one who has travelled so much NEG speak.3SG many languages
       For someone who has travelled so much, he doesn't speak many languages.

This brings some additional insight into the status of the infinitive in *per*-concessive, which could be an instance of nominalisation.

this in section 4. Unlike purposive and causative *per* + infinitive clauses, which typically follow the main clause, concessive *per* clauses typically precede it. These concessive clauses can be formally identical to the purpose and causal clauses presented above:

(7)   a.   Giuseppe è stato ripreso per aver viaggiato all'estero così spesso.
           Giuseppe is been reprimanded for have.INF travel.PST.PTCP at.the abroad so often
           'Giuseppe was reprimanded for travelling abroad so often.'
      b.   Si è impegnato per essere tuo amico.[3]
           REFL.PRO is work.hard to be.INF your friend
           'He worked hard to be your friend.'

The concessive interpretation, as is the case for concessive constructions in general, is therefore derived from the interplay of certain syntactic properties with semantic and pragmatic factors in both the subordinate and matrix clause. However, unlike other canonical types of concessive clauses of the 'although' kind, such as *benché* and *nonostante* clauses, *per*-concessives do not rely on a specialised concessive subordinator. The next section will break down the properties that allow the concessive interpretation of these constructions.

3. THE CONCESSIVE INTERPRETATION

In this section I will address the semantic constraints on *per*-concessives, focusing on their reliance on genericity and the types of concepts that determine their felicity.

3.1. Genericity: non-specific events and entities

Per-concessives evoke stereotyped roles and kinds, as described in the literature on generics (cf. Krifka et al. 1995, Carlson 2009), whether through embedded NPs, adjectives, or complex predicates, as in (6c). These constructions are intrinsically non-specific (cf. Enç 1991; Ihsane and Puskas 2001) and never point to concrete entities or events. For this reason, they often include overtly indefinite NPs, as illustrated by the contrast in (8).

(8)   a.   ?? Per essere Genoveva, non parla bene ungherese.
           For be.INF Genoveva NEG speaks well Hungarian
           'For Genoveva, she doesn't speak Hungarian very well.'
      b.   Per essere una Genoveva, non parla bene ungherese.
           For be.INF a Genoveva NEG speaks well Hungarian
           'For a Genoveva, she doesn't speak Hungarian very well.'

While (8a) is infelicitous, (8b) becomes interpretable by removing definiteness. Here, the indefinite article allows *Genoveva* to shift from a concrete referent to a member of a conceptual kind. Upon hearing a sentence like (8b), the hearer infers the speaker's belief that people called Genoveva should speak Hungarian fluently. In this context, *Genoveva* does not refer to any actual individual but instead evokes conceptual associations tied to the name. While the indefinite article in (8b) overtly signals a non-specific reading, even phrases that appear referential on the surface are interpreted as non-specific in *per*-concessive contexts.

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[3] Note that this sentence is ambiguous. It could still have a concessive interpretation if delivered with the right intonation. Prosody is an important aspect in the interpretation of these types of concessive clauses; however, it will not be discussed here.

(9)   Per essere tua mamma, non ti chiama molto spesso.
         For be.INF your mother, NEG you.DAT call very often
         'For someone who's your mom, she doesn't call you very often'

In (9), *tua mamma* does not refer to the actual mother of the interlocutor, but instead invokes stereotypical expectations about mothers: for instance, that they call their children often. Here, the presence of the copula *essere* is crucial, as it highlights that the contrast is not with the addressee's mother, but rather with the concept of *being* her mother and what it implies. Similarly, the predicate in (6c) no longer refers to a concrete action but instead acts as a conceptual frame for inference: people who are well travelled usually speak several languages. Both (9) and (6c) therefore illustrates a form of coercion (cf. Pustejovsky 1993, Asher 2015). The construction triggers a shift from a descriptive interpretation to a normative one. This requires the concepts evoked to have some properties which allow them to be interpreted both in descriptive and normative ways.

3.2. Dual character concepts, natural kind concepts and gradability

Works in philosophy make a distinction between three types of concepts, or types, which are relevant to this discussion: natural kind concepts, dual character concepts, and artifacts. As it will be shown in this section, *per*-concessives have some restrictions with regard to the type of concept that they can evoke to achieve a felicitous interpretation. While they work particularly well with dual character and natural kind concepts, they are infelicitous with concepts with non-gradable, criterial properties, like artifacts.

3.2.1. *Dual character concepts*

Dual character concepts, as described by Knobe, Prasada and Newman (2013), are concepts that include both (i) a set of concrete, descriptive features and (ii) abstract values that are realised through those features. These are concepts that allow for the following type of contrastive reasoning:

(10)   There is a sense in which she is clearly a scientist, but ultimately, if you think about what it really means to be a scientist, you would have to say that she is not a scientist at all. (Knobe et al. 2013:242)

Some concepts, such as BUS DRIVER, do not allow this kind of contrast. In *per*-concessive constructions, the expectations being challenged or confirmed are not based on the descriptive features of the concept, but rather on the speaker's normative beliefs about what the role entails. Consider again the following example:

(11)   Per essere tuo amico, non ti dà molta confidenza.
         For be.INF your friend NEG you.DAT gives much confidence
         'For a friend of yours, he doesn't confide in you that much.'

In (11), the contrast is evaluative in nature and based on the speaker's normative expectations of friendship. Although the evaluative stance is usually presumed to be shared by the addressee, it is fundamentally the speaker's own stance. Example (12) shows a plausible exchange which highlights this distinction.

(12)   A: Certo che per essere tuo amico, non ti dà molta confidenza
              'I mean, for a friend, he doesn't really trust you that much.'
              B: Cosa intendi?
              'What do you mean?'
              A: Beh, un vero amico ti direbbe la verità
              'Well, a real friend would tell you the truth.'
              B: Non sono d'accordo.
              'I don't agree with you.'

This exchange illustrates how the use of a *per*-concessive construction reflects a speaker-specific evaluative norm, which may not be shared by the addressee. To summarise, when built on dual character concepts, *per*-concessives express an evaluative stance based on personal normative beliefs.

3.2.2. *Natural kind concepts*

Dual character concepts like friend contrast with natural kind concepts like TIGER. As a number of researchers have emphasised, the concept of tiger can be associated to a list of features (*striped*, *ferocious*, etc.), however these features are understood as the product of an underlying causal factor, the tiger's essence (Gelman 2003, Newman and Keil 2008, Knobe et al. 2013). When such concepts are evoked in *per*-concessives, they also result in felicitous readings.

(13) a.   Per essere una tigre, non sembra (molto) feroce.
            For be.inf a tiger neg seem very ferocious
            'For a tiger, it doesn't seem (very) ferocious.'
      b.   Per essere un bambino, è (molto) maturo
            for be.inf a child is very mature
            'He's (very) mature for a child.'

The examples in (13) are felicitous because although tigers are typically ferocious animals, they still qualify as tigers even when they do not display ferociousness. Similarly, although children are typically immature by virtue of being young and inexperienced, they still qualify as children even when they do not adhere to that expectation. These *per*-concessives evoke stereotypical expectations grounded in inferred properties. They thus elicit a sense of surprise that the subject, while still qualifying as a member of the category, fails to conform to its typical features.

3.2.3. *Artifacts*

Unlike dual character concepts or natural kinds, artifact concepts such as KNIFE are defined by their intended function (cf. Putnam 1975; Thomasson 2007), which makes them less compatible with *per*-concessives, as shown in (14).

(14)   ?   Per essere un coltello, non taglia
            For be.INF a knife NEG cuts
            'For a knife, it doesn't cut.'

 A sentence like (14) is infelicitous, because failing to fulfil its purpose undermines its status as a knife altogether, instead of violating a normative or inferred expectation. Artifacts also

result in infelicitous concessive readings when compared against their constitutive properties, such as *having wheels* for BICYCLE, as shown in (15).

(15)   ??   Per essere una bicicletta, non ha le ruote.
              For be.INF a bicycle NEG has the wheels.
              'For a bicycle, it doesn't have wheels.'

This sentence is infelicitous because, without wheels, the object fails to qualify as a bicycle in the first place. A friend, on the other hand, can be more or less *friend-y* depending on how closely they align with the normative expectations associated with friendship. Similarly, a tiger can appear more or less *tiger-y* based on variable features like the pattern of its fur. This inherent gradability is reflected in the fact that *per*-concessives frequently, and most naturally, co-occur with degree adverbs such as *molto*, as seen in (13a) and (13b).

4. CONCESSION AS INOPERANT NORMATIVE PURPOSE

In much of the typological and theoretical literature, concessive constructions are understood as expressing a type of 'inoperant' cause, that is, a causal relation that fails to yield its expected result (König 1985, 1991). On this view, concessive clauses presuppose a causal link between subordinate and main clause, while simultaneously asserting the failure of this link to hold in the actual context. For instance, a sentence like (16a) is taken to negate the expected causal consequence of training in (16b).

(16)   a.   Although she trained hard, she lost the race.
       b.   She won the race because she trained hard.

However, the *per* + infinitive concessive construction in Italian does not exactly fit this causal mold. Instead, I argue that these clauses instantiate a kind of anti-purpose relation. Rather than presenting a cause that fails to produce its usual effect, *per*-concessives evoke an implicit normative purposive frame against which the subject of the main clause is evaluated. By 'normative purpose', I refer to a teleological normative relation in which a concept is defined by a set of properties that an entity must exhibit in order to fulfil or qualify as an instance of that concept.

The subordinate clause introduces a stereotyped role or kind that carries with it a set of normatively associated expectations. These expectations are not overtly stated, but can be reconstructed from corresponding normative purposive constructions such as:

(17)   a.   Per essere un buon/vero amico, bisogna dare confidenza.
              For be.INF a good/true friend, must.3SG give confidence
              'In order to be a good/real friend, one must confide in others.'
       b.   Per essere un bambino tipico, dovrebbe essere immaturo.
              For be.INF a child typical must.COND.3SG be immature
              'In order to be a typical child, he should be immature.'

In the concessive variant, the purposive frame is invoked but subverted.

(18) a.   Per essere tuo amico, non ti dà molta confidenza.
              For be.INF your friend NEG you.DAT give much confidence
              'For a friend of yours, he doesn't confide in you that much.'
      b.   Per essere un bambino, è molto maturo.
              For be.INF a child, is very mature
              'He's very mature for a child.'

The main clause explicitly denies the expected behaviour, creating a contrast between the presupposed normative conditions to satisfy the category membership (FRIEND, CHILD) and actual performance. This pattern supports an analysis in which the concessive interpretation arises through the failure to meet the normative function implied by the concept.

While *per*-concessives share the general concessive structure of subverting an expected relationship between two clauses, they differ significantly from canonical concessive constructions in Italian, such as those introduced by *benché* or *nonostante*. Traditional concessives typically presuppose an epistemic or factual conflict: they present a proposition that would normally license a certain effect or conclusion, and then deny that conclusion in spite of the apparent evidence. Consider the example in (19).

(19)   Nonostante abbia studiato molto, ha fallito l'esame
              Although have.SBJV.3SG studied very.much has failed the exam
              'Although he studied a lot, he failed the exam'

Here, the concessive clause highlights a contradiction in real-world causality grounded in concrete events. In contrast, *per*-concessives do not involve factual contradiction or epistemic conflict. Instead, they evoke a normative frame about types and roles, and deny that the subject conforms to it. The contrast, then, is between normative expectation and observed behaviour, and not between factual cause and effect. This makes *per*-concessives closer to a subversion of normative purpose, as presented in (17a) and (17b), than a denial of cause, and distinguishes them both morphosyntactically and conceptually from standard concessives.

Such an analysis aligns with observations made in Section 4, where *per*-concessives were shown to involve generic concepts, and to rely on gradable, normative properties. These concessive constructions implicitly state the following normative reasoning for dual character concepts (20a) and natural kind concepts (20b):

(20) a.   STATED In order to qualify as a real friend, IMPLIED he should confide in you.
              STATED However, he doesn't confide in you. IMPLIED Therefore, he is not a real friend.
      b.   STATED In order to qualify as a typical child, IMPLIED he should not be mature.
              STATED However, he is mature. IMPLIED Therefore, he is not a typical child.

The underlying norms surrounding the expectations are either grounded in moral values, in the case of dual character concepts, or inferred properties, in the case of natural kind concepts. Because of this distinction, *per*-concessives involving dual character concepts tend to have a sarcastic or judgemental tone. Those involving natural kind concepts, on the other hand, express surprise.

Similar constructions are found in Spanish with the purposive preposition *para*.

(21)   Para ser tan listo, le salen mal todos los examenes. (Pilar Hernández 2003:28)
              for be.INF so smart, 3SG.DAT go.out badly all the exams
              'For someone so smart, he fails all his exams.'

Unlike *per*, *para* is exclusively employed as a purposive connector in adverbial clauses (Lunn 1987), further supporting the idea that *per* and *para* concessives presuppose a normative purpose rather than a causal relation. Framing this kind of concession in opposition to a normative purposive relation allows to account both for the form of the construction and its interpretation.

5. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This squib has argued that concessive *per* + infinitive clauses in Italian are best analysed as expressing inoperant normative purpose rather than inoperant cause. Unlike canonical concessive constructions, these clauses do not negate a causal relation but instead evoke a normative purposive frame against which the subject of the main clause is evaluated. The concessive reading arises when the expected properties linked to that role are not met.

The analysis is supported by the generic nature of the constructions, their compatibility with dual character or natural kind concepts, and their incompatibility with artifact concepts. Their formal similarity to purpose clauses further reinforces the idea that the concessive meaning builds on an implicit, normative purposive structure.

Future research could explore how similar constructions behave cross-linguistically, as well as look into the diachronic patterns of *per* + infinitive clauses. The role of intentionality in normative purpose and *per*-concessives also remains an open issue. This squib takes the first steps in accounting for the emergence of concessive readings from markers of purpose, laying the ground for a future formal syntactic and semantic analysis of *per*-concessives and equivalent constructions in other languages.

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