

Modals between control and restructuring: What *si* makes us see

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We argue that Italian root modals, which have a dual nature, can be **control** verbs and **functional restructuring** verbs. Evidence comes from their interaction with **impersonal *si*-constructions**, which resist control and show that modals are transitives/unergatives in certain configurations.

Impersonal voice. Italian has two impersonal constructions with the clitic *si* (Cinque 1988), both come with the auxiliary *essere* ‘be’. The impersonal argument construction (***si*-Arg**) is active-like in that the internal argument is accusative (cliticizable). Impersonal voice (***si*-Voice**), which we focus on, is passive-like in that the internal argument agrees with T and is nominative (droppable); see (1). The crucial properties that identify *si*-Voice (as opposed to *si*-Arg) are (i) its **incompatibility with unaccusatives** and (ii) when embedded under *sembrare* ‘seem’, the **clitic *si*** in *si*-Voice surfaces in the **embedded clause**, rather than on *sembrare*; see (2).

- (1) Si sono trovate le ragazze. (2) Sembrano esser-si trovate le ragazze.
 SI be.3PL found.F.PL the girls seem.3PL be-SI found.F.PL the girls
 ‘People found the girls.’ ‘It seems that people found the girls.’

Uncontrollability. Control verbs cannot embed either type of *si*-construction (Cinque 1988). It is obvious that (overt) *si*, which is distinct from PRO, cannot be controlled. Example (3) shows that the internal argument of a transitive under *si*-Voice cannot be PRO either (unlike the internal argument in a passive) despite otherwise behaving like a subject (bears nominative, agrees with T); cf. nominative objects in Icelandic quirky subject constructions (Jónsson 1996).

- (3) * Le ragazze_i sperano di PRO_i esser-si trovate t_i.
 the girls hope to be-SI found.F.PL
Intended: ‘The girls hope that people found them.’

***Si*.** We analyze *si*-Voice as a functional head that selects an **active** vP (which captures its restriction to transitives and unergatives) and saturates its argument slot. The clitic *si* shows behavior that is in between a passive implicit argument and a DP: unlike DPs, it disallows reflexive/reciprocal binding, quantifier float, and sluicing (tests from Legate et al. 2020); unlike the passive implicit argument, it disallows *by*-phrases, and can control (examples omitted).

Modals. Certain root modal verbs in Italian show two types of behaviors, summarized in Table 1 (see also Cardinaletti & Shlonsky 2004, Amato 2024). We argue in favor of a distinction between **control** and **(functional) restructuring**, and against the hypothesis that these modals are invariably raising verbs distinguished only by the amount of structure they embed, by showing that Type 1 behavior cannot arise from a raising structure. (We set epistemic modals aside.)

Table 1	Type 1 (control)	Type 2 (restructuring)
Auxiliary	<i>avere</i> ‘have’	depends on the embedded verb
Clitic climbing	*	obligatory
Ellipsis of the infinitive	possible	*

First, if Type 1 behavior resulted from a raising syntax, both sentences in (4) should be grammatical; *si*-Voice (not *si*-Arg) is guaranteed by the auxiliary agreeing with the internal argument.

Sentence (4a) would be derived the same way as (2), with auxiliary ‘have’ as per Table 1 (auxiliary ‘be’ would be ungrammatical as well). The ungrammaticality of (4a) is instead explained if Type 1 is a control structure, where **si-Voice cannot be embedded** (uncontrollable). *Si*-Voice is only compatible with modals under Type 2 behavior, (4b), where *si* surfaces high and ellipsis of the infinitive would be ungrammatical. The auxiliary is ‘be’ because of the presence of *si*.

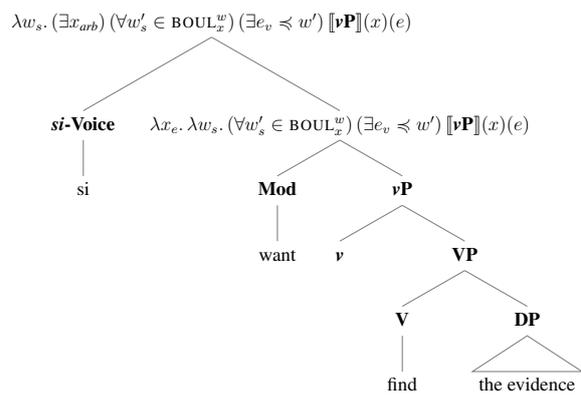
- (4) a. *Hanno dovuto / voluto trovar-si le ragazze.
 have.3PL must.PPT.M.SG want.PPT.M.SG find-SI the girls
 b. Si sono dovute / volute trovare le ragazze.
 SI be.3PL must.PPT.F.PL want.PPT.F.PL find the girls
 ‘People had/wanted to find the girls.’

Second, Type 1 behavior patterns with **transitives/unergatives** (5). The position of *si* under *sembrare* ‘seem’ unambiguously identifies *si*-Voice (see (2)), which is incompatible with unaccusatives. Since *arrivare* ‘arrive’ is unaccusative, the only verb that can host *si*-Voice is the modal, which then must be unergative/transitive, cannot be raising, and must be a control verb.

- (5) Sembra esser-si dovuto / voluto arrivare tardi.
 seem.3SG be-SI must.PPT.M.SG want.PPT.M.SG arrive late
 ‘It seems that people had/wanted to arrive late.’

Want. The fact that *volere* ‘want’ shows the same behavior as the deontic modal gives us a more precise insight into the structure underlying Type 2 behavior. *Volere* can be a restructuring verb (Cinque 2006), but it is semantically implausible for it to be a raising verb: as an attitude verb, it has to select an argument and make it the holder of a bouletic attitude. It is generally assumed that argument selection cannot happen via movement, which is confirmed by (4b): even though *volere* agrees with the internal argument *le ragazze* ‘the girls’, it cannot select the latter as its argument; the sentence can only be interpreted with an impersonal attitude holder. We propose that Type 2 *volere* (and by extension the other modals) is merged directly above the thematic domain of another (lexical) verb (cf. semi-lexical verbs in Cavirani-Pots 2020) and asserts that its attitude holder is also the external argument of

vP. A lexical entry is given in the tree below. Type 2 *volere* is thus a non-raising functional restructuring verb and *si*-Voice (as in (4b)) can merge with it directly, making *si* the bouletic attitude holder. We conclude that restructuring does not require raising and that it can be reconciled with control-like interpretations without special devices such as binding of incorporated variables (as in Grano 2015).



Not raising. We submit that the 6 arguments in favor of a raising analysis of Type 1 behavior in Amato (2024) are not conclusive. (i) Active-passive synonymy and (ii) the availability of inanimate subjects do not hold of *volere* ‘want’; *dovere* ‘must’ and *potere* ‘can’ pass these tests because they do not semantically manipulate their external argument: they are control verbs in that PRO receives the interpretation of their external argument. (iii) The unavailability of passive can be linked to passive implicit arguments being unable to act as controllers. (iv) Case retention relies on the controversial assumption that datives are subjects in Italian. (v) Narrow scope of the subject is demonstrated with examples that include another layer of modality. (vi) Wide scope of the object has been argued to be possible even in English control (e.g., Truswell

2013). Treating Type 1 behavior as raising fails to capture that *volere* shows the same syntactic behavior as the other two modals. Our approach allows for a unified treatment: the three verbs have the same syntax and *volere* is different from *dovere/potere* due to its semantics.

Conclusion. We argue that Italian root modal verbs lead one life as control verbs (Cardinaletti & Shlonsky 2004) and that they are never raising verbs, based on novel and otherwise unexplained data with *si*-Voice under such modals. We show that there is no semantic issue with extending the dual control/restructuring behavior to *volere* ‘want’ and conclude, more generally, that restructuring does not entail raising.

References

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