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Variation and Optionality in the Italian Mirative Marking System

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Abstract This paper provides a comprehensive overview of most mirative markers resorting to syntactic means available in Italian and in the Italo-Romance varieties of Delia (Sicily) and Lugagnano Val d'Arda (Emilia-Romagna), also considering the two relevant regional Italians. The combinatorial possibilities of different markers and their use in different contexts are considered. The optionality in mirative marking that emerges from this state of affairs is attributed to the absence of a [+MIRATIVE] feature in syntax which leaves room for a more liberal use of the mirative strategies. However, it is shown that optionality is only apparent, as not all combinations are possible (due to structural competition), and not all markers are felicitous in every context.

Keywords Mirativity. Variation. Optionality. Italo-Romance. Verbal periphrases.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Mirative Strategies in Italian. – 3 Some Dialectal Peculiarities Concerning Mirativity. – 4 Conclusions and Open Questions for Future Research.

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1 Introduction

Since the seminal work by Aksu-Koç, Slobin (1986) on Turkish, mirativity has emerged as a central topic in linguistic research, especially with respect to its relationship to evidentiality and exclamativity (DeLancey 1997; 2001; Aikhenvald 2012, a.o.). Following the refinement of DeLancey's (1997) definition in Hengeveld, Olbertz (2012), mirativity is defined as "a linguistic category that characterizes a proposition as newsworthy, unexpected, or surprising", signalling a mismatch between prior expectations and newly asserted content. Crucially, mirative expressions do not affect the truth conditions of a proposition, but rather contribute speaker- or hearer-oriented evaluations at the level of discourse interpretation.[1]

Cross-linguistically, mirativity can be expressed by prosodic means, dedicated morphological markers, syntactic constructions, or lexical strategies. Romance languages are particularly rich in syntactic and discourse-based strategies to convey mirativity. Italian represents a particularly interesting case, as speakers may resort to multiple mirative strategies (henceforth, MSs) that appear, at first glance, optional and freely interchangeable.

Recent work on Italo-Romance has highlighted the richness of the mirative repertoire.[2] While individual mirative strategies have been studied in isolation or in limited combinations, their interaction within a unified system remains underexplored. In particular, little attention has been paid to the structural constraints governing the co-occurrence of different strategies (but see Di Caro et al. 2025a, b).

Moreover, mirativity is inherently dialogic and context-sensitive. The felicity of a given MS depends not only on the propositional content of the utterance, but also on the interactional setting, the degree of involvement of discourse participants, and the communicative goals pursued by the speaker.[3] Different conversational configurations

1 This paper is the result of joint work by the two authors. For academic purposes, Vincenzo Nicolò Di Caro is responsible for §§ 1, 2.1, 3.1, 3.2, and 4, while Luca Molinari is responsible for §§ 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, and 3.3. We thank two anonymous reviewers for their stimulating remarks. All errors remain our own. Luca Molinari acknowledges current financing by the OPUS 26 grant (2023/51/B/HS2/02217) from the Polish National Science Center (NCN). We wish to dedicate this contribution to Anna Cardinaletti, influential scholar and kind presence during our doctoral and post-doctoral years at Ca' Foscari University of Venice.

2 See Cruschina 2012; Cruschina, Bianchi 2021; Di Caro, Molinari 2024; Rodríguez Rosique 2025.

3 Mirativity can also be divided into first-level (where surprise is attributed either to the speaker or to the hearer), and second-level, in which the unexpected reaction is projected onto the grammatical subject (e.g., constructions with *altro che* 'other than' in Italian; see Mauri, Russo 2025). In this paper, we will limit our discussion to the former type.

may therefore license different subsets of MSs, even within the same linguistic variety.

The present paper pursues two main goals. On the descriptive side, it provides a compact overview of the main syntactic strategies used to encode mirativity in Italian, also considering selected Italo-Romance varieties (Sicilian and Emiliano-Romagnol) and the corresponding regional Italians. On the theoretical side, it argues that the optionality observed *prima facie* in the co-occurrence of MSs in Italian is only apparent as it is ruled by structural and pragmatic constraints. Such apparent optionality, however, follows from the absence of a [*u*MIRATIVE] feature in syntax.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 introduces the main syntactic mirative strategies available in Italian and discusses their combinatorial properties. Section 3 examines how the mirative repertoire is restricted and reshaped in selected regional and dialectal varieties. Section 4 summarizes the main findings and outlines directions for future research.

2 Mirative Strategies in Italian

Italian displays a rich set of syntactic MSs. For analytical purposes, these strategies can be grouped according to the clausal layer they target. We therefore distinguish between TP-internal strategies, which contribute mirative meaning within the temporal domain of the clause, and CP-internal strategies, which operate in the Left Periphery of the clause (Rizzi 1997). This distinction proves crucial for understanding both stacking possibilities and the limits of apparent optionality.

2.1 TP Strategies

In Di Caro et al. (2025a), the merging point of some of the MSs in Italian is located in the TP.[4] All these strategies give rise to conventional implicatures, hence they contribute to the non-at-issue content of the utterance.

One of the most productive MSs in Italian involves the use of grammaticalized GO, which typically occurs either in an Infinitival Construction, or InfCo (featuring an infinitival lexical verb) which is the most common configuration in Standard Italian, or in a Pseudo-Coordination, or PseCo (featuring an inflected lexical verb), which

4 We refer the interested reader to Di Caro et al. (2025a; 2025b) for a thorough overview of these MSs.

is very common in Sicilian (along with the InfCo) but also attested in Italian (Giusti et al. 2022). Mirative GO may surface in the present tense even when the event is located in the past. This is possible because mirative GO occupies a very high, left peripheral position within the TP domain as a consequence of its semantic bleaching as an andative verb due to the grammaticalization process it underwent.

Another TP-internal strategy involves the use of 1SG and 2SG dative clitics, referred to as Mirative Ethical Datives (MEDs), which anchor the utterance to the speaker's or addressee's evaluative perspective. Following Di Caro et al. (2025a; 2025b) we take MEDs to be merged within the TP domain (but cf. Greco 2025) as they are generally proclitic on the tensed verb, but they can also appear enclitic on the infinitival verb when occurring in an InfCo.

These two strategies can co-occur, as in (2), referring to the context given in (1):[5]

(1) *An office secretary is warned by his boss that there are two customers with the same first and last names and he is repeatedly told which one he should phone. Nevertheless,* ***the office secretary ends up phoning the wrong person****. When the secretary's boss finds out about the mistake, she immediately reproaches him.*

(2) {*Mi* / **ti*} sei andato a chiamare il cliente sbagliato!
1SG.ED 2SG.ED be.2SG gone to call.INF the client wrong
'You called the wrong client!'

A sketched structural representation for GO and MEDs is given in (4) below.

2.2 CP Strategies

The first MS known in the literature as being merged in the CP domain is Mirative Focus Fronting (MFF, cf. (3a)), where a constituent is moved from the TP to a CP projection labelled FaiP (Focused Associated Implicature), that activates the typical focus projection immediately dominated by it (Bianchi et al. 2015). The mirative import introduced by Fai^0 belongs to the level of conventional implicature rather than to the truth-conditional content of the proposition, and is interpreted at the interface as an evaluative comment on the unexpected nature of the event described (Cruschina 2012; Cruschina, Bianchi 2021).

Another CP strategy involves what Greco (2020 and references therein) calls Surprise Negative Sentences (Snegs, cf. (3b)), i.e.,

5 Note that in the context in (2), the 2SG MED is ruled out for pragmatic reasons.

sentences featuring a negation (NEG) that does not reverse the truth conditions of the proposition, paired with a prosodic pattern exhibiting a mixed behaviour between a question and an exclamation. In Snegs, NEG is merged in the Left Periphery after the vP phase is closed: in this way, NEG cannot affect its content. NEG is somewhat associated with Focus, as it gives rise to alternatives that are re-ranked in a way that the less expected one is picked out. In this sense, NEG can be thought of as being merged in FaiP (Tsiakmakis, Espinal 2022).

A further CP strategy regards the use of functional TAKE in a PseCo (3c). Syntactically, mirative TAKE is analyzed as being merged directly in a high left-peripheral position associated with contrastive Focus (see Giusti, Cardinaletti 2022 and references therein). TAKE introduces the pragmatically most relevant information, at the same time presupposing the existence of a set of alternatives (associated with Focus) evaluated against the event denoted by the lexical verb. The surprise effect obtains because the alternative that is spelled out is ranked low on a scale of expectedness.[6]

(3) a. *IL CLIENTE SBAGLIATO hai chiamato!*
the wrong client have.2SG called
b. *#Non hai chiamato il cliente sbagliato?!*
NEG has called the client wrong
c. *#Hai preso e hai chiamato il cliente sbagliato!*
have.2SG taken and have.2SG called the client wrong
'You called the wrong client!'

Despite their surface differences, it is clear that these CP strategies can be seen as competing for the same left-peripheral position, while TP strategies do not (4).

(4) $[_{ForceP}\,[_{FaiP}\,[_{FocP}$ MFFi $[_{Foc^{\circ}}$ {TAKE / NEG}] $[_{CP}$ (e) $[_{TP}$ MED=GO $[_{TP}$ …(ti)…]]]]]]

This structural arrangement proves crucial in accounting for the combinatorial restrictions of these MSs.

6 Note that Snegs and TAKE PseCo are not felicitous in this context when the boss addresses the secretary directly, but they would be felicitous, if she were telling this story to someone else.

2.3 Stacking Possibilities

One of the most striking properties of Italian mirative marking is the possibility of stacking multiple strategies within a single clause. Stacking is, however, not completely free, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Possible combination of MSs. "+" stands for 'possible combination', "-" for 'impossible combination', "?" signals that the combination is perceived as not totally ungrammatical but at least awkward/degraded

MSs	**MFF**	**TAKE PseCo**	**Snegs**	MED	GO InfCo
MFF	/	-	-	+	+
TAKE PseCo	/	/	-	+	?
Snegs	/	/	/	+	+
MED	/	/	/	/	+
GO InfCo	/	/	/	/	/

Table 1 shows that TP strategies can freely combine with each other and can also co-occur with a single CP strategy. By contrast, combinations of multiple CP strategies (in bold) are systematically excluded. This asymmetry easily follows from structural competition: TP strategies are merged in distinct positions within the TP domain and therefore do not interfere with one another. CP strategies, on the other hand, compete for the same projection in the Left Periphery and cannot co-occur.

The possible co-occurrence of multiple TP strategies with one CP strategy leads *prima facie* to optionality in the marking of mirativity. This fact suggests that there can be no syntactic [*u*MIRATIVE] feature to be checked in the structure: if such a feature were present, multiple MSs should either be redundant (due to multiple checking of the same feature) or obligatorily licensed. Instead, as observed by Di Caro et al. (2025a, b), mirativity arises as the pragmatic consequence of the manipulation of the speaker's expectations in syntax.

2.4 Optionality Revisited

The possible combinations of co-occurring MSs seem to be optional. Were this the case, however, mirativity would be the only liberal domain to permit such optionality, given the commonly accepted idea that no true synonymy exists (Bloomfield 1933, 145, a.o.).

Looking more closely, we notice that the use of MSs is not optional in any strong theoretical sense. In fact, according to McGregor (2013, 1152), "[a]n element is optional in a given construction iff, in a specifiable set of linguistic circumstances: (a) it may be present

or absent; and (b) its presence or absence does not affect the grammatical structure: the construction remains unchanged as a linguistic sign regardless of whether or not the element is present".

On the one hand, it is true that MSs in Italian are never obligatory, meeting the criterion (a). As for (b), however, their presence or absence does affect the grammatical structure. A neutral sentence arguably differs at an abstract level from one with exclamative intonation in that the former lacks the left peripheral projection that triggers the exclamative contour in the latter. Furthermore, McGregor (2013, 1151) explicitly considers components of meaning other than the propositional one, such as the "social" meanings.

Thus, the non-at-issue level is to be taken into account in this case: a neutral sentence completely lacks the non-at-issue contribution of the exclamative intonation and of MSs. In general, TP and CP strategies alter the syntactic structure of a sentence, hence their presence vs. absence does not qualify as optional. Even MFF differs from an utterance with exclamative intonation only: despite the two sentences seem to be analogous (from the point of view of lexical material, structure, and non-at-issue content), at the level of information organization MFF restricts the *locus* of surprise to the focussed constituent, while exclamative intonation has scope over the whole predicate. Total optionality, then, is to be excluded in this case as well.

3 Some Dialectal Peculiarities Concerning Mirativity

In this section we will discuss how the large array of MSs listed in § 2 for Standard Italian is to a certain extent limited in the regional Italians of Sicily (SIt) and Emilia-Romagna (ERIt), plausibly under the influence of the different local Italo-Romance varieties that generally display fewer mirative options. For this reason, in § 3.1 we provide a brief overview of the intricate relationship between Italian and the other Italo-Romance varieties spoken in Italy.

3.1 The Sociolinguistic Background

Italy is characterized by an exceptionally dense and complex landscape of linguistic variation. Italo-Romance varieties are not descendants of Italian, but independent continuations of Vulgar Latin, which developed in parallel with Italian itself. As a result, speakers typically navigate between Italian and a local Italo-Romance variety, giving rise to stable bilingual or diglossic repertoires (see Di Caro 2022, ch. 3).

This situation has important consequences for the expression of mirativity. While Standard Italian displays a wide range of MSs, many Italo-Romance varieties exhibit a more restricted inventory. Regional Italians, which emerge from continuous contact between Italian and local varieties, often reflect intermediate systems, selectively adopting or disfavouring specific MSs. Variation in mirative marking is therefore not free, but shaped by the interaction between grammatical architecture and sociolinguistic pressures.

3.2 Mirativity in the Regional Italian Spoken in Sicily

In order to try to understand to what extent the mirative repertoire in SIt differs from that of Italian, we must first have a look at what is found in Sicilian. We can capitalize on the existing literature on Sicilian to identify the main MSs available: MFF (Cruschina 2012; 2021), TAKE PseCo (Giusti, Cardinaletti 2022; Di Caro, Molinari 2024), GO PseCo and GO InfCo (Giusti et al. 2022, and references therein). Snegs are a least favourite strategy, while MEDs are very marginal and can be considered the result of a contact effect with Italian. As regards GO PseCo and InfCo, the data from Sicilian tell us that these periphrases represent high frequency MSs and they can be usually found also in combination with functional TAKE (in the fixed order TAKE + GO), more frequently than in Italian.

Let us consider some examples featuring only functional GO in the dialects of Delia (cf. (5a-b)) and Catania (cf. (5c-d)), then some examples with TAKE (6a-c) and, finally, the result of the combination of both (7a-b) in Deliano:

(5) a. ***Va*** ***a*** ***cchjama*** *a* *lu* *clienti* *sbagliatu!*
go.3SG A[1] call.3SG to the client wrong
'He ended up calling the wrong client!' [Delia; GO PseCo]

b. ***Jì*** ***a*** ***cchjamari*** *a* *lu* *clienti* *sbagliatu!*
go.PST.3SG to call.INF to the client wrong
'He ended up calling the wrong client!' [Delia; GO InfCo]

c ***Occhjama*** *ô* *client* *sbagghjatu!*
o+*a*+call.3SG to-the client wrong

d. ***Occhjamau*** *ô* *clienti* *sbagghjatu!*
o+*a*+call.PST.3SG to-the client wrong
'He ended up calling the wrong client!' [Catania; GO PseCo] [1]

1 For the status of Sicilian *a* as a pseudo-coordinator, see Cardinaletti, Giusti 2001, 393.

2 For the interpretation of *occhjama* 'he goes and calls' and the other example in (5) from Catanese as incorporating the invariable GO form *o-* plus a covert *a* as instances of a GO PseCo cf. Di Caro, Menza (2024) and references therein.

(6) a. ***Piglia*** ***e*** ***cchjama*** *a* *lu* *clienti* *sbagliatu!*
take.3SG and call.3SG to the client wrong
b. ***Piglià*** ***e*** ***cchjamà*** *a* *lu* *clienti* *sbagliatu!*
take.PST.3SG and call.PST.3SG to the client wrong
c. ***Piglia*** ***e*** ***cchjamà*** *a* *lu* *clienti* *sbagliatu!*
take.3SG and call.PST.3SG to the client wrong
'He ended up calling the wrong client!' [Delia; TAKE PseCo]

(7) a. ***Piglia*** ***e*** ***bba*** ***a*** ***cchjama*** *a* *lu* *clienti*
take.PRS.3SG and go.PRS.3SG A call.PRS.3SG to the client
sbagliatu!
wrong
b. ***Piglià*** ***e*** ***gghjì*** ***a*** ***cchjamari*** *a* *lu* *sbagliatu!*
take.PST.3SG and go.PST.3SG to call.INF to the wrong
'He ended up calling the wrong client!' [Delia; TAKE PseCo + GO PseCo]

Following the same path, SIt tends to resort to the same MSs as Sicilian does, i.e. functional TAKE and GO, with the notable difference that the regional Italian uses the analytic past (*Passato Prossimo*) as in Standard Italian instead of the synthetic one (*Passato Remoto*), widespread in Sicilian (Di Caro 2022, 98-9). The combination of the two functional verbs yields a slightly deviant result, as shown in (8d):

(8) a. ***È*** ***andato*** / ***Va*** ***a*** ***chiamare*** *al* / *il* *cliente*
is gone go.3SG to call.INF to-the the client
sbagliato! [1]
wrong
b. ***Prende*** ***e*** ***chiama*** *al* / *il* *cliente* *sbagliato!*
take.3SG and call.3SG to-the the client wrong
c. ***Ha*** ***preso*** ***e*** ***ha*** ***chiamato*** *al* / *il*
has taken and has called to-the the
cliente *sbagliato!*
client wrong
d. ??***Ha*** ***preso*** ***ed*** ***è*** ***andato*** ***a*** ***chiamare*** *al* /
has taken and is gone to call.INF to-the
il *cliente* *sbagliato!* [1]
the client wrong
'He ended up calling the wrong client!'

1 Differential Object Marking is a typical feature of Southern Italo-Romance varieties (Ledgeway 2011, a.o.), which is also widespread in the regional Italian spoken in the same areas.

2 Note that (8d) becomes perfectly acceptable when GO retains its semantics of motion.

As for MFF, while Standard Italian generally realizes informational focus *in situ*, Sicilian clause structure does not tolerate informational focus remaining in its base-generated position within the vP domain (Cruschina 2012). Instead, even neutral or non-contrastive focus must undergo movement to the Left Periphery, giving rise to what appears on the surface as obligatory FF. This structural difference has far-reaching interpretive consequences, since in Sicilian focus movement is the default strategy to mark new information, rather than an exceptional or emphatic one as in Italian.

In the cartographic model adopted for Sicilian, the projection hosting focus (FocP) is systematically activated even in the absence of any contrastive or corrective reading. The focussed constituent, often the verb's internal argument or adjunct, obligatorily moves to the specifier of FocP, leaving behind a gap or a resumptive clitic in the lower clause. The mirative potential of Sicilian FF emerges when it interacts with higher left-peripheral operators. As proposed by Cruschina (2021), Sicilian allows for an additional functional layer above FocP, i.e. FaiP, which introduces the same evaluative or unexpectedness component attested in Italian MFF.

The difference lies then in the division of labour: while in Italian, fronting itself is marked and therefore available for mirative interpretation whenever licensed by Fai^0[mir], in Sicilian, fronting is structurally required for focus, so the mirative reading surfaces only when the Fai^0 head is independently activated, producing an additional expressive layer on top of the regular informational-focus movement. This means that sentences like (9a) and (9b) in Sicilian do not necessarily entail mirativity and can be generally also feature a GO InfCo to force the mirative reading:[7]

(9) a. ***A*** ***LU*** ***CLIENTI*** ***SBAGLIATU*** *chjamasti /* *jisti*
to the client wrong call.PST.2SG go.PST.2SG
a *cchjamari!*
to call.INF
'You called the wrong client!' [Delia; PST / GO InfCo]

b. ***A*** ***LU*** ***CLIENTI*** ***SBAGLIATU*** *chjamà /* *jì*
to the client wrong call.PST.3SG go.PST.3SG
a *cchjamari!*
to call.INF
'He ended up calling the wrong client!' [Delia; PST / GO InfCo]

7 Note, again, that, in this respect, GO InfCo and PseCo (where available) display the same mirative function. In the Deliano examples in (5b) and (7b), the InfCo is forced by the nature of the lexical V2, which does not allow for an inflected form to occur. If, on the other hand, a suitable V2 were present, such as *scrìviri* 'write, e-mail', as in *A LU CLIENTI SBAGLIATU jì a scrissi!* 'He wrote to / e-mailed the wrong client!', PseCo is preferred.

This is also found in SIt where, again, the GO InfCo just forces the mirative reading. This, however, is more acceptable in the unload/gossip setting:

(10) a. ***AL*** */* ***IL*** ***CLIENTE*** ***SBAGLIATO*** *hai* *chiamato /*
to-the the client wrong have.2SG called
sei *andato* *a* *chiamare!*
be.2SG gone to call.INF
'You called the wrong client!' [SIt]

b. ***AL*** */* ***IL*** ***CLIENTE*** ***SBAGLIATO*** *ha* *chiamato /*
to-the the client wrong has called
è *andato* *a* *chiamare!*
is gone to call.INF
'He ended up calling the wrong client!' [SIt]

As for the Snegs, our preliminary fieldwork suggests that it is not a favourite strategy itself but becomes more acceptable, once again, in combination with the GO InfCo:

(11) a. ??*Non* *chiama /* *ha* *chiamato* *al /* *il* *cliente* *sbagliato?!*
NEG call.3SG has called to-the the client wrong
'Doesn't / Didn't he call the wrong client?!' [SIt]

b. *Non* *va /* *è* *andato* *a* *chiamare* *al /*
NEG go.3SG is gone to call.INF to-the
il *cliente* *sbagliato?!*
the client wrong
'Doesn't / Didn't he go and calls the wrong client?!' [SIt]

Finally, as for MEDs, our fieldwork data in Delia confirm what was found in the eastern area of Catania (cf. Di Caro, Menza 2025) about the 'unpopularity' of this MS in Sicily (for both Sicilian and regional Italian). We know from Di Caro (2023) that Sicilian resorts to Ethical Datives with certain verbs (including consumption verbs), such as 'eat', 'drink', 'buy' and 'sell' as their unmarked, default version. This leaves no place for other EDs used as MSs. Wherever MEDs do not occur regularly with some types of verbs, as in the northern varieties of Emilia-Romagna, they are perfectly fine as mirative markers (cf. § 3.3).

3.3 Mirativity in the Regional Italian Spoken in Emilia-Romagna

We turn to the repertoire of MSs available in ERIt. Before doing so, it is important to have a look at the Gallo-Italic varieties spoken in this region. The array of mirative markers at their disposal has not

received the same attention as the one in the varieties of Sicilian in § 3.2. For this reason, this section presents a general overview of the strategies, taking examples from Lugagnanese, a variety spoken in the town of Lugagnano Val d'Arda, in the westmost Emilian province of Piacenza.

It seems that Lugagnanese displays only a subset of the mirative repertoire presented in § 2. The most common ways of expressing mirativity in Lugagnanese are MEDs (12a), GO InfCo (12b), Snegs (12c) and a combination of the three (12d). MFF is rather marginal (13a), while TAKE PseCo is instead totally impossible (13b).[8]

(12) a. *Al* ***m'*** *ha ciamè al client asbaglièl!*
3SG= MED= has called the client wrong

b. *L' é* ***andè*** ***a ciamè*** *al client asbaglièl!*
3SG= is went to call.INF the client wrong

c. *L' ha* ***mia*** *ciamè al client asbaglièl?!*
3SG= has NEG called the client wrong

d. *Al* ***m'*** *é* ***mia andè*** *a ciamè al client asbaglièl!*
3SG= MED= is NEG gone to call.INF the client wrong
'He ended up calling the wrong client!' [Lugagnano]

(13) a. ??*AL* ***CLIENT*** ***ASBAGLIÈ*** *l' ha ciamèl!*
the client wrong 3SG= has called
'He ended up calling the wrong client!' [Lugagnano]

b. **L' ha {****töt*** */* ***ciapè****} e (l') ha ciamè*
3SG= has taken caught and 3SG= has called
al client asbaglièl!
the client wrong
Intended: 'He took and called the wrong client!' [Lugagnano]

Lugagnanese confirms the popularity of GO InfCo as a MS, but unlike Sicilian, it also relies on MEDs. This probably stems from the fact that Lugagnanese EDs are not used in benefactive contexts, thus they are not "overloaded" with too many functions and are available to express mirativity.

The biggest difference between Lugagnanese and Deliano is the awkwardness of MFF and the total absence of TAKE PseCo in the former variety. While the presence, although very marginal, of MFF

8 TAKE in Lugagnanese can be rendered either by *tö* or *ciapè*. The former is mostly associated with the meaning of 'buy', while the latter is used in situations of grabbing/catching something, also in an abstract sense (e.g., *ho {ciapè / *töt} 'l fardur* lit. have.1SG caught the cold 'I caught a cold').

can be explained by the independent availability of the underlying movement mechanism, the absence of TAKE PseCo can only be justified by a low degree of grammaticalization of this functional verb (but see fn. 12). The lack of mirative TAKE is thus an intriguing issue that we shall leave for future research.

Given the picture presented in (12)-(13), one would expect ERIt to display the same strategies while disfavouring MFF and TAKE PseCo. This seems to be only partially true.[9] On the one hand, the most frequent strategies seem to be the TP ones, i.e., MED and GO InfCo. They seem to be more acceptable when appearing alone, but their co-occurrence is also quite productive. Snegs alone is not popular, although, interestingly, it surfaces in combination mainly with GO InfCo, but also with either MED alone or with MED and GO InfCo together. The acceptability of Snegs is thus boosted when paired with other MSs.

Turning to MFF, its status in ERIt resembles the one it has in Lugagnanese, i.e., it is available, but speakers reluctantly resort to it. The situation is different for the TAKE PseCo, since this MS seems to be commonly used by speakers of ERIt. This is not surprising, considering that the speakers of this region are predominantly in contact with Italian, which translates into a neat differentiation between the two grammars.[10]

4 Conclusions and Open Questions for Future Research

In this study we have provided a contribution to the understanding of how variation and optionality can apparently emerge in a specific domain within Italo-Romance varieties, i.e. the expression of mirativity by means of syntactic strategies. By discussing new cases of multiple mirative markers stacking that arise from that scenario, we were able to achieve some important goals, summarized as follows:

1. We have given an overview of the most widespread mirative markers in Italian (§ 2), showing that the current syntactic analyses in the literature can account for the impossibility of co-occurrence (at least in Italian) of multiple CP-strategies, as they compete for the same position.

9 The judgments for ERIt are based on consultation with 19 native speakers from different provinces of the region.

10 This is particularly true for the younger generation, whose local variety grammar displays a great convergence towards the Italian system (given the pressure of the latter) even in highly functional domains (e.g., in the use of indefinite determiners; Molinari 2022).

2. We have shown that the great variation and (apparent) optionality in the use of several mirative markers (and combinations thereof) is a consequence of the absence of a [+MIRATIVE] feature in syntax (§ 2.3.2). This in turn goes in the direction of Di Caro et al.'s (2025a, b) idea that mirativity should be placed in the pragmatic domain (see also Cruschina, Bianchi 2021, a.o.), while stemming from the manipulation of the speaker's expectations in syntax.
3. The focus on the mirative repertoire in the Italo-Romance varieties and regional Italians spoken in Sicily and Emilia-Romagna (§ 3) has allowed us to observe the complex interactions between the two linguistic systems and their mutual influence. This opens the way for a future more fine-grained study of mirativity in other Italo-Romance varieties, a field that up to now remains mostly unexplored.

Naturally, this contribution leaves many unsolved questions which should be addressed by future research. First and foremost, the contribution of each mirative marker (in isolation and in combination with other strategies) needs to be clarified, both in terms of its semantic import and of the conversational contexts it can occur in.

Furthermore, this paper has scratched the surface of the prominent dimension of variation in the mirative repertoire in Italo-Romance varieties and regional Italian, dimension that is still understudied. Filling this gap will inevitably lead to further intriguing questions. Some of these have been briefly mentioned in § 3.2 and § 3.3, e.g., the factors fostering the popularity of MFF and the unpopularity of MEDs in Deliano, or the reasons behind the unavailability of the TAKE PseCo in Lugagnanese.

All in all, what emerges is the complexity of the phenomenon of mirativity, which has ramifications in different modules of language and raises new questions that will hopefully fuel future research.

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