# A corpus-based investigation of language change in Italian

## The case of *grazie/ringraziare di* and *grazie/ringraziare per*

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In Italian, *grazie* 'thanks' and *ringraziare* 'to thank' historically introduce an object by means of the preposition *di* 'of' (Renzi, Salvi & Cardinaletti 1991: 545–548); when *grazie* and *ringraziare* introduce a subordinate infinite clause, they may all the same be followed by either *di* or *per* 'for', the latter being the habitual preposition introducing an implicit causal subordinate (ibid.). In light of these considerations, a general lower frequency of occurrence of collocations with *per* would be expected. This article argues that, in contemporary Italian, there has been an increase in the use of constructions with *per* and that such an increase is due to an influence from the English *thanks/to thank for*. Through diachronic lexicographic, quantitative and qualitative analyses carried out over a range of dictionaries and corpora, this article will show that the frequency of use of forms with *per* has indeed more than octupled in writing from 1200 to 2011 and more than doubled in speech from 1965 to 2003. Moreover, by analyzing the distribution of the studied constructions in a corpus of dubbed Italian from (American) English, the article will also explore the possibility that language contact with English, mainly via dubbing translations, may have played a concurrent fundamental role motivating such changes.

**Keywords:** historical corpus linguistics, language change, Italian, diachronic quantitative investigations, English in contact with Italian

## 1. Introduction

This article investigates the diachronic trend of two Italian constructions, *grazie/ringraziare di* 'thanks/to thank of' (thanks/to thank for) and *grazie/ringraziare per* 'thanks/to thank for'. It is argued that over time *grazie/ringraziare per* have

increasingly been used in Italian in place of *grazie/ringraziare di*, the latter considered the historically preferred form (Renzi, Salvi & Cardinaletti 1991: 545–548). The claims of the increase in the use of constructions with *per* has been reported by a number of authors (e.g., Renzi 2000, Alfieri, Motta & Rapisarda 2008: 331) who, though having differences in the way they approached the subject, have also hypothesised that such an alleged increase may be due to an influence from the English *thanks/to thank for*. Renzi, for example, in examining the supposed increase of forms with *per*, mainly focuses on the specific use of *grazie/ringraziare per* when thanking someone in anticipation of future situations which, in expressions such as *grazie di/per mandare la lettera* (thanks for sending the letter), is not admissible in contemporary Italian (cf. Serianni 2010). According to the author, the appearance in Italian, particularly in business contexts, of these inadmissible constructions in which *grazie/ringraziare per* are used to refer to future actions seems to be an indication of interference from English. However, the alleged increase in such constructions in Italian, whether referring to future situations or not, is not supported by any verifiable data and solid evidence is overall missing.

Similarly, Alfieri, Motta & Rapisarda (2008) argue that there has been an increase in constructions followed by the preposition *per* and that this may be due to the influence from English; their hypothesis, however, is that the main source of interference is the dubbing of (American) English films and TV programs. Such a hypothesis rests upon the fact that the Italian language is, arguably, particularly subject to this type of interference, as in Italy, over 90% of all audiovisual (AV) products are imported (Cinetel 2016) and therefore dubbed; moreover, dubbing has been steadily in use since 1932. However, their claims of changes in the Italian language due to an influence from English via dubbing have so far only been limited to descriptive approaches, i.e., with no or negligible use of empirical data; a systematic investigation of the extent to which such instances of interference might have passed into Italian in real use has not been conducted yet (Viola 2016).

Specifically, these authors do make use of quantifiable data such as corpora of both dubbed and original Italian TV programs to substantiate their claims, but there are limitations in both their analyses and the way they present their results. For example, the corpora themselves are not available, and only partial and nonspecific details of the frequency of occurrence of *grazie/ringraziare di* vs *grazie/ringraziare per* (raw or relative) are given. The size of the corpora is indicated in hours of recorded TV programs rather than per number of words, and therefore the points of comparison used to evaluate the given frequencies of occurrence as high are not clear; furthermore, the claims of why uses of *grazie/ringraziare di* are considered "traditional" (Alfieri, Motta & Rapisarda 2008: 331) are not supported by any lexicographic or diachronic quantitative investigation. In other words, though occurrences of *grazie/ringraziare per* were found to be higher than those

with *di* in both products dubbed from (American) English and original Italian TV programs, their results cannot be considered conclusive.

On the whole, then, it appears that regardless of the approach and the framework employed, both the claims of an increase in the use of *grazie/ringraziare per* in everyday Italian and the alleged influence from English have been hypothesised rather than effectively proven. In contrast, the aim of this article is to use empirical data drawn from language corpora of written, spoken and dubbed Italian to investigate the diachronic distribution of *grazie/ringraziare di* and *grazie/ringraziare per* in the language so as to obtain a full account of trends in use of these constructions through the history of Italian. By analyzing the distribution of the studied constructions over time, particularly before and after the beginning of dubbing in Italy as well as in Italian dubbed products from (American) English, it will also be possible to explore the research hypothesis that an influence from English via dubbing can be claimed. In this respect, it is important to clarify that the article does not try to claim that language change can occur without live social interaction (Giles & Powesland 1975, Giles 1984, Trudgill 1986, Giles, Coupland & Coupland 1991, Milroy 1992, 2002, Labov 1994, 2001, 2010, Eckert 2000, 2008), which clearly plays a fundamental role in diffusing certain language features; nor does it claim that dubbing is the only direct cause for the increase in the use of the forms under analysis. For instance, factors such as globalization, the Internet, and the predominance of English as lingua franca are acknowledged as other major sources of influence. The investigations are therefore carried out to empirically assess (1) whether *grazie/ringraziare per* constructions are historically less frequent than *grazie/ringraziare di* forms, (2) the frequency of use of both constructions in Italian dubbed products from (American) English, and (3) if and when the distribution of the two forms has changed, thus helping shed the light on plausible correlations with the beginning of dubbing.

First, I will outline the methodology adopted in the article and provide a brief overview of the resources used for the investigation (Section 1.1). In Section 2, I will then present the data showing the distribution of the two forms through the history of Italian and in a corpus of Italian films dubbed from (American) English which has been built for the purposes of this article. Conclusions are finally drawn in Section 3.

## 1.1  Methodology and resources

The research hypothesis of this article is that, over time, *grazie* and *ringraziare* have been increasingly used in combination with *per* compared to forms followed by *di,* which are believed to have been traditionally more frequent (Renzi, Salvi & Cardinaletti 1991: 545–548). The analysis, in this way, needs to account not only

for the frequency of occurrence of the two constructions in old Italian, but, crucially, also for their distribution through the history of Italian. It is paramount to assess whether it is true that *grazie/ringraziare* traditionally collocate more strongly with *di* than with *per* in order to conclusively establish whether an increase in collocations with *per* has occurred. If evidence is gathered that such a change has taken place, then the article will also explore the hypothesis that the increase may be correlated to an influence from the English *thanks/to thank for* via dubbing translations. Thus, the distribution of the two forms will be investigated in our corpus of Italian dubbed films from (American) English so as to identify any possible significant differences between the frequency of occurrence of the two constructions; the results will be then compared with the data of their distribution in Italian in real use. The procedure will allow us to identify possible positive correlations with Italian dubbing tradition, thus ultimately validating the hypothesis of a plausible influence from English via dubbing.

Unlike previous accounts, this article develops using an evidence-based approach where in-depth rigorous investigations are pursued across a range of verifiable data such as etymological and historical dictionaries (Battaglia 1961–2002, Cannella 2007, Cortelazzo & Zolli 2008, De Mauro 2000, Devoto & Oli 2013, Grande dizionario di Italiano 2013, Migliorini 1950, Nocentini 2010, Panzini 1905, Tommaseo & Bellini 2007, *Vocabolario Degli Accademici Della Crusca, Quarta edizione 1729–1738* 2001, *Vocabolario Degli Accademici Della Crusca, Quarta edizione 1863–1923* 2001, *Vocabolario Treccani* n.d.) together with corpora of old, contemporary (both written and spoken) and dubbed Italian. The written corpora of old Italian used for the analysis are the OVI Corpus (Opera del Vocabolario Italiano), which gathers texts of written Italian up to 1375 (about 23 million words); and the MIDIA (Morfologia dell'italiano in Diacronia) Corpus (Gaeta et al. 2013), which collects texts from the 13th century to the early 20th century (about 7.5 million words). The written corpora of modern and contemporary Italian (DiaCORIS and CORIS) (Rossini Favretti, Tamburini & De Santis 2002) gather authentic Italian texts from 1861 to 2011 (about 160 million words), while the spoken corpora Stammerjohann (Stammer, Tucci & Signorini 2004), LIP (De Mauro et al. 1993), and C-ORAL-ROM (Cresti & Moneglia 2005) collect oral dialogues from 1965 to 2003 (about one million words). To explore the research hypothesis that an increase in *grazie/ringraziare per* constructions may be due to the influence of English, particularly via dubbing translations, a corpus of Italian films dubbed from (American) English will also be used; the corpus has been built by collecting the scripts of 15 dubbed films[1] distributed in Italy between 1964 and

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**1.** The films are *Mary Poppins* (1964), *Dr Strangelove* (1964), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *The Andromeda Strain* (1971), *Young Frankenstein* (1974), *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975),

2007 (about 155 thousand words). The list of resources is not to be considered complete or finished by any means and, in future works, different resources may be used, either as complementary or substitute tools for those employed here; the complete list of the resources employed here is provided in the reference list.

These linguistic resources have been selected according to criteria of completeness, authoritativeness, and representativeness of diaphasic, diastratic, diamesic, diatopic, and diachronic variation and sample a broad range of authors and genres which may be considered to even out and provide a reasonably accurate picture of written Italian as a whole, and of cities, speakers and contexts for spoken Italian. As argued by McEnery & Wilson (2001: 78), the criticism that frequency rates may be unrepresentative of the population as a whole, for example when they are particularly low, applies "not only to linguistic corpora but to any form of scientific investigation which is based on sampling rather than on the exhaustive analysis of an entire and finite population". However, because the corpus is sampled to be maximally representative of the population, findings on that sample may be generalized to the larger population; furthermore, it means that direct comparisons may be made between different corpora. Conversely, when there are no occurrences, this is also an interesting and important comment on the frequency of that specific construct or word (McEnery & Wilson 2001). There will always be the possibility that some constructions may occur due to pure chance, but such limitations – which, again, apply to any sampling analysis – can at least, in corpus linguistics, be partially addressed by maximizing representativeness. Furthermore, significance tests (i.e., chi-square test and log likelihood test) will be performed to exclude the possibility that any observed effect will have occurred due to a sampling error alone (cf. Babbie 2013).

Finally, because the corpora used are different in size, the results of the quantitative investigations are presented in tables which show the number of occurrences in each corpus (raw frequency) and the corresponding proportions in parts per million (PPM) for the whole corpus and for each time period, when applicable.

## 2.   Distribution of *grazie/ringraziare di* and *grazie/ringraziare per* through the history of Italian

This section investigates the diachronic distribution of *grazie/ringraziare di* and *grazie/ringraziare per* through the history of Italian in order to assess which form was historically preferred and if any change has happened over time. The detailed

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*The Shining* (1980), *Back to the Future* (1985), *Life of Brian* (1991), *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Apollo 13* (1995), *Titanic* (1997), *The Big Kahuna* (1999), *Donnie Darko* (2001), and *300* (2007).

account of their frequency of occurrence and diachronic trends will provide us with valuable information which will be relevant to the research hypotheses of both an increase in the use of forms followed by *per* and any possible plausible correlation with the influence of English from dubbing. Section 2.1 investigates the distribution of the two variants in Old Italian (up to 1375), while Section 2.2 analyzes the respective frequencies of occurrence from the 13th century to the 20th century. In Section 2.3, the investigations are carried out to cover the period from 1861 to 2011. The distribution in dubbed films from 1965 to 2007 is analyzed in Section 2.4, and Section 2.5 explores both forms in spoken Italian.

## 2.1 Distribution in Old Italian (up to 1375)

The Italian *grazie* 'thanks' is the elliptic form of *vi rendo grazie* 'I will return you the favour'; because of the verbal phrase it derives from, *grazie* introduces an object by means of *di* 'of', which is considered to be the preposition historically preferred (Renzi, Salvi & Cardinaletti 1991: 545–548). However, when *grazie* and *ringraziare* introduce a subordinate infinite clause, they may be followed by either *di* or *per* 'for', the latter being the habitual preposition introducing an implicit causal subordinate (Renzi, Salvi & Cardinaletti 1991). Although Latin already admitted variation between *de* (of) and *pro* (for), the etymological (Cortelazzo & Zolli 2008) and lexicographic (*Vocabolario Degli Accademici Della Crusca*, *Quinta edizione 1863–1923*) sources report occurrences for *ringraziare di* but no occurrences for constructions with *per*, thus suggesting that the preposition *di* historically collocates more strongly than *per*. In this section, the distribution in Old Italian of *grazie/ringraziare di* and *grazie/ringraziare per* is investigated in order to further verify the etymological and lexicographic findings. The corpus used for the analysis is the OVI Corpus which collects texts up to 1375; the results are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

**Table 1.** Frequency rates of *grazie di* vs *grazie per* in OVI corpus

|  | *grazie di* | *grazie per* |
|---|---|---|
| **Up to 1375** | 23 | 7 |
| **PPM** | 1 | 0.3 |

**Table 2.** Frequency rates of *ringraziare di* vs *ringraziare per* in OVI corpus

|  | *ringraziare di* | *ringraziare per* |
|---|---|---|
| **Up to 1375** | 106 | 15 |
| **PPM** | 4.61 | 0.65 |

The results show that up to 1375, *grazie/ringraziare di* collocated more strongly than *grazie/ringraziare per*, thus confirming that historically, forms followed by *di* were preferred in Italian. Here below, (1), (2), (3) and (4) are examples retrieved from the corpus of the contexts of use of the constructions under analysis (bold mine).

(1)   Io re     di Francia faccio molte **grazie  delle**  grandi proferte
      I   King of France  give    many thanks of the great   offers
      'I, King of France, give thanks for the great offers.'          (E/KI, 1282–99)

(2)   In comandamento abbiamo di rendere **grazie  per** queste cose
      In commandment we have  to give      thanks for  these   things
      'We have been commanded to give thanks for these things.'
                                                      (Cit/1. Deche, 14th century)

(3)   Direte al   nostro Signore lo     **ringraziamo di**          tanta buona
      You    will tell    to our  Lord that we will   thank him of such  good
      proferta
      offer
      'You will tell to our Lord that we will thank him for such a good offer.'
                                                                (E/KI, 1282–99)

(4)   **Per** queste parole, **ringrazia**   l'altore   Beatrice
      For these   words, thanks who gives life Beatrice
      'For these words, Beatrice thanks him who gives life.'    (Cit/1. Chiose, 1375)

In the examples above, it can be noticed that there are no observable differences in the contexts of use, conveyed meaning, or function of the two forms, thus showing that the prepositions can be used interchangeably. In the next section, I will investigate the frequency of occurrence of both forms in the MIDIA Corpus, which collects data from the 13th century to the first half of the 20th century.

## 2.2  Distribution from 13th century to 20th century

I will now move on to analyze the distribution of *grazie/ringraziare di* and *grazie/ringraziare per* from 1200 to 1947. Tables 3 and 4 show the raw frequency rates and the correspondent PPM for occurrences of both constructions. The relative frequencies are calculated both over the whole corpus (7,652,526 words), signified by the symbol (T), and for each of the time windows, which are divided as follows: 1200–1375 (1,238,457 words); 1376–1532 (1,646,428 words); 1533–1691 (1,600,301 words); 1692–1840 (1,499,412 words); 1841–1947 (1,667,928 words). This allows for comparison not only of potential distribution differences of the frequencies over the whole time period covered by the corpus, but also within the same time

windows. Finally, chi-square tests are performed to exclude the possibility that any observed effect has occurred due to a sampling error alone (cf. Babbie 2013).

**Table 3.** Frequency rates of *grazie di* and *grazie per* in MIDIA corpus

|           | *grazie di* | PPM   | PPM (T) | *grazie per* | PPM  | PPM (T) |
|-----------|-------------|-------|---------|--------------|------|---------|
| 1200–1375 | 2           | 1.61  | 0.26    | 1            | 0.81 | 0.13    |
| 1376–1532 | 7           | 4.25  | 0.91    | 2            | 1.21 | 0.26    |
| 1533–1691 | 10          | 6.24  | 1.30    | 4            | 2.50 | 0.52    |
| 1692–1840 | 8           | 5.33  | 1.04    | 4            | 2.67 | 0.52    |
| 1841–1947 | 19          | 11.39 | 2.48    | 2            | 1.19 | 0.26    |
| Total     | 46          | –     | 5.99    | 13           | –    | 1.69    |

**Table 4.** Frequency rates of *ringraziare di* and *ringraziare per* in MIDIA corpus

|           | *ringraziare di* | PPM   | PPM (T) | *ringraziare per* | PPM  | PPM (T) |
|-----------|------------------|-------|---------|-------------------|------|---------|
| 1200–1375 | 5                | 4.04  | 0.65    | 2                 | 1.61 | 0.26    |
| 1376–1532 | 18               | 10.93 | 2.35    | 2                 | 1.21 | 0.26    |
| 1533–1691 | 23               | 14.37 | 3       | 0                 | 0    | 0       |
| 1692–1840 | 48               | 32.01 | 5.62    | 8                 | 5.33 | 1.04    |
| 1841–1947 | 30               | 17.99 | 3.92    | 16                | 9.59 | 2.09    |
| Total     | 124              | –     | 16.2    | 28                | –    | 3.66    |

The results show that through the history of Italian, *grazie/ringraziare di* collocates more strongly than *grazie/ringraziare per*; also, a direct comparison between the different time periods gives clear evidence that collocations with *di* are consistently more frequent than collocations with *per*. In order to establish whether the difference in the forms' frequencies is significant, chi-square tests were performed. The results from these tests show that the difference in frequency is significant for *ringraziare di* and *ringraziare per* ($\chi^2 = 15.45$; $df = 4$; $p = 0.004$); although *grazie di* occurs more frequently than *grazie per*, the difference in their frequency is not significant ($\chi^2 = 3.38$; $df = 4$; $p = 0.497$). These results will be relevant when compared to the difference in their frequency distributions in more recent corpora; if found significant, it will indeed evidence that a substantial change has occurred.

The quantitative analysis has revealed that constructions with *di* consistently collocate more strongly than forms with *per*; a qualitative analysis of Examples (5), (6), (7) and (8) will identify any potential observable difference in the contexts of use of the two constructions (bold mine).

(5)  Insieme  meco **grazie** a    Dio     rendete **dell**'ammirabili sua
Together with  me    give thanks to     God              of his admirable
divine compassion
pietà  divina
'Join me in thanking God for his admirable divine compassion'
(TEA2_LMED_RAPGP, 1376–1532)

(6)  Ella rendea cortese **grazie  per** lodi
She gave    kind    thanks for  the prayers'
'She kindly gave thanks for the prayers'    (POE3_TAS_GERU00, 1533–1691)

(7)  Sperate     in Dio,  seguendo suo dottrina, **ringraziandol d**'ogni benefizio
Have hope in God, following his  doctrine, thanking him  of any  help
'Have hope in God, follow his doctrine, and thank him for his help'
(TEA2_RAPP_GRLAZ, 1376–1532)

(8)  Leggiamo di fatti  (…) che  S.     Gregorio lo    **ringrazia per** i
We read    of facts (…) that Saint Gregorio him thanks     for four
quattrocento scudi d'oro
hundred      gold  ecus
'We read that ( … ) Saint Gregorio thanks him for four hundred gold ecus'
(PER5_DESA_ROM00, 1841–1947)

As no significant difference in the contexts of use, conveyed meaning, or func-
tion can be observed, the examples above confirm that the two constructions are
equivalent. These results are consistent with the previous findings and confirm
that *grazie/ringraziare di* is the form historically preferred. In the next section, I in-
vestigate the frequency of occurrence of both forms in the DiaCORIS and CORIS
Corpora, which collect data from the 1861 to 2011.


**2.3**  Distribution from 1861 to 2011

This section presents the results of the investigation of *grazie/ringraziare di* and
*grazie/ringraziare per* in the DiaCORIS and the CORIS Corpora. Tables 5, 6, 7 and
8 show the raw frequency rates and the correspondent PPM proportions for oc-
currences of both constructions; the relative frequencies are calculated both over
the whole corpus (25 million words) and for each time window, each of which
contain approximately 5 million words.

**Table 5.** Frequency rates of *grazie di* and *grazie per* in the DiaCORIS Corpus

|  | *grazie di* | PPM | PPM (T) | *grazie per* | PPM | PPM (T) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1861–1900** | 12 | 2.4 | 0.48 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **1901–1922** | 17 | 3.4 | 0.68 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **1923–1945** | 4 | 0.8 | 0.16 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **1946–1967** | 13 | 2.6 | 0.52 | 3 | 0.6 | 0.12 |
| **1968–2001** | 3 | 0.6 | 0.12 | 3 | 0.6 | 0.12 |
| **Total** | 49 | – | 1.96 | 6 | – | 0.24 |

**Table 6.** Frequency rates of *grazie di* and *grazie per* in CORIS corpus

|  | *grazie di* | PPM | *grazie per* | PPM |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1980–2011** | 290 | 2.23 | 485 | 4.72 |

**Table 7.** Frequency rates of *ringraziare di* and *ringraziare per* in DIACORIS Corpus

|  | *ringraziare di* | PPM | PPM (T) | *ringraziare per* | PPM | PPM (T) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1861–1900** | 47 | 9.4 | 1.88 | 4 | 0.8 | 0.16 |
| **1901–1922** | 34 | 6.8 | 1.36 | 1 | 0.2 | 0.04 |
| **1923–1945** | 36 | 7.2 | 1.44 | 6 | 1.2 | 0.24 |
| **1946–1967** | 20 | 4 | 0.8 | 14 | 2.8 | 0.56 |
| **1968–2001** | 18 | 3.6 | 0.72 | 8 | 1.6 | 0.32 |
| **Total** | 155 | – | 6.2 | 33 | – | 1.32 |

**Table 8.** Frequency rates of *ringraziare di* and *ringraziare per* in CORIS corpus

|  | *ringraziare di* | PPM | *ringraziare per* | PPM |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1980–2011** | 210 | 1.61 | 468 | 3.6 |

The findings show that the use of *grazie per* and *ringraziare per* has considerably increased in the most recent history of Italian while, at the same time, the use of the traditional forms *grazie di* and *ringraziare di* has decreased. This is evidenced by comparing the overall rate of occurrences in PPM from 1861 to 2001 for *grazie per* (0.24) and *grazie di* (1.96) against the rate of occurrences of the two forms from 1980 to 2011, respectively 4.72 vs 2.23.

The situation is similar for *ringraziare di* vs *ringraziare per,* where constructions with *di* have been found to have a considerably higher frequency from 1861 to 1945 than constructions followed by *per* (4.68 vs 0.44). Again, the gap gets narrower and narrower with the passing of time until the situation is turned upside down in more

recent years; from 1980 to 2011 the relative frequency between *ringraziare di* and *ringraziare per* is 1.61 vs 3.6. The significance tests' results show that the difference in the frequencies of *grazie di* and *grazia per* in the DiaCORIS Corpus is indeed significant over time ($\chi^2 = 14.49$; $df = 4$; $p = 0.006$). Notice that in the MIDIA Corpus, the difference in the frequencies of *grazie di* and *grazie per* was, on the contrary, not significant, showing that in more recent times the gap in the distribution between the two forms is even wider than in earlier stages of Italian. The results are also significant for *ringraziare di* and *ringraziare per* ($\chi^2 = 25.10$; $df = 4$; $p < 0.001$).

The chi-square test results have therefore proved that the difference in the distribution of the two forms is significant in DiaCORIS with collocations with *di* being consistently more frequent. A log likelihood test (LL) gives us the opportunity to find out if the difference in the distribution of forms with *per* in DiaCORIS and in CORIS is significant. The results are the following: the LL value for total occurrences of *grazie per* constructions in DiaCORIS and in CORIS is 127.73 while for *ringraziare per* is 41.75. These results are extremely significant, and they conclusively prove that the change in the increased use of constructions with *per* is as recent as the past 40–50 years.

In the examples below, (9), (10), (11), and (12) allow us to verify if the distribution of the two concurrent variables can be correlated with the context of use or other variables.

(9)   Addio,   Pinocchio, – rispose il   cane; – mille **grazie   di**      avermi
Farewell Pinocchio – the      dog said  – and   thank you so much of
liberato    dalla morte
saving me from death
'Farewell Pinocchio – the dog said – and thank you for saving me from
death'                                                    (Narrativa – 1883)

(10)   Domattina devo  levarmi presto.     E    **grazie      per** la  bella
I have to    get up early     tomorrow. And thank you for  the good
compagnia
company
'I have to get up early tomorrow. Thank you for the good company'
                                                         (Narrativa – 1958)

(11)   Cari  amici,   **grazie  di** essere qui
Dear friends, thanks of being  here
'Dear friends, thanks for being here'          (EPHEMOpuscoli 1980–2011)

(12)   **Grazie  per** aver     cercato in tutti i  modi   di ostacolarmi, capo!
Thanks for  having tried     so hard to hinder me,                boss!'
'Thanks for trying so hard to hinder me, boss!'   (MON2001_04 1980–2011)

The examples show once more that there does not seem to be any correlation between the choice of the preposition and the context of use, which indicates that the change may be due to other sociolinguistic variables, such as an influence from the English *thanks/to thank for*. In the next section, I analyse the distribution of *grazie/ ringraziare di* and *grazie/ringraziare per* in a corpus of Italian films dubbed from (American) English which has compiled dialogue from fifteen films distributed in Italy from 1964 to 2007.

## 2.4 Distribution in Italian dubbed films

I now analyse the distribution of the two variants in a small corpus of Italian films dubbed from (American) English to assess which form collocates more strongly. The results of the investigation will be particularly relevant for discussions concerning the alleged influence from English via dubbing translations, which purportedly caused the increase in the use of forms followed by *per* in Italian in real use. Tables 9 and 10 show the raw frequency rates and the correspondent relative proportions (per thousand words) for occurrences of both constructions.

**Table 10.** Frequencies of *ringraziare di* and *ringraziare per* from film corpus

|  | *ringraziare di* | RELATIVE | *ringraziare per* | RELATIVE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1964–2007** | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0.03 |

**Table 11.** Frequencies of *grazie di* and *grazie per* from film corpus

|  | *grazie di* | RELATIVE | *grazie per* | RELATIVE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1964–2007** | 0 | 0 | 9 | 0.05 |

In the film corpus, there are no occurrences for constructions with *di*; the fact that occurrences with *per* have, on the contrary, been found shows that the communicative situation in question is represented; thus the absence is not due to a lack of representation in the corpus of the speech act of thanking somebody for something. More importantly, it shows that, even in a relatively small corpus, variants with *per* are strongly preferred. Here below, (12), (13), and (14) are examples taken from the corpus (bold mine).

(12) Jack, voglio **ringraziarla per** quello che ha fatto
     Jack, I want to thank you for  what   you    did
     'Jack, I want to thank you for what you did'                    (1994–1997)

(13) **Grazie per** la    collaborazione
     Thanks for  your cooperation
     'Thanks for your cooperation'                                   (1971–1975)

(14)   Signore, **grazie per** la   vostra piacevole compagnia
Sir,        thanks for  the lovely                company
'Sir, thanks for the lovely company'                          (1994–1997)

From the above excerpts, it can be seen how traditional constructions with *di* would have been equally acceptable. These results are particularly important with regards to the hypothesis that the predominant use of constructions with *per* in Italian dubbed films may have played a fundamental role in boosting the increase of such forms in Italian in real use. Such discussions are also supported by the DiaCORIS and CORIS results, which conclusively established that the increase of *grazie/ringraziare per* constructions can be observed starting from the mid/late 20th century, which coincides with the arrival of sound cinema and dubbing in Italy.

In the next section, I analyze the distribution of the two forms in three corpora of spoken Italian which collect samples of oral dialogues from 1965 to 2003.

## 2.5  Distribution in spoken Italian

I now move on to investigate the distribution of *grazie/ringraziare di* and *grazie/ringraziare per* in three corpora of spoken Italian which collectively amount for about 1 million words. Because these three corpora are different in size, the log-likelihood test (LL) will be performed as the significance test alongside the chi-square test within each corpus for both constructions. Table 12 shows the results for *grazie di* and *grazie per,* while Table 13 shows the results for *ringraziare di* and *ringraziare per*.

**Table 12.**  Frequency rates of *grazie di* and *grazie per* in spoken Italian from 1965 to 2003

|  | *grazie di* | PPM | *grazie per* | PPM |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| STAMM. (1965) | 1 | 9.99 | 0 | 0 |
| LIP (1990–1992) | 4 | 8.18 | 3 | 6.13 |
| C-ORAL-ROM (2000–2003) | 1 | 3.21 | 24 | 77.03 |

**Table 13.**  Frequency rates of *ringraziare di* and *ringraziare per* in spoken Italian from 1965 to 2003

|  | *ringraziare di* | PPM | *ringraziare per* | PPM |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| STAMM. (1965) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| LIP (1990–1992) | 7 | 14.31 | 18 | 36.80 |
| C-ORAL-ROM (2000–2003) | 6 | 19.26 | 3 | 9.63 |

The results show that no occurrences for *grazie per* have been found in the older corpus of spoken Italian (Stammerjohann 1965), while the form registered a high frequency rate in the most recent corpus (2000–2003). The LL value for these two results is 13.38, which is extremely significant, as the probability of this result happening by chance is less than 1%. Similarly, in the Stammerjohann Corpus (1965), no occurrences for *ringraziare per* have been found and the LL value between Stammerjohann and LIP is 6.70, which, again, is extremely significant (99% certainty that the difference between the two results is not due to chance). At the same time, the chi-square value for occurrences of *grazie/ringraziare di* and *grazie/ringraziare per* within the LIP is not significant ($\chi^2 = 0.97$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.325$), while the chi-square value is significant in the C-ORAL-ROM Corpus ($\chi^2 = 12.29$; $df = 1$; $p < 0.001$). This means that the difference in the distribution of the two forms in spoken Italian is extremely significant in the most recent corpus, thus proving that in contemporary spoken Italian, forms with *per* are, overall, preferred to forms with *di*.

## 3. Conclusions

This article investigated the diachronic trend of two Italian constructions, *grazie/ringraziare di* 'thanks/to thank of' ('thanks/to thank for') and *grazie/ringraziare per* 'thanks/to thank for'. The main research hypothesis is that, although both forms are equally acceptable and constructions with *di* have been historically more established than forms with *per*, in recent times, the forms *grazie/ringraziare per* have increasingly been used in Italian. A number of authors (e.g., Renzi 2000, Alfieri, Motta & Rapisarda 2008) have also hypothesised that such an alleged increase may be due to an influence from the English *thanks/to thank for*; however, both the claims of an increase in real use Italian of *grazie/ringraziare per* and the alleged influence from English had not been substantiated by any empirical investigation. In contrast, this article has used empirical data from language corpora of written, spoken and dubbed Italian to investigate the diachronic distribution of *grazie/ringraziare di* and *grazie/ringraziare per* in three language varieties (written, spoken, dubbed) so as to obtain a full and detailed account of the trend of these constructions through the history of Italian.

The etymological and lexicographic analyses conducted in Section 2.1 have reported occurrences for *ringraziare di,* while no occurrences for constructions with *per* have been found, thus suggesting that the preposition *di* historically collocated more strongly than *per.* Diachronic quantitative investigations have been carried out across corpora of authentic written and spoken Italian from 1200 to 2011 to empirically support this finding and to assess whether and when the users'

choices have shifted towards forms with *per*. The results confirmed that, while constructions with *per* were extremely rare in older stages of Italian, the use of *grazie/ringraziare per* has increased remarkably over time, to the point that the frequency of occurrence of these constructions is higher in contemporary Italian than traditional forms with *di*. Moreover, the diachronic analysis of the distribution of both forms has shown that, while the difference in the frequency distributions between *ringraziare di* and *ringraziare per* has constantly been significant (with forms with *per* being consistently less frequent), the difference in the frequency distributions of *grazie di* and *grazie per* has only been found to be significant after 1861 (with forms with *per* being less frequent). Such findings are particularly relevant when compared to data from the corpus of dubbed Italian and data from after the arrival of dubbing in Italy, where a clear dominance of forms with *per* has been found instead.

These investigations have empirically proved that a change in the Italian language has taken place and indicate that, in absence of other sociolinguistic variables such as context of use or expressed function, strong positive correlations exist with an influence from English via dubbing. Specifically, it has been shown here that: (1) forms followed by *di* were historically preferred; (2) in dubbed Italian, forms with *per* are strongly preferred; and (3) the rate of use of constructions with *per* has substantially increased since the introduction of dubbing in Italy, to the point that in contemporary Italian in real use they are in fact more frequent than constructions with *di*.

The article has not attempted to claim that dubbing is the *only* direct cause for the increase in the use of *ringraziare per* and *grazie* per. At the same time, however, if on the one hand the role of dubbing cannot be isolated, on the other hand it also cannot be excluded, as clear positive correlations have been found. In other words, the results of this article show that such a concurrent role, although it may not be measurable, is, however, demonstrable.

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