On documenting language change as it happens:
The periphrastic construction "motion verb + *a* + infinitive" in Italian
Emanuela Li Destri, Università degli Studi di Udine (Italy)

Introduction. Grammaticalization refers to the process a lexical item undergoes in the course of time to become a functional item. It involves four main mechanisms (Heine and Kuteva 2002): semantic bleaching, extension, decategorialization and phonetic reduction. It is well known that motion verbs often partake in grammaticalization process: Bybee *et al* (1994) find, for examples, that they are the most common base for the creation of new *grams* for future forms. In some Romance languages, for instance, forms based on motion verbs are the base for the creation of analytic futures, the *go*-futures, that are, in various degrees, replacing the synthetic form of future, as it is seen in the French *je vais chanter* 'I'm going to sing' and the Spanish *voy a cantar*, same meaning.

The problem. While the fact that motion verb may undergo grammaticalization is widely attested cross-linguistically, it is less understood how this process comes about. Motion verbs in Italian appear to be a promising case to address the question. In Italian motion verbs can be used in what appears to be an aspectual periphrasis ('motion verb + *a* + infinitive', see exx. (1) and (2)), which suggests that they have undergone grammaticalization.

(1) *Oggi   vado   a   spiegarvi   Aristotele*
    Today   go-1SG   *a*   explain-INF-you   Aristotle
    'Today I'm going to explain Aristotle to you'

(2) *Questa situazione si è   venuta   a   creare   a causa della pandemia*
    This   situation   REFL is   come   *a*   create-INF due to the pandemic"
    'This situation has arisen due to the pandemic'

In this periphrasis a motion verb appears to have lost its original lexical meaning in favour of a grammatical one (more precisely aspectual: culminative, inchoative, and iterative are typically assigned to this periphrasis in literature, see Strik Lievers 2017); this seems to be compatible with the 'bleaching' process. Moreover, a reanalysis process can be assumed to have taken place, which suggests a 'decategorialization' process: thus, from a biclausal sentence with a motion verb followed by a purpose clause the structure has become a monoclausal sentence, as for instance clitic climbing shows (see exx. (3) and (4); cfr. Cinque 2001):

(3) [VP motion verb [CP *a* [VP infinitive]] > [FP motion verb [FP *a* [VP infinitive]]]

(4) {*Ve lo*}   *vado*   *a*   *spiegar(e)*   {*velo*}   *subito*.
    {you it}   go-1SG   *a*   explain-INF-   {you-it}   right away
    'I'm going to explain it to you right away'.

This process appears to affect several verbs (Strik Lievers 2017), but the most common and undoubtedly the most studied are *andare* 'to go', *venire* 'to come', and *tornare* 'to come back'. From a diachronic viewpoint the periphrasis 'motion verb + *a* + infinitive' dates back to the early stages of Italian. Strik Lievers (2017), by using the MIDIA corpus, shows that *andare* + *a* + infinitive is attested since the fourteenth century, while *venire* + *a* + infinitive and *tornare* + *a* + infinitive are found since the thirteenth century. Although the periphrasis was in use in Old Italian, it does not seem to have been particularly common in written texts through the history of Italian (Strik Lievers 2017). In the past forty years, however, it appears to have been increasingly used. Renzi (2012), Levie (2015) show that it is widely used in the language of journalists and television, as well as in academic and bureaucratic discourse, which suggests a process of 'change from above' in a variationist perspective (Renzi 2012, following Labov's framework).

Methodology. The available corpora of Italian appear to be well suited to document in great detail the undergoing process. In particular two corpora will be used to investigate what changes the periphrasis has been running into, CORIS and KIParla, which document two different

registers, written (formal) and spoken (informal). CORIS (CORpus di Italiano Scritto, 'Written Italian Corpus') is a synchronic corpus of written Italian that contains 165 million words, and it is divided into sub-corpora (such as press, narrative and academic prose, etc.). KIParla is a corpus of spoken Italian that contains 100 hours of recordings of spontaneous conversations and semi-structured interviews as well as lectures and academic oral exams. In CORIS, I searched for motion verb followed by *a* and an infinitive form. In KIParla, which is not *pos*-tagged, I searched for the various verb forms followed by *a*, then manually selected the ones with an infinitive verb. We expect that if the use of motion verbs as functional verbs is a change from above, CORIS should include more occurrences of motion verbs in this capacity than KIParla.

Results. Preliminary data appear to confirm the hypothesis of a change from above. Building on the examination of 1800 occurrences of *andare*, *venire*, and *tornare* it became apparent that the periphrastic form occurs more frequently in the more formal subcorpora, such as academic or bureaucratic prose. In addition, the verb *tornare* is used the most often in the periphrastic structure (up to 100% in the bureaucratic subcorpus, 88% on average), followed by *venire* (64% on average) and then *andare* (43% on average). As for the KIParla corpus, the verb *andare* is used in periphrastic constructions at a rate that is similar to what is found in CORIS, while *tornare* and *venire* are less used in the periphrastic construction (56% and 14% respectively) and have overall fewer occurrences than in CORIS. These facts do not surprise us, given that the KIParla corpus contains a more informal diaphasic variety than the CORIS corpus. However. they show a striking divide between *andare* and *tornare* on one hand, which are attested as functional verbs both in written and in spoken usage, and *venire* on the other, which is mainly attested as a functional verb in formal registers.

Moreover, the query allows us to draw some generalizations about the aspectual nuances of the periphrases. First, the inchoative aspectual value is more highly attested in KIParla than what had been verified in earlier investigations (Strik Lievers 2017), in which the culminative value was judged as the most common value. Second, the inchoative reading appears to be overwhelmingly associated with the presence of first and second person subjects, while the culminative meaning appears to be connected to the presence of a non-agentive subject. This is shown quite clearly in the data obtained w.r.t. *andare*. Moreover, there appear to be some occurrences with *andare* in KIParla that could be described as future forms, even if the context does not allow us to draw undoubtful conclusions.

Conclusions. Data collected querying two corpora of contemporary Italian allow us to show the trajectory of a change involving some motion verbs which have undergone a process of grammaticalization. The data show a higher presence of the periphrastic construction in the more formal varieties, corroborating the hypothesis that this is a 'change from above', but with some nuances than were not earlier noticed: motion verbs have undergone a similar process of grammaticalization but have followed different patterns of behaviour across language varieties, both in terms of how frequent they are in the periphrastic construction and in the aspectual value they convey. *Andare* and *tornare* show a more consistent change, while *venire* seems to be restricted to the more formal variety with a propensity for culminative meaning.

Selected references. Bybee, J. *et al.*, W., (1994), *The evolution of grammar: tense, aspect, and modality in the languages of the world*, Chicago. Cinque G., (2006), *Restructuring and Functional Structure*, in *Restructuring and Functional Heads*, New York: 11-64. Heine, B., Kuteva, T., (2002), *World lexicon of grammaticalization*, Cambridge. Levie, Y., (2015), *L'effet de sens d'"aboutissement" au terme d'un parcours fictif par la périphrase andare a + infinitif en italien*, «Cahiers de praxématique», 65. Renzi, L., (2012), *Come cambia la lingua. L'italiano in movimento*, Bologna. Strik Lievers, F., (2017), *Infinitive con verbi di* movimento, in *Strutture linguistiche e dati empirici in diacronia e sincronia*, Pisa: 169-196.