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FROM LEXICAL THEORY TO AI TRANSLATION

Procomplement Verbs and ChatGPT

Abstract Procomplement verbs (PCVs) are a highly frequent yet understudied class of semantically idiosyncratic verb–clitic constructions found across Romance languages. Despite their relevance for everyday communication, they remain only marginally represented in grammars and dictionaries. Building on recent theoretical work on Italian PCVs and drawing on Generative Lexicon theory, this study investigates the relationship between the syntactic–semantic properties of PCVs and their treatment by large language models. A dataset of 160 highly frequent Italian PCVs, primarily extracted from GRADIT and comprising 256 usage examples, was submitted to ChatGPT 5.2 for translation from Italian into English. The analysis focuses on the model’s ability to account for the semantic, pragmatic, and phraseological complexity of these constructions. The results show that translation quality is influenced less by the specific subclass of PCVs than by transversal properties such as connotation and the pragmatic functions encoded by individual utterances. While ChatGPT generally succeeds in translating strongly conventionalised and highly idiomatic expressions, it frequently encounters difficulties with polysemous PCVs, context-sensitive pragmatic meanings, and morphologically complex verb–clitic combinations. The findings highlight the value of a fine-grained syntactic–semantic classification of PCVs for bilingual lexicography and suggest potential applications for the improvement of AI-assisted translation systems.

Keywords Procomplement verbs; phraseology; generative lexicon; bilingual AI-assisted lexicography; AI-assisted translation; ChatGPT; LLMs

1 Introduction

This paper aims to evaluate the performance of a large language model (LLM)-driven tool when translating a class of linguistic units that poses significant challenges for human translators and bilingual lexicography. In doing so, it hopes to shed light on ways to harness machine translation for lexicographic applications. More specifically, it aims to provide a clear impression of the ability of ChatGPT to translate Italian procomplement verbs (PCVs) into English and further inform theory about this verb class. Typologies of procomplement verbs from previous studies form an analytical framework for an assessment of ChatGPT 5.2’s translation performance. The results reveal that, although the tool is capable of producing generally accurate and idiomatic translations, its output is not yet fully reliable. In particular, the analysis highlights recurring difficulties at the intersection of specific PCV subtypes and different dimensions of non-referential meaning, including the speech-act value conveyed by individual utterances and stylistic aspects of connotative meaning.

2 Procomplement Verbs (PCVs)

2.1 Features

Procomplement verbs represent a special class of semantically idiosyncratic verbs in Romance languages that are conjugated with complement clitic pronouns (De Mauro, 1999–2000, p. xxxiv), as illustrated by the following dictionary examples where PCVs (bolded) could reasonably be translated as ‘to have it in for’ (i.e. to harm or criticise someone):

*Que veut dire cela? à qui **en avez-vous**?* (Molière, in Le Robert)

Lit.: What does that want to say? At whom do you have it?

*Qualcuno mi vuol male o addirittura il mondo intero **ce l'ha** con me.* (Moravia, in GDLI)

Lit.: Someone wants evil to me, or even the whole world has it with me.

*La vecina **la ha cogido** con nosotros y nos hace la vida imposible.* (usage example drawn from the RAE)

Lit.: The neighbour has taken it with us and makes life impossible for us.

Although PCVs are high-frequency forms in everyday spoken Catalan, French, Italian, and Spanish, they have been largely disregarded in the literature and are only marginally covered by dictionaries. Building on Russi (2008) and generative studies such as Espinal (2009), Caruso (2025) identified two types of reference instantiated by clitics (anaphoric and deictic). Drawing on Pustejovsky's generative lexicon theory (Pustejovsky, 1995), she further proposed that different mechanisms govern the interaction between the semantics of verbs and those of their arguments lexicalized by clitics (or cliticised arguments). The interplay between reference and verb–argument structure allows for the identification of different subclasses of PCVs, providing a coherent syntactic–semantic description that is valuable for human-oriented lexicography—especially pedagogical lexicography—and potentially useful for improving AI-based resources.

It should be emphasised that the lemmatisation of PCVs represents one of the most significant achievements of Tullio De Mauro's GRADIT in the treatment of multiword expressions. First published in 1999, this ground-breaking dictionary was the first—and remains the only—work in Italian lexicography to include multiword expressions as lemmas. This innovation not only led to a substantial increase in the number of lexical items recorded for Italian, but also made a more accurate and reliable description of the Italian lexicon possible. In particular, it recognised PCVs as a special class of verbal lexemes which, although highly frequent in everyday interaction, had not been addressed elsewhere. However, unfortunately, De Mauro's treatment of this verb class is limited to the inventory of 159 PCVs provided in the dictionary and a brief explanation in the introduction:

«In the lemma list of the dictionary [. . .] 159 pro-complement [verbs] are included, they have a meaning of their own, which cannot be derived from the main verb, or which is very opaque: *avercela, cavarcela, fregarsene* [Eng. to have it in for sb, to cope/manage, not to care about]». (De Mauro, 1999-2000, p. xxxiv)

Russi (2008) was the first scholar to explicitly acknowledge this gap in the literature in a comprehensive monograph on Italian clitics. Much of the volume is devoted to the behaviour of the most frequent verbs belonging to this class, which are examined within the context of a broader discussion on the continuum between lexicalisation and grammaticalization processes of Italian pronouns over time. Espinal's (2009) work is another important contribution to the study of PCVs across Romance languages. It focuses on the similarities between PCVs and the complex predicates found in polysynthetic languages, situating the discussion within the broader generativist debate on clitic processing. Espinal places particular emphasis on the most idiosyncratic PCVs, such as the Catalan *ballar-la* ('suffer', from *ballar*, 'dance') and highlights the lack of compositional mechanisms available for the interpretation of such idiomatic multiword expressions.

Caruso (2025) represents a further step forward in the study of this verb class and one to which the present analysis is indebted. Building on this work, the current study aims to systematically assess the contribution that large language models (LLMs) can make to the lexicographic description of PCVs, focusing in particular on the quality of Italian to English PCV translations provided by ChatGPT 5.2.

2.2 Classification

In Caruso (2025) *procomplement verbs* are attributed to two primary types of reference encoded by the lexicalized clitic. On the one hand, there are verbs where the clitic refers to or anticipates an element present in the surrounding text: *non so se nella valigia₁ ci₁ sta tutto* ('I don't know if everything fits in the suitcase'). In these cases, the clitic retains an *anaphoric* value. On the other hand, verbs such as *prenderle* [le botte] ('take a beating'), *arrivarci* [alla soluzione] ('get it/understand'), or *attaccarla* [una malattia] ('catch it', i.e. a disease) involve clitics that lexicalize an implicit argument, which is only made explicit in marked constructions such as left-dislocation: *le botte le hanno prese tutte nella caserma di Bolzaneto* ('they all got beaten up in the Bolzaneto barracks'). In the current analytic framework, the first type is referred to as *anaphoric procomplement verbs*, while the latter are called *deictic procomplement verbs*.

The distinction between the two modes of referentiality has syntactic ramifications. Deictic procomplement verbs have an unexpressed argument and are one-place predicates. Anaphoric procomplement verbs, by contrast, complete their meaning with an argument that is recoverable from the co-text or the communicative context. Thus, they take two arguments—at times, with obligatory expression of the second argument (*in salotto₁ ci₁ andrebbe un divano*, 'A sofa would be just right in the living room').

A further pertinent remark concerns the metalinguistic label introduced by De Mauro in GRADIT. The term *procomplement verb* contrasts with *pronominal verb*, which refers to verbs combining with other clitics in a strictly compositional way and grammaticalizing different types of diathesis, as in *abbracciarsi* ('hug each other'), *vestirsi* ('get dressed'), and *mangiarsi un panino* ('eat oneself a sandwich'). By contrast, procomplement verbs constitute a heterogeneous class of verbal multi-word expressions in which clitic complement pronouns are lexically integrated into the verb form, contributing semantically and/or syntactically in different ways. On this basis, PCVs can be grouped into several subtypes distributed along a continuum ranging from relatively transparent constructions, in which the clitic retains its argumental value, to fully lexicalized and semantically opaque idioms (e.g. *farcela*, 'make it').

Beyond referential anchoring, the semantics and syntax of procomplement verbs can be explained by general principles of argument omissibility and by standard mechanisms of argument–predicate interaction, as described in lexicalist approaches (e.g., Pustejovsky, 1995; Ježek, 2016). These mechanisms support a model that distinguishes between co-text-based reference (anaphoric PCVs) and indexical or ostensive reference (deictic PCVs), giving rise to various verb subtypes.

Among deictic procomplement verbs, several subtypes can be identified: PCVs in the central group exhibit a *default argument*, since the clitic replaces an implicit but highly predictable and culturally salient nominal argument which is congruent with the verb's semantics and its collocational/distributional profile. For instance, in *azzeccarla* ('guess right'), the clitic *la* conventionally evokes *la risposta* ('the answer'), agreeing in gender, number, and syntactic role with the cliticised noun phrase. A second group consists of PCVs with a *coerced argument type*, where the clitic presupposes an abstract or eventive complement that reshapes the verb's core meaning. In *pagarla*, for example, the clitic does not refer to a concrete object but rather encodes the event of "paying the consequences", metaphorically extending the literal meaning of a financial transaction. A further subtype is found in *predicative deictic PCVs*, where the clitic stands for an elided predicate rather than a nominal argument. In *provarci* ('try'), *ci* corresponds to an unexpressed infinitival clause (e.g., *provare a fare qualcosa*), thus functioning as a marker of predicate ellipsis. Some deictic PCVs also share striking resemblances to *light verb constructions*, for instance where the verb is semantically bleached, and the elliptic noun encodes the

actual predication. In *prendersela* ('take offense'), *la* encodes an inferred nominal event like 'an offense' or 'a reason for anger'. In contrast, the fully lexicalized PCVs, or *idiomatic PCVs*, are completely opaque and no longer decomposable. Verbs like *battersela* ('flee'), *spuntarla* ('succeed'), and *sguazzarsela* ('live it up') exhibit total semantic opacity, with clitics that no longer exhibit referential function.

Alongside the deictic PCVs, the second macro-category consists of *anaphoric procomplement verbs*, where the clitic relates to an element present in the co-text or discourse context which is necessary to complete the verb's semantics and syntax. In *ne₁ andrà del suo prestigio₁* ('his/her reputation will be at stake'), *ne* marks an obligatory argument tied to the predicate. Yet, among anaphoric PCVs there are also instances where predicates may remain implicit, thus offering instances of *null-object instantiations*. Examples include verbs like *fregarsene* ('not to care'), *entrarci* ('be relevant'), and *farsene* ('make use of'), in which *ne* (and occasionally *ci*) is fully grammaticalized and recoverable via inference: *che se ne fa di tutta quella roba?* can also be found as *che se ne fa_ø* ('what does he need all that stuff for?').

A final, distinct class is made up of *connotative-pragmatic procomplement verbs*, where the clitic contributes affective nuance rather than argumental content (Masini, 2015). These verbs actually express a "benefactive" meaning (Ježek, 2004) similar to the middle diathesis in ancient Greek. Russi (2008) argues that they encode a form of subjective involvement on the part of the speaker or another participant. For example, in an utterance such as *lei dovrebbe smetterla di bere*, a fitting translation would be 'you really should stop drinking' or even 'you need to stop drinking' rather than a literal 'you have to stop drinking'. Therefore, in verbs such as *smetterla* and *finirla*, the clitic *la* is considered as a marker of *affectedness*: its presence signals that the speaker is personally affected by, or emotionally involved in the situation, whereas its omission yields a more neutral and detached interpretation. This interpretation is also expressed by Masini (2015) who, for her part, analyses the clitic cluster *sene* as the marker of a specific emphatic function [+EMPHASIS]. In this construction, *sene* does not contribute referential or locative meaning, but rather signals the involvement of the subject (or another participant) in the event, highlighting a heightened degree of subjective participation: *(me ne) sono andata a spasso* might be rendered as 'I took myself off for a walk', rather than simply 'I went for a walk'. Masini further relates this function to the Italian transitive middle construction (*mangiarsi, bersi*), where the clitic *si* similarly marks subject involvement. Unlike the *transitive middle*, however, the *sene* construction is largely restricted to intransitive predicates and may therefore be regarded as a type of *intransitive middle construction*. Synchronically, it displays a certain degree of autonomy: it is less lexicalized than many other PCVs, exhibits analogical productivity, and is distinguished by its primarily pragmatic rather than argument-structural contribution.

Overall, this classification outlines a richly articulated continuum of procomplement constructions in Italian, where clitics function either as argument saturators or as pragmatic-emotive markers. Their degree of syntactic and semantic integration determines the placement of each verb type within the broader continuum of lexicalization and grammaticalization processes (Russi, 2008).

2.3 Connotation

Apart from the subtle differences discussed so far, PCVs are, for the most part, connoted and informal lexical items used to convey expressive nuances and pragmatic values. For this reason, they tend to be underrepresented in written discourse and in more formal or controlled communicative contexts. This has undoubtedly contributed to the very limited attention they have received in both grammars and dictionaries, resulting in a significant gap not only in Romance

linguistics, but also in the broader understanding of the phraseological continuum. Indeed, comparable pronominal phrasemes can be found in a variety of other languages. Consider, for instance, the English expressions *do it with someone*, *push it/push your luck*, and *like it or lump it*, where the pronoun *it* contributes, to varying degrees, to the semantics of the multiword expression. Masullo & Bertora (2014, p. 203) make a similar point, observing that “Asimismo, abundan en inglés las locuciones con *it* como objeto expletivo” (‘expressions containing *it* as an expletive object also abound in English’).

By exploiting the semiotic potential of pronouns, PCVs reveal interesting mechanisms of compositional semantics within the domain of complex lexical units. Through the incorporation of implicit arguments, they give rise to synthetic lexicalisations characterised by a high degree of semantic transparency, a feature that arguably enhances their descriptive and expressive potential. The role of connotation as a phenomenon arising from figurativeness has been extensively discussed by Dobrovol’skij & Piirainen (2005), who regard idioms as additional means of lexicalising concepts in languages. In their view, idioms are connoted lexical items that speakers choose in order to express their ideas more effectively, since the literal meaning associated with an idiom contributes to a more evocative form of communication. This observation may help explain the widespread use of PCVs in everyday language, where they are often preferred as a means of conveying connoted meanings such as aggression, personal involvement in the event described, and even obscene or sexual undertones. As predominantly informal lexical items used in spontaneous communication, PCVs constitute a valuable expressive resource, as they allow speakers to encode evaluative and affective nuances directly within the verbal expression itself, thereby enriching the expressive repertoire available in everyday interaction.

3 The Experiment

3.1 Data

To assess the suitability of current large language models for lexicographic tasks, an experiment was conducted using data extracted from the GRADIT. The aim was to evaluate the performance of ChatGPT 5.2 in the translation of usage examples. It was hoped that the candidate translation would provide a valuable starting point for identifying appropriate cross-linguistic correspondences and enriching bilingual dictionary entries.

The analysis was based on a dataset of 160 Italian PCVs. The original inventory extracted from GRADIT was refined by excluding obsolete verbs and regional forms no longer widely used (e.g., *sbroccolarsela*). In addition, polysemous PCVs listed as subsenses in GRADIT were treated as separate lexical units and added to the list of lemmas. Five noteworthy lexemes that were not included in the dictionary (Russi, 2008), but are highly frequent in contemporary standard Italian (Berruto, 1987), such as *metterci* and *saperne*, were also added. Usage examples for these additional lemmas were retrieved from the ItTenTen20 corpus.

3.2 Translation Procedure

All examples were submitted to ChatGPT 5.2 with an explicit prompt not to alter, shorten, or reformulate the source text, and to provide both the original sentence and its English translation as output. The lexical items were presented in batches of fifty entries, organized in tabular form and marked with numerical identifiers. In several cases, multiple examples were available for the same PCV, making it possible to observe intra-lexical variation in the model’s

translation behaviour. The final dataset comprised 256 example sentences, corresponding to an average of 1.6 examples per lexical unit.

3.3 Analysis Procedure

Following Caruso (2025), each PCV was assigned to one of three major classes: deictic, anaphoric, or connotative-pragmatic. The two authors of the paper, a native speaker of Italian and a native speaker of English, served as expert annotators in evaluating the translations produced by ChatGPT. Given the subtle semantic and pragmatic nuances conveyed by many of the example sentences, as well as their often limited contextual information, the annotation process was conducted by consensus rather than through the calculation of inter-annotator agreement. In many cases, it proved difficult to determine whether the English translation fully preserved the semantic and pragmatic values of the source sentence or, conversely, introduced meanings absent in the original, as illustrated by the usage examples discussed below ([1]-[14]).

Consider, for instance, the examples in [1] and [2], where ChatGPT's translation is given. In [1], the English expression *to lose one's life/health* does not adequately convey the affective meaning encoded by the Italian *rimetterci la vita, la salute*, which is more effectively rendered by expressions such as *to pay for something with one's life/health*. Similarly, in [2], the translation *You're wrong if you think you can move me* has a predominantly descriptive value and fails to convey the reproachful attitude lexically encoded by the Italian expression *la sbagli se . . .*

1. *rimetterci la vita, la salute* → *to lose one's life, one's health* [stylistic error];
2. *la sbagli se pensi di commuovermi* → *You're wrong if you think you can move me* [pragmatic error].

Similar decisions concerning semantic values extending beyond the referential meaning of Italian PCVs had to be taken jointly by both annotators to ensure that the transfer from the source language to the target language adequately reflected the specific semantic and pragmatic properties of these lexical items. Given the features of PCVs discussed above, and in particular their ability to convey specific speech acts such as orders, reproaches, and threats, translation accuracy was assessed using four parameters: denotation, style, affect, and pragmatics.

Misinterpretations of the referential value of the source sentence were classified as denotative errors. Examples [3]–[6] illustrate this type of error; the expected translations are provided in square brackets.

3. *non ci va, è inutile provare* → *It won't work, there's no point in trying* [It **doesn't fit (in)**, there's no point in trying]
4. *Hai la macchina? Sì, ce l'ho.* → *Do you have a car? Yes, I do* [Do you have **the** car? Yes, I do]
5. *ti aspetto a cena, guarda che ci conto* → *I'll wait for you for dinner, I'm counting on it* [I'm expecting you for dinner, I'm counting **on you**]
6. *Carlo e Giacomo se le sono date per lei* → *Carlo and Giacomo **beat each other up** over her [fought, got into a fight, came to blows]*

Stylistic errors arise when translations fail to preserve the sociolinguistic and interactional cues encoded by the source expression (Coseriu, 1969; Cruse, 1986, pp. 283-285). A useful diagnostic consists in asking: “Who would use this expression?” and “In what context or situation would it be

appropriate?". In examples [78], the English translations preserve the propositional content of the Italian utterances but neutralize their stylistic and interpersonal meaning. Consequently, they fail to convey the familiarity with the interlocutor and the informal setting implied by the original expressions.

7. *le ho buscate da mio padre* → *I got beaten by my father* [My father gave me a beating]
8. *quello che dici non ci azzecca!* → *What you're saying has nothing to do with it!* [What you are saying doesn't make sense]

The affective dimension encompasses utterances that encode a heightened degree of speaker involvement (Cruse, 1986, pp. 275-278; Ježek, 2016, p.43). While this feature is most salient in the connotative-pragmatic PCVs discussed above, it is also observable in other PCV types, as illustrated in example [9-11]. A useful diagnostic is whether the following question can be answered positively: "*Does this utterance express a heightened degree of speaker involvement in the event or toward one of its participants?*".

9. Connotative-pragmatic PCV:
Perché non se ne restano a casa loro e cercano comunicare? → *Why don't they stay at home and try to communicate?* [Why don't they just stay at home where they belong and try and communicate?]
10. Idiomatic PCV:
Ho come l'impressione che Virtual DJ sia diventato un software obsoleto e non se lo fumi più nessuno → *I have the feeling that Virtual DJ has become obsolete software and that no one takes it seriously anymore* [I get the impression that Virtual DJ has become obsolete and nobody touches it anymore]
11. Deictic PCV:
ci hai azzeccato a scegliere la tua professione → *You made the right choice in picking your profession* [You chose the right professions, You were spot on . . . , You made a good call . . .]

As regards pragmatics, translations can be considered successful insofar as they preserve the illocutionary force of the source utterance. The relevant question is therefore whether the target sentence can be interpreted as the same speech act as the original (e.g. a request, a compliment, or a threat). In examples [12-14], however, this requirement is not fully met. Although the referential content of the Italian utterances is preserved with little difficulty, the translations reduce them to straightforward descriptive or locutionary acts. As a result, they fail to convey the illocutionary force of the compliment in [12], the directive force of the order in [14], and the threatening force associated with the interrogative utterance in [13].

12. Anaphoric PCV
Anna così magra ci guadagna → *Anna looks better being that thin* [Being that slim suits Anna]
13. Idiomatic PCV
ce l'hai con me? → *Have you got something against me?* ["Are you mad at me?" or "Do you have it in for me?"]
14. Connotative-pragmatic PCV
adesso è ora di finirla → *Now it's time to stop* [That's enough now/enough already]

4 Results and Discussion

The results reveal both the strengths and weaknesses of AI in the translation of PCVs. The overall translation accuracy rate of 82% (see Table 1) is relatively high. However, it means that approximately one in five examples were translated incorrectly—a significant problem for real-world lexicographic applications.

TABLE 1 Comparative overview of ChatGPT's translation accuracy by PCV type, illustrating the frequency of successful translations and error categories across the dataset (N = 1,024). The total number of observations derives from the evaluation of 256 usage examples across four assessment parameters

Type of error	Anaphoric PVCs	Deictic PVCs	Idiomatic PVCs	Pragmatic-affective PVCs	Total
none	238	280	191	129	838
stylistic	16	23	22	12	73
affective	11	20	18	10	59
denotative	8	12	5	2	27
pragmatic	7	5	12	3	27
Total	280	340	248	156	1024
none	85%	82%	77%	83%	82%
stylistic	6%	7%	9%	8%	7%
affective	4%	6%	7%	6%	6%
denotative	3%	4%	2%	1%	3%
pragmatic	3%	1%	5%	2%	3%

The main difficulties do not appear to depend primarily on the specific subclasses of PCVs identified above. Rather, they stem from a set of transversal properties across the different classes identified so far, especially the connotative dimension and the correct interpretation of performative values, or speech-act functions. To some extent, highly idiomatic [15] and strongly conventionalized [17] PCVs tend to receive successful translations, and the model is often able to preserve their connotative or emphatic meaning, see especially [16]. Greater challenges arise, however, when the translation requires the recognition and rendering of pragmatically loaded meanings, such as the benefactive values associated with connoted-pragmatic PCVs (Ježek, 2004; Masini, 2015; Russi, 2008, pp. 54–57), whose interpretation is highly context-sensitive. In such cases, translations may be lexically accurate yet pragmatically inadequate [18]. More generally, ChatGPT often struggles to reproduce the illocutionary and discourse-oriented functions encoded by PCVs, particularly when a high degree of idiomaticity is coupled with stylistic, affective, and pragmatic values (see Table 1). In such cases, translations tend to preserve the propositional content while failing to convey the intended pragmatic force [19].

15. dopo lunghe discussioni l'ho spuntata.

Lit.: After long discussions, I have blunted it.

After long discussions, I got my way

16. chi se ne frega?

Lit.: Who rubs himself about it?

Who gives a damn?

17. È ora di piantarla con queste sciocchezze.
 Lit.: It is time to plant it with these foolish things.
It's time to stop this nonsense.
18. Me ne vado al cinema.
 Lit.: I go myself away to the cinema.
 #I'm going to the cinema.
 =*I'm taking myself to the cinema.*
19. guarda come se la ride!
 Lit.: Look how he/she laughs it to himself/herself!
 ?Look at him, laughing it off!
 =*Look at him, having a good laugh!*

Similarly, when idiomaticity interacts with stylistic variation, affective meaning, or specialized pragmatic functions, ChatGPT's output may become problematic. In [20], the model fails to recover the intended speech-act value of the utterance: the original Italian sentence conveys a reproach directed at the addressee's reluctance to carry out his/her duties, whereas the translation incorrectly frames the complaint in terms of the effort required to complete the task.

20. ha finito il lavoro, ma ce n'è voluto! → *He finished the job, but it took a lot!* [He finished the job, but it took **him** long enough!]

In addition, the system shows an uneven ability to handle subtle semantic contrasts induced by clitic variation. In some cases, fine-grained distinctions are successfully captured, as with *ridersela* vs. *ridersene* ('laugh off' vs. 'scoff at'). However, literal translations are also produced with morphologically complex PCVs involving multiple clitics, such as *ridacchiarsela*, which is rendered as 'giggling to themselves', incorrectly interpreting the clitic cluster as a reflexive adjunct rather than as a lexicalized unit.

Weaknesses emerge in the translation of the more idiomatic senses of polysemous PCVs. This is the case, for instance, of *farla* referring either to defecation [21] or to playing a trick on someone [22], which ChatGPT renders through inappropriate collocations. This failure to account for metaphorical and idiomatic meanings is reminiscent of findings reported in previous studies on the use of ChatGPT in lexicography (cf. Jakubíček & Rundell, 2023). By contrast, ChatGPT performs well when the different senses of a polysemous PCV correspond to strongly conventionalised expressions in English, as in *andarsela a cercare*, which is appropriately rendered as *to bring it on oneself*, *to go looking for trouble*, or *to ask for it*.

21. l'ha fatta nel vater → *He did it in the toilet*
22. farla a un avversario → *to pull a trick on an opponent* [play a trick on/get the better of/to pull x off against an opponent]

Interestingly, ChatGPT often fails to capture the different degrees of intensification encoded by the Italian PCVs expressing INDIFFERENCE. The semantic domain is structured along a gradient of expressive intensity, ranging from the relatively neutral *importarsene* and the more affectively marked *stropicciarsene* to the progressively more vulgar *fottersene*, *sbattersene*, and *strafottersene*, examples from [23] to [29]. For this set of verbs, the tool provides appropriately graded translations only when the contrastive degrees of intensification are made explicit within the examples themselves, as in [27].

23. non me ne importa niente, la cosa mi è indifferente → *I don't care at all, it makes no difference to me*

24. me ne stropiccio di lui! → *I don't give a damn about him!*
25. non me ne fotte niente! → *I don't give a damn about it!*
26. me ne fotto di lui e delle sue prediche! → *I don't give a damn about him and his lectures!*
27. sbattersene l'anima, le palle, i coglioni → *to not give a damn at all/to not give a shit/to not give a fuck*
28. me ne strafotto del giudizio degli altri → *I really don't give a damn about other people's judgment*
29. strafottersene dei genitori → *to really not give a damn about one's parents.*

Overall, the findings confirm that, while ChatGPT 5.2 can produce reasonably idiomatic translations of PCVs under favourable conditions, it still struggles with their polysemy, pragmatic load and, in some cases, their morphological complexity. These results support the relevance of a fine-grained syntactic–semantic classification of PCVs not only for pedagogical lexicography, but also as a resource for improving AI-driven translation systems.

A worthwhile extension of this protocol would be to test other LLMs, particularly those more extensively trained on Italian, in order to identify any significant differences with respect to the translations examined so far. Furthermore, it would be particularly interesting to evaluate ChatGPT again by providing it with the translation guidelines derived from the present study, thereby assessing its ability to improve its performance through targeted prompting and instruction-based adaptation. Despite these avenues for further research, the translations of the example sentences collected so far and refined within the present discussion constitute a solid starting point for the development of a high-quality bilingual lexicographic resource covering the highly idiosyncratic class of PCVs.

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