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Auxiliary verbs in compound tenses in Italian and German: A comparative study

1. Introduction

The present study analyses the problem of the choice of an auxiliary verb in compound tenses in Italian and German. In languages in which forms of compound tenses can be created with more than one auxiliary verb it might be difficult for a learner not only to understand the use of the tense as such in opposition to other tenses and to memorize the list of irregular past participle forms, but also to comprehend the rules which govern the choice of an appropriate auxiliary verb. To help both teachers and students we analyse these rules in the two languages in order to identify similarities and differences between them according to the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (cfr. Lado 1957). These considerations seem to be particularly useful for students learning both languages, if they speak one of the languages better than the other or are native speakers of one of them, and for teachers working with such students in the classroom. Nowadays, when a growing number of people are learning more than one language, the potential target group of the present research is expanding as well. It is important to remember that grammar rules are, on the one hand, strict, but on the other hand in some cases the use of a given form depends on the message that a speaker wants to convey, on his or her understanding of the processes that are to be discussed. As Langacker explains (2008:4): "It [grammar – MK] is thus an essential aspect of the conceptual apparatus through which we apprehend and engage the world. […] grammar is not only an integral part of cognition but also a key to understand it". As this independence of expression might be problematic for students since they would prefer unequivocal solutions, a set of rules to remember given as a manual, in the present study we wish to investigate the rules that govern the choice of auxiliary verbs in Italian and German in order to make this issue less problematic.

2. Contrastive analysis: Theory and practice

The methodology adopted in the study is based on the Contrastive Analysis tradition developed after the Second World War by Charles Fries (in the 1940s) and Robert Lado (in the 1950s). The main idea is to compare two or more languages in order to find similarities and differences, which can be useful in both language teaching/learning and in translation. As Lado put it (1957:vii), "we can predict and describe the patterns that will cause difficulty in learning, and those that will not cause difficulty, by comparing two languages". Usually it is believed that similarities are easier to learn than differences, but not all the researchers share this belief; e.g. Komorowska (1980:116) argues that similarities between two languages can actually cause more errors than differences would. As further research and practice mentioned below showed, the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis cannot be accepted in its strong version according to which all errors can be predicted on the basis of the comparison of two languages. First of all, some errors are made by students regardless of their mother tongue while in other situations students of the same group can differ in making mistakes (we do not introduce the distinction between errors and mistakes mentioned by Brown (2000:217) treating them as synonyms instead). In addition to that, students can have problems with some aspects of a language that they do not perceive as particularly difficult. It can also happen that the Contrastive Analysis identifies some potential errors that are not committed in practice (Lennon 2008:53). Another problem is that "only part of the learning problems can be predicted" (Johansson 2008:10). What is more, the Contrastive Analysis method is also narrowed in some studies to the comparison of one's mother tongue and a foreign language, while it can be also used in the case of two foreign languages, e.g. in the case of Polish students learning Italian and French (cfr. Karczewska 2011). Regardless of these issues, the Contrastive Analysis can be of help in language teaching and learning (Johansson 2008:9), not only in the classroom, but also in creating materials for grammar and course books. These publications can also be based on the Error Analysis which is an a posteriori analysis of errors committed indeed, not a priori speculative reflection, as not all problems identified theoretically can appear in practice, as indicated before. It has to be added that the Contrastive Analysis is useful not only for "the identification of probable areas of difficulty in another language where […] interference in likely to occur", as Fisiak (1981:3) put it, but also to identify possible similarities that can accelerate the acquisition of a foreign language. This requires a broader definition of interference which should rather be defined as an influence of one language on the other instead of the famous Weinreichian "deviation from the norm" due to the ability to speak two languages (1953:1). This positive aspect of the analysis should not be neglected.

    Although a pure description of similarities and differences between two languages will not eliminate all the errors, many teachers, even without any deeper

reflection or theoretical background, know that their students have problems with structures that are either non-existent or different in their mother tongue or another language that they speak. This is the reason why, for instance, Polish teachers (of English, German or Romance languages) focus on the use of articles, introducing many exercises: the fact that Polish does not have articles is a serious problem for Poles learning foreign languages. Also many linguists conduct their research comparing two or more languages, e.g. comparing the use of articles, pronouns or certain verbal forms in more or less distant languages, which can later have its practical application in the mentioned fields of teaching/learning and translation. Still, as Gast and König (2008:213) argue, "such applied aspects of language comparison are no longer its [contrastive analysis's – MK] primary concern". In the present study this application of the Contrastive Analysis is, however, important.

3. The study of auxiliary verbs in compound tenses in Italian and German: Similarities and differences

We chose to analyse the issue of the use of auxiliary verbs in compound tenses in two Indo-European languages, Italian and German, as they both have compound tenses which are quite similar in terms of structure and in both cases there are some strict rules determining which auxiliary verb should be used with which verb to create the forms of a given compound tense. These rules will be discussed on the basis of well-known Italian and German grammar books used by teachers in schools and at universities (Dreyer/Schmitt 2000, Duden 1995, Hall/Scheiner 1999 and Helbig/Buscha 2001 for German and Moretti 1994 and Storni 1994 for Italian). Actually, in both languages one can identify certain groups of verbs which create compound tenses forms with a given auxiliary verb and it is the very fact of belonging to this category or not that is of major importance for the present study.

In Italian and German, just like in other languages such as French, to create a compound tense, one has to conjugate in the appropriate tense one of two auxiliary verbs: *avere*/*haben* 'to have' or *essere*/*sein* 'to be' which are followed by the past participle (participio passato/Partizip II). The choice of the appropriate auxiliary verb is based on some general rules which will be presented throughout the paper. However, there are numerous exceptions to them. In addition, some verbs can conjugate with both auxiliary verbs. In the present study we will focus on the past perfect tense: passato prossimo and Perfekt, but in other compound tenses the rules of auxiliary verb choice remain the same. As stated before, we will try to analyse these similarities and differences in order to identify general rules governing the choice of auxiliary verbs in these two languages.

In the analysis we will compare certain groups of verbs in both languages. The first and least numerous group are the auxiliary verbs themselves. In both

Italian and German auxiliary verbs conjugate with themselves, i.e. the verbs *avere* and *haben* are conjugated with the auxiliary verbs *avere* and *haben* while *essere* and *sein* are conjugated with the auxiliary verbs *essere* and *sein*, as the following examples show:

(1) *Ho avuto un incidente* and *Ich habe einen Verkehrsunfall gehabt* 'I had an accident',

(2) *Ieri sono stato a Varsavia* and *Gestern, bin ich in Warschau gewesen* 'Yesterday I was in Warsaw'.

There are no exceptions to this rule which is connected with another basic rule of auxiliary verb choice in both languages. According to this rule, transitive verbs in both languages take the auxiliary verb *avere*/*haben* 'to have' while intransitive verbs take the verb *essere*/*sein* 'to be' (cfr. Storni 1994:93–94 and Dreyer/Schmitt 2000:63). Among the examples[1] we can cite:

(3) *Ho letto un libro* 'I read a book'

in which a direct object is present, but the sentence

(4) *Ho già mangiato* 'I have already eaten'

is correct, too, even if no direct object is given. The same rule is present in German: according to Duden (1995:120), Helbig/Buscha (2001:123) and Hall/Scheiner (1999:8), transitive verbs conjugate with *haben* even if a direct object is not given:

(5) *Sie hat einen Brief geschrieben* 'She wrote a letter' and *Sie hat geschrieben* 'She wrote',

(6) *Die Mutter hat gegessen* 'The mother ate'.

At this point we should reflect on this rule. It has been stated before that transitive verbs, the ones which are usually followed by a direct object, take the verb *avere*/*haben* 'to have'. It is worth mentioning that in other languages, like French and English, the same auxiliary verb is used to create forms of compound tenses. An interesting explanation is provided by Mańczyk (2002:91–92) who argues that what was done by somebody somehow belongs to this person, which is why the

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[1] If we mention grammar books and then give examples, it means that these examples come from these reference books. If no source is indicated, examples are our own.

verb 'to have' is used to create past forms in many languages: if a person reads a book its content becomes his or her intellectual "belonging" just like something eaten or drunk enters the body of the consumer. This theory seems to stem from primitive beliefs reflecting the profound original conception of repossessing of an object (or a person, the case of cannibalism included) by coping with it in a given way, e.g. eating it. This interpretation, however closer to philosophical reflections than pure linguistic research, might be useful for teachers and students as it could help to remember the rule. In German it is also true that transitive verbs conjugate with *haben*, but there might be some exceptions, like (Hall/Scheiner 1999:8):

(7) *Sie ist kein Risiko eingegangen* 'She did not take any risk',
(8) *Sie ist die alte Wohnung schnell losgeworden* 'She got rid of her old flat quickly'.

In the above examples the verbs do have direct objects and nevertheless they conjugate with the verb *sein* 'to be'. This exception can be explained by the fact that these verbs are actually (Germ.) pseudotransitive Verben, the ones that do not have a passive form, although they do have a direct object. Another explanation is given by Helbig/Buscha (2001:123), according to whom verbs which are derivatives of other verbs (such as *gehen* 'to go' or *werden* 'to become, to stay') that conjugate with *sein* will conjugate with *sein*, too. Apart from this type of verbs, other transitive verbs conjugate with the verb *avere/haben* 'to have' in both languages.

One of the major differences between the two languages as far as auxiliary verbs are concerned is related to reflexive verbs. In Italian all reflexive verbs take the auxiliary verb *essere* 'to be' and there are no exceptions to this rule, except for the use of reflexive verbs with modal verbs like 'want', 'can' or 'must' (*volere*, *potere* and *dovere*), but this problem will be discussed later. Therefore, in Italian we can cite examples like:

(9) *Mi sono riposata* 'I took a rest',
(10) *Ti sei vestita* 'You dressed yourself',
(11) *Ci siamo visti ieri* 'We saw each other, we met yesterday'.

In all the examples in Italian the verb *essere* was used, also in the case of the reciprocal reflexive verb. The explanation of this rule can be the fact that in Italian, just like in German, verbs which express some changes in appearance or state of health conjugate with *essere/sein*. Reflexive verbs in numerous cases express the changes in appearance or health condition or at least this is the perspective of the Italian language. Still, in German all reflexive verbs conjugate with the auxiliary verb *haben* 'to have'. This is the reason why in German the above Italian sentences will be translated as follows:

(12) *Ich habe mich erholt.*
(13) *Du hast dich angezogen.*
(14) *Wir haben uns gestern getroffen.*

Let us now consider some more complex issues. Not only transitive verbs, but also some intransitive verbs have the auxiliary verb *avere*/*haben* 'to have', contrary to the rule mentioned at the beginning of the article that intransitive verbs conjugate with the auxiliary verb *essere*/*sein* 'to be'. In Italian such verbs as *ballare* 'to dance', *pranzare*/*cenare* 'to have dinner/supper', *dormire* 'to sleep', *piangere* 'to cry', *ridere* 'to laugh' conjugate with *avere* even if they do not usually have direct objects. Probably there is no reason to conjugate them with the other auxiliary verb (the rules of the use of *essere* will be explained later on), so they "stay" with the verb *avere*. The most interesting example is *ballare* since, as we will see later, verbs which express movement usually take the verb *essere*/*sein* 'to be'. Anyway, in Italian dance seems to belong to the category of other activities, pleasures rather than movements.

Let us now explore the equivalents of these verbs in German. *Tanzen* can conjugate with both *haben* and *sein* with a difference in meaning (Helbig/Buscha 2001:125):

(15) *Sie hat früher sehr viel getanzt* 'She used to dance a lot before'

where dancing is indeed a kind of hobby, activity for pleasure and not a movement, which is expressed by the choice of the auxiliary verb *haben* 'to have' used in the case of the durative type of action (Germ. durativer Aktionsart) contrary to the following example:

(16) *Sie ist durch den Saal getanzt* 'She was dancing through the dancehall'

in which the verb *tanzen* conjugates with the auxiliary verb *sein* 'to be' as the activity is perceived rather as a movement, a way of covering a given distance. This change of perspective is immediately reflected in the language. All the other German equivalents of the Italian verbs mentioned above: *zu Mittag/Abend essen*, *schlafen*, *weinen* and *lachen* conjugate with *haben*. This means that in the case of the verbs analysed Italian and German have the same rules of the auxiliary verb use.

Ballare and *tanzen* are not the only verbs that can cause confusion. In Italian verbs like *camminare* 'to walk', *marciare* 'to walk, to march', *passeggiare* 'to stroll', *viaggiare* 'to travel', *nuotare* 'to swim', *sciare* 'to ski', *navigare* 'to sail', *remare* 'to row' all conjugate with the verb *avere* 'to have'. This means that they are not perceived as movements, changes of position, but types of leisure. In German, however, the perspective is different: the verbs *gehen* 'to walk', *spazieren gehen* 'to stroll' and *reisen* 'to travel' conjugate with *sein* only, which means

that walking and travelling is a method of relocation according to the German grammar while it is not from the perspective of the Italian grammar. Other verbs like *reiten* 'to ride a horse', *segeln* 'to sail', *paddeln* 'to paddle', *fahren* 'to go by a means of transport', *fliegen* 'to fly', *bummeln* 'to wander', *flattern* 'to flap', 'to fly' and *rudern* 'to row', just like *schwimmen* 'to swim' can conjugate with both auxiliary verbs, just like in the case of *tanzen* mentioned above.

Let us take a look at the following examples (Helbig/Buscha 2001:125):

(17) *Der Urlauber hat den ganzen Tag gepaddelt* 'The holidaymaker paddled all day long' and
(18) *Der Urlauber ist ans andere Ufer gepaddelt* 'The holidaymaker paddled towards the other lakeside'.

We can easily observe that if a verb represents a simple activity, such as leisure, it takes the auxiliary verb *haben* 'to have'. When the speaker concentrates on the fact that some distance was covered and the activity had its starting and end point, the verb *sein* 'to be' is used. Sometimes the use of an adjunct changes the verb (Helbig/Buscha 2001:125):

(19) *Er hat drei Stunden gesegelt* 'He sailed for three hours',
(20) *Er ist nach der Insel gesegelt* 'He sailed to the island'.

In these examples we can observe that the information about the place of the action changes the auxiliary verb. Indeed, Hall/Scheiner (1999:14) and Helbig/Buscha (2001:125) explain that when the goal of the activity or its place is given, verb forms are created with *sein* 'to be' whereas when the manner (and we should add: the durative aspect) of the action is given, verbs conjugate with *haben* 'to have'.

A similar situation can be observed in the case of the Italian verb *correre* 'to run' which can conjugate with *essere* 'to be' when the goal of the action is mentioned:

(21) *Sono corso in giardino* 'I ran to the garden' (Moretti 1994:210)

while the action of running as such requires the verb *avere* 'to have':

(22) *Ho corso più di un'ora* 'I ran for more than an hour' (Storni 1994:95).

To complete this description we need to add that in German *laufen* 'to run' conjugates with *sein* 'to be' only, which means that running is perceived as an action with a certain goal taking place in a given space rather than a simple activity.

After verbs with *avere* and *haben* have been discussed, we are now outlining the rules governing the use of the auxiliaries *essere* and *sein* 'to be'. In both languages these are verbs which express movement, in Italian these are such verbs

as: *andare* 'to go', *venire* 'to come', *arrivare* 'to arrive', *tornare* and *ritornare* 'to return, to come back', *entrare* 'to enter', *uscire* 'to go out', *partire* 'to leave' (Storni 1994:94), all of which conjugate with *essere*. In German these are respectively: *gehen/fahren*, *kommen*, *ankommen*, *zurückkehren/wieder gehen/wieder fahren*, *in gehen*, *gehen/herausgehen*, *weggehen*, e.g.

(23) *Ieri sono andata al cinema* and
(24) *Gestern bin ich ins Kino gegangen* 'Yesterday I went to the cinema'

and again, the auxiliary verb in all the examples is *essere/sein* 'to be'. Nevertheless, it is necessary to analyse the verbs of movement like *fahren* 'to go, by a given means of transport' and *fliegen* 'to fly'. In general, if the verb is used in the sense of 'going by car/plane', it conjugates with *sein* 'to be' and if it means 'to drive a car/to steer a plane', it takes the auxiliary verb *haben* 'to have', as there is a direct object like a car/plane:

(25) *Er ist nach Dresden gefahren* 'He drove/went to Dresden',
(26) *Er hat einen Mercedes gefahren* 'He drove a Mercedes' (Helbig/Buscha 2001:126).

In Italian there are two equivalents of *fahren*: *andare* (*in macchina*) and *guidare* (*una macchina*), obviously the first one conjugates with *essere* 'to be' as an intransitive verb while the other one, a transitive verb with a direct object, takes *avere* 'to have':

(27) *Lui è andato a Roma in macchina* 'He went to Rome by car',
(28) *Lui ha guidato una Mercedes* 'He drove a Mercedes'.

The same rule is valid with *volare* 'to fly': it is treated like a verb of movement and therefore conjugates with *essere* 'to be' when one speaks about a completed action, a movement from one place to another (of creatures which fly themselves):

(29) *Il canarino è volato via dalla gabbia* 'A canary flew away from the cage'.

Also in the metaphorical sense of 'passing quickly' *volare* takes *essere*:

(30) *Le vacanze sono volate via in un attimo* 'Holidays flew away = passed in a while'.

In the sense of 'travelling by plane' or simply the action of flying in its duration *volare* has the auxiliary verb *avere* 'to have':

(31) *Non ho mai volato* 'I never flew = travelled by plane'.

Another group of verbs which take the auxiliary verb *essere*/*sein* 'to be' in both languages are verbs expressing the fact of staying in one place: *stare*, *restare*, *rimanere* in Italian:

    (32) *Ieri sono restata a casa* 'I stayed at home yesterday'

and *bleiben* in German:

    (33) *Gestern bin ich zu Hause geblieben* 'Yesterday I stayed at home'.

It is interesting that these verbs in both languages have the auxiliary verb *essere*/*sein* 'to be' which is associated with motion and not with staying in one place. In this case the explanation is the fact that these verbs are intransitive ones, so the auxiliary verb *essere*/*sein* 'to be' is used.

    Another important group of verbs which take the auxiliary verb *essere*/*sein* 'to be' in both languages are verbs expressing changes. Among possible examples we can cite *bruciarsi* and *verbrennen* 'to burn down':

    (34) *I rifiuti da giardino si sono bruciati* and
    (35) *Die Gartenabfälle sind verbrannt* 'Garden waste burnt down' (Hall/
        Scheiner 1999:9),

svegliarsi and *aufwachen* 'to wake up':

    (36) *Mi sono svegliata alle otto*,
    (37) *Ich bin um acht Uhr aufgewacht* 'I woke up at eight',

addormentarsi and *einschlafen* 'to fall asleep', *arrossire* and *erröten* 'to turn red', as well as *nascere* and *geboren sein* 'to be born' and *morire* and *sterben* 'to die'. In these cases changes are concluded, in German we can speak of the so-called perfektive Verben, verbs used to express finite actions having a result. These verbs conjugate with *sein* 'to be'.

    However, not always do the examples confirm this rule as Duden (1995:120) gives a pair of sentences:

    (38) *Er hat/ist rasch gealtert* 'He got old soon, quickly',
    (39) *Der Wein hat/ist gegoren* 'The wine (has) fermented'.

In these examples both auxiliary verbs are possible. Helbig/Buscha (2001:125) explain that the use of the verb *haben* 'to have' focuses attention on the ongoing process while the use of the verb *sein* 'to be' concentrates on the phenomenon and its results. A similar situation can be observed in the three following sentences:

(40–42) *Die Rose ist erblüht*, *Die Rose hat geblüht* and *Die Rose ist verblüht*
'The rose bloomed' = started to bloom, 'the rose bloomed' = con-
tinued to bloom and 'the rose wilted' (Helbig/Buscha 2001:124).

One can easily observe that indeed the action of starting or finishing the process of blooming is perceived as a change and therefore the auxiliary verb is *sein* 'to be' while the continuation of the action with no changes is perceived as stability and the auxiliary verb is *haben* 'to have'. Again, the difference between the perfect, finite and durative actions (Germ. perfektiver and durativer Aktionsart) is visible.

In Italian the situation is complex, too, as there is the verb *sbocciare* 'to start to bloom', *fiorire* 'to start to bloom and continue to bloom' and *sfiorire* 'to wilt', all of which conjugate with *essere* 'to be'. This means that also the action of being in bloom is perceived in Italian as an ongoing process. However, returning to the previous examples with the man and the wine, in Italian the first sentence would be

(43) *È invecchiato velocemente*

with the auxiliary verb *essere* 'to be', while the second sentence would be:

(44) *Il vino ha fermentato*

with the use of the verb *avere* 'to have'. This difference from the perspective of grammar means that the process of ageing is treated as a bigger change than the process of wine fermentation.

Another major difference between Italian and German is the use of modal verbs. In German all modal verbs conjugate with *haben* 'to have':

(45) *Sie hat das gut machen können* 'She could do it well',
(46) *Sie hat ins Kino gehen wollen* 'She wanted to go to the cinema'

regardless of the auxiliary verb with which the verb in infinitive is conjugated. In Italian this verb is important as the choice between *avere* and *essere* in the conjugation of modal verbs depends on the verb in infinitive: if it takes the auxiliary *avere* 'to have' then the modal verb will take it as well, when the auxiliary verb is *essere* 'to be', this verb will be the auxiliary verb for the modal verb used, too:

(47) *Abbiamo voluto parlare* 'We wanted to talk'

because the verb *parlare* 'to speak, to talk' takes the auxiliary *avere* but

(48) *Siamo dovuti uscire* 'We had to go out'

because the verb *uscire* 'to go out', as a verb of motion, takes the auxiliary *essere*.

Moreover, Italian introduces even more confusion in the case of reflexive verbs used with modal verbs. In such a case the choice of an auxiliary verb depends on the position of a reflexive pronoun: if it is situated before the verb, then the auxiliary verb is *essere* 'to be', when it is joined to the verb in infinitive, the auxiliary verb is *avere* 'to have' (the change of position of the verb does not change the meaning of the utterance) as can be seen in the two following examples:

(49) *Mi sono dovuto alzare alle otto*,
(50) *Ho dovuto alzarmi alle otto*.

Both sentences have the same meaning of 'I had to get up at eight'. The position of the pronoun in the first sentence stresses the fact that this is a reflexive verb while in the second sentence the reflexive pronoun is less "visible" and the reflexive verb is to a greater extent similar to other verbs, therefore the auxiliary verb is *avere*.

Another interesting category are verbs which in Italian can conjugate with *avere* and *essere* depending on the fact whether in a given sentence the verb is a transitive one with a direct object or the sense of the verb is reflexive (even if from the formal point of view the verb is not reflexive). Let us analyse the following examples:

(51) *Ho cominciato la lezione* 'I started the lesson'

and

(52) *La lezione è cominciata* 'The lesson began'.

In the first example there is a subject, a teacher, who begins his or her lesson, this is a typical transitive verb, therefore the auxiliary verb is *avere* 'to have'. In the second example there is the same verb *cominciare* but it is used in a reflexive manner (in Polish in such a sentence the reflexive verb *zaczynać się* would be used) as the lesson begins on its own (obviously, there must be a teacher to start it, but it is the result that is important, not the agent). The fact that the auxiliary verb in this example is *essere* 'to be' lets us think that the situation when some action starts (and finishes as well) is a kind of change. In German there is no such distinction as the verbs *beginnen* and *anfangen* 'to start something' and 'to start on its own' as well as *enden* and *aufhören* 'stop something' and 'finish on its own' take the auxiliary verb *haben* 'to have'.

Also the verbs with the meaning 'to change' in German all have the auxiliary verb *haben*: *ändern* 'to change something, e.g. opinion', *sich ändern* 'to change oneself, e.g. appearance', *wechseln* 'change something, e.g. address or surname' and *sich verändern* 'to change on its own, e.g. the situation changed', as they are transitive verbs.

In Italian the verb *cambiare* can be used as a transitive one and is then conjugated with *avere* 'to have'':

(53) *Ho cambiato idea* 'I changed my opinion, my mind'

and as a verb with the reflexive meaning:

(54) *La situazione è cambiata* 'The situation changed'

when it is conjugated with *essere* 'to be'. This fact confirms the rule that in Italian verbs expressing changes have the auxiliary verb *essere* 'to be'.

However, in German there are also verbs which take both auxiliary verbs depending on the fact whether in a given sentence there is a subject completing an action on an object or the subject changes on its own (even if usually because of some external factors). These differences in meaning and valence of verbs is illustrated by the following examples (Helbig/Buscha 2001:126):

(55) *Die Sonne hat das Eis geschmolzen* 'The sun melted the ice',
(56) *Das Eis ist geschmolzen* 'The ice melted',
(57) *Der Arzt hat die Wunde geheilt* 'The doctor cured the wound',
(58) *Die Wunde ist geheilt* 'The wound healed'.

As can be seen, in the examples in which there is a subject and an object, so the verb is transitive, the auxiliary verb *haben* 'to have' is used. When the action is completed on its own by the subject, the auxiliary verb is *sein* 'to be'. In Italian the problem is solved in a different way, by the use of the transitive and reflexive verb in the first pair of sentences:

(59) *Il sole ha sciolto il ghiaccio* 'The sun melted the ice',
(60) *Il ghiaccio si è sciolto* 'The ice melted'.

It needs to be stated that again there are two different auxiliary verbs used, *avere* 'to have' with the transitive verb *sciogliere* 'to melt something' and *essere* 'to be' with the reflexive verb *sciogliersi* 'to melt itself'.

In the case of the other pair of sentences, in Italian the same verb *guarire* is used with two different auxiliary verbs:

(61) *Il medico ha guarito la lesione* 'The doctor cured the wound',
(62) *La lesione è guarita* 'The wound healed',

just like it is in the German examples above. Again, in the case of the transitive verb the auxiliary verb is *avere* 'to have' while in the case of the reflexive use of the verb which at the same time expresses some kind of change, the verb *essere* 'to be' is used to create the form of the past perfect tense.

Finally, we discuss the form of the past participle when the auxiliary verb *essere*/*sein* 'to be' is used, which is another marked difference between Italian and German. In Italian the use of the auxiliary verb *essere* requires the use of the appropriate ending indicating the number and gender of the subject. Therefore, a man would say:

(63) *Sono andato al cinema* 'I went to the cinema',

while a woman would say:

(64) *Sono andata al cinema* 'I went to the cinema'.

In German no such distinction is made, both subjects would simply say:

(65) *Ich bin ins Kino gegangen* 'I went to the cinema'.

In the plural the form of Partizip II remains the same:

(66) *Wir sind ins Kino gegangen* 'We went to the cinema'

while in Italian a group of men or men and women would say:

(67) *Siamo andati al cinema* 'We went to the cinema'

and a group consisting of women only would say:

(68) *Siamo andate al cinema* 'We went to the cinema'.

This difference between Italian and German is a significant one. In Romance languages using a compound tense the speaker has to indicate the number and gender of the subject which is related to the biological sex in the case of human beings or to the grammatical gender of nouns indicating animals and objects (as all the nouns have one of two genders: masculine or feminine). In German no such information is given.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, our contrastive analysis of the use of auxiliary verbs in compound tenses in Italian and German indicates a number of similarities and differences between the two languages. In both languages there are compound tenses whose forms are created with the use of one of the two auxiliary verbs, *avere*/*haben* 'to have' or *essere*/*sein* 'to be'. In both Italian and German transitive verbs with a direct object usually take the auxiliary verb *avere*/*haben* 'to have', while verbs

expressing movement, remaining in one place and changes have the auxiliary verb *essere/sein* 'to be'. There are also some differences: reflexive verbs have the auxiliary verb *essere* 'to be' in Italian while in German their auxiliary verb is *haben* 'to have'. In the case of modal verbs, in German they always conjugate with *haben* 'to have', while in Italian the choice depends on the verb in infinitive. In both languages there are also verbs which can have both auxiliary verbs.

Analysing the use of auxiliary verbs in compound tenses in Italian and German we have found out that the choice of an appropriate auxiliary verb is related mainly to the transitivity or intransitivity of the verb. In some cases, also the perception of the action completed is relevant, whether it is for example a motion and a change or an action perceived more as a process with given results. This means that there might be no strict rules as to which auxiliary verb should be used with a given verb, but the speaker himself needs to reflect on the nature of the action he or she is describing in order to categorise it properly to produce correct utterances.

The present study can bee seen as an introduction into the problem which can be expanded to include other verbs and other languages.

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