

Deriving the interpretations and constraints of Italian *si*-constructions: A new analysis and its consequences for a typology of Voice

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1.Introduction: Italian *si* constructions are a long-standing issue in generative syntax: like in other Romance languages, the clitic *si* is employed to obtain various readings (passive, impersonal, middle, ergative, and reflexive) with an apparently very similar structure, and has interesting properties with regard to Case, agreement, and sensitivity to aspect and finiteness (Burzio, 1986; Cinque, 1988; D'Alessandro, 2007 and many others).

- 1) Passive (*si*-pass): *Si sono letti molti libri* ('Many books were read')
- 2) Impersonal (*si*-imp): *Si è letto libri* ('One read books')
- 3) Middle (*si*-mid): *Questi libri si leggono facilmente* ('These books read easily')
- 4) Ergative (*si*-erg): *Il ramo si è spezzato* ('The branch broke')
- 5) Reflexive (*si*-refl): *Mario si è lavato* ('Mario washed himself')

This work aims to provide an account of what syntactic factors affect the availability of *si*'s potential interpretations: in particular, we focus on the features found on the internal argument (IA) of *si* constructions, and its structural position. The analysis we propose explains some asymmetries between (1) and (2-5) that have never received satisfactory solutions. Moreover, we show that *si* is not a non-active Voice head, unlike other languages' morphemes that exhibit a very similar kind of Voice syncretism.

2.The puzzle: The discussion is based on three main observations about constraints that *si*-pass shows and other *si*-constructions do not (Cinque, 1988; Pescarini, 2015; Dobrovie-Sorin, 2017, 2021; Giurgea, 2019):

- i. 1st/2nd person IAs are banned:
 - 6) **Mi sono invitato*. (**si*-pass: 'I was invited')
 - 7) *Mi sono svegliato*. (*si*-erg: 'I woke up')
- ii. The IA cannot move to Spec,TP despite receiving nominative Case and triggering verbal agreement, as revealed by Aux-to-C constructions, which isolate Spec,TP (Rizzi, 1982):
 - 8) *Essendosi* (**questi libri*) *letti* (*questi libri*)... (*si*-pass: 'These books having been read...')
 - 9) *Essendosi* (*Mario*) *svegliato* (*Mario*)... (*si*-erg: 'Mario having woken up...')
- iii. PRO as IA is banned:
 - 10) **Mario vuole PRO invitarsi*. (**si*-pass: 'Mario wants to be invited')
 - 11) *Mario vuole PRO svegliarsi*. (*si*-erg: 'Mario wants to wake up')

Focusing on the factors that previous literature has taken to determine what readings are possible for a given *si*-construction (i.e. the lexical semantics of the verbal root, the animacy of the IA, and aspect), we show that these cannot capture (i-iii). Moreover, we present some evidence from binding, control, and secondary predication that singles out *si*-pass and *si*-imp, i.e. the only two cases where we can find an agent theta-role which is not co-referential with the IA but has an arbitrary interpretation instead.

3.The proposal: We try to explain these facts while maintaining a unifying analysis for virtually all the constructions in (1-5), extending and modifying a proposal put forth by Roberts (2010), which did not consider (i-iii). Following Roberts (2010), we assume that, depending on whether *v*'s phi-features have been already valued or not, *si* merges with *v* as a maximal projection (deriving (2)) or a minimal projection (deriving (1, 3-5)), given the following basic structure: [TP T_(uPerson,uGender,uNumber) ... [_{vP} *si* *v*_(uGender,uNumber) [_{VP} V IA]]].

If *si* is first merged as a maximal projection, it is a genuine external argument (EA) and agrees with T, receiving nominative and cliticising on T. In this case, only the impersonal interpretation is available, so *si* necessarily has arbitrary reference and gets whatever external theta-role the verb assigns. This is a consequence of the requirement for arguments to have phi-

features/be referential (Longobardi, 1994). For this reason, *si* has [Person: arb] and triggers default third-person agreement on the verb, regardless of the features on the IA.

If *si* is merged as a minimal projection, i.e. directly cliticises on *v* by valuing its features, it does not need to have a full set of phi-features/be referential; therefore, there are two possibilities.

- If *si* has [Person: arb], the *si*-pass interpretation is obtained. Not only can this explain the binding, control, and secondary predication facts, but it also has some more consequences, including (i-iii): since *v* lacks [uPerson], *si*'s [Person: arb] feature remains active after its cliticisation and creates an intervention configuration for [Person] agreement between T and the IA. So, T's [uPerson] is valued by *si* while its [uGender, uNumber] are valued by the IA. Consequently, only IAs that lack [Person] altogether (i.e. 3rd person DPs) are admitted (cf. Giurgea, 2019 for Romanian). At the same time, the IA cannot move to Spec,TP as a consequence of the argumental status of *si* (since the *arb* value makes it referential and not a variable), which then qualifies as an intervener for A-movement in terms of locality. For the same reason, when the IA is PRO, it cannot move across *si* and cannot enter the control relation.
- If *si* does not have [Person:arb], the ergative, middle, and reflexive interpretations are available, thanks to the presence of a variable in *si*'s Logical Form. In *si*-erg, *si* is expletive due to the lexical semantics of the verb, which does not assign an external theta-role; in *si*-mid, *si*'s reference is determined by a GEN operator introduced by a T projection; in *si*-ref, *si*'s reference is determined via binding. In all of these cases, *v/si* retains both accusative Case and the external theta-role, so the IA receives nominative and triggers verb agreement, and nothing prevents it from moving to Spec,TP.

4. Consequences and conclusion: This analysis shows that an intervention configuration created by a [Person:arb] feature on *si* is the key to the peculiarities of *si*-pass and explains in a straightforward fashion a number of contrasts that had never received a comprehensive account. Moreover, it correctly predicts that the EA can never be realised in *si*-constructions, not even as a PP/by-phrase, because the EA position is no longer available after *si* merges. Consequently, *si* cannot be analysed as (non-active) Voice, like it has been proposed for other languages' morphemes that exhibit a similar kind of syncretism (e.g. Latin, Modern Greek, Albanian, see Kallulli, 2021; Kallulli & Roberts, 2022): these languages lack the constraints found on *si* and all allow the EA to be realised as a PP.

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