

# The Variety of Syntactic Patterns of Dative Experiencer Verbs in Italian

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**Abstract** This article investigates the variety of syntactic constructions characterizing Dative Experiencer verbs in Italian. This psych class, whose representative verb has always been considered *piacere* ‘appeal’, includes only ten verbs, which in most cases share the inverted structure, i.e. the SVO and the OVS patterns. However, DE verbs display an irregular and idiosyncratic syntactic behaviour, given the abundance of (pronominal/ reflexive) transitive/non-transitive constructions in which they may appear.

**Keywords** Dative verbs. Dative Experiencer. Alternation. Psych verbs. Inverted structure.

**Index** 1 Introduction. – 2 Subjecthood and Topicalization: An Overview. – 3 A Taxonomy of Psych Verbs. – 4 The Variety of Patterns of Dative Experiencer Verbs. – 5 Conclusions.



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## 1 Introduction

Dative Experiencer verbs are well known for being unaccusative and receiving a stative interpretation cross-linguistically (Fábregas, Marín 2020). In their seminal work on psych verbs, Belletti, Rizzi (1988) place Italian dative verbs in Class III; the Experiencer is linked to the inherent dative case. The authors claim that both Dative and Accusative Experiencer verbs (such as *piacere* ‘appeal’ and *preoccupare* ‘worry’, respectively) have an underlying unaccusative structure.

Italian Dative Experiencer (DE) verbs, whose representative has always been considered *piacere* ‘appeal’, have been widely discussed in the literature as they display an inverted structure (Giusti, Iovino 2019), that is, DEs may appear in preverbal position. Perlmutter (1983) takes the Dative Experiencer to be an underlying (‘initial’) subject demoted to indirect object status at a later level of representation. Belletti, Rizzi (1988; 2012) and Cardinaletti (2004) claim that DEs are quirky subjects.

The aim of this study is to show that, in addition to the inverted structure and the stative semantics defining the much-discussed verb *piacere* ‘appeal’, the Dative Experiencer class also includes verbs, usually neglected, that exhibit a heterogenous syntactic and semantic behaviour. Italian Dative Experiencer verbs are not only characterized by variations in the position of the DE but also by the variety of syntactic structures in which they may appear. Thus, they constitute an unstable psych class, given their idiosyncratic syntactic behaviour.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 is an overview of the hypothesis advanced on the inverted construction of Dative Experiencer verbs. Section 3 briefly presents the taxonomy of psych predicates, while Section 4 provides a detailed examination of the syntactic properties of the verbs in the Dative Experiencer verb class. Section 5 draws some conclusions.

## 2 Subjecthood and Topicalization: An Overview

In this section I will give an overview of the different approaches to the analysis of the inverted structure, that is, the variation in the position of DEs (SVO vs OVS). This is the DE verb property that has been widely discussed in the literature and I will not investigate it any further since the aim of this article is to show that, besides the variation in word order (SVO vs OVS) and the subjecthood properties of Dative Experiencers, this class of verbs is also characterized by a variety of idiosyncratic syntactic constructions in Italian.

Belletti, Rizzi (1988; 2012) and Cardinaletti (2004) claim that DEs are quirky subjects in Italian; Masullo (1992) and Fernández-Soriano (1999) make the same claim for Spanish. The latter compares true Nominative subjects and Dative Experiencers in order to show that DEs are subjects in Spanish. Tubino (2009) states that preverbal DEs in Spanish are not quirky subjects, rather they are the result of Topicalization in the left periphery of the sentence. More recently, Jiménez-Fernández, Rozwadowska (2016; 2017), who analyse Spanish, English and Polish, claim that the distribution of DEs in the sentence depends on factors related to the argument structure and to the Information Structure.

In Italian, the verb *piacere* ‘appeal’, which is usually considered the representative of the Dative Experiencer class, is characterized by an inverted structure (Giusti, Iovino 2019) where the DE can appear in postverbal position as in (1) or in preverbal position as in (2). As Belletti, Rizzi (1988, 334) and Cardinaletti (2004) point out, the *piacere* ‘appeal’ class displays both orders, that is, Theme V Experiencer (SVO) and Experiencer V Theme (OVS). The same happens in the Spanish counterparts (3)-(4) (drawn from Jiménez-Fernández, Rozwadowska (2016), examples (5c-c’)):

- (1) *Questo piace a Gianni*  
 this appeal.PRS.3SG to Gianni  
 ‘This appeals to Gianni’
- (2) *A Gianni piace questo*  
 to Gianni appeal.PRS.3SG this  
 ‘This appeals to Gianni’
- (3) *Esto le gusta a Angela*  
 this her appeal.PRS.3SG to Angela  
 ‘This appeals to Angela’
- (4) *A Ángela le gusta esto*  
 to Angela her appeal.PRS.3SG this  
 ‘This appeals to Angela’

Belletti, Rizzi (1988, 337) provide evidence that supports the subjecthood status of DEs. The authors point out that “Wh-extraction across a topicalized dative is weakly deviant [...], extraction across a preverbal Experiencer is fully natural” as shown in (5)-(6), respectively. In sentence (6) “the preverbal Experiencer patterns exactly like any other preverbal subject”, for example as in (7) (examples are drawn from Belletti, Rizzi 2016, (106a-c)):

- (5) ?? *I libri che a Gianni ho dato sono questi*  
 the book that to Gianni give.PST.1SG are these  
 ‘These are the books I gave to Gianni’
- (6) *I libri che a Gianni sono piaciuti sono questi*  
 the books that to Gianni please.PST.3SP are these  
 ‘These are the books that appealed to Gianni’
- (7) *I libri che Gianni mi ha dato sono questi*  
 the books that Gianni me give.PST.3SG are these  
 ‘These are the books that Gianni gave me’

Furthermore, Belletti, Rizzi (1988, examples (107a-b)) point out the contrast between the Dative Experiencer in (8) and other dative arguments, such as in (9):

- (8) ? *A nessuno gli piace essere mandato al diavolo*  
 to nobody to.him appeal.PRS.3SG be.INF send.PTCP to.the devil  
 ‘Nobody likes to be sent to hell’
- (9) \* *A nessuno gli hanno detto di andare al diavolo*  
 to nobody to.him tell.PST.3PL of go.INF to.the devil  
 ‘They told nobody to go to hell’

Belletti, Rizzi (1988, 337, examples (104-105)) suggest that the preverbal dative fills the subject position. Further evidence in favour of this hypothesis “is that the order Experiencer V Theme appears to be unmarked, i.e. the most natural order – the one which does not require contextual justification. For example [...] Topicalization of a dative verbal complement is rather odd, but a preverbal dative Experiencer is perfectly natural”.

As (10)-(12) show:

- (10) *Tutti sono preoccupati perché ho raccontato questa storia a Gianni*  
 all be.PRS.3PL worry.PTCP because tell.PST.1SG this story to Gianni  
 ‘Everyone is worried because I told this story to Gianni’
- (11) ?? *Tutti sono preoccupati perché a Gianni ho raccontato questa storia*  
 all be.PRS.3PL worry.PTCP because to Gianni tell.PST.1SG this story  
 ‘Everyone is worried because I told Gianni this story’

- (12) *Tutti sono preoccupati perché a Gianni piace la linguistica*  
 all be.PRS.3PL worry.PTCP because to Gianni appeal.PRS.3SG the linguistics  
 ‘Everyone is worried because Gianni likes linguistics’

Similarly, Cardinaletti (2004, examples (19-20)) points out that DEs’ behaviour differs from other dative arguments. The gerundive Aux-to-Comp constructions (13)-(14) and the Complementizer deletion constructions (15)-(16) are grammatical only when applied to DEs. The auxiliaries *essendo* ‘being’ and *avendo* ‘having’ move to the Complementizer position in (13)-(14); only (13) is grammatical because of the presence of the Dative Experiencer. As regards (15)-(16), the Complementizer *that* can be null only in the context indicated in (15) where *piacere* ‘appeal’ is embedded under the verb *credere* ‘believe’:

- (13) *Essendo a Gianni piaciuto molto il regalo, ...*  
 be.GDV to Gianni appeal.PTCP much the gift, ...  
 ‘Since Gianni really liked the gift, ...’
- (14) \* *Avendo(gli) a Gianni dato questi libri, ...*  
 have.GDV(to.him) to Gianni give.PTCP these books, ...  
 ‘Having given Gianni these books, ...’
- (15) *Credevo a Gianni piacesse queste storie*  
 believe.PST.1SG to Gianni appeal.SBJV.3SG these stories  
 ‘I thought Gianni liked these stories’
- (16) ?? *Credevo a Gianni (gli) avesse dato questi libri*  
 believe.PST.1SG to Gianni (to.him) give.SBJV.3SG these books  
 ‘I thought s/he had given these books to Gianni’

On the contrary, Haspelmath (2001, 11-12) suggests that DE verbs should be placed on a continuous transitive-intransitive scale. The author affirms that:

On balance it seems that dative-experiencer constructions should be regarded as intransitive, i.e. not as “dative-subject constructions” [...] If one admits only two possibilities – either transitive (A – O), or intransitive (S – E) – then the results [...] might appear problematic. However, if one allows the possibility of intermediate stages between intransitive and transitive, then languages can be seen as occupying a particular point on the continuous transitive-intransitive scale. [...] Experiential predicates seem to constitute a class of their own with respect to

word order, intermediate between normal extended intransitive and transitive verbs.<sup>1</sup>

Jiménez-Fernández, Rozwadowska (2016, 100) propose that DEs in Spanish may move to TP for both agreement and discourse rules. The authors' study is mainly based on the hypothesis advanced by Miyagawa (2007), who sets up a classification of languages as agreement-prominent languages (Indo-European languages) and discourse-prominent languages (Japanese). The former exploit agreement features to trigger movement, while the latter highlight focus features (Jiménez-Fernández 2010). On the basis of this parametric variation, Jiménez-Fernández (2010) proposes a third class of languages, such as Spanish, which is both argument- and discourse-prominent.

Jiménez-Fernández, Rozwadowska (2017, 236) mainly analyse the (unmarked) order OVS (preverbal Dative) used as a reply to an open question in Polish and in Spanish; here, I only cite the Spanish examples (17)-(18). The authors claim that:

From an argument-structure point of view, a preverbal DE is generated in the VP in a position higher than the nominative subject, and hence it is the closest candidate to move to spec-TP and satisfy the EPP under T. From an information-structure perspective, DEs occur first only in two situations, namely when they are part of the broad focus that the whole sentence performs [...] or when they function as topic.

- (17) Q: *¿Te has enterado de la noticia?*  
 you hear.PST.2SG of the news  
 'Have you heard the latest news?'  
 A: *A Angela le gusta la pasta*  
 to Angela her like.PRS.3SG the pasta  
 'Angela likes pasta'  
 B: *# La pasta le gusta a Angela*  
 The pasta her like.PRS.3SG to Angela  
 'Pasta pleases Angela'
- (18) Q: *¿Qué le gusta a Angela?*  
 what her like.PRS.3SG to Angela?  
 'What does Angela like?'

**1** In the citation **A** stands for the subject argument of a transitive clause, **O** refers to the transitive object and **S** to the intransitive subject, while **E** refers to the Experiencer argument. For a detailed analysis I refer the reader to Haspelmath (2001).

A:	A	Angela	le	gusta	la	pasta	
	to	Angela	her	like.PRS.3SG	the	pasta	
	'Angela likes pasta'						
B:	#	La	pasta	le	gusta	a	Angela
		the	pasta	her	like.PRS.3SG	to	Angela
	'Pasta pleases Angela'						

The status of Dative Experiencers is an issue under debate in the literature. As Butt et al. (2006, 1) affirm, “Dative subjects appear to be a fairly unstable part of a language’s grammar [...]. [They] are found crosslinguistically and are a standard part of South Asian languages”.

### 3 A Taxonomy of Psych Verbs

In this section I will briefly present the main properties of Italian psych verbs according to the taxonomy set up in Vietri (2024) to which I refer the reader for a detailed analysis, especially as regards the encoding of the causative/anticausative alternation (CAA).

Psych verbs can be stative predicates, as in the case of Subject Experiencer (SE) transitive verbs like *ammirare* ‘admire’ in (19) where the direct object has the semantic role of Object of Emotion.<sup>2</sup> SE transitive verbs present the reflexive construction as in (20):

(19) *Maria*<sub>Experiencer</sub> *ammira* *Gianni*<sub>Object of Emotion</sub>  
 Maria admire.PRS.3SG Gianni  
 ‘Maria admires Gianni’

(20) *Maria* (*si* *ammira* + *ammira* *se stessa*)  
 Maria (*si* admire.PRS.3SG + admire.PRS.3SG herself)  
 ‘Maria admires herself’

Psych verbs can be eventive predicates, as in the case of Accusative Experiencer (AE) verbs like *spaventare* ‘frighten’ in (21). A large subset of AE verbs undergo the causative/anticausative alternation:

<sup>2</sup> Belletti, Rizzi (1988) propose that the Theme and Experiencer roles constitute the  $\theta$ -grid of psych verbs. Grimshaw (1990), Zaenen (1993) and Pesetsky (1995) claim that Theme is not the correct  $\theta$ -role to be assigned in the case of Accusative Experiencer verbs that have a causative semantics like *frighten*. In particular, Pesetsky (1995) distinguishes the Causer of Emotion role from the Subject/Target of Emotion roles. In this study I adopt the Cause of Emotion  $\theta$ -role for causative psych verbs and the Object of Emotion  $\theta$ -role for stative verbs.

the transitive causative construction (21) alternates with the anticausative pronominal construction in (22). In the causative construction (21) the subject has the Cause of Emotion role while the Experiencer is expressed by the direct object (accusative). The semantic roles are inverted in the anticausative construction in (22), where the Experiencer is expressed by the Subject and the Cause of Emotion by the PP, which can be dropped. In this case, the anticausative construction presents a pronominal unaccusative verb, i.e. *spaventarsi* ‘get frightened, lit. frighten.si’:

(21) *Il terremoto*<sub>Cause of Emotion</sub> *spaventò* *Gianni*<sub>Experiencer</sub>  
 the earthquake frighten.PST.3SG Gianni  
 ‘The earthquake frightened Gianni’

(22) *Gianni*<sub>Experiencer</sub> *si spaventò* (*per il terremoto*<sub>Cause of Emotion</sub>)  
 Gianni **SI** frighten.PST.3SG for the earthquake  
 ‘Gianni got frightened because of the earthquake’

Furthermore, the lexical causative verb *spaventare* ‘scare, frighten’ in (21) is in a periphrastic relation with the syntactic (or analytical) causative in (23). Unlike Subject Experiencer transitive verbs which reflexivize as in (20), Accusative Experiencer verbs do not reflexivize, i.e., sentence (24) is not accepted. The presence of repair particles like *persino* ‘even’ and emphatic reflexives (Postal 1993; Potts 2001) make (25) deviant:

(23) *Il terremoto*<sub>Cause of Emotion</sub> *fece* *spaventare* *Gianni*<sub>Experiencer</sub>  
 the earthquake make.PST.3SG frighten.INF Gianni  
 ‘The earthquake frightened Gianni’

(24) \* *Maria spaventò se stessa*  
 Maria frighten.PST.3SG herself  
 ‘Maria frightened herself’

(25) ?\* *Maria spaventò (persino) se stessa*  
 Maria frighten.PST.3SG even herself  
 ‘Maria frightened even herself’

The periphrastic relation between a lexical causative and a syntactic causative is the property/diagnostics that singles out Accusative Experiencer verbs which undergo the causative/anticausative alternation from those that do not. The lexical causative *spaventare* ‘frighten’ in (21) alternates with the marked anticausative *spaventarsi*

'get frightened, lit. frighten.*si*' in (22) and it is in a periphrastic relation with (23). On the contrary, an Accusative Experiencer verb like *sedurre* 'seduce' in (26) does not show the anticausative alternant, i.e. (27) is not accepted and is not in a periphrastic relation with the syntactic causative in (28). The latter is accepted only if *Maria* is interpreted as the Initiator of said event, while the Agent/Causee is expressed by the PP = *da Lea* 'by Lea', as in (29):

- (26) *Maria sedusse Gianni*  
 Maria seduce.PST.3SG Gianni  
 'Maria seduced Gianni'
- (27) \* *Gianni si sedusse*  
 Gianni **SI** seduce.PST.3SG  
 '\*Gianni seduced himself'
- (28) # *Maria fece sedurre Gianni*  
 Maria make.PST.3SG seduce.INF Gianni  
 'Maria seduced Gianni' (intended reading)
- (29) *Maria fece sedurre Gianni (da Lea)*  
 Maria make.PST.3SG seduce.INF Gianni (by Lea)  
 'Maria had Gianni seduced by Lea'

Subject Experiencer non-transitive verbs include verbs that can be unaccusative (*arrabbiarsi* 'get angry') or unergative (*gioire* 'rejoice') or both (*trasecolare* 'boggle'). The PP, which can be dropped, is headed by the prepositions *di* 'of' and/or *per* 'for', or by the preposition *a* 'at'. Most SE non-transitive verbs can be considered change-of-state verbs that show only the anticausative construction like (30) and lack the lexical causative, i.e. (31) is ungrammatical. However, (30) alternates with the syntactic causative in (32):

- (30) *Max<sub>Experiencer</sub> (si arrabiò+ gioì) (di+for) quella notizia<sub>Cause of Emotion</sub>*  
 Max (si anger.PST.3SG + rejoice.PST.3SG) (of+for) that news  
 'Max (angered + rejoiced) at that news'
- (31) \* *Quella notizia<sub>Cause of Emotion</sub> (arrabiò + gioì) Max<sub>Experiencer</sub>*  
 that news (anger.PST.3SG + rejoice.PST.3SG) Max  
 'That news (angered + \*rejoiced) Max'

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- (32) *Quella notizia*<sub>Cause of Emotion</sub> *fece* (arrabbiare + gioire) *Max*<sub>Experiencer</sub>  
 that news make.PST.3SG (anger.INF + rejoice.INF) Max  
 ‘That news made Max (angry + rejoice)’

Besides Subject Experiencer transitive/non-transitive verbs and Accusative Experiencer verbs, Dative Experiencer verbs form a very small class of verbs that show a variety of idiosyncratic syntactic patterns which I analyse in the next section.

#### 4 The Variety of Patterns of Dative Experiencer Verbs

Besides the inverted structure, Dative Experiencer verbs show an idiosyncratic syntactic behaviour since they appear in a variety of syntactic constructions. Moreover, the paucity of Dative Experiencer verbs contrasts with the abundance of Accusative and Subject Experiencer verbs. In Vietri’s (2024) taxonomy, there are 224 Accusative Experiencer verbs and 87 Subject Experiencer (transitive/non-transitive) verbs, while there are only 10 Dative Experiencer verbs.

The DE class includes the verbs *piacere* ‘appeal’, *manicare* ‘miss’, *garbare* ‘appeal’, *dispiacere* ‘regret’, *spiacere* ‘regret’, *rincrescere* ‘be sorry, regret’, *interessare* ‘interest’, *compiacere* ‘please’, *ripugnare* ‘disgust’, *importare* ‘matter’. I will analyse these one by one and show that they constitute a heterogeneous class where each verb can be distinguished from the others on the basis of the syntactic constructions in which they appear. Therefore, *piacere* ‘appeal’ cannot be considered the representative of this verb class.

I constructed example sentences based on data drawn from Italian dictionaries (De Mauro; Devoto-Oli; Treccani online; Zingarelli). The grammaticality judgments about these sentences are my own; in case of doubt, I searched the Italian Web Corpus 2020, accessible through the application Sketch Engine<sup>3</sup> (Kilgarriff et al. 2004; 2010).

##### 4.1 *piacere* ‘appeal’, *garbare* ‘appeal’, *manicare* ‘miss’

The DE verb *piacere* ‘appeal’ is universally considered a stative predicate, hence the subject has the role of the Object of Emotion. As already pointed out in Section 2, this verb is characterized by the inverted structure in (34) and presents a reflexive form as in (35). Being stative, the *fare*-construction in (36) has no periphrastic relationship

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3 [www.sketchengine.eu](http://www.sketchengine.eu).

with (33)-(34); sentence (36) is a *fare*-infinitive construction which introduces a further argument (*Lei* 'she') that refers to the Initiator of the event expressed by the embedded infinitive:

(33) *Maria piace a Gianni*  
 Maria appeal.PRS.3SG to Gianni  
 'Maria appeals to Gianni'

(34) *A Gianni piace Maria*  
 to Gianni appeal.PRS.3SG Maria  
 'Gianni likes Maria'

(35) *Maria si piace*  
 Maria si like.PRS.3SG  
 'Maria likes herself'

(36) *Lei fece piacere a Gianni*  
 She make.PST.3SG appeal.INF Maria to Gianni  
 'She made Gianni like Maria'

The verbs *garbare* 'appeal' and *mancare* 'miss' in (37) behave similarly to *piacere* 'appeal': they are both stative verbs where the Subject plays the role of the Object of Emotion and which show the inverted structure in (38). However, unlike *piacere* 'appeal', neither verb appears in any reflexive construction, and thus (39) is not accepted:

(37) *Gianni (garbava + mancava) a Maria*  
 Gianni (appeal.IPFV.3SG + miss.IPFV.3SG) to Maria  
 'Gianni (liked + missed) Maria'

(38) *A Maria (garbava + mancava) Gianni*  
 to Maria (appeal.IPFV.3SG + miss.IPFV.3SG) Gianni  
 'Gianni (liked + missed) Maria'

(39) \* *Maria si (mancava + garbava)*  
 Maria si (miss.IPFV.3SG + appeal.IPFV.3SG)  
 \*\*Maria (missed + appealed) herself'

## 4.2 *dispiacere* ‘regret’ and *importare* ‘matter’

The verb *dispiacere* ‘regret’ displays a set of constructions which differentiate it from the verb *piacere* ‘appeal’; the two verbs only share the root (Latin *placēre*, prefix *dis-*) and the inverted structure in (41):

(40) *Ciò dispiace a Maria*  
 this regret.PRS.3SG to Maria  
 ‘Maria is sorry about this’

(41) *A Maria dispiace ciò*  
 to Maria regret.PRS.3SG this  
 ‘Maria regrets this’

(42) *Maria si dispiace (di + per) ciò*  
 Maria SI regret.PRS.3SG (of + per) ciò  
 ‘Maria is sorry about this’

The pronominal construction in (42) has a different status from the reflexive construction that *piacere* ‘appeal’ presents in (35). The Dative Experiencer in (40)-(41) appears as a Subject Experiencer in (42), while the Subject of (40), i.e. *ciò* ‘this’, appears in (42) as a PP headed by the prepositions *di/per* ‘of/for’. Therefore, the Dative Experiencer constructions (40)-(41) alternate with the Subject Experiencer unaccusative pronominal construction (42).

Furthermore, the Dative constructions (40)-(41) are periphrastically related to the syntactic causative construction (43), where the subject *ciò* ‘this’ is the causal subject and *Maria* is the Experiencer:

(43) *Ciò fa dispiacere Maria*  
 This make.PRS.3SG regret.INF Maria  
 ‘This causes Maria to feel sorry’

Unlike *piacere* ‘appeal’, the verb *dispiacere* ‘regret’ syntactically behaves more like a change-of-state predicate than a stative one. This is reflected in the pronominal construction in (42) and the periphrastic syntactic causative in (43). The pronominal form of *piacere* ‘appeal’ (35) is reflexive, whereas that of *dispiacere* ‘regret’ marks an alternation (cf. (40), (42) and (43)). Furthermore, the causative construction of *piacere* ‘appeal’ requires an additional argument (cf. (33)-(34), (36)), while the causative construction of *dispiacere* ‘regret’ in (43) keeps the same argument structure as in (41)-(42), that is, it functions as a periphrastic syntactic causative.

These syntactic patterns align with those of causative psych verbs, as illustrated by *spaventare* ‘frighten’ in (22)-(23).<sup>4</sup> I suggest that the Subject in (40) (postposed in (41)), and the Subject in (43) both play the role of Cause of Emotion, unlike *piacere* ‘appeal’. Moreover, *dispiacere* ‘regret’, unlike *piacere* ‘appeal’, also shows the impersonal construction in (44), where both the Experiencer and the Cause of Emotion are expressed by a PP:

- (44) *A Maria dispiace (della + per la tua) partenza*  
 to Maria regret.PRS.3SG (of.the + for the your) departure  
 ‘Maria is sorry about your departure’

The verb *spiacere* ‘regret’ behaves similarly to *dispiacere* ‘regret’:<sup>5</sup> it shows the alternation between the Dative Experiencer constructions

**4** eventive verbs; yet in practice, they do not produce a meaningful contrast between (i)-(ii):

- (i) *Quella iniziativa piacque to Gianni immediatamente*  
 that initiative appeal.PST.3SG to Gianni immediately  
 ‘That initiative appealed to Gianni immediately’

- (ii) *Quell’ annuncio dispiacque a Gianni immediatamente*  
 that announcement displease.PST.3SG to Gianni immediately  
 ‘That announcement displeased Gianni immediately’

The telicity test offers slightly more insight, but it still does not clearly distinguish the stative *piacere* ‘appeal’ in (iii) from the causative *dispiacere* ‘regret’ in (iv):

- (iii) *Quella iniziativa piacque a Gianni in cinque minuti/ per mesi*  
 that initiative appeal.PST.3SG to Gianni in five minutes/ for months  
 ‘That initiative appealed to Gianni in five minute/per mesi’

- (iv) *Quell’ annuncio dispiacque a Gianni in cinque minuti/ ?per giorni*  
 that announcement displease.PST.3SG to Gianni in five minutes/ for days  
 ‘That announcement displeased Gianni in five minutes/for days’

**5** The verbs *spiacere* and *dispiacere* ‘displease’ are both formed of the negative prefixes *s-* and *dis-* and the verb *piacere* ‘appeal’. However, neither verb is an antonym of the verb *piacere* ‘appeal’. Moreover, the verb *dispiacere* ‘regret’ preceded by the negative marker *non* ‘not’ in (v) expresses a fairly positive judgement about an entity/event. The negative construction is semantically close to *piacere* ‘appeal’:

- (v) *Il film non è dispiaciuto a Paolo*  
 the movie not displease.PST.3SG to Paolo  
 ‘The movie appealed to Paolo’

(45)-(46) and the Subject Experiencer pronominal construction (47). Furthermore, (45)-(46) are periphrastically related to the syntactic causative construction (48). However, unlike *dispiacere* ‘regret’, *spiacere* ‘regret’ lacks the impersonal construction, and thus (49) is not accepted:

(45) *Ciò spiacce a Maria*  
 this regret.PRS.3SG to Maria  
 ‘Maria is sorry about this’

(46) *A Maria spiacce ciò*  
 to Maria regret.PRS.3SG this  
 ‘Maria regrets this’

(47) *Maria si spiacce (di + per) ciò*  
 Maria SI regret.PRS.3SG (of + per) ciò  
 ‘Maria is sorry about this’

(48) *Ciò fa spiacere Maria*  
 this make.PRS.3SG regret.INF Maria  
 ‘This causes Maria to feel sorry’

(49) \* *A Maria spiacce (della + per la tua) partenza*  
 to Maria regret.PRS.3SG (of.the + for the your) departure  
 ‘Maria is sorry about your departure’

The verb *rincrescere* ‘be sorry, regret’ in (50) also behaves like *dispiacere* (and *spiacere*) ‘regret’ in many aspects: it shows the inverted structure (51), and the Dative and the Subject Experiencer pronominal alternation between (50)-(51) and (52). However, the syntactic causative (53) is deviant, while the impersonal construction (54) is ungrammatical:

(50) *Questo contrattempo rincresce a Maria*  
 this setback regret.PRS.3SG to Maria  
 ‘Maria is sorry about this setback’

(51) *A Maria rincresce questo contrattempo*  
 to Maria regret.PRS.3SG this setback  
 ‘Maria is sorry about this setback’

(52) *Maria si rincresce (di + per) questo contrattempo*  
 Maria si regret.PRS.3SG (of + for) this setback  
 'Maria get sorry about this setback'

(53) ?\* *Questo contrattempo fa rincrescere Maria*  
 this setback make.PRS.3SG regret.INF Maria  
 'This setback made Maria sorry'

(54) \* *A Maria rincresce di questo contrattempo*  
 to Maria regret.PRS.3SG of this setback  
 'Maria is sorry about this setback'

The verb *importare* 'matter' in (55) displays the inverted structure (56) and the impersonal construction (57). However, it is not related to any pronominal/reflexive form and shows no alternations:

(55) *Ciò importa a Gianni*  
 this matter.PRS.3SG to Gianni  
 'This matters to Gianni'

(56) *A Gianni importa ciò*  
 to Gianni matter.PRS.3SG this  
 'This matters to Gianni'

(57) *A Gianni importa di ciò*  
 to Gianni matter.PRS.3SG of this  
 'This matters to Gianni'

#### 4.3 *interessare* 'interest', *compiacere* 'please' and *ripugnare* 'disgust'

Besides the inverted structure (59) with respect to (58), the verb *interessare* 'interest' also displays the alternation between the Dative Experiencer constructions (58)-(59) and the Accusative Experiencer construction in (60). This type of alternation is not shown by any of the verbs examined in sections 4.1 and 4.2:

(58) *Quella ragazza interessa a Paolo*  
 that girl interest.PRS.3SG to Paolo  
 'Paolo is interested in that girl'

(59) *A Paolo interessa quella ragazza*  
 to Paolo interest.PRS.3SG that girl  
 'Paolo is interested in that girl'

(60) *Quella ragazza interessa Paolo*  
 that girl interest.PRS.3SG Paolo  
 'Paolo is interested in that girl'

Moreover, the DE/AE constructions (58)-(60) alternate with the Subject Experiencer pronominal construction (61), where the PP is headed by the preposition *a* 'to'. However, the pronominal construction (61) is not periphrastically related to the syntactic causative construction (62) which is not accepted (unlike *dispiacere* 'regret' in (42) which is instead periphrastically related to (43)):

(61) *Paolo si interessa a quella ragazza*  
 Paolo si interest.PRS.3SG to that girl  
 'Paolo takes an interest in that girl'

(62) \* *Quella ragazza fa interessare Paolo*  
 that girl make.PRS.3SG interest.INF Paolo  
 '\*That girl makes Paolo interested'

The verb *compiacere* 'please, make happy' in (63), like *interessare* 'interest', shows the alternation between the Dative Experiencer construction (63) and the Accusative Experiencer construction (64). However, unlike all the unaccusative verbs (auxiliary *essere* 'be') analysed previously, *compiacere* 'please' is unergative (auxiliary *avere* 'have') and the inverted dative structure (65) is ungrammatical. The intransitive pronominal verb *compiacersi* 'feel satisfaction' in (66) is a Subject Experiencer intransitive pronominal verb which is not semantically related to (63)-(64):

(63) *Gianni compiace ai suoi genitori*  
 Gianni please.PRS.3SG to.the his parents  
 'Gianni pleases his parents'

(64) *Gianni compiace i suoi genitori*  
 Gianni please.PRS.3SG the his parents  
 'Gianni pleases his parents'

- (65) \* *Ai suoi genitori compiace Gianni*  
 to.the his parents please.PRS.3SG Gianni  
 ‘Gianni pleases his parents’ (intended reading)
- (66) *Maria si compiace della vittoria della figlia*  
 Maria SI satisfy.PRS.3SG of.the victory of.the daughter  
 ‘Maria feels satisfaction for her daughter’s victory’

The verb *ripugnare* ‘disgust’ in (67) is also unergative (auxiliary *avere* ‘avere’); however, unlike *compiacere* ‘please’, it accepts the inverted structure (68) and does not show the alternation with the Accusative construction. In fact, sentence (69) is not grammatical. The syntactic causative (70) is periphrastically related to (67). No reflexive/pronominal forms are present:

- (67) *Quel discorso ha ripugnato a Maria*  
 that speech disgust.PST.3SG to Maria  
 ‘That speech (disgusted + sickened) Maria’
- (68) *A Maria ha ripugnato quel discorso*  
 to Maria disgust.PST.3SG that speech  
 ‘That speech (disgusted + sickened) Maria’
- (69) \* *Quel discorso ha ripugnato Maria*  
 that speech disgust.PST.3SG Maria  
 ‘That speech (disgusted + sickened) Maria’
- (70) *Quel discorso ha fatto ripugnare Maria*  
 that speech make.PST.3SG disgust.INF Maria  
 ‘That speech (made Maria sick + disgusted Maria)’

## 5 Conclusions

In this article I have shown that the inverted structure (SVO vs OVS patterns) and the subjecthood properties of Dative Experiencers are not the only aspects that characterize dative psych verbs. The Dative Experiencer class includes few verbs but each of them exhibits a variety of idiosyncratic syntactic constructions in which *piacere* ‘appeal’ does not appear.

Figure 1 illustrates the heterogeneity of Dative Experiencer verbs: each of them displays a set of distinctive syntactic properties. I took

into account the properties (a) through (g) which are indicated in the rows of the table in Figure 1:

- (a) unergativity: e.g. *ripugnare* ‘disgust’ (Aux= avere ‘have’) in (67);
- (b) the inverted structure: e.g. *piacere* ‘appeal’ (unaccusative) in (34), *ripugnare* ‘disgust’ (unergative) in (68);
- (c) the reflexive construction: e.g. *piacere* ‘appeal’ in (35);
- (d) the DE/SE alternation: e.g. *dispiacere* ‘regret’ in (40) and (42);
- (e) the DE/AE alternation: e.g. *interessare* ‘interest’ in (58), (60);
- (f) the syntactic causative: e.g. *dispiacere* ‘regret’ in (43);
- (g) the impersonal construction: e.g. *importare* ‘matter’ in (57).

Except for the verbs *mancare* ‘miss’ and *garbare* ‘appeal’, all the others differ from one another in at least one property. Furthermore, the analysis has shown that *dispiacere* ‘regret’ and *spiacere* ‘regret’ display a causative semantic rather than a stative one.

Giusti, Iovino (2019, 39) state that “the class of inverted unergatives [...] is found in Latin but not in Italian”. This holds true for the unergative *compiacere* ‘please’ which shows no inverted structure; however, the verb *ripugnare* ‘disgust’ is unergative and accepts the inverted structure. On the one hand, the unergative *ripugnare* ‘disgust’ shows some properties of Accusative Experiencer verbs, for example the acceptability of the periphrastic syntactic causative (70). On the other hand, it accepts the inverted structure in (68), despite being unergative. On the contrary, the unergative verb *compiacere* ‘please’ does not show the inverted structure OVS, but alternates with a transitive (non-causative) construction in (63)-(64).

Table 1 shows the idiosyncratic syntactic behaviour of DE verbs which constitute a small, heterogeneous and unstable class of psych verbs.

A close examination of DE verbs shows that some of them may appear in DE and AE constructions (*interessare* ‘interest’, *compiacere* ‘please’), while others share some properties with change-of-state verbs (*dispiacere* ‘regret’, *spiacere* ‘regret’, *ripugnare* ‘disgust’). Therefore, Haspelmath’s (2001) suggestion on the continuous transitive-intransitive scale of DE verbs as regards the inverted structure can also be extended to the variety of the syntactic patterns in which DE verbs appear. Ultimately, *piacere* ‘appeal’ cannot be considered the representative verb of the whole class.

**Table 1** Syntactic Constructions of Dative Experiencer verbs

	PIACERE 'appeal'	MANCARE 'miss'	GARBARE 'appeal'	DISPIACERE 'regret'	SPIACERE 'regret'	RINCRESCERE 'be sorry'	IMPORTARE 'matter'	INTERESSARE 'interest'	COMPIACERE 'please'	RIPUGNARE 'disgust'
(a) Unergative	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+
(b) Inverted Structure	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+
(c) Reflexive Construction	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
(d) DE/SE Intr. Pron. Alternation	-	-	-	+	+	+	-	+	-	-
(e) DE/AE Alternation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-
(f) Syntactic Causative	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	+
(g) Impersonal Construction	-	-	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	-

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