

The Substance and Value of Italian Si

Joseph Davis

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The Substance and Value of Italian *Si*

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by Joseph Davis

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Foreword

Three intellectual reactions are liable to occur when one looks at all closely into the behavior of the Italian clitic *si* in discourse: skepticism, surprise, and satisfaction.

Skepticism because we think we know already about *si* and have nothing more to learn. Oh, we think, *si* is the impersonal and reflexive clitic. It is translated either as 'one' or as 'himself, herself, itself, themselves.' If pressed, we are likely to concede that that is a bit of a simplification: Impersonal *si* is at times indistinguishable from the passive voice. Reflexive *si*, as any reader of Italian knows, is quite often interpreted as an intransitive or a passive. Too, other forms can be used impersonally, and other forms can be used reflexively. And there are many lexical idiosyncracies. But that's the nature of language: it's messy.

Surprise because, once we look at all closely, we find that the problems posed by little *si* are so big. It does seem that, the smaller a linguistic element, the more can be said about it. For instance, while there may be few purely synchronic linguistic treatises on the English morpheme *hickory*, there are many on the *-s* suffix of the verb. And surely there are many more serious linguistic works that concentrate on that smallest linguistic element, the unseen and unheard hypothetical entity known as null or trace or zero.

Such a paradox presented itself in the preparation of this book. The Italian clitic *si* is very small indeed, but there is much to say about it. Each chapter of this book could easily have been expanded into a book of its own. Such further detailed work ought surely to be undertaken. But to do so here would have compromised each of those analyses, because each would have suffered from the failure to present the full picture of *si*. This book represents an attempt to lay out the full picture of *si*.

The third intellectual reaction – if the reactions occur sequentially – ought to be satisfaction. It is satisfying to make order out of chaos, to impose simplicity where there was complexity. And it is satisfying, ultimately, to settle on a position that feels moderate, somewhere between the competing thrills of theoretical extremes. For, in linguistics, the theoretical positions truly are divergent, ranging all the way from:

- Mere accidental facts of usage reveal nothing about the underlying human language faculty. The pragmatic demands of communication, which vary so much by occasion and by speech community, must be kept separate from the universal and innate language endowment of the species.

to:

- Knowledge of the facts of usage is the only linguistic knowledge that speakers have. There is no structure beyond the ever-changing statistics that emerge from usage.

Both of those are exciting positions, and research along both lines has suggested intriguing possibilities about human language. Nevertheless, it is worth considering whether linguistic investigation might not profitably parallel, to some extent, scholarly investigation in other fields. In other fields, to a large extent, the analysis of experiential phenomena leads to hypotheses about the essential nature of the thing. Real-world data are taken to be evidence that might support or disconfirm a hypothesis about structure. To be sure, such empirical investigation can often lead to erroneous conclusions, but it does appear to have proven itself a productive way to learn about our world.

The overall impression that emerges here from the analysis of the distribution of the Italian clitic *si* in discourse is surprising but, I hope, satisfying. It turns out that the great versatility displayed by *si* results from something close to semantic vacuity. An extremely simple underlying structure is responsible for the initially bewildering complexity of *si*, its presence in a great variety of sentence types and sentence parts: impersonal, passive, and reflexive; subject and predicate; direct and indirect object. This book will advance the claim that *si* does have a constant meaning – *si* is not a meaningless syntactic marker – but its meaning is quite meager. *Si* is not a semantically rich lexical item capable of distinguishing, say, *hickory* from *pecan*, or even distinguishing masculine from feminine, singular from plural, or agent from patient. *Si* does make an important contribution to communication, but one that leaves room for a great deal of contextual inference. In the case of *si*, the gap between what is linguistically encoded and what is pragmatically communicated – a gap that is always present in language use – is especially wide.

This investigation of the distribution of *si* in discourse will inevitably involve consideration of the properties of other linguistic forms as well. *Si* will need to be seen in terms of the properties it shares with them and the properties that distinguish it from them. And so the analysis will to some extent be a bird's-eye view of the entire pronominal clitic system of Italian. But the center of analytical interest here will remain *si*; other linguistic elements, particularly the other clitics and the finite verb endings, are brought in only in order to facilitate the formation of a hypothesis about *si*.

Much scholarly research – from specifically Italian to generally Romance to indeed the universal – has been directed at *si*, and selected relevant findings will be brought in throughout this book as appropriate. However, unlike many linguistic analyses, this one will not begin with a review of that literature and then build upon it or criticize points of it. That decision was made out of necessity: The school of thought that has most influenced this analysis, the Columbia School, has so thoroughly rejected canonical categories of linguistics (such as *sentence*, *subject*, *pronoun*, *reflexive*, *dative*) as to render any point-by-point comparison of treatments utterly unwieldy (Diver 1995/2012). To do justice to those points, so numerous and each so thoroughly studied elsewhere, would quickly overwhelm the analysis offered here. The proper place to confront Columbia School linguistics with other schools of thought – such as formal linguistics, Cognitive Grammar, or usage-based linguistics – is not at the level of details but at the most fundamental level, and that has been done elsewhere (e.g., Tobin 1987, Contini-Morava 1995, Otheguy 2002, Kirsner 2004, Langacker 2004, Huffman 2012, Butler and González-García 2014).

Briefly, and for the benefit of readers unfamiliar with Columbia School: The goal in Columbia School has been to account for the observed distribution in discourse of linguistic forms. Typically, those forms are posited to be signals of meanings that language-users employ intelligently in order to communicate. The meanings posited are language-specific and noncanonical; they are not assumed to be universal or logic-based.

Because, as must be true for any linguistic element, the data coverage does not naturally constrain itself – *si* is found across the centuries, in many different places, and in the linguistic behavior of nearly infinitely varied language-users – the data coverage must be imposed by the analyst. One way to do that – not adopted here – would be to restrict coverage to a particular corpus, intended or not to be representative of some body of usage. For reasons that are completely irrelevant to the goal of linguistic theory-building, I got interested years ago in twentieth-century Italian literature, and so I use that body of discourse as my base. There, one does find some degree of linguistic heterogeneity vis-à-vis *si*, but not much, nothing beyond what is widely held to reflect regional differences, not so much variation as to preclude hypothesis-formation. Then the matter of how far one can expand the data coverage becomes an empirical question. No pretense is made here that the conclusions arrived at hold for, say, attested medieval legal testimony in Rome, or for the current colloquial speech of teenagers on the streets of Milan, or for acceptability judgements made by native speakers of the standard variety in experimental settings. How far into twenty-first-century colloquial speech do the conclusions hold? How far into internet writing? We can only let the data and the analysis guide us. The hypothesis covers the data as far as it covers the data; at some point, it will

stop. Unless one is interested only in linguistic universals, then one fully expects one's linguistic analysis to be limited in applicability.

Still, there remains the possibility that a modest analysis of Italian *si*, plus one of English *-s*, plus one of Japanese *wa*, plus one of Swahili *li*, can contribute to our overall understanding of the nature of grammar. This is one contribution.

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What is *si*?

A. A disconnect between category and use

The Italian clitic *si* is identified in dictionaries, traditional treatments, and much linguistic scholarship as the reflexive pronoun of the third person:¹ *Egli si ferì* ‘He hurt himself.’ In authentic discourse, however, Italian *si* rarely translates into English as a reflexive *-self* pronoun. For example, in Chapter 1 of Lampedusa’s novel *Il gattopardo* (1958), only seven (3%) of the 213 tokens of verbs with *si* are actually rendered as reflexives in a published translation, *The Leopard* (Colquhoun 1960). Instead, about half are rendered as intransitives. Table 1.1 gives the distribution (with arrows highlighting the relatively low ranking of reflexive translations).²

A separate text confirms this overall pattern (though the details are different). In Part One, Chapter 5, of Moravia’s *La romana* (1949/1965), again about half of the tokens of verbs with *si* are rendered as intransitives in a published translation, *The Woman of Rome* (Holland 1973); only about one out of eight tokens gets translated as a reflexive.³

This discrepancy between grammatical label and actual usage calls into question the advisability of categorizing *si* as a reflexive pronoun. Of course, if a linguistic system is, per Saussure (1916/1972: 25), a principle of classification unto itself, then cross-linguistic comparisons such as this cannot reveal an element’s grammatical status; they can only raise doubts. This book will make the case, by means of a linguistic analysis of Italian discourse data, that *si* is best understood in a very different way than as a reflexive. By and large, the data for the analysis will come from authentic texts, from both published and internet sources. Examples cited will typically be richly contextualized.

1. For this traditional label, as well as for other categories covered later in this chapter and throughout the present study, see, e.g., Cordin (1991: 593), Lepschy and Lepschy (1988: 220), Russi (2008: 51), Collins Sansoni, Sansoni, and Wanner (1987b).

2. Percentages do not add to 100 due to rounding.

3. Actual numbers: intransitive 23, passive 3, transitive 5, not represented 1, possessive 0, reflexive 6, noun 0, impersonal 6, miscellaneous 5; $n = 49$. Note: Lampedusa is a third-person narrative; Moravia is first-person and so may be expected to have fewer tokens of *si*.

Table 1.1 Rendering of Italian *si* in English translation
Chapter 1 of Lampedusa's *Il Gattopardo* (transl. Colquhoun)

Structural description of English translation	Number of tokens of <i>si</i>	Percentage	
intransitive	114	54	
passive	19	9	
transitive	19	9	
not represented	17	8	
possessive	12	6	
⇒ reflexive	7	3	←
noun	4	2	
impersonal	2	1	
miscellaneous	19	9	
	213	100	

The essence of the analysis is that *si* is a member of a network of grammatical oppositions comprising most of the clitics. *Si*, functioning as a kind of surrogate for certain of them, represents a language-user's *opting out* of distinctions that other clitics make: distinctions in gender, number, and role in the event. In a manner of speaking, what *si* says is, "You do not need information about gender, number, or role; either you have it already, or it is irrelevant." To put it somewhat more technically, *si* encodes less information than most of the other clitics, and that fact evidently has an effect on interpretation. Exactly what effect *si* has in a given instance depends partly on what alternatives to *si* exist in the grammatical system to be developed in this study: Does this particular token of *si* appear here in the text instead of (in opposition to) an accusative clitic that encodes gender and number (*lo, la, li, le* 'him, her, it, them')? or instead of a dative clitic that encodes number (*loro* 'them') or gender and number (*gli, le* 'him, her, it')? or instead of a nominative that signals biological sex and number (*egli* 'he') or some other explicit subject (e.g., *quella donna* 'that woman')? The effect of *si* depends too on other elements in the context: What is the verb? Who is doing what? What expectations has the larger context set up? In addition to answering these questions, the analysis will also offer a hypothesis that semantically: compares *si* with the clitics of the other grammatical persons, *mi, ti, ci, vi*; and distinguishes *si* from the only other third-person clitic that does not signal gender, number, or the dative-accusative case distinction: *ne*, traditionally called the partitive pronoun ('of him, her, it, them').

B. The traditional distinction *transitive/intransitive*, and an alternative view

a. The traditional distinction *transitive/intransitive*

Overwhelmingly, the most common translation of an Italian verb with *si* is as an English intransitive verb.⁴ Over half (54%) of the tokens of *si*-verbs in Lampedusa's chapter are rendered as intransitives in English (Table 1.1). That is, in over half of the instances, *si* is not only *not* rendered as a reflexive with *-self*, it is not overtly expressed at all. In the translation of Example (1.1), below, a blank in square brackets indicates a place where the published translator used no linguistic form in English at all – particularly, not *himself* – to render an instance of Italian *si*.

- (1.1) Bencidò ... *si* ritrasse nauseato e *si* affrettò a cercare sensazioni più salubri
 (LG 8)⁵
 Bencidò ... drew [] back in disgust and hurried [] off in search of healthier
 sensations (Colq. 18)

This observation quantifies the impression that any English-speaking reader of Italian gets: that *si* in Italian is nearly ubiquitous, whereas the *-self* pronouns in English are relatively few and far between.

This observation by itself does not by any means establish the grammatical status of *si*; specifically, *si* is not the marker of an intransitive in Italian. There are intransitives in Italian with no clitics and indeed no objects at all: *Sorrise* (LG 34) 'He smiled' (Colq. 53). But the observation that *si* is so seldom translated as an English reflexive and is in fact usually translated as an intransitive does suggest that the true grammatical status of *si* has been missed, both by traditional grammarians and by linguists who rely upon the syntactic category of reflexive.

The same, regarding transitivity, could be said of the clitics of the first and second persons: *mi* 'me,' *ti* 'you-SG,' *ci* 'us,' and *vi* 'you-PL.'

- (Io) *mi* ritrassi.
 I drew [] back.

These clitics, however, are not always coreferential with the subject, and so they must be grammatically distinguished from *si* in that respect. See Chapters 3, 4, and 6 for more on the status of the clitics of the other persons.

4. Without giving frequency, Cordin (1991:101) notes that one of the categories of *si* is as a 'simple sign of the intransitivity of the verb' for verbs that have both transitive and intransitive uses (ergatives).

5. Throughout, abbreviations, such as "LG," will be used for frequently cited sources of examples. See Sources of data, with abbreviations.

The sheer preponderance of intransitive translations suggests that, in its essence, Italian *si* is doing something other than prompting the interpretation that an agent is acting upon himself, and that the reflexive interpretation is merely one possible result of the actual semantic contribution of *si*. The aim of this book is to specify the grammatical status of *si* and to identify its semantic contribution in discourse.⁶

Whatever one's theoretical platform in linguistics, one thing that can perhaps without controversy be said about intransitives is that, unlike transitives, they do not make an explicit distinction among participant (or thematic) roles. Most strikingly, they do not distinguish agent (performer of the action) and patient (sufferer of the action). Consider first a transitive in English:

The gardener changes the flowers every season.
 = agent = patient

Transitive: The gardener (agent) makes the change; the flowers (patient) undergo the change. Most likely interpretation: The gardener uproots old flowers and plants new flowers.

Or, also transitive:

The flowers change the gardener every season.
 = agent = patient

The flowers (agent) make the change; the gardener (patient) undergoes the change. Perhaps the flowers make the gardener alternately hopeful, exuberant, pensive, etc.

Consider now an intransitive:

The gardener changes every season.

It is unstated who or what makes the change, that is, who or what is most responsible for the change. Perhaps the gardener is most responsible and willingly changes clothes or appearance or mood. Or perhaps one gardener decides to quit the job and another gardener comes in. Or, instead, perhaps the owner of the property fires the gardener; that is, the owner changes gardeners. Or the flowers change the gardener's mood. And so forth. The grammar and lexicon tell us here only that there is an event of changing and that a gardener somehow participates in it.

Another intransitive:

The flowers change every season.

6. The approach taken in this chapter to the problem of *si*, namely the approach through translation, is merely a presentational tactic; it was not the origin of the analysis, nor does the analysis crucially depend upon translation. The use of published translation may, however, have actual linguistic value in demonstrating various communicative effects, as claimed in Kirsner (2014: 52–53).

Again, it is unstated who or what is most responsible for the change: the gardener, the owner, the weather? There is a change, and flowers somehow participate in it.

b. An alternative view: Introduction to Columbia School

Concerning such examples, Diver, Davis, and Reid (2012) offer an analysis in the Columbia School framework (more about which just below). Diver, Davis, and Reid do not subscribe to the traditional grammatical terms *transitive*, *noun*, and *verb*. And instead of appealing to canonical roles (agent and patient), they hypothesize that the relative positions of certain words (e.g., *gardener*, *change*, *flowers*, above) function as *signals* with relative *meanings* within a *semantic domain* they call Degree of Control. (A hypothesis of Degree of Control for Italian will be developed in Chapter 4.) Degree of Control has to do with the relative responsibility that each participant has for an event's occurrence. For two-participant examples such as those treated here, the entire domain of Degree of Control is exhaustively divided, by hypothesis, into two meanings, HIGHER and LOWER.⁷ So in *The gardener changes the flowers*, the gardener exercises HIGHER Control over the change and the flowers exercise LOWER Control. The reverse is true in *The flowers change the gardener*. Degree of Control in this account, however, is more than just a switch in terminology for the traditional agent-patient distinction; Degree of Control is not absolute but relative and so continues to obtain even when the roles played are not straightforwardly those of agent and patient:

The owner changes the flowers. (He orders the gardener to replant.)
The weather changes the flowers. (It causes them to bloom, flourish, fade, etc.)
The gardener changes the landscaping. (With new flowers, trees, statuary, etc.)
The flowers change hues. (They exhibit a range of color.)

By contrast, the English intransitive construction does not distinguish Degree of Control at all but instead leaves a participant's responsibility for an event completely up to inference:

As for landscaping, the owner changes at will; you never know what you'll see here.
The gardener changes whenever he gets dirty.
The weather changes throughout the year.
The landscaping changes at the owner's whim.
The flowers change for every major holiday.
With these flowers, the hues change daily, it seems.

7. The Columbia School convention of using all capital letters for formally hypothesized meanings is here adopted.

Thus, with English intransitives, language-users *opt out*, so to speak, of distinguishing case roles; intransitives *neutralize* case distinctions.

This property of neutralization resembles the relevant grammatical property of Italian *si*: Unlike most other pronouns that accompany a verb, *si* “opts out,” so to speak, of distinguishing nominative, dative, and accusative case. The form *egli* ‘he’ is unambiguously nominative.⁸ The clitics *gli* ‘him/it’ and *le* ‘her/it’, and enclitic *loro* ‘them,’ are unambiguously dative. And the clitics *lo* ‘him/it,’ *la* ‘her/it,’ *li* ‘them-masc.’ and *le* ‘them-fem.’ are unambiguously accusative. But *si* remains *si*, regardless of case role. The following series illustrates how the other personal pronouns vary in form according to case role, while *si* does not.

Personal pronouns

Egli cambia sempre.

He-NOM. changes always

‘He always changes.’

Anna *gli* cambia il pannolino.

Anna *him*-DAT. changes the diaper

‘Anna changes his diaper (for him).’

I pantaloni? Anna *li* cambia sempre.

The pants? Anna *them*-ACC. changes always

‘Pants? Anna’s always changing them.’

Si

Si cambia sempre.

Si changes always

‘One always changes.’

Anna *si* cambia la camicia.

Anna *si* changes the shirt

‘Anna changes her [own] shirt.’

A volte Michele *si* cambia in un diavolo.

At times Michele *si* changes into a devil

‘At times Michele turns/changes (himself) into a devil.’

I fiori *si* cambiano.

The flowers *si* change

‘The flowers change.’

8. As is widely noted, *egli* ‘he’ appears almost exclusively in writing, very rarely in speech. Most writers do not use the nominative *ella* ‘she.’ The disjunctives *lui* ‘he/him’ and *lei* ‘she/her,’ both common in speech and writing, will figure indirectly in this analysis; see Davis (1992).

The pronouns *egli*, *gli/le*, *lo/la/li/le* vary according to case roles; *si* does not.

The systematic grammatical nature of *si* – its relative dearth of encoded *meaning* – is in fact responsible for the contribution that *si* makes to a gestalt communicated *message* in a particular instance. That is, because *si* encodes so little communicative information, *si* is free to be interpreted in a wide variety of ways. In a particular instance, in context with other meaningful forms – such as *cambia* ‘changes,’ *sempre* ‘always,’ *camicia* ‘shirt,’ *in* ‘in(to),’ *diavolo* ‘devil,’ *fiori* ‘flowers’ – plus even forms in the wider discourse than the sentence, the reader might infer that the referent of *si* plays one or more of a great variety of roles, such as – to mention just a few – willful agent, unwilling experiencer, owner of a piece of clothing or body part, or even a personality exhibiting some sort of mental disorder. None of these particulars comes directly from *si*.

The distinction between *meaning* and *message* is a crucial one in Columbia School linguistics. This is a good place, therefore, to spell out some basic principles of the school of thought, as these will be needed throughout the present work.

The goal for a Columbia School grammatical analyst is to account for his observation of the distribution of linguistic forms in discourse. Typically, this entails positing *signals* (cf. Saussure’s *signifiants*) that encode *meanings* (cf. *signifiés*). Speakers and writers combine signaled grammatical meanings and the semantic content of lexical items in context in order to communicate a *message* that develops as discourse proceeds. *Message* in Columbia School, then, is the holistic communication that a writer or speaker conveys through a combination of signaled *meanings* in context. Listeners and readers attempt, with more or less success, to identify those meaningful signals and to use the semantic hints that they furnish in the complex inference of an intended communication. For his part, the analyst attempts to identify the signals and meanings through an examination of their observed distribution in discourse. That is, the *hypotheses* consist of signals and meanings. For a complete statement of the Columbia School position, see Diver (1995/2012).

While encoded semantic content is probably best thought of as always being relational (in the Saussurean sense that, in a language-user’s repertoire, *tout se tient*), sometimes it is tightly organized into what Columbia School calls a *grammatical system*. In this situation, a particular semantic *substance* or *domain* is exhaustively divided into grammatical *meanings*, each with a *value* relative to the other meanings in the system, and each with its grammatical *signal*. For instance, in the treatment by Diver, Davis, and Reid (2012) above, in English a semantic substance called Degree of Control is exhaustively divided into the relative grammatical meanings HIGHER and LOWER, each signaled by position of words relative to the verb (before or after). In Italian, in the analysis to come in Chapter 3 of this book, a semantic substance called Focus on Participants is exhaustively divided into the relative grammatical meanings CENTRAL, PERIPHERAL, and OUTER, each signaled

by morphology: *egli* ‘he,’ *gli/lo* ‘him,’ *ne* ‘of him.’ Other semantic substances that have been proposed by Columbia School grammatical analysts include Number, Sex, Time, and Probability. For commentary on the need for both substance and value in Columbia School, see Davis (2016b).

Most Columbia School work, like the present study, has concerned such tightly organized grammatical systems. Less work has been done on what appears to be the more loosely organized elements called *lexicon*. Representatives of studies on lexicon include De Jonge (1993), Crupi (2006), and Sabar (2016).⁹

To illuminate the distinction between *meaning* and *message*, an illustration may be helpful, but the illustration will require the use of several provisional hypotheses about linguistic forms and their meanings, beyond the scope of the present work. Some, but not all, of these hypotheses will be developed at length in the present work.

A speaker may wish to communicate, in a particular context about a boy named Nino, a message something to the effect that Nino respects a man named Michele; that is, that Nino, for whatever reason – perhaps but not necessarily deliberately – has adopted an attitude of respect vis-à-vis Michele. The speaker, within that wider context, might produce the utterance:

Lo stima.
Him-ACC. respect-3-SG
‘He respects him.’

The speaker has selected a form, *stim*, whose inherent semantic content – let us for the sake of the presentation label this content RESPECT – can pretty accurately get across the speaker’s idea of the attitude involved. The speaker has also selected the form *-a* and attached it to the end of *stim* in order to make it clear that the speaker is not talking about himself (cf. *stimo*) or about the listener (cf. *stimi*) in regard to this attitude of respect. The form *-a* is a good choice for this task because (by hypothesis, again for the sake of the presentation) *-a* in this position is a *signal* of the two “interlocked” meanings NUMBER ONE and THE FOCUS OF THIS EVENT IS NOT ON THE SPEAKER OR THE HEARER.¹⁰ A plausible inference is that the reference

9. Some Columbia School work has also been done on phonology. For work by Diver, see Huffman and Davis, eds., (2012); see also Tobin (1997) and Davis (2006b).

10. Plus perhaps other meanings, including quite possibly meanings corresponding to the traditional distinctions of tense and mood. This work, however, will not systematically attempt an analysis of the Italian verb endings. I am grateful to an anonymous reader for the proposed formulation of the Focus meaning of the Italian verb ending. The term *interlock* will be treated further in later chapters; for now, it can be thought of as essentially what has been known as a *portmanteau* morpheme, incorporating several grammatical oppositions simultaneously.

is to Nino in this case. And the speaker has selected the form *lo* and positioned it immediately before *stima* in order to specify that an additional participant, Michele in this case, is involved in the feeling of respect, but involved in a different way than Nino: Michele, though perhaps not entirely indifferent to Nino, is less responsible than Nino for Nino's attitude of respect. The form *lo* is a good choice for this task because *lo* in this position is a signal of the complex of meanings Number ONE (cf. *li* 'them'), Gender MASCULINE (cf. *la* 'her, it'), FOCUS INNER (cf. *ne* 'of him/her/it/them,' thus with even less involvement) and Degree of Control LOW (cf. *gli* 'to/for him').¹¹ In sum, the speaker has used linguistic forms whose individual meanings should, in combination and in context, allow him to communicate the holistic message he wishes to communicate on this occasion.

To take now the perspective of the listener: The listener must attempt to identify the signals in the speaker's utterance and use their meanings in order to construct, by inference, a plausible message in this context. So the listener hears something that can be represented as:

[lostima]

Of course, a phonetic stretch can be broken down into infinitely smaller phonetic stretches, but let us jump right in somewhere near what turn out to be the meaningful morphological boundaries. Upon hearing [lo], the hearer must decide whether this is: the beginning of a larger linguistic form (such as *loc* 'let, rent out'); an instance of what is traditionally called the definite article (as in *lo stivale* 'the boot'); or – the correct decision in this case – an instance of *lo*, the signal of the interlocked meanings Number ONE, Gender MASCULINE, FOCUS INNER, Degree of Control LOW. Context both near and far will help the listener make this decision. Similarly, the listener should eventually recognize *stima* as the complex of forms detailed above. All this is still not much for the listener to go on if he is to infer more or less accurately the message that the speakers intends. The listener still must decide, for instance, *who* respects the 'him' or 'it': Nino (not, say, Michele, or Nino's father). The listener must decide *whom* or *what* Nino respects: Michele (not say, Nino's father, or *il podere* 'the farm'). The listener might also factor into his interpretation information gleaned from the wider context, such as some understanding of how Michele has earned that respect, and so to what degree Michele is responsible for the respect;

11. Although the formalisms here of "Gender," "MASCULINE," and "FEMININE" indicate that these are here taken to be a semantic substance divided in Italian into two meanings, that must be understood as an extremely provisional working hypothesis. In fact, no analysis of grammatical gender is attempted here, and no effort is made to define those terms as they apply – if indeed they do – to the grammar. For suggestive Columbia School work on grammatical gender, see Diver (1970/2012: 251–255), Zubin and Köpke (1981), and Otheguy and Stern (2000).

to what degree Nino has adopted this position deliberately or consciously; whether the respect is relatively fleeting or permanent; and so forth.

Thus there exists a large but bridgeable “gap” (Davis 2004b) between the sparse signaled *meanings* and the holistic inferred *message*. The analyst must not confuse the one with the other. Once the analyst has more or less understood the message, he has not necessarily identified the meanings, which is his analytical goal. No doubt too, there will be a gap between the message intended by the speaker and the message inferred by the listener, though this will be small in a relatively successful act of communication. The analyst, of course, does not have direct access to either language-user’s mental state. The analyst can only rely on some large body of data in his effort to formulate some hypothesis as to what the signals and their meanings are.

The recognition of a gap between meaning and message notwithstanding, it is entirely possible that a certain signaled *meaning* in a certain utterance will contribute fairly straightforwardly to the *message* inferred. For instance, in the utterance *Lo stima*, the gap would, to be sure, seem quite large between the meaning LOW Degree of Control and the inferences that Michele might be quite ignorant of Nino’s respect, might have done very little to earn that respect, might in fact be a very different sort of person from the image that Nino has of Michele (all of which are themselves maybe more robust ways of saying simplistically that Michele plays the role of *patient*). Yet, on the other hand, the gap is quite small, relatively, between the meaning NUMBER ONE and the inference that the object of Nino’s respect is unitary. To justify applicability of the meaning LOW Degree of Control in this instance, the analyst might need to do a considerable amount of work to articulate how the meaning contributes to the inference, while to justify the applicability of the meaning NUMBER ONE the analyst might have a relatively easier time of it. In other words, there is variation in the degree of resemblance between our statement of a meaning – our hypothesis – and our renderings of messages. Our names for postulated meanings sometimes look quite different from our discussion of the larger communication, but they sometimes look quite similar. Whether the gap in a particular instance be large or small, it is taken in Columbia School to be the case that in general the meanings do *contribute* to the messages inferred.¹² Therefore, while the two constructs of *meaning* and *message* should not be confused, it is nevertheless quite legitimate for the analyst to speak of a given

12. On the “contributory” (or “instrumental”) nature of linguistic meaning, see Reid (1991: 8, 40), Contini-Morava (1995: 5–6), and Huffman (1997: 16–19). The position taken here on the relative transparency of a meaning’s contribution to message resembles a distinction made earlier in Columbia School between “direct” and “indirect strategies” (Diver 1975/2012: 56–59).

meaning being present in, or part of, a given message, for indeed it is. For instance, just as the analyst may find it useful, in discussing the inference of *message* from the contextualized utterance *Lo stima*, to say that “Nino respects one man,” so the analyst may find it useful to say that “Michele has a low degree of control over the respect, relative to Nino.” As a formalism, the Columbia School analyst, including the present writer throughout this work, is careful to employ small capitals (e.g., ONE, LOW) to refer to technical hypothesized meanings and normal type (e.g., one, ignorant) when articulating, less technically, some approximation of the message to be inferred. Still, because Columbia School meanings in general are, in fact, *meanings* and not mere formal constructs (such as are commonplace in formal syntax), and because sometimes the connection between meaning and message is relatively straightforward, this distinction is on occasion not absolutely clear. One analyst might write “ONE,” and another analyst might write “one.”

Diver explains the *meaning-message* distinction this way:

[T]he meanings are no more than a collection of hints offered by the speaker, on the basis of which the hearer makes a guess at the message intended. The guess may be either right or wrong [though, it might be added, consistent with the following, there is not even a simple dichotomy between right and wrong – jd], and the attempt at communication proceeds from there. The success of the communication thus depends to a large extent on the speaker’s ability to assess how much knowledge the hearer already has concerning the intended message, and what hints should be selected for successful transmission of the new material.

...

The message that results from the collection of hints bears considerable resemblance to a vector resultant, where there have been a number of different forces involved as input (the various morphemes in the utterance), and the output produced in the message as a whole is not identical with any of the inputs. In consequence, there is often relatively little correspondence between any components of the complete thought, or message, and the meanings of the individual morphemes involved. (Diver 1995/2012: 479)

The position taken in this book is that the grammatical properties of *si* – its complex of *meanings*, both signaled and systematically not signaled – are responsible for its distribution in discourse (and so for the pattern seen in Table 1.1), and that the meanings contribute to the messages that are inferable from the stretches of discourse in which *si* is present. The principle burden of the work will be to validate the postulation of those grammatical properties, and that task will entail, *inter alia*, the articulation of how the postulated meanings plausibly contribute to the communication in observed instances of *si*.

The validation, then, is pursued essentially along these lines:

1. For every token of *si*, we ask, “Why is *si* here?” This is the distributional problem.
2. For every token, the answer is, “Because the meaning of *si* contributes to the message here.” This is the theoretical position: that the structure of the grammar reflects its use in communication. The meaning of *si* is the hypothesis being validated.
3. The demonstration of that contribution necessarily involves a cognizance of our hypothesized meaning for *si* and some kind of articulation of what message the writer is communicating here. On this latter the analyst and the reader of this study need to share considerable agreement (that is, the analyst cannot fabricate an interpretation just because it favors his hypothesis.) Thanks to other elements in the context besides *si*, the articulation of the message is able to be largely independent of the hypothesis.
4. When the analyst and the reader of the study are satisfied that data coverage has been adequate and that the demonstration of the contribution of the hypothesized meaning of *si* has been convincing enough, then the validation is complete. (Of course, all hypotheses are forever provisional.)

That procedure – not necessarily in strict algorithmic order – is in essence what will be encountered in the following chapters.

With this introduction to Columbia School accomplished, let us return to the opening challenge: What is *si*?

c. The rendering of Italian *si* + verb into English intransitives

The translation of Lampedusa from which Table 1.1 is drawn exhibits several ways that an Italian expression with *si* can be rendered as an intransitive in English, thus achieving a neutralization of roles. In order for the reader of this volume to get a sense of the flavor, as it were, of *si*, and in order to begin to move away from thinking of *si* as a reflexive pronoun, it may be helpful to see an overview of these ways of translating *si* as an English intransitive. Colquhoun, Lampedusa’s translator, appears to have done a good job.

In some instances, the English lexical item used for a translation of a *si*-verb is the same as might have been used had the interpretation been reflexive. An instance of this sort is Example (1.2):

- (1.2) [Le rose *Paul Neyron*] *si* erano mutate in una sorta di cavoli color carne
(LG 8)
- [The Paul Neyron roses] had changed [*si*] into things like flesh-colored
 cabbages (Colq. 18)

Mutare is commonly glossed ‘change,’ whether it is reflexive or not: *The wizard changed himself into a lizard. The painter changed the background of the painting.* In (1.2), the translator uses this common gloss. Notice that it would be infelicitous in this instance to force a translation inspired by the traditional category *reflexive*: ‘The roses had changed themselves into things like flesh-colored cabbages’; roses possess no such volition. To force the grammatical category of reflexive onto this example might be consistent with the idea that different communities of speakers betray cognitively different views of the world: Italians just say it that way! But that conclusion ought also to prompt us to question whether the grammatical category we used to analyze the example was correct to begin with. Possibly, *si* is not, after all, a reflexive pronoun but has some fundamentally different grammatical status that only sometimes, in certain instances, coincides with the syntactic category of reflexive.

In other instances, the English lexicon furnishes a transitive-intransitive distinction that Italian lacks, but which can be brought out in Italian with a change of clitic, as in (1.3a, 1.3b) with ‘rise’ vs. ‘raise’:

- (1.3) a. La recita quotidiana del Rosario era finita.... Le donne *si alzavano* lentamente (LG 5)
 The daily recital of the Rosary was over.... The women *rose* [*si*] slowly to their feet (Colq. 13)
- b. Uno dei suoi bicchieri era rimasto a metà pieno di Marsala; egli *lo alzò* (LG 31)
 One of his glasses was still half full of Marsala. He *raised it* (Colq. 50)

The lexical stem *alz-* with *si* is translated in (1.3a) with the intransitive English lexical item *rise/rose*, while the same lexical stem with an accusative object, *lo*, is translated in (1.3b) as the transitive English lexical item *raise/raised*. In (1.3a) in Lampedusa’s novel, women of various ages are simply standing up at the end of a mass. A less skillful translator might have rendered (1.3a) as ‘The women raised themselves slowly to their feet’; again, that would misrepresent the Italian in this context. In (1.3b), by contrast, a man *raises* an inanimate glass: a distinction of roles between the two participants in the raising, one exerting force and the other responding to that force.

Quite commonly, the translator has recourse to an English lexical item entirely different from what is commonly given as the gloss of the Italian original. Example (1.4):

- (1.4) Don Fabrizio ... *si mise* a passeggiare su e giù (LG 9)
 The Prince ... *began* to stroll up and down (Colq. 19)

Mise (a form of *mettere*) is commonly glossed ‘put,’ but it would be awkward to translate here ‘The Prince ... put himself to strolling up and down.’ This discrepancy occurs so often that indeed ‘begin’ is given in dictionaries (e.g., Sansoni) as a possible translation of *mettere* with *si*.

Often, English offers a lexical item that seems to be more inherently intransitive than the Italian original:

- | | | | | |
|-------|-----|-------------|-------------------|------------|
| (1.5) | Il | ciambellano | <i>si scusava</i> | (LG 10) |
| | The | chamberlain | <i>apologized</i> | (Colq. 21) |

As a transitive, *scusare* is typically translated ‘excuse,’ and, indeed, a misleading translation here might be ‘The chamberlain excused *himself*.’ But in the context of the episode in the chapter, that is not actually what the chamberlain did: He did not depart, did not absent himself, nor grant himself absolution – both of which would have been rude under the circumstances. Rather, this servant ‘apologized’ to an honored guest for the behavior of others. This translator again does a good job of approximating for the English reader the *message* that the Italian reader would get from the original.

English intransitives are quite often the most communicatively accurate way to translate an instance of Italian *si*. This is no accident, since, like *si*, intransitives in English remain neutral as to who is most responsible for the event – who exercises the highest Degree of Control over it.

C. *Si* and the traditional category *impersonal*

The tradition itself recognizes that *si* is not always reflexive. Another major label for certain tokens of *si* is the *impersonal pronoun*.¹³ In such instances, the interpretation is that no particular person is being referred to, though the subject may quite unmistakably be human. In other words, what is intended here by the term *impersonal* is represented by sentences such as:

Si sa bene che è vero.
Si know-3SG well that is true
 ‘One knows well that it’s true.’

13. Wanner (1987a) lists some major treatments of the problem of whether the impersonal *si* and the reflexive *si* are the same *si*.

Excluded from this rubric are non-human situations, also called *impersonal*, such as

Piove.
Rain-3SG
'It's raining.'

As Table 1.1 shows, however, very few instances of *si* in an actual text are translated as impersonals: only one percent in Lampedusa's chapter; in Moravia's chapter, there are no tokens of *si* translated as impersonals. Here, in Examples (1.6) and (1.7), are the two from Lampedusa (with, in 1.6, first a more word-for-word translation and then the published translation):

- (1.6) Perché morire per qualche d'uno o per qualche cosa, va bene, è nell'ordine; occorre però sapere o, per lo meno, esser certi che qualcuno sappia per chi o per che *si* è morti (LG 9)

Because dying for somebody or for something, fine, it's normal; it is necessary, however, to know or, at least, to be sure that someone knows for whom or for what *one* has died

Dying for somebody or for something, that was perfectly normal, of course; but the person dying should know, or at least feel sure, that someone knows for whom or what *he* is dying (Colq. 19)

In (1.6), *si* is parsed not as a pronoun in the predicate of its clause (*per chi o per che si è morti*) referring back to the subject of the clause, but as in fact the very subject of the clause, and that subject is no one in particular: an impersonal. If the reference had been personal, then a form signaling more information, such as *egli* 'he' signaling sex, or a noun like *il soldato* 'the soldier,' could have been used.¹⁴

The other impersonal from the translation of Lampedusa's chapter is Example (1.7):

- (1.7) "Non *si* conchiude niente con i 'pum! pum!' È vero, Bendicò?" (LG 12)
"One never achieves anything by going bang! bang! Does one, Bendicò?" (Colq. 24)

The speaker is making a general statement about the futility of violence, not referring to anyone in particular.

The analysis offered in this book will show that *si* is ideally suited to such communicative effects because *si* does not signal grammatical Number, Gender, or Sex.

14. The *-i* ending on *morti*, rather than the masculine singular *morto*, is typical of impersonals and will be discussed in Chapter 9.

D. *Si* and the traditional category *passive*

The other important category of *si* in the tradition – in addition to the reflexive and the impersonal – is the *passive*. Here the grammatical subject of the sentence is not acting upon someone or something but is (at least implicitly) being acted upon by someone else. That is, someone other than the subject is the performer of the action. In logical terms, the subject functions as a *patient* rather than as an *agent*. Because word order in Italian is not nearly as rigid as in English – that is, in Italian, position does not signal Degree of Control – two orders are given below to illustrate; for present purposes, the two are equivalent.¹⁵

<i>Si vede la luna di notte.</i>	<i>La luna si vede di notte.</i>
<i>Si</i> see-SG the moon of night	The moon <i>si</i> see-SG of night
‘The moon is seen at night.’	‘The moon is seen at night.’

The grammatical subject is *la luna* ‘the moon,’ but the moon is the patient, not the agent of the seeing; presumably, someone with eyes performs the action of seeing.

The tradition can confidently identify *la luna* as the grammatical subject here because the verb is said to agree in number with the subject: here, singular *vede* ‘sees’ agrees with singular *luna* ‘moon,’ but elsewhere, plural *vedono* ‘see’ agrees with plural *stelle* ‘stars’:

<i>Si vedono le stelle di notte.</i>	<i>Le stelle si vedono di notte.</i>
<i>Si</i> see-PL the stars of night	The stars <i>si</i> see-PL of night
‘The stars are seen at night.’	‘The stars are seen at night.’

Si, then, might be said to be a marker of the passive voice. And indeed, in Lampedusa’s chapter, a substantial number (9%) of the tokens of *si* are rendered as passives in English. Example (1.8) illustrates. Two men are traveling to Palermo in a carriage at night:

(1.8) La strada adesso era in leggera discesa e *si* vedeva Palermo vicina completamente al buio (LG 16).

The road was now beginning to slope gently downhill, and Palermo could be seen [*si*] very close, plunged in complete darkness (Colq. 29)

Naturally, the city does not see itself down the hill; the context makes clear that it is in fact the two men who see Palermo. Palermo is the patient, not the agent, of the seeing; the thing seen, not the seer.

15. Cf. Cordin (1991: 102) for a modern traditionalist statement of these descriptions.

Example (1.9), from Lampedusa, illustrates the traditional category of passive with a plural verb. (In addition to the word-for-word gloss, two possible translations are given, one the more literal and one the published.)

- (1.9) “... queste sono cose che non *si* fanno” (LG 32)
 these are things that not *si* do-PL
 “... these are things that aren’t done”
 “... things like that just aren’t done” (Colq. 52)

In the text, prior to the example, a petulant teenage boy has been griping about the political activities of a cousin of his. He ends by making a judgement about the activities or ‘things’: they are improper to his and his cousin’s social class. *Cose* ‘things’ is the grammatical subject of the clause and agrees with plural *sono* ‘are,’ but *cose* does not represent the agent of the doing.

Impersonal and *passive* cannot be maintained as distinct grammatical categories for Italian.¹⁶ Example (1.6) above – *si è morti* ‘one has died’ – being intransitive, does illustrate rather well the traditional category of the impersonal. But in the case of a transitive verb, the traditional categories of impersonal and passive practically cannot be distinguished. Thus Example (1.7) might as well be translated as a passive: ‘Nothing is achieved.’ And the translation of (1.8) is logically equivalent to an impersonal: ‘one could see Palermo.’ Likewise, the translation of (1.9) is logically equivalent to ‘these are things that one doesn’t do.’ Indeed, if one does something (= impersonal), then, necessarily, the thing is done (= passive). Granted, there are cases where, practically speaking, one translation and not the other is possible (cf. Lepschy and Lepschy 1988: 223–225), but several linguistic variables are involved (verb number singular or plural; auxiliary *essere* or *avere*; participial form in *-o*, *-i*, *-a*, or *-e*, presence or absence of modals), and the effects of such variables should not be confounded. The distinction between impersonal and passive is far from absolute. The data in Table 1.1 reflect merely how this particular translator rendered the tokens of *si*, not whether they could have been rendered some other way.

Separate from the question “What is the best translation into English in this instance?” and from “What is the traditional parsing in this instance?” another question entirely is: “What is *si*?” That is the question posed and answered in this book.

16. Wehr (1995) too disputes the traditionally accepted split into impersonals and passives. She proposes a four-level model encompassing all the following structures: the pragmatic, the referent, the semantic, and the syntactic. From the point of view of the analysis to be presented in this study, Wehr’s treatment illustrates the structural complexity that becomes necessary if one retains traditional categories such as topic, referent, agent, and syntactic features such as un/specified.

E. *Si* and the traditional category *reflexive*

The principal traditional label associated with *si* is the *reflexive pronoun*. The term *reflexive* belongs to traditional sentence grammar and serves as the label there for a situation in which a pronoun in a sentence's predicate is coreferential with the sentence's subject, as in the following, where the vertical bar separates the subject from the predicate:

Il disperato | *si* uccise.
 The wretch | *si* killed
 'The wretch killed *himself*.'

In terms of sentence structure, *si* is said to refer back to *disperato*. In terms of interpretation, the reflexive is said to be used "when the subject performs the action on himself" (Lepschy and Lepschy 1988: 221), as opposed to performing the action on someone or something else (e.g., 'The wretch killed the flowers'). The 'wretch' of the suicide is both the agent (or perpetrator) and the patient (or victim) of the killing.

As Table 1.1 shows, only seven out of 213 tokens of *si* in Lampedusa's chapter are rendered into English with reflexives (i.e., with a *-self* pronoun) in the published translation.¹⁷ Even these, it turns out, are arguable from the linguistic (if not the literary) point of view. All of these seven are given below (1.10–1.16), with first the published translation and then an alternative, linguistically plausible, translation.

Two of the seven, Examples (1.10) and (1.11), involve the lexical item *trovarsi*, which is commonly glossed with a copula; thus, 'find oneself' or 'be.'

(1.10) al di sopra del caminetto una Madonna di Andrea del Sarto sembrava stupita di trovarsi contornata da litografie colorate rappresentanti santi di terz'ordine e santuari napoletani (LG 10)

above the mantelpiece was a Madonna by Andrea del Sarto looking astounded at finding *herself* in the company of colored lithographs representing obscure Neapolitan saints and sanctuaries (Colq. 21)

above the mantelpiece, a Madonna by Andrea del Sarto seemed astounded to *be* surrounded by colored lithographs representing third-tier Neapolitan saints and sanctuaries.

(1.11) Ancora una volta il Principe *si* trovò di fronte a uno degli enigmi siciliani. (LG 24)

Again the Prince found *himself* facing one of the enigmas of Sicily. (Colq. 40)

Once more the Prince *was* in front of one of the Sicilian enigmas.

17. García (1975: 154) similarly found that, for the Spanish clitic *se*, the truly reflexive interpretation is "remarkably low." For this insight, however, she relied on her own native-speaker intuition rather than on independent translation, as here.

Similarly, Example (1.12), *chiedersi* may be glossed ‘ask oneself’ or ‘wonder’:

- (1.12) E mentre palleggiava pettegolezzi con l'impeccabile ciambellano andava chiedendosi chi fosse destinato a succedere a questa monarchia che aveva i segni della morte sul volto. (LG 12)

And as he exchanged gossip with the impeccable chamberlain, he was asking *himself* what was destined to succeed this monarchy which bore the marks of death upon its face. (Colq. 23)

And while he exchanged gossip with the impeccable chamberlain, he was *wondering* who was destined to succeed this monarchy which bore the marks of death upon its face.

Others that this translator renders as reflexives might just as well, perhaps, be rendered as passives. Examples (1.13–1.15):

- (1.13) era impossibile arrabbiarsi; sorprendersi, però, poteva forse esser lecito. (LG 20)
it was impossible to be angry; but he might allow *himself* a touch of surprise. (Colq. 34)

it was impossible to be angry; to *be surprised*, however, could perhaps be permitted.

- (1.14) Era davvero troppo insolente, credeva di poter permettersi tutto. (LG 20)
Really, this was a little too insolent. Tancredi thought he could allow *himself* anything. (Colq. 35)

He was truly too insolent; he believed he could *be permitted* anything.

- (1.15) Il sole, che tuttavia era ben lontano in quel mattino del 13 Maggio dalla massima sua foga, *si* rivelava come l'autentico sovrano della Sicilia: (LG 28)

The sun, which was still far from its blazing zenith on that morning of the thirteenth of May, showed *itself* to be the true ruler of Sicily (Colq. 45)

The sun, which was still far on that morning of the thirteenth of May from the height of its ardor, *was revealed* as the true ruler of Sicily.

And the last of the seven, Example (1.16), could perhaps be rendered as an intransitive, the most common translation of *si*, as we have seen:

- (1.16) la loro apparizione prevista era anzi il trionfo della ragione umana che *si* proiettava e prendeva parte alla sublime normalità dei cieli. (LG 29–30)

their [i.e., comets'] appearance at the time foreseen was a triumph of the human mind's capacity to project *itself* and to participate in the sublime routine of the skies. (Colq. 48)

their predicted appearance was indeed the triumph of human reason, which *projected (out)* and took part in the sublime routine of the skies.

What this exercise reveals is that the logical, philosophical concept of the reflexive ought to be kept separate from the linguistic categories available to speakers and writers of Italian. When, logically speaking, an agent acts upon himself, a logician commenting upon that action has the choice of using some formalism – perhaps a logical calculus – encoding a reflexive, a passive, an intransitive, or perhaps some other logical category. Italian *si*, however, does not distinguish reflexive, passive, and intransitive. Quite possibly, the messages that writers of Italian are communicating are something other than logical calculi, and the linguistic categories of Italian are different from logical categories. A writer of Italian might at times be commenting something to the effect, “I’m not able or willing to say here exactly who or what bears how much responsibility for what happened. I choose to remain neutral on that question.”

F. Conclusion

If *si* is best known as the reflexive pronoun, that is perhaps because the overwhelming majority of tokens of *si* could, if one wished to adhere to a logical scheme, be said to refer to the subject of their clause; certainly they do not appear to refer to anything else. But another way of stating the same fact is to say that, with *si*, a writer is choosing *not* to invoke any other entity: not some additional participant in the event (hence examples that get labeled intransitives); not some personal subject (hence impersonals); not any particular agent at all (hence passives); not some external, distinct object (hence reflexives). But perhaps it is vacuous, really, to say that *si* “refers” to anything at all; if one really wanted to *refer* to a person or thing, one might better use its name. What *si* does, actually, is to indicate that no additional person or thing needs to be brought into the picture. So either (a) any subject that is mentioned is the only participant which is relevant (intransitives, passives, reflexives), or (b) no one in particular is relevant at all (impersonals).

The purpose of a published translation of a novel, such as summarized in Table 1.1, is not merely to provide a morpheme-by-morpheme gloss of the original, such as one finds in technical linguistic treatises; rather, the purpose of a published translation of a novel is, arguably, to convey to a reader of the target language (English, in this case) an *interpretation* of the original that is both as close to being idiomatic in the target language and as faithful to the original as possible. It therefore seems fair to say that, while *si* may in some ways (primarily by factoring out all the impersonals) come close to satisfying the logical, structural definition of a reflexive, it falls far short of meeting the interpretive definition of a reflexive. This book will offer a linguistic analysis that accounts both for the apparent structural

fact that *si* is typically coreferential with the grammatical subject of its clause and for the evident fact that *si* is rarely interpreted as an indication that the subject is acting upon himself. The grammatical status of *si* will be seen to contribute consistently to the interpretation of the discourse in which *si* appears.

To put the aim of this book in the simplest terms: Rather than answering the question “What is the reflexive pronoun in Italian?” this book answers the question “What is *si*?”

Opting out of sex and number

Si vs. other impersonals

Before taking on the intertwined complexities of what the tradition calls reflexives, passives, and intransitives – before, that is, replacing those traditional categories with an improved understanding of the grammatical status of *si* vis-à-vis case role – it will be well to address a part of the problem that is more obviously semantic rather than syntactic, that is, a problem that more clearly has to do with communicated meaning than with pure sentence structure. This is the problem of the impersonal.

A. The traditional category *impersonal*

Impersonal is one of the major traditional labels given to examples of *si*. For instance, Lepschy and Lepschy (1988: 223) state, under the heading “Impersonal *si*”: “*Si* is ... used in impersonal constructions, when the agent is indefinite.”¹ In fact, however, Italian has other morphological types in addition to *si* that can be used impersonally, and the label fails to distinguish them. As will be seen below, the distribution of the various forms that are called impersonal (or indefinite) pronouns follows from their grammatical organization, some of which is quite transparent. Indeed it might be better to avoid the term *impersonal*, or at least to qualify it and understand it as a blanket term since, taken seriously as a category, it can only obscure the facts of the grammar and the nuances of discourse (cf. Achard 2010 for French *il*, *ça*).

Relevant to this chapter are examples that have to do with humans but no particular human, comparable to the French *on ne sait jamais*, or the German *man kann nie wissen*, or the English *one can never tell*. In traditional terms, these examples have impersonal (or indefinite) human subjects. Excluded are examples that have nothing to do with humans. For instance, there is a pronoun *ciò* in Italian,

1. In other treatments (e.g., Allen and Greenough § 318b for Latin; Napoli 1976, Cordin 1991 for Italian), this type is labeled *indefinite*; the term *impersonal* sometimes applies instead to constructions that reference no human person at all. D’Alessandro (2006) and D’Alessandro (2008), within the Minimalist program framework, treat impersonal *si*. D’Alessandro (2006: 64) rejects the categorization of *si* as indefinite, proposing instead that *si* is “a definite pronoun with an underspecified person feature.”

which is a kind of neuter impersonal demonstrative that does not refer to a human but to an abstract concept: *Ciò mi sorprende* ‘That surprises me.’ There is also a type of verb in Italian that is called impersonal, such as *bisogna* ‘it is necessary’ or *piove* ‘it’s raining,’ where there is no reference to any person at all but to a kind of situation. Also largely excluded from this chapter are examples with *si* that involve, in addition perhaps to some impersonal human agent, a nonhuman, typically inanimate patient. In other words, the examples with *si* in this chapter will mostly be intransitive, not transitive, in nature. That is because examples of *si* with nonhuman patients usually can be thought of as either impersonal or passive, indiscriminately, as in Example (2.1):

- (2.1) La prima isola che s’incontra, vista dal mare è una distesa di verde (TD 13)
 The first island that *one (si)* encounters, seen from the sea, is an expanse of green
 The first island that *is encountered (si)*, seen from the sea, is an expanse of green

These will be treated separately, when the traditional category *passive* is deconstructed in Chapter 5.

Note that the choice of examples to be included in this chapter, as in others, is made on a heuristic, interpretive basis, not on a purely linguistic basis. That is as it must be, since *si* is the same, linguistically, in all its uses.

B. A multiplicity of forms used impersonally

Among the pronouns that can be used impersonally, the quintessential impersonal is *si*, as in Example (2.2), below. Three translations are offered. The first translation gives perhaps the most literal, word-for-word gloss, with ‘one.’ The second, with ‘everyone,’ suggests the generality of reference that will be claimed in this chapter as an inference drawn from *si*. And the third translation foreshadows what will be shown eventually: that the traditional categories of impersonal and passive cannot be maintained. Any of the three translations works adequately in this case.

- (2.2) *Si* sa bene che i ricchi non sono molto splendidi in fatto di dar via denari.
(BB 36)
One (si) knows well that the rich are not especially magnificent in the matter of giving away money.
Everyone (si) knows well that....
 It is well known that....

The reference of this *si* is impersonal in the sense that no particular person who ‘knows’ is indexed. Contrast that with the personal, or specific, reference made by *egli* in Example (2.3).

(2.3) “Sua Eminenza paternamente desidera che il culto celebrato in privato sia conforme ai piú puri riti di Santa Madre Chiesa ... *egli* sa come la vostra casa splenda, faro di luce, sul laicato palermitano...” (LG 173)

“His Eminence paternally desires that the mass celebrated in private be in conformity with the purest rites of Holy Mother Church ... *he (egli)* knows how your house shines, beacon of light, on the laity of Palermo...”

The personal pronoun *egli* here refers clearly to *Sua Eminenza*, the Archbishop of Palermo.

At first blush, the distinction of impersonal versus personal seems clear. But it is simplistic.

Among the several morphological types, in addition to *si*, that can be used to suggest personhood but without referring to any particular person, is *uno* ‘one,’² as in Example (2.4):

(2.4) e se *uno* non volesse continuare a vivere, deve continuare lo stesso a vivere per forza? (MR 176)

and if (*some*)one (*uno*) didn’t want to keep living, must he nevertheless necessarily continue to live?

Another is the supposedly “personal” second-person pronoun, which at times can have an impersonal interpretation, as in (2.5), a general complaint about the human condition:

(2.5) Se fai il *tuo* dovere sta lí a guardarti e non *te* lo lascia fare. (BB 224)

If *you (-i)* do *your (tuo)* duty, it [the conscience] stands there looking at *you (ti)* and won’t let *you (te)* do it.³

Another impersonal is the supposedly personal first-person plural, as in (2.6), another comment on the general human condition:

(2.6) Ci sono azioni che *si* compiono cosí d’impulso, azioni qualsiasi senza valore, che però poi dànno origine a un cambiamento nella *nostra* vita e nella vita di coloro che hanno relazione con *noi*. (BB 12)

2. Lepschy and Lepschy (1988: 128–130) list *uno* among the “indefinite adjectives and pronouns.”

3. On the apparent difference between forms like *ti* and *te* here, see Chapter 10.

There are actions that are taken so impulsively – whatever unimportant actions – which, however, then give rise to a change in *our* (*nostra*) life and in the lives of those who have relations with *us* (*noi*).

The third-person plural too can be an impersonal, as in (2.7), where it presumably refers to unidentified government officials, thus excluding speaker and hearer (cf. Cordin 1991:99):

- (2.7) Anch'io da domani cambio nome e mi chiamerò pier-pier-silvio berlusconi e con il nuovo cod[ice] fiscale non pagherò più l'ici..... però *loro* hanno cambiato il nome dell'ici in imu e forse mi fregheranno lo stesso?⁴

I too, starting tomorrow, am changing my name and will call myself Pier-Pier-Silvio Berlusconi, and with the new fiscal code I will no longer pay the ICI [a property tax].... but *they* (*loro*) have changed the name of the ICI to IMU, and perhaps they will screw me anyway?

Even the first-person singular can conceivably be used impersonally:

- (2.8) Egli disse, “Se *io*, una donna impiegata, guadagno meno di un uomo...”⁵
He said, “If *I* (*io*), an employed woman, earn (-o) less than a man....”

The question then naturally arises, what are the differences among the various impersonals?

Consider the practically transparent morphological differences arrayed in Table 2.1 below.

Note: Beginning here, the following formalisms are adopted: A hyphen (-) indicates the direction of attachment of a bound form; e.g., -o is a suffix to a lexical stem, while *si-* is clitic to – i.e., preceding – a finite verb (orthographically, a space separates the two morphemes).⁶ A plus sign (+) indicates the place of attachment of a suffix (-o/-a/-i/-e) indicating a four-way classification in terms of grammatical gender (masculine/feminine) and number (singular/plural). Forms with no hyphen and no plus sign are freestanding.

The gist of the approach taken here is that the interpretive differences among these forms when used impersonally follow straightforwardly from their morphological – suggesting their grammatical – differences. Most obviously, when the first person is forced into duty as an impersonal, as in (2.8) above, the implication can

4. Source: <http://www.comuni.it/servizi/forumbb/viewtopic.php?p=740550&sid=5c25db-cfec207443ffed0aaa0ae21cbc>, accessed Apr. 27, 2014.

5. An example constructed by the present writer.

6. *Si-* is enclitic to (i.e., following) a nonfinite verb and not separated by an orthographic space.

Table 2.1 Morphology of various impersonal forms

Form	Morphological status	Morphological analysis
<i>si-</i>	clitic	3rd person, indifferent gender and number
<i>un + -o/a/i/e</i>	disjunctive	stem ‘one’ + suffix for gender and number
<i>tu, ti-, -i</i> etc.	various	2nd person, number SG
<i>noi, ci-, -iamo</i> etc.	various	1st person, number PL
<i>loro, li-, -ono</i> , etc.	various	3rd person, number PL
<i>io, mi-, -o</i> , etc.	various	1st person, number SG

only be that ‘I’ am using myself as an illustration that has some larger human relevance: ‘Even I, as a male, can understand how any woman in such a situation would feel.’ When the third-person plural is used impersonally, as in (2.7), the implication is that some individuals other than myself and you are being referred to: ‘Those bureaucrats – those powers that be – have changed the name of the tax.’ So to call both forms “impersonal” in such cases is to obscure entirely the difference between them: a difference of including or excluding the speaker. A similar line of analysis can be applied to the other forms, which are more commonly used as impersonals. Consider now each form separately, to see how each differs grammatically and in interpretation.

C. *Si* vs. *uno* used impersonally

Uno is bi-morphemic, consisting of the stem *un+* and the suffix *-o*. *Uno* is not clitic but disjunctive, that is, freestanding from the verb. The stem *un+* is, apparently, simply the number ‘one,’ as in *uno, due, tre* ‘one, two, three.’ The suffix *-o* is the port-manteau that interlocks the so-called masculine – that is, the generic – grammatical gender with singular number. So there are actually four different forms: *uno, una, uni, une*. The four suffixes help to identify the intended referent when there is one. In traditional terms, this form agrees with an antecedent, which need not be human. So *une*, for example, would refer to more than one grammatically feminine thing, such as women or bicycles. *Un+* is by no means restricted to human reference.

Uno, not surprisingly, then, sometimes refers not to an indefinite person but specifically to one grammatically masculine thing, such as a ‘field,’ a plot of land, as in (2.9):

- (2.9) – Abbiamo due poderi, – dissi. – *Uno* qui vicino e l’altro a Lauzara.... (BB 24)
 “We have two farms,” I said. “*One (uno)* near here and the other at Lauzara....”

Uno in this instance is not impersonal but refers to a particular one of two farms. *Uno* picks up on the (masculine) word *poderi* ‘farms’ found elsewhere in the context, and it contrasts with *l’altro*, the ‘other’ farm.

In other contexts, reference is made to a human being but a somewhat less inspecific human being than in, say, Example (2.4) above; such is Example (2.10):

- (2.10) le guardie spararono per la terza volta e *uno* degli uomini cadde gridando.
(BB 141)
the guards fired a third time, and *one* (*uno*) of the men fell, crying out.

Here the reference is to a human being, and not to a specific one, but to a pretty limited range of possibilities: one of the men, *gli uomini*, mentioned in the near context. Is this impersonal, personal, or somewhere in between? The category bleeds.

By contrast with *uno*, the clitic *si-* is mono-morphemic. Like *uno*, *si-* is sometimes impersonal but sometimes personal. This *si-* is the same morpheme as the one (cf. Chapter 1) traditionally labeled the third-person *reflexive* pronoun. As such, *si-* at times has a personal reference, as in (2.11):

- (2.11) Michele Rende *si* tagliò una grossa fetta di pane e *si* versò anche del vino.
(BB 79)
Michele Rende cut (*si*) off a big slice of bread and poured (*si*) some wine too.

Si- in this example, as in many, refers to a particular person, Michele Rende. The translation could even be:

Michele Rende cut *himself* (*si*) off a big slice of bread and poured *himself* (*si*) some wine too.

But, as we have seen, *si-* rarely translates as a *self* pronoun in English, and here it would probably place too much emphasis on the man, implying that there was something unusual about his doing this on his own behalf. (The example will be discussed with more context in Chapter 4.)

So the forms that can be personal can also be impersonal, and vice versa. The categories *personal* and *impersonal* do not match up with usage of the forms in discourse.

An analysis of authentic examples in context reveals that *uno* used impersonally is pragmatically different from *si-* used impersonally, and that this difference in *message* is a consequence of the difference in signaled grammatical *meaning* between *uno* and *si-*. As we shall see presently, the (pluralizable) lexical stem *un+* suggests individuation, and the suffix *-o*, which is morphologically singular, results in an interpretation something like ‘one individual.’ When *uno* refers in the most general way to one human individual, the result is – to coin a nontechnical term – a kind of *individualized impersonal*. The implication is that *some* person or other, but not all persons, might plausibly be included in the reference. By contrast, *si-*,

lacking any information at all about number, gender and sex, contributes to the most *generalized impersonal* message. The implication is that *any* person, even the speaker and addressee, might well be included in the reference.⁷

It is hard to know how to gloss this *si*: ‘one,’ ‘you,’ and ‘we’ often seem equally (un)suitable. English, of course, has no exact translation equivalents for the various Italian pronouns, anyway. In order, therefore, to facilitate the distinguishing of these two impersonals in Italian, examples below will have impersonal *uno* always glossed as ‘a person,’ ‘a guy,’ and the like, and impersonal *si* glossed wherever possible as ‘anyone,’ ‘everyone,’ and the like. The resulting translations may therefore be at times less than ideally idiomatic, but the goal is to highlight the difference in message between *uno* and *si*.

The larger context for Example (2.4) above, given below as (2.12), will illustrate; others in the collection for this study would make the same point. In this wider context, we also see a shift from a more individualized impersonal, with *uno*, to a more generalized impersonal, with *si*.

A distraught mother is venting her feelings just after her grown daughter has for the first time brought home a male client for sexual services, the beginning of the daughter’s entry into prostitution.

(2.12) «... tutto mi ha girato intorno... sai come quando *uno* ha bevuto... tutto sembra così strano....»

...

... «Ti dico che ho avuto paura; e ho pensato: e se *uno* non volesse continuare a vivere, deve continuare lo stesso a vivere per forza?... Non dico che *uno* dovrebbe ammazzarsi, per ammazzarsi ci vuole coraggio, no, ma soltanto non voler vivere più come non *si* vuole più mangiare o camminare... ebbene, te lo giuro sull’anima di tuo padre... vorrei non vivere più». (MR 175–176)

“... Everything was turning around me – you know, like when *a person (uno)* has been drinking – everything seemed strange like that...”

...

... “I tell you I was afraid. And I thought: so if *a person (uno)* didn’t want to keep living, must he nevertheless necessarily continue to live? I’m not saying *a person (uno)* should kill himself – to kill oneself demands courage – no, but only not to want to live any more, the way *anyone (si)* doesn’t want to eat or walk any more. Well, I swear to you on your father’s grave, I’d like not to live any more.”

7. This account of Italian *uno* differs from that offered for Spanish by García (1975:20), who sees the difference between Spanish *uno* and *se* as “primarily one of degree of focus on the actual performer of the action.” This account essentially agrees with hers, however, in claiming that, among the various impersonals, the clitic (It. *si*, Sp. *se*) “goes farthest in excluding consideration of the logical subject.”

The speaker's use of *uno* is restricted to actions that are less than generally applicable, in this case even taboo: over-drinking, wishing to die, and committing suicide. The implication is that not everyone – certainly not the daughter listening, presumably not even the mother speaking – will fit into these categories. (It may be relevant that the two characters are identified as Roman Catholic.) Use of *uno* depends on there being some unidentified representative person (*uno*) who does fit the bill. It's almost as if the mother were saying, "Gee, I – your own poor mother – was feeling like some drunken suicidal person!" By contrast, the *si*- here is much more general: everyone, including the speaker and the addressee, at some time wishes not to eat more or walk farther. In this passage, the mother links her fleeting, uncharacteristic, suicidal feelings provoked on this one disturbing occasion, with a more generic, widely known feeling of depression.

The individualized nature of the *uno* impersonal is confirmed in the next example, (2.13). Here, *uno* first sets up the reference to an individualized impersonal, let's call him 'a guy.' Then, subsequent reference to this representative person can be made with any third-person form, including *lui* 'he.' That is, even the third-person *personal* (sometimes called demonstrative) pronoun can be impersonal.⁸ In this example, the male narrator, recounting events from his adolescence, alludes to himself, avoiding the first-person *io* 'I' due to the highly personal and embarrassing nature of what he says (in the Italy of the time),⁹ concerning his intense longing for the company of a certain older male, his sister's lover. We have, then, the curious but perfectly reasonable subterfuge of a speaker alluding to himself precisely while denying that he is referring to himself. The symbol [] indicates absence of any overt subject.

- (2.13) Il mattino dopo tutta quell'esaltazione si era spenta, naturalmente. È un fatto che bastano poche ore di sonno per riportare entro dei giusti limiti certi *nostri* entusiasmi troppo improvvisi. *Uno si* sveglia – c'è la madre che chiama dalla cucina – e subito [] *si* ricorda degli ultimi pensieri della sera prima e quasi [] ci ride sopra, ma egualmente [] corre alla finestra sperando di trovare chissà quale segno fuori, non sa neanche *lui* cosa. (BB 41)

8. Another example of *lui* used impersonally: "Ed è per questo che io ho pensato trattarsi del dio della Felicità: ma la felicità di chi ha compreso così pienamente il senso della vita che per *lui* la morte non ha più nessuna importanza" (TD 17); 'And it is for this reason that I have thought it to have to do with the god of Happiness: but the happiness of someone who has understood so fully the meaning of life that for *him* death no longer has any importance.'

9. Giuseppe Berto's novel *Il brigante* was published in Italy in 1951. The first-person narrator recalls events during World War II (BB 23, 71–73), when he was thirteen years old (BB 8) in a small, isolated village.

The next morning all that excitement was gone, naturally. It is a fact that it takes only a few hours of sleep to return certain of *our* (*nostri*) too rash enthusiasms to their proper limits. A *guy* (*uno*) awakens (*si*) – there’s mother calling from the kitchen – and immediately *he* [] remembers (*si*) the last thoughts of the night before and [] almost laughs about them, but all the same [] runs to the window hoping to find who knows what sign outside, not even *he* (*lui*) knows what.

In addition to that individualized impersonal *uno*, the example also contains two instances of (reflexive) *si* (the ‘guy’ ‘awakens’ and ‘remembers’) and three of verb ending alone (no overt subject) [] referring to this imagined person (he ‘remembers,’ ‘laughs,’ and ‘runs’), plus a first-person plural *nostri* ‘our’ that includes the imagined person, along with the speaker and the reader (we’ve all experienced the clarity of the light of a new day). All told, then, five different forms in the passage could be said to be impersonal. Furthermore, the instances of *si*- here show that the categories *reflexive* and *impersonal* are not mutually exclusive; *si*- here is *both* impersonal *and* reflexive. The passage cannot but make us question whether the traditional categories are at all helpful if we wish to understand the distribution of the forms.

Example (2.14) below comes from the same chapter and continues the same narrator’s thoughts of longing and loneliness. It adds the personal pronoun *gli*-‘him-DAT.’ to the list of forms that can be used impersonally.

- (2.14) Allora *uno* può girare come disperato pei campi ad aspettare che arrivi la sera, e poi, tornare alla tavola di ogni giorno, e intorno c’è il padre e la madre e una sorella, e sempre [] *si* sente sperduto. E non *gli* rimane altro che chiudersi nella sua camera ad assaporare in solitudine l’infelicità di sentirsi sperduto, e così [] non fa l’unica cosa che sarebbe giusto fare per non essere solo e non lasciare solo chi ha come *lui* bisogno di essere consolato. (BB 54)

Then a *guy* (*uno*) can walk around as if hopeless through the fields waiting for evening to arrive, and then return to the dinner table as every other day, and inside there’s father and mother and a sister, and still *he* [] feels (*si*) lost. And there remains *to him* (*gli*) only to shut *himself* (*si*) in his room to savor in solitude the unhappiness of feeling (*si*) lost, and so *he* [] does not do the only thing that would be right to do in order not to be alone and not to leave alone one who (*chi*), like *himself* (*lui*), needs to be consoled.

Uno again refers to ‘some guy’ who ostensibly is not the speaker. Subsequently, other forms can refer to that ‘guy,’ as appropriate.

The effect of *uno* as an impersonal, then, is to conjure up some imagined individual who might stand in as a representative of what the speaker says but who will not necessarily include the speaker or the hearer, indeed might exclude them.

In contrast with the individuality of the *uno* impersonal, the *si*- impersonal is completely general, at least from the point of view of the speaker. In (2.15) below, a lower-class boy has been promised fifty lire by a rich girl for delivering a letter to her former lover, but now the boy is not sure she will actually come through with the money. This is Example (2.2), repeated with more context; again, three alternative translations are given.

- (2.15) Del resto, non ero neanche tanto sicuro che me le avrebbe date, adesso che non servivo piú per la lettera. *Si* sa bene che i ricchi non sono molto splendidi in fatto di dar via denari, e quando possono risparmiare anche un soldo lo fanno volentieri. (BB 36)

Besides, I was no longer so sure she would give them to me, now that I was no use with the letter. *One (si)* knows well that the rich are not especially magnificent in the matter of giving away money, and when they can save even one cent, they do so gladly.

... *Everyone (si)* knows well that....

... It is (*si*) well known that....

As the boy sees it, the reference is completely general; everybody knows perfectly ‘well’ that the rich are a breed apart.

Notice that, morphologically, *si*- conveys less identifying information than even the finite verb ending alone. The finite verb ending encodes grammatical person and number, suggesting that these semantic domains are relevant. *Si*- signals only person: third person. Number is irrelevant or not needed. So it stands to reason that, quite often, a finite verb by itself, with no overt subject, will have a definite, personal subject.¹⁰ One often finds a string of bare finite verbs with quite definite subjects, as in (2.16).

- (2.16) «[] Mi conosce e [] sa quello che mi piace... Lascia fare a lui...» (MR 164)
 “*He []* knows me and *he []* knows what pleases me – leave it to him....”

By contrast, multiple generalized impersonal verbs in sequence require that each have its own *si* (Cordin 1991: 108). This repetition forces the interpretation that number, though encoded by the finite verb, is essentially irrelevant;¹¹ Example (2.17):

10. Those bare verbs that do not have a definite, personal subject include lexical items like *bisogna* ‘it is necessary’; see Chapter 4.

11. See Chapter 9 on the morphology of the participle, as in the evidently plural *giunti* of 2.17.

(2.17) Quegli alberi assetati ... annunziavano parecchie cose: che *si* era giunti a meno di due ore dal termine del viaggio; che *si* entrava nelle terre di casa Salina; che *si* poteva far colazione

Dieci minuti dopo *si* era giunti alla fattoria di Rampinzèri (LG 34–35)

Those parched trees ... announced a few things: that *one* (*si*) had arrived at less than two hours from the end of the trip; that *one* (*si*) was entering into the lands of the House of Salina; that *one* (*si*) was able to have lunch

Ten minutes later *one* (*si*) had arrived at Rampinzèri's farm.

And so a fact that would appear to support a syntactic distinction between *impersonal* and *personal* – whether or not an overt pronoun is required – turns out to follow as a consequence of what grammatical information is signaled (cf. García 1975: 18). *Si-* appears in the text to forestall the normal inference that, for a particular verb (e.g., here *giungere*, *entrare*, *potere*), the finite inflection, with its person and number information, refers to some particular individual (human or otherwise).¹²

Example (2.18) below, with *egli* ‘he,’ will illustrate the effect of opting *into* the signaling of grammatical Number and Sex (*egli* refers unambiguously to ONE MALE). Contrast (2.18) with (2.15) and (2.16) above. The result of explicitly signaling Sex and Number is that the hearer will typically infer that a particular male human is being referred to.

(2.18) Anche tra le persone piú generose nel giudicare il prossimo, non ce n'era una che non stimasse almeno stolto l'atteggiamento di Michele Rende. La sua unica scusa poteva essere che *egli* forse non sapeva chi fosse Natale Aprici, ma tant'era, le conseguenze non mutavano. (BB 46)

Even among those who were most generous in judging their neighbor, there was not one who did not consider Michele Rende's behavior at least foolish. His only excuse could be that *he* (*egli*) perhaps did not know who Natale Aprici was, but, even so, the consequences did not change.

Egli ‘he’ explicitly encodes Number and Sex (ONE, MALE). Here, *egli* refers unambiguously to the man Michele Rende.

12. There does exist the option of choosing a verb form that does not encode number, such as an infinitive, but that has the effect of downplaying the event referenced; if it is an event that moves the narrative along, it needs to be finite (cf. Diver and Davis 2012 on the Latin system of Vividness). For discussion of verbs (e.g., *bisognare* ‘it is necessary’) which, per their lexical semantic content, frequently refer to no particular individual entity, see Chapter 4. So-called presentative constructions do not bear upon this discussion, since in Italian they involve a system not analyzed here, typically involving the clitic *ci-*, and since they present an individual entity (*C'è una donna nella macchina* ‘There's a woman in the car’) (cf. Cordin 1991: 111; also, in the present study, Chapter 10§ B).

D. *Si* vs. other pronouns used impersonally

We have seen that both *si*- and *uno* are interpreted sometimes personally and sometimes impersonally, and that their distribution in texts is attributable to the writer's intent to convey differently nuanced messages. The same is true of the so-called "personal" pronouns: They too, as already seen for *io* 'I' and *loro* 'they,' are sometimes personal and sometimes impersonal, and their distribution is a function of their encoded grammatical meanings.

Consider the supposedly "personal" second-person singular, 'you.' Sometimes it is personal and sometimes it isn't. When it isn't, we might well call it the *empathetic impersonal*, because it appears to ask the addressee to place himself in the position being described (cf. Cordin 1991:99). In Example (2.19) below, a distraught policeman gets himself drunk on wine and vents about the fact that he is likely going to be fired for a recent offense. Sentences are numbered for ease of reference in the discussion to follow.

(2.19) (1) *Mi spiace, – io dissi.*

(2) *Cosa credi, che a me non dispiaccia?* (3) *Ventidue anni di servizio, e adesso alla fine del mese via, un calcio e mi mandano a spasso con settemila lire di pensione, e la coscienza che sta lí a guardarti giorno e notte.* (4) *Bisognerebbe toglierla via, la coscienza.* (5) *Se fai il tuo dovere sta lí a guardarti e non te lo lascia fare.* (6) *E se non fai il tuo dovere sta lí a guardarti lo stesso, e cosí non si capisce cosa voglia.* (7) *Ma tu devi dirglielo a Michele Rende, che mi mandano in congedo* (BB 224)

(1) "I'm sorry," I said.

(2) "What do *you (-i)* think, that I'm not sorry? (3) Twenty-two years of service, and now at the end of the month, out, the boot, and they dismiss me with a seven-thousand lire pension, and the conscience standing there looking at *you (ti)* day and night. (4) It ought to be removed, the conscience. (5) If *you (-i)* do *your (tuo)* duty, it stands there looking at *you (ti)* and won't let *you (ti)* do it. (6) And if *you (-i)* don't do *your (tuo)* duty, it stands there looking at *you (ti)* just the same, and so *there's (si)* no knowing what it wants. (7) But *you (tu)* have to tell Michele Rende that they're firing me...."

First (Sentence 1), the narrator explicitly signals his empathy: "I'm sorry." The first second-person reference (Sentence 2, with verb ending, *Cosa credi* "What do you think?") is direct, an address to the boy. But then, beginning with Sentence 3, the speaker implicitly asks the addressee to put himself (*ti, tuo*) in the speaker's place; this is the empathetic impersonal. This is a highly personal experience: a conscience that won't be satisfied. It's like, 'Hey, imagine this happened to you! Put yourself in

my shoes.’ Next, though, in this example as before in Example (2.12), the conclusion to this episode (the end of Sentence 6) is generalized, with *si-*. The only possible reaction to the dilemma is a reaction that anyone (*si-*) would have in such a situation, namely bewilderment: ‘there’s no knowing what the conscience wants’, ‘no one can know.’ Finally, in Sentence 7, the rant turns personal again, addressed specifically to the boy: “But you (*tu*) have to tell Michele Rende.”

An impersonal message can also be approached from the first person plural. Here, not surprisingly, the message is: ‘you and I and others – we – are alike in this respect.’¹³ This might well be called the *inclusive impersonal*. In (2.20) below, the narrator is a teenage boy (the same as before) telling the story of how he met and became infatuated with the soldier who would become his sister’s lover. The novel’s main past-tense, first-person narration by the boy is momentarily interrupted by a rare, more authorial present-tense comment from the boy’s grown-up self, addressed implicitly by the writer to the reader. That is, the narrator is kind of stepping outside the story momentarily to speak to the reader, adult to adult. Sentences are again numbered.

- (2.20) (1) Tante volte in seguito io ho cercato di ragionare e di rendermi conto della vera importanza dell’atto che feci. (2) Ci sono azioni che *si* compiono così d’impulso, azioni qualsiasi senza valore, che però poi danno origine a un cambiamento nella *nostra* vita e nella vita di coloro che hanno relazione con *noi*. (3) E non so ancora se sia giusto vedere la *nostra* responsabilità in quelle azioni e sentirne il rimorso. (4) Certo che se quel giorno io non avessi rincorso il soldato, ..., probabilmente tanti fatti non sarebbero accaduti. (5) Ma allora ne sarebbero accaduti degli altri, e delle cose non avvenute non *si* può mai dire se sarebbero state meglio o peggio. (BB 12)

(1) So many times since then, I have tried to reason and to appreciate the true importance of what I did. (2) There are actions that are taken (*si-*) so impulsively – whatever unimportant actions – which, however, then give rise to a change in *our* (*nostra*) life and in the lives of those who have relations with *us* (*noi*). (3) And I still do not know whether it is right to see *our* (*nostra*) responsibility in those actions and to feel remorse for them. (4) Certainly, if that day I had not chased down the soldier, ..., probably lots of things would not have happened. (5) But then other things would have happened, and with things that have not happened *one* (*si-*) can never say [or, ‘no one can ever say,’ or ‘it can never be said’] if they would have been better or worse.

13. Cordin (1991:99, 106) notes the inclusion of the speaker with *noi* used impersonally but then – evidently relying on truth value at the expense of communicative nuance – claims that this ‘ends up corresponding’ to those instances of impersonal *si* that include the speaker.

Where the present tense begins (in Sentence 2, with ‘There are actions’), the ‘actions’ *azioni* are subject of the finite verb *sono* ‘are,’ with the agent of those actions left unspecified. The writer’s point is not who takes the actions but rather the irony of impulsive actions having profound consequences. Then, in this rare aside to the reader, the writer describes how we all (*nostra, noi*) can experience such consequences from actions we have taken. The author’s message to the reader here is something like, ‘You know what I’m talking about, reader? We’re in this together?’ Then (Sentence 5), with the shift to *si-*, comes the conclusion that anyone in general would draw: No one can know the consequences of actions not taken.

E. Conclusion

One might well question, at this point, whether these subtle differences in message among the various types of impersonals are real or are imagined. Are they being forced by the analyst? First of all, the morphology is self-evidently different among the examples; the last one could have been made first person plural (*non possiamo mai dire* ‘we can never say’) but was not. *Prima facie*, then, the effects can be expected to be different. In the Columbia School tradition which the present study builds on, one finds other instances where grammatical distinctions produce quite subtle effects in certain contexts: certain examples of subjunctive vs. indicative in Latin (Diver 1992b/2012), of imperfect vs. preterit aspect in Serbo-Croatian (Gorup 1987), of subject-verb order in English (Huffman 2002), or of *egli* ‘he’ vs. *lui* ‘he’ in Italian (Davis 1995a). Perhaps it should not be surprising that users of the language are capable of exploiting its grammatical resources, just like its lexical resources, for the making of fine as well as gross differences in message.

The category *impersonal* is not a category of Italian grammar, not a category of “the language.” It is not part of the linguistic knowledge of Italian writers. It is evidently not part of the linguistic endowment, whatever that may turn out to be. But the category *impersonal* is also not even a very good category for talking about the kinds of messages that Italian writers convey, not even very good, that is, for talking about interpretation. In Columbia School terms, *impersonal* is not even a “message parameter” (Reid 1995: 169) but something much more “non-discrete” and “unstructured” (Reid 1991: 348), quite likely nothing more than a *façon de parler*, a term that is perhaps presentationally “useful to group examples” (Diver 1990/2012: 78), even though it risks misrepresenting the true linguistic situation. To think of a certain passage of discourse as containing an “impersonal” reference is largely to miss the writer’s point. The actual message has a finer grain than that: Is the speaker implicated? the hearer? Is it an *us-versus-them* situation? Is it a matter that might apply only to ‘some guy’ who is not very much like you and me? Huffman

(1997) forces one to a similar conclusion regarding the potential message category of *beneficiary* when it comes to the dative in French: There is no such message category. Sometimes, the referent of a dative pronoun benefits, and sometimes he suffers, but that information comes from elsewhere in the context than the dative pronoun itself. It is probably fair to say that messages cannot be categorized. Every example in authentic discourse is unique; practically every combination of linguistic meanings is novel. Even when the same construction is used over and over, its effects in various situations – or even in the same situation – vary widely (“Why are you repeating that?”). The only thing the linguist can categorize is linguistic meaning, and we do that with the help of linguistic signals, acting as a control.¹⁴

14. See Davis (2004b) for a critique of the Columbia School construct of the *communicative strategy*, which involved categorizing messages. See also Chapter 11 for further on the non-discreteness of message effects. In contrast, García (1975: 11) had “a synchronically independent impersonal” use of Spanish clitic *se*, historically related to its reflexive use.

The system of Focus on Participants

A. The failure of the traditional category *subject* and the need for a new hypothesis

In the preceding chapter, the traditional category *impersonal* was shown not to be up to the task of accounting for examples of *si-* used as subject. It will now be seen that the category *subject* is even more pervasively problematic if one's goal is to explain the occurrences of *si-* in all its manifestations. The concept *subject of the sentence* underlies all the traditional categories of *si-*: not only the impersonal subject but also the reflexive direct object and the marker of the passive voice, since these too are defined in terms of the subject of the sentence. Because the category *subject* lies in the background of everything in this book, it merits some scrutiny here.

To be explicit again about the overall goal: Consistent with Columbia School practice, the categories that are proposed in this book are proposed *precisely in order to* explain observed occurrences of *si-*. In this chapter and the next, these categories will be presented as parts of *hypotheses* to account for the observed distribution. These hypotheses will take the form of semiotic *grammatical systems*: organized sets of *signals*, each with its encoded *meaning*, together exhaustively dividing up a *semantic substance* or *domain*. The grammar, in this view, is inherently meaningful. In these two chapters, the hypotheses will only be rather simply illustrated through examples from texts. Discussion of examples in subsequent chapters will need to make use of the hypotheses and terms introduced here.

The term *subject* has been used in the grammatical tradition for three quite different concepts, which only sometimes overlap (Diver, Davis, and Reid 2012: 394–407).

One sense of the term *subject* is “what the thought is about.” This is coupled with the term *predicate*, that which is claimed of some subject. This sense of *subject* goes all the way back to Aristotle's analysis of rational thought (*On Interpretation*) and is thus properly a component of the analysis of thought, not of language. Nevertheless, the grammatical tradition has appropriated the concept in sentence grammar, and it survives in modern linguistics. This sense of *subject* is illustrated in the following excerpt, Example (3.1), from the narrative of a dream about the Hesperides, mythical island-dwelling nymphs. Grammatical subjects are in bold; the verbs of their predicates are italicized.

- (3.1) **La prima isola** ... è una distesa di verde.... **Le coste sono** impervie.... **Le piogge sono** abbondanti.... **Le altre isole sono** più rocciose....
Gli uomini sono chiari.... **Le donne sono** belle e altere.... (TD 13–14)
The first island ... *is* an expanse of green.... **The coasts are** impervious.... **The rains are** abundant.... **The other islands are** more rocky....
The men are fair-skinned.... **The women are** beautiful and dignified....

As the writer introduces the reader to the dream, the subject of the thought moves from element to element: the first island, its coasts, its climate, the other islands, the men, the women. It is almost as if a camera were mounted on a airplane, and the camera's focus moves from one thing to another as the plane approaches the islands. Sometimes, as above, only one item at a time is involved, and it may be elaborated upon with some type of complement, such as a noun or an adjective in the predicate (e.g., 'The first island is an expanse of green'; 'The coasts are impervious').

At other times, additional items may be mentioned but not as the subject of the thought nor as descriptions of the subject. For example, in the passage below, (3.2), the subject of the thought of the second clause is *ciascuno* 'each [principal god]'; but another entity is introduced: *il suo tempio* 'his temple.' Thus the distinction in traditional grammar between *subject* ('each') and *object complement* ('temple').

- (3.2) **i principali sono** in numero di nove, come le isole, e **ciascuno ha** il suo tempio in un'isola differente. (TD 14)
the principal [gods] are nine in number, like the islands, and **each has** his temple on a different island.

That might seem straightforward enough. Indeed, it might at first appear that this sense of *subject* has a specific syntactic correlate: the subject is the noun that precedes the verb. But such is not the case. That *subject* in this sense fails to correlate with the order SV in actual text can be seen by examining the paragraph which, in the original text, immediately precedes the one quoted above. It is the beginning of the text. Example (3.3):

- (3.3) Dopo avere veleggiato per molti giorni e per molte notti, **ho capito che l'Occidente non ha** termine ma **continua** a spostarsi con noi, e **che possiamo** inseguirlo a nostro piacimento senza raggiungerlo mai. Così è **il mare ignoto** che **sta** oltre le Colonne, senza fine e sempre uguale, dal quale **emergono**, come la piccola spina dorsale di un colosso scomparso, **piccole creste** di isole, nodi di roccia perduti nel celeste. (TD 13)

After having sailed for many days and many nights, **(I) have learned** that **the West has** no limit but **continues** to travel with us, and that **(we) can** follow it as long as we like without ever reaching it. Such **is the unknown sea** that **lies**

beyond the Pillars [of Hercules], without end and ever the same, from which *emerge*, like the little backbone of a vanished giant, **little ridges** of islands, lumps of rock lost in the blue.

Example (3.3) shows that two problems arise when we attempt to identify a correlate in the language to the subject of the thought. One, there is no syntactic or morphological marker on the noun that represents the subject. Sometimes, the noun representing the subject does not precede but follows the verb, as in *Così è il mare ignoto* ‘Such is the unknown sea.’ Nor do Italian nouns have case morphology that marks the subject; the form of a noun is the same whether it is subject or not; compare *isole* of (3.1–3.3).¹ If the goal is to account for the distribution of forms, then the category *subject of the thought* fails to account for the distribution of forms vis-à-vis nouns as subject. A solution to this problem might be that the subject is whichever noun makes sense, but then we are back to an analysis of thought, not of language, back to identifying components of thought, not mechanisms of Italian grammar.

The second problem is that sometimes there is no noun (or even pronoun) at all representing the subject, but only the conjugated verb, as in *ho capito* ‘I have learned’ or *possiamo* ‘we can.’ A solution to this problem might be to dispense with the need for an explicit noun or pronoun and to say that, in Italian, the subject is represented by the form (often the suffix) of the finite verb. That might work well for the first and second grammatical persons, but it fails utterly for the third, where the verb form by itself could refer to anything in the universe except the speaker/writer and the hearer/reader; that is, the verb fails to identify the subject. Context would often clear up the reference, but then we are beyond the boundaries of the sentence.

The second sense of the traditional term *subject* is “the performer of the action of the verb – also called the *actor* or *agent*.” This is paired with the second sense of the term *object*, namely, “the receiver of the action, the *goal* or *patient*.” Crucially, the two senses of the term *subject* – “what the thought is about” and “performer of the action” – do not consistently identify the same element of the sentence. The two definitions of *subject* lead to contradictory analytical results. Consider Examples, (3.4a, 3.4b), from the same passage:

- (3.4) a. **La prima isola** che *s’incontra*, *vista* dal mare è una distesa di verde (TD 14)
The first island that *is encountered*, *seen* from the sea, is an expanse of green

1. That was true, actually, even of Latin, which had quite “free” word order. The nominative is the case of both the subject and the predicate nominative of a finite verb; and the subject of an infinitive is in the accusative case (Diver, Davis, and Reid 2012). The nominative is found too where there is no verb (Allen and Greenough §319; Davis 2016a).

- b. **Il loro Panteon non è abitato** da dèi come i nostri (TD 14)
Their Pantheon is not inhabited by gods like ours

Here, although by the first definition of *subject* what is being talked about is ‘The first island’ and ‘Their Pantheon,’ the performers of the actions are something else, sentient beings in these cases. In the first case, the agents of the ‘encountering’ and the ‘seeing’ are presumably visitors to the island, or perhaps the dreamer-narrator; in the second case, the agent of the (not) ‘inhabiting’ is explicitly ‘gods.’ This conundrum is traditionally covered over with the label of *passive voice*, in which the subject of the thought is *not* the agent of the action. In Italian, to compound the problem, the single grammatical category *passive voice* is traditionally identified with two different morphological constructions: *si-*, as in (3.4a), and the participle paired with a main verb, as in (3.4b). Thus, again, there is a complete failure of traditional grammatical categories to correlate with form. This sense of *subject*, moreover, simply fails to apply to many sentences, namely to those without agents, such as all the examples in (3.1).

The third sense of the term *subject* is neither logical nor notional but purely formal. It thus abandons any attempt to link grammatical features to thought and “plunges us into” *arbitrary syntax* (Diver, Davis, and Reid 2012: 402). This third sense of *subject* is “the word that stands in agreement with the verb.” A subject is subject *ipso facto*, regardless of the importance or the role of its referent. Since testability is now out of the question, this definition of *subject* clearly cannot be considered a *hypothesis*. See Reid (2011) and Contini-Morava (2011) on theoretical problems with the construct of subject-verb agreement.

Analytically, results of applying this third definition, based on agreement, can be bizarre; consider Example (3.5):

- (3.5) Noi per fortuna non eravamo poveri. La terra era poca, ma era nostra.... Certo, non vi erano soste nella nostra fatica. *Bisognava star sempre piegati* sulla terra e faticare, ma con l’aiuto di Dio non *avremmo patito* la fame.... *Avevamo tutto* ciò che ci occorreva, il pane e il vino e l’olio. Dalle travi annerite della nostra cucina pendevano formaggi e salsicce e grosse fette di lardo. Tutto questo *dava* la nostra terra e il nostro lavoro. (BB 98)

We, fortunately, were not poor. The land was not much, but it was ours.... Granted, there were no pauses in our labor. *It was necessary to stay* constantly *bent* over the ground and toiling, but with the help of God we *would not suffer* hunger.... We *had* everything we needed: bread and wine and oil. From the blackened beams of our kitchen hung cheeses and sausages and big slices of lard. Our land and our work *yielded* (SG) all this.

By the third definition of *subject*, if all sentences are to have subjects, then certain subjects must be covert, not overt. Such would be, in (3.5), the subjects of *non avremmo patito* ‘we would not suffer’ and of *avevamo* ‘we had,’ since there is no overt *noi* ‘we’ to agree with the first-person plural verbs *avremmo patito* and *avevamo*. Yet if one thus identifies ‘we’ as subject here, one is in effect analyzing thought rather than mechanically identifying the noun or pronoun that agrees with the verb; one is in fact not applying the third definition. Moreover, it would be tricky to say what, exactly, agrees with the singular third-person verb *Bisognava* ‘It was necessary’; perhaps the one infinitive *star* ‘stay,’ or perhaps not, since the several members of the family ‘stay’ bent over the ground.

Also by the third definition of *subject*, the subject of the last sentence in (3.5) must be the singular *Tutto questo* ‘all this,’ because the verb *dava* ‘yielded’ is singular; the subject cannot be *la nostra terra e il nostro lavoro* ‘our land and our work,’ which is compound and thus plural. Yet surely it is the land and the work which ‘yielded’ the goods; they are the agent of the yielding. Just what exactly is the subject of the thought here is perhaps debatable, but ‘land and work’ would seem to have a stronger case than cheeses, sausages, and slices of lard, since the paragraph seems to be about the family’s hard farm life. For more on problems with syntactic agreement, see Chapter 9.

Yet another objection to this third definition of *subject* might be that certain verbs, namely infinitives and participles in Italian, would not have subjects. So, in (3.5), *star* ‘stay’ and *piegati* ‘bent’ would have no subjects. Infinitives in Italian have no morphology that could agree with anything. Participles might be said to agree in gender and number with the noun they modify (by inference, members of the family in Example 3.5), but they are not said to agree with their “subject” in any sense.

The third definition of *subject*, the one that leads into arbitrary syntax, appears to be entirely unworkable if one is concerned with attested discourse.

Specifically as regards *si-*, the category *subject* will be unhelpful. *Si-*, it would seem, ought to be ideal to embody the grammatical relations among parts of the universal sentence. Yet, once *si-* is examined in its own right, without the *assumption* that those relations will be relevant, *si-* turns out to be a mass of contradictions to the syntactic framework.² *Si-* might sometimes be said to represent the subject of the thought, as when it is an impersonal subject, but sometimes it does not, as when, in its reflexive uses, it is a direct or indirect object. And sometimes *si-* does not exactly represent a subject or non-subject at all, as when it is said to be the

2. Such “grammatical relations” among parts of universal sentence structure are made central and are formalized in Relational Grammar (e.g., Perlmutter and Rosen 1984, Rosen 1987 or 2012 Chapter 2).

syntactic marker of the passive voice. Likewise, the referent of *si-* is sometimes the performer of the action (some impersonal subjects, Chapter 2), but sometimes the referent of *si-* is the sufferer of the action (passives, Chapter 5) and sometimes both the performer and the sufferer of the action (reflexive direct objects, Chapter 6). The third sense of the term *subject* is completely useless as regards *si-*: Since *si-* does not encode grammatical number, it can never agree in number with anything. It does agree in grammatical person with a third-person finite verb, but by that measure *si-*, contrary to the whole of tradition, is always grammatical subject, even when it is a grammatical object. And, again, on infinitives there is nothing to agree with, while on participles there is only the wrong thing – not a subject – to agree with.

The traditional category *subject* is not going to be useful in accounting for occurrences of *si-* in discourse. Let us dispense with it.

B. New categories: Focus and Degree of Control

For understanding the distribution of *si-*, more helpful than the familiar notion of *subject* will be a distinction made by Diver and his successors in the Columbia School between two separate semantic *domains*, or *substances*: Focus on Participants and Degree of Control. Columbia School uses these two terms quite differently than they are used in other linguistic traditions. For Columbia School, the terms are semantic, not syntactic, and they are language-particular, not universal.

The term *Focus* can be defined as “a direction to concentrate attention on something” (Diver and Davis 2012: 212).³ There are different degrees, or *values*, of Focus, characterized in terms such as: FOCUS (Concentrate attention!) vs. NON-FOCUS (Do not concentrate attention!); or, alternatively, concentrate attention MORE or LESS. In terms used in the present treatment, the substance of Focus on Participants is divided into the values of the CENTRAL Focus on the referent of *egli* ‘he’ or the finite verb ending, the diminished or PERIPHERAL Focus on the referents of most of the clitics, and an even more diminished OUTER Focus.

By contrast, the term *Control* has to do with a referent’s “degree of responsibility for bringing about that event” in which he is signaled to be a participant (Huffman 1997: 31).⁴ In Italian – as in Latin, Spanish, French, and English – language users

3. Regarding Focus, see also Zubin (1979), Reid (1991) Chapter 5, Huffman (1997), and Huffman (2002) § 3.2 and fn. 1 there, for additional references.

4. The term *event*, common in Columbia School, must be understood as a (less than ideal) non-technical term intended to cover those elements of meaningful discourse that the language-user chooses to encode with what in traditional grammar was called verbal morphology.

have a mechanism for signaling a “relative Degree of Control exercised by a participant over some activity, usually that indicated by the verb” (Diver and Davis 2012: 215). Degrees of Control correspond, essentially, to the distinctions traditionally called *case*.

García (2009: 51) refers to the “participancy oppositions” within these two domains as they relate to individual events in discourse. Whether an entity is included as a participant or not, and then that entity’s ranking within the participancy oppositions, is a matter of “the Speaker’s judgment” – not objective reality or truth value.

Through their morphological dependence on a verbal form, the referring potential of [Spanish and Italian] clitics is associated to semantic dimensions relevant to actions or states: Focus and Case [or Degree of Control; jd] categorize the syntagmatic contrast between distinct participants in the same event.

The term Focus refers to the attention “concentrated” on a contextually prominent participant....

The verb-ending’s privileged status as inflectional morpheme singles it out as the grammatical heart of the [verbal complex]: ... the [participant in focus] outranks any non-focus participant. Non-finite verb forms do not explicitly invoke a [participant in focus]: if his identity is relevant, it will be contextually obvious; if it is not apparent, it can be presumed to be irrelevant, since no explicit morphology draws attention to it.

Case [or Degree of Control; jd] primordially concerns the relation between distinct ... participants, (García 2009: 51)⁵

The Columbia School concepts of Focus and Control may to some degree resemble, respectively, two of the traditional senses of *subject*: what the thought is about, and who performs the action. It must be emphasized, however, that, for Columbia School, systems of Focus and of Degree of Control are *a posteriori* hypotheses for particular sets of data (roughly, for different languages), not *a priori* linguistic

As is well known, those elements are not always “events” in the ordinary sense but often states. They may (finites) or may not (infinitives and participles) have tense morphology. And nouns, too, often represent “events” in the ordinary sense. It is an analytical question what motivates language-users to choose one signaling mechanism over another; cf. *Dio ci aiutava* ‘God helped us’ with Example 3.5 *con l’aiuto di Dio* ‘with the help of God.’

5. García (1975: 51) defines “Case” (“Degree of Control” in the present study) as being limited to “non-focus” (non-subject) participants. Mention of that restriction has been omitted from this quotation, for two reasons. One, the situation in Italian is different, where there is, as we shall see in Chapter 4, a signal of HIGH Degree of Control. Two, we must state the meanings of the datives and accusatives in Italian so as to allow for the inference that some other participant plays an even more controlling role in the event than they do.

universals. It is conceivable that some particular grammar may have no system of Focus or no system of Degree of Control at all; assignments of relative importance and potency might be made, if at all, purely on the basis of inference rather than being facilitated by grammatical signaling. Even where attested, the systems differ quite a bit in their particulars. For Classical Latin, Diver (in Diver and Davis 2012) posits two levels of Focus and four Degrees of Control, and these are signaled by case morphology. Modern English, by contrast, has two levels of Focus and three Degrees of Control, signaled by position (of nouns, relative to the verb) (Diver and Davis 2012). For Italian, this analysis will posit three levels of Focus on Participants and three Degrees of Control, signaled by pronominal morphology and the order thereof. Thus, the systems of Focus on Participants and of Degree of Control presented here for Italian are by no means assumptions but are instead data-driven hypotheses that are subject to revision and falsification. (For convenience, the term “Focus on Participants” will sometimes be abbreviated to “Focus” and that of “Degree of Control” sometimes abbreviated to “Control.”)

C. The three degrees of Focus in Italian

The term *Focus*, as used here, has to do with apportioning the reader’s or hearer’s attention among the various participants in an event named by a verb.⁶ Not all participants in a given event are equally attention-worthy; typically, one participant will deserve the highest level of Focus, and the other participants will deserve less. Diagram 3.1, below, presents a simplified version of the Focus hypothesis for Italian excluding, for the moment, *si*- and Gender and Number distinctions.

The diagram claims that in Italian the *semantic substance*, or *domain*, of Focus on Participants has a range that is exhaustively divided into three levels, each a grammatical *meaning* with its grammatical *signal*. The highest level of Focus, the meaning CENTRAL, is signaled by *egli*, traditionally a nominative case pronoun,

6. In Italian, the system of Focus on Participants is grammatically (i.e., morphologically and semantically) linked with the individual verb; this is why it is called Focus on Participants. Its relation to the larger discourse structure must thus be said to be indirect. After all, in addition to ranking the participants in individual events, the writer makes large-scale decisions about which events to include in the narrative and which participants to foreground. It may be that in other grammars systems of Focus are not tied to the individual verb at all but in principle apply to both the clause and the discourse level. Such may be the situation in Serbo-Croatian, in which nouns bear case morphology whether they are arguments of verbs or not (Gorup, p. c. 2014). It appears to be the case in Latin (Davis 2016a). The accounts of Latin by Diver (in Diver and Davis 2012) and of German by Zubin (1979) can be read – apparently clear statements to the contrary notwithstanding – as noncommittal in this regard.

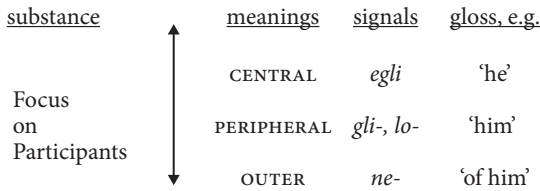


Diagram 3.1 The System of Focus on Participants: Preliminary Statement

usually glossed ‘he.’ This level corresponds essentially to the notion of “the subject of the thought,” above. The middle level, PERIPHERAL, is signaled by clitic *gli-* or *lo-*, traditionally the dative and accusative pronouns, respectively, glossed ‘him’ when referring to a male character.⁷ This level corresponds essentially to the traditional objects: indirect and direct, respectively. Finally, Italian has a third level of Focus, called here OUTER Focus, whose referent is so remotely involved in the activity as not even to be fully participating. This least attention-worthy level is signaled by *ne-*, traditionally the partitive pronoun of the third person.⁸ A more complete diagram of the system will follow.

Though Focus is signaled anew for each verb in a text (and so typically moves, as in Example 3.1 about the Hebrides above, from item to item), it is really only by looking at an extended context that one can reliably verify that one participant deserves more Focus than another. One cannot possibly assess attention-worthiness in an isolated sentence such as *Ida married Ira* or *Ira married Ida*. Quantitative validation, involving extended discourse, is required.

In a novel with one clear main character (a “hero”), that character can be predicted to be assigned, more often than other characters, the highest level of Focus. Minor characters, though important enough to be mentioned in the text, will tend to be assigned lower levels of Focus.⁹ This statistical tendency can be seen in Table 3.1 below, which combines results for counts on four texts, each with one clearly identifiable principal character.¹⁰ The table gives numbers of tokens observed of each type

7. The names for the meanings CENTRAL and PERIPHERAL are identical to those posited for French by Huffman (1997). Typically in Columbia School, as in all the references associated with note 3, only two degrees of Focus are posited.

8. The term *pronoun* is misleading, implying that these forms take the place of a noun, which is not always the case, particularly for *ne* and *la* (cf. Russi 2008: 103ff, 173ff).

9. Diver, in Diver, Davis, and Reid (2012:212–215), reports that the idea for such a prediction is due to David Zubin. Diver reports results for a count on sections of Caesar’s *De bello gallico*.

10. See Sources of Data for abbreviations.

and, in bold, column proportions adding vertically to 1.00.¹¹ For example, among tokens of *egli*, 137 referred to the principal character while 30 referred to some other man, a proportion of .8 to .2. The proportions show that, as Focus moves down from its highest level, CENTRAL, to its lowest level, OUTER, the proportion of times the Focus signal refers to a principal character decreases, from .8 to .5. In other words, principal characters, relative to minor characters, tend to show up most in CENTRAL Focus, less in PERIPHERAL Focus, and least in OUTER Focus.¹²

Table 3.1 Focus Correlated with Character Status

Principal characters, relative to other characters, tend to appear with CENTRAL Focus

Referent	<i>egli</i>		<i>gli-/lo-</i>		<i>ne-</i>		row total
	CENTRAL		PERIPHERAL		OUTER		
	<i>n</i>	proportion	<i>n</i>	proportion	<i>n</i>	proportion	
Principal man	137	.8	307	.6	7	.5	451
Other men	30	.2	178	.4	6	.5	214
	167		485		13		665

Sources of data: texts BB, TD “Antero de Quental. Una Vita,” CV, and RL (Davis 1992:91)

It is also instructive to study a passage during the course of which a single character moves across the field of Focus.¹³ The narrator in Example (3.6) is looking for his friend, the hero of the novel.

- (3.6) A tutti io domandavo di Michele Rende.... Rispondevano ambiguamente. Alcuni dicevano di non aver mai sentito parlare di un brigante. Altri *ne* avevano sentito parlare, ma in modo vago, non *l'*avevano mai visto. No, non sapevano se *egli* fosse ancora nascosto sulla montagna o se si fosse trasferito altrove.

(BB 182)

To everyone, I asked after Michele Rende.... They answered ambiguously. Some said they had never heard talk of a brigand. Others had heard tell of *him* (OUTER) but in a vague way; they had never seen *him* (PERIPHERAL). No, they did not know whether *he* (CENTRAL) was still hidden on the mountain or had moved somewhere else.

11. Proportions rather than percentages are given because, in the tables in this study, the total number of tokens in a column is at times less than 100; percentages would add an unsubstantiated level of precision.

12. No test of significance is offered here because this is not a random sample and cannot be taken to be representative of any particular population of tokens of the pronouns. See Davis (2002b) regarding the use of statistics in Columbia School grammatical analysis.

13. See Davis (1995b:81), from which much of this section is drawn.

The boy's questions at first elicit only vague, noncommittal answers from the respondents, but with persistence he is able to bring the hero, Michele, into the center of the respondents' attention, to the extent that they even provide details about where Michele might have been found (but has not). References to Michele (the brigand, the hero) progress (in the negative) from mere rumors to actual sightings to a statement of what Michele himself may have done.

For a table to give a fair picture of the characteristics of a population or sample, the columns need to be comparable and the rows need to be comparable. Table 3.1 achieves that goal by including only references to human male characters; all tokens in Table 3.1 refer to human males. The reason for that exclusion is that the table needs to include both CENTRAL-Focus *egli*, which explicitly signals MALE Sex (and so is always glossed 'he,' never 'it'), and signals of the other Focus meanings, which do not signal Sex and so, in overall usage, include inanimates ('it'). To show the skewing in the entire Focus scale, it is necessary in Table 3.1 to limit data points to references to human males. At the same time, however, it will be useful for readers of this study to have a fair picture of the relative distribution of those Focus signals which are not restricted to Sex and so include inanimates. Therefore, Table 3.2 is offered below, excluding CENTRAL-Focus *egli* and opening up the data pool to all grammatically masculine referents.¹⁴ Again, proportions appear in bold.

Table 3.2 Focus Correlated with Character Status (cont.)

Principal characters, relative to other entities, tend not to appear with OUTER Focus

Referent	<i>lo-</i>		<i>ne-</i>		row total
	PERIPHERAL		OUTER		
	<i>n</i>	proportion	<i>n</i>	proportion	
Principal character	92	.4	5	.1	97
Other masculine	150	.6	90	.9	240
	242		95		337
					OR > 11

Sources of data: texts BB Chapter 1–3, CV, and RL (Davis 1992:92)

14. To include *egli* in Table 3.2 would bias the impression given by the table in favor of the hypothesis but for a reason having nothing directly to do with Focus. The column for CENTRAL, relative to the two other columns, would overwhelmingly show tokens for principal characters, since it, unlike the other columns, would systematically exclude inanimates. The middle column excludes *gli-* for a similar reason: Both *gli-* and *lo-* signal meanings (cf. Chapter 4 here) that are not signaled by *egli* or *ne-*; excluding *gli-* from the table is the best – but not a perfect – way to make PERIPHERAL systematically comparable to OUTER so that the table is as unbiased as possible. The sources of data for Table 3.2 are a portion of those for Table 3.1 simply because tokens of *lo-* and *ne-* are so common once inanimates are included; it would be pointless to pile on more tokens exhibiting the same correlation.

The table shows that principal characters tend to be placed in the middle level of Focus (PERIPHERAL) relative to other things mentioned in the story, which tend to be placed in the lowest level of Focus (OUTER). The skewing is quite strong; the odds ratio (OR), measuring the strength of association between the two variables, is over 11.¹⁵

For further on *ne-*, see Chapters 6 and 10.

In Italian, Focus on participants in events is tracked through a narrative not only by pronominal clitics to verbs but also by the endings on finite verbs. While non-finite verbs (participles, gerunds, and infinitives) give no information about Participant Focus (nor about tense – which is why the tradition calls them non-finite), finite verbs do give information about Participant Focus (and tense). It will be necessary, therefore, to spell out a working hypothesis regarding the finite verb ending.

This study, without undertaking a full analysis of verb morphology – far less a validation of any formal hypothesis regarding verb morphology –, will take the position that, within a text, finite verbs carry the main narrative and non-finite verbs fill in information that is secondary in importance to the narrative.¹⁶

The morphology of the finite verb functions as a set of signals of interlocked meanings concerning the place of CENTRAL Focus at that point in the narrative (plus information about Time and perhaps other substances). The finite verb ending provides no information about participants at PERIPHERAL or OUTER Focus. CENTRAL Participant Focus is signaled to be on SPEAKER OR HEARER OR NOT SPEAKER OR HEARER (i.e., first, second, or third-person). This scale is interlocked with a kind of Number system so that the speaker must signal at the same time that the hearer should ENUMERATE or should NOT ENUMERATE the Discourse Referent at CENTRAL Focus. The meaning ENUMERATE is useful when Focus is to be taken to apply to multiple individuals (i.e., plural); the meaning DO NOT ENUMERATE is useful when Focus is to be taken otherwise, that is, to apply to one individual (i.e.,

15. The odds ratio is merely a standard measure of association in a four-celled table. Without claiming anything about statistical significance (i.e., applicability to other data sets), it simply quantifies the strength of an association between two variables. Odds ratios range from zero to infinity. The odds ratio for no association (equal distribution) between the two variables is 1.0. The odds ratio for a positive association is anything greater than 1.0. And the odds ratio for a negative association (the variables correlate inversely) is between 0.0 and 1.0. Here, the odds of a principal character appearing with PERIPHERAL Focus rather than OUTER Focus are over 11 times as high as the odds of another entity appearing with PERIPHERAL Focus.

16. See Diver and Davis (2012), especially note 4, for Diver's hypothesis of Vividness for Latin, in which finite verbs sit at the top of a scale of Vividness (or attentionworthiness). Provisionally, the present work will take the position that the verb morphology of modern Italian (with its finites and non-finites) functions analogously.

singular) or to no one or nothing in particular (impersonal, as will be discussed in Chapter 9). In sum, the six nodes of the interlock might be formalized as follows: SPEAKER, NOT ENUMERATED (first-person singular); HEARER, NOT ENUMERATED (second-person singular); NOT SPEAKER OR HEARER AND NOT ENUMERATED (third-person singular); SPEAKER PLUS OTHERS ENUMERATED (first-person plural); HEARER PLUS OTHERS ENUMERATED, EXCLUDING SPEAKER (second-person plural); and NOT SPEAKER OR HEARER BUT ENUMERATED (third-person plural).¹⁷

Thus, as is well known, the Italian finite verb, on its own, with no overt subject noun or pronoun, indicates who or what is the subject of thought at that point in the narrative. For example: *stim-o* ‘I respect,’ *stim-i* ‘you-SG respect,’ *stim-a* ‘he/she/it respects,’ *stim-iamo* ‘we respect,’ *stim-ate* ‘you-PL respect,’ and *stim-ano* ‘they respect.’¹⁸ Obviously, these meanings do not at all completely identify the Discourse Referent at CENTRAL Focus; the meanings are imprecise: Who, exactly, is the speaker? Who, exactly, is the hearer? The identification is especially imprecise for third-person, since the meaning eliminates often only two individuals in the entire universe, the speaker and the hearer. In the case of the third person, then, when *egli* or some appropriate noun is also present, that item serves to narrow down the identity of the participant in CENTRAL Focus.¹⁹ For example, from (3.3) above, in the phrase *l’Occidente ... continua a spostarsi con noi* ‘the West continues to travel with us,’ the ending *-a* of *continua* signals that, at this point in the narrative, CENTRAL Focus is NOT SPEAKER OR HEARER and is NOT ENUMERATED. By itself, that leaves open a lot of possibilities as to just who or what ‘continues,’ but nearby sits the lexical item *Occidente* ‘West,’ and in the context, the West is a plausible candidate for a more precise identification of just what entity other than speaker or hearer is

17. Cf. García (1975: 80) for Spanish and Reid (2011: 1093) for English. At variance with Reid’s analysis of English verb number, however, Italian verb number will here be assigned the two grammatical meanings DO NOT ENUMERATE and ENUMERATE, rather than ONE and MORE THAN ONE. This is done especially because of the impersonals with *si-*; cf. Chapter 9.

18. The present work will not undertake to describe the (regionally peculiar) uses of these meanings in order to convey politeness or social relations between speaker and hearer. Nor will it undertake an analysis of the conjugations. Nor to account for irregular verb morphology. Those are worthy studies unto themselves.

19. Another function of an explicit subject can be to provoke some inference about that subject that is independent of the verb. Such is illustrated in the example here of *A tutti io domandavo di Michele Rende* ‘To everyone I asked after Michele Rende,’ with the “optional” disjunctive pronoun *io* ‘I.’ Context reveals here an implied contrast between the more talkative townie (*io*) and the more reticent folk on the mountain (*riservata, abituata alla solitudine*). See Davis (1992, 1995a) for further on the communicative effects of disjunctive subjects.

at CENTRAL Focus in the continuing.²⁰ At this point, the writer is signaling to the reader NOT to place CENTRAL Focus on the writer or the reader. On what then? A plausible and available candidate is ‘West,’ and so that is the inference that a successful reader will make.

Further illustrations of the interlock (some from examples above) include: *non lo so* ‘I do not know,’ *sei pazzo* ‘you-SG are crazy,’ *si fosse trasferito altrove* ‘he/she/it had moved somewhere else,’ *avevamo tutto* ‘we had everything,’ *avete ragione* ‘you-PL are right,’ and *rispondevano ambiguamente* ‘they answered ambiguously.’

This provisional analysis of Italian verb morphology is presented merely as a working hypothesis so that the task of validating a hypothesis about *si-* can proceed. The analysis of verb morphology certainly bears resemblance to the traditional verbal paradigm of grammatical person and number. What is important here, if anything, is the claim that the finite verb ending is a *signal* of a *meaning* in the system called here Discourse Referent at CENTRAL Focus.²¹

D. The status of *si-* in the System of Focus on Participants

With the basic three-level structure of the Italian Focus system sketched out, it remains to specify how *si-* relates to Focus. Simply put, *si-* encompasses the range of Focus that is divided in two by CENTRAL and PERIPHERAL; *si-* excludes only OUTER Focus. CENTRAL is the level that is signaled by *egli* and the verb ending, and PERIPHERAL is the level that is signaled by *gli-*, *le-*, *-loro*, and *l+-*. *Si-* shares these two levels of Focus with these other verbal satellites.²² *Si*, that is, *does not distinguish* the two levels of Focus CENTRAL and PERIPHERAL. This combined level of Focus

20. In modern Italian, unlike Classical Latin, nouns do not bear case, and so *Occidente* by itself does not signal anything about Focus. Also in modern Italian, unlike modern English, word order is more variable than a strict SVO, and so the order *l’Occidente continua* by itself does not – so far as is known at this point – signal anything about Focus.

21. The name of this semantic substance must be taken as provisional. What seems obvious is that it is built somehow on a system of Discourse Referents (*io parlo, tu parli, lui parla*, etc.), but the exact place in the system of the third-person finite verb ending, which at times does not even “refer” to anything, remains to be worked out. The third-person is treated here as a “residual member” (Diver 1995/2012: 494–497), NOT SPEAKER OR HEARER, but it may be some kind of opposition of substance, opting out of distinctions of Discourse Referent altogether.

22. This hypothesis differs from that of García (1975: e.g., pp. 70–71) regarding Spanish clitic *se*; she has *se* “neutral to Focus,” that is, not signaling Focus. From the present point of view, that appears to be due to the fact that Spanish *se*, like Italian *si*, does not distinguish the levels that are here called CENTRAL and PERIPHERAL. The existence in Italian, however, of a third level of Focus, INNER, compels the recognition that *si* does cover only part, not all, of the range of Focus.

can be called INNER (in contrast with the level OUTER, below). All of these INNER Focus signals (*egli*, the verb ending, *gli-*, *le-*, *-loro*, *l+-*, and *si-*) have in common that they refer to bona fide *participants* in the event, entities that deserve attention vis-à-vis the event, and that often (as we shall see) contribute in some way to making the event happen.

To grasp why *si-* is said to “encompass” – i.e., *not distinguish* – the two levels of Focus that are divided by most of the other verbal satellites, it helps to think paradigmatically, in terms of the commutations that one can make between *si-* and them.

First, consider how *si-* covers the range of CENTRAL Focus, the same range covered by *egli* and the verb ending. In the preceding chapter, it was seen that *si-* sometimes has the effect of a *generalized impersonal* (e.g., 2.2, *si sa bene che... ‘everybody knows well that...’*). In such cases, *si-* and the verb ending are coreferential; *si-* signals INNER Focus, which encompasses the CENTRAL Focus signaled by the verb ending. Both are third-person, the only difference being that *si-* does not even signal grammatical Number. The participant signaled to be involved in this act (of ‘knowing’) is thus minimally identified. When there is occasion to be more specific about just who or what is at CENTRAL Focus, some linguistic form can be used that is more informative than *si-*, such as (nominative) *egli* ‘he’, which explicitly signals ONE MALE participant, or else a disjunctive pronoun (*lui* ‘he’) or a proper name (*Michele*) or a lexical item (*brigante* ‘brigand’), any of which can be inferred to be coreferential with the verb ending. So *si-*, *egli*, and the verb ending cover the same level of Focus, CENTRAL, the difference being that *si-* does not signal Number and Sex.²³

Alternatively, *si-* may be coreferential with a specific (or, personal) participant. This happens, as will be examined in greater detail in the next chapters, in those examples in which the tradition would parse *si-* as a reflexive pronoun to a finite verb. In such cases, *si-* is again coreferential with the finite verb ending.

egli *s’* *uccise*
 he [si-] *kill*
 ‘he killed himself’

23. The postulation of the Focus meaning for *si-*, including the impersonal, challenges the claim of García (1975: 193) that “one cannot focus except on something whose identity is important.” It is perfectly possible to direct attention to a generality. Too, the explanation offered by García (1975: 203) for the restriction of *se* to *human* impersonals (**Se ladró en la noche* ‘There was barking during the night’) – that “human beings are inherently more deserving of focus than are non-human entities” – is replaced here by the opposition of substance, within the Focus system, of sexless *si-* to sexed *egli*. Even though *si-* does not explicitly signal Sex, *si-*, unlike verb ending, has a structural relation to a system of Sex. Others, e.g., Rosen (1982 or 2012 Chapter 2), handle this restriction to humans with a syntactic feature. It has also been noted descriptively, e.g. by Cordin (1991: 106).

Egli, si-, and the verb ending *-e* all refer to the same male suicide, the person who is indicated by *egli* and the verb ending to occupy the CENTRAL level of Focus.

Example (3.4a) in this chapter, too, contains an instance of *si-* referring to a specific participant in Focus. The example is repeated here as (3.7):

- (3.7) La prima isola che s'incontra, vista dal mare è una distesa di verde (TD 14)
The first island that (*si-*) is encountered, seen from the sea, is an expanse of green

The ending *-a* on the finite verb *incontra* signals that CENTRAL Focus is NOT ON SPEAKER OR HEARER and is NOT ENUMERATED; that is easily inferred to be consistent with 'the first island.' *Si-* is coreferential with this island. Again, then in this example, *si-* effectively stands at the level of CENTRAL Focus, a level contained within INNER Focus. In traditional grammar, such an example would be parsed as an instance of the passive voice; such examples will be examined in depth in Chapter 5.

Consider now how *si-* covers the range of PERIPHERAL Focus, the same range covered by *gli-*, *le-*, *-loro*, and *l+-* (the datives and accusatives). To explore PERIPHERAL Focus, it is necessary now to consider *si-* as satellite to a nonfinite verb, where the Focus may be on someone else. In (3.8a) and (3.8b) below, *si-* is satellite to an infinitive. (With non-finites, the position is *enclitic*; cf. Chapter 2, n. 6.)

In (3.8a), *si-* refers to the participant in CENTRAL Focus, signaled by the verb ending on *era deciso* 'had decided,' and inferred to be identical with the disjunctive pronoun *lui*.

- (3.8a) Anche lui si era deciso a parlare quando non aveva piú potuto sostenere l'accusa
senza difendersi (BB 65–66)
Even he had decided to talk when he could no longer bear the accusation
without defending *himself* (*si-*).

The referent of *si-* (enclitic to infinitive *difender*) is inferred to be both the patient and the agent of the defending. He (*lui*) also has been placed at the center of attention, as established by inferred coreference with the finite verbs *era deciso* and *aveva potuto*.

By contrast, *si-* might not refer to the person at CENTRAL Focus:

- (3.8b) E poi le venne l'impulso di nascondersi (BB 238)
And then there came to her the impulse to hide (*herself*) (*si-*).

Again, the referent of *si-* is, in point of fact, both the patient and the agent of the hiding. But this time she has not been placed at the center of attention. She is at PERIPHERAL Focus, as established by *le-* 'her-DAT.' It is not she but the *impulso* 'impulse' which is inferred to be coreferential with the ending on *venne* 'came' at CENTRAL Focus.

Examples (3.8a) and (3.8b) illustrate how *si-* covers the range of CENTRAL and PERIPHERAL Focus combined. Example (3.8c) shows why *si-* must be assigned a Focus meaning at all.

In (3.8c) below, as in (3.8b) above, the referent of *si-* is both inferred agent and patient, and again not at the center of attention. But this time, no one is at the center of attention.

(3.8c) Ma a un certo punto bisogna avere il coraggio di misurarsi con la realtà, almeno con la realtà della nostra vita. (TD 25)

But at a certain point it is necessary to have the courage to measure *oneself* (*si-*) according to reality, at least with the reality of our life.

The most recent CENTRAL Focus in (3.8c) has been signaled (again NOT ON SPEAKER OR HEARER) by finite verb *bisogna* ‘it is necessary.’ There is no particular referent at all, just an instruction to direct Focus onto one need. Then the generalized impersonal human referent (‘oneself’) of infinitive *misurar* ‘measure’ (both agent and patient of the measuring) is not at the center of attention. If some level of Focus were to be signaled for the human measuring himself – which it is not here – then it could well be at either CENTRAL OR PERIPHERAL Focus:

Egli (CENTRAL) ha il coraggio di misurarsi con la realtà.

‘He has the courage to measure *himself* according to reality.’

Lei gli (PERIPHERAL) dà il coraggio di misurarsi con la realtà

‘She gives him the courage to measure *himself* according to reality.’

If there were two participants in the measuring, then the person measured would be signaled to have PERIPHERAL Focus:

Lei ha il coraggio di misurarlo (PERIPHERAL) con la realtà.

‘She has the courage to measure *him* according to reality.’

The reason for claiming that *si-* has a Focus meaning at all, even when there is nothing in the context to establish such Focus independently, is that *si-* in (3.8c) above still contrasts with *ne-*, the signal of OUTER Focus.

Conosco bene Mario, e ho il coraggio di misurarne (OUTER) il peso.

‘I know Mario well, and I have the courage to measure *his* weight.’

Mario, referent of *ne-*, is tangentially involved in the act of measuring but is not the thing actually measured (His height, for instance, is not measured; nor his character). Evidently, *si-*, like *egli*, *gli-*, *le-*, *l+-*, and *-loro*, is a bona fide signal of Focus in its own right. And so in (3.8c) there is indeed a signal of Focus: *si-* signals INNER Focus, in opposition to OUTER Focus and not distinguishing between CENTRAL and PERIPHERAL Focus.

Because *si-* covers the same range of Focus as *egli*, *gli-*, *le-*, *-loro*, and *l+-* combined – all referring to bona fide participants in the event –, *si-* contrasts in Focus value only with OUTER-Focus *ne-*, the referent of which does not wholly participate in the event but stands at some remove from it, as it were, or is associated with the event only through the mediation of some other participant.²⁴ *Si-* is separated from *ne-* by an *opposition of value*: two distinct values of Focus. The value opposed to OUTER (*ne-*) can be called INNER.

The value of INNER Focus *si-* is divided in two by the other third-person verbal satellites. INNER Focus is divided into CENTRAL Focus, signaled by *egli*, and PERIPHERAL Focus, signaled by *gli-*, *le-*, *-loro*, and *l+-*. These also differ in terms of *oppositions of substance*. *Si-* lacks information about Sex (cf. MALE *egli*), grammatical Gender (*l+-*), Number (*l+-*; ONE *egli*, *gli-*, *le-*; MORE *-loro*), and Degree of Control (MID *gli-*, *le-*, *-loro*; LOW *l+-*). *Si-* “opts out” of these semantic substances. These oppositions of substance, as we shall see in the remaining chapters, are crucial for distribution.

A more complete diagram of the (third-person) System of Focus on Participants is Diagram 3.2:

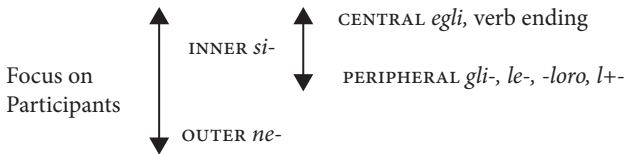


Diagram 3.2 The System of Focus on Participants

In the Italian System of Focus on Participants, there are two bifurcations. First, a distinction is made between true participants (with INNER Focus) and mere associates (with OUTER Focus). Then, a distinction is made among the true participants between the one who deserves the highest level of attention (CENTRAL Focus) and all other bona fide participants (PERIPHERAL Focus).²⁵

While no complete analysis of the first- and second-person clitics can be offered here, it can be stated that *mi-* ‘me,’ *ti-* ‘you-SG,’ *ci-* ‘us,’ and *vi-* ‘you-PL’ may (with reflexive finites) or may not (with non-reflexives and non-finites) be coreferential

24. This is the sense that is captured by the traditional term *partitive*: often, only some *part* of the referent of *ne-* actually participates in the event.

25. Parallel with *egli* ‘he,’ some writers (e.g., Moravia) use *ella* ‘she,’ but most writers (e.g., Berto, Lampedusa, Vittorini), for reference to a female, use instead the grammatically feminine disjunctive *essa*. All use the disjunctives *lui* ‘he/him’ and *lei* ‘she/her,’ which signal Sex but do not signal Focus.

with a verb ending and that they always represent bona fide participants. Therefore, they can, like *si-*, be tentatively assigned the meaning INNER Focus. Thus they share some, but not all, distributional properties with *si-*. They differ from *si-* in their other meanings: DISCOURSE REFERENT SPEAKER (*mi-*), HEARER (*ti-*), SPEAKER AND OTHERS (*ci-*), and HEARER AND OTHERS, EXCLUDING SPEAKER (*vi-*).²⁶

The hypothesis that *si-* signals a higher level of Focus on Participants than *ne-* finds quantitative support from texts in which there is one clearly identifiable principal character. In such texts, the principal character tends strongly to appear in INNER Focus, signaled by *si-*, compared with other referents, which tend to appear in OUTER Focus, signaled by *ne-*. See Table 3.3.²⁷

Table 3.3 FOCUS (INNER / OUTER) Correlated with Character Status
Principal characters, relative to others, tend to appear with INNER, not OUTER, Focus

Character status	<i>si-</i>		<i>ne-</i>		row total
	INNER		OUTER		
	<i>n</i>	proportion	<i>n</i>	proportion	
Principal character	165	.26	2	.02	167
Other character	477	.74	99	.98	576
	642		101		743
					OR > 17

Sources of data: BB Chapter 1, MI Chapter 2, CV.

Table 3.3 confirms that a principal character is rarely referred to by *ne-* but is fairly often referred to by *si-*. The results support the hypothesis that *si-* signals a higher level of Focus on Participants than *ne-*.

Example (3.9) illustrates the tendency. In CENTRAL FOCUS (finite verbs *Tendeva, sapeva, stringeva, sentiva, lasciava*) is the principal character, the naive Viscount Medardo, standing pensively at night at some distance from the site of a terrible battle.

26. Contrast García (1975: 68–71), where the Spanish first and second-person clitics are assigned the meaning NON FOCUS in contrast to *se*, which she says is “neutral to focus.” If, as she claims, “the purpose of Focus is to differentiate entities,” then, with reflexives, two distinct degrees of Focus should not apply to the same entity. (While it is conceivable that a participant might “span,” say, two Degrees of Control, it is implausible that a participant might simultaneously be in and not in Focus.) Rather, it is the person (Discourse Referent) meanings of *mi-*, *ti-*, *ci-*, *vi-*, not their Focus meanings (*pace* García), that account for their not being used impersonally. See Chapter 4 n. 11 and Chapter 6 for further on the first and second-person clitics.

27. Table 3.3 combines results from three texts (BB, MI, CV), each of which skews in the same direction.

(3.9) Tendeva lo sguardo al margine dell'orizzonte notturno, dove sapeva essere il campo dei nemici, e a braccia conserte si stringeva con le mani le spalle, contento d'aver certezza insieme di realtà lontane e diverse, e della propria presenza in mezzo a esse. Sentiva il sangue di quella guerra crudele, sparso per mille rivi sulla terra, giungere fino a lui; e *se ne* lasciava lambire, senza provare accanimento né pietà. (CV 22)

'He stretched his gaze toward the edge of the night horizon, where he knew the enemies' camp to be, and with folded arms he squeezed his shoulders with his hands, happy to have certainty both of realities far and wide and of his own presence in the midst of them. He felt the blood of that cruel war, spilled in a thousand streams on the ground, reaching even to him; and he allowed *himself* (*si-*) to lick *at it* (*ne-*), without feeling either rage or pity.'

Here, as often, INNER-Focus *si-* refers to the principal character, while OUTER-Focus *ne-* refers to something else: a small part of the blood of other men, in this case.²⁸ Consistent, moreover, with the meaning OUTER Focus, the blood of the enemies does not fully participate in the licking. This is not a literal statement: Medardo did not plunge his tongue into the blood running on the ground: not *se lo lasciava lambire* 'he let himself lick it.' Rather, he took some pleasure in tasting – licking 'at it' – a bit of the reality of life and death. The Viscount is a dilettante at war, not (yet) fully plunged into it (Davis 2016b).

E. Another view of the System of Focus on Participants

Another way to conceptualize the System of Focus on Participants is as a kind of target or field of vision taken in by a camera lens. In the graphic representation below, Diagram 3.3, concentric circles represent different levels of Focus on Participants, from the center (the disk) to the periphery (the doughnut surrounding that disk) to almost a kind of outer frame that is not really even part of the picture (the doughnut farthest out from the center). The outermost doughnut is separated from the two inner parts of the disk by a circle that represents the opposition of value between INNER *si-* and OUTER *ne-*. In the accompanying legend, the curly brackets to the left of *si-* and to the right of *si-* are intended to suggest that *si-* encompasses the two INNER levels of Focus, excluding the OUTER level: thus, inclusively, { *si-* }.

28. See Chapter 10 concerning the form *se* rather than *si* before *ne*.

In sum, *si-* may or may not be coreferential with a finite verb ending, but *si-* does always refer to a bona fide participant in an event, and such participants occupy the levels of Focus called here CENTRAL and PERIPHERAL. This is in distinction with *ne-*, which does not refer to a bona fide participant but only to someone or something that is remotely or partly involved, or indirectly involved through association with some true participant. Therefore, *si-* is assigned the meaning INNER Focus, to distinguish it from the OUTER Focus of *ne-*.

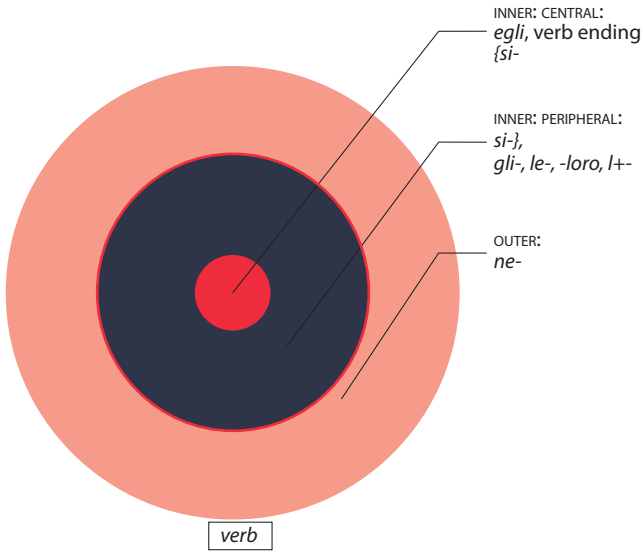


Diagram 3.3 The System of Focus on Participants: A graphic representation

The system of Degree of Control

The previous chapter developed a hypothesis for a system of Focus on Participants in which several of the morphological satellites to the verb are signals of meanings: *egli* at INNER: CENTRAL FOCUS; *gli-*, *le-*, *l+-*, *-loro* at INNER: MID FOCUS; *si-* at INNER FOCUS (encompassing CENTRAL and PERIPHERAL); and *ne-* at OUTER FOCUS. The present chapter develops a hypothesis for an additional system, the system of Degree of Control, in which several but not all of the Focus signals take part; specifically, *gli-*, *le-*, *l+-*, and *-loro* are signals of Control, while *egli*, *si-*, and *ne-* are not. After laying out this system within a system, the present chapter will explain how *si-* relates to it without actually being a part of it. Chapters 5–8 will illustrate how consideration of both systems together is useful in accounting for the distribution of *si-*.

A. The three Degrees of Control

In addition to signaling, with the Focus System, how much relative attention the participants in an event deserve (Chapter 3), writers and speakers of Italian have a mechanism for signaling how relatively responsible participants are for making the event happen. This mechanism is the system of Degree of Control. The signals of Degree of Control are a subset of the signals of Focus and do not include *si-*. The status of *si-* with respect to the system of Control will be detailed later in this chapter. Since the signals of Degree of Control also have meanings from the system of Focus on Participants, the systems of Focus and Control are said to be *interlocked*. Diagram 4.1, below, formalizes the hypothesis, in a preliminary way.

substance		meanings	signals	interlocked Focus meanings
Degree of Control	↑	HIGH	*	INNER: CENTRAL
		MID	<i>gli-</i> , <i>le-</i> , <i>-loro</i>	INNER: PERIPHERAL
	↓	LOW	<i>l+-</i>	INNER: PERIPHERAL

* The signal of HIGH Control, being somewhat complex, will be discussed below.

Diagram 4.1 The system of Degree of Control: Preliminary statement

The diagram shows that, in Italian, the semantic substance of Degree of Control is exhaustively divided into three levels, each a meaning (HIGH, MID, LOW Degree of Control), each with its signal. The information as to grammatical Gender and Number that is signaled by the clitics is not shown explicitly in this diagram.¹ The system of Degree of Control interlocks with the system of Focus; the signals of Degree of Control are also signals of Focus, as shown on the right-hand side of the diagram. Participants that contribute substantially to making an event happen (HIGH, MID, or LOW Control) deserve the hearer's or reader's attention (INNER Focus). The meaning OUTER Focus, signaled by *ne-* does not interlock with Degree of Control; a participant at OUTER Focus is too remotely involved to be attributed a degree of responsibility for bringing the event about. The status of *si-* vis-à-vis the system of Control will be explained later in this chapter.

As with the Focus meanings, the Control meanings are semantic, not syntactic. As seen in Chapter 3, the sentence-based categories of subject and object will not be helpful if our goal is to account for the distribution of *si-* in discourse. Moreover, the Control meanings, like the Focus meanings, are relative. The Control meanings do not equate to traditional absolute thematic roles such as agent, beneficiary, and patient.² The imprecise Control meanings accommodate a great variety of messages about how various participants contribute to making events happen, leaving it to the reader or hearer to infer the actual type of involvement of a given participant.

In particular, the familiar idea that the dative refers reliably to a recipient (one to whom something is *given*) is refuted by examples such as (4.1):

- (4.1) *Esaú, vai pian piano dal mulo, levagli la biada e dàgli qualcos'altro.* (CV 87)
 'Esaú, go quietly to the mule, take the oats away from him (*gli-*) and give him (*gli-*) something else.'

With one *gli-*, the mule receives something, and with another *gli-*, the mule loses something.

1. The accusative clitics distinguish grammatical Gender and Number as follows: *lo-* MASCULINE, ONE; *la-* FEMININE, ONE; *li-* MASCULINE, MORE THAN ONE; *le-* FEMININE, MORE THAN ONE. The dative clitic *le-* signals FEMININE, ONE. (Thus the dative feminine singular is homophonous with the accusative feminine plural.) Continuing in traditional terms: The dative clitic *gli-* in our texts is almost always masculine singular ('[to] him/it'), but it rarely shows up referring to a feminine singular or to a plural; regional, social, and historical variation among language users is evidently at play (Lepschy & Lepschy 1988: 37, 79, 118). In addition to the enclitic dative plural *-loro* ('[to] them'), there is a disjunctive *loro* ('they, them') and a possessive *loro* ('their, theirs'). These all derive from the Latin genitive plural *illorum*. Here, the provisional position is taken that they constitute three different signals that are members of different grammatical systems, with the enclitic position of *-loro* being one aid to disambiguating them.

2. Contrast, e.g., *confessarlo* (LG 15), where *lo* is a failing confessed by a penitent, and *confessarla* (SP 79), where *la* is a woman wanting to be confessed by a priest.

By hypothesis, Degree of Control is explicitly signaled only by the mechanisms shown (in preliminary fashion) in Diagram 4.1. Often, other discourse elements, such as nouns surrounding the verb (cf. Chapter 5), or such as prepositional phrases, will have communicative effects that appear to be similar to Control signals. A speaker or writer's grammatical systems, presumably, do not go away, as it were, when for the nonce they are not being employed; the hypotheses are always available in the mega-system for the analyst to appeal to. So one can sometimes speak somewhat loosely in terms of interpreting the referents of nouns and disjunctive pronouns to be contributors to making events happen; e.g., *Michele mandò una lettera* 'Michele sent a letter'; *mandato da Michele* 'sent by Michele,' *mandare a lei* 'send to her.' But in such cases that is a product of inference, facilitated by the postulation of those systems in the grammar, not of grammatical signaling. As for noun subjects and objects, both orders, SVO and OVS, occur (cf. Chapter 5). Words that the tradition labels "prepositions" (e.g., *da*, *a*) routinely suggest a *disassociation* of their objects from events, rather than the close *association* that is a characteristic of Control. This *lack* of attribution of responsibility is seen perhaps most clearly when these words are paired with place names: *mandato da Venezia* 'sent from Venice,' *mandare a Roma* 'send to Rome,' where the places are not responsible for the activity. Prepositions give the "type of involvement" ('from' is a different type than 'to'), while clitics give the "degree of responsibility" (García 1975: 95). So a distinction must be made between, on the one hand, formal grammatical signaling and, on the other hand, the various inferences that can be made on the basis of forms coming together in a piece of discourse with the ever-present background of the network of signaled meanings. See Huffman (1997) for further on the status of prepositional phrases, particularly their *not* signaling Degree of Control in French.

The relative nature of the meanings of Degree of Control can be illustrated in the following two examples, (4.2) and (4.3). As these come from the same text, and as the concept of Control may be unfamiliar to readers who are accustomed to thinking in terms of syntactic categories, some background context will be helpful.

Examples (4.2) and (4.3) are taken from Calvino's novel *Il visconte dimezzato*, which title translates to something like *The Halved Viscount*. In this witty but often bitter allegory, a viscount named Medardo, gravely wounded in battle, returns to his native village literally divided in two: one half of him purely good and one half purely evil. The evil half-Viscount goes about wreaking havoc upon his village, its people, and its animals. He develops a compelling desire to take into his possession a young shepherdess, Pamela, and to imprison her in his castle, where he will have her all to himself.

In the scene from which Example (4.2) is taken, Pamela ventures into the forest hoping to see Medardo. She lies down upon a bed of pine needles. When the

Viscount appears and asks if she is prepared to go to the castle, she coyly replies no, that if he desires her he should take her there in the forest ‘on the bed of pine needles.’ Will he take her there? Will he remove her to his castle? Can he resist the temptation to kill her?

- (4.2) Il Visconte s’era accosciato accanto alla testa di lei. Aveva un ago di pino in mano; l’avvicinò al suo collo e *glielo* passò intorno. Pamela si sentí venir la pelle d’oca ma stette ferma. Vedeva il viso del visconte chino su di lei.... Medardo strinse l’ago di pino nel pugno e lo spezzò. Si rialzò. – È chiusa nel castello che voglio avverti, è chiusa nel castello! (CV 63)

‘The Viscount had crouched down beside her head. He held in his hand a pine needle; he brought it near to her neck and threaded *it* (*lo-*) around *it* (*gli-*). Pamela felt the gooseflesh rising, but she remained still. She saw the Viscount’s face inclined above her.... Medardo clinched the pine needle in his fist and broke it. He stood up. “It’s locked in the castle that I wish to have you, locked in the castle!”’

The hypothesis of Degree of Control makes the claim that the referents of the two clitics – the girl’s neck and the pine needle – *participate* in the act of ‘threading’ or ‘passing around,’ and that they have two different levels of responsibility for making that event happen. The neck and the needle are explicitly signaled not to have HIGH Control over the event and to have mutually different Degrees of Control over the it: MID for the neck, and LOW for the needle. The participant with the greatest responsibility for the event is not signaled. The finite verb ending of *passò* ‘passes,’ however, signals that CENTRAL FOCUS IS NOT ON SPEAKER OR HEARER and IS NOT ENUMERATED. Nearby in the context is *Il Visconte*, who is the main character and is powerful. It is an eminently reasonable inference that the Viscount is the most responsible participant in the event.

The needle has no choice as to whether it gets tightened around the neck or crushed and discarded. It is a detached part of a tree, with no will of its own, a pawn in Medardo’s hand. It contributes to this act of ‘threading around’ only the inherent characteristics of its shape and pliability, which render it suitable for such an act. Medardo could hardly have threaded the trunk or the seed of a pine tree around Pamela’s neck.³ With *lo-*, the needle is signaled to participate in the event but with a relatively LOW Degree of Control.

3. This careful formulation is intended to avoid claiming, as did García (1975:99, 102) that “the accusative is totally inactive,” “absolute” in being least active, with its “sole contribution” consisting “in passively being there for the event to affect [it].”

Pamela's neck, by contrast, is crucial to the event even though it too, like the pine needle, lacks a will of its own. While Medardo might well have used a long stringy weed or a shoelace, or whatever, to strangle the girl, he could not very well target her wrist or her ankle to strangle her, but only her neck. The neck exerts control over Medardo's movement in that it presents itself as life-sustaining and vulnerable and so drives Medardo to move the pine needle just there and nowhere else. With *gli-*, the neck is signaled to have a MID Degree of Control over the event, in between that of Medardo and the pine needle.⁴

Example (4.3) appears just two pages later. Pamela has escaped. That night, the haystack where Pamela's mother sleeps catches fire, and the barrel where Pamela's father sleeps falls apart. In the morning, Medardo shows up, offers a ridiculous apology, and formally and politely asks the old man and woman for their daughter's hand in marriage. The parents endeavor to convince Pamela that the Viscount has become good.

- (4.3) Ma i due vecchietti covavano qualcosa. E l'indomani legarono Pamela e la chiusero in casa con le bestie; e andarono al castello a dire al visconte che se voleva la loro figlia la mandasse pur a prendere, ch  loro erano disposti a consegnargliela.
(CV 65)

'But the two old folks were hiding something. And the next day they tied Pamela up and locked her in the house with the animals; and they went to the castle to say to the Viscount that if he wanted their daughter he could certainly send to get her, since they were inclined to deliver *her (la-) to him (gli-)*.'

This example involves two distinct, living human beings, rather than mindless parts of bodies and plants, as in the preceding. So, while Example (4.2) allowed us to contrast the Control levels of two essentially inanimate beings, Example (4.3) allows us to contrast the Control levels of two sentient – even wily – human beings.

In Example (4.3), Pamela's parents can again only be inferred – are not signaled – to have the highest degree of responsibility over 'delivering' their daughter

4. Since *ago* 'needle' and *collo* 'neck' are each grammatically singular and masculine, number and gender cannot help here in determining which clitic refers to which thing. Inference connects the dots: It would hardly be possible to thread the girl's neck around the pine needle, and what would Medardo hope to accomplish by doing that anyway? to strangle the pine needle? No, the needle must be the more inert object of the 'passing around,' and the neck must be guiding (i.e., exerting some control over) the 'passing around.' Also, the pine needle has already been mentioned before the neck gets mentioned, and it (*I+-*) has already been assigned a LOW Degree of Control with respect to a previous event, *l'avvicin * 'he brought it near' (assuming, of course, that the inference that this *I+-* refers to the pine needle has correctly been made). That fact may contribute to the inference that it is the pine needle which remains at LOW Control (*I+-*) in the next event, the 'passing around.'

to the Viscount. But here the inference is not even helped by a Focus meaning on the verb: the morphology of the infinitive *consegnar* says nothing about who or what is most responsible. The inference regarding the parents and their responsibility for the delivering is helped, however, by the fact that, previously, six finite verbs have explicitly signaled that CENTRAL FOCUS IS NOT ON SPEAKER OR HEARER and is ENUMERATED. Presumably, the reader has correctly inferred that it is the parents whose actions are being related. It is therefore reasonable to infer that it is the parents who are most responsible for delivering Pamela to the Viscount. The other two Control levels are explicitly signaled. Pamela (FEMININE, ONE *la-*) is signaled to have a relatively LOW Degree of Control over the ‘delivering,’ and the Viscount (*gli-*) is signaled to have a MID Degree of Control over the ‘delivering.’ Although Pamela has proven that she is no push-over, here the parents believe that they are able to control her in their wish to deliver her to the Viscount: they have tied her up and locked her in the house. The Viscount, for his part, enjoys a higher level of control over the ‘delivering’ than Pamela since – through his money and social status – he motivates the parents to do what they do, and since – through his vandalism to their home – he frightens them into doing what they intend to do. Pamela is the potential victim, and Medardo is the provocateur of her potential victimization. (Recall from Example 4.1 that it is immaterial that Medardo is the intended recipient; what matters is his controlling role.)

Before leaving this pair of examples, note that the meanings of the system of Degree of Control apply individually to each separate cluster of clitics with their verb. In Example (4.2) the ‘neck’ has a higher Degree of Control than the ‘needle,’ and in (4.3) Medardo has a higher Degree of Control than Pamela. But it would be fruitless to attempt to compare the levels of control across examples. It is fruitless to ask whether the ‘neck’ has the same amount of control over the ‘passing around’ in Example (4.2) as Medardo has over the ‘delivering’ in (4.3). Or to ask whether the ‘pine needle’ has the same amount of control over the ‘passing around’ in (4.2) as Pamela has over the ‘delivering’ in (4.3). The meanings of the system rank participants in the individual events to which the clitics are satellite; they do not rank one participant in one event to another in a different event.

The evidence of the texts supports a conclusion that the participants ranked by the system of Degree of Control may be anyone or anything to which the writer wishes to attribute Control. We have already seen examples of Control for a human (4.3), a body part and plant part (4.2), and an animal (4.1). The following passage, (4.4), shows the signaling of Degree of Control for an abstraction and for an inanimate object,⁵

5. The phrases *Inutile phare de la nuit* and *Les Natchez* were italic in the original.

- (4.4) A lungo ho portato nella memoria una frase di Chateaubriand: *Inutile phare de la nuit*. Credo di averle sempre attribuito un potere di disincantato conforto....

Quando avevo quindici anni lessi *Les Natchez*, libro incongruo e assurdo e a suo modo magnifico.... Ne ricordo alcuni passaggi con molta esattezza e per anni ho creduto che la frase del faro *gli* appartenesse. Mi è venuto l'idea di citare il brano esatto in questo mio quaderno, così ho letto di nuovo *Les Natchez*, ma non ho trovato la mia frase.... Mi sono ... domandato quale parte abbia potuto avere la forza evocatrice e di suggestione, magari inconscia, di questa frase a chiamarmi in un'isola dove non c'era nulla che là mi chiamasse. (TD 34–35)

'For a long time I have held in memory a phrase of Chateaubriand: *Inutile phare de la nuit*. I believe I have always attributed to it (*le-* MID) a power of disenchanted comfort....

When I was sixteen, I read *Les Natchez*, an incongruous and absurd and – in its own way – magnificent book.... I remember certain passages from it with great precision, and for years I believed that the phrase about the lighthouse belonged to it (*gli-* MID). The idea came to me to cite the exact excerpt in this notebook so I re-read *Les Natchez*, but I did not find my phrase ... I have wondered what part the evocative and suggestive force – even if unconscious – of this phrase may have played in calling me to an island where there was nothing that should call me there.'

Though the 'phrase' is but an abstraction, the writer nevertheless is explicit about the 'power' and 'force' that he 'attributes' to it; it even inspired him to undertake a long journey. And though the 'book' is but an inanimate object, it too, according to the writer, has the ability to do 'magnificent' things, including the ability – since it might contain the desired phrase – to inspire him to read it again.⁶

The term "Degree of Control," then, should not be taken to impute consciousness or deliberateness to the referent. A language-user (an intelligent and creative human being) may impute Control over an event to any person, thing, or figure of the imagination that he desires. One has to do here with an instrument of communication, not with an objective description of the world. It is not even necessary to appeal to metaphor. The term "Control" is used in the present study because that seems to be the best English word to capture how the grammatical system works – and is not used as an empty formalism. It is used, however, as a technical term and so must be properly understood in the context of the analysis. Granted, the term "Control" may for some readers of this work have connotations

6. For an additional example of MID Control for an abstraction, cf. MR 47 *convinti di resistergli tuttora* 'convinced to be still resisting it (i.e., sleep)'. For an inanimate object, cf. BB 30 *con l'ombra che già le si addensava intorno* 'with the shadow that was already gathering around it (i.e., a house)'.

of willfulness (as when a strong person controls a weak person), but such connotations, developed perhaps from extensive and frequent everyday usage, are inappropriate when it comes to the workings of this grammatical system in Italian. See Huffman (1997) for excellent discussion of the use of the meanings of Degree of Control (in French) for things other than human referents. See Diver (1995/2012 *et passim*) and Chapter 11 of this study for further on the Columbia School's *human factor orientation* for linguistic analysis.

Even characteristics of entities – as opposed to entities themselves – may be attributed Control. The present analysis follows Huffman (1997: 183–185) in taking the accusative clitic (Italian generic-gender *lo-*) to be the signal of LOW Control even when, as traditionally parsed, it functions as a predicate adjective or noun.⁷ In Examples (4.5) and (4.6) below, *lo-* refers to a characteristic of a woman.

- (4.5) Ma io, tutte le volte che sono stata offesa, e *lo* sono stata spesso per la mia povertà, ingenuità e solitudine, ho sempre provato il desiderio di scusare l'offensore e dimenticare al più presto l'offesa. (MR 143)

'But, in all the times that I have been (F) offended (F) – and I have been (F) so (*lo-*) often on account of my poverty, innocence, and loneliness – I have always felt the desire to excuse the offender and forget as soon as possible the offense.'

- (4.6) «Sei mia moglie, allora?»
 «*Lo* sono se mi vuoi. Mi vuoi?» (VU 117)
 “‘You are my wife, then?’
 ‘I am [*lo-*] if you want me. Do you want me?’”

In both examples, a speaker effectively ranks herself higher in responsibility than a characteristic she has. In (4.5), the speaker signals that the characteristic of being 'offended' (*lo sono stato*) has a relatively LOW Degree of Control over the state she presently finds herself in. Who, then, is more to blame for her state? The correct inference is that she is, especially since she admits she bears some responsibility for being offended ('on account of my'). In (4.6), the speaker effectively ranks herself higher in responsibility than a characteristic (*lo-*) that she has chosen, that of being her interlocutor's 'wife' (*lo sono*). To paraphrase Huffman, between the characteristic itself and the person who bears some responsibility for that characteristic, it is clearly the former that exercises the lesser (LOW) Degree of Control.

Also illustrated by Examples (4.5) and (4.6) is the consideration that the technical term "Degree of Control," if it is to account for the observed distribution of forms, must not be conceived of *a priori* as being limited to kinetic actions. Italian

7. See too García (1975:378).

signals of Control occur routinely with a variety of verbs that evidently name more state-like than action-like situations (among them, to name just a few, *essere* ‘be,’ *stare* ‘be, stand,’ *sembrare* ‘seem,’ *rimanere* ‘remain’). Language-users can assign responsibility for states and conditions, too.⁸

Because *si-* itself does not signal a Degree of Control, this book is not the place to validate fully the hypothesis of Degree of Control for Italian; readers are referred to Huffman (1997) on French.⁹ Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to have some quantitative support for a hypothesis that, to many readers, will be unfamiliar. That support comes from the fact that – across large stretches of text, independent of our reading of any particular excerpt – the meanings of Degree of Control correlate strongly with animacy. It stands to reason that human users of the grammar will tend to attribute greater control to animate beings than to inanimate beings.

Table 4.1 gives the results of a count on the first three chapters of Berto’s *Il brigante*. (Because this text, with its rural setting, often mentions domesticated animals, the count distinguishes all beings that are sexed, including domesticated animals, from those that are unsexed.) The table gives the number of tokens of: sexed referents that are represented by *gli-* (90), sexed referents represented by *lo-* (96), unsexed referents represented by *gli-* (1), and unsexed referents represented by *lo-* (47). The odds ratio (OR) again measures the strength of the correlation between the two variables.¹⁰

8. If lexical items in other languages, such as English “forms of *be*,” disfavor or do not allow what might seem to be analogous mechanisms (cf. **I am it*), that is a cross-linguistic analytical problem involving at least a close examination of those lexical items and an analysis of the grammatical mechanisms of that language. There is no reason *a priori* to expect that Italian *sono* will behave like English *am*, nor that the Italian system of Degree of Control will resemble in all particulars the position of arguments in English.

9. Formally, Huffman (1997) actually proposes a two-member system for the dative and accusative clitics in French, with meanings respectively called MORE and LESS. This is in part because (pp. 32–34) the third person in French has no dedicated pronominal signal of HIGH Control. Huffman allows, however, for a “de facto” three-member scale, since pre-verbal nouns, pronouns, etc., in French signal that their referent exercises HIGH Control, the consequence being that the dative and accusative clitics de facto signal MID and LOW Control, respectively. Huffman’s position for French resembles that of García (1975: 66–67 *et passim*) for Spanish. For Italian, a three-member system is proposed here because Italian does actually have a dedicated signal of HIGH Control, as we shall see. But these are technicalities; in effect, French, Spanish, and Italian have three-member scales of Control.

10. As before, no test of statistical significance is given here because the data do not represent a sample from some population; each text is different. See Davis (2002b).

Table 4.1 Degree of Control correlated with biological sex
Sexed beings tend to be attributed a higher Degree of Control than unsexed beings

Referent	<i>gli-</i>		<i>lo-</i>		row total
	<i>MID</i>		<i>LOW</i>		
	<i>n</i>	proportion	<i>n</i>	proportion	
Sexed	90	.99	96	.67	186
Unsexed	1	.01	47	.33	48
	91		143		234
					OR > 44

Source of data: BB (Davis 1992: 129)

The correlation is quite strong. The odds of a sexed referent being assigned *MID* Control are over 44 times as great as the odds of an unsexed referent being assigned *MID* Control, relative to *LOW* Control.

More germane here than validation of the hypothesis concerning *gli-* and *l+-* is the matter of how *si-*, while not directly signaling a meaning of Degree of Control, nevertheless relates to that system.

B. The status of *si* and Degree of Control

Si- does not belong to the system of Degree of Control but instead sits outside it, as it were, in an opposition of substance. All the third-person clitics *gli-*, *le-*, *-loro*, *l+-*, and *si-* share certain meanings – *INNER* Focus and *OTHER* Discourse Referent – but only certain of these clitics signal Degree of Control.¹¹ Thus there is a formal opposition between those clitics that do signal a meaning in the system of Degree of Control (*gli-*, *le-*, *-loro*, *l+-*) and the clitic that does not signal a meaning in that system (*si-*). This analysis does not assign *si-* a formal meaning in the system of Degree of Control for several reasons.

11. As stated in Chapter 3, no full analysis of the first and second-person clitics *mi-*, *ti-*, *ci-*, *vi-* will be offered here. Tentatively, they can be assigned the meaning *NON-HIGH* Degree of Control. There may be a distinct participant inferred to have a higher but not total (i.e., a shared) degree of control (*lui mi tagliò* ‘he cut me’: I only enabled (indirect object) or suffered (direct object) the cutting; he executed it); or else one participant may be attributed an inclusive range of responsibility, one larger than that of either agent or patient with a shared responsibility (*io mi tagliai* ‘I cut myself’: I both enabled or suffered and executed the cutting). See Chapter 3 on Focus, and contrast García (1975: 68–71, 218), who distinguishes Spanish *se* from the first and second-person clitics not by means of Degree of Control but by means of Focus: since *se*, she says, is “neutral to focus,” it “is not debarred from being understood as *non focus*.”

The simplest reason why *si-* is not assigned a Control meaning is that *si-* cannot always be associated with a message of control. With *si-*, control is sometimes irrelevant. Examples with the verb *trattare* with a variety of complements will illustrate.

As a transitive, *trattare* has dictionary glosses such as ‘treat’ a theme.¹² Example (4.7) illustrates *trattare* in combination with distinctions of Degree of Control.

- (4.7) *Platone, invece [di Aristotele], il filosofo dello spirito, speculò con tanto acume di mente e trattò con tanta leggiadria di stile l'argomento d'amore, da renderlo d'allora in poi di ragion pubblica universale. Due sono i dialoghi in cui egli lo trattò, il Fedro e il Simposio* (Bellorini, Egidio. *Studi di letteratura italiana*. Vol. 9. 1909. Reprint. London: Forgotten Books, 2013. 222–3)¹³

‘*Plato*, by contrast [with Aristotle], the philosopher of the spirit, observed with such mental acumen and *treated* with such gracefulness of style *the subject* of love as to make it forevermore universal [or, to publish it universally]. There are two dialogues in which *he treated it*, the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*’

In (4.7), Focus is inferred to be on Plato and then on two of his Dialogues. Twice the writer says that Plato ‘treated’ the ‘subject’ of love. In the first instance, that is all done via lexicon: *Platone trattò l'argomento*. In the second instance, it is done with grammar: *Egli lo trattò*. *Lo-* ‘it’ is a signal of PERIPHERAL Focus and LOW Degree of Control over the ‘treating.’ *Egli* ‘he’ signals CENTRAL Focus and is inferred to have the highest responsibility for the ‘treating,’ relative to the theme of love. Several factors aid this inference: ‘He’ is signaled to be the most important participant; ‘he’ is human; the level of LOW Control is explicitly taken by *lo-*; and the writer, to refer to this human, did not use a signal of MID Degree of Control. *Trattare* ‘treat,’ then, can involve distinctions of Degree of Control.

With the introduction of a preposition such as *di* ‘of’ or *con* ‘with’ – as opposed to having a direct object, as in (4.7) – the verb is then considered intransitive, and the dictionary gives glosses such as ‘be about’ and ‘deal with.’ In terms of the present hypothesis, Degrees of Control are not signaled, and conceptually, the connection between the participants is less direct:

il film tratta della guerra
the film treats of-the war
‘the film is about the war’

12. Or a person, such as a sick person; e.g., *sul modo come deve trattarlo* ‘on how she should treat him’ (SP 82).

13. Source: http://www.forgottenbooks.org/readbook_text/Studi_DI_Letteratura_Italiana_v9_1300007545/227, accessed May 11, 2014.

The Focus meaning of the third-person singular ending on *tratta* is consistent with the inference that the ‘film’ does the ‘treating,’ but the ‘war’ is less directly involved in the ‘treating.’ Above, in *egli lo tratta*, ‘he,’ Plato, has control over treating his theme (LOW *lo-*) as he sees fit. By contrast in *il film tratta della guerra*, the ‘film’ does not have control over the treating ‘of the war’; the film is merely the medium for the director’s treatment of the war. The ‘film’ and the ‘war’ are not ranked relative to each other with respect to the ‘treating.’

Now, Example (4.8), from a web site about science for school children, contains *si-* with *trattare*.

- (4.8) L’acqua, come hai studiato, ha formula H_2O perché le sue molecole sono costituite da un atomo di ossigeno (O) e due di idrogeno (H). La molecola dell’acqua è polare perché presenta un polo positivo, dove sono gli atomi di idrogeno, e uno negativo, dove c’è l’ossigeno. I due poli della molecola d’acqua si comportano un po’ come delle... mani con le quali ogni molecola si attacca alle altre.

Si tratta della forza di coesione: gli H positivi di una molecola attirano a sé gli O negativi di un’altra e viceversa, così da formare *legami a idrogeno*, o *legami a ponte*.¹⁴

‘Water, as you have studied, has the formula H_2O because its molecules are made up of one atom of oxygen (O) and two of hydrogen (H). The water molecule is polar because it has a positive pole, where the atoms of hydrogen are found, and a negative one, where the oxygen is. The two poles of the water molecule behave a bit like hands, with which each molecule is attached to the others.

It is a matter (*Si tratta*) of the **force of cohesion**. The positive Hs of a molecule attract to themselves the negative Os of another, and vice versa, that is, to form “hydrogen bonds” or “bridge bonds.”’

The combination *trattarsi* (here realized as finite *si tratta*) is typically listed in dictionaries separately from *trattare* with its transitive and intransitive uses. Glosses include ‘be a matter of,’ ‘be a question of.’ *Trattarsi* has to do not with a particular person or thing at all, but with some situation, here in (4.8) the chemical properties of the force of cohesion. In terms of the present hypothesis, *si-* in such examples is telling readers not to look for any particular referent of the third-person singular ending on *tratta*, neither a particular person (e.g., *egli* ‘he’) nor a particular thing (e.g., a ‘film’). Questions of Number, Sex, and Gender are factored out as

14. Source: http://media.giuntiscuola.it/_tdz/@media_manager/700025/?filename=lab-5-1H5B-BV6K.pdf&cmg_defaultViewer=cmg_MediaServer&, bold and italics, except *Si*, in original, accessed Apr. 27, 2014. Bold as in the original.

we consider where to place our CENTRAL Focus vis-à-vis the event of ‘treating.’ Granted, there are scientists, teachers, and students contextually involved, but none of them is a writer ‘treating’ the ‘force of cohesion’; the point here, rather, is the identification of the relevant property of water. It would seem futile to debate what might conceivably be the Degree of Control of such an ill-defined referent, if indeed it can even be considered a referent.¹⁵

Figures 4.1 and 4.2, below, illustrate plausible interpretations of, respectively, *Egli lo tratta* and *Si tratta*. The interpretations are based on three types of ingredients: the lexicon, the grammatical meanings, and the wider context. The ovals indicate where grammatical Focus is placed. The rectangles enclose lexical items for the events with respect to which Focus is assigned to participants. And the vertical arrow in Figure 4.1 represents the grammatically signaled differential in Degree of Control between participants.

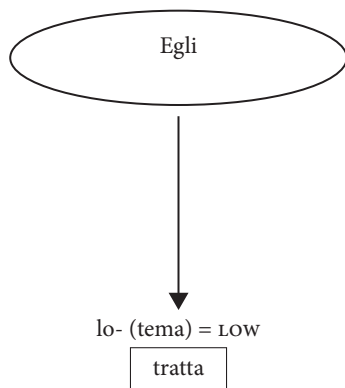


Figure 4.1 *Egli lo tratta*
‘He treats it’

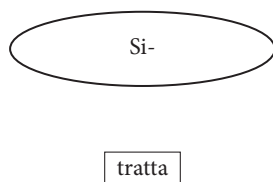


Figure 4.2 *Si tratta*
‘It is a matter’

15. This is one reason why, in Chapter 3, care is taken to define the meaning corresponding to the traditional third person singular as NOT SPEAKER OR HEARER AND NOT ENUMERATED, thus not requiring that it, and *si-*, actually have some referent other than speaker and hearer.

In Figure 4.1, *Egli lo tratta* ‘He treats it [e.g., a theme],’ Focus is placed grammatically on the referent of *egli* ‘he,’ perhaps an author (e.g., Plato) who treats a theme (e.g., love) in his book (cf. Example 4.7). The event in which the author and the theme participate is represented by the lexical item *tratta* ‘treats.’ The author exercises a great deal of influence over the ‘treating,’ relative to the theme, since it is the author who decides to ‘treat’ something and what theme to ‘treat.’ The grammar signals explicitly that the theme has a LOW Degree of Control over the treating.

In Figure 4.2 (cf. Example 4.8), *si tratta* ‘it is a matter,’ Focus is placed not on anyone or anything that ‘treats’ any theme. Focus here is on something so ill-defined that even the human impersonal ‘one’ seems too specific; the effect is rather like a pleonastic *it* in English. Since all participants on the scene go unmentioned, and there is no signal of Degree of Control, there is no differential to be depicted here between relative amounts of influence in the ‘treating.’

Figures 4.1 and 4.2 are schematic, heuristic representations of particular *interpretations* of linguistic forms in particular contexts; they are not grammatical hypotheses to be validated.¹⁶ As we examine additional examples in this and following chapters, we shall see abundantly that interpretations depend on the context at least as much as on the grammar. With that caveat, however, note that the figures do key the interpretations to linguistic forms, both lexical items and grammatical signals, and that hypothesized *meanings* for those grammatical signals are explicitly indicated: ovals for CENTRAL Focus and vertical arrows for distinctions in Degree of Control. Thus, the figures represent an attempt to help us to understand how interpretations might be arrived at, in a given context, with the help of grammatical meanings.

A second reason why *si-* is not formally assigned a Control meaning has to do with a group of verbs that are “impersonal” in the sense that no human at all exercises agency over them (as distinct from the human impersonals, often glossed ‘one,’ that were treated in Chapter 2).

Among the verbs that are usually (e.g., Lepschy and Lepschy 1988: 144, 234–235) given as having prominently “impersonal” uses, those that most have the potential to be transitive – i.e., to occur with a signal of LOW Control – are the ones that have *si-* when used impersonally. This observation suggests that here *si-* effects an *opting out* of distinctions made by signaling a LOW Degree of Control; *si-* is a tool that allows the speaker to opt out of making those distinctions. So the transitive *trattare* ‘treat’ (Example 4.7, Figure 4.1, *lo trattò*) has *si-* when no person is being said to ‘treat’ anyone or anything; *trattarsi* ‘be a question of’ (Example 4.8, Figure 4.2). Similarly, transitive *convenire* ‘summon [e.g., a witness]’ but impersonal

16. Thus they do not have the same status as the diagrams of Cognitive Grammar.

convenirsi ‘behoove’: To the transitive *Il giudice la conviene* ‘The judge summons her,’ with its signal of LOW Control, compare the impersonal *Gli si conviene ubbidire* ‘It behooves him to obey’ with no signal of LOW Control.

Unlike potentially transitive verbs, highly intransitive verbs such as *essere* ‘be’ and *capitare* ‘arrive, happen’ do not have *si-* in their impersonal uses: *È chiusa nel castello che voglio avverti* ‘It’s locked in the castle that I want to have you’ (Example 4.2); *Tante volte capita di sentire che la nostra vita si allargherà* ‘So often it happens, to feel that our life will open up’ (Example 5.4). With such verbs, there are no mutually opposing HIGH-LOW Control distinctions to opt out of.

Example (4.9) below contains two such impersonal verbs without *si-*: *bisognare* ‘it is necessary’ and *succedere* ‘succeed, follow, come to pass, happen.’ Both verbs are highly intransitive; they tend strongly never to occur with a signal of LOW Degree of Control. Thus there is no mutually opposing Control distinction to opt out of. In (4.9), an Italian soldier fighting in Russia in World War Two on Christmas Day is delighted to receive gifts of wine and pasta from his captain for the men in his stronghold.

- (4.9) Ritornai giù alla mia tana saltando fra la neve come un capretto a primavera. Nella furia scivolai e caddi ma non ruppi il fiasco né mollai la pasta. *Bisogna* saper cadere. Una volta sono scivolato sul ghiaccio con quattro gavette di vino e non versai una goccia: io ero giù per terra ma le gavette le avevo salde in mano con le braccia tese a livello. Ma *era successo* in Italia di aver quattro gavette di vino, al corso sciatori. (RS 17–18)

‘I returned down to my tent jumping in the snow like a kid in spring. In my haste, I slipped and fell, but I did not break the bottle or drop the pasta. *It is necessary* to know how to fall. One time, I slipped on the ice with four mess kits of wine and did not spill a drop: I was down on the ground, but I kept the mess kits firmly in my hand with my arms held out straight. But *it happened* in Italy having four mess kits of wine – on a ski slope.’

The advice, *Bisogna saper cadere*, applies generally.¹⁷ Of the three lexical items (all verbs) in this sentence, only one rises to the level of attention that a finite form demands: *Bisogna* ‘It is necessary.’ What is paramount here is the (tongue-in-cheek) giving of advice – of what is ‘needed’ – so that mishaps can be avoided. That lexical item, *bisogna*, expresses an existential concept and practically never admits a participant with LOW Control. Consequently, there is no HIGH-LOW Control differential to be opted out of, no need for *si-*.

17. It is noteworthy, from the point of view of sentence grammar, that this complete sentence contains no subject anywhere at all.

Figure 4.3, below, illustrates the kind of inference involved in examples of *bisogna* such as (4.9). Because there are no pronominal signals of Focus or Degree of Control, and no lexical items referring to participants, the diagram looks practically empty. It is instructive, however, by comparison with Figures 4.1 and 4.2.

Bisogna

Figure 4.3 *Bisogna*

‘It is necessary’

Similarly, with *succedere*, as in (4.9), there is no mutually opposing (HIGH-LOW) Control distinction to opt out of.

It is true that signals of MID Control are found with such verbs. By being at the right place at the right time (or the wrong place at the wrong time), a person can be affected by a succession of events – a happening – thus will bear some responsibility for it happening to him, and so will therefore be signaled to have a MID Degree of Control over the befalling (*gli succede che...* ‘it happens to him that...’).¹⁸ But this befalling never involves a HIGH-Control participant in opposition to a LOW-Control participant, no agent acting upon a patient, thus no Control differential between opposing participants that needs to be opted out of.

The idea that a function of *si-* is to allow a language-user to *opt out* of distinctions in Degree of Control will be very important in the following chapters.

A third reason for assigning *si-* no Degree of Control meaning has to do with quantitative evidence. Table 4.2 gives results of a count made on two chapters from Devoto’s history *Gli antichi italici* ‘*The Ancient Italic Peoples*.’ Chapter VI, on ‘Italic Alphabets and Dialects,’ has little to say about humans and contains only one personal name inferred in Focus (by finite verb) referring to a human. Chapter XI, on ‘Becoming Part of the Roman World,’ contains fifty-four personal names inferred in Focus (by finite verb) referring to humans. Since inanimates are routinely viewed as exercising less control over events than humans do, one can predict that the chapter on alphabets and dialects, where control is irrelevant, will have a higher ratio of *si-* to Control signals than will the chapter about humans, where control is relevant.¹⁹

The chapter on alphabets has a *si/l+* ratio of about 14:1; the chapter on humans has a *si/l+* ratio of only about 6:1, relatively fewer *si*’s, relatively more Degree of

18. Huffman (1997: 114–124) discusses use of the comparable Degree of Control meaning in French for an “expediter”: “Thanks to the characteristics/actions of this participant, the state exists.”

19. Kirsner (1979) and Gildin (1989: 80ff., 108ff), too, recognized that different texts exhibit different skewings.

Table 4.2 *Si* and the neutralization of Control

	Chapter VI	Chapter XI
	'Italic Alphabets and Dialects'	'Becoming Part of the Roman World'
<i>si</i> (no Control meaning)	122	196
<i>l+</i> (a Control meaning)	9	35
	Ratio 14:1	Ratio 6:1, OR > 2.4

Source of data: Giacomo Devoto. 1951. *Gli antichi italici*. 2nd edition. Firenze: Vallecchi.

Control signals. The odds ratio measures the strength of the correlation at 2.4 (>1.0). Signals of Degree of Control tend more to be used in contexts where distinctions of control are more relevant; *si-* tends more to be used in contexts where such distinctions are less relevant (Davis 2016b: 8–9).

Another situation where it would be difficult to support a hypothesis that *si-* signals Control is the generalized impersonal (Chapter 2), in which *si-* is present where *egli* or some other more specific referent might have been. This is part of a much larger question: Is a participant that is focused on always responsible in some way for the event? Does a “subject” necessarily always play some thematic role, even in the absence of any signal of Degree of Control? Is “subject” *ipso facto* a controller? Well, if so, Control would have to be a property of the verb ending, not of *si-*. The verb ending would have to signal, in addition to the meaning CENTRAL Focus, also a meaning of Control. Consider the triplet:

Egli è giovane.	‘He is young.’
È giovane.	‘He/She/It is young.’
Si è giovani. ²⁰	‘One is young.’

The distribution of *si-* is accounted for not by invoking the substance of Degree of Control (which, if it applies, would be equivalent across the three utterances above) but by invoking the opposition of substance with the systems of Sex and Number. *Si-* contributes nothing about Control; it functions only as the signal of the irrelevance of Sex and Number. That large question of the status of subjects vis-à-vis Control would be a matter for a full analysis of the finite verb ending, not of *si-*.

In this regard, consider the authentic Example (4.10):

- (4.10) Come *si* è pazienti e ignari quando *si* è molto giovani (MR 28)
 how (*si-*) is patient and ignorant when (*si-*) is very young
 ‘How one is patient and ignorant when one is very young’
 How patient and ignorant we are when we are very young! (Holland 19)

20. The problem of the ending on predicate adjectives will be dealt with in Chapter 9.

Now it might well be argued that a person has some responsibility for being ‘patient’ and ‘ignorant,’ but that would be harder to argue for being ‘young.’ The question of Degree of Control does not arise in the matter of age. Or the question arises no more for age than it does for, say, shape in:

La terra è rotonda
 ‘The earth is round.’

Again, this is a question about the status of the verb ending, not *si-*, vis-à-vis Control. *Si-* adds nothing having to do with Control, as can be seen by comparing (4.10) to:

È paziente e ignaro quando è molto giovane.
 ‘He/She/It is patient and ignorant when he/she/it is very young.’

If the referent does have some responsibility for being ‘patient,’ ‘ignorant,’ and ‘young,’ that is not the property of *si-*. Granted, it was argued above, for Example (4.2), that a pine needle (*lo-*) could be attributed a LOW (greater than absolute zero) Degree of Control over an event of strangulation by virtue of the pine needle’s inherent characteristics of being long and pliant. Likewise, perhaps a person, or the earth, might be attributed some Degree of Control over a state of being merely by virtue of his or her or its characteristics (of being patient, ignorant, young, or round). But for Example (4.2) Control was invoked in order to account for the presence of *lo*; for (4.10) there is no need to invoke Control to account for the presence of *si-*. If Control is relevant, then, that would be a property of the verb ending, not of *si-* nor of any lexical item (e.g., *terra*) that might be coreferential with the verb ending.

A final reason why *si-* is not assigned a formal Degree of Control meaning is that *si-* does not participate in an opposition of value with any other signal of Control. While *gli-* clearly contrasts with *l+-* (Examples. 4.2 and 4.3), *si-* ignores such distinctions, referring alike to participants that contribute more and participants that contribute less.

We encountered examples of *si-* referring to relatively inert participants in Chapter 1: *si vedeva Palermo* ‘Palermo was seen’ (Example 1.8); and *cose che non si fanno* ‘things that are not done’ (Example 1.9). We shall see more such “passives” in Chapter 5.

To illustrate *si-* for a participant who actually exercises quite a bit of control, consider Example (4.11); two alternative translations are given:

- (4.11) Michele Rende *si* tagliò una grossa fetta di pane e *si* versò anche del vino. (BB 79)
 ‘Michele Rende cut (*si-*) off a big slice of bread and poured (*si-*) some wine too.’
 ‘Michele Rende cut *himself* (*si-*) off a big slice of bread and poured *himself* (*si-*) some wine too.’

Michele Rende is a brigand who has taken refuge in the home of near strangers. The woman of the house has asked whether he wants to eat and is cooking for him. Meanwhile, Michele sits at the kitchen table. Through his hunger and his thirst, Michele (*si-*) motivates the ‘cutting’ of the bread and the ‘pouring’ of the wine, and Michele too actually performs the ‘cutting’ and the ‘pouring.’ These instances of *si-* can be analyzed as taking the place of a signal of MID Degree Control such as *le-*: he cut ‘her’ off a big slice of bread and poured ‘her’ some wine. As both the agent and the motivator of the ‘cutting’ and the ‘pouring,’ Michele exercises a relatively high Degree of Control over these actions. Such examples, traditionally parsed as reflexives, will be discussed in Chapter 6. This particular example will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

A plausible interpretation of Example (4.11) is illustrated in Figure 4.4. Again, the oval indicates where Focus is placed (by *si-* in combination with the finite verb), and the rectangle encloses the finite verb. In this figure, however, unlike those seen before, certain ingredients that are purely inferential must be pointed out. There is no signal of Degree of Control; as a result, degrees of responsibility for the cutting must be inferred. This is probably done largely on the basis of the fact that Michele Rende is a human being and the piece of bread is not. Therefore, in the figure, coreferential *Michele* and *si* are together placed vertically higher than *fetta*. As for the relative placement of *Michele* and *si-*: The fact that this *si-* is most plausibly interpreted as a stand-in for a signal of MID Degree of Control (such as *le-* ‘her’) – since Michele (not the woman) motivates the cutting – is represented by the word MID being placed in square brackets, with the leftward-pointing arrow suggesting that inference. The fact that this instance of *Michele* is most plausibly interpreted as a reference to the agent of the cutting is represented by the word

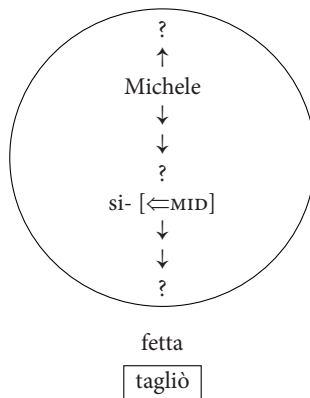


Figure 4.4 *Michele si tagliò una fetta*
‘Michele cut (himself) a slice’

Michele being placed vertically high in the oval. And the fact that the distinction between agent and motivator here is purely inferential and so therefore open to question – not grammatically signaled at all – is represented by the series of short, broken arrows ending in question marks. The man *Michele* seems to span a range of responsibility for the cutting, since we know that he is both a hungry man and a knife-wielder sitting before a loaf of bread, but none of that knowledge is encoded grammatically here.

Example (4.11) raises a question that will recur repeatedly throughout this analysis if it is not addressed: Is it not a contradiction to claim that one person is assigned two *different, contrasting* Degrees of Control over one event? The answer is no. Any Degree of Control is positive, and the effects of being assigned two degrees are closer to being additive than to being contradictory.²¹ In (4.11), when *Michele* cuts a piece of bread and pours a glass of wine, he does so deliberately, in full control of his actions. Now consider the effect of his being mentioned again (*si-*) as the motivator of those actions. Other things being equal, *Michele* has a higher degree of control over the act of ‘cutting’ and the act of ‘pouring’ when he himself is the one who is hungry and thirsty. Other things being equal, he would have less motivation to cut the bread and pour the wine if in doing so he were motivated by the hunger and thirst of someone else, such as the woman of the house. Degrees of Control add up rather than canceling out. This insight will stand us in good stead too when we look at examples of *si-* that are present in place of signals of the LOW Degree of Control.

Back to our survey of the range of Control exhibited by referents of *si-*.

Si- can even be associated with a role of agency. When *si-* is used in place of *egli* or some other more specific human reference, as a *generalized impersonal*, that person can actually exert deliberate control over an event. This agency is clearest in the presence of another clitic that signals a lower Degree of Control. Example (4.12) below is from the same World War Two memoir as Example (4.9):

(4.12) Il tenente voleva che *si* provassero tutte le armi automatiche.... Quando un’arma era pronta *la si* portava in un camminamento verso la squadra del Baffo.

(RS 32)

‘The lieutenant wanted every automatic weapon to be tested.... When a weapon was ready, *someone* (*si-*) would carry *it* (*la-*) in a communication trench toward Moustache’s squad.’

21. Cf. García (1975: 225). Yet she attributes this enlargement of “the scope of involvement” not to Degree of Control (i.e., to “Case”) but to Focus. In general, García (1975: e.g., 70, 120–121) fails to separate adequately the effects of Focus and Control: “there is a de facto overlap between the substance of Case ... and of Focus”; “to cover all possibilities for focus ... is tantamount to covering the entire range of case roles.”

As we shall see in the next section, per the order of clitics *la si-*, whoever (*si-*) carries the weapon through the trench to the squad will exert a HIGH Degree of Control over this action, relative to the weapon (*la-*), with its LOW Degree of Control. That person can be inferred to be the agent of the carrying.

The interpretation of Example (4.12) is illustrated in Figure 4.5, below. Here, as before, signaled Focus on a participant is indicated by the oval; signaled Focus on the event is indicated by the rectangle. Signaled Degree of Control is shown by the meanings HIGH and LOW with no square brackets; and the differential in Degree of Control which is entailed by those meanings is indicated by the solid downward-pointing arrow.

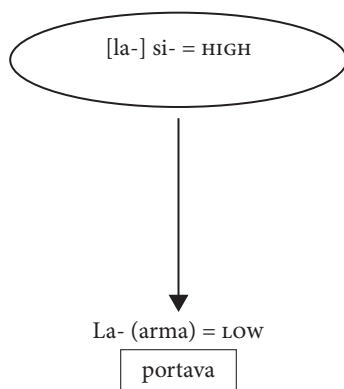


Figure 4.5 *La si portava*
'One carried it'

In light of all we have seen, *si-* could, arguably, be assigned a place in the Control system, but if so, its place would have to be that of an *opposition of inclusion* (Diver 1987/2012: 89–99) and indeed would have to include not only some (e.g., MID and LOW) but all (HIGH, MID, and LOW) of the range of the semantic substance.²² *Si-* would have to be assigned the meaning ANY Degree of Control. If that were done, then one might as well argue that the same should be done for the systems of Number, Sex, and grammatical Gender; one would have to maintain that *si-* signals *either* grammatical Number, *either* Sex, *either* grammatical Gender. Further, a rationale would have to be advanced that *si-* actually signals Degree of Control even when that semantic substance seems irrelevant to the communication, as in (4.8)

22. Cf. García (1975: 66) re Spanish *se*. For the same reason, Gildin (1989: 87) does not assign a Control meaning to one-participant utterances (SV/VS) in French. *Pace* Kirsner (2014: 55–56), oppositions of substance and oppositions of inclusion must be kept distinct, as they have quite different manifestations in the distribution of signals in texts.

and (4.10) above. Moreover, this opposition of inclusion would operate in a very different way from that posited by Diver (1987/2012:99), who observed that the less “precise” member of an opposition of inclusion is used when the writer places less “relative importance [on] the passage as a whole.” That would certainly not be the case with *si-*, which quite often refers to the main character engaged in actions that are important enough to merit finite verbs with him in CENTRAL FOCUS.

It seems prudent, therefore, to attribute the message effects of *si-* having to do with Control (when these are present) to the formal *opposition of substance* rather than assigning *si-* an actual Degree of Control meaning.²³ Often *si-* is used *in place of* (or *instead of*) some signal of Degree of Control (*gli-*, *le-*, *-loro*, *l+-*) with which *si-* shares the meaning INNER FOCUS. The inferential result is that effective levels of Control, Number, Sex, and grammatical Gender may be easily inferred even though they are not explicitly signaled.

This indeed is one of the defining features of an opposition of substance: Meanings from certain semantic substances are shared between two forms, but distinctions within some other semantic substance are not signaled by one of those forms. *Si-* does not signal any particular value within the system of Degree of Control, but – crucially – *si-* – does systematically relate to the system of Degree of Control, and both *si-* and the signals of Control sit within the system of Focus. Within the observed distribution of *si-*, some tokens can be accounted for without reference to Control at all, while other tokens are accounted for by recognizing simultaneously the relevance of some particular Control meaning with respect to a given verb *and* the communicative need not to distinguish Control levels among participants. It is necessary, in accounting for the distribution of *si-*, to posit a *formal relation* between *si-* and the system of Degree of Control, even though *si-* (versus *gli-*, *le-*, *-loro*, *l+-*) does not signal *distinctions* within that system. The opposition of substance does that.²⁴

23. Regarding the wording here “attribute the message effects” to the hypothesis: Recall (Chapter 1) that, in Columbia School, meanings are held to “contribute” to the message, and so, while it is certainly not the aim of this study to account for messages, but rather for observed distribution, it is nevertheless legitimate to speak of attributing a message effect – at the very least partially – to a meaning or a complex of meanings. The analyst does use the postulated meanings to account for the presence of the postulated signals in particular contexts, and the main tool in doing that is to explain how the meanings contribute in that case to the message; that is, to “attribute” the message plausibly to the meanings involved.

24. Contrast this situation with, say, that of the signal *l+-* vis-à-vis a system of Time (tense): The system of Time has nothing at all to do with *l+-* ‘him/her/it/them’.

This feature of oppositions of substance has been recognized ever since they were first proposed (Davis 1992). Indeed, it is their *raison d'être*. Italian *egli* 'he' and *lui* 'he/him' are in an opposition of substance. Both *egli* and *lui* signal meanings of Number (ONE) and Sex (MALE), but *egli* signals a meaning from the system of Focus (CENTRAL), while *lui* does not: *lui* is entirely noncommittal to distinctions of Focus. Within the observed distribution of *lui*, some tokens (e.g., the prepositional ones) can be accounted for without reference to Focus at all, while other tokens (e.g., the subjects and direct objects) are accounted for by recognizing simultaneously the relevance of some particular Focus meaning (CENTRAL or PERIPHERAL) with respect to a given verb *and* the relevance of some element in the larger context beyond the given verb. See Davis (1995a) for a summary presentation of that analysis.

This opposition of substance between *si-* and the system of Degree of Control is formalized, in the diagram in the appendix to this chapter, by situating *si-* outside but not apart from the system of Degree of Control. There will be more discussion of the use of *si-* rather than a Control signal in the chapters to follow.

C. Order of clitics and Degree of Control

With one exception, clitics in Italian appear in a fixed order.²⁵ The exception is systematic and relates to the signaling of Degree of Control. The one variable order is this: *si-* can occur either before or after the accusative *l+-* in the line-up of clitics. The difference in order consistently signals a difference in Degree of Control. When *si-* occurs before *l+-*, the two appear together as *se lo*, *se la*, *se li*, *se le*.²⁶ (See Chapter 10 regarding the form *se* rather than *si-*.) When *si-* occurs after *l+-*, the two appear together as *lo si*, *la si*, *li si*, *le si*. Here, as always, the accusative *l+-* signals a LOW Degree of Control. And here, as always, *si-* in and of itself does not signal any Degree of Control. However, the *order* of the two clitics does signal contrasting meanings in the system of Degree of Control. In *se lo*, etc., the referent

25. For various reasons, the order is difficult to state succinctly. As regards the third person, it is, essentially: dative (*gli-*, *le-*), reflexive (*si-*), accusative (*l+-*), impersonal (*si-*), partitive (*ne-*). See Wanner (1977), Lepschy and Lepschy (1988: 212–213) and Russi (2008: 225). Cross-linguistic differences notwithstanding, it may be possible to account for the fixedness of their order and for the bindedness to a verb in terms of processing constraints (e.g., García 1975: 474–477).

26. When in clitic position before a finite verb, the two are written with a space as shown; when in enclitic position after a non-finite verb, the two are written with no space. There is no difference in pronunciation that correlates with the orthographic space. These remarks apply as well to the reverse order given just below here.

of *si-* exercises a MID Degree of Control, comparable to the datives *gli-*, *le-*, *-loro*.²⁷ In *lo si*, etc., the referent of *si-* exercises a HIGH Degree of Control. (Of course, in co-occurrence with accusative *l+-*, the signal of LOW Control, the referent of *si-* will never have LOW Control, since clitics assign participants *different* roles in an event.)²⁸

The order *l+ si-* as a signal of HIGH Control for the referent of *si-* was illustrated in Example (4.12) above, where any soldier (*si-*) carrying a weapon would have a HIGH Degree of Control over the ‘carrying’ relative to the weapon (*la-*), with its LOW Degree of Control.

This is unambiguously a *generalized impersonal si-* (Chapter 2). Overt evidence, besides interpretation, comes from verb number. With impersonal *si-* in general, the verb number is singular (DO NOT ENUMERATE); cf. Chapter 9. That remains the case here, even when the signal of LOW Control, *l+-*, is plural, as in (4.13):

(4.13) Vicini molesti? I peggiori *li si trova* in treno. Difficile viaggiare spalla a spalla con uno sconosciuto, specie in determinate circostanze.²⁹

i peggiori li si trova in treno
the-M.PL worst-PL them-M.PL *si* finds-3-SG on train

‘Bothersome neighbors? One finds the worst of them on a train. Difficult to travel shoulder-to-shoulder with a stranger, especially in certain circumstances.’
‘Bothersome neighbors? The worst of them are found on a train...’

Singular *trova* confirms that a *generalized impersonal* participant – ‘one, anyone, everyone’ – is in Focus with respect to ‘finds.’ This distributional fact supports the assignment of the meaning CENTRAL Focus, in addition to the meaning HIGH Degree of Control, to the *si-* of *l+ si-* in Diagram 4.2 below.

The order *se l+*, signaling a MID Degree of Control for the referent of *si-*, is illustrated below, in Example (4.14):

27. The more apparently obvious hypothesis that a morpheme *se*, as distinct from *si-*, signals MID Control cannot be maintained, due to the combination *se ne*, in which the referent of this *se* may be inferred to have low Control, comparable to an accusative (*egli se ne libera* ‘he frees himself [*se*] from it/them’), or high Control (*ci se ne libera* ‘one [*se*] frees oneself from it/them’). See Chapter 9.

28. Cordin (1991: 102) and Wanner (1987a: 424) note the different orders for impersonal and reflexive uses (or functions).

29. Title and subtitle of news article, source <http://societa.panorama.it/life/Vicini-molesti-I-peggiori-li-si-trova-in-treno>, accessed May 3, 2014.

(4.14) La bicicletta. Forse in casa mia c'era una bicicletta: ce n'era una, era da donna, mia madre *se la* portava dietro da quando era ragazza.

Non c'era una famiglia di contadini che ne aveva due o tre. La bicicletta serviva per andare dal dottore, per andare in Comune o a trovare un parente malato.³⁰

'A bicycle. Possibly there was a bicycle in my house. There was one, a woman's bike. My mother carried *it (la-)* with *her (si-)* since she was a girl.

There wasn't a peasant family that had two or three of them. A bicycle was useful for going to the doctor, for going into town, or for visiting a sick relative.'

Here the mother, in addition to playing the role of agent in the 'carrying,' also plays the role of motivating the carrying. As she moves from house to house, growing from girl to mother, she continues to find a bicycle useful for various tasks. So, for her own sake, she carries it with her.

A more complete diagram of the System of Degree of Control can now be presented (Diagram 4.2):

	meanings	signals	interlocked Focus meanings
Degree of Control	HIGH	<i>l+ si-</i> *	INNER: PERIPH., CENTRAL
	MID	<i>gli-, le-, -loro, se l+-</i> *	INNER: PERIPHERAL
	LOW	<i>l+-</i>	INNER: PERIPHERAL

* where the order *l+ si-* signals that the referent of *si-* has HIGH, and the order *se l+-* that the referent of *si-* has MID Degree of Control.

Diagram 4.2 The system of Degree of Control

There are three meanings in the system of Degree of Control. LOW is signaled by the accusative clitic *l+-*; MID by the datives *gli-, le-, -loro* and (for the referent of *si-*) by the order *se l+-*; and HIGH (for the referent of *si-*) by the order *l+ si-*.³¹

30. Enzo Cei, <http://www.enzocei.com/index.php?it/111/news/54/il-regalo-un-testo-di-enzo-scelto-dal-ministero-dellistruzione-come-prova-di-esame>, accessed March 5, 2014.

31. In usage, the signal *l+ si-* is not common. More often than HIGH Control being actually signaled, the greatest degree of responsibility for an event can be inferred based on contextual clues such as, Who is likely, given all we know at this point, to be an agent in a certain event? The inference may be aided by process of elimination based on any Degree of Control that actually is signaled for another participant in a given event. This is the common situation with lexical items, disjunctive pronouns, and verb ending alone, where there is no actual signal of Degree of Control.

Diagram 4.3, below, presents a different visualization of the system.

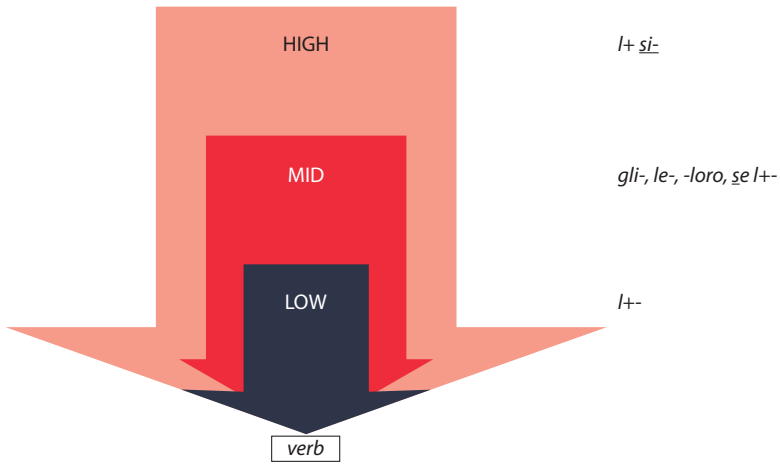


Diagram 4.3 The system of Degree of Control: A graphic representation

Appendix to Chapter 4. The interlock of the systems of Participant Focus and Degree of Control

The diagram below gives the *interlock* of the systems of Participant Focus and Degree of Control.

			← Degree of Control →		
			HIGH	MID	LOW
↑ Focus ↓	↑ INNER ↓ <i>si-</i>	CENTRAL <i>egli</i> , verb ending	<i>l+ si-</i>		
				<i>se l+-</i>	
		PERIPHERAL		<i>gli-, le-, -loro</i>	<i>l+-</i>
	OUTER <i>ne-</i>				

The diagram shows the system of Participant Focus ranged vertically and the system of Degree of Control ranged horizontally. Beginning from the left-hand side, the range of Focus is first divided into two meanings, INNER and OUTER, and then INNER is subdivided into two meanings, CENTRAL and PERIPHERAL. The levels of Focus encompassed by the meaning INNER are interlocked with the system of Degree of Control. The interlock of the meanings CENTRAL Focus and HIGH Control is signaled by the order *lo+* *si-* for the referent of *si-*; that is, the referent of this *si-* (a generalized impersonal) is at CENTRAL Focus and has a HIGH Degree of Control. The interlock of the meanings INNER Focus (encompassing CENTRAL and PERIPHERAL) and MID Control is signaled by the order *se* *l+* for the referent of *si-*. The interlock of the meanings PERIPHERAL Focus and MID Control is signaled by *gli-*, *le-*, and *-loro*. (These further interlock with Gender and Number, not shown). And the interlock of the meanings PERIPHERAL Focus and LOW Control is signaled by the clitic *l+* (which further interlocks with Gender and Number as indicated by the “+” sign).

Egli, si-, ne-, and finite verb ending are signals of Focus but not of Degree of Control.

With this interlock, writers and speakers are able to direct attention onto entities that play different roles in an event. True participants deserve more attention (INNER) than mere associates (OUTER), and among participants some deserve more attention (CENTRAL) than others (PERIPHERAL). Some participants are more responsible for bringing the event about than are others (HIGH, MID, LOW Degree of Control).

Systematic effects of a *human factor* can be seen in the form that the interlock takes.³² Humans tend to pay attention to entities that we deem to be powerful; witness the prominence often given by the news media to government leaders. In the interlock of Focus and Degree of Control, anyone or anything that is attributed Control over the event is deemed important enough to deserve a relatively higher level of Focus (INNER). Among these true participants in the event, those that exercise relatively less Control (MID or LOW) are assigned a lower level of Focus (PERIPHERAL) than the most attention-worthy participant (CENTRAL). That highest level of Focus is thus left available for the participant that exercises the greatest amount of control. The “subject of thought” is indeed often the “agent.” Recall Example (4.2): *glielo passò* ‘he [the Viscount] threaded it [pine needle] around it [neck].’ And recall Example (4.7): *egli lo trattò* ‘he [Plato] treated it [the theme].’

Users of the grammar, however, enjoy great flexibility in assigning this highest level of attention. Where there is only one potential participant (with a typically intransitive verb) and so Control is not ranked, that participant occupies CENTRAL stage (per the finite verb ending), regardless of its actual agency: *La terra è rotonda* ‘The earth is round.’ And when a user of the grammar wishes to place CENTRAL Focus elsewhere than on a highly controlling participant (with a potentially transitive verb), he can “opt out” of ranking Degree of Control by using *si-*. Recall Example (4.8): *si tratta della forza di coesione* ‘it is a matter of the force of cohesion’ ~ ‘the force of cohesion is being treated.’ The following chapters will develop this idea in detail.

32. The “human factor” is a major Columbia School concept; see, e.g., Diver (1995/2012).

Scale of Degree of Control

The view from the bottom

The two preceding chapters provide the formal mechanisms for accounting in a systematic way for the distribution of *si-* in discourse. The hypotheses of Participant Focus and Degree of Control will prove useful in analyzing authentic contextualized examples. This chapter will concentrate on examples that the tradition would parse mostly as passives, and the next, Chapter 6, will deal mostly with reflexives. But that division, like the segregation of so-called impersonals in Chapter 2, is merely heuristic since the grammatical mechanism responsible for the distribution of *si-* in general is the same: an opposition of substances whereby *si-* opts out of signaling Number, Sex, Gender, and Degree of Control while sharing a Focus meaning with clitics that do signal meanings in those substances.¹ Chapter 7, therefore, will summarize, in a fashion, what we learn in this chapter and the next and will do away with the distinction altogether.²

In spite of the failure of the passive-reflexive distinction, it is useful to group examples in some way that is both familiar to readers and responsive to the analysis. Therefore, examples in this chapter will largely be restricted to those involving entities in Focus that could not plausibly be construed as human beings. Here, *si-* refers to nonhuman things and to abstractions. The next chapter will deal with examples of *si-* that place Focus on human beings. This restriction will help us to see in this chapter how the use of *si-* can amount to a “subversion” of the Focus-Control interlock and allow users of the grammar to instruct others to focus on a participant other than the most active one in an event.³

1. Stefanini (1983: 103) understandably calls the coincidence, in *si*, of the three categories ‘neither logical, nor economical, nor even “sane,” indeed downright “*pathologique*.”

2. While agreeing that the *grammar* makes no distinction between “true reflexives” and passives or intransitives, García (1975: 7–8, 23–25, 115, 186, *et passim*) makes much of what she treats as distinct *messages* between the “true reflexive” and what she terms the “Romance reflexive,” which is often translated as an intransitive.

3. To describe the phenomenon here called “subversion of the Focus-Control interlock,” García (2009: 67–68) speaks in terms of Spanish *se* “short-circuiting role-differentiation,” “role-levelling,” and “the event’s introversion.”

The observation that language-users have ways of directing Focus onto relatively inactive participants supports the postulation of a human factor (Chapter 4 Appendix, 11) in the structure of grammar. As we have seen, the organization of the Focus-Control interlock allows users to direct INNER Focus again and again onto more active participants, those who are more prone to attract human attention, and to relegate to OUTER Focus those entities that are so remotely associated with a given event that they are not even assigned a Control status. However, language-users do sometimes have an interest in directing attention onto less active (more passive) participants; *si-* gives them a means of doing so.⁴

A. Subversion of the Focus-Control interlock: *Si* for Focus on low-controllers

Si- is commonly found when the discourse calls for Focus (signaled by verb ending) to be inferred to apply to a relatively inert or passive entity, a patient. In terms of traditional grammar, the sentence is in the passive voice, and the subject of the clause is an inanimate noun, or an allusion to one by pronoun or verb ending. In terms of the hypotheses of Chapters 3 and 4, CENTRAL Focus is (by inference from the signal provided by the verb ending) on an entity that, by virtue of Degree of Control, *ought* to be assigned the meaning LOW, but to signal that meaning explicitly, with *l+-*, would take the entity effectively out of CENTRAL Focus and place it explicitly in PERIPHERAL Focus.

This is a frequent function of *si-*, this prompting of the inference that Focus is on something other than a highly active participant. We saw in Chapter 1 that, in the published English translation of the first chapter of Lampedusa's novel, passives rank second only to intransitives among ways to render *si-*, more frequent than reflexives or impersonals.

Even though Degree of Control is not technically signaled by *si-*, it will often, as just above, be convenient to speak of "low," "mid," and "high control" as if such meanings were signaled. To speak in this way is not to confuse actually signaled grammatical *meanings* with whatever inferences might come to mind, nor to assume *a priori* that systems of Control are features of any particular grammar. Typographical conventions (e.g., LOW vs. low) will remind us of the distinction between directly signaled meaning and more indirect inference. In order to defend

4. García (1975:138) terms it "an unnatural inference" that our attention should be drawn to focus on a least active participant. That characterization seems too strong; there is nothing "unnatural" at all in focusing on whatever one is most interested in. Perhaps the claim was based on an overfamiliarity with action narratives as opposed to, say, academic treatises such as, for instance, a chemist focusing on the chemicals being manipulated.

a hypothesis about signaled *meanings* as an account for the observed distribution of *si-*, this treatment must include discussion of the *messages* that *si-* contributes to; those messages have very much to do with the choice of *si-* in lieu of a signal of Degree of Control. Recall that, in Columbia School, signaled meanings are held to “contribute” to inferred messages. While *si-* does not signal distinctions of Degree of Control, *si-* does stand in a formal opposition of substance with that system; in the system, *si-* takes the place of – stands in lieu of – one of the signals of Degree of Control. Italian speakers evidently draw on knowledge of that system in interpreting instances of *si-*; certainly, the analyst draws on it.⁵

Example (5.1) below illustrates the subversion of the Focus-Control interlock by *si-* for Focus on a participant with effectively low control over an event. It comes from a passage that introduces a description of a series of inhabited islands (cf. Example 3.1). Focus – signaled by verb ending and extended by inference here to particular third-person entities – is indicated in bold type. Notice how Focus is placed on inanimate features of the scene. Forms in bold italic are for particular discussion below.

- (5.1) **Così è il mare ignoto che sta** oltre le Colonne, senza fine e sempre uguale, dal quale **emergono**, come la piccola spina dorsale di un colosso scomparso, **piccole creste di isole**, nodi di roccia perduti nel celeste.

La prima isola che s'incontra, vista dal mare è una distesa di verde.... **Le altre isole sono** più rocciose (TD 13–14)

Such is **the unknown sea that lies** beyond the Strait of Gibraltar, without end and always the same, from which **emerge**, like the little backbone of a vanished giant, **little crests of islands**, knots of rock lost in the blue.

The first island that is (SG) *encountered* (*si*), seen from the sea, is an expanse of green.... **The other islands are** (PL) rockier

5. Based on the evidence of the texts, there appears to be a link in language use between the availability of signaled Control meanings *in the grammar*, and the implication of messages of control *ad hoc* even when those meanings are not signaled. A grammatical system can set the parameters along which individual utterances are (to be) interpreted even when that system is “opted out of” as an opposition of substance is exploited. For example, the Focus system in Italian sets the parameters, as it were, for the interpretation of disjunctive pronouns, which do not signal Focus (Davis 1992, 1995a). Thus *lui*, though it does not actually signal any degree of Focus, is routinely interpreted as being effectively in central focus (as *egli* ‘he’ is by virtue of formal signaling) or as being effectively in peripheral focus (as *lo-* ‘him’ is by virtue of formal signaling). This may be what is involved as well in, e.g., the interpretation of English *put* as referring variously to past or non-past time, even though *put*, unlike *place/placed*, does not signal meanings in the system of Time. This idea of a kind of ghost signaling, if you will, extends the thinking of Diver (1995/2012 §3.2.2.4.3) on the “imprecision in signalling” of value oppositions in the homophonous Latin ablative and dative plural and the hearer’s consequent “need for the application of an intelligent appraisal.” Cf. too García (1975:77).

The discourse sets up the expectation of Focus on islands, and indeed what follows is a survey of islands: their topography, flora and fauna, people, and culture (cf. Examples 3.1–3.4). The finite verbs *incontra* ‘encounter-SG’ and *sono* ‘are-PL’ confirm, respectively, that Focus is to be inferred on first *La prima isola* ‘The first island’ and then *Le altre isole* ‘The other islands.’⁶ The function of *si-* here is that of a sort of placeholder, somewhat like the digit zero in, say, ‘20,’ as opposed to ‘2.’ Just as the digit ‘0’ in ‘20’ indicates that no units value, 1–9, will be given for this number, so *si-* in *La prima isola che s’incontra* indicates that no additional participant in the ‘encountering’ will be given beyond the one being focused on, by inference, the ‘first island.’ The ‘island,’ a stationary rock, is not the agent of the ‘encountering,’ does not move or see anything. Rather, properties inherent in the island, principally its height, allow it to be ‘encountered.’

If any person ‘encounters’ the island, it would be some traveler. In this text the Focus by and large is on the islands and their characteristics, not on any traveler. It would be less felicitous rhetorically for the writer to place CENTRAL focus on a traveler:

Egli (CENTRAL Focus) incontra la prima isola
 He (CENTRAL Focus) encounters the first island

The relatively passive state of the island is reflected in the fact that, if the island were to be assigned a Degree of Control, it would be LOW and the island would then have PERIPHERAL Focus relative to the traveler:

Egli (CENTRAL FOCUS) l’ (PERIPHERAL FOCUS, LOW Degree of Control) incontra
 He (CENTRAL FOCUS) encounters it (PERIPHERAL FOCUS, LOW Degree of Control)

And so *si-* in (5.1) in effect *subverts* the Focus-Control interlock by allowing the writer to place CENTRAL Focus on a participant that in fact has a low degree of

6. To say that the singular *incontra* confirms that Focus is on *la prima isola* is not to ignore the relative pronoun *che* ‘that.’ As stated earlier, neither noun morphology nor word order in Italian signals Focus, and so just what, exactly, the verb ending refers to is always a matter of inference. Nor does *che* signal Focus, and Focus is in general unpredictable in a clause introduced by *che* (cf. *la prima isola che io incontro è* ‘the first island that I encounter is’). All that is being claimed here is that in this instance Focus is determined to be on *la prima isola*. In support of that determination, note that the verb would be plural in *le prime isole che s’incontrano sono* ‘the first islands that are encountered are,’ where *incontrano* confirms that Focus is effectively on *le prime isole*. Moreover, the treatment here in no way ignores the fact that verbs do not always agree with their subjects; see Chapter 9 *contra* the existence of a rule of subject-verb agreement. To this view that verb number *signals* where Focus should be, contrast García (1975:206), for whom verb number in such passives is merely “influenced” by the number of the least active participant when the most active one is indefinite.

control, which participant normally would, per the organization of the interlock (Chapter 4 appdx.), be relegated to PERIPHERAL FOCUS with *la-*.

The same lexical item in (5.2) below, from the same text, is third-person plural, *incontrano*, placing Focus on some ENUMERABLE entity.

- (5.2) Per arrivare al tempio è necessario percorrere **un sentiero** scavato nella roccia **che assomiglia** al letto di un torrente scomparso: e cammin facendo **si incontrano strani scheletri** di enormi e ignoti animali, forse pesci o forse uccelli
(TD 15)

To get to the temple, **it is** necessary to travel along a **path** dug out of the rock **that resembles** the bed of a dried-up river: and along the way, **strange skeletons** of enormous and unknown animals, perhaps fish or perhaps birds, **are (PL) encountered (si-)**.

Again, no traveler is mentioned; Focus remains on the inert features of the landscape, in particular the ‘strange skeletons,’ Focus on which is suggested by plural *incontrano*.⁷ As these are skeletons of ‘enormous animals,’ it is natural that they protrude from the excavated ground and so are ‘encountered’ by anyone who might take that path. *Si-* allows focus on the skeletons even though they have little control over the ‘encountering.’

The function of *si-* in such examples is to block the expectation that an additional participant – a high-controller – will be provided. That function of *si-* is brought into relief by a comparison with another verb in the passage (Example 5.1), a verb without *si-*:

emergono ... piccole creste di isole
emerge ... little crests of islands

In contrast with *incontrare* ‘encounter,’ the lexical item *emergere* ‘emerge’ does not readily suggest differentiated degrees of involvement of more than one participant (in traditional terms, *emergere* is intransitive). Here, as above, the participant in the event is inanimate, ‘little crests of islands.’ Yet the semantic content of *emergere* is such that its participant need not be animate. Yes, a human being can deliberately ‘emerge’ from the shadows, say. But just as well, ‘little crests of islands’ can ‘emerge’ from the sea. In different contexts, this might be said to happen over long stretches of geologic time as the islands grow taller and taller from the floor of the sea. In the present context, no actual change in topography is suggested; rather, the present-day shape of the islands in the fluid sea is responsible for their position relative to it, their ‘emergence’ from it. There need not even be a human observer in order for islands to be said to ‘emerge’ from the sea.

7. Variable contraction (*s'incontra*, *si incontrano*) will not be treated in this analysis.

This pair, *incontrare* and *emergere*, one with *si-* and one without, illustrates how the distribution of *si-* depends crucially upon the idiosyncracies of the lexical items involved (cf. Chapter 7). It cannot be said that *si-* appears whenever an inert object is in Focus, nor that *si-* appears whenever distinctions of Degree of Control are irrelevant. Rather, *si-* appears when the particular verb in question is one (e.g., *incontrare* ‘encounter’) that, by its own properties, suggests the involvement of multiple participants, each with its own Degree of Control. Then *si-*, sitting in an opposition of substance with the signals of Degree of Control, and sharing a Focus meaning with them, effectively blocks the expectation that distinct participants will be mentioned. In (5.1) and (5.2), no traveler who encounters ‘the first island’ or the ‘strange skeletons’ is mentioned, and this omission allows the writer to place Focus on these inert participants, consistent with the structure of the discourse he is creating.

This analysis of *si-* with inanimates in Focus resembles to a large degree that of García (1975: 7–8, 25–26, 121–122, 155) for Spanish *se*. Both posit that Focus is on the inanimate participant; both point out that no higher-controlling participant will be mentioned; and both see the relevance of “the nature” of the inanimates – here, the islands and the skeletons – to participate in the particular event, so too the nature of the event and other things in the context. The present treatment differs from García’s, however, in *not excluding* from the interpretation there being some other unmentioned participant. For example, no claim is made here that, in (5.1), there is “nobody else to blame” except the island for the encountering of it. Though *si-* does “short-circuit,” “rule out,” “eliminate,” or “exclude” an agent, it does so only at the level of the *grammar* itself – the organization of grammatical *meaning* – not by any means at the level of the *scene* of what actually transpires in the world, nor at the level of the *message* that a language-user conveys concerning that scene.⁸ With *si-*, the speaker in no way “denies that other, outside, forces were involved.” Here, for example, there is no necessary implication that the ‘island’ or the ‘skeletons’ are ‘encountered’ without the participation of some agent.

Example (5.3), below (already seen as Example 1.8), makes it clear that *si-* allows the writer to place Focus on a participant that is not active even when, on the scene, there undeniably is an agent. Two specific men, the Prince of Salina and his priest, are riding at night in a carriage.

- (5.3) **La strada adesso era in leggera discesa e *si vedeva* Palermo vicina completamente al buio. Le sue case basse e serrate erano oppresse dalla smisurata mole dei conventi; di questi ve ne erano diecine.** (LG 16)

8. The three-way distinction of *meaning*, *message*, and *scene* is due to Diver (1975/2012: 48–54).

The road now was in a slight descent, and Palermo *was seen* [*si-*] close by, completely in the dark. Its squat and shuttered houses were overwhelmed by the enormous bulk of the convents, and of these there were dozens.

(cf. Colq. 29–30)

There follows more description of the panorama. On the actual scene, it is of course the men who see Palermo. But in this passage the writer has chosen to place Focus not on the men, the agents of the seeing, but on features of the panorama: the road, the city itself, its houses (and other features in the following context). So the passage does not say *gli uomini vedevano Palermo* ‘the men saw-3-PL Palermo’, placing the men in Focus; nor *la vedevano* ‘they saw-3-PL it’, placing the city in PERIPHERAL Focus and assigning to it a LOW Degree of Control. No agents are mentioned, and Focus, as established by the third-person singular verb, is cast on Palermo, opening the possibility that anyone in such a position as the men were would have seen Palermo from that vantage point, owing to its geography and its architecture. (The example will be discussed further in Chapter 7.)

In Examples (5.1–5.3) above, *si-* effects a subversion of the Focus-Control interlock such that Focus can be placed on entities that exercise low control. *Si-* does this by virtue of signaling INNER Focus (participant status) while sitting in an opposition of substance with the dedicated signal (*l+-*) of LOW Degree of Control. Figure 5.1, below, based on Example (5.3), illustrates that inference. Focus is on Palermo (coreferential with the verb ending on *vedeva*), and no distinctions of Degree of Control are acknowledged. It is entirely a matter of inference how much influence the city and the men (*uomini*) have over the event of seeing. This inferential status is indicated with square brackets and small arrows with question marks at their tips.

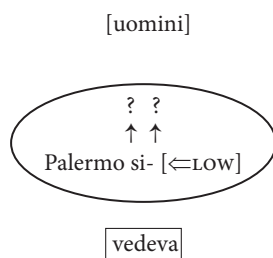


Figure 5.1 *Si vedeva Palermo*
‘Palermo was seen’

Thus far we have considered examples where Focus is placed on inanimate things – physical objects – that cannot easily be attributed a high degree of agency over events: an island, skeletons, and features of a landscape. With such inert entities, it is easy to accept that they would have less control over events of ‘encountering’

and ‘seeing’ than would the human beings who ‘encounter’ and ‘see’ them, and we now know that writers can place Focus on these inert bodies. But what about abstractions? We saw in Chapter 4 that users of the grammar can assign Control to whatever they wish, from humans to inanimate objects and abstractions. We turn now to the subversion of the Focus-Control interlock in examples where Focus is placed on abstractions.

Leading up to Example (5.4) below, a train has just departed a small town. The narrator is a teenage boy.

- (5.4) La valle rimase vasta e silenziosa, assopita nel nuovo calore del sole. Oppure ero io che stavo così assorto e sperduto nelle cose che avevo davanti, con un vago desiderio di lontananza. Tante volte in primavera capita di sentire che la nostra vita *si* allargherà all'improvviso, per qualche ragione impensata. (BB 10)

The valley was again vast and silent, lulled by the new heat of the sun. Or else it was I that was so absorbed and lost in the things I had in front of me, with a vague desire to get away. So often in springtime it happens that we feel that our life will suddenly open up (*si-*), for some unimagined reason.

The lexical item *allargare* lends itself to distinctions in Degree of Control (it is a transitive verb). A person can ‘widen’ a thing. Here, however, no agent of the widening or opening up of ‘life’ is specified; in fact, the narrator says that such a thing can happen in springtime for no foreseen reason. Focus is directed onto ‘life’ and not on whatever agent might enlarge it. As it turns out, the boy’s life is about to change forever. The train has brought a young soldier, who will become the hero in the boy’s first-person coming-of-age story.

Example (5.5) occurs in the text soon after. Upon meeting the soldier and giving directions for where the soldier wants to go (by pointing, since the boy is too dumbstruck to speak), the boy impulsively takes off running to accompany the soldier.

- (5.5) Tante volte in seguito io ho cercato di ragionare e di rendermi conto della vera importanza dell'atto che feci. Ci sono azioni che *si* compiono così d'impulso, azioni qualsiasi senza valore, che però poi danno origine a un cambiamento nella nostra vita e nella vita di coloro che hanno relazione con noi. E non so ancora se sia giusto vedere la nostra responsabilità in quelle azioni e sentirne il rimorso. (BB 12)

So many times since then I have tried to figure out and understand the true importance of the thing I did. There are actions that happen (*si-*) so impulsively, any old actions with no meaning, which however then give birth to a change in our life and in the lives of those who have relations with us. And I still do not know if it is right to see our responsibility in those actions and to feel regret for them.

The lexical item *compiere* ‘complete, finish, fulfill, accomplish,’ like *allargare* in Example (5.4), lends itself to distinctions in Degree of Control. But here, whoever accomplishes the ‘actions’ is not worthy of mention. Though the boy took the action of running after the soldier, what is placed in Focus is not the boy but the ‘actions.’ As we saw in Chapter 2, *si-* often has the effect of *generalizing* a reference, and here the boy seems to wish to justify his action by comparing it to actions that we all (*nostra, noi*) commit. Therefore, the boy does not place focus on himself. The ‘actions,’ however, are terribly important and worthy of Focus: actions like this one can change the life of the person who takes them and the lives of the people in that person’s circle. That is what happens in this story, as the events that unfold change the lives of the boy, the soldier, and every member of the boy’s family.

Si-, by signaling INNER Focus while opting out of the system of Degree of Control, allows a writer to place Focus upon whatever he wishes, even if that is an inanimate object or an abstraction, something that is inherently less capable of exerting Control over events.

B. That *passive* and *impersonal* are not categories of Italian grammar

The reader of this volume might question the translations here of Examples (5.1), (5.2), and (5.3), above, asking whether these might not just as well be translated not as passives but as generalized impersonals, as in Chapter 2: ‘One encounters the first island,’ ‘one encounters strange skeletons,’ and ‘one saw Palermo.’ Indeed they might be. Either translation would accurately reflect the *scene* described in those examples. If an island is encountered, then one encounters an island; if skeletons are encountered, then one encounters skeletons; if Palermo is seen, then someone sees Palermo. *Passive* and *impersonal* are terms that describe logical calculi: the subject of the proposition is not the agent; the subject is not a particular person. *Passive* and *impersonal* are not terms for grammatical mechanisms of Italian. In the examples of generalized impersonals seen in Chapter 2 and in the examples of passives seen here, the grammatical mechanism is the same: *si-*. The grammatical function of *si-* in (5.1), (5.2), and (5.3) is to take the place of a verbal satellite that would introduce an additional participant, just as the grammatical function of *si-* in examples in Chapter 2 is to take the place of any more informative mention of a participant, such as ONE MALE *egli* ‘he.’ The only guide to suggest that we should translate (5.1) and (5.2) as shown above is the grammatical Number of the finite verbs *incontra* and *incontrano*, indicating the Number of the entity in CENTRAL Focus. That distinction would have to be ignored if we were to translate both examples as impersonals with ‘one.’ As for (5.3), the professional translator may well

have been sensitive to that very nuance – On what is the Focus? – in choosing to translate *si vedeva Palermo* as ‘Palermo was seen’ rather than ‘one saw Palermo.’⁹

For a passive example that could not be interpreted as an impersonal, we need a passage where no human being could conceivably be involved as agent. Example (5.6):

- (5.6) Dicono che l’ambra grigia sia il residuo del guscio cheratinoso dei crostacei che la balena non riesce a digerire e che le *si* accumula in certi segmenti dell’intestino. Ma altri sostengono che è il risultato di un processo patologico (TD 55)
- They say that the ambergris is the residue of the keratinous shell of crustaceans that the whale does not manage to digest and that accumulates (or, ‘is accumulated’) (*si-*) in certain portions of her intestine. But others maintain that it is the result of a pathological process

In the passage, Focus is inferred to be on *l’ambra grigia* ‘the ambergris’ (finite verbs *sia* ‘is’ and *accumula* ‘accumulates’) and on people who espouse theories about its origin (*Dicono* ‘say,’ *sostengono* ‘maintain’). Inside the whale, there is no human being who ‘accumulates’ the whale’s ambergris, the way an investor, say, accumulates wealth. So it would not be feasible to translate Example (5.6) as a generalized impersonal: ‘the residue ... which one (*si-*) accumulates in certain portions of her intestine.’ But this is an artifact of the topic of this discourse, a result of the nature of ambergris, whose own properties cause it to ‘accumulate’ inside the intestine of a whale. The grammatical mechanism employed here, *si-*, is exactly the same as that employed in examples that are translated as impersonals.

Passive and *impersonal* are not categories of Italian grammar.

C. That *intransitive* is not a category of Italian grammar

As we saw in Chapter 1 (Table 1.1), most examples of *si-* are translated into English not as passives but as intransitives. The traditional, universalist distinction between passive and intransitive¹⁰ ignores the features of Italian; the grammatical mechanism in Italian is the same for both types: *si-*. What *si-* does is to allow Focus to be placed on a participant that has low control in an event where the Italian verb that is used suggests a Control dichotomy; that is, to focus on a participant in a passage

9. As noted by García (1975: 22), word order too may tend to have an effect on interpretation; however, as shown by Example (5.3), word order is not decisive.

10. See Diver, Davis, and Reid (2012) on *intransitive* as essentially a semantic universal.

where, in spite of the verb used, distinguishing Degrees of Control is not an issue. Example (5.7), below, will illustrate.

The main character, the Prince, is relaxing in his garden. Notice to what an extent Focus (again, bold type) is placed upon features of the garden. The three examples with *si-* referring to features of the garden are italicized; all were rendered in the published translation as intransitives.¹¹

- (5.7) Ma **il giardino** ... *esalava* profumi untuosi, carnali e lievemente putridi...; **i garofanini sovrapponevano** il loro odore pepato a quello protocollare delle rose ed a quello oleoso delle *magnolie* che *si appesantivano* negli angoli; e sotto sotto *si avvertiva* anche **il profumo** della menta misto a quello infantile della gaggia ed a quello confetturiero della mortella, e da oltre il muro **l'agrumeto faceva** straripare il sentore di alcova delle prime zàgare.

Era **un giardino** per ciechi: **la vista** costantemente **era** offesa ma l'odorato **poteva** trarre da esso un piacere forte benché non delicato. **Le rose Paul Neyron** le cui piantine **aveva egli stesso** acquistato a Parigi **erano** degenerate: eccitate prima e rinfrollite dopo dai succhi vigorosi e indolenti della terra siciliana, arse dai lugli apocalittici, *si erano* mutate in una sorta di cavoli color carne, osceni, ma che **distillavano** un denso aroma quasi turpe che **nessun allevatore francese avrebbe** osate sperare. **Il Principe** se ne **pose** una sotto il naso e gli **sembrò** di odorare la coscia di una ballerina dell'Opera. (LG 8)

But **the garden** ... **exhaled** cloying scents, fleshly, and slightly putrid...; **the carnations superimposed** their pungent scent on the formal one of the roses and the oily one of **the magnolias** that *were drooping [si]* in the corners; and somewhere beneath it all **the faint smell** of mint, mingled with the nursery whiff of acacia and the jammy one of myrtle, *stood out [si-]*;¹² from beyond the wall **the citrus orchard made** the smell of early orange blossom overflow.

It was a **garden** for the blind: **the sight was** constantly offended, but **the sense of smell could** take from it a pleasure strong if somewhat crude. **The Paul Neyron roses**, whose cuttings **he had himself bought** in Paris, **had** degenerated; first stimulated and then enfeebled by the strong if languid pull of Sicilian earth, burned by apocalyptic Julies, **they had changed [si-]** into things like flesh-colored cabbages, obscene but which **distilled** a dense, almost indecent, scent which **no French horticulturist would have dared** hope for. **The Prince put** one under his nose and **it seemed** to him to be sniffing the thigh of a dancer from the Opera. (cf. Colq. 17–18)

11. The words *Paul Neyron*, italicized in the original, have been rendered here in plain type.

12. This gloss of *si avvertiva* is meant to suggest the active sense of that verb – ‘caution, warn’ – better than would the alternative gloss ‘was noticed.’

Focus is placed, by inference from the verb ending, on the garden or features of it nine times out of a total of fifteen. Of those nine having to do with the garden, three have *si-*, and six do not.¹³ The six that do not have *si-* do not require a subversion of the Focus-Control interlock in order that the garden be kept in Focus: ‘the garden exhaled scents,’ ‘the carnations superimposed their scent,’ ‘the citrus orchard made the smell of orange overflow,’ ‘It was a garden for the blind’ ‘the roses had degenerated,’ [the roses] distilled a scent.’ What *si-* does in the three examples that have it, which are italicized, is to allow the writer to place Focus on aspects of the garden that are low-controllers of their respective events: Magnolias were ‘weighed down’ (their own bulk ‘weighed’ them down). A smell ‘stood out’ or ‘was noticeable’ in the garden (its own strength, ‘faint’ but strong enough to be noticed, would have ‘warned’ anyone passing by of its presence). And the Parisian roses ‘had changed’ or, more literally, ‘were changed,’ that is, were now in a new and different state than they had been (their own properties rendered them susceptible to the harsh Sicilian climate).¹⁴ In these three examples, the Italian verbs in question (*appesantire*, *avvertire*, *mutare*), by virtue of their lexical content, suggest distinctions in Degree of Control: Typically – or at least potentially – something ‘weighs down’ something else; someone or something ‘warns’ someone; and one thing ‘changes’ another. But in this passage those distinctions are ignored and Degrees of Control are not signaled, so that, instead, Focus can be placed on participants that exercise very little control over these events: the magnolias that are weighed down, the smell that is noticed, and the roses that are changed. That is similar to the effect achieved with intransitives in English (cf. Chapter 1): the magnolias ‘drooped,’ the smell ‘was there,’ and the roses ‘had changed.’ In this way, Focus is kept largely on the garden throughout the paragraph, regardless of whether the verb in question suggests distinctions in Degree of Control.

The three traditional categories of *passives*, *impersonals*, and *intransitives* all represent, upon close scrutiny, an avoidance of distinguishing clearly just who acts upon whom. Italian grammar does allow speakers and writers to signal distinctions in Degree of Control (Diagram 4.2), but that explicitness comes at a price: Any participant signaled to have less than a HIGH Degree of Control over an event is necessarily placed in PERIPHERAL, not CENTRAL, Focus. The choice to avoid distinguishing Degrees of Control, by using *si-* instead, is communicatively motivated by the need, in connected discourse, to place Focus upon participants who most

13. Of the remaining six out of fifteen overall instances of Focus, two are on the senses, two are on the main character experiencing the garden, one is on a nonexistent ‘horticulturist,’ and one is an abstract reference to the main character’s sniffing of a rose.

14. See Chapter 7 to contrast *cambiare* with *mutare* here. See Chapter 10 on the distinction between *avere* and *essere* as auxiliaries with the compound tenses.

deserve the reader's attention, regardless of whether they are most or least responsible for making the event happen. In other words, the Focus-Control interlock in Italian (Diagram in Appendix to Chapter 4) is set up to direct attention to the movers and shakers in a narrative, but sometimes writers want us to pay attention to the stuff that just sits around, or that gets moved and shaken, while the movers and shakers move and shake. *Si-* allows us to do that.

D. Absence of *si* with Focus on mid-controllers (no passivization of datives)

In examples we have seen in this chapter, the function of *si-* is to allow Focus to be placed on a participant that effectively exercises low control over an event. In the tradition, these are the classic passives, with patients (would-be accusatives) as subject. In Italian, there is no similar mechanism for passives with recipients or beneficiaries (would-be datives) as subject. In traditional terms, *si-* does not passivize datives. That is, *si-* is not found in examples where Focus is placed specifically on a participant that effectively exercises a mid degree of control over an event, *excluding* the high and low ends of the scale. If these existed, they would be comparable, in sense, to the perfectly acceptable English:

<i>Those reporters will be told the truth.</i>	Cf. <i>We will tell the reporters the truth.</i>
<i>The defendant is denied bail.</i>	Cf. <i>The judge denied the defendant bail.</i>
<i>Your dog was given a bone.</i>	Cf. <i>Someone gave your dog a bone.</i>

We must explain the absence in Italian of examples analogous to those on the left for English. Why is *si-* unable to accomplish such a feat?

First, observe that, in Italian, *si-* is in fact used to refer to a participant who in effect exercises a mid degree of control over an event, but in such examples that participant also exercises a high degree of control over the event. That is, *si-* is used when the effective control exercised by a participant *spans the range* covered by (the signals of) HIGH and MID Degrees of Control, but not when a participant's control is *limited* to just the middle range. Examples where the referent of *si-* spans the range of HIGH and MID Degrees of Control are not uncommon. Example 4.11 (see also Figure 4.4) is repeated here as Example (5.8):

(5.8) Michele Rende *si* tagliò una grossa fetta di pane e *si* versò anche del vino.
(BB 79)

Michele Rende cut (*si-*) off a big slice of bread and poured (*si-*) some wine too.
Michele Rende cut *himself* (*si-*) off a big slice of bread and poured *himself* (*si-*) some wine too.

To repeat the background information necessary for the interpretation of the example: Michele Rende is a brigand taking temporary refuge in the home of a woman who has offered to cook something for him. Meanwhile, he sits at the kitchen table and performs the actions described in (5.8). Through his hunger and thirst, he motivates the ‘cutting’ and the ‘pouring’; he thus exercises a Degree of Control that is routinely signaled as MID, by a dative *gli-*, *le-*, or *-loro* (*La madre gli tagliò una fetta* ‘Mother cut *him* a piece’). But Michele also deliberately performs the actions of ‘cutting’ and ‘pouring’ and so very much controls the actions. Michele’s effective control over the cutting and pouring spans the range of HIGH to MID. Such examples are traditionally classed as “reflexives” with dative *si-* (reflexives are the topic of the next chapter). The interpretation of (5.8) that is not possible is the one traditionally classified as the “passive” with dative *si-*:

* Michele Rende was cut a big piece of bread and was poured some wine too.

That interpretation would imply that Michele *only* motivated the cutting and pouring, did not actually perform those actions, which were instead performed by someone else, such as the woman of the house, who is cooking.

So, our hypothesis (Diagram in Appendix to Chapter 4) that *si-* stands in an opposition of substance with the system of Degree of Control and can take the place of any member of that system, from HIGH through MID to LOW, is borne out, but the restriction of interpretation described above is still to be explained: Why can *si-* not passivize an indirect object?

The reason has to do with the human factor and precision. People are generally not more precise than they need to be. This is the theme of *économie* advocated by Martinet (e.g., 1964) and addressed at length and in depth by Diver in several works (1970/2012, 1987/2012, 1990/2012, 1995/2012). The meaning MID Degree of Control is highly precise. Here are four ways (a–d) in which it can be seen to be precise:

a. MID Control is not signaled in Italian by the order of lexical items relative to each other but only by precise grammatical signals. Italian exhibits examples like:

La madre racconta una storia
The mother tells the story

but not examples like

*La madre racconta *il figlio* una storia *La madre racconta *il figlio*
The mother tells *the child* a story The mother tells *the child*

With precise signals of the meaning MID Control, more combinations are found:

La madre *la* racconta. La madre *gliela* racconta.
The mother tells *it*-LOW. The mother tells *him*-MID *it*-LOW.

La madre *gli* racconta la storia. La madre *gli* racconta di ...
 The mother tells *him*-MID the story. The mother tells *him*-MID about ...

And even then, the signal of MID Control is not found with most verbs absent some information of some sort (by lexical item, Control signal, prepositional phrase, etc.) pertaining to the controller at the low end of the scale:

?La madre *gli* racconta.
 The mother tells him.

Furthermore, in Italian, the two controlling participants – the high and the low – can appear in any position relative to the verb:

- | | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| (5.9) Questo pensava il Principe (LG 16) | cf. Una storia racconta la madre |
| ~ | ~ |
| Il Principe pensava questo | cf. La madre racconta una storia |
| ‘The Prince thought this’ | ‘The mother tells a story’ |

Clitics signaling Degree of Control may or may not be present, but when they are, their marking of Gender and Number do not necessarily help to disambiguate reference:

- (5.10) Questo glielo raccontava suo padre (TD 41)
 this-M-SG *gli*-MID *lo*-LOW-M-SG told-3-SG his-M-SG father-SG
 ‘His father told him this’

Pei offers the following illustration:

Così vince la forza la ragione – Pulci, *Morgante maggiore*, XX, 91. Does reason overcome strength, or is it the opposite? Only the context can tell us.
 (Pei 1941: 114)

In fact, in Italian, all six possible permutations of the SVO order are attested (Davis 1992: 137, 198).¹⁵ For that reason, and because it lies beyond our scope, this study will not offer a hypothesis regarding word order and the signaling of Degree of Control, nor of Focus, in Italian.¹⁶ One possibility, however – under which we can

15. Also for OVS, *Un cavallo se lo prende Cenci per il suo plotone* (RS 93) ‘Cenci takes a horse for his platoon.’ Examples of the other four: SOV *questa persistente inquietudine qualcosa doveva significare* (LG 76) ‘this persistent disquiet must mean something’; OSV *sono con te, qualsiasi decisione tu prenda* (Collins Sansoni 1981: 1569) ‘I am with you, whatever decision you make’; VSO *incitava anche lui Astarita* (MR 95) ‘he too incited Astarita’; VOS *Forse ha la febbre il capitano* (RS 113) ‘Maybe the captain has a fever.’

16. Contrast French, where word orders for nouns and verbs are signals of meanings of Focus and Control (Gildin 1989). Contrast also English (Diver and Davis 2012: 239–245).

tentatively operate – would be that Italian does have a positional signal of Degree of Control for freestanding lexical items but with meanings that are systematically indeterminate, such as, say, HIGH/LOW and LOW/HIGH, crucially excluding MID.¹⁷

See Huffman (1997: 33–34, 294–298) regarding the relation of word order to Degree of Control in French. In sum, French too excludes mid-control participants from being signaled by position relative to the verb, but French does specify the order of the high and low-controllers.

Regardless of what the details actually are for nouns and Degree of Control in Italian, what is clear is that participants that effectively exercise specifically a mid degree of control do not appear as freestanding lexical items but must be represented either by a grammatical signal of Degree of Control (*gli-*, *le-*, *-loro*) or – in this case not truly “freestanding” – by a noun related to the verbal complex through a prepositional phrase (with, e.g., *a* ‘to,’ *per* ‘for,’ *da* ‘from’).¹⁸

b. The second way in which the meaning MID Degree of Control can be seen to be precise, relative to the other two meanings, is this: Few verbs in Italian occur with signals of MID Degree of Control but not LOW Degree of Control. In terms familiar from dictionary listings, there are few verbs in Italian that are exclusively intransitive; most have the potential to be transitive. Examples of the few verbs that are sometimes found with a signal of MID but not a signal of LOW include *sembrare* ‘seem,’ *bisognare* ‘be necessary,’ *capitare* ‘arrive, happen,’ and *succedere* ‘succeed, happen.’¹⁹

c. Cognitively, MID Control is hemmed in by the two polar members of the scale, HIGH and LOW, which themselves range quite a bit in terms of the *actual* amount of responsibility *on the scene* that their referents exercise.²⁰ Entities that have a relatively high degree of control may in fact, on the scene, not bear a terribly high

17. Those meanings are reminiscent of the Control meanings that Diver (in Diver and Davis 2012: 217–219) posits for Classical Latin, where both the nominative and the accusative case could signal both MOST and LEAST Control, as opposed to the ablative and dative cases signaling, respectively, MORE and LESS Control.

18. As in Huffman (1997), these are viewed here not as signaled controllers of the event but as circumstantial information surrounding the event; see Huffman for extensive validation of that position for French.

19. For an analysis of *sembrare* and *parere* (‘seem, appear’), see De Jonge (1993). Cf. also Chapter 4§B here.

20. This rationale contrasts starkly with García (1975: 414–415), who sees the middle meaning covering a “wide semantic range” compared with the two other meanings, the complexity of which she evidently underestimates.

level of responsibility for an event's occurrence; they do not have to be conscious and deliberate about what they do:

Il marciapiede gli ha rotto la testa.
The sidewalk broke his head open.

At the other end of the scale, entities that have a relatively low degree of control may in fact, on the scene, bear a fairly high level of responsibility for an event's occurrence; they may contribute in some way to making it happen:

Con entusiasmo gli ho raccomandato questo nuovo impiegato.
With enthusiasm, I recommended to him this new employee.

If this were said, it would likely be the case that the new employee had done something substantial to contribute to being recommended, such as by exhibiting interest in the job and possessing traits that make him a promising candidate.

d. Possibly the most telling bit of evidence that *si-* is unsuitable as a signal of *precisely* that level of Control which is hemmed in by HIGH and LOW is that *si-*, as a morpheme, contains, as we have seen, very little information about its referent. Unlike the dedicated signals of Degree of Control (*gli-*, *le-*, *-loro*, *l+-*), *si-* bears information about *neither* grammatical Gender *nor* Number. To use *si-* to signal precisely the MID Degree of Control would be to mix drastically different levels of precision. *Si-* is too blunt an instrument to signal such a precise meaning when other, more precise instruments are available.

In this chapter and the next two, we shall see that *si-* effectively covers a wide range of Degree of Control, is hardly ever limited to one extreme or the other, and is never confined to just the middle of the scale. Already, with our examination in this chapter of examples of *si-* referring to inanimate things, we have had occasion to make note of the degree to which those inanimate things actually contribute in some substantive way to making the event happen. This point will be amplified in the next two chapters.

E. *Si* vs. the participle

In addition to *si-*, a major morphological type that has been labeled *passive* is the participle, which (though often irregular) regularly ends in *-t+*, often used with a main verb such as *essere* 'be,' *venire* 'come,' or *andare* 'go' (Lepschy & Lepschy 1988:222; Russi 2008:15). Absent a semantic analysis of the participle (often misleadingly called the "past participle"), this study cannot undertake to account fully

for its distribution.²¹ Still, examples in the present collection do point to a difference in communicative effect: In examples with *si-*, the responsibility for the event is typically quite general or vague, attributable to properties of the event's patient as much as to any external agent; the inferred high controller need not be looked for.²² By contrast, examples with a participle typically have a potentially identifiable responsible agent who must, however, be sought – if indeed identification is of interest – outside the Focus of the event in question (cf. García 1975: 15).²³

Example (5.11) illustrates the difference between *si-* and the participle. The excerpt is taken from a description of the bells in the campanile of S. Corona in Vicenza.

- (5.11) Le nuove quattro campane furono *benedette* dal Cardinale Priuli, Vescovo di Vicenza il 14 settembre 1761. Di queste ne restano oggi solamente due, le piccole, in quanto la terza *si ruppe* nell'anno 1882, mentre della maggiore non si ha piú notizia.

La terza campana venne *sostituita* con un bronzo, di dimensioni inferiori alle due antiche campane, *fuso* da Pietro Colbachini fu Giovanni di Bassano nel 1882 che funge oggi da campana minore. (Carollo and Sottill, pp. 35–36)

The four new bells were *blessed* (-t+) by Cardinal Priuli, Bishop of Vicenza, on September 14, 1761. Of these, there remain today only two, the small ones, inasmuch as the third *broke* (*si-*) in the year 1882, while there is no information concerning the large bell.

The third bell was *replaced* (-t+) by a bronze of a size smaller than the two old bells, *cast* (-t+) by Pietro Colbachini, son of the late Giovanni di Bassano, in 1882, which today serves as the small bell.

21. Diver, in Diver and Davis (2012), proposes that the Classical Latin participle from which this modern Italian form is descended is part of a system of Vividness that includes most of the other verb forms too, including finites and infinitives. It is the lowest member of the scale, signaling the least vivid presentation of the activity. Huffman (1977) tentatively proposes the meaning DEEMPHASIS OF ACTIVITY for the French participle.

22. In the words of Lepschy & Lepschy (1988: 222), *si-* is used “especially when the agent is not expressed.”

23. Cordin (1991: 107–108), without offering explanation, notes descriptively various ‘differences between the passive construction and the *si* passive.’ Among these, the most interesting for the present analysis is her observation that the *si* passive ‘approaches, in certain respects,’ an intransitive, while the participial passive ‘approaches, in certain respects,’ an active. This description, though couched in traditionalist terms, does begin to get at the semantic nuance which in the present treatment is attributed to the systematic structural (i.e., signal-meaning) differences between the two.

The excerpt contains three participles with a passive sense: *benedette* ‘blessed,’ *sostituita* ‘replaced,’ and *fuso* ‘cast.’ In each case, the actions were executed (controlled) by persons who are at least amenable to identification. The person who was most responsible for the ‘blessing’ of the new bells in 1761 was explicitly Cardinal Priuli. The person who was most responsible for the ‘casting’ of the replacement bell in 1882 was explicitly Pietro Colbachini. And the party most responsible for the ‘replacing’ of the broken bell in 1882 is easily inferred to be the local ecclesiastical authorities (even a wealthy donor would have had to obtain their go-ahead). In these instances, responsibility for the actions was neither general (cf. the *generalized impersonals* with *si-* in Chapter 2) nor inherent in the bells. Figure 5.2, below, illustrates. In *campane benedette*, no Focus is signaled at all: No grammatical signal of Focus is present; nouns in Italian do not bear case morphology, and the verb here is a participle, devoid of any ending that signals Time, Number, and Discourse Referent (grammatical person). And no distinction is made explicit in Degree of Control; the role of the Cardinal as executor of the ‘blessing’ is not signaled by the grammar but is known only thanks to context.

[Cardinale]

campane
benedette

Figure 5.2 *Le campane benedette*
‘The blessed bells’

By contrast, the one example of *si-* (which would be classified traditionally as a passive) in Example (5.11) has no potentially identifiable high-controller. Who or what ‘broke’ the bell? People think of bells as breaking on their own, due to some flaw in their casting (Indeed, bellfounders work hard to avoid such flaws and so such breakage). Even if someone ‘broke’ the bell by ringing it – and we have no indication that such was the case – that was not the fault of the bellringer but of the bell, since bells are meant to be rung. Figure 5.3, below, illustrates this inference, based on the grammatical signals present in context. Focus is inferred to be on the ‘bell’ and is signaled to be on the fact that it ‘broke.’ How much responsibility is to be attributed to what or to whom is left open to inference. It is a reasonable inference that *si-* here is present in place of a distinct participant, since that is how one might signal that a person ‘broke’ the bell, if one were to do that: *Egli la ruppe* ‘He broke it.’

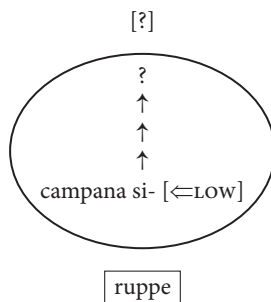


Figure 5.3 *La campana si rompe*
'The bell broke'

The two grammatical mechanisms, *si-* and *-t+*, have distinct communicative effects and should not be labeled indiscriminately as “passives.” Moreover, the communicative effects of *si-* are attributable to its meaning: INNER FOCUS with an opposition of substance vis-à-vis the systems of Number, Sex, grammatical Gender, and Degree of Control. In examples with *si-*, information about Number, Sex, and grammatical Gender is not needed for the identification of any additional participant, and the Control status of the participant that is mentioned is easily figured out.

Just as, in (5.11) above, bells are excluded, by participles, from primary responsibility for ‘blessing,’ ‘replacing,’ and ‘casting,’ so too a human being can be excluded, by participle, from primary responsibility for an activity. In the context preceding Example (5.12), below, the townsfolk, suspicious of the outsider Michele Rende, have been discussing a fight that he had gotten into the previous night.

- (5.12) Le cose stavano a questo punto, quando *si sparse* improvvisa la voce che Michele Rende era stato *arrestato*. Non era una voce *infondata*. Erano stati in parecchi a vedere l'appuntato Fimiani e il carabiniere Bronte salire a Grupa e poi scenderne portandosi dietro Michele Rende. (BB 46)

Things stood at this point, when the rumor suddenly *spread* (*si-*) that Michele Rende had been *arrested* (*-t+*). It was not an *unfounded* (*-t+*) rumor. There had been a lot of people who saw Corporal Fimiani and Officer Bronte go up to Grupa and then come back down bringing behind them Michele Rende.

The arrest of Michele Rende did not occur simply on account of inherent characteristics of Michele Rende. The arrest (*-t+*) was the action of other individuals, and those individuals are identified in the nearby context as police officers. By contrast, it is the nature of a rumor to ‘spread’ (*si-*), and if there is no particular reason to care who actually ‘spreads’ it, but rather if interest is more in the rumor itself than in the rumormongers, then there is no reason for the writer to encourage the reader to hunt for identifiable perpetrators. True, it is people who ‘spread’ a rumor – just as

it is people who ‘bless,’ ‘replace,’ and ‘cast’ bells – but the objective facts of the *scene* do not dictate the *message* that a writer communicates; his interests are subjective. Finally, in (5.12), contrast the ‘spread’ of the rumor (*si-*) to its being ‘unfounded’ (*-t+*). The narrator is quite interested in the actual fact that his hero has been arrested. It is important to him whether or not there are solid facts upon which this rumor is founded. The reader should seek to identify those facts. And so the writer furnishes the facts: there were many witnesses to the arrest.

Example (5.13) below contains a minimal pair.

- (5.13) – A Buenos Aires c’è un piccolo fiume che *si chiama* Riachuelo, e attorno a quel fiume abitano gl’italiani, che sono *chiamati* «gringos» e anche «tanos»....
(SP 205)

“In Buenos Aires there is a little river that *is called* (*si-*) Riachuelo, and around that river live the Italians, who are *called* (*-t+*) ‘gringos’ and even ‘tanos’ ...”

Presumably, all residents of Buenos Aires in general, both Spanish-speakers and Italian-speakers, call the geographical feature by the same proper name, *Riachuelo* ‘Stream.’ But surely the people whom the speaker calls ‘Italians’ do not call themselves “*gringos*” ‘foreigners’ or “*tanos*” ‘Wops’; rather, those pejorative terms are probably used exclusively by someone else, the dominant Spanish-speakers of the area.

Just as (Chapter 2) the “impersonal” uses of *si-* should not be confused with those of, say, *uno* and are attributable to the meaning of *si-*, so too the “passive” uses of *si-* should not be confused with those of the participle and are attributable to the meaning of *si-*.

Scale of Degree of Control

The view from the top

This chapter completes our examination of the major types of examples of *si-*. Previous chapters have dealt with: (Chapter 2) examples of *si-* in which the interpretation is that some human or humans, but none in particular, are focused on with respect to a given event (the traditional impersonals); and (Chapter 5) examples of *si-* in which the interpretation is that some relatively inert thing or abstraction is referenced and focused on (the traditional passives). This chapter deals mostly with examples of *si-* in which the interpretation is that a particular human being (or a plurality of them) is focused on. These are examples that tend to be classified in traditional and modern treatments as *reflexive*. As we have seen (in Chapter 1), examples of *si-* in which this person is interpreted as an agent acting upon himself (English *-self* constructions), analogously to an agent acting upon a patient (English transitives), are surprisingly uncommon in authentic discourse, but they do exist. Much more commonly, the person is interpreted as acting but not necessarily so willfully or autonomously (English intransitives). In this chapter, we shall see that the function of *si-* is, while signaling CENTRAL Focus (Chapter 3), to *opt out* of the semantic domains of Sex, grammatical Gender, and Number, and to *neutralize* Degree of Control (Chapter 4).

In the preceding chapter, we saw that, when *si-* is used to allow a relatively inert object to be focused on in a given event, that inanimate participant typically bears some responsibility for bringing the event about, thanks often to some inherent characteristic it has. Naturally, human beings have characteristics that make them prime candidates for the attribution of control over events. This has to do with the nature of human beings, not with the grammar, which works the same here as before.

A. The traditional reflexive

In the grammatical tradition, *si-* is principally known as the third-person reflexive pronoun. The label is not unreasonable, even if it does misrepresent the frequency of the reflexive interpretation in actual usage. Within traditional sentence grammar, the term *reflexive* refers to a structural situation in which a pronoun in the

predicate refers to the subject of its own clause. Below, (a) is not reflexive, and (b) is reflexive:

- (a) *egli l' uccise.*
 he him/her/it killed
 'he killed him/her/it'
- (b) *egli s' uccise*
 he (si) killed
 'he killed himself'

In both sentences, the subject of the clause is *egli* 'he'. In (a), the predicate is *l'uccise*; in (b), the predicate is *s'uccise*. In (a), the pronoun *l'* refers to someone other than the subject: not reflexive. In (b), the pronoun *s'* (a contraction of *si*), refers back to the subject of the sentence: reflexive.

What makes it not unreasonable, within sentence grammar, for *si-* to be labeled the reflexive pronoun is that, among the third-person clitic pronouns, *si-* is the only one that, as in (b) above, can refer to the subject of the verb. The others, such as *l'* in (a) above, always refer to someone or something outside the clause.

There are, however, three problems with this account.

First, as seen in the chapter on impersonals (Chapter 2), *si-* does not always refer back to the grammatical subject of its clause as in (b); sometimes *si-* is the subject of its clause: *Si nasce, si vive, si muore* 'One is born, lives, and dies.' That objection – that *si-* does not always refer back to the grammatical subject of its clause – can also be made regarding cases in which *si-* is clitic to a nonfinite verb, one that has no overt grammatical subject (though it may well have an inferred agent).¹ For example:

- (6.1) *E poi le venne l'impulso di nascondersi.* (BB 238)
 And then her-DAT came-3-SG the-impulse of hide-*si*
 'And then there came to her the impulse to hide (*herself*).'

In this example, *si-* is inferred to refer to *le-* 'her,' but the grammatical subject of the finite clause is *l'impulso* 'the impulse.'²

The second problem with the traditional account is that there are other third-person pronouns besides the clitic *si-* that can refer back to the subject of

1. See Chapter 3 and Diver, Davis, and Reid (2012) on the three definitions of *subject* in traditional grammar.

2. One can, of course, recognize infinitive clauses, in addition to finite clauses, but then one has to say that the reflexive pronoun can refer to something that is not present in the language but only in the mind, i.e., to the implied subject of the infinitive.

their clause. Chief among these, all of them disjunctive,³ is *sé: Mussolini scopri se stesso* ‘Mussolini discovered himself.’⁴ Such examples will be examined in this chapter. Also, the cleavage between clitics and disjunctives as regards their behavior vis-à-vis reflexivity will be explained.

The third problem with the traditional account has to do with interpretation. Traditionally, a reflexive clause is interpreted as there being an agent who acts upon himself; that is, the agent (subject) is also the patient (direct object) or the beneficiary (indirect object). In (b) at the beginning of this chapter, the single referent of *egli* and of *si-* is, respectively, both the agent and the patient of the ‘killing’: a suicide. And indeed, authentic discourse does contain examples of *si-* that can be interpreted this way, but such examples are fairly uncommon (Chapter 1). Far more common are examples of *si-* that are interpreted as intransitives, that is, not as an agent acting upon himself but merely as an actor acting, or a participant undergoing some event. Also, there are examples of *si-* with human subjects that are interpreted as passives, not reflexives, that is, with the human as patient, not agent. Such examples, too, will be examined in this chapter.

To paraphrase García (1975: 10), *si-* “is not a reflexive pronoun.”

B. Pronouns other than *si* that can be reflexive

While *si-* is indeed the only third-person clitic that can be reflexive, it is not the only pronoun that can be reflexive. Two will be examined here: the disjunctives *sé* (including *se stess+*) and *lui/lei* ‘him/her’ (disjunctive *loro* ‘them’ functions analogously.)

First, however, a brief treatment of the difference between *conjunctive* (including *clitic*) and *disjunctive* pronouns. These are traditional morphological terms. Italian (and other Romance languages) exhibits a fairly tight morphological distinction between, on the one hand, conjunctive pronouns, which must occur with a verb, and, on the other hand, disjunctive pronouns, which can stand apart from the verb or even alone. Among the conjunctive pronouns, some are more tightly attached to the verb than others. The “clitics” are phonologically and morphologically

3. The traditional term *disjunctive* refers to a form that is not structurally dependent on a verb but can stand alone, such as *io* ‘I’ in the exchange: “Chi c’è?” “Io.” “Who’s there?” “I.”

4. There is no need to assume that *se stesso* is a construction distinct from the disjunctive *sé* plus the lexical item *stess+* ‘same’. The semantic contribution of *stess+* – a kind of intensification – appears to be quite comparable here to its contribution elsewhere: *la donna stessa* ‘the woman herself’. The disjunctive form, pronounced [se], is variously written as *sé*, *sè*, and, usually when before *stess+*, *se* (but cf. LG 112 *sé stesso*).

bound to the verbal complex; no clitic can be separated from its “host” verb except by another clitic. In the terminology of Zwicky (1977) – summarized, not without criticism, in Russi (2008: 3ff.) – the Romance clitic pronouns, such as those treated here, are “special clitics,” in that they are opposed to stressed forms with similar functions (e.g., It. clitic *si-* vs. stressed *sé*, both reflexive); they are not “simple clitics,” which relate instead to stressed forms with different properties (e.g., English *n’t* from *not*, where only the stressed form can modify, say, a noun phrase).

Columbia School linguists replace the traditional terms, which are merely descriptive, with other terms that are meant to be more explanatory. The morphology and the semantics, in this way, are analytically united. Columbia School distinguishes between:

- a. grammatical forms that are *satellite* to – morphologically and semantically in the orbit of – a lexical item that is their *center*. These may be *directly satellite* – morphologically bound to a lexical center (including *gli-*, *le-*, *l+-*, *-loro*, *si-*, *ne-*), or *indirectly satellite* – morphologically separable from but semantically related to a lexical center (*egli*, *ella*);
- b. grammatical forms that are *non-satellite* to any center (*lui*, *lei*, *loro*, *sé*).

(Diver 1995/2012; Italian illustrations jd)

The clitic pronouns appear in particular slots around the verb and cannot be separated from the verb, while the disjunctive pronouns exhibit a greater freedom of position. This morphological fact correlates, even iconically, with interpretation. The relevance of a satellite pronoun – such as *si-*, *lo-*, or *egli* – is limited to the event represented by the verb, while the relevance of a non-satellite pronoun – such as *sé* or *lui* – extends beyond the event to something in the wider context. An adequate interpretation of the discourse at that point in a text requires that the reader make some association between the referent of the non-satellite pronoun and something else in the context.

a. *Si* vs. *sé*

The difference in scale of relevance for clitic *si-* vs. disjunctive *sé* is illustrated by the following pair of examples, (6.2) and (6.3), the first of which involves *si-* in an act of ‘finding,’ and the second of which involves *sé* in an act of ‘discovering.’

- (6.2) – ... Non so come spiegarti, ma è così, avrei preferito aspettarlo per tutta la vita senza che tornasse, piuttosto che tornasse com'è tornato, e adesso *si* trova in queste condizioni che deve vivere come un brigante. Ma lui non immaginava che *si* sarebbe trovato così. Lui davvero credeva di aver pagato il suo debito con la giustizia, facendo la guerra.... (BB 169–170)

“... I don’t know how to explain it to you, but it’s like this: I would have preferred to wait my whole life for him without his returning rather than that he return the way he has returned. And now he finds *himself* (*si-*) in these conditions in which he has to live like a brigand. But he never imagined that he would find *himself* (*si-*) in those conditions. He really believed he had paid his debt to justice, going to war...”

It could be said, along traditional lines, that the effect of *si-* here is that in the ‘finding’ – in the discovery of reality – ‘he’ is both the patient and the agent. The man finds himself to be in the condition of a brigand. Yet there is no suggestion in the context that he might have found someone else in that condition, nor that someone else might have found him in that condition. The relevance of the *si-* is limited to the event of ‘finding,’ not tied too to someone else in the wider context.

This lack of contrast with another potential patient is consistent with the fact that *trovarsi* is often best glossed not as ‘find oneself’ at all but in fact as ‘be found’ or even simply as ‘be’ (in a place or condition), so the translation here might well be something like ‘he is in this condition,’ or – to use another English intransitive, ‘he ends up in this condition.’ Recall Chapter 1, where we saw that examples of *si-* are usually rendered as intransitives in English.

Contrast *si-* in (6.2) above with *sé* in (6.3) below:⁵

- (6.3) questi ... scopri Mussolini prima ancora che Mussolini scoprisse *se* stesso.
 (MI 35)
 the latter ... discovered Mussolini even before Mussolini could discover *himself*
 (*se stesso*)

The effect of *sé*, as with non-satellites generally, is to dissociate the referent of the pronoun conceptually from the event named by the verb, often in order to associate it with something else in the context. Here, Mussolini, as potential self-discoverer, is conceptually linked with his actual discoverer, a different man. That is, the connection between *sé* ‘himself’ and *questi* ‘the latter’ is just as important as the connection between *sé* and *scoprisse* ‘could discover.’⁶

Davis (1992, 1995a) examines at length this phenomenon of lesser vs. greater contextual relevance for, respectively, the indirectly satellite *egli* ‘he’ vs. the non-satellite *lui* ‘he’ as grammatical subject of a verb. The grammatical mechanism behind it is what Davis terms an *opposition of substance*, as opposed to a somewhat more

5. See note 4, above, regarding the orthography without the accent mark.

6. Another example: “a Napoli [Tancredi] aveva patito per un certo rimorso nei riguardi di lei e per questo si era tirato dietro Cavriaghi col quale sperava di rimpiazzare *sé* stesso nei riguardi della cugina” (LG 112); ‘at Naples he had felt a certain remorse with regard to her, and for that reason he had brought with him Cavriaghi, with whom he hoped to replace *himself* with regard to her.’

Saussurean *opposition of value*. In an opposition of substance, one grammatical signal encodes more semantic substance than another grammatical signal. (In an opposition of value, two signals encode different values of the same semantic substance.) The satellite pronouns in Italian, including *si-* and *egli*, bear meanings of Focus (Chapter 3): they rank participants in a particular event in terms of their relative importance in that event. By contrast, the non-satellites *sé* and *lui* do not signal values of Focus at all but are grammatically independent of that substance; as free-floaters, they leave their relevance completely up to inference. Typically that relevance will be inferred as encompassing both a particular event and something else in the wider context, such as another person or a word other than a verb (a preposition). In traditional terms of parsing, both *sé* and *lui* are found as subject, as direct object, as prepositional object, and as absolute.⁷

Though a cross-linguistic investigation is beyond the scope of the present study, it is reasonable to suggest that it may be this opposition of substance between *si-* and *sé* that makes the non-satellite *sé* more comparable than the clitic *si-* to the English *-self* pronouns. *Sé* often is translated as an English *-self* form, while *si-* rarely is (Chapter 1). Stern (2006) proposes that the English *-self* forms signal a meaning of INSISTENCE ON A REFERENT, essentially, ‘I really do mean to refer to this person.’ Thus, in English, the so-called reflexive pronouns are not by accident identical morphologically to the so-called emphatic pronouns. According to Stern, these are in fact the same linguistic entities, signaling INSISTENCE in both cases. The reason for insisting on a referent in a reflexive usage is, often, that there is something unexpected about a person playing two distinct roles in the same event.⁸ For example, an act of *killing* typically involves two distinct parties, a perpetrator and a victim, but in a suicide – *he killed himself* – those two roles are played by the same person. This counterintuitive inference is facilitated through the explicit signaling, in English, of INSISTENCE. Italian *sé* does often have, in fact, something of an emphatic effect, often because of an implied contrast with some other person. This emphatic effect is especially pronounced when, as in (6.3), *sé* is amplified by the adjective *stess+* ‘same.’

It might be pointed out in passing that *sé* does not always refer to the grammatical subject of its clause, and so should not really be labeled a reflexive pronoun. Consider:

7. See Davis (2002a: 126–129) for a rare example of *sé* as subject of a finite verb.

8. The “role conflict” may or may not be hinted at by signaled Control meanings; thus, we speak here of “roles” (in the interpretive, not the syntactic, sense) rather than of Control meanings.

(6.4) Tutti e due vicinissimi ancora all'infanzia prendevano piacere al giuoco in sé
(LG 106)

Both, still so close to childhood, took pleasure in the game in *itself* (sé)

Here sé refers to *giuoco* 'game,' not to *tutti e due* 'both,' grammatical subject of the clause.

For more on sé and other disjunctive pronouns, see Davis (2002a).

b. *Si* vs. *lui/lei*

In addition to sé, other non-satellite forms that can appear in the predicate and refer back to the subject of their own clause include *lui* 'him' and *lei* 'her'.⁹ This can happen when *lui* or *lei* appears in a prepositional phrase within a clause. The syntactic complexities of pronouns, including reflexives, in prepositional phrases were particularly vexing in Government and Binding Theory, possibly in part because "choice" (Chomsky 1982: 148 n. 109) was undeniably involved. From the point of view taken in this study, the choice between the disjunctives *lui/lei* and sé appears to involve a simple opposition of substance: the question of whether or not the information encoded by *lui/lei* is needed for identification of the referent. *Lui* and *lei* explicitly signal the sex (MALE and FEMALE, respectively) and the grammatical number (ONE) of their referent; sé, like *si-*, does not signal any such meanings. Following is an example, (6.5), of *lei* that refers back to the subject of its finite clause:

(6.5) Avevano ucciso Miliella....

...

... Aveva indosso un cappotto cachi troppo grande per *lei*, il cappotto di Michele Rende. (BB 228)

They had killed Miliella....

...

... She had on a khaki overcoat too big for *her* (*lei*), Michele Rende's coat.

Here, *lei*, which explicitly signals FEMALE Sex and Number ONE, can only be taken to refer to the female Miliella, the grammatical subject of the clause, not to the grammatically masculine *cappotto* 'coat.' The alternative *un cappotto cachi troppo grande per sé* might be interpreted as 'a khaki coat too big for itself' (i.e., too big for its own usefulness as a coat). Sé, with its lack of Sex, Gender, and Number information, would risk miscommunication.

9. This fact has been noticed before, by, e.g., Cordin (1991: 596–597).

Contrast (6.5) above with the following, (6.6), which has *sé*:

- (6.6) L'odiatore delle grida urlava lui stesso con quanto fiato capiva nel torace smisurato. Credendo avere un tavolo dinanzi a *sé* menò un gran pugno sul proprio ginocchio, si fece male e si calmò anche lui. (LG 68)

He who so hated shouting shouted himself with all the breath he had in his enormous chest. Thinking to have a table in front of *him* (*sé*), he slammed a heavy fist onto his own knee, hurt himself, and calmed down too.

Lacking Number and Gender, *sé* could grammatically refer to *tavolo* 'table,' but here it would not make sense to interpret the passage as 'Thinking to have a table in front of itself.' While, in the preceding example, a coat might conceivably be too big for itself, a table cannot conceivably be in front of itself. Consequently, *sé*, even lacking information about Number and Gender, is adequate for this reference to 'he.'

Example (6.7) below, like (6.5), contains a supposedly nonreflexive pronoun, *lui*, that here is reflexive by the traditional definition. The Sex meaning of MALE is useful in (6.7) for identifying the referent of *lui*, though it refers to the subject of its own clause. The example also contains an instance of non-satellite *sé* in which no Gender or Sex meaning is necessary for identifying the referent – and which is *not* reflexive by the traditional definition. So the pronouns are reversed according to the traditional definitions! The narrator here comments upon his unhappy relations with his father when the narrator was a child living at home with his family. The father had unrealistic career plans for the narrator and his brother.

- (6.7) Sono costretto a dire che, forse per tutto questo, aveva preso a far vita a *sé*; rigido con tutti, s'era creato dentro di *lui* una famiglia immaginaria, che non eravamo noi (MA 91)

I must say that, perhaps on account of all this, he had begun to lead a separate [i.e., unto *itself* (*sé*)] life; strict with everyone, he had created (*for himself* [*si-*] inside *himself* (*lui*)) an imaginary family, one that was not us.

The Sex meaning, MALE, of *lui* is useful in identifying the father as referent, to draw a sharp distinction between the father – the correct referent – and the 'imaginary family' – an incorrect referent. The father creates the imaginary family 'in his mind,' to use another gloss of *dentro*. The use of *sé* instead of *lui* here would have risked the misinterpretation that the father 'had created in *their* (or, *its*) mind an imaginary family, one that was not us.' Such an interpretation is not immediately and entirely implausible: one can, after all, create in others the illusion that they are a family. By contrast, no Gender or Sex meaning is necessary to identify 'life' as the referent of *sé*. *Vita* is the closest and most obvious candidate for reference. Even though the father is the subject of the clause, he is not a strong candidate for reference. The preceding

context¹⁰ has made it clear both that the father lives with the family, not separately – i.e., not ‘unto *himself*’ – and that the father’s real life is a disappointment, thus setting the stage for the creation of a separate, imaginary, life.

c. Why *si* is the only reflexive among the third-person clitics

So a variety of pronouns – including at least *si-*, *sé*, and *lui/lei* – may or may not refer back to the subject of their clause; the label *reflexive* is unhelpful. Still to be explained here, however, is the fact that, among the clitics, *si-* is the only one that can refer back to a third-person subject in the same clause. Note, first of all, that this statement applies, strictly speaking, only to clauses with third-person finite verbs; these are the only directly relevant examples, since nonfinite verbs have no encoded grammatical subject.

The reason for the restriction of reflexivity to *si-* is that the clitics are a small, closed set that apportions straightforward roles among the familiar participants in a given event. “With clitics, the speaker does what the hearer expects with what the hearer already knows” (Davis 2004b: 161). If any unusual inference is called for, such as a contrast between referents, recourse is had to the non-satellite forms. The number of clitics, the number of slots for them, and the number of grammatical meanings (Discourse Referent, Number, Participant Focus, and Degree of Control) are all finite. The third-person clitics *si-*, *gli-*, *le-*, *-loro*, *l+-*, and *ne-* all exclude the first and second persons as additional participants to the already established third-person subject (so *egli si vide* excludes, e.g., ‘he saw me’ and ‘he saw you’). Among the third-person clitics, *ne-*, the so-called partitive, relegates its referent to OUTER Focus, beyond the periphery of what can even be called bona fide participant status. The referent of *ne-* is not even directly involved in the event but is typically associated with it only through association with one of the bona fide participants.¹¹ Among the remaining participant clitics, all (in most literary usage, anyway) explicitly encode information about grammatical Gender and Number;¹²

10. *Quando rientrava dal lavoro, voleva trovarci tutti a casa* ‘When he came home from work, he wanted to find us all at home’ (MA 90).

11. See Davis (1995b), Chapter 3 here, and Chapter 10 here for further on *ne-*.

12. No firm position will be taken here regarding the clitics *ci-* and *vi-* used adverbially (‘there.’). These are homophonous with the first- and second-person plural participant clitics (‘us’ and ‘you-PL,’ respectively), but they may well constitute a separate system. Based on preliminary analysis, that system will be very tentatively taken to have to do with Restrictedness of Space, with *vi-* MORE and *ci-* LESS Restricted. What is quite clear, anyway, is that *ci-* and *vi-* are not, *pace* Russi

all, that is, except *si-*. As a consequence, less informative *si-* is used when the referent is obvious; the more referentially informative other clitics are used when the referent is less obvious (cf. García 1975 on Spanish *se*). With a finite verb, the referent that is “obvious” is the referent that is assigned or inferred to enjoy the highest degree of attention, CENTRAL Focus: the grammatical subject. Referents that are “less obvious” are anything other than what is at the CENTER of Focus. So, in the apportioning of roles, *si-* says, in essence, the participant with the highest degree of Focus in this event is being mentioned twice; he is not only most attention-worthy (in CENTRAL Focus) but also playing a role that potentially might have been taken by the referent of a *gli-*, *le-*, *-loro*, or *l+-* (MID or LOW Degree of Control). Those clitics say, in essence, that someone other than the participant with CENTRAL Focus is being mentioned as an additional participant in this event, someone for whose identification you need Gender and Number. (With infinitives, no one is in CENTRAL Focus; everything is open to interpretation.) While *si-* itself does not signal a Degree of Control, it participates in an opposition of substance (sharing only Focus meanings) with clitics that do. Thus *si-* stands in, as it were, for one of those other clitics. *Si-* thus facilitates the inference that its referent bears a degree of responsibility for the event such as might have been signaled by one of the other clitics.

It is the mere fact of the opposition of substance, not the appropriateness of the encoded meanings, that accounts for the difference between *si-* and the other clitics. The following minimal pair, (6.8) and (6.9), will illustrate:

- (6.8) Uno dei suoi bicchieri era rimasto a metà pieno di Marsala;
 One of-the his glasses had remained at half full of Marsala;
 egli *lo* alzò (LG 31)
 he *it* (*lo-*) raised

‘One of his glasses had remained half full of Marsala; he raised *it*.’

- (6.9) Egli era tornato a guardarla, ma restava staccato. «Ah!» esclamò piano. «Non credevo che intendessi dire questo.»
 «Che cosa credevi che intendessi dire? Venire via con te?»
 Egli *si* alzò in piedi. (VU 17–18)

He had turned to look at her, but he stood apart. “Ah!” he exclaimed quietly. “I didn’t think you meant to say this.”

“What did you think I mean to say? To come away with you?”

He (*si-*) raised in feet
 ‘He stood to his feet’

(2008: 57), “fully synonymous” in our data: both are used by a single writer with a difference in nuance that the term *synonymy* fails to capture. For particularly intriguing examples of the pair, see CV 51–52, SP 207, and RS 66. Cf. Chapter 10.

In (6.8), even though the clitic *lo-* agrees in Gender and Number with *egli* ‘he,’ it refers not to the man, the grammatical subject, but to the ‘glass.’ In (6.9), *si-* lacks information about Gender and Number and is taken to refer to the man, the grammatical subject. So it is the opposition of substance that accounts for this difference in distribution among the clitics; it is not syntactic agreement that accounts for it.

Examples (6.8) and (6.9) will be examined further in Chapter 7.

The traditional definition of *si-*, then, as the reflexive pronoun of the third person, is inadequate on two formal grounds: (A) that *si-* does not always refer back to the subject of its clause (recall impersonals and nonfinites); and (B) that other pronouns besides *si-* can refer back to the subject of their clause. Among clitics, what is really responsible for the distinction between *si-* and the other third-person participant clitics is the opposition of substance: whether a clitic encodes or does not encode information about Gender and Number.

The definition of *si-* as a reflexive pronoun is inadequate, moreover, on (C) interpretive grounds. The interpretation of an example with *si-*, even when it has a human subject, is not necessarily that of an agent acting upon himself, as we shall now see.

C. Subversion of the Focus-Control interlock: Passive people

There are examples of *si-* that have human beings in Focus but not exercising the highest degree of control over an event. In other words, the referent is not an agent acting upon himself; rather, he or she is acted on by someone or something else. In traditional terms, these are examples that look just like reflexives but are interpreted more like passives.

Such an example is (6.10). The narrator is a young woman living with her solicitous¹³ widowed mother, desperately in love with a dead-end chauffeur but, at the same time, being desperately herself courted by a well-to-do member of the police hierarchy. She arrives home to find that her unwelcome suitor has come to her house and has been admitted by her mother. She suspects that he has spoken to the mother in his own favor and has even given her money, to bribe her to let him see the narrator. (This writer uses *ella* ‘she’ as a signal of Number ONE, Sex FEMALE, Discourse Referent OTHER THAN SPEAKER OR HEARER, and Focus CENTRAL; that is, the female counterpart of *egli* ‘he’; cf. Chapter 3, n. 25.)

13. *Silenzionsa e attenta ai miei ordini* ‘silent and attentive to my orders’ (MR 125).

- (6.10) «Questo signore dice che ti conosce», incominciò la mamma con aria confidenziale, «voleva salutarti...» «Fammi il piacere, tu vattene», dissi alla mamma. Ella *si* spaventò per la mia voce che era quasi selvaggia; e, senza dir parola, uscì dalla parte della cucina. (MR 131)

“This gentleman says he knows you,” mother began in a confidential tone. “He wanted to say hello.” ... “Do me a favor, go away,” I said to mother. She was alarmed [*si-*] by my voice, which was almost wild, and, without saying a word, she went out into the kitchen.

The mother is not an agent acting upon herself. She does not ‘alarm,’ or ‘frighten,’ herself. Rather, the narrator’s ‘frantic,’ or ‘almost wild,’ voice, alarms or frightens her. This clause, in spite of its human subject, is not reflexive. If the writer had placed the Focus on something other than the mother, he could have used a signal of LOW Control to refer to the mother:

La mia voce che era quasi selvaggia *la* spaventò
My voice, which was almost wild, alarmed *her* (*la-*)

A logical parsing would have the mother as the patient, not the agent, of the ‘alarming.’

Why, then, does the writer choose instead *Ella si spaventò*? Because that formulation places the mother in CENTRAL Focus, as is appropriate in the recounting of a dialogue, especially one that is a kind of contest, where the Focus shifts from one party to another: *incominciò* ‘she began’; *dissi* ‘I said’. *Si-*, standing as it does in an opposition of substance with the system of Degree of Control, tells us that no other participant in the ‘alarming’ will be given in direct association with the verb. Control over the ‘alarming’ will not be ranked; instead, we must infer the role of the mother in the ‘alarming.’ Under the circumstances, that role is unlikely to be the role of agent, with the mother frightening herself. More likely, given the mother’s solicitousness and avarice, and given that the daughter has just told her, in an ‘almost wild’ voice, to ‘go away,’ the role of the mother is closer to that of victim than of perpetrator. Yet, at the same time, the mother is not without some measure of responsibility. She has, over time, gotten herself into a submissive but manipulative relationship with her daughter, wanting to please her but also wanting her to marry well. She has invited a stranger into the house because he strikes her as a good catch for her daughter and, likely after taking a bribe from the man, she attempts to facilitate his access to her daughter. In a phrase, she deserves what she gets.

A traditional or transformational account would have the agent of the ‘alarming’ here in the prepositional phrase *per la mia voce* ‘by my voice.’ Granted, it is the daughter’s voice that frightens the mother. But that blunt, logical parsing ignores the communicative nuance of the mother’s own responsibility for the event, which

is instead brought out by *si-*. That parsing also ignores the semantic contribution of the word *per*, which is variously glossed as ‘through,’ ‘for,’ ‘during,’ ‘by means of,’ or ‘because of.’ Altogether, the communicated message of (6.10) is perhaps something akin to, ‘On account of the tenor of my voice, mother allowed herself to be alarmed.’

In fact, the very same phrase, *Ella si spaventò*, referring to the very same woman, occurs elsewhere in the novel, and this time, the woman does bear the brunt of the blame for the ‘alarming.’ The mother and daughter have gotten into a terrible screaming argument, about the daughter’s relationship with the dead-end chauffeur. The dispute turns physical when the mother starts striking the daughter, threatens to kill her, and then picks up a pair of sewing scissors and lunges. She misses her target, and the scissors go flying against the wall.

(6.11) *Ella si spaventò di questo suo gesto; e, tutto ad un tratto, sedette al tavolo, la faccia tra le mani, e ruppe in un pianto nervoso e tossito in cui pareva sfogarsi piú rabbia che dolore.* (MR 37–38)

She was alarmed (*si-*) by ~ She frightened herself (*si-*) with this act of hers; and, all of a sudden, she sat down at the table, her face between her hands, and broke into a nervous and coughing fit of crying in which there seemed to be vented more anger than sadness.

Here, in contrast with Example (6.10), the mother really can be said to ‘frighten herself.’ She is the agent and the patient of the frightening. True, this example too, like (6.10), can be translated as a passive – ‘She was alarmed by this act of hers’ – but that comes with the price of overlooking the vast difference in her responsibility between the two events. As we shall see in an examination of the examples to come, below, *si-* does not specify the Control status of its referent but leaves that completely up to inference. In terms of grammar, Examples (6.10) and (6.11) are perfectly parallel, but in interpretation they are quite far apart. That difference is due entirely to context beyond the string *Ella si spaventò*.

Figure 6.1 and 6.2, below, illustrate, respectively, inferences that might be drawn from the two examples. This juxtaposition should make it quite clear that these figures are illustrations of *inferences* that might be drawn in particular contexts with the help of grammatical meanings and lexical items, not diagrams of grammatical hypotheses. In the two examples, the interpretations may be quite different, but the grammar is exactly the same.

In both examples, Focus is grammatically signaled to be on the mother and on the event of alarming or frightening. In both, no distinction in Degree of Control between participants is signaled; only the mother is explicitly involved. Everything else, though, is a matter of inference based on context. It is most reasonable, in both,

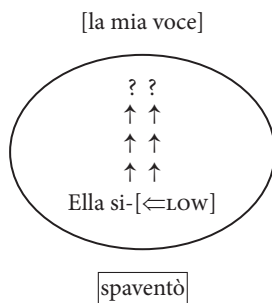


Figure 6.1 *Ella si spaventò₁ per la mia voce*
‘She was alarmed by my voice’

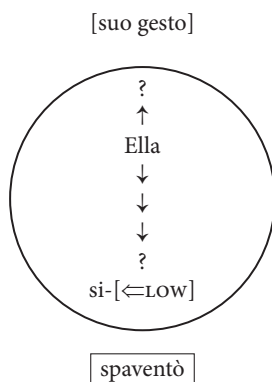


Figure 6.2 *Ella si spaventò₂ di questo suo gesto*
‘She was alarmed by this act of hers’

to infer that the mother suffers a fright; if a signal of Degree of Control were to be used, it would be that of *LOW*: *la spaventò*, someone or something ‘alarmed her.’ But it is also reasonable for a reader to attribute more responsibility in the alarming to the mother when she lunges at her daughter with a pair of scissors than when she gets yelled at by her daughter. This difference is suggested in the diagrams by the relatively higher vertical placement of *Ella* ‘She’ in Figure 6.2 than in Figure 6.1.

Finally, the respective triggers of the two alarms, the daughter’s ‘voice’ and the mother’s ‘act,’ provided only by the context, are indicated vertically above the signaled Focus in square brackets.

Si-, then, fails to be a reflexive pronoun even on interpretive grounds, because the interpretation of an example like *Ella si spaventò* depends crucially on the context. *Si-* does not necessarily – though it may – entail that an agent acts upon herself; rather, it may be the case that a human in Focus bears only a small degree

of responsibility for the event, almost to the point of being an innocent victim. Reflexives and passives are grammatically indistinguishable in Italian. Moreover, those two aprioristic, simplistic terms of sentential relations are inadequate to describe the communicative nuances of examples of *si-* that involve the participation of humans.

Because it has been a topic of some interest in linguistics, a bit more should be said about the claim made in the last two sentences above. A digression from the survey in this chapter of third-person reflexives with human participants is therefore in order.

Typically, it would be nonsensical to interpret a *si*-clause with an inanimate participant (as in Chapter 5) as a reflexive (an agent acting upon itself), but that is a function of the way language-users talk about inanimates, not of the grammar. As shown by Examples (6.10) and (6.11), the reflexive-passive distinction formally collapses for human participants as well. By nature, of course, humans are typically attributed, via inference, greater agency than inanimates. That is, *si*-clauses with human participants are unlikely to be interpreted as passives; even in (6.10) above, the fairly passive mother bears some responsibility for the act of frightening. This tendency is even more apparent in the first and second persons, where it has even been maintained that a passive reading is impossible (*Io mi lavo* ‘I wash myself,’ not *‘I am/get washed’) (e.g., Leone 1979). However (tentatively, since, again, no full analysis of the first- and second-person clitics is offered here), there is a grammatical difference between *si-*, on the one hand, and the first- and second-person clitics, on the other. While *si-* participates in an opposition of substance with the system of Degree of Control (Chapter 4) – systematically not making distinctions in Degree of Control – the first- and second-person clitics (*mi-*, *ti-*, *ci-*, *vi-*) explicitly signal a meaning of Degree of Control: NON-HIGH (cf. Chapter 4, n. 11). That is, the first- and second-person clitics clearly establish that distinctions of Degree of Control are relevant. When a clitic like *mi-* ‘me’ is satellite to a nonfinite verb form, only the wider context – not the formal grammar – can clarify that distinction and support an inference of who has agency (*Lei cominciò a guardarmi* ‘She began to watch me’ vs. *Io cominciai a guardarmi* ‘I began to watch myself’). But when *mi-*, e.g., is satellite to a finite verb form, the participant is mentioned at least twice, once by the clitic and once by the finite verb ending: (*mi guardai* ‘I watched myself’).¹⁴ It is therefore a ready inference that the two distinct roles (agent and patient) are played by the same participant, thus a reflexive, not a passive, interpretation. Still, again, it may not be true that there is an absolute

14. Such was not the case with finite forms of the Latin so-called passive voice: *servor* ‘I am watched.’

prohibition against a passive interpretation with humans, as seen in (6.10, 6.11).¹⁵ To resolve the matter, a full study of the first- and second-person clitics is needed, and that is beyond the scope of this volume.

There has been debate as to the diachronic path of development from the Latin *sē* to the modern Italian *si*- (Leone 1979, Stefanini 1983, Diver 1986/2012: 287–289).

D. Neutralization of Degree of Control: People under the influence

With *si*-, the range of responsibility for events that humans can be attributed is great, all the way from agency to passivity. Points near the two extremes are illustrated by, respectively, Examples (6.10) and (6.11) above. This section will sample points in between, illustrating some of the variety. Across examples in this, the preceding, and the following sections, we shall see a spectrum of responsibility (cf. García 1975: 10). That fine-grained variety, however, is a product of the interpretation of individual examples; systematically, Italian grammar makes only a three-way distinction among Degrees of Control: HIGH, MID, LOW. These three grammatical meanings, therefore, are much more imprecise than the roles that humans – or indeed any participant – may play in an actual event on a given scene.

Even less precise than the signals of Degree of Control is *si*-, which stands in an opposition of substance outside the system of Degree of Control and so may take the place of any signal of Control. *Si*- has the effect of *neutralizing* the distinctions made by the system of Degree of Control. The referent's responsibility is left to inference, with the aid of context, including the lexical content of the verb and the referent's own nature. The result of such inference, actually, will likely *not* be strictly analogous to a two-participant situation; after all, "it is very rarely possible to act on oneself exactly as one would on something or somebody else" (García 1975: 124). In translation, the result when the referent is human is often a one-participant intransive, with Control left unranked.

In Example (6.12), the narrator, a somewhat insecure high school boy, marvels at how his ultra-cool new best friend, Guido, talks about literature.

15. Consider too such pairs as *Il frate mi confessò* 'The monk confessed me' and *Io mi confessai* 'I was confessed [by the monk]' / 'I confessed.' Consider *Lui mi chiama Giuseppe* 'He calls me Giuseppe' and *Io mi chiamo Giuseppe* 'I am called Giuseppe' / 'I go by Giuseppe' / 'My name is Giuseppe.' It is difficult to avoid imputing some degree of agency to a human, hence the facility of the control-neutral intransitive interpretations of *Io mi confessai* and *Mi chiamo Giuseppe* versus the relative awkwardness of the passives.

(6.12) Guido mi ha raccontava di libri che stava leggendo: parlava di Stendhal e Kafka e Scott Fitzgerald con un interesse che aveva per pochi altri argomenti. Quando *si* appassionava a uno scrittore andava avanti per settimane a vivere nella sua atmosfera: raccoglieva informazioni sulla sua vita, cercava di rintracciare nei libri che aveva scritto sue storie personali, filtrate e dissimulate com'erano.

(DD 39)

Guido told me about books he was reading: He talked about Stendhal and Kafka and Scott Fitzgerald with an interest that he had for few other matters. When he got interested (*si-*) in a writer, he would go around for weeks living in his atmosphere: he collected information about his life, tried to track down in the books he had written his personal stories, filtered and disguised as they were.

When the lexical item *appassionare* is used with two distinct participants who have two distinct Control levels, it is often glossed as ‘move, interest, excite.’ So writers of books, for example, might ‘interest’ a boy: *Stendhal e Kafka e Scott Fitzgerald lo appassionavano* ‘Stendhal and Kafka and Scott Fitzgerald interested him.’ There, the boy (*lo-*) has a LOW Degree of Control relative to the writers: They live lives and write books that influence the boy. But that formulation locates the writers in CENTRAL Focus (per the verb ending) and the boy in PERIPHERAL Focus. What this narrator does instead – as he does throughout so much of this novel – is to place the friend, Guido, in CENTRAL Focus (per the verb ending), in this instance at the expense of the ‘writer.’ Notice that nowhere in the passage are any book authors put in Focus. This narrator is interested not in the literary giants but in Guido. In order to place the relatively passive Guido in Focus with respect to this verb, the narrator must use *si-* and thus sacrifice any distinctions in Degree of Control. The effective level of control that Guido has over the event of ‘moving, interesting, exciting’ must be left up to inference. The most likely inference is that Guido has less control than the writer of whatever book has just excited him; Guido didn’t live the life or write the book. But the relatively low level of control of the ‘interested’ boy in Example (6.12) is, arguably, a bit higher than that of the ‘frightened’ mother’s in Example (6.10). The ‘frightened’ mother was almost innocently startled by a sudden, fierce voice that seemed to her unprovoked. The ‘interested’ boy, by contrast, has facilitated this event: He has gone to the trouble to read the books. He then even goes around living under their influence, collects information about the writers’ lives and tries to find clues to those details hidden in the books, and talks about the books to his friend. It would sell the boy’s efforts short to call him “passive” in this event. Without too much of a stretch, one might even give the boy full credit and say, ‘he interested himself’ in some writer. In interpretation, the example hovers somewhere between passive and reflexive.

In the following example with *si-*, the same Guido takes an action for which he might be said to be completely responsible except that the action is provoked by an outside stimulus. So in acting, Guido is *reacting* to something outside his control. Guido has come to see his friend, the narrator, ostensibly for no reason but, it turns out, in order to get some consolation after receiving his draft notice for military service. The boys talk, but Guido is distracted ‘by other thoughts.’ Guido smokes hashish and gives his friend some. He has a ‘wandering’ look. He breaks the news. This excerpt is from the conversation that ensues. Bold type here indicates emphasis in the original.¹⁶

(6.13) Gli ho chiesto «E adesso cosa vuoi fare?», anche se non ero sicuro di sentire la mia voce.

Lui ha detto «È un tale **sopruso** incredibile, che questo stato bastardo si senta in diritto di rapire una persona e **sequestrarla** per un anno».

Gli ho chiesto «Ma allora?»

Guido *si* è affacciato alla finestra, guardava fuori. Ha detto «Allora posso solo provare a fare il **matto**, e se mi va male prendo il primo treno che va in Francia». (DD 119)

I asked him, “And now what are you going to do?” even if I wasn’t sure I could hear my own voice.

He said, “It’s such an incredible **abuse of power**, that this bastard of a state thinks it has the right to abduct a person and **confine him** for a year.”

I asked him, “But then what?”

Guido faced (*si-*) toward the window and looked out. He said, “Well, then, I can only try to pretend to be **crazy**, and if it goes wrong take the first train that goes to France.”

Guido then demonstrates, in ridiculous fashion, how he might pretend to be crazy, and the boys dissolve in laughter. In (6.13), with *si* è *affacciato*, the action that Guido takes, turning to face the window, is certainly under his control in that he can move his body however he wishes. Still, his control is somewhat diminished to the extent that it is directly prompted by the question his friend asks him, “But then what [are you going to do]?” Guido is embarrassed to need help from his friend and so turns away, ‘looking out’ the window so as not to have to make eye contact.

In one more example of *si-* from the same novel, we again see Guido turning his body, but this time unprompted. This is the boys’ first meeting. Guido, a new transfer, arrives late to a class where all the other students are already seated. The teacher tells Guido to find a seat.

16. In this quotation, italic type in the original, used for emphasis, is changed to bold type, so that the example of *si-* in question can, as usual, be italicized.

(6.14) Lui è venuto verso il fondo, guardava le facce dei tre o quattro studenti che occupavano da soli un banco per due. È arrivato fino a me e senza guardarmi si è seduto al mio fianco; ha fissato la cattedra a occhi stretti, in atteggiamento di grande attenzione. Solo dopo qualche minuto *si* è girato, mi ha detto «Ehi».

(DD 14–15)

He came towards the back, looking at the faces of the three or four students who sat alone on a bench for two. He came up to me and, without looking at me, sat down beside me; he stared at the teacher's chair with narrow eyes, in the attitude of great attention. Only after a few minutes did he turn (*si-*), and he said to me, "Hey."

This act of turning is far from being spontaneous; it is studiously choreographed. Guido is much too cool to let it be known that he would be interested in meeting anyone in that high school class. So he holds out until he is sure he has made his point and only then makes his move.

In the examples we have seen of *si-* in this section – all of which would be classified in the tradition as reflexives – we have found instead a range of responsibility borne by the in-Focus participant, a range that calls into question the familiar formulation that a reflexive involves an agent acting upon himself. In Examples (6.12) through (6.14) it would be difficult to maintain the position that the referent of *si-* acts simultaneously as an agent and a patient. Instead, what we find is that *si-* neutralizes distinctions in Degree of Control, so that just how responsible the referent is for the action can only be inferred from ingredients in the context.

The division between inanimates in Chapter 5 and human beings in this chapter was purely presentational (cf. García 1975: 115). The grammatical status of *si-* is the same throughout. Moreover, the distinction in terminology between *subversion* of the Focus-Control interlock (mainly Chapter 5) and *neutralization* of Degree of Control (mainly Chapter 6) was somewhat presentational. That distinction, however, does have an analytical basis. The term *neutralization* (Chapter 6) captures the effect of the opposition of substance whereby *si-* stands outside the system of Degree of Control, "opting out" of making distinctions of Degree of Control. Speaking in terms of "neutralization" of Control is especially useful when the participant is a human being in Focus and yet no distinction is made between high and low control. The term *subversion* (Chapter 5) captures the effect of *si-* in allowing any participant, particularly one with less than high control, including inanimate objects, to be put in Focus, thus flipping the basic structure of the Focus-Control interlock (Diagram, Appendix to Chapter 4).

The bottom line is that *si-* is *si-* is *si-*, even while everything else around *si-* changes from example to example.

E. Neutralization of Degree of Control: Self-regulated and self-interested people

In light of all the preceding, it is merely a matter of degree when distinctions in control are not made and a human being is inferred to have a quite high degree of responsibility for an action. These are examples that are clearly classifiable as reflexives in the tradition – an agent acting upon himself –, but now they are revealed to be merely an extension of the property we have seen whereby *si-* avoids making distinctions among participants in terms of Degree of Control. These are just the extreme end of the spectrum.

a. Neutralization of high and low control

An example with *si-* that clearly involves deliberate control by a human who masters his action – whose action is “self-regulated” – is (6.15). The reference is to Benito Mussolini when he was Prime Minister:

(6.15) Liquidato l'incidente e segnato all'attivo del proprio prestigio, egli *si* ridette anima e corpo ai preparativi delle elezioni. (MI 224)

Having taken care of the incident [a dispute with Greece] and tallied it up in favor of his own prestige, he gave *himself* again, body and soul, to preparations for the elections.

Here there can hardly be any doubt that the referent exercises a high degree of control over his action. And what was ‘given again’ to the cause of the elections was Mussolini himself, not someone or something else. So in that sense, yes, the example is reflexive. (A figure of its interpretation would look much like Figure 6.2.) Yet this example is grammatically identical to the other examples of *si-* that we have seen. And this example is akin to the others in interpretation too, in that there is no distinction between control roles in the act of ‘giving again.’ As we saw in Chapter 1, such examples in Italian are usually best rendered into English not as reflexives with a *-self* pronoun but as one-participant constructions, which do not in English signal Degree of Control but leave the referent’s responsibility up to inference. So Example (6.15) might just as well – or perhaps even better – be translated as ‘he recommitted, body and soul, to preparations for the elections.’ Even in an example where the referent of *si-* clearly has total control over his actions, it is not absolutely necessary to think of the example as reflexive; it too can be understood as a “neutralizing” of control distinctions.

Recall that “neutralizing” control distinctions does not imply averaging those distinctions out. It was argued in Chapter 4 that, when *si-* provides a second mention of a participant, the two levels of control are perhaps better understood as being

additive than subtractive. So in (6.15) it is not contradictory to speak of Mussolini as effectively having *both* high and low degrees of control over the ‘giving again.’ Mussolini is even more able to exercise his control by virtue of giving ‘himself’ again to the elections than he would be by coercing someone else into being ‘given again’ to the elections. This way, Mussolini encounters no resistance and is able to have his way unopposed.

b. Neutralization of high and mid control

We have already seen, in Chapters 4 and 5, that *si-* can take the place of a signal of MID Control as well as it can a signal of LOW Control (*Si-* can be dative.) Recall Example (4.11 = 5.8), in which the uninvited guest ‘cut (himself *si-*)’ a slice of bread and ‘poured (himself *si-*)’ a glass of wine. The man both motivated the cutting and pouring (through his hunger and thirst) and performed the cutting and pouring. In other words, the man’s actions were “self-interested.” It is more accurate to say, as García (1975: 130) does, that the different degrees “may collapse into one single, undifferentiated role” rather than to say, as she also does (p. 124), that the participant “plays two roles.”

Such examples of *si-* are not particularly uncommon, but our examination of them can be fairly brief, merely illustrating how they can be handled with the present analysis.

One common lexical item whose use with and without *si-* would seem perplexing without our analysis is *sedere* ‘sit.’ *Sedere* and *sedersi* would at first blush seem to be identical in sense. But they are not.

Example (6.16) comes from Calvino’s fantastical novel about the ‘divided viscount,’ one half of whom is thoroughly evil yet strangely attractive to the young goatherd Pamela. The example contains two instances of ‘sitting.’

- (6.16) L’indomani quando giunse alla pietra dove usava *sedere* pascolando le capre, Pamela lanciò un urlo. Orrendi resti bruttavano la pietra: La pastorella capì ch’era un messaggio. Voleva dire: appuntamento stasera in riva al mare. Pamela si fece coraggio e andò.

Sulla riva del mare *si sedette* sui ciottoli e ascoltava il fruscio dell’onda bianca. E poi uno scalpito sui ciottoli e Medardo galoppava per la riva. (CV 61)

The next day, when she went to the rock where she normally *sat* watching the goats, Pamela let out a cry. Horrible remains soiled the rock: The shepherdess understood that it was a message. It meant: appointment this evening along the shore of the sea. Pamela screwed up her courage and went.

Along the shore of the sea she *sat down* (*si-*) on the pebbles and listened to the rustling of the white surf. And then a pawing on the pebbles and Medardo was galloping along the shore.

One feature of the interpretation that might spring to mind is the more dynamic nature of the second ‘sitting,’ the one with *si-*, that is brought out here with the English phrase ‘sat down,’ as opposed to ‘sat’ in the first paragraph, without *si-*. But what does that have to do with the meaning of *si-*? We know that *si-* entails a neutralization of distinctions of control. We know that *sedere* (an intransitive) does not involve the participation of a low-controller but at most a second participant (in addition to the person who sits) who exercises a MID Degree of Control, an interested party.

Consider in that regard the contribution to the ‘sitting’ of the referent of *gli-* in Example (6.17). Here a woman has finagled herself an invitation to dinner in the home of a man with whom she is infatuated but who cares nothing for her.

(6.17) Lasciai lo specchio e venni a *sedergli* accanto e gli passai un braccio sotto il braccio e mi strinsi a lui. (MR 374)

I put the mirror down and came to *sit down* beside *him* (*gli-*), and I put my arm under his and squeezed myself to him.

The man, by being desirable to the woman and showing promise of giving her what she wants, motivates her sitting beside him.

The situation is similar in Example (6.16) except that there Pamela ‘sits’ in her own self-interest, not in the interest of someone else. It is true that Medardo has been courting her, but she has also in the past flirted with him, and here she willingly goes to meet him, frightening though the prospect may be. So *si-* is accomplishing the same thing in (6.16) that it always does: a neutralization of Control distinctions: the agent and the motivator of the sitting are the same person. It is this mention of two roles (albeit played by the same person here) that accounts for the heightened sense of dynamism in the activity. Notice that such a heightening of dynamism is accomplished just as well by the non-reflexive *gli-* of Example (6.17); it does not depend on *si-*. Figure 6.3, below, illustrates the interpretation of Example (6.16). The dashes below the Focus circle indicate that no mention is made of any low controller.

This understanding of *si-* as neutralizing the distinction between HIGH and MID Degrees of Control elucidates the otherwise puzzling construction *andarsene* ‘go away.’ *Andarsene* turns out to be not an idiomatic construction, as it is often treated, but simply the lexical item *andare* ‘go’ with, satellite to it, two clitics from the system of Focus: *si-* and *ne-*.¹⁷ As we have seen (Chapter 3), *ne-* means OUTER Focus and can convey the sense of ‘away’ from something or some location. It

17. See Chapter 10 regarding the appearance of *si-* as *se* before *ne-*.

occurs with many verbs besides *andare* (cf. Russi 2008: 107).¹⁸ And as we have now seen, *si-*, taking the place of a clitic that means MID Control, can convey the sense of self-interest as motivation for the action.

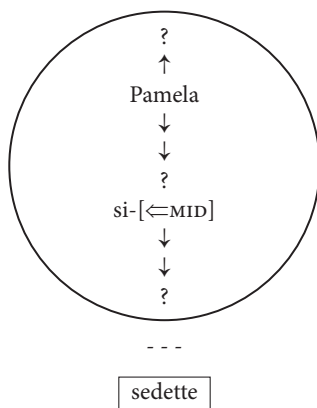


Figure 6.3 *Pamela si sedette*
'Pamela sat (down)'

In Example (6.18), a boy goes over to his sister to comfort her after she has been interrogated by police. As a sister in need, she motivates his going.

(6.18) *Era pallida, coi lineamenti induriti, e non mi guardò quando le andai vicino.*
(BB 152–153)

She was pale, with hardened features, and she didn't look at me when I went over near her (*le-* MID Degree of Control).

The meaning MID Degree of Control conveys the sense that the sister motivates the boy to 'go' to her.

The situation is the same with *andarsi* except that it is self-, not other-motivation.¹⁹

18. Russi (2008: 103ff.) treats "Verbs in *ne*" in terms of grammaticalization, i.e., in terms of historical development, with different verbs showing "different degrees of idiomatic meaning." Thus, each verb has its own history, and there is no attempt, as here, to posit a single meaning for *ne-*. Nevertheless, a constant theme can perhaps be gleaned from that treatment: one of subjective dismissal, an effect that seems congruent with the meaning OUTER Focus chosen by an egocentric user of the grammar.

19. See Chapter 10 regarding the appearance of *si-* as *se* before *l+-* (Example 6.19) and before *ne-* (Example 6.20). Russi (2008: 118) also views this *se* as the clitic *si-*.

(6.19) uno che non aveva famiglia da mantenere, un tetto per protegger il suo riposo poteva *andarselo* a trovare in molti luoghi della terra. (BB 19)

a man who did not have a family to keep, a roof to protect his rest, could go (*si-*) find it (*lo-*) in many places on earth.

Then, to complete, the picture, with *andarsene*, we have to do with both self-motivation and a sense of ‘away.’ In Example (6.20), which in the text leads directly into (6.19), a police deputy disputes local sentiment that the outsider Michele Rende is likely to remain in their area. According to the deputy:

(6.20) non era poi detto che il figlio di Francesco Rende si sarebbe fermato fra noi. Anzi, ... un tipo come quello fosse capitato per puro sbaglio nel nostro paese e ... non avrebbe tardato ad *andarsene*. Del resto, uno che non aveva famiglia.... (BB 19)

it wasn’t a given that Francesco Rende’s son would stay with us. Indeed, ... a guy like that had probably happened through pure error upon our town and ... he wouldn’t hesitate to get (*himself*) out of there. Besides, a man who did not have a family....

According to the deputy, a man who ‘goes away’ (*ne-*) from where he is, self-motivates (*si-*) the ‘going away’ for several reasons: He ended up there by accident to begin with, he has no family to feed, no roof over his head. Such a man would be better off somewhere else.

Moreover, the combination of *se ne* is not unique to *andare*; Russi (2008: 122) suggests that it “can be applied to any verb of motion.” Consider Example (6.21), with *tornare* ‘return’:

(6.21) E i due *se ne tornarono* a casa, per sempre guariti dalla loro infatuazione dannunziana. (MI 122)

And the two returned (*si-*) (thence) home, forever healed of their D’Annunzian infatuation.

Two Fascist revolutionaries were disillusioned by a visit to D’Annunzio, so they left him behind (*ne-*) and returned to the comfort of their own (*si-*) home.

F. *Si* interpreted reciprocally

When *si-* is plural, it does not distinguish between reflexive and reciprocal. That is easy to state in familiar traditional terms, but it must be stated in terms of the present hypothesis.

When *si-* has a plural referent while neutralizing Degree of Control for an event, it makes no distinction between the following two types of interpretations: one in which the Degree of Control of each individual member of the plurality is neutralized, and one in which the Degree of Control of the plurality as a collective is neutralized (cf. García 1975: 150–153). Opting out of the system of Number, *si-* not only fails to distinguish singular from plural; it also, among plurals, fails to distinguish collectives from collections of individuals. Thus:

si vedono
 si see-3-PL
 ‘they see themselves’ ~ ‘they see each other’

The first interpretation – ‘they see themselves’ – might apply, for instance, when two individuals walk past a mirror and see their own images reflected in it, or when each of two individuals pulls a mirror out of his pocket and sees his own image. The second interpretation – ‘they see each other’ – might apply when each of two individuals, with no mirrors, sees the other individual, as when one is facing the other. Either way, the ‘seeing’ remains inside the group (It is a “group” in the sense that its members are referenced together in the utterance).

This situation, then, contrasts with:

le vedono
 them-F-PL see-3-PL
 ‘they see them’

and

li vedono
 them-M-PL see-3-PL
 ‘they see them’

in which individual members of a group ‘see’ individuals who do not belong to the group.

The reason for the restriction of reference by *si-* to members of the one group is the same as the restriction of reference by any *si-* to the most obvious party and not some different party: The reason is the opposition of substances, whereby *si-* avoids signaling distinctions in grammatical Gender and Number. When grammatical Gender and Number are opted out of – even while being available in the grammar – the speaker can rely upon the hearer to select the most obvious referent. When grammatical Gender and Number are opted into, the speaker can rely upon the hearer to take advantage of that information and look farther afield for the referent. So *le-* (ACC.F.PL) in *le vedono*, for example, points to a second group that

contains members who are all grammatically feminine (such as a group of sisters or of bicycles), while *li-* (ACC.M.PL) in *li vedono* points to a group that contains members who are of mixed gender or all grammatically masculine (such as a group of siblings or brothers or trees). Nothing is said, by the way, about whether any of these individuals in the second group have the faculty of vision.

The same inferences are available when Focus is not signaled by a finite verb, but then there is the additional problem of inferring how many individuals are referenced by the infinitive; that is, how many individuals ‘see’? how many exercise visual ability? That information, as always, must come from context.

<i>vedersi</i>	<i>vederle</i>	<i>vederli</i>
see <i>si</i>	see them-F-PL	see them-M-PL
‘see himself~herself~itself ~themselves~each other’	‘see them’	‘see them’

The following set of Examples (6.22a–c) can illustrate how it is the context, not the grammar, which pushes a reader to one interpretation or the other, the reflexive or the reciprocal. Out of context, *si guardarono* may be interpreted as ‘they watched (~ looked at) themselves’ or as ‘they watched (~ looked at) each other.’ Even one sentence may not be enough context to determine the appropriate interpretation:

- (6.22a) I tre uomini *si* guardarono, e poi lo guardarono. (VU 38)
 ? The three men looked at *themselves*, and then they looked at him.
 ? The three men looked at *each other*, and then they looked at him.

Is each of ‘the three men’ concerned about his own appearance, perhaps on account of the presence of the fourth man (*lo-*), and so checking out his own appearance in a hand-held mirror? Or are ‘the three men’ members of perhaps a gang, with the fourth man being an outsider? On the next page, referring to the same men:

- (6.22b) Di nuovo i tre uomini *si* guardarono. (VU 39)
 ? Again the three men looked at *themselves*.
 ? Again the three men looked at *each other*.

Still not clear. Finally, two additional pages later, context clears things up:

- (6.22c) e ora *si* guardarono per la terza volta l’un l’altro. (VU 41)
 ‘and now they looked at *each other* for the third time, one the other’

Context eventually leads to the reciprocal interpretation: ‘the three men’ are members of a gang or something, and the fourth man is an outsider. The only thing *si-* ever specifies here is that the ‘looking’ done by ‘the three men’ is restricted within their own party of three.

This failure of *si-*, when referentially plural, to distinguish between the “collective” and the “collection” (as we have called it above) – though a hallmark of logic-based traditional grammar – is no unique peculiarity of *si-*. Actually, nothing in Italian grammar – not even signals of the meaning ENUMERATE OR MORE THAN ONE – makes that distinction. For instance, the explicitly plural clitics do not. Thus *le* (ACC.F.PL) *vedo* or *li* (ACC.M.PL) *vedo* ‘I see them’ could be interpreted in either of two ways: Either ‘I see a group of multiple individuals,’ or ‘I see more than one individual.’ So you might say *li vedo* when you see a massed army approaching you from afar on a battlefield, or you might say it when you see two different friends of yours on two different days and in two different locations.

Grammatical constancy and lexical idiosyncrasy

In the preceding two chapters, we have seen that the dichotomy between *passive* and *reflexive* examples is false, entirely a function of elements of the context other than *si-*, including our knowledge of the world, such as, for example, what bells can do versus what humans can do. In actual discourse, the levels of responsibility that referents of *si-* have for events range across the spectrum from nearly entirely passive to willfully dictatorial. And in any given instance, the level of responsibility is likely to be too wide to pin down narrowly to one particular “role”; this is the result of the neutralization of Degrees of Control.

In trying to isolate the semantic contributions of the systems of Participant Focus and Degree of Control, and particularly of *si-*, it helps to hold other contextual ingredients constant to some extent. It is particularly useful to observe the effects of various Focus and Control meanings when the verb is held constant across examples. This chapter will survey the relation of the systems of Focus and Control to four verbs: *aprire* ‘open,’ *alzare* ‘raise,’ *voltare* ‘turn,’ and *cambiare* ‘change.’ For each, we shall look at the effect of *si-* vs. signals in the system of Degree of Control and vs. usage of the verb with no explicit second participant at all.

In what follows, it will be unavoidable to wade a bit into lexical analysis. But this will be kept to a minimum and will always be tied to data concerning the distribution of the signals of Participant Focus and Degree of Control. Lexical analysis is engaged in only *in order to* allow us to account for the observed distribution of *si-*. (Similarly, the discussion of *messages* communicated in particular examples has been engaged in only in order to allow for an account of the observed distribution of *si-*.)

Examples in this chapter are numbered in a way to highlight their grouping by verb.

A. *Aprire* ‘open’

The following pair, (7A1, 2) illustrates the difference between MID and LOW Degrees of Control with the lexical item *aprire*, glossed ‘open.’ This can serve as a brief review of Chapter 4.

(7A1) un cinese ti suona alla porta, tu *gli apri*, e questo inizia ad urlare ed a insultarti nella sua lingua; tu che fai?¹

A Chinese man rings your doorbell. You *open for him* (MID), and he begins to shout and insult you in his language. What do you do?

(7A2) metal detector ecc no problem.....l'unico problema è che se la incarti nel pluribol, spesso il metal detector non la vede e ti chiedono di aprire lo zaino e fargli vedere che c'è;....tu *l'apri*, la tiri fuori e gli spieghi cos'è²

metal detector, etc., no problem – the only problem is that if you wrap it [a certain electronic device] in pluribol [a certain packaging], often the metal detector doesn't see it, and they ask you to open your backpack and let them see what's in there – you *open it* (LOW), pull it out, and explain to them what it is

In (7A1), the 'Chinese man' is responsible for the 'opening' of the door inasmuch as he has rung its bell. He thus exercises more control over the 'opening' than the inanimate, though openable, 'door,' and he exercises less control than the resident – 'you' – on the other side, who has the option of not opening the door. Social convention, or possibly an actual physical locking mechanism, prevents the 'Chinese man' from opening the door himself and permits 'you' to do so. Therefore, the 'Chinese man' is signaled to have a MID Degree of Control over the 'opening,' relative to the 'door' and to 'you.'

By contrast, in (7A2), the 'backpack' has done nothing to motivate the traveler to engage in an act of 'opening.' Lacking mind, hand, and mouth, it merely possesses features that allow it to contain items that people like airline security agents might want to inspect and that allow it to be opened. It is the security agents who motivate (by 'asking') the traveler to open the backpack, and it is the traveler who obligingly complies by willingly opening the backpack. Therefore, the 'backpack' is signaled to have a LOW Degree of Control over the 'opening,' relative to the security agents and the traveler.³

Figure 7.1 and 7.2, below, illustrate the two examples. As in Figures 4.1 and 4.5, here too distinctions in signaled Degree of Control are represented by wide downward-pointing arrows. In Example (7A1), Figure 7.1, the grammar makes it explicit that the 'Chinese man' has a MID Degree of Control; in Example (7A2), Figure 7.2, the grammar makes it explicit that the 'backpack' has a LOW Degree of Control.

1. ask.fm/Acceeveee/answer/66028808534, accessed Feb. 20, 2014.

2. www.gamesvillage.it/forum/showthread.php?652022-XBox-e-aeroporto, accessed Feb. 20, 2014.

3. The use of *gli-* here for a plural referent is not unusual and occurs, if rarely, in the data used for this study. Diachrony and register are said to be factors (Lepschy and Lepschy 1988: 79, 118). It is for reasons such as this that Chapter 11 includes a caveat about data coverage.

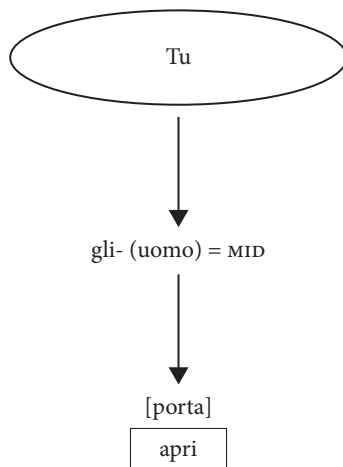


Figure 7.1 *Tu gli apri*
 ‘You open for him.’

Example (7A3), below, involves another door-opening. The narrator, an adolescent, has an appointment with the newly arrived soldier who soon becomes the boy’s hero. The boy arrives early at the soldier’s house and waits expectantly outside, watching the house for any sign of invitation.

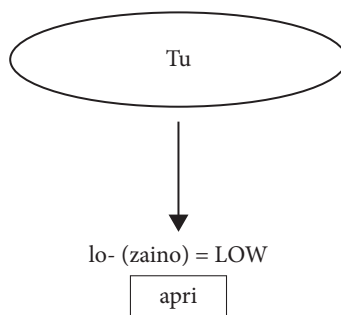


Figure 7.2 *Tu l’apri*
 ‘You open it.’

(7A3) Mi misi seduto al sole, davanti alla casa. Le finestre e la porta erano chiuse, e certamente la vedova aveva lasciato spegnere anche il fuoco in segno di lutto, per seguire l’usanza. Doveva mancare ancora molto alle cinque, ma lui aveva detto verso le cinque, ed era un’espressione poco precisa. E io non avevo ancora deciso cosa avrei fatto, quando fossero state le cinque, se andare a bussare oppure attendere là fuori....

Ma non erano ancora suonate le cinque che la porta *si apri* e lui apparve sulla soglia. (BB 22)

I sat down in the sun, in front of the house. The windows and the door were shut, and surely the widow had let the fire go out too, as a sign of mourning, to follow the custom. It must have been well before five o'clock, but he had said around five, and that was hardly a precise wording. And I had not yet decided what I would do when five o'clock came, whether to knock or instead to wait there outside....

But it wasn't yet five o'clock when the door *opened* (*si-*) and he appeared on the threshold.

The referent of *si-*, the inanimate door, effectively has very little control over its opening. Surely someone opens it, but we can't be sure who: the widow or the soldier. Regardless, the writer has placed Focus on the door (as that is what the narrator is looking at so intently), and has declined to mention anyone else. Therefore, whatever control the door exercises over the opening is all the control that need concern us for the nonce.⁴ Doors, naturally, being inert, exercise no deliberate control at all over their opening, but they are designed to be opened, and by their architecture they lend themselves to that activity quite well. Even low control is some control.⁵ After the boy enters the house, we learn that it was the soldier who opened the door:

Egli aveva richiusa la porta (BB 23)
He had shut the door again

Figure 7.3, below, illustrates Example (7A3), above. Focus is on the door (*La porta*, through inferred coreference with verb ending) and on the opening (*apri*). The door, largely due to its nature, is inferred to have a relatively low degree of responsibility for the opening; this *si-* is comparable, effectively, to a LOW Degree of Control (note the square brackets around LOW, and note the small upward arrow ending in

4. The discussions in García (1975) regarding the Spanish analog *Se abrió la puerta* are ambiguous. There one finds (p. 7) that “no entity other than the [door] is responsible for the event”; that the construction “confines the opening to the door, thus eliminating the potential agent”; and that the reflexive clitic serves to “short-circuit’ ... the possibility of supplying an outside agent.” And one finds (p. 215) that the result of using the reflexive clitic is “implicitly ruling out thereby the possibility that other parties may be responsible for the event.” That clearly is not true for Italian: It would be absurd to pretend that no one opened the door. Elsewhere (p. 218, emphasis in original), however, the interpretation is more nuanced and accurate: “doors do not open by themselves”; and “Since in fact doors don’t open anything but, on the other hand, are regularly opened,” the phrase describes “the same situation, the same kind of event, as if somebody had opened the door, except that the point of view is different: if anybody did, we are not interested in him at all, since *only the door occupies our attention*.” With that, one can have no dispute.

5. Several such examples, traditionally parsed as passives, were discussed in Chapter 5. See also CV 69.

a question mark). Wide context provides the information that the soldier (*il soldato* in square brackets) was most responsible for opening the door.

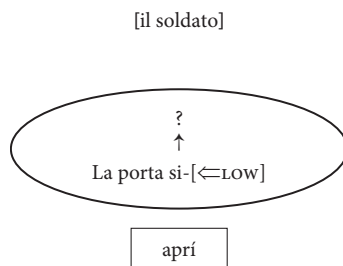


Figure 7.3 *La porta si aprì*
‘The door opened’

Example (7A4), below, contains the same grammatical construction as (7A3): noun plus *si-* plus *aprire*. But in (7A4) the participant in Focus with respect to the ‘opening’ is a crowd of human beings, not an inanimate door, and so the result of inference, as to how controlling the crowd is over the ‘opening,’ will be much more open to question. Here the brigand, Michele Rende, walks out of jail. Focus moves from first being on him, to next being on the crowd outside the jail, and then to the boy who narrates.

(7A4) Venne verso di noi lentamente. Era un po’ rosso in viso, ma camminava a testa alta, con lo sguardo duro e fisso in avanti sopra le nostre teste. E come *si aprì* la gente davanti a lui! Lo odiavano e lo disprezzavano, ma gli fecero largo perché passasse. E io ebbi il coraggio di mettermi al suo fianco. (BB 48)

He came towards us slowly. He was a bit red in the face, but he walked with his head high, with his eyes hard and set forward above our heads. And how the people *opened up* (*si-*) before him! They hated him and despised him, but they made way for him to pass. And I had the courage to place myself at his side.

The crowd is made up of individual human beings, each with a mind of his own, who can move as he pleases. Collectively, however, the crowd, or ‘the people’ (*la gente*), acts as if it had one mind: it splits so as to make way for the compelling, mysterious outsider to pass through. To what degree is the suspicious but curious crowd in control of the ‘opening,’ and to what degree is the proud man in control of it? The grammar does not say; it says only that the two Degrees of Control that are implied by this lexical item are here not signaled. Only the participation of the crowd in the ‘opening’ is acknowledged by the grammar. The context is what makes clear who does what in this scene. But even understanding who does what, and why, we find that the traditional dichotomy between *passive* and *reflexive* is not up to the job of capturing the interpretation. What matters here is that *si-* allows the writer

to shift the Focus onto the crowd, so that we see first its hypocritical reaction and then the boy's courageous reaction to Michele's release. Figure 7.4, below, illustrates the interpretation, as always based on the context, the lexicon, and the grammatical signals, but with the crowd attributed perhaps a higher level of responsibility than some readers might give it credit for. The stimulating role of Michele Rende is indicated by his name in square brackets, since he is not signaled as a participant in the event but only present in the context.

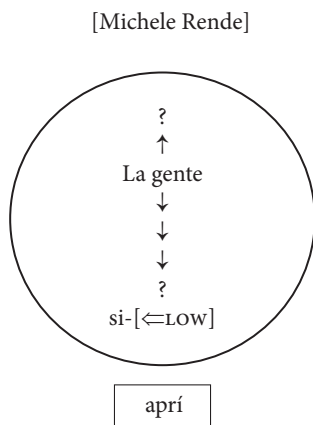


Figure 7.4 *La gente si aprì*
'The crowd opened'

In (7A5), below, the participant in Focus with respect to 'opening' is an individual human being, and a powerful one at that: Benito Mussolini during the tensest moments of the Fascist revolution, just before he takes the reins of government. The context is this: Mussolini had neglected to inform the leaders of his own Fascist militia that he had given the okay for a violent raid on two Italian cities.

- (7A5) Forse queste dimenticanze erano volute. Dopo averla costituita, egli voleva dimostrare alla Milizia che anche in campo militare il potere decisionale spettava soltanto a lui, e che lui intendeva esercitarlo senza controlli da parte di nessuno. Infatti le sue intenzioni non le confidava nemmeno al segretario del partito, Bianchi, di cui apprezzava la fedeltà e l'impegno, ma non l'intelligenza.... L'unico con cui *si apriva* seguiva ad essere Cesare Rossi, l'uomo che gli era stato accanto dal primo momento, lo aveva seguito in tutte le sue palinodie e gli dava sempre dei consigli che corrispondevano ai suoi desideri. (MI 166)

Perhaps these lapses were intentional. After having formed it, he wanted to show the militia that, even in military matters, the decision-making power belonged to him alone, and that he intended to exercise it without constraints from anyone. In fact, he did not reveal his plans even to the party secretary,

Bianchi, whose loyalty and commitment, but not intelligence, he valued.... The only one with whom he *opened up* (*si-*) turned out to be Cesare Rossi, the man who had stood beside him from the first, had followed him in all his palinodes, and who always gave him the advice that matched his desires.

Mussolini is nothing if not calculating here. He is in full control of his decisions as to whom to inform about the upcoming raid. His secret plans can be revealed only if someone ‘opens’ him up. The only person who can do that, however, is Mussolini himself. And so the distinction between high and low control over the ‘opening’ gets neutralized. Figure 7.5, below, illustrates. Notice, in contrast with Figure 7.4, that here no one is inferred to be higher in responsibility than the participant signaled (by verb ending) to be in Focus.

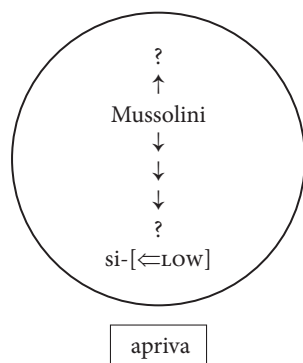


Figure 7.5 *Mussolini si apriva*
‘Mussolini opened (up)’

The grammar makes no distinction between the ‘opening’ of a door and the ‘opening’ of a dictator. That is the work of human intelligence.

The absence of mention of any low controller (e.g., *l+-*), and the absence too of a neutralization of Control (*si-*), in no way impedes the inference, based on the semantic content of the lexical item, that some low controller is nevertheless involved. Again (cf. particularly Chapter 1), Italian grammar works quite differently from English in these examples where only one participant, the inferred agent, is given. Example (7A6), below, has no overt patient and is not reflexive. A man opens a door, but the door is not mentioned in satellite to the verb *aprire*. The narrator goes with her lover to his room:

(7A6) giungemmo alla camera di Gino. Egli *aprì*, entrammo (MR 57)
we reached Gino’s room. He *opened*; we went in.

In context, there is no doubt what Gino ‘opened,’ but the door is not even mentioned, and the ‘room’ to which the door leads is mentioned only in a different

sentence. Italian does not signal Degrees of Control by means of the position of nouns around the verb; Italian, unlike English, does not opt out of Control by mentioning only one participant. Thus there is nothing in (7A6) to suggest that the distinctions in control that are inherent to the lexical item *aprire* are suspended here. In English, one finds *The door opened*. But in Italian, one does not find *La porta aprí* in that sense.⁶ The subversion of the Focus–Control interlock in Italian requires double mention of a single participant; in the third person, that is done with *si*.⁷ Figure 7.6, below, illustrates Example (7A6). Focus is signaled to be on the man (*Egli*) and on the opening (*apri*). Experience with usage of the lexical item *aprire* suggests strongly that the man is highly responsible for the opening.

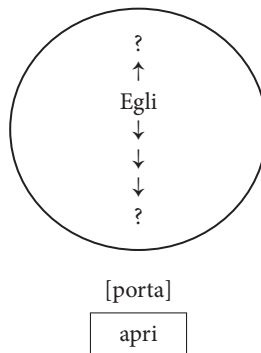


Figure 7.6 *Egli aprí*
'He opened.'

It might be well to pause here, before looking at the second lexical item, to make explicit a contrast between the grammars of Italian and English as concerns the signaling of Degree of Control.⁸ See Diagram 7.1, below.

6. But only in the agentless architectural sense of giving access, as in *Se la porta apre su un'altra stanza* 'If the door opens into another room,' <http://www.housemag.it/coprire-nascondere-una-porta-inutilizzata/>, accessed June 7, 2017. See also below.

7. Space prohibits this study from presenting an analysis of the clitics of the other grammatical persons. Suffice it to say that, for them, double mention has the same effects as it does in the third person: *mi aprí con lui* 'I opened (myself) up to him'; *ti apristi con lui* 'you opened (yourself) up to him.' In this respect, the clitics *mi-*, *ti-*, *ci-*, *vi-* in the first and second persons are comparable to *si-* in the third. See Chapter 3§D and Chapter 4 n. 11.

8. García (1975: 137–140) sketches out an account of the difference between Spanish and English in this regard, and it is somewhat in accord with what follows here: *se* suggests an “undifferentiated” role. But that account attributes too much reality to the notions of “role” and “strategy” (cf. Chapter 11), and it claims incorrectly that “a ‘zero object’ implies that its identity is ‘irrelevant.’”

<u>Italian</u>	<u>English</u>
a. <i>L'uomo l' apre.</i>	a'. The man <i>opens</i> it.
= 'The man LOW <i>opens</i> .'	= HIGHER <i>opens</i> LOWER
b. <i>La porta si apre.</i>	b'. The door <i>opens</i> .
c. <i>L'uomo apre.</i>	c'. The man <i>opens</i> .

Diagram 7.1 The Control signaling of Italian and English, contrasted

To signal meanings of Degree of Control, Italian uses morphology, whereas English uses the position of words relative to one another. Consequently:

- (a) In Italian, *l+-* signals a relatively **LOW** Degree of Control. The referent of *l'* 'it' – a door, say, or a backpack – has a relatively **LOW** Degree of Control relative to the man in the 'opening.'
- (a') In English, position signals a relatively **HIGHER** Degree of Control for the man and a relatively **LOWER** Degree of Control for the door or the backpack over the act of opening.

In (a) and (a'), Italian and English are somewhat comparable in that the interpretations are highly constrained, by morphology on the one hand and by position on the other. One can to some extent analogize the Italian morphology *l+-* with the English post-verbal position.

However, in (b) and (b'), and in (c) and (c'), Italian and English work quite differently. Interpretations are more constrained in Italian than in English, because Italian makes a grammatical distinction that English does not. There is nothing in English that is analogous to the Italian *si-* that appears in (b). Consequently, English employs the same formalism (SV) in both (b') and (c'). Italian distinguishes grammatically (b) and (c); English does not distinguish grammatically (b') and (c'). It is futile to try to understand Italian grammar by analogizing it to English grammar.

A second way of saying the same thing: Italian does not exhibit *La porta apre* comparable to English *The door opens* (in response to someone's efforts). Instead, Italian distinguishes grammatically between *La porta si apre* ('The door opens' in response to someone's efforts) and *L'uomo apre* ('The man opens' something, such as a door).

A third way of describing that cross-linguistic difference: In Italian, the reader of (c) knows – due to the lexical content of *aprire* and *uomo*, and due to the absence of *si-* – that there are distinctions in degree of control and that *l'uomo*

‘the man’ exercises relatively high control over the action.⁹ The reader knows that the man opens *something*, but he is on his own to identify just *what* it is that is opened. Similarly, the Italian reader of (b) knows – thanks to *si*- – that distinctions in Degree of Control are opted out of and that, though *la porta* ‘the door’ may well be opened by someone or something, that role-player is not what is in Focus here. But the Italian reader is on his own to identify who opens the door: Maybe the door opens itself (not likely), or maybe (more likely) somebody or something opens the door. Only context will clarify that a man opens the door. By contrast, the English reader of (b’) and (c’) knows practically nothing thanks to the grammar. Who is responsible for the door’s opening or the man’s opening? The English reader has only lexicon and context, not grammar, to guide him in answering those questions.

Both the categories of traditional grammar and the categories of English grammar are misleading if one wishes to understand the working of Italian *si*-. To borrow an aphorism from Saussure (1916/1972: 25), the grammar of Italian is a principle of classification all unto itself.¹⁰

B. *Alzare* ‘raise’

As was noted in Chapter 1, the English lexicon has a distinction between *raise / raised* and *rise / rose*. The former supports a distinction in Degrees of Control, and the latter does not. Italian uses the same lexical item, *alzare*, for the two senses and, when necessary, opts out of Control distinctions with *si*-. Examples (7B1) and (7B2) illustrate the contrast:

(7B1) Uno dei suoi bicchieri era rimasto a metà pieno di Marsala; egli *lo alzò*. (LG 31)
‘One of his glasses had remained half full of Marsala; he *raised it*.’

(7B2) Egli era tornato a guardarla, ma restava staccato. «Ah!» esclamò piano. «Non credevo che intendessi dire questo.»
«Che cosa credevi che intendessi dire? Venire via con te?»
.... Egli *si alzò* in piedi. (VU 17–18)

9. Similarly, García (1975: 85, 222–223) takes the position that lexical items that function as verbs may “strongly suggest” the involvement of a certain number of participants. This, of course, is a weaker position than the traditional, categorical distinction between *transitive* and *intransitive*.

10. See Otheguy (2002) on the importance of Saussurean antinomenclaturism in Columbia School.

He had turned to look at her, but he stood apart. “Ah!” he exclaimed quietly.
 “I didn’t think you meant to say this.”
 “What did you think I mean to say? To come away with you?”
 ‘He *rose* (*si-*) to his feet’

In (7B1), a distinction is maintained between Degrees of Control. One participant, a man, has more control over the ‘raising’ than does the other participant, an inanimate glass.

In (7B2), that distinction, between the one who raises and the thing raised, is eliminated. During a discussion with a woman, about their relationship and her relationships with other men, a man exercises control over his posture relative to her: turning to look at her, keeping a distance from her, and finally standing up and walking away from her, ostensibly to find something to drink. Apparently, what the woman says provokes the man to stand up and so, as with several other examples of *si-* (7A4, so far in this chapter), we have to do here with an external stimulus affecting the behavior of a human being.

Still, a man ‘rising’ to his feet is exercising a relatively high degree of control over his action. And so here we might conceivably speak of an agent acting upon himself: ‘raising’ his own body (not, e.g., a glass of wine). Yet rarely would such examples, common in Italian, be translated into English as ‘he raised himself.’ That is because the latter formulation invokes two grammatical mechanisms that the Italian does not and that render the translation unsuitable: the English system of Degree of Control (Diver, Davis, and Reid 2012; cf. Chapter 1 here), and the meaning INSISTENCE on a referent (Stern 2006; cf. Chapter 6 here). In the English *he raised himself*, the positions of the lexical items signal that the man had both HIGHER and LOWER Control over the event of ‘raising’; he is both the raiser and the thing raised, thus explicitly signaled (twice!) to be controlling the event, and in two different ways. That counterintuitive situation (a “role conflict”) is bolstered by the meaning INSISTENCE, signaled by *himself*, the effect being a sort of reassurance by writer to reader that no performance error has been made. Such a juxtaposition of grammatical meanings would be unsuitable for a fairly routine act of standing up, as in (7B2). It would be more suitable for something unusual, such as: *Though gravely wounded by enemy fire, the soldier nevertheless raised himself above the top of the trench and fired again*. It is a bit unusual for a person to expend the effort to ‘raise’ a weight when that weight is none other than the very person himself. Example (7B2), again, challenges the notion that there is a distinction between examples that are passive and examples that are reflexive.

To appreciate the fact that, in (7B2), it is a matter of inference, not of grammar, that we have to do with willful action directed towards oneself, compare (7B2), with its human referent, to (7B3), below, with its inanimate referent in an act of *alzarsi*:

(7B3) La strada adesso era in leggera discesa e si vedeva Palermo vicina completamente al buio. Le sue case basse e serrate erano oppresse dalla smisurata mole dei conventi; di questi ve ne erano diecine.... Smunte cupole dalle curve incerte simili a seni svuotati di latte *si alzavano* ancora piú in alto, ma erano essi, i conventi, a conferire alla città la cupezza sua e il carattere.... A quell'ora, poi, a notte quasi fatta, essi erano i despoti del panorama. (LG 16)

The road now was in a slight descent, and Palermo was seen close by, completely in the dark. Its squat and shuttered houses were overwhelmed by the enormous bulk of the convents; of these there were dozens.... Pale cupolas with flaccid curves like breasts emptied of milk *rose* [*si-*] even higher, but it was these, the convents, that gave the city its grimness and its character.... At that hour, then, in almost total darkness, they were the despots of the scene.

The cupolas could not possibly be the agents of their own 'raising'; it was of course their original builders who 'raised' them. But, seen from a distance, their height strikingly exceeds that of the convents. A measurement of the cupolas, proceeding from the ground upward – such as the informal measurement taken by the eyes of these travelers – would 'rise' above the level of the convents. No one at this point in the story – not the characters in the novel, not the readers of the novel – cares about the efforts of the original builders; what matters is the height of the cupolas.

That difference in interpretation between Examples (7B2) and (7B3) is traceable entirely to elements in the passages other than *si-*, primarily to the fact that (7B2) concerns a willful man and (7B3) concerns inanimate pieces of architecture.¹¹

Example (7B4) below illustrates *alzare* with a signal of MID Control. The example comes from a blog about soccer and concerns the triumphs of a coach, Murat Yakin, over challenges in the profession, particularly his teams' owners' propensity to sell his players to other teams:

(7B4) Se non *gli alzano* l'asticella, non si diverte Murat Yakin. E non solo perché piú glieli vendono, i campioncini del futuro, piú i suoi fanno strada.¹²

If they don't *raise* the bar *on him* (*gli-*), Murat Yakin doesn't have fun. And not just because the more they sell players out from under him – those little future champions – the more his own players make strides.

11. For an example with disjunctive subject and imperfect aspect to compare with (7B3), see LG 6: *Lui, il Principe, intanto si alzava* 'He, the Prince, meanwhile, was standing up.'

12. Christian Giordano, <http://footballpoetssociety.blogspot.com/2014/04/basilea-dasta.html>, accessed May 6, 2014.

The teams' owners 'raise' the bar (an appropriate sports metaphor, perhaps), and the inanimate 'bar' has no say in how high it gets raised (though, in track events, the whole point of a 'bar' is that it can be raised and lowered for competitors to jump over). The coach, Yakin, is signaled to have a MID Degree of Control, somewhere between that of the owners and the bar. The coach does not make the decision to sell players, nor is he a pawn in the hands of the owners. His job, as coach, is to work with what he's got. The better he and his players do, the higher the owners must 'raise the bar' if they intend to profit at his expense.

Like *aprire*, so too *alzare* retains its inherent suggestion of distinction in Degree of Control even when no low controller is specified. Example (7B5):

- (7B5) Quando un giocatore ha già rilanciato prima di voi dovrete considerare alcuni fattori. Un giocatore *alza* quando ha carte buone, e ciò significa che voi dovete avere carte ancora migliori per vedere il suo rilancio.¹³

When a player has raised before you, you must consider certain factors. A player *raises* when he has good cards, and that means you must have even better cards to see his raise.

In the context of poker-playing, it is important which player 'raises' when, but it is also obvious to the reader *what* is raised – the bidding, the pot – so that need not be said.¹⁴ There is no need to specify a LOW controller, nor to opt out of distinctions of Degree of Control; the 'player' who 'raises' is in charge of his action.

C. *Voltare* 'turn'

The lexical item *voltare* is routinely glossed 'turn,' but its precise lexical content is a bit hard to isolate, both because there are other common Italian words glossed 'turn' (*girare, rotare, volgere*) and because *voltare* appears rather infrequently as a transitive, with a clear distinction in Degrees of Control. Meanwhile, *voltarsi*, with *si-*, referring to human being, is found quite commonly, particularly in narrative fiction. An understanding of the presence of *si-* in these examples requires an understanding of the sense of *voltare*.

13. <http://www.pokerlistings.it/holdem-prima-del-flop-guida-per-principianti>, accessed May 5, 2014.

14. According to dictionaries, *alzare* has the sense of 'cut the deck' in the context of card-playing, but here, from a poker web site, it is used in the sense of 'raise' the bidding (indistinguishable in interpretation here from *rilanciare*).

Like *aprire* and *alzare*, *voltare* can involve distinctions in Degree of Control; one can ‘turn’ something. In (7C1), a man on a train, idly reading the front page of a newspaper, dozes off when he reads a boring account of the Tsar and Tsarina of Russia accepting gifts from the Lama of Tibet and then wakes up when the train stops at a station.

(7C1) Avevo il giornale ancora in mano e *lo voltai* per cercare in seconda pagina qualche dono migliore di quelli del Lama.

(Luigi Pirandello, *Il fu Mattia Pascal*, Milano: Treves, 1919, p. 89)

I still had the newspaper in my hand, and I *turned it (lo-)* to try to find on the second page some better gift than those of the Lama.

In (7C1), *lo-* signals that ONE third-person thing of the grammatically MASCULINE Gender has relatively LOW Control over the ‘turning’; that would be the newspaper, *il giornale*. The narrator, in Focus thanks to the verb ending on *voltai* ‘turned-1-SG,’ is inferred to have high control over the ‘turning.’ The narrator turns the newspaper. This act of ‘turning’ involves two distinct participants in the ‘turning’ with two distinct Degrees of Control over the action. Nothing grammatically unusual here.

An extensive, albeit unsystematic, search suggests, however, that there are few other inanimate objects that a person can ‘turn’ with *voltare*; in addition to pages, I find that *monete* ‘coins’ can be ‘turned over.’¹⁵

Common, on the other hand, are examples of *voltare* in which a sentient being ‘turns’ a part of his body, specifically the head (7C2, below), the shoulders (7C3, below), or the back (cf. MR 471). In (7C2), Said is a pet dog.

(7C2) Gli slegai la corda dal collo, raccolsi un sasso da terra e glielo mostrai. Non lo lanciai molto lontano. – Su, Said, prendilo!

Lui *voltò* solo la testa per vedere dove il sasso andava a finire, ma non si mosse.

(BB 58–59)

I loosened the rope around his neck, picked up a stone from the ground, and showed it to him. I did not throw it very far. “Fetch, Said, get it!”

He only *turned* his head to see where the rock landed, but he did not move.

In Example (7C3), the bold type is retained from the original. James Franco is a currently popular polymath known primarily, perhaps, as an actor.

15. <http://www.lamoneta.it/topic/54331-folder-di-ricambio/page-2>, accessed May 5, 2014.

(7C3) Dovete sapere che io odio, aborro, detesto, **ripudio James Franco**. ...

Ebbene, l'altra sera mi trovavo a un party ... e chi mi passa esattamente sui piedi? James Franco. La voglia di prenderlo a schiaffi e' stata momentaneamente domata, tornando prepotentemente subito dopo, quando l'ho visto quasi **negare una foto a una sua fan**, facendo versi da minorato mentale e nascondendosi dietro una sua amica alta due metri. Respirando zen e ricordandomi che ero in veste professionale, *gli ho voltato* signorilmente le spalle.¹⁶

You must know that I hate, abhor, detest, **repudiate James Franco**....

Well, the other night I was at a party ..., and who steps right on my toes? James Franco. The desire to slap him was momentarily contained, returning overbearingly immediately afterwards, when I saw him almost **refuse a picture to a fan**, making faces like a mentally disabled person and hiding behind a six-foot-tall female friend of his. Breathing Zen, and remembering that I was in professional garb, I in a ladylike way *turned my shoulders to him* (*gli-*).

In the usual way, a signal of MID Control signals a relatively important contribution to the occurrence of an event.¹⁷ Here, James Franco – perhaps unbeknownst to him – has many characteristics (explicit but elided here) and has done something to offend the writer.

So with *voltare*, a person or animal can 'turn' a page (e.g., of a newspaper), a coin, his head, his back, or his shoulders. Quite rare, on the other hand, are authentic examples in which, with *voltarsi*, an inanimate object is placed in Focus, comparable to the door with *aprirsi* (7A3) and the cupolas with *alzarsi* (7B3). Here is one, the title of a collection of poetry, published in 2011:

(7C4) *Mentre un'altra pagina si volta*¹⁸

While Another Page Turns ~ While Another Page Is Turned

In terms, then, of potential to distinguish Degrees of Control and potential to have those degrees neutralized by *si-*, the verb *voltare* is systematically, if not statistically, comparable to *aprire* and *alzare*.

We examine now the much more common usage of *voltare* with *si-* referring to a person. Quite often, in the narratives in the present collection, a person is

16. Camilla Maccaferri, <http://www.giovio15.com/5/category/festival/1.html>, accessed May 6, 2014).

17. Contrary to what the tradition says about dative clitics referring to the inalienable possessor of body parts, the 'shoulders' in (7C3) do not belong to the referent of *gli-*.

18. <http://www.libreriauniversitaria.it/mentre-altra-pagina-si-volta/libro/9788863161991>, accessed Sept. 25, 2014.

said to ‘turn’ with *voltarsi*. Contrast Example (7C5) below, which is representative of *voltarsi*, to Example (6.10), with *si spaventò*. In Example (6.10), a mother is involuntarily ‘frightened’ by her daughter’s voice; the mother is quite passive. In Example (7C5), by contrast, the likely interpretation is that the person in Focus, a monk, willingly and deliberately undertakes the specified action – to ‘turn’ – albeit still (cf. 7A4) only under immediate provocation from an external force. The scene takes place in a church.

(7C5) vidi qualcuno ... avviarsi dall'altra parte. Era un frate, non capii bene di che ordine, e, fattomi coraggio, lo chiamai sommessamente. Egli *si voltò* e mi venne subito incontro (MR 115–116)

I saw someone ... walking away on the other side. He was a monk – I couldn't tell exactly of what order – and, having gathered my courage, I called him softly. He *turned* (*si-*) and came immediately over to me.

The monk here is specifically prompted towards an action by some external force. It is the narrator's voice that ‘turns’ the monk – causes him to ‘turn.’ But the monk, we know, has leeway in carrying out those duties. He responds out of a sense of duty or charity to a visitor to his church, and he evidently exercises his discretion in just what manner he responds: Rather than ignoring the narrator, or signaling to her to wait, or asking from a distance what she wants of him, or even obeying mechanically – since she is not his superior – the monk ‘immediately’ goes over to the woman who calls out to him. This example, then, is two steps up, as it were, from the passivity of the frightened mother of (6.10). At the same time, the monk here, being prompted by the woman's voice, is certainly not as willful – as agentive – as, say, Mussolini, with *si apriva* in (7A5). Figure 7.7, below, illustrates the interpretation,

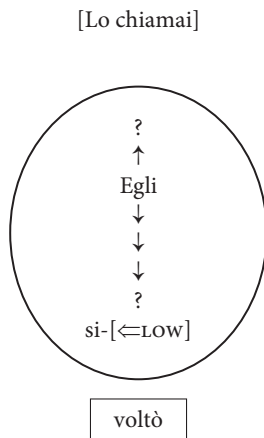


Figure 7.7 *Lo chiamai. Egli si voltò*
‘I called him. He turned.’

assigning a fairly high level of responsibility to the monk but acknowledging the prompting given by the woman's voice.

Many examples of *voltarsi*, like (7C5) above, involve the inference of a fairly sudden (*subito*), relatively complete (*dall'altra parte*) turn that is prompted by an outside stimulus (*lo chiamai*). But not all. Compare (7C6–8):

- (7C6) Egli *si voltò*, lentamente, e mi guardò. (MR 373)
He *turned* (*si-*), slowly, and looked at me.

The 'turn' is 'slow.'

- (7C7) Ci sedemmo sulla pietra del focolare, vicini. Tenevo tra le mie una delle sue piccole mani, e lei guardava intorno le cose della cucina e riconoscendole sorrideva, e poi *si voltava* a sorridere verso di me. (BB 191)

We sat down on the stone of the fireplace, close to each other. I was holding in my hands one of her little hands, and she was looking around at the kitchen things and, recognizing them, she smiled, and then she *turned* (*si-*) to smile in my direction.

The girl must have 'turned' at most forty-five degrees.

- (7C8) – Dov'è Grupa? – mi domandò.
... Infine *si voltò* e prima di partire fece un richiamo al cane. (BB 11)
"Where is Grupa?" he asked me.
... [Dumbstruck by the man who asks the question, the boy is unable to speak. Seventeen lines of text intervene.] Finally, he *turned* (*si-*) and, before leaving, called out to the dog.

There is a pregnant *absence* of stimulus before this 'turning.'

Voltarsi cannot be reliably associated with sudden, complete, and prompted – that is, with relatively dynamic – turning. What, then, is the sense of *voltare*, and what is the contribution of *si-* in context with it?

To answer that question, it will help to examine the last type of example of *voltare*: those in which there is no overt low controller and no *si-*. Again, the types of things that can be said to 'turn' in this way are extraordinarily limited; a search finds people, roads, and vehicles.

Example (7C9) continues the scene of the brigand's release from jail (cf. 7A4), when the boy narrator courageously, and alone among the bystanders, walks with him out of town.

- (7C9) e lo seguì anche dopo, quando arrivato in fondo egli non *voltò* per Grupa ma continuò verso la campagna. Non mi aveva ancora guardato (BB 48)
and I followed him even afterwards when, arrived at the end [of the street], he did not *turn* for Grupa but continued toward the countryside. He hadn't even looked at me.

In interpreting this example we must, of course, factor in the negative. The outsider Michele, *egli*, is in CENTRAL FOCUS and confirmed in Focus by the ending on *voltò*. Unmentioned is any thing (page, coin, head, back, shoulders) turned; this example contains no *l+*- to signal LOW Control. At the same time, there is no *si-* to signal a neutralization of distinctions of Degree of Control. This man is not suspended somewhere on the scale between HIGH and LOW Control; he is not propelled to act by some outside force. Consequently, one infers that there are control distinctions to be made, but the lower controller has gone unmentioned. What gets turned? What is turned here is the man's direction or orientation: He 'turns' to walk 'toward the countryside.'

A similar change of orientation can be appreciated in Example (7C10), from a news account of a bicyclist being struck by a car:

(7C10) Da una prima ricostruzione, auto e bici andavano appaiate, quando all'improvviso la potente macchina *ha voltato* a destra, travolgendo Fabio, che non ha potuto fare nulla per evitare l'auto.¹⁹

Based upon an initial reconstruction [of the events], car and bicycle were going along side by side when, suddenly, the powerful machine *turned* to the right, knocking down Fabio, who could do nothing to avoid the car.

The car changes orientation (*a destra*) much as the man in (7C9) changes orientation.

Example (7C11) is representative of a few examples in which a 'road' 'turns':

(7C11) Il re così raggiunse il nascondiglio del lupo. Davanti a lui si apriva un lungo buco nero, delimitato da una perfetta grotta naturale. Davanti alla grotta si apriva una estesa stradina battuta, che il re aveva percorso per raggiungere il lupo. Quando la strada *voltava* a destra si potevano notare le carcasse degli animali da lui divorati. Ad un certo punto quando il nostro eroe scese dal cavallo, vide due bagliori di color rosso sangue che scintillavano nel buio della grotta.²⁰

The king reached the hiding-place of the wolf. Before him there opened up a long black hole, framed by a perfect natural cave. Before the cave there opened up a long beaten path, which the king had taken to reach the wolf. When the road *turned* to the right, carcasses of the animals that he had eaten could be seen. At a certain point, when our hero got down off his horse, he saw two bright spots the color of red blood that shone in the dark of the cave.

19. Corrado Benzio, <http://iltirreno.gelocal.it/versilia/cronaca/2010/06/06/news/muore-in-bi-ci-travolto-da-un-audi-1.1902473>, accessed May 6, 2014.

20. Giacomo Z, http://web.educazione.sm/scuola/servizi/CD_virtuali/lavori_scuole/Re%20Golmar%20e%20la%20posizione%20magica%201.pdf, accessed May 6, 2014.

Somewhat like the man in (7C9) and the car in (7C10), the road in (7C11) changes orientation (*a destra*). Unlike the man and the car, however, the road, when it changes orientation, does not itself move. Yet the writer says that the road *voltava*. In fact, what changes orientation where the road *volta* is the road's *course* for anyone traveling along it. And that is the tacit low-controller that (7C9–11) have in common.²¹ When the man walking along the road *non voltò*, he failed to change course, avoided facing a different direction. When the car driving along the road *ha voltato*, it changed course, facing a different direction. And when the road in front of the cave *voltava*, it changed course, so that any traveler faced a different direction. All three of these examples with no explicit low-controller, then, have to do with a person changing course to face in a different direction.

By factoring out the variable elements of the contexts in these examples of *voltare*, we can better isolate the constant semantic contribution of the lexical item itself. That appears to have to do with a changing of orientation so that someone or something faces in a different direction. And that makes explicit that the “someone or something” must have a ‘face.’ Humans, pages, coins, heads, backs, shoulders, and cars (which are driven by humans) all have faces or surfaces that can be oriented in a direction. While Italian has other lexical items for other kinds of ‘turning,’²² the kind of turning represented by *voltare* is essentially two-dimensional. It is hardly surprising, then, that one word in Italian for ‘face’ is *volto*.

Again, the only reason for engaging in this highly tentative lexical analysis of *voltare* is that doing so helps us to isolate the constant semantic contribution of *si-*. We need to be as sure as we can not to confuse the effects of the lexicon with those of *si-*, lest we fall back into cataloguing “uses” such as “reflexive,” “passive,” “dynamic,” and so forth.²³

So, after all that, we are in a better position to say that the semantic contribution of *si-* with *voltare* is the same as it is everywhere: to opt out of making distinctions in Degree of Control. Where there is *l+-*, there is a distinction in Degree of Control.

21. Cf. García (1975: 148–149) re Sp. *dar vuelta*, in which *something* is turned.

22. See, in particular, *io mi girai verso di lui* ‘I turned [or, rolled over] towards him’ (MR 471).

23. This line of reasoning (a careful tying of inference to particular elements in a given context) differs from some earlier Columbia School work in which grammatical meanings were associated by the analyst with an essentially uncontrolled list of “strategies” or conventionalized uses, many of which echoed traditional categories. For discussion, see Reid (1995) and Davis (2004b) and cf. Chapter 11 here. The situation with *voltarsi*, e.g., might tempt one to say that *si-* has “strategies” of completeness or of a more dynamic realization of an action (i.e., turning suddenly and fully around). But why should it? How would its meaning cause those effects? Besides, the full range of examples does not support an uncritical identification of those inferences with *si-* itself but, variously, with other elements in the context.

Where there is no *si-* and no *l+-*, distinctions of Degree of Control that are implicit in the lexical item tacitly remain, as with the other verbs we have seen. Where there is *si-*, the writer opts out of distinctions of Degree of Control. The result is that Focus can be placed on a low-controller (e.g., a page of a book, Example 7C4) or on a person whose behavior resembles that of a low-controller, as if he were being manipulated (turned) by a high-controller. The behavior in question is the re-orienting of the face. As always with *si-* referring to humans, just how much the human controls the re-orienting is up for grabs; it can be high (unprovoked turning, as in Example 7C8) or low (provoked turning as in Example 7C5).

D. *Cambiare* ‘change’

The Italian system of Degree of Control is always satellite to a particular lexical item, a verb. Exactly how the Control meanings are interpreted – and exactly what is the effect of *si-* – will depend in large part on the semantic content of the lexicon. Such idiosyncratic variation is limited, however, by the meanings of the system of Degree of Control. As the present analysis moves from verb to verb, it uncovers both a constancy in the exploitation of *si-* and individual differences due to lexicon. The common thread being followed now is that *si-* opts out of making whatever distinctions in Degree of Control are implicit in the verb. A signal of Degree of Control (*gli-*, *le-*, *l+-*, *-loro*) makes those distinctions explicit. The absence of both a Control signal and *si-* leaves those distinctions tacit.

In context with *cambiare* ‘change,’ the properties of *si-* remain constant even though the properties of this lexical item differ from those of *aprire*, *alzare*, and *voltare*. Unlike those three, *cambiare* ‘change’ is quite flexible in terms of the implied roles of its principal participant, whether an additional participant is mentioned or not.

In English, *change* says nothing on its own about roles. As shown below, Degree of Control in English is signaled, in (a), or not, in (b, c), by the position of surrounding words:

- a. *She changes costumes for every scene.*
HIGHER changes LOWER (Degree of Control is signaled)
- b. *She changes after every scene.* (Degree of Control is not signaled)
- c. *Her costume changes with every scene.* (Degree of Control is not signaled)

In some respects, Italian *cambiare* seems to work like the other verbs we have seen. There can be straightforward distinctions of Degree of Control. This will be shown below in examples (7D1) through (7D3).

A person can ‘change’ a thing, as in Example (7D1), below (which begins with a headline, then a subtitle, followed by the body of the text):

(7D1) Albero “strano” in piazza Venezia

Alemanno: *lo cambiamo*, non mi piace

Un cono alto 10 metri con chioma e tronco artificiali, fusi in un’unica forma. Una fascia tricolore avvolta, a simboleggiare il 150° anniversario dell’Unità d’Italia. Anche il sindaco confessa: “Ho dato mandato di sostituirlo con un bell’albero classico, preferisco le cose tradizionali.”²⁴

An “odd” tree in Piazza Venezia

Alemanno: *Let’s change it*, it doesn’t suit me

A ten-meter-high cone with artificial foliage and trunk, fused into one shape. A tricolor belt wrapped around it, to symbolize the 150th anniversary of Italian unification. Even the mayor confesses, “I have given orders to replace it with a nice classic tree. I prefer traditional things.”

The mayor of Rome has the power (albeit with the cooperation of others) to ‘change’ the display in the city square. Clitic *lo-* signals a LOW Degree of Control for the artificial tree.²⁵

Nor is it unusual that inanimate things, even events, can ‘change’ a human being. We know, after all, that, just as a worker in a quarry can ‘strike’ a rock, breaking it into pieces, so too a rock can ‘strike’ a person, injuring him. In Example (7D2) below, from a blurb about a romance novel, a ‘wound’ has higher control over a ‘change’ than a man does:

(7D2) Tancredi è l’uomo dei sogni: Tutte le donne prima o poi cedono al suo fascino. Ma lui non sa dimenticare una ferita del passato che *l’ha cambiato* per sempre. Ora Tancredi odia la felicità e non vuole più amare.²⁶

Tancredi is the man of your dreams.... All the women sooner or later fall for his charm. But he can’t forget a wound from the past that *has changed him* (*lo-*) forever. Now Tancredi hates happiness and no longer wants to love.

24. http://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2011/12/06/news/albero_strano_a_piazza_venezia_alemanno_lo_cambiamo_non_mi_piace-26175280/, accessed May 5, 2014.

25. In the ‘suiting’ (or ‘pleasing’), the control roles are essentially reversed from their status in the ‘changing’: the tree does not ‘please’ the man, so the man wishes to ‘change’ the tree. The translation ‘it doesn’t suit me’ (or ‘it doesn’t please me’) brings out the relative control roles better than the more idiomatic translation ‘I don’t like it.’

26. <http://www.qlibri.it/narrativa-italiana/romanzi/l'uomo-che-non-voleva-amare/>, accessed May 5, 2014.

An emotional ‘wound’ from his past continues to exercise control over a man (*lo-*), who ‘no longer’ feels the way he did before the ‘wound’ afflicted him.

A MID Degree of Control with *cambiare* is illustrated by Example (7D3) below. This comes from a web site where people can write in to ask questions and get advice.

(7D3) ho comprato la mia tartaruga d’acqua a dicembre.. il negoziante me l’ha data nella vaschetta, ma io *le ho cambiato* sistemazione e messa in una vasca più grande e larga.²⁷

I bought my water tortoise in December. The shopkeeper gave it to me in a small aquarium, but I changed *its (le-)* set-up and put it in a bigger, wider aquarium.

The writer seeks advice on how to care for her tortoise (which is not eating). The tortoise (*le-* MID), being a pet that was chosen and purchased and now needs the woman, motivates her to ‘change’ its environment, to give the tortoise more room.

The lexical item *cambiare*, then, does admit distinctions in Degree of Control. However, unlike *aprire*, *alzare*, and *voltare*, surveyed earlier in this chapter, and therefore resembling English intransitives, *cambiare* permits humans and nonhumans alike (inanimate objects, situations, etc.) to appear alone as sole participants, with no other participant being signaled or even implied and no neutralization of Degree of Control. Examples (7D4) and (7D5), below, illustrate:

(7D4) Era mio padre che si accaniva più di tutti.... Non *cambiava*, lui (BB 187).

It was my father who dug in his heels more than anyone.... He didn’t *change*, that guy.

Only one participant is mentioned in the change: the ‘father,’ who is willful, effectively exercising high control over not changing. That interpretation, however, is purely a product of inference, since the grammar tells us only that one third-person is in Focus with respect to the ‘change’; *cambiare* here has no signals of Degree of Control in its satellite orbit.

In (7D5) too only one participant is mentioned in the change, but this time it is ‘things’ that (ought to) change. This example has to do with the political situation in Italy.

27. <https://it.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20110407092426AA6ckK9>, double periods *sic*, accessed May 6, 2014.

(7D5) Renzi – da pochi giorni Premier – già deve fare i conti con la questione Gentile. Altro che rottamazione. Qui siamo alle solite.

Non c'è niente da fare! Forse hanno ragione i pessimisti. Forse davvero le cose non *cambiano* mai o forse quello che abbiamo è ciò che ci meritiamo. Punto e basta.²⁸

Renzi – Premier for only a few days – already must deal with the problem of Gentile. Something other than auto demolition. Here we are as usual.

There's nothing to be done! Maybe the pessimists are right. Maybe things really don't ever *change*, or maybe what we have is what we deserve. Period, end of story.

Perhaps Italian politicians ought to be able to 'change' things, but the properties of the lexical item *cambiare* allow the writer to lament that things simply don't 'change,' with or without anybody's intervention. It is as if 'things' 'change' – or do not change – of their own accord. Notice that this is unlike the other verbs we have seen in this chapter: Italian does not exhibit *La porta aprì*, *Le cupole alzavano*, or *La pagina volta* (at least not in the senses of English *The door opened*, *The cupolas rose*, and *The page turns*). So with *le cose non cambiano mai*, we see that *cambiare* behaves differently from those other verbs.

The lexicon may be idiosyncratic, but the grammar is constant. The grammatical properties of *si-* are the same with *cambiare* as elsewhere. Even with *cambiare*, *si-* opts out of distinctions in Degree of Control. Examples (7D6) and (7D7), below, illustrate. In (7D6), the boldfaced numbers (original) refer to times of the morning. Athletes are cross-training.

(7D6) **10.30** – I giocatori si fermano per bere. *Si cambiano* gli scarpini e si mettono le scarpe da atletica. Inizia il **percorso** tra i boschi.

...

10.55 – Termina l'esercitazione sui **gradoni**. I giocatori si rimettono gli scarpini da calcio.²⁹

10:30 – The players stop to drink. They *change (their) (si-)* soccer shoes and put on athletic shoes. The **run** through the woods is beginning.

...

10:55 – The training on the **big steps** ends. The players put their soccer shoes back on.

28. Luigi Carnevale, <http://www.formiche.net/2014/03/02/225980/>, accessed May 5, 2014.

29. <http://www.pagineromaniste.com/roma-ritiro/>, bold type in the original, accessed May 6, 2014.

The referent of *si-* in (7D6) is the athletes who both need their shoes to be changed, so that they can begin the run through the woods, and actually change their own shoes themselves (There is no mention in the context that anyone else changes their shoes for them). The players span the range of high and mid control over the changing of the shoes; that is, they are quite securely in control of the changing of the shoes, requiring no one's cooperation.

By contrast, in (7D7), *si-* refers to inanimate 'colors.' This is another example from a web site that offers advice to people who write in with questions. PES 2011 is a video game about soccer.

(7D7) [Q:] Ciao xkaso sapete come *si cambiano* i colori delle scarpe a pes 2011 sull xbox?

[A:] devi andare su modifica..poi su giocatore..poi su scarpini³⁰

[Q:] Hi, xkaso. Do you know how the colors of the shoes in PES 2011 *are changed (si-)* on Xbox?

[A:] You have to go to "Modify," then to "Player," then to "Shoes."

In the question, Focus is signaled by the verb ending on *cambiano* to be on a third-person entity³¹ that is ENUMERABLE (plural); that participant is easily inferred to be referent of the very next word, *colori* 'colors.' *Si-* therefore refers to the colors. Of course, the colors of the shoes on the video game do not change (by) themselves; else, the writer would not be writing to ask how to change them. He might well have asked, "Come *li cambio*, i colori?" 'How do I change them [*li-*], the colors?' with an explicit distinction in Degree of Control. *Si-* here thus refers to a participant that effectively has low control over the changing, in contrast to the athletes in (7D6). The changing of the colors in the video game requires the intervention of a person, a distinction in Degree of Control between colors and players. *Si-* here effects a subversion of the Focus-Control interlock so that a patient, the 'colors' can be focused on.

Recall, in passing, that, as we saw in Chapter 5, the traditional distinction between *impersonal* and *passive* cannot be maintained. This example could well serve as a reminder of that and be rendered as 'How does one change the colors?'

Though the properties of the lexical item *cambiare* are quite different from those of the other verbs we have looked at in this chapter, the grammatical status of *si-* is the same: It opts out of distinctions of Degree of Control.

30. <https://it.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20101017131211AAGbcwT>, double periods and spacing *sic*, accessed May 6, 2014.

31. Strictly speaking, Focus is signaled *not* to be on the first or second person.

E. Conclusion

In this chapter, the communicative function of *si-* has been examined across a range of verbs. As a result, it is evident that, admitting lexical and other contextual idiosyncrasies, the semantic contribution of *si-* is constant across examples: *Si-*, in systematic opposition to a signal of Degree of Control, opts out of the Control ranking among participants.

How one gets from the extremely sparse semantic content of *si-* to a fully worked-out interpretation of a stretch of discourse depends to a very large extent on elements in the wider discourse other than *si-*. Even holding constant the verb and the noun that are in close context with *si-*, one can still calculate a bewildering variety of interpretations. Consider the multiple ways that the following *si-* clause can be interpreted depending upon the context, from the mundane to the fanciful:

si ruppe una campana

'A bell broke'	(not to say how)
'A bell was broken'	(through overzealous change ringing)
'One broke a bell'	(at that step in that cult's rite)
'A bell broke itself'	(a willful, self-destructive bell)
'A bell broke (itself) [something]'	(a gleeful, havoc-wreaking vandal-bell)
'He broke himself a bell'	(thus obtaining a needed chunk of bronze)
'She broke herself a bell'	(ditto)
'It broke itself a bell'	(ditto, if 'it' is, say, a monster)

Sitting in oppositions of substance outside the systems of grammatical Gender, Sex, Number, and Degree of Control, and signaling only an imprecise level of Focus, *si-* contributes very little of positive value to the overall communicated message. Mostly, *si-* indicates that certain things are being left *unsaid*.

Grammar constrained by lexicon

The “inherently reflexive” verbs

A. The ostensible problem

The previous chapter provided a survey of four Italian verbs, showing how each of them interacts in its own way with the unvarying meanings of the signals of Participant Focus and Degree of Control. That survey permitted one major contextual element at a time, the verb, to be held constant so that the semantic contributions of the clitics could be more accurately isolated. The result of that survey was an understanding that the contribution of each clitic is meager but constant. In particular, the semantic content of *si-* is extremely light, but *si-* is the same grammatical signal with the same semantic content regardless of what stands around it in the context.

This chapter offers a survey of a different sort. There are verbs in Italian – one hesitates to call them a class – that are said to be *inherently reflexive*, also called *pronominal* or *ergative* (e.g., Burzio 1981, cited in Everaert; Everaert 1986; Lepschy and Lepschy 1988: 144, 211, 222–223). Cordin (1991: 600–601) calls these ‘dese-manticized’ or ‘pseudo-reflexive’ in that they, though apparently reflexive, appear to have no true reflexive value. In the simplest terms: in the third person, these verbs always occur with *si-*. As we shall see in this chapter, that is not entirely true. But it does beg the question, why do certain verbs strongly tend to have *si-* as clitic rather than, say, *lo-*? In other words, what semantic property of these lexical items makes them especially inhospitable to distinctions in Degree of Control? Why is it that, when writers choose these verbs, they overwhelmingly also opt out of the system of Degree of Control and use instead a Focus signal that sits in an opposition of substance outside the system of Degree of Control? This chapter addresses that question.

Italian verbs are traditionally classified as transitive, intransitive, or reflexive; a given verb may belong to one or more of these categories. The last category (again, also called pronominal) refers to the so-called inherently reflexive verbs, which supposedly always have a co-referential clitic, thus *si-* when third person. In this view, this type of reflexivity is a lexically coded property of a given verb rather than a syntactic property of a given sentence: It is not so much that the sentence is

reflexive as that the verb is reflexive. Equivalently, one might say that certain verbs govern the reflexive clitic, with the implication being that the clitic is redundant.¹

There are three types of shortcomings with this approach: one involving data-coverage, another involving morphology, and the third being semantic. An examination of these shortcomings will lead to the conclusion that the *si-* of inherently reflexive verbs is no different from *si-* in general.

B. Data coverage

The matter of exactly which verbs belong to this inherently reflexive lexical category turns out to depend upon how far into the data the lexicographer's net extends. One small dictionary (Bantam 1976) lists 80 verbs (not including those labeled as being restricted to literary usage) that are inherently reflexive. Of those 80, however, 11 are shown in one of two larger dictionaries (Garzanti, Sansoni) to have transitive uses as well. Of the remaining 69 verbs, only 12 remain inherently reflexive according to the largest dictionary (Battaglia 1961–2000).² Presumably, the smaller dictionaries are including only the more common usages, while the largest dictionary includes rarer transitive usages. This observation suggests the possibility that reflexivity is after all only a potential or a statistical tendency for a given lexical item, not a hard-and-fast property.

The idea that reflexivity is a potential, not a property, of a given lexical item is supported by textual data as well. Table 8.1, below, gives the results of a search of the data collection used in this study for all instances of eight selected lexical items.³ The table shows that verbs exhibit a range of affinity for co-referential clitic, that is,

1. Also unsatisfying are the speculative remarks offered by García (1975: 162–163) regarding the inherently reflexive (or “reflexive tantum”) verbs in Spanish. Her position is that certain verbs, *qua* lexical items, “span the opposition” between single mention – i.e., inherent intransitives – where “there is nobody to exclude,” and double mention – i.e., with clitic *se* – where “anybody else is excluded.” As for why one verb has come down on one side of this dilemma, and another verb on the other side, she precludes there being a synchronic explanation, saying, “there is only a historical explanation.”

2. One volume of Battaglia being unavailable at the time, another large dictionary (De Mauro 2000) was consulted for one of the verbs, *vergognare*.

3. Passive participles are not included, except when they form part of what would traditionally be parsed as a compound tense. For other non-finite forms, co-referentiality was determined by inference. For third-person (*si-*), no attempt was made to distinguish reflexive from so-called passive or impersonal tokens, since, as we have seen, those distinctions cannot be maintained. The data set was originally assembled for a study (Davis 1992) of the pronouns *egli* and *lui*; it contains authentic passages of varying length from several genres of twentieth-century published literature. The sources are BB, CD, CV, LG, MA, MI, MR, RG, RS, SC, TD, VU.

for reflexivity. This suggests that what has been called “inherent reflexivity” ought not be understood as a category but viewed instead as simply the upper extreme (1.0) of a scale that ranges down to zero affinity, with most verbs falling somewhere in between. Note that although dictionaries give both of the top two verbs (*accorger* and *inginocchiar*) as inherently reflexive (R), in fact one of them (*inginocchiar*) exhibits just about the same tendency (0.9), in this data set at least, to be reflexive as another verb (*voltar*) which dictionaries classify as transitive, intransitive, and reflexive (TIR) (cf. Chapter 7 on *voltar*).

Table 8.1 Proportion of tokens with co-referential clitic, for eight verbs

lexical item	gloss	classed as*	proportion co-ref.	co-ref/ total
accorger	notice	R	1.0	60/60
inginocchiar	kneel	R	0.9	11/12
voltar	turn	TIR	0.9	33/38
alzar	raise	TR	0.6	33/59
trovar	find	TR	0.4	64/159
aprir	open	TR	0.2	8/45
tornar	return	I	0.03	4/116
sembrar	seem	I	0.00	0/105

* According to Bantam (1976), omitting the classes “literary” and “obsolete.”

T = transitive, I = intransitive, R = reflexive.

There is no clear boundary between what are called inherently reflexive verbs and other verbs. As a lexical classification, the division is spurious. If this type of reflexivity is then not a matter of lexical class, it may be a grammatical (i.e., a semantic) phenomenon. It turns out to be the same one that has been proposed here for *si-* in general.

C. Morphology

A second shortcoming with the inherently reflexive, lexically coded approach is that these verbs do not in fact always exhibit co-reference between verb ending and clitic; only the finite forms of the verbs do – usually, or “(supposedly)” (Rosen 1982: 530).⁴ Under four regular conditions involving non-finite forms, there will not be co-reference between a clitic and a verb ending.

4. Rosen (1982 or 2012 Chapter 2) aims to unify the various types of Italian *si-* within the account of “multiattachment” provided earlier by Perlmutter (1978). In that framework, she says, “There is nothing anomalous” (p. 540) about the “(supposedly)” inherently reflexive verbs, because their syntax is the same.

a. Infinitives

In general, infinitives, by definition, lack a finite verb ending. *Si-* clitic to an infinitive will have no verb ending with which to be co-referential. It is not the case, then, that there is always co-reference between *si-* and a verb ending. That lack of agreement is true of verbs in general, as we have seen (Chapter 3), and it includes the inherently reflexive verbs as well. Example (8.1) shows a verb of this class in infinitive form and so with no co-referentiality between *si-* and its verb.

- (8.1) una straordinaria facilità a *impadronirsi* subito d'un
 an extraordinary facility at *grasping (si-)* an argument
 argomento (MI 16)
 immediately

The form *impadronir* 'grasp, seize, master' has nothing overt to identify it as third-person singular; morphologically, on its own, it could refer to any grammatical person or number. There is no overt co-reference. The clause could even be embedded in finite clauses of different grammatical persons and numbers, such as first plural or third singular:

- vediamo in lui una straordinaria facilità a *impadronirsi* subito d'un argomento
 'we see in him an extraordinary facility at *grasping (si-)* an argument immediately'
 rivelava una straordinaria facilità a *impadronirsi* subito d'un argomento. (MI 16)
 'he showed an extraordinary facility at *grasping (si-)* an argument immediately'

That criticism of the notion of inherent reflexivity might appear to be an attack upon a strawman: everyone knows that the subject of an infinitive is not morphologically marked. Yet there is a real consequence for one's understanding of how *si-* works as a signal of a meaning once the fact is taken seriously. The consequence is that there will not be, in general, a mechanical way to identify the referent of *si-*; identification depends instead on inference. The principal participant of an event represented by an infinitive must be inferred from context. By extension, the referent of *si-* on an infinitive, too, must be inferred; it is not given syntactically. Consider the pair of Examples (8.2a, b):

- (8.2a) In ogni caso aveva ragione di *vendicarsi*. (BB 88)
 In any case, he had reason to *avenge himself (si-)*.
 (8.2b) E poi le venne l'impulso di *nascondersi* (BB 238)
 And then there came to her the impulse to *hide (herself) (si-)*

In traditional terms: The logical subject of *vendicar* 'avenge', and the referent of its *si-*, is inferred to be 'he,' the grammatical subject of the finite verb *aveva* 'had.' Yet

the logical subject of *nascondere* ‘hide,’ and the referent of its *si-*, is inferred to be something (her) other than the grammatical subject of the finite verb *venne* ‘came.’

In general, the principal participant (the agent, if that inference suits the context) of a non-finite verb must be inferred on the basis of coherence in the context. As a corollary, the referent of *si-* must be inferred on the basis of coherence in the context. Reference is not given syntactically.

b. Gerunds

The same applies to the so-called gerunds.⁵ There is no verb ending on them either for *si-* to agree with; their ending, *-ndo*, is invariable. The gerunds of the supposedly inherently reflexive verbs are no special case. Example (8.3):

- (8.3) La luna di miele, egli la trascorse *arrabattandosi* con le penna (MI 34)
His honeymoon night he spent *busying himself (si-)* with his pen

In this particular case, the logical subject of the gerund, and hence the referent of *si-*, is the grammatical subject of the preceding finite verb, *trascorse*. But that is certainly not always the case. In the following example, (8.4), the logical subject of the gerund is not the grammatical subject of any finite verb.

- (8.4) Ma *essendo* i suoi familiari contrari al matrimonio per ragioni che tutti potevano capire, lei era stata costretta a rompere il fidanzamento. (BB 65)
But, her relatives *being* opposed to the marriage for reasons that everyone could understand, she had been forced to break the engagement.

c. Participles

While infinitives and gerunds lack a Focus signal (finite verb ending) for *si-* to be co-referent with, participles of inherently reflexive verbs routinely lack the reflexive clitic itself. That is, there is no *si-* and no verb ending to refer to each other at all. Thus, supposedly inherently reflexive verbs do not, in fact, always appear with a reflexive clitic. Examples (8.5a–d):

- (8.5a) Rimasi a lungo immobile, *inginocchiata* sul letto davanti a lui (MR 339)
I stayed still a long time, kneeling [i.e., *knelt*] on the bed before him
- (8.5b) Ella pareva *accanita* quasi piú di lui (MR 96)
She appeared almost more ruthless [i.e., *worked up*] than he

5. “Gerund” is the usual term for this verb form in Italian.

(8.5c) gridando *arrampicato* in cima a un albero quando lui passava (CV 67)
shouting from up [i.e., *climbed*] in the top of a tree when he went by

(8.5d) *Sì, pentito: e desidero che lui lo sappia* (SC 172)
Yes, sorry [i.e., *repented*], and I want him to know it

While no full analysis of the participle can be undertaken here, and so only observational remarks can be made, it is useful to view this absence of *si-* with the participles of “inherently reflexive” verbs in the context of Italian participles in general. Routinely, they do not have a clitic referring to the participant, if any, which plays a low-control role in the event. Instead, where there is a low-controller to be inferred at all, this verb form, with its suffix *-t+* signaling Gender and Number, is tied inferentially more closely to the low-controller than to the high (hence, of course, the traditional term “passive” participle).⁶ An agent may not even be mentioned:

(8.6) *Visti due turchi era come averli visti tutti.* (CV 24)
To have seen [i.e., *Seen* (M.PL)] two *Turks* (M.PL) was like having seen them
(M.PL) all (M.PL).

On those rare occasions when a participle, in general, does have *si-*, the effect is to provide a second mention of the party alluded to by the Gender-Number ending on the participle itself. In traditional terms, this makes the activity reflexive. Example (8.7):

(8.7) *Questi gettò delle bombe a mano e la terza scoppiò, tirò qualche fucilata e i russi, vistisi scoperti, ritornarono indietro.* (RS 32)

The latter threw some hand grenades and the third exploded, drew some fire, and the Russians, seeing [i.e., *seen* by] *themselves* (*si-*) discovered, turned back.

6. This is equally the case when one infers that the action took place previously (which is why the form is also known as the “past participle”), as in: *Tacqui, e lui, ..., domandatomi di nuovo se fossi veramente pentita e decisa a cambiar vita, e avutane una risposta affermativa, mi impartì l'assoluzione* (MR 356) ‘I [Adriana] stopped speaking, and he [a priest], ..., *having asked* (M.SG) me once more if I was truly *repented* (F.SG) and *persuaded* (F.SG) to change my way of life, and *having had* (F.SG) thereto an affirmative response, gave me absolution.’ The endings on the participles link them conceptually to a low-controlling, rather than a high-controlling inferred participant. Feminine singular *avuta* links to feminine singular *risposta* (not to the male priest), just as *decisa* links to Adriana. Generic-gender, singular *domandato* links to what was asked, *se fossi ...* (not to the priest). *Pentita* is the participle of “inherently reflexive” *pentirsi*, links to Adriana, and is covered by remarks in this section; cf. (8.5d). As for verbs that do not generally admit low-controllers (true intransitives such as *sedere*), their participles link to an inferred non-MID participant; so, e.g., *sedutagli accanto* describes a woman ‘seated’ (F.SG) beside a man. See Chapter 5 on the special status of MID Degree of Control: why it has to be signaled and cannot merely be inferred.

The mechanism appears to be that the participle itself (*visti*) is, as usual, linked to a low-controller, and the *si-* invokes additionally the role of a high-controller, which will be, as usual with *si-*, the obvious party. In other words, *si-* on a participle provokes the inference that the agent is the same as the patient. This mechanism, it might be noted, is conceptually the reverse of the active forms of the verb, where, routinely, *si-* provokes the inference that the patient is the same as the agent. While the situation seems paradoxical from the traditional point of view, it is thoroughly in line with the Focus-Control hypothesis. As always, *si-*, lacking meanings of Gender, Sex, and Number, refers to an obvious party. And, bearing its meaning of INNER Focus, it is appropriate for a bona-fide participant.

The absence of *si-* from the participial form of inherently reflexive verbs, then, will not be surprising if, as will be argued below, these verbs involve relationships of participant Control that are exactly analogous to transitive and intransitive verbs. That is, the passive participles of inherently reflexive verbs lack *si-* because these participles, like passive participles in general, refer in their own right to the least controlling of their participants. There is no need to prompt the reader to infer some unusual control relationship among participants, and it would in fact be counterproductive to do so.

d. Inherently reflexive verbs with non-reflexive clitics

One last type of morphological evidence will now be presented against the traditional view that there is a list of verbs that are classifiable lexically as being inherently reflexive. There are instances of so-called inherently reflexive verbs that have not a reflexive but a non-reflexive clitic. These are instances of the so-called causative construction with *fare* ‘make’ (noted too by Rosen 1982: 538–539). Example (8.8):

- (8.8) «... sai cosa fa la signora quando trova un granello di polvere in un angolo? Chiama la cameriera, *la fa inginocchiare e glielo fa togliere* con le mani...»
(MR 60)

“... do you know what the mistress does when she finds a speck of dust in a corner? She calls the maid and *makes her (la-) kneel down* and *makes her (gli-) pick it (lo-) up* with her hands...”

As an inherently reflexive verb in infinitival form with a logical third-person subject (the maid), *inginocchiare* might be expected to have a clitic *si-*. Instead, the party kneeling is referred to with the non-reflexive form *la-*, formally clitic to the finite *fa* ‘makes’ (which has a distinct subject). In this regard, *inginocchiare* behaves exactly like all other verbs in causative contexts: The person made to perform the action is referred to with a signal of LOW Degree of Control (*l+)* if the action (here

‘kneeling’) does not involve some participant with even less control over the action. The person made to perform the action is referred to with a signal of MID Degree of Control (*gli-*) if the action (here ‘picking up’) does involve some participant with even less control over the action (here the ‘speck of dust’).⁷

To summarize thus far the argument against there being a lexical class of inherently reflexive verbs: Lexical items which function as verbs show a range, not a dichotomy, of reflexivity. Some verbs are rarely if ever reflexive, some are occasionally reflexive, and others are almost always or evidently always reflexive. Even those verbs which are always, or practically always, conceptually reflexive show up in certain forms without a reflexive clitic, and in other forms with a so-called reflexive clitic but with no verb ending to provide co-reference. Ultimately, the referent of *si-* with these verbs, when *si-* is present, must be determined by inference on the basis of context, as is the case, ultimately, with all verbs, as we have seen. Viewing all these distributional facts, one begins to suspect that the problem of the inherently reflexive verbs will yield to a semantic treatment in which both the constant grammatical status of *si-* and the idiosyncratic content of the lexicon (cf. Chapter 7) are recognized. We shall see that *si-* on such verbs functions in exactly the same way as *si-* on other verbs: *si-* suggests that some inference concerning the ranking of control is both made and also neutralized or subverted. And, as always, the semantic content of the lexical item will prove to be relevant in that inference.

D. Semantics: Opting out of distinctions of Degree of Control

An analysis of authentic contextualized examples of those few verbs which do, for all intents and purposes, mainly appear with a second-mention clitic (second, at least, to the finite verb ending) does indeed suggest that *si-* functions with these verbs in the same way as with other verbs. *Si-* indicates that the system of Degree of Control is being opted out of so that the Focus-Control interlock can be “subverted” or so that the distinctions of Degree of Control can be “neutralized.”⁸ The referent of *si-* is playing some less-than-highest control role, though he may *also, in addition*, be playing some relatively high-control role, thus spanning a range of control. This is the same thing we have seen in previous chapters. At one end of the spectrum are those examples in which the referent of *si-*, though in Focus, is

7. See Huffman (1997: 164–180) for discussion of clitics and causatives in French, which resembles Italian in this regard.

8. Keep in mind (Chapters 5–7) that this is actually not a mutually exclusive dichotomy but a spectrum.

inferred to have a low degree of control (the quintessential passives, Chapter 5), and at the other end are those examples in which the referent of *si-* is inferred to have a range of control that spans high to low (the quintessential reflexives, Chapter 6). Here with the supposedly inherently reflexive verbs, *si* is, as always, being exploited because of its oppositions of substance, particularly its opposition with the MID and LOW Control signals that also bear Number and Gender meanings. These verbs in usage merit their *si-* just as much as reflexive and passive instances of transitive verbs merit their *si-*.

Of the 80 reflexive verbs listed by Bantam (1976), that is, verbs which are practically always reflexive in common usage, almost all have morphologically complex stems. Of these, the 12 that are reflexive even in Battaglia (1961–2000) are all morphologically complex. The morphological pattern is prepositional prefix plus stem. The most common prefix is *ad-* ‘to’ (27 words), followed by *in-* ‘in(to),’ (21 words), *s-* ‘out’ (10 words), and *ri-* ‘back’ (five words).⁹ Not only are these prefixes quite current in contemporary Italian, two of them, *ad-* and *in-*, are, including their regular assimilation to following consonant, identical in pronunciation to their prepositional counterparts. Furthermore, the stem of almost every one of these verbs is productive in contemporary Italian (one major exception will be discussed below). Meanwhile, the sense of both the prefix and the stem is typically apparent in the gloss given by the dictionary to the verb. To illustrate, Table 8.2, below, lists a few of the *si-* verbs that appear in the main sources of data for this study.¹⁰

Without wishing to venture too deeply into lexical analysis, one might reasonably suppose that the semantic content of the morphological parts of these verbs is contributing to the semantic sense of the whole, and that this in turn has something to do with the overwhelming tendency for these words to appear with *si-*. That is, *si-* appears with these verbs not by unmotivated government but because their semantic content makes them particularly suited for *si-*. If that is true, then *si-* here is contributing semantically exactly what *si-* always contributes. A similar argument for a semantic motivation behind apparent government has been made at length by Huffman (1997).

Here is how the semantic analysis might run for most of the 80 verbs. The principal participant (the one exercising the highest control) gets himself ‘to’ or ‘into’ the condition named by the stem. That participant is thus spanning a range of control, a range that often leads to the inference of an agent acting upon himself. Consider Example (8.9). The metonym *il Poeta* ‘the Poet’ refers to D’Annunzio:

9. One of which, *rintanar* ‘burrow, hide,’ also contains *in-*.

10. The sources are the same as for Table 8.1.

Table 8.2 Morphological make-up of some *si*-verbs*

<i>si</i> -verb	gloss	stem or comparison item
<i>ac-can-ir</i>	'persist, work doggedly'	<i>can-e</i> 'dog'
<i>ac-corg-er</i>	'notice, become aware'	cf. <i>s-corg-er</i> 'perceive'
<i>ac-cosci-ar</i>	'squat'	<i>cosci-a</i> 'thigh'
<i>ac-cov-acci-ar</i>	'crouch'	<i>cov-a</i> 'brooding'
<i>ad-ir-ar</i>	'get angry'	<i>ir-a</i> 'wrath'
<i>ar-rabatt-ar</i>	'strive'	cf. <i>rabatt-ino</i> 'go-getter'
<i>ar-ramp-ic-ar</i>	'climb (up)'	<i>ramp-a</i> 'ramp'; cf. <i>ramp-icante</i> 'climbing'
<i>as-ten-ér</i>	'abstain'	<i>ten-ére</i> 'hold'; cf. <i>as-ten-sione</i> 'abstention'
<i>av-val-ér</i>	'avail oneself'	cf. <i>val-ére</i> 'have influence, be valid'
<i>av-ved-ér</i>	'become aware'	cf. <i>ved-ére</i> 'see, sight'
<i>genu-flett-er</i>	'kneel'	cf. <i>gino-cchio</i> 'knee' + <i>flett-ere</i> 'bend'
<i>im-padron-ir</i>	'seize, master'	<i>padron-e</i> 'master'
<i>im-possess-ar</i>	'seize, master'	<i>possess-o</i> 'possession'
<i>in-ginocchi-ar</i>	'kneel (down)'	<i>ginocchi-o</i> 'knee'
<i>lagn-ar</i>	'complain, moan'	<i>lagn-a</i> 'whine'
<i>r-ab-bui-ar</i>	'darken'	<i>bui-o</i> 'dark'
<i>ri-fugi-ar</i>	'take refuge'	cf. <i>ri-fugi-o</i> 'refuge'; cf. <i>fugg-ire</i> 'flee'
<i>s-capp-ell-ar</i>	'tip one's hat'	<i>capp-a</i> 'cape'; cf. <i>capp-ello</i> 'hat'
<i>vergogn-ar</i>	'be ashamed'	<i>vergogn-a</i> 'shame'

* The infinitive is the usual citation form. Infinitives that are not followed in discourse by a clitic (rare for these particular verbs) end in *-e*; e.g., *inginocchiarsi* but *la fa inginocchiare*. Orthography does not distinguish stressed *-ér* (cf. Latin second conjugation) from unstressed *-er* (cf. Latin third conjugation). Morphological divisions indicated here (-) are not necessarily definitive but are those relevant to this discussion.

- (8.9) All'idea che Mussolini fosse davvero sul punto d'*impadronirsene*, il Poeta abbandonò il suo atteggiamento di oracolo e scese in lizza. (MI 155)

At the idea that Mussolini might truly be on the point of *seizing* him [i.e., making *himself* (*si-*) *master* of him], the Poet abandoned his oracular high ground and came down to the tilting ground.

D'Annunzio's fear is that Mussolini will get himself (*si-*) into (*in-*) the position to be 'master' (*padrone*) of D'Annunzio. The semantics is in this way almost transparent.

What is perhaps less transparent is the reason for the virtual absence in contemporary Italian of the transitive counterpart, **impadronirlo* ('make him master'). Yet certainly at least the rarity of that construction will be expected: to become master is to exercise absolute control, while to be made master by someone else is to exercise relatively less control and so in fact not to be quite the *padrone* after all. By contrast, a control ranking of two participants is quite logical in the case of enslavement: one makes someone else a slave by virtue of one's control over him.

Indeed, Italian has a transitive verb for that very situation: *asservire* (*ad* ‘to’ + *servo* ‘slave’), so *l’asservirono* ‘they enslaved him.’

The semantic calculus need not always be so literal; many examples are clearly metaphorical. The reflexive verb *accanir* is made up of the prefix *ad* ‘to’ plus the root *can-* ‘dog’ and is glossed as ‘persist, work doggedly.’ Example (8.10):

- (8.10) Era mio padre che *si accaniva* piú di tutti. Se io cercavo di interessarlo ai lavori che avevo fatti o a quelli che avevo in animo di fare, non rispondeva, o rispondeva appena. Non cambiava, lui. Appena finito di mangiare prendeva il suo berretto e usciva. (BB 187)

My father was the one that *persisted* [i.e., made *himself* (*si-*) *dogged*] more than anyone. If I tried to interest him in the work I had done or in what I had in mind to do, he didn’t respond, or hardly responded. He didn’t change, that man. As soon as he finished eating, he took his cap and went out.

The man was behaving stubbornly, as dogs can do. He was turning himself into a certain type, and the implication is that he could have done otherwise; he controlled his own transition. One can readily see that it would be difficult to imagine a context in which someone makes someone else behave so stubbornly, contrary to that person’s volition; hence the absence of transitive **accanirlo*. While one person can hardly turn another into a stubborn dog, one can turn something into something like a stone, and Italian has a transitive verb to the purpose: *impietrire* (*in* ‘into’ + *pietra* ‘stone’).

Such lexical pairs help to make clear the fact that the systematic opposition between *si-* and *l+-* is operative even when other elements in the context (e.g., the stems *padron-* ‘master’ and *can-* ‘dog’) make *l+-* effectively inapplicable.

There is a much smaller set of inherently reflexive verbs in which the message appears to be not that the participant exercises high control over himself (i.e., active reflexive) but that the participant does not even exercise high control (i.e., passive or middle voice).

Chief among these in the present data collection, and always with co-referential clitic, is the very common *accorgersi* ‘notice, become aware of.’ This verb is unusual among the 80 in at least one other way: its stem, *corg* (phonetically [korg] or [korgǽ]), is not productive; consequently, the quasi-compositional semantic analysis sketched out above cannot be so straightforward.¹¹ However, the root does appear in a transitive verb, *scorgere*, glossed ‘perceive, discern.’ It will be useful to compare these, each in its context.

11. The stem derives from the Latin *corrġgere* ‘make straight’; possibly one can see a conceptual relation between ‘being made aware’ and ‘being set straight in regards to’ something.

Example (8.11) is representative of *accorgersi*. A thirteen-year-old boy has just learned that his older sister is romantically involved.

(8.11) – Ma non capisci che gli voglio bene?

– Vai via, – dissi di nuovo, rabbiosamente, ed essa se ne andò.

Io non volevo capire niente. Non avevo mai pensato che lei potesse essere di un uomo, lei che tante volte mi aveva detto che saremmo stati insieme, sempre, e che aveva la bocca e gli occhi puri di una bambina. Faceva male al cuore *accorgersi* così all'improvviso che la nostra fanciullezza era finita, che eravamo cresciuti fino a diventare uomo e donna... (BB 123–124)

“But don't you understand that I love him?”

“Go away!” I said again, angrily, and she went away.

I didn't want to understand anything. I had never thought that she could belong to a man, she who so many times had said to me that we would be together, always, and who had the mouth and the clear eyes of a child. It wounded the heart to *become aware* (*si-*) so suddenly that our childhood was over, that we had grown up to be a man and a woman...

The sister's revelation catches the boy off guard; he had been unprepared to see the truth about her. He is not terribly in control of things.

In the following example, (8.12), of transitive *scorgere*, the same boy, living in a small mountain town sometime pre-1945, describes an event that interrupts a quiet afternoon of communal laundering at the village fountain. Here *scorgere* appears with the LOW Control accusative *la-* and with *si-* in the order *la si*, a combination which (Chapter 4) signals HIGH Degree of Control for the generalized impersonal referent of *si-*.

(8.12) L'automotrice del pomeriggio arrivò mentre noi eravamo alla fontana. La si sentì ancora da lontano correre nella valle e poi fermarsi a Vico, che è la frazione piú bassa del nostro paese, vicino al torrente. Ripartí quasi subito, e dopo poco *la si scorse* che aveva già fatto la grande curva del ponte e tagliava il pendio dell'altro versante della valle. Era una piccola vettura color alluminio...

(BB 9)

The afternoon train arrived while we were at the fountain. One heard it still far away running in the valley and then stop at Vico, which is the lowest section of our town, near the torrent. It left almost immediately, and after a little while *one* (*si-*) *saw it* (*la-*), having already made the great curve of the bridge and crossing the slope of the other side of the valley. It was a little aluminum-colored car....

The contrast in the relative Degree of Control exercised by the two grammatical subjects in (8.11) and (8.12) is clear. The boy who 'becomes aware' (*accorgersi*) of his sister's sexuality is surprised, jolted into awareness by something that happens

to him. The context of an external stimulus that provokes awareness is a general feature of examples of *accorgersi*. By contrast, those who ‘perceive’ (*scorgere*) the approaching train attentively (HIGH Control) watch the object, having first been alerted to its arrival by its sound. The effect of the co-referential clitic with *accorgersi*, then, is to suggest that the Focus-Control interlock is being subverted, the main participant being not an agent but instead exercising less control than an agent would. This situation is quite comparable to examples we have seen of *si-* with other verbs; specifically, compare Examples (7A4), the crowd ‘opening’ to make way for the brigand, and (7C5), the monk ‘turning’ in response to a voice.

The supposedly inherently reflexive verbs of Italian yield to the same treatment as verbs that occur less exclusively with co-referential clitic. The clitic on these verbs, as with other verbs, serves to allow the writer to opt out of the ranking of Degree of Control, with the principal participant playing something other than a strictly high-control role. The only thing special about these verbs is that their semantic content makes them especially suited to such a grammatical maneuver.

Number and gender with *si* used impersonally

The preceding chapters have offered a hypothesis and analysis to account for the distribution of *si-* in authentic discourse. This chapter and the next deal with peripheral but related problems. These problems would each require its own separate analysis, but to omit them entirely from this study would leave many readers unsatisfied if they are at all familiar with Italian usage or with traditional grammatical treatments of Italian.

A. An apparent problem

When *si-* has the effect of a *generalized impersonal* subject, with no particular sexed referent and no particular number of referents being assigned Participant Focus (Chapter 2), then what grammatical Number should be signaled on the verb? When there is a predicate adjective, what should its grammatical Number be? Its grammatical Gender? The problem is striking in examples such as (9.1) and (9.2):

- (9.1) Come *si è pazienti e ignari* quando
 how (si-) is-SG patient-PL and ignorant-M-PL when
si è molto giovani (MR 28)
 (si-) is-SG very young-PL

How (si-) is patient and ignorant when (si-) is very young¹
 ‘How patient and ignorant we are when we are very young!’ (Holland 19)

- (9.2) Alla mattina *si è contenti se ci si lava i denti*²
 in-the morning (si-) is-SG happy-M-PL if ci (si-) wash-SG the teeth
 ‘In the morning, one (si-) is happy if one (si-) brushes one’s teeth’³

1. In this chapter, no gloss, such as ‘one’ or ‘you’ or ‘we’ or ‘they’, is given for *si-*, so as not to prejudice the question of grammatical Number on the verb or participle.

2. <https://twitter.com/bioastracos/status/288379440680013824>.

3. See Chapter 10 on the combination *ci si*.

In a nutshell, one could say that, with an impersonal *si*- construction, the verb is singular and the predicate adjective is masculine plural (Lepschy and Lepschy 1988: 223–225).⁴ How can this anomaly be accounted for?

It would be mistaken to think that the anomaly in (9.1) and (9.2) is the plural adjective and to take the singular verb for granted. In fact, the situation involves the status of grammatical Number on three distinct elements: *si*-, a finite verb, and a predicate nominative. The three elements exhibit three different possibilities for the encoding of Number: *si*- does not encode grammatical Number at all, one way or the other. The finite verb is grammatically singular. And the predicate nominative is grammatically plural. There are three facts, not one anomaly, concerning grammatical Number. There are also three facts concerning grammatical Gender: *si*- does not encode Gender, the finite verb does not encode Gender, and the predicate nominative is grammatically MASCULINE. Consider first the problem of verb Number and then the problem of Number and Gender in the predicate nominative.

B. Verb number in general

Syntactic agreement requires its own extensive treatment, and that is beyond the scope of this study. Reid (2011) offers an analysis of subject and verb Number in English that calls into question the very status of syntactic agreement as a linguistic reality and instead treats subject and verb Number as each being meaningful, amenable to choice, and useful for the communication of both straightforward and nuanced messages. Contini-Morava (2011) offers a meta-theoretical defense of that position. That position will be adopted here, since in Italian too the signaling of grammatical Number is not mechanical.

In Italian as in English, a finite verb does not always agree in Number with its grammatical subject. As in English, a singular verb can suggest that a compound subject should be conceptualized as effectively one entity. Example (3.5) is repeated as (9.3).

- (9.3) Avevamo tutto ciò che ci occorreva, il pane e il vino e l'olio. Dalle travi annerite della nostra cucina pendevano formaggi e salsicce e grosse fette di lardo. Tutto questo *dava* la nostra terra e il nostro lavoro. (BB 98)

4. Cordin (1991: 106, 109–110) calls the construction 'semantically plural' on account of the 'agreement phenomena,' evidently referring there to the plural predicate adjective or participle, not the singular verb. She does then describe more fully the discord of grammatical number involving the verb and the participle, still referring, however, to 'agreement' and not offering an explanation.

We had everything we needed: bread and wine and oil. From the blackened beams of our kitchen hung cheeses and sausages and big slices of lard. Our land and our work *yielded*-SG all this.

The verb *dava* is singular, while the grammatical subject is compound. (Keep in mind that word order in Italian is “freer,” so to speak, than in English, and OVS order is not particularly uncommon.) In other words, ‘our land and our work on our land, taken together, yielded these benefits.’

The same sort of reconceptualization prompted by a mismatch of number can obtain when *si-* is present in what is traditionally categorized as a passive voice, and this in spite of the rule that “There is agreement in number between the verb and the subject of the passive” (Lepschy & Lepschy 1988: 223). In Chapter 1, we saw the rule illustrated with constructed examples out of context:

<i>Si vede la luna di notte.</i>	<i>Si vedono le stelle di notte.</i>
(<i>Si-</i>) see-SG the moon of night	(<i>Si-</i>) see-PL the stars of night.
‘The moon is seen at night.’	‘The stars are seen at night.’

Singular *vede* ‘sees’ agrees with singular *luna* ‘moon,’ and plural *vedono* ‘see’ agrees with plural *stelle* ‘stars.’ In authentic discourse, the situation is sometimes otherwise. In (9.4), the narrator tells how two clumsy boys tried to befriend an attractive classmate and then resented his rejection of them:

- (9.4) Guido non aveva mostrato il minimo interesse, si era svincolato dopo poche frasi senza cercare preteste; l’attrazione di Ablondi e Farvo si era trasformata in risentimento. Lo guardavano da lontano con i loro occhi miopi, dove *si mescolava* ostilità ragionata e diffidenza fisica. (DD 15)

Guido had shown minimal interest, had broken away after a few sentences without trying to pretend; Ablondi and Farvo’s attraction had turned into resentment. They looked at him from afar with their myopic eyes, where considered hostility and physical distrust *was*-SG mixed.

The boys’ eyes evidenced a mixture of the two emotions simultaneously; ONE look characterized the eyes.

Often, a reconceptualization of the subject, prompted by verb Number, will be supported then by a predicate nominative. That is, verbs in Italian often, rather than reflecting the Number of the grammatical subject, anticipate that of a predicate nominative.

- (9.5) In queste tragiche congiunture, Mastro Pietrochiodo aveva di molto perfezionato la sua arte del costruire forche.... Ma un cruccio pungeva sempre il cuore del bastaio. Ciò che lui costruiva *erano* patiboli per gli innocenti. (CV 43)

In these tragic circumstances, Master Pietrochiodo had quite perfected his art of building gallows.... But a worry always pricked at the saddle-maker's heart. What [lit., that-SG which] he was building *were-PL* scaffolds-*PL* for the innocent.

The grammatical subject *ciò* 'that' is singular. Yet the verb *erano* 'were' has the same Number – plural – as the predicate nominative *patiboli* 'scaffolds'.⁵

In general in Italian, the Number of the subject and the Number of the verb are not always the same; rather, each is meaningful.

C. Verb number with impersonal *si*

Si- does not encode Number; its referent can be one, more than one, or indeterminate. The question then naturally arises: When *si-* is the only participant reference in a given event (and thus when the interpretation is that the Focus is on a generalized impersonal), what is going to be the grammatical Number of the finite verb, singular or plural?

As a matter of fact, the number of the verb in such examples is singular, even when there is no adjective, and whether the verb is existential (9.1 and 9.2 above, 9.6 below) or substantive (9.7 below, = 2.2).

- (9.6) “... Quando *si* è con lui... il mondo appare piú buffo
 “... when (*si-*) *is*-SG with him... the world appears more droll
 di come appaia sempre...” (LG 97)
 than appear ever...”

“... When one (*si-*) *is* with him... the world seems more droll than it ever does...”

- (9.7) *Si sa* bene che i ricchi non sono molto splendidi in
 (*Si-*) *know*-SG well that the rich not are very magnificent in
 fatto di dar via denari (BB 36)
 matter of give away money

‘It (*Si-*) *is* well known that the rich are not very magnificent in the matter of giving away money’

5. Contrast this example: «Ecco, quella nuvola è i turchi...» “Look, that cloud *is*-SG the Turks...” (CV 24), in which Focus is more on the faraway cloud, which is actually seen, than on the invisible men kicking up the dust. Any differences with English in regard to verb Number with subjects and predicate nominatives may well be due to the existence in English of a word-order signal; see Diver’s analysis summarized in Reid (2006:22–23).

And the verb number is also singular even when there is a plural adjective that is not logically a predicate adjective:

- (9.8) Qualcosa non andava proprio: *si viveva tutti* come in un
 something not went really: (*si-*) *lived-SG all-M-PL* as in a
 incubo (RS 33)
 nightmare
 ‘Something was not working, really: everybody (*si-*) was living as if in a nightmare’

It is this general fact of singular verb with *si-* used impersonally that must be justified. Reid’s (1991, 2011) analyses of Number in English can be used to suggest a justification for the use of singular verb with *si-* used impersonally.

The gist of the proposal here is that, as it affects interpretation, the singular verb discourages the “enumeration” that a plural verb requires, discourages the establishment of “discrete boundaries” between entities in question (Reid 1991:77). In a prototypical singular, such as *il ragazzo sa* ‘the boy knows,’ the Focus is entirely upon one individual, and so no enumeration is required – no conceptual movement from point to point. No discrete boundaries enter into the picture. By contrast, in a prototypical plural, such as *i ragazzi sanno* ‘the boys know,’ the interpreter must conceptually leap across discrete boundaries separating individual boys, enumerating boys beyond oneness. The boys – the loci of the ‘knowing’ – are “countable.” With a “collective,” boundaries are ignored, treated as if they did not exist, so in *la facoltà è internazionale* ‘the faculty is international,’ boundaries among individual professors are ignored for the sake of focusing on the ‘faculty’ as a whole. With a so-called “mass noun,” too, no enumeration is required; no boundaries between individuals are crossed. So in *l’acqua è pura* ‘the water is pure,’ any boundaries internal to the water, such as its molecules, are irrelevant, and no boundaries between different bodies of water enter into the picture.

In a semantic substance that he calls “Number of the Third Person Entity in Focus,” Reid’s technical grammatical *meaning* for the English singular verb form is ONE. The other meaning in that system is MORE THAN ONE. His argument is that the meaning ONE, in opposition to the meaning MORE THAN ONE, discourages enumeration.

While the same hypothesis might work for the Italian verb, it would have to be extended to cover the case of *si-* used impersonally; one would have to show that the meaning ONE is appropriate for such examples. Instead, the position taken here is that in Italian the Number meaning of the singular verb is actually DO NOT ENUMERATE, and the meaning of the plural verb is ENUMERATE. (Either hypothesis here would be provisional for Italian, and the argumentation used will be the same, except that the rationale is more closely tied to the meaning if the meaning is DO NOT ENUMERATE than if it is ONE.)

Example (9.6) above is an excerpt from the Prince of Salina's extolling of the virtues of his favorite nephew (*lui*) to the commoner who is in love with the nephew. The effect of *si- è* is this: Number and Sex are irrelevant in identifying who might be with the nephew and so enjoy his company. It is not necessary to enumerate or identify these persons. Anybody, everybody would enjoy his company. The nephew is just generally charming. And there is support throughout the book for this opinion: The Prince's son is jealous of his cousin, and the commoner who is in love with him is uncommonly beautiful.

In (9.7) above, the adolescent narrator, a farm boy, doubts that an older rich girl will follow through and actually give him money she has promised him for running an errand for her. The effect of *si sa* is this: Number and Sex are irrelevant in identifying who 'knows' about the rich, and it is not necessary to enumerate who knows: Anybody knows, everybody knows. By the time of this narration, the boy has witnessed firsthand how all the poor people in his area had felt the 'indifference' of the rich (BB 129–130).

In (9.8) above, a soldier is describing the tension that everyone felt during war. Though there were many men (*tutti-PL*), each – every one – 'was-SG living' his own nightmare.

Back in (9.1) and (9.2), repeated as (9.9) and (9.10), below, the message being communicated must be something like: Do not look for any particular individual or individuals to fit the bill; whoever fits, fits; it doesn't matter who or how many. The presence of a singular verb is commensurate with the general pattern.

- (9.9) Come *si è pazienti e ignari* quando *si è* molto giovani.
 how (*si-*) is-SG patient-PL and ignorant-M-PL when (*si-*) is-SG very young-PL
 How (*si-*) is patient and ignorant when (*si-*) is very young (MR 28)
 'How patient and ignorant we are when we are very young!' (Holland 19)

- (9.10) Alla mattina *si è contenti* se ci si lava i denti
 in-the morning (*si-*) is happy-M-PL if (*si-*) washes one's teeth
 'In the morning, one (*si-*) is happy if (*si-*) one brushes one's teeth'

Everyone who is very young is patient and ignorant, or so thinks the narrator, as, looking back, she sees herself at that age. Anyone who brushes his teeth in the morning is happy. A signal that means DO NOT ENUMERATE is appropriate for reference to an event involving an unspecifiable number of people.

In this volume, in a heuristic effort to minimize ambiguity, examples of *si-* with only one participant who is human (Chapter 2 on "impersonals"; e.g., 'one goes') have been mostly separated from examples of *si-* with an inanimate participant (Chapter 5 on "passives"; e.g., 'a bell was broken'). This separation recalls – but is more transparent than – the traditional intransitive-transitive distinction. In the

literature of the field, however, that separation is definitely not insisted upon, and one finds discussion of “impersonal *si* constructions (ISCs) with transitive verbs,” a discussion that systematically blends the impersonal and the passive, even while accepting those categories. In such constructions, both verb numbers – singular and plural – are attested.

Taking the view (in line with “recent syntactic theory”) that “semantic structure is reflected in the syntax” (p. 66) – to which contrast the longstanding autonomy hypothesis in formal linguistics” – D’Alessandro (2004) proposes that, with such “impersonal *si* constructions” of transitive verbs, the grammatical number of the verb reflects two semantic distinctions of *Aktionsart*, or “aspectual class.” *Accomplishments* are defined as “events with duration and an obligatory temporal endpoint” (such as ‘paint a picture’). *Activities* are defined as “events with internal change and duration, but no necessary temporal endpoint” (such as ‘run’) (p. 63).⁶ Using a battery of syntactic tests on constructed sentences in isolation, combined with her intuition on those sentences, D’Alessandro (2004) proposes that, with such “impersonal *si* constructions”, when the verb shows “agreement” with the “direct object,” the verb represents an *accomplishment*; when the verb does not agree with the direct object, the verb represents an *activity*. For example, the sentence with agreement:

In Italia *si* mangiano-*PL* gli-*PL* spaghetti-*PL*
‘In Italy people eat spaghetti’

would represent an *accomplishment* (presumably, a finite amount of spaghetti is fully eaten up), while the sentence without agreement:

In Italia *si* mangia-*SG* spaghetti-*PL*
‘In Italy people eat spaghetti’

would represent an *activity* (perhaps a recurring cultural practice) (pp. 61–63).

D’Alessandro (2004: 62) reasons correctly that such a pattern would not be “imputable to any special property of *si*.” Nor, however, does it turn out to have anything to do with aspectual class.

Two problems with D’Alessandro’s claim will already be familiar to the present reader: One, the syntactic phenomenon of agreement itself is highly questionable (this chapter §B). Two, the validation or invalidation of D’Alessandro’s claim would require the acceptance of the impersonal-passive distinction (in order to recognize an impersonal of a transitive verb), and that distinction cannot be maintained

6. The other two aspects of *Aktionsart* are *states* and *achievements*.

(Chapter 5§B). Furthermore, however – even conceding the first two problems for the sake of the argument – the claim does not stand up to attested usage.⁷

Consider the following example, (9.11), of *si-* with a plural verb presumably showing agreement with a plural direct object. This is from the foreword to a book.

(9.11) Alle confidenze di un uomo che suppongo di aver incontrato in una taverna di Porto Pim devo ... la storia che conclude il volume. Non escludo di averla modificata con le aggiunte e le ragioni proprie della presunzione di chi crede di trarre dalla storia di una vita il senso di una vita. Forse costituirà un'attenuante confessare che in quel locale *si consumavano bevande alcoliche* in abbondanza e che mi parve indelicato sottrarmi alla consuetudine vigente. (TD 10–11).

To the confidences of a man that I suppose I met in a tavern in Porto Pim I owe ... the story that concludes the volume. I do not deny having changed it with the additions and the accounts peculiar to the presumptuousness of someone who believes he is extracting the sense of a life from the story of a life. Perhaps it will count as an extenuating circumstance to confess that in that bar *alcoholic beverages* (PL) *were (si) consumed* (PL) in abundance and that it seemed rude for me to exempt myself from the prevailing custom.

Clearly, in this context, though there is a plural verb (*consumavano*) and a plural noun that would be parsed as its direct object (*bevande alcoliche*), the action does not have “an obligatory temporal endpoint.” It would be absurd to imagine that the author and his bar friend consumed all the alcohol on the premises. Indeed, the writer claims – tongue no doubt in cheek – that over-drinking was a ‘custom’ in that place. This consumption is not an *accomplishment* as defined in *Aktionsart* but an *activity*.

Consider now the opposing – and “far less common” (Lepschy and Lepschy 1988: 225) – case represented by the following example, (9.12): a singular verb not showing agreement with a plural noun in an impersonal *si-* construction with a transitive verb.

(9.12) questa applicazione ti aiuta in diversi settori chiave nell'apprendimento della lingua inglese pronunciation.1. si vedrà e ascoltare la pronuncia di ogni suono usato per fare parole complete e come *si pronuncia le parole complete*.⁸

7. Only plurals test the proposal, since singular verb is the “default” (p. 62).

8. <http://www.androidapps.biz/app/com.microphonics.proncoachwordlistsfree/it>, accessed Aug. 2, 2016.

‘This application helps you in several key areas in the pronunciation of the English language. 1. One sees and [can] hear the pronunciation of every sound used in order to produce complete words and how (*si-*) pronounces (SG) the complete words (PL).’

Obviously, the pronunciation of ‘complete words’ has a “necessary temporal end-point,” and so this is not an *activity* as defined but an *accomplishment*.

Stefanini (1983: 109) has a more plausible, if impressionistic, view: that, with the impersonal of a transitive, the elimination of an overt subject ‘intensifies the relationship’ between verb and object. This ‘slipping’ towards the passive is reflected in the agreement of the verb with the logical object.

In light of everything seen so far in this study, one can only say that a systematic study of verb number in Italian is much to be desired. That would include both examples with *si-* and examples without *si-*. Meanwhile, as we have seen, data in the present study suggest that the verb ending is a signal as to whether (PL) or not (SG) to ENUMERATE the third-person participant in CENTRAL Focus. When there is only a generalized impersonal human participant (Chapter 2), there is no one to enumerate: *Finalmente si giunge alla meta* ‘At last, one arrives at the destination’ (cf. Example 2.17). When Focus is instead on MORE THAN ONE inanimate thing (Chapter 5), there is something to enumerate: *Si incontrano strani scheletri* ‘Strange skeletons are encountered’ (Example 5.2). Even when mentioning such multiple beings, however, language-users retain the expressive potential to relegate those inanimates out of Focus and to place CENTRAL FOCUS instead on whatever innumerable human or humans – MALE or FEMALE – might engage in the activity. Thus Example (9.13), from a website promoting tourism:

(9.13) Nel pomeriggio *si continua la nostra esplorazione* del centro città e *si visita numerosi monumenti* di epoca bizantina.⁹

‘In the afternoon, we (*si-*) continue (SG) our exploration (SG) of the center city and (*si-*) visit (SG) many monuments (PL) of the Byzantine period.’

With impersonal *si-*, verb Number may or may not coincide with what is logically a direct object. Verb Number is a separate study from *si-*.

9. <http://global.mazi.travel/9AF18F3A.it.aspx>, accessed Aug. 2, 2016.

D. Number of predicate nominative with impersonal *si*

Before a survey of Number, and then of Gender, in the predicate nominatives of impersonal *si*- (recall *pazienti, ignari, giovani, contenti, sinceri, senatori*), a major caveat is in order: The problem lies far beyond the scope of this book.

Lepschy and Lepschy (1988: 211, 224–225) treat number and gender in *si*-constructions (including personal and impersonal; passive and reflexive; adjective, noun, and participle; predicate adjectives and compound tenses with *essere*). That descriptive treatment would have been much simpler if it had stated outright that *every* combination of verb number, predicate number, and predicate gender is attested with *si*-. That, in fact, is the logical and practical conclusion of a full application of the rules they offer.¹⁰ (They provide examples of many but not all of the combinations.) Now granted, one might – as they do – by admitting unconstrained exceptions and accepting great complexity, attempt to use those attested facts in a defense of the traditional categories. However, in view of the data in the preceding chapters, one is now disinclined to defend those categories. Therefore, in light of the extent of the problem, it must unfortunately be left to some other analysis to account fully for verb Number and participle Number and Gender.

It would be regrettable, however, were this book to have nothing to offer with respect to these matters insofar as they relate to *si*-. The goal here has been to account for the observed distribution of *si*-. The goal of this analysis is not to account for verb Number or for participle Number or Gender. The most that can be offered, therefore, is observations and remarks concerning how the examples of *si*- in the present collection relate to these problems and inform the issues. We look at just three types: The routine combination, seen so far in this chapter, of *si*- plus singular verb plus masculine plural predicate nominative (adjective, participle, or noun); an interesting deviation from that pattern that achieves a particular nuance; and then (in §G) one authentic example of a combination that wreaks havoc upon rules of agreement.

Just as the presence of a singular verb in examples like (9.9) and (9.10) is part of a general pattern, so too the presence of a plural adjective as the predicate nominative is part of a general pattern, not an identifying property of a peculiar *si*- construction. It is generally the case that a predicate nominative – whether adjective or noun – will be plural when the reference is general enough to include multiple

10. There are mathematically 32 possibilities ($2 \times 4 \times 4$: SG/PL copula; SG/PL and M/F participle or adjective; SG/PL and M/F passive subject / personal object noun), but 4 of these are morphologically indistinguishable from 4 others in the set, so effectively 28 possibilities, all attested, according to the statements in the treatment.

individuals, even absent *si-*. In fact, *any* predicate – even a direct object – will be plural when the reference is general enough.

In (9.14) below, Lampedusa's narrator comments upon the feelings of the Prince of Salina vis-à-vis the city of Palermo in the days after its takeover by Garibaldi at the start of the Risorgimento. The Prince, happy to leave Palermo for his country house, views the raucous behavior of the common people of the city as an instance of 'ill breeding.'

(9.14) Per esser *sinceri*, lo spettacolo che aveva offerto Palermo negli ultimi tre mesi lo aveva un po' nauseato (LG 36)

'To be *honest-M-PL*, the spectacle that Palermo had offered the past three months had somewhat sickened him.'

The effect of plural *sinceri* is, politely, to de-personalize the haughty comment and to imply that all commentators would impute the same reaction to the Prince. It is not so much that the narrator himself, as a person, is being honest as that the statement is incontestable for all 'honest' observers. The narrator, who never figures as a character in Lampedusa's novel, downplays his own importance.¹¹

Contrast that with the title of a 2004 film, *Se devo essere sincera*, with its feminine singular *sincera*. Here, *sincera* refers to the female protagonist. According to a summary of the plot,¹² a man, Renzo, asks his wife, Adelaide, the main character, whether there has been any serious relationship between her and a particular man.

(9.15) Adelaide sta per rispondere (da qui il *Se devo essere sincera* del titolo), ma Renzo la interrompe, dicendo di preferire una bugia

'Adelaide is about to reply (hence the title *If I Have to Be Honest-F-SG*), but Renzo interrupts her, saying he prefers a lie.'

It matters whether or not Adelaide, personally, is honest.

What applies to adjectives applies to nouns. In (9.16), just after the Risorgimento, a representative of the government of the newly unified Italy pays a courtesy visit to the Prince of Salina to ask him to serve as senator. The Prince expresses skepticism.

11. A similar example has been seen: Example (1.6), with the impersonal phrase *esser certi* 'to be sure-PL' (LG 9). There, the same narrator was musing on the importance of anyone in military service being 'sure' for whom he is dying. Many soldiers must be 'sure.'

12. http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Se_devo_essere_sincera, accessed Feb. 3, 2014.

- (9.16) “... mi spieghi un po’ che cosa è veramente essere *senatori*...” (LG 120)
 “... me explain a bit what thing it-is truly to-be *senators-PL*...”
 “... explain to me a bit what it truly is to be a senator...”
 “... do explain what being a Senator means...” (Colq. 180)

The infinitive phrase *essere senatori* is impersonal in reference; the Prince is asking an abstract question about senatorship, not a specific one about his own potential role: Just what do senators do? The new government will presumably include multiple ‘senators.’ Thus, the reference is general enough to include multiple individuals.¹³

It being irrelevant whether *si-* is present or not, the same observation – a plural predicate nominative – is made when *si-* is present, as in routine instances of the generalized impersonal such as (9.9) and (9.10), above.

The following, (9.17), is an exceptional example – the nuanced one promised above – with impersonal *si-* and predicate adjectives that are not plural but *singular*. The first speaker, Marta, the sister of a retired priest who taught school, is described as looking even older than her actual age, and pathetic and sad. The second speaker, Concettino, is a man in his early thirties, a former student of the priest, and a guest in their house.

- (9.17) – Ognuno di noi riceve la vita in regalo, e che strano regalo. Esso impoverisce e intristisce se conservato gelosamente e avaramente; si arricchisce e abbellisce se è speso per gli altri...

...

– Non può succedere, osserva Concettino, che dando tutto agli altri, *si* resti *vuoto e povero* e si rinunzi a godere i doni che la vita ci ha affidato? (SP 21)

“Each one of us receives life as a gift, and what a strange gift! It impoverishes and withers if jealously and greedily guarded; it grows richer and beautifies if it is lived for others...”

...

“Can it not happen,” observed Concettino, “that in giving everything to others, (*si-*) remains *empty-M-SG* and *poor-M-SG* and (*si-*) refrains from enjoying the gifts that life has entrusted to us?”

Concettino objects to the general truth espoused by Marta. He tries to restrict the universality she claims, but without denying the claim entirely. His counterclaim might almost apply just to some poor ‘nice guy’ who comes in last; he might almost

13. Compare English “I’m *friends* with her,” placing oneself in a condition – friendship – that is experienced by many, or at least by the two individuals mentioned.

have used *uno* instead of *si*-. Yet the challenge to Marta is stronger than that; it applies to more than just some particular individual. Probably, Concettino doubts the truth of his host's statement and thinks that anybody (*si*-) who gives everything away is a fool, but, out of respect, he softens the challenge just a bit by retreating from plural to singular on 'empty' and 'poor.' Those descriptors might apply to somebody, even if not to everybody.¹⁴

Not only predicate nominatives but even direct objects will be plural when their reference is general enough to include multiple individuals. In Example (9.18) below, the same scene as (9.17) above, a thirty-something medical doctor defends conformity to the ways of the world, ostensibly supporting a cynical view of his friend Concettino who wears the uniform of the Fascist Italian army:

- (9.18) – Se poi l'adattamento si compie con riti e uniformi nuove, allora *si* cerca di convincere *se stessi* e il pubblico che ha avuto luogo una rivoluzione (SP 23)
 “If then the conforming is carried out with ceremonies and new uniforms, then *one* (*si*-) tries to convince *oneself* (*se stessi*-M-PL) and the public that a revolution has taken place.”

Disjunctive *se stessi*-PL 'oneself' is parsed as the direct object of *convincere*.

With generalized *si*- impersonals, neither the grammatical Number of the verb nor the grammatical Number of the predicate nominative is a special case.

To summarize: (1) *Si*- does not encode grammatical Number. (2) When *si*- is interpreted as a generalized impersonal, the grammatical Number of the finite verb signals the meaning DO NOT ENUMERATE, whether there is a predicate nominative or not. (3) The predicate is plural (MORE THAN ONE) whenever the point of the description is to include multiple individuals, whether *si*- is involved or not; it is singular (ONE) when the reference is to a single person. The question of the Number of the predicate nominative is independent of *si*-.

14. It may help as well that the *-o* ending on those two words avoids pointing directly at Marta as a woman, suggesting instead a reference to Concettino himself (see below on gender).

E. Gender of predicate nominative with impersonal *si*

As for the grammatical Gender of the predicate nominative, only brief remarks will be offered, especially in light of the complexity attested above.

First of all, some lexical items in Italian – principally descendants of the Latin third declension – overtly distinguish only grammatical Number, not Gender. Thus:

<i>paziente</i>	<i>giovane</i>	<i>senatore</i>
'patient-SG'	'young-SG'	'senator'
<i>pazienti</i>	<i>giovani</i>	<i>senatori</i>
'patient-PL'	'young-PL'	'senators'

Others – principally descendants of the Latin first and second declensions – make distinctions in both grammatical Number and Gender. Thus:

<i>ignaro</i>	<i>contento</i>	<i>sincero</i>
'ignorant-M-SG'	'happy-M-SG'	'honest-M-SG'
<i>ignara</i>	<i>contenta</i>	<i>sincera</i>
'ignorant-F-SG'	'happy-F-SG'	'honest-F-SG'
<i>ignari</i>	<i>contenti</i>	<i>sinceri</i>
'ignorant-M-PL'	'happy-M-PL'	'honest-M-PL'
<i>ignare</i>	<i>contente</i>	<i>sincere</i>
'ignorant-F-PL'	'happy-F-PL'	'honest-F-PL'

What is misleadingly called the “masculine” gender – and even here has been treated, with all capital orthography, as if it were a bona fide grammatical meaning – ought perhaps better be thought of as the *generic* class, typically used when grammatical gender is unknown or mixed:

Chi è giovane, è *ignaro*.
Whoever is young, is *ignorant-M*

Lui e lei sono *contenti*.
He and she are *happy-M*

La casa e l' albero sono *vecchi, tutti e due*.
The house-F and the tree-M are *old-M, all-M* and two.

'Both the house and the tree are old.'

It is therefore not remarkable that the generic class would be appropriate for the most generalized impersonal reference, with *si*-. So *ignari* in (9.9), *contenti* in (9.10), and *sinceri* in (9.14).

F. Further on Number and Gender with *si* used impersonally

Examples like (9.9) and (9.10), which might appear to reflect a special *rule* for the formation of an “impersonal *si* construction,” are instead entirely consistent with more general patterns of usage. Such examples should not be treated as a special case but instead included in general analyses of grammatical Number and Gender in Italian.

Be that as it may, one cannot escape the impression that, in such examples, the grammar is having it both – or indeed three – ways, straddling the fence of grammatical Number. The writer is first signaling that grammatical Number is not needed (*si*-). But then, forced twice to choose what to do about grammatical Number,¹⁵ the writer first opts one way (DO NOT ENUMERATE) and then another (MORE THAN ONE). Those three choices, however, are not entirely contradictory. The first two choices, in fact, are quite compatible: Number is not needed, so DO NOT ENUMERATE; that is, do not cross boundaries between individuals and count beyond one. More specifically, in the first choice where reference to (typically) human beings is called for, *si*- signals that no particular Sex or Number of human beings is referred to. In the second choice, the verb, the question is, Enumeration or not of entities in Focus with respect to an event in time? The singular verb signals that loci of the event need not be enumerated, i.e., counted beyond one. Finally, the third choice has to do with the applicability of a descriptive term: Does it apply to ONE or to MORE THAN ONE? With a generalized impersonal reference, it applies to MORE THAN ONE; it is quite general.

Number, Sex, and Gender are not needed in this reference	DO NOT ENUMERATE entities in Focus for this event	Description applies to MORE THAN ONE
<i>si</i>	<i>è</i>	<i>contenti</i>

This type of impersonal – a generalized impersonal – is the kind of state of affairs in discourse that Reid (1991: 74–75) characterizes as a “spanned opposition”: the “given state of affairs may be described in more than one way with equal accuracy.”¹⁶ Yet the analysis does not stop with such a non-committal statement. Just as Reid (2011) goes on to account for the choice made in each instance (subject Number and verb Number in English), so here we must account for the choice made in each

15. The writer is “forced” to choose grammatical Number only if the writer chooses to employ all the grammatical machinery that is involved in the use of a finite verb (grammatical person, tense, mood)

16. García (1975: 162–163) also uses the concept of a spanned opposition.

instance. To state the challenge outright: If Number is not needed and can be mixed, then why do we not find all combinations?

Below is an analysis of the inferential chain that each combination would provoke.

- si è contento*¹⁷ Num/Sex/Gen are not needed in the reference; DO NOT ENUMERATE in-Focus entities for the event; the description applies to ONE
 → Statement is specific; an obvious referent has Control (cf. *gli*-).
 → ‘He is happy with himself’
- si sono contenti*¹⁸ Num/Sex/Gen are not needed in the reference; ENUMERATE in-Focus entities for the event; the description applies to MORE THAN ONE
 → Statement is specific; obvious referents have Control (*si*- not *-loro*).
 → ‘They are happy with themselves’
- si è contenti*¹⁹ Num/Sex/Gen are not needed in the reference; DO NOT ENUMERATE in-Focus entities for the event; the description applies to MORE THAN ONE
 → Statement is a generalized impersonal (*si*- not *egli*, etc.)
 → ‘One is happy’
- * *si sono contento* Num/Sex/Gen are not needed in the reference; ENUMERATE in-Focus entities for the event; the description applies to ONE
 → Statement seems uninterpretable; instructions are contradictory
 → ??? But see below!

In the typical impersonal *si è contenti*, the instructions are not incompatible. There may be a touch of cognitive dissonance in the instruction DO NOT ENUMERATE entities in Focus for the event and the instruction that the description *contenti* applies to MORE THAN ONE. However, a description may be applicable to more than one individual, yet, in a particular instance, there may be no need to identify and enumerate individuals. The generalized impersonal with singular verb and plural predicate nominative exhibits just such coherence.

The cognitive dissonance built into the resulting constellation of meanings achieves a particular communicative effect. The “crossed” (Reid 2011) grammatical numbers help to create a nuance not found in the other types of impersonals (such

17. allora si e' contento e soddisfatto e ti lascia finire di mangiare tranquilla (<http://lavocedeiconigli.forumfree.it/?t=62197174>, accessed Feb. 3, 2014)

18. Di conseguenza, molti italiani non si sono contenti con l'idea di divorzio (<http://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=%22si+sono+contenti%22&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>, accessed Feb. 3, 2014).

19. Example (9.2 = 9.10).

as with *uno* ‘one,’ *tu* ‘you-SG,’ *noi* ‘we’) or in personal references (such as with *egli* ‘he,’ *loro* ‘they’), in all of which grammatical Number is typically consistent. The crossed numbers of *si*- impersonals contribute to a “textual cohesion” (Halliday and Hasan 1976, appropriated by Reid 2011: 1127) with multiple parts of the discourse.

Fuller context for (9.9), above, will illustrate (Context is given here in translation). The narrator is recounting experiences from her life when she was a young woman:

I continued working as a model, even though Mama grumbled, because it seemed to her that I was earning too little money... It was a kind of continuous blackmail; and I understood then why many girls, continually bothered in such a way by disappointed and ambitious mothers, end up one day leaving home and giving themselves to the first man to come along just so as not to suffer that torment. Of course Mama acted this way because she loved me; but it was kind of like the love that some housewives feel for the hen that lays the eggs, and, if she does not lay them, they start palpating her, weighing her, and figuring out whether it isn't better for them to kill her.

The narrator is generalizing her own experience, to include ‘many girls.’ Now comes the passage with *si*-:

Come *si è pazienti e ignari* quando *si è molto giovani*. Io facevo allora una vita orribile e non me ne accorgevo. (MR 28)

How *si is-SG patient-PL* and *ignorant-M-PL* when *si is-SG very young-PL*. I was living a horrible life at that time and didn't know it.

Si- signals that grammatical Number and Gender are irrelevant; any young adult would feel this way with such a mother. Twice, singular *è* ‘is’ signals that the reader need NOT ENUMERATE the individuals to whom this statement applies; it could be anybody or everybody. The plurals *pazienti*, *ignari*, and *giovani* signal that these descriptors apply to MORE THAN ONE person, since surely there is not just one person who is ‘patient,’ ‘ignorant,’ and ‘young.’ And the generic grammatical gender of *ignari* – where a gender distinction is possible – suggests that the term would apply to both males and females. Thus, even when the speaker is a female, and when the jumping-off point, as it were, for the impersonal reference is one female (*io* ‘I’ here), and the relevance is somewhat limited to females (‘many girls’), even then one finds the same constellation of grammatical features, suggesting that no particular individual is intended, and the relevance is quite general.

G. Remarks on Number and Gender of participles with impersonal *si*

In the tradition, the distinction in grammatical Number of the participle with *si*-impersonals is taken as justifying a distinction between passive and active voice in compound tenses. In light of the enormous variety of Number and Gender with *si*- that is attested for participles, and in light of the doubt that has elsewhere been cast on the viability of the category “compound tenses” with forms of the copula as auxiliary (Huffman 1977, cf. Chapter 10 here), it would be ill-advised here to launch into a study of participles with *si*-. However, a few observations and remarks may be beneficial in any future analysis of those problems.

To a very large extent, participles function just like predicate adjectives; indeed, they are sometimes indistinguishable in interpretation. Example (9.19) below is typical. A fugitive has announced that he plans to return to his hometown.

- (9.19) – Ti prenderanno, l’ammonisce la Chelucci. Adesso vi sarà molta sorveglianza.
 – Il paese nel quale *s’è nati* è come la propria casa, spiega Spina. *Si è più conosciuti*, ma ci si sa anche meglio nascondere. (SP 376)

“They’ll take you,” warns Chelucci. “Now there’ll be a lot of surveillance.”

“The town where one (*si*-) *was*-SG *born*-M-PL is like one’s own house,” explains Spina. “One (*Si*-) *is*-SG more *known*-M-PL but one (*si*-) knows better how to hide (oneself).”

These are generalized impersonals (*si*-) like any others we have seen. It just so happens that one descriptive word in one predicate – the word describing all those unnamed humans who are in Focus but not enumerated, with *è* – is a participle of an *essere* verb: *nati* ‘born.’ Another, *conosciuti*, ‘known,’ is a participle of an *avere* verb. Anyone who ‘is’ native to (i.e., come-to-life in) a town ‘was’ of course ‘born’ there. And any fugitive hiding in his hometown is dangerously ‘known’ by many townfolk. Example (9.16) follows the usual pattern of *si*- plus singular finite copula plus masculine plural predicate adjective. It just so happens that these predicate adjectives are participles.

By contrast, consider Example (9.20), with alternative (~) translations as impersonal and passives:

- (9.20) Non sarebbe equo tacere che una frequentazione più assidua del Principe aveva avuto un certo effetto anche su Sedàra....

... Quando, poi, ebbe imparato a conoscere meglio Don Fabrizio ritrovò in lui sí la molezza e l’incapacità a difendersi che erano le caratteristiche del suo pre-formato nobile-pecora, ma in più una forza di attrazione ...; inoltre ancora una certa energia tendente verso l’astrazione ...; da questa energia astrattive egli rimase fortemente colpito benché gli si presentasse grezza e non ridicibile in parole come qui *si è tentato* di fare (LG 92–93)

It would not be fair to fail to mention that more continuous contact with the Prince had had a certain effect even on Sedàra...

... When, then, he had learned to know [Prince] Don Fabrizio better, [Sedàra] found in him, sure, the softness and inability to defend himself that were the characteristics of his pre-formed noble-sheep, but, moreover, a force of attraction ...; and as well, a certain energy tending towards abstraction ...; he was very much struck by this abstractive energy even though it presented itself to him whole and not reducible into words such as here *one has-SG attempted-M-SG* to do (i.e., impersonal)

~ ‘into words such as here *has been attempted*’ (i.e., passive)

What is in Focus is singular (*è*), and it matters not at all whether we gloss the example as impersonal or passive: the two amount to the same thing. If one has attempted to do something, then something has been attempted. In the tradition (e.g., Lepschy & Lepschy 1988: 224), the exceptional *-o* ending with an impersonal was used to justify the distinction between passive impersonals (as in 9.19, *si è più conosciuti* ‘one is more known’) and active perfect-tense impersonals (as here in 9.20, translated ‘one has attempted’). But actually the *-o* ending supports the interpretation of (9.20) not as impersonal but as passive, with the Focus-Control interlock subverted and Focus on some participant having less than high control: Focus not on the one who ‘attempts’ something but on an abstract idea: what is ‘attempted.’ Then the generic-gender singular *-o* ending on the participle is not exceptional but is in line with wider usage of that ending.

This foray into the problems of Number and Gender on verbs and participles with *si-* can end with a look at an example, (9.21), that thwarts any attempt to fashion a rule of agreement. The example is morphologically of the same type that, above, was admitted to be probably “uninterpretable,” with instructions given by the grammar that are “contradictory.” The passage comes from Berto’s novel *Il brigante*.

(9.21) Accadde che due o tre volte i poveri si riunirono e si lasciarono guidare fin nella piazza di Santo Stefano, dove sorgeva il palazzo del comune. E là si misero a gridare che avevano fame e volevano lavoro. E tutte le volte qualcuno si affacciò e disse loro parole qualsiasi, che bisognava avere pazienza, che la guerra era appena finita, che tra non molto le cose si sarebbero messe a posto da sole.

Tornavano alle loro case avviliti. Non avevano ottenuto niente, e *si erano sentita intorno l’indifferenza e l’ostilità* di quelli che non erano poveri. E tuttavia una cosa avevano acquistato, la certezza che tutto ciò era inutile, gridare e chiedere.... Così si cominciò a parlare dell’occupazione delle terre incolte.

(BB 129–130)

It happened that two or three times the poor (M PL) got together and were led to Piazza Santo Stefano, where the town hall stands. And there they took to shouting that they were hungry and wanted work. And every time someone came out and said just whatever words to them, that it was necessary to have patience, that the war had just ended, that in a little while things would get fixed on their own.

They returned home dejected (M PL). They had obtained nothing, and *they had felt around them the indifference and hostility* of those who are not poor. And yet they had won something: the certainty that all that was useless, shouting and asking... So began the talk about the occupation of idle farms.

Here is the gloss of the italicized passage:

si erano sentita intorno l' indifferenza e l' ostilità
 si were-3-PL felt-F-SG around the indifference-F-SG and the hostility-F-SG

Here, in a context of mixed or possibly all-male sex, is numberless, genderless *si-* with a plural copula, a feminine singular participle, and a feminine plural (compound) subject or direct object, depending on whether one takes this to be a passive or an active:

'the indifference and the hostility were (~had been) felt-F-SG around *si-*'
 ~ 'they had felt-F-SG around *si-* the indifference and the hostility'

In the first gloss, plural *erano* agrees with *l'indifferenza e l'ostilità*, and *si-* marks the passive voice. But then why is *sentita* singular? In the second gloss, plural *erano* agrees with *i poveri*, and *si-* is the dative plural reflexive. But again why is *sentita* feminine singular? Lepschy and Lepschy (1988: 211) say (unhelpfully) that in some examples the participle "agrees with either the subject or with the object," but here it agrees with neither.

Though anomalous, the example is not beyond reach, given the present hypothesis about the meaning of *si-*, an understanding that choices of Number are not mechanical but motivated, and a skepticism about compound tenses. The interpretation, based on the grammatical analysis offered in this study, goes like this: The passage places Focus over and over (by means of verb endings) on the plural 'poor,' both before and after the italicized example. The passage is about the poor and their acts of protest. The sentence with our example says that they, the poor (MORE THAN ONE), had obtained nothing concrete from those acts, and they were (MORE THAN ONE) NOW, as a result, in the condition of having felt (ONE f) a combined indifference (f) and hostility (f) all around them (*si-*), coming from people who were in a different condition, the condition of the un-poor. So they had won something after all, the knowledge that it is useless to ask anything of the well-off,

that they would have to take rather than ask. Such passages can no doubt eventually be fully parsed once the grammatical natures of all their parts are as fully understood as the grammatical nature of *si*- now is.

The problems of the verb and the participle await full analyses that extend way beyond – but that can be informed by – what we have learned about *si*-.

Other related matters

This chapter, like the previous chapter, concerns problems that are closely related to *si-* but are not, strictly speaking, part of the analysis of *si-* itself. To omit them from this book would leave many readers curious as to how they would be handled commensurately with the present hypothesis and so might make the hypothesis itself less convincing. Those problems are: (A) use of auxiliary *essere* with *si-*, even for verbs that routinely have *avere* as auxiliary; (B) the so-called impersonal reflexive construction *ci si*; and (C) the difference between what appear to be two different clitics, *si* and *se*. Also included in this chapter are (D) certain vexing properties of OUTER-Focus *ne-*, since these are very much related to the hypothesis of the system of Participant Focus (Chapter 3) but not directly to *si-* itself.

A. Auxiliaries *avere* and *essere* in compound tenses

The following passage (from Example 5.7, repeated here as 10.1) contains two instances, highlighted, of what the tradition calls “compound tenses,” verb tenses formed with an “auxiliary” verb and the participle of the “main” verb.¹ The first of these has the auxiliary in a form of *avere* (‘have’) and the second in a form of *essere* (‘be’). The point of view is that of Fabrizio, Prince of Salina.

(10.1) Ma il giardino ... esalava profumi untuosi, carnali e lievemente putridi....

Era un giardino per ciechi: la vista costantemente era offesa ma l’odorato poteva trarre da esso un piacere forte benché non delicato. Le rose Paul Neyron *le cui piantine aveva egli stesso acquistato* a Parigi erano degenerate: eccitate prima e rinfrollite dopo dai succhi vigorosi e indolenti della terra siciliana, arse dai lugli apocalittici, *si erano mutate* in una sorta di cavoli color carne, osceni, ma che distillavano un denso aroma quasi turpe che nessun allevatore francese avrebbe osate sperare. Il Principe se ne pose una sotto il naso e gli sembrò di odorare la coscia di una ballerina dell’Opera. (LG 8)

1. Plus one compound conditional: *avrebbe osate*.

But the garden ... exhaled cloying scents, fleshly, and slightly putrid....

It was a garden for the blind: the sight was constantly offended, but the sense of smell could take from it a pleasure strong if somewhat crude. The Paul Neyron roses, *whose cuttings he had* (aveva) *himself bought* in Paris, had degenerated; first stimulated and then enfeebled by the strong if languid pull of Sicilian earth, burned by apocalyptic Julies, they *had* (erano) *changed* (*si-*) into things like flesh-colored cabbages, obscene but which distilled a dense, almost indecent, scent which no French horticulturist would have dared hope for. The Prince put one under his nose and it seemed to him to be sniffing the thigh of a dancer from the Opera. (cf. Colq. 17–18)

While not entirely ignoring considerable variability and complexities, the tradition states the overall pattern quite clearly: “As a rule transitives take the auxiliary *avere*, intransitives *essere*”; and, as regards constructions with *si*, “The auxiliary actually used with a *si* construction [i.e., regardless of which auxiliary the verb would normally take] is always *essere*” (Lepschy and Lepschy 1988: 143, 223–224; cf. also Cordin 1991: 109). The statement having to do with transitives should be understood as relating more to a verb’s semantic potential rather than to an actual instance of its use (where a direct object may not be overtly present but *avere* would be used anyway).

The situation is not very different in French. Huffman (1977), rather than accepting the descriptive statements unexplained, proposes that the choice between the two auxiliaries in French “can be accounted for entirely by semantic factors.” Huffman proposes that, in French, all instances of forms of *être* (‘be,’ cf. It. *essere*), whether in context with a participle or not, are simply what they appear to be: forms of *être*, with their usual meaning, and that, on the other hand, instances of *avoir* (‘have,’ cf. It. *avere*) with participle are indeed signals of a meaning of Time, that is, a tense.

A full analysis of the auxiliaries and the participle in Italian cannot be undertaken here. To facilitate the task at hand, Huffman’s analysis for French is adopted and applied to Italian.² The assumption, then, is that the various forms of *essere* are just what they appear to be – forms of *essere* – and that, when these appear in context with a participle, it too is just what it appears to be. And so, in Example (10.1), all

2. To a large extent, the two grammars appear to work similarly in this regard. One striking difference is that, while French *être* ‘be,’ as main verb, has *avoir* for auxiliary, Italian *essere* ‘be’ is said to have *essere* for auxiliary: Fr. *Il a été un bon ami*, It. *Egli è stato un buon amico* ‘He has been a good friend.’ However, this traditional statement ignores the fact that the participle supposedly used in compound tenses of *essere* in Italian is actually the participle of a different verb, *stare* ‘stay, stand, live, be,’ and that verb is intransitive.

the following below, (a-d), are comparable in terms of the contribution of the forms of *essere*, whether they have a participle (b, c, d) or not (a), and whether they might be translated as compound tenses (c, d) or not (a, b). All of these, in other words, can be analyzed as straightforward instances of *essere*.

- | | |
|--|---|
| a. <i>Era</i> un giardino per ciechi | 'It <i>was</i> a garden for the blind' |
| b. la vista costantemente <i>era</i> offesa | 'the sense of sight <i>was</i> constantly offended' |
| c. Le rose ... <i>erano</i> degenerate | 'The roses <i>were</i> degenerate' |
| d. si <i>erano</i> mutate in una sorta di cavoli | 'they <i>were</i> changed into a kind of cabbage'
(i.e., were now 'different' in that way) |

This adoption of Huffman's line of thought is particularly helpful because of how it relates to participancy and so to *si-*. As Huffman explains, as García (1975: 222–223) noted, and as this analysis has also held (e.g., Chapter 7), a particular lexical item (a particular verb) has a certain "potential" to "suggest" multiple participant roles.

What are usually labeled *transitive* verbs are those with the potential for two participant roles of highly contrasting degrees, what are called in the present hypothesis of Degree of Control (Chapter 4), the HIGH and LOW degrees. To illustrate with instances from Example (10.1):

- | | |
|--|--|
| il giardino ... <i>esalava</i> profumi untuosi | le cui piantine <i>aveva</i> egli stesso <i>acquistato</i> |
| 'the garden <i>exhaled</i> cloying scents' | 'whose cuttings he himself <i>had bought</i> ' |

In the 'exhaling' are two participants with two distinct roles: the 'garden' and the 'scents.' In the 'buying' are two participants and two roles: the Prince (*egli* 'he') and the 'cuttings.' Such verbs, labeled in dictionaries as transitives by meaning and use, have the potential to suggest that highly contrasting participant roles are involved, and often, of course, such potential is realized, with accusative clitics: *li esalava* 'it exhaled them'; *le aveva acquistate* 'he had bought them.' The potential for such highly contrasting participant roles, according to this reasoning, entails a heightened interest in the *activity itself*, as opposed to the *state* that results from the activity, once completed. Thus the lexical items *esalare* 'exhale' and *acquistare* 'buy' would inherently entail greater interest in the activities of 'exhaling' and 'buying' than in their end states, characterizable perhaps as depletion and possession, respectively.

Other verbs, because of their own semantic properties, lack the potential to suggest that highly contrasting participant roles are involved. These are usually labeled *intransitive*. In compound tenses, they have auxiliary *essere*. To illustrate, one verb from (10.1):

- gli *sembrò*
'it *seemed* to him'

plus another verb from nearby in the context, Example (10.2) below. The Prince recalls that, months before, one of the things smelling up the garden was the corpse of a soldier.

- (10.2) “Ma è morto per il Re, caro Fabrizio, è chiaro” (LG 9)
 “But he *died* for the King, dear Fabrizio, it’s clear”

Sembrare ‘seem’ and *morire* ‘die’ lack the potential for highly contrasting control roles. They are routinely labeled intransitive by dictionaries and practically never would occur with a direct object. In Huffman’s terms (as adapted here), they do not have a strong potential to suggest highly contrasting participant roles. Thus, relative to the typical transitives, they inherently involve less attention to the activity itself (‘seeming,’ or ‘dying’), at the expense of attention to its “end-point” (an impression, or death).

It is true that, in this instance of ‘seeming’ there are two distinct roles: one played by the sensation of sniffing a rose (-ò ‘it’) and one by the Prince (*gli-* ‘him’). Yet those two participant roles are not so far apart: The Prince bears a great deal of responsibility for what memories of his are stirred up by the act of sniffing the rose. Likely, a different person (a more faithful husband) would have a different impression, and sniffing a rose would not ‘seem’ to such a person like sniffing the thigh of an opera dancer. And so the Prince is assigned a MID, not LOW, Degree of Control (*gli-*). A MID participant exerts a great deal of Control over an event of ‘seeming.’ Though there may be two levels of Control here, there is not in this verb a potential for a great differential of Control.

Now we are prepared to understand why it is that, with *si-*, the auxiliary is always *essere*, never *avere*. With verbs that have *essere* anyway, there is no change when they have *si-*; they still have *essere*. They inherently already involve less attention as activities and relatively more attention to the state that results from the activities. Both verbs in *è morto*, for example – i.e., the finite form of *essere* plus the participle of *morire* – are compatible with this sense of relative inactivity. On the other hand, with verbs that normally have *avere* (e.g., *mutare* ‘change’), the presence of *si-*, as we have seen (Chapter 6), *neutralizes* distinctions in Degree of Control, thus lessening the sense of activity that the verb would normally convey. Of all verbs, *essere* inherently involves probably the least amount of activity, and moreover the participle (e.g., *mutat+*) has, in Huffman’s terms, the effect of *de-emphasizing the activity* associated with that verb.³ Thus it is appropriate to use as finite verb a form of *essere*, and to relegate the other verb to its participial form: *si erano mutate* ‘they were changed,’ that is, ‘were’ now ‘different,’ in a new state.

3. Compare Diver’s hypothesis of Vividness for Latin (Diver and Davis 2012: 197).

B. *Ci si*: The “impersonal reflexive”

The combination *ci si*, glossed ‘one ... [verb] ... oneself’ and labeled the *impersonal reflexive*, might well be considered, under traditional guise, to be an unmotivated construction and to require a special descriptive statement (as in Cordin 1991: 106).⁴ However, as Lepschy and Lepschy (1988: 212–213) accurately note, but without explanation, the absence of **si si* is an instance of the general pattern whereby “combinations with identical clitics are avoided.” That appears to be a strong pragmatic processing constraint.⁵ In light of that, the claim here will be that the combination of *ci-* and *si-* is motivated by their meanings.

Because an analysis of *ci-* is beyond the scope of this book, the working hypothesis here will be that modern Italian has two homophonous clitics *ci-*.⁶ They are historically the same reflex of the Latin *ecce hic* ‘here’ (Pei 1941: 87). One *ci-* has locative and existential uses and is usually glossed ‘there.’ This clitic is provisionally considered here to be a signal, along with *vi-*, in a system of Restrictedness of Place. The other *ci-*, usually glossed ‘us’ or ‘ourselves,’ is a signal – along with *mi-* ‘me, myself,’ *ti-* ‘you, yourself’ (sg), and *vi-* ‘you, yourselves’ (pl) – in the system of Discourse Referents. In traditional terms, this *ci-* is first person plural, indistinct between reflexive and non-reflexive, or dative and accusative.

Absent a complete analysis of *ci-*, no definitive position can be taken here as to whether the *ci-* of *ci si-* is one or the other of those grammatical signals – or indeed is yet a third. However, some observations are suggestive. And in neither case does the combination *ci si-* undermine the present hypothesis of *si-* as a signal of INNER Focus with oppositions of substance involving the systems of Sex, grammatical Gender, Number, and Degree of Control. Indeed, the combination *ci si-* is consistent with that hypothesis.

4. There are examples of *ci si-* that are not labeled impersonal reflexive, where the *ci-* is parsed adverbially, as in *Lui ci si nascondeva* ‘He hid (himself) there’ (CV 51).

5. Davis (2004b) uses the general fact of non-repetition of clitics in an argument against the treatment by García (1975) of the comparable Spanish **se se*. García (1975: 254–256, 481, and 2009: 37) notes the general phenomenon and acknowledges that it “is perfectly conceivable” on the basis of the meaning she hypothesizes, but she dismisses its relevance to **se se* on grounds that are astonishing for a student of Diver: because traditional grammar leads us to expect **se se* as an impersonal reflexive. García’s treatment, however, does share with the present one the claim that the constraint has to do with processing. Lepschy and Lepschy (1988: 213) hint at the same: Clusters with multiple clitics are uncommon “because they are ungainly and unclear, rather than because they are ungrammatical. [¶] Clitics refer to things which are known ..., and it is unlikely that one would want to introduce so many known elements into one sentence.”

6. Cf. Chapter 4, n. 11, and Chapter 6, n. 12.

We have seen repeatedly that *si-* opts out of distinctions of Degree of Control and so can be said to *neutralize* those distinctions, particularly when a human being is in Focus. With *si-*, no distinction is made between two levels of Control where, based on the lexical item chosen for the verb, we might expect there to be a distinction. These are the quintessential reflexives of traditional grammar (Chapter 6). We have also seen (Chapter 2) that Italian has several ways of making what might be called an “impersonal” human reference. Among these are what have been termed here the *generalized impersonal* that is best accomplished with *si-*, since it opts entirely out of the systems of Sex and Number, and the *inclusive impersonal* achieved by including the speaker through the means of *noi*, ‘we, us,’ *nostr+* ‘our(s),’ and *ci-* ‘us, ourselves.’ That is, we have already seen *si-* used impersonally and reflexively, and we have already seen *ci-* used impersonally and reflexively. Given, then, the processing constraint that the same clitic cannot appear twice as satellite to the same verb, it is not surprising that *ci-* and *si-* should appear together when two grammatical tasks need to be accomplished: the avoidance of a sexed or gendered reference, and the neutralization of distinctions in Control.

It might be objected that the same could be achieved with *ti si-* (or even *vi si-*) as impersonal reflexive. But these would have the disadvantage of excluding the speaker. Moreover, in situations where the sex of the second-person addressee is known, they effectively would further specialize the reference, potentially excluding half of the world’s population. By contrast, *ci si-* includes the speaker, plus an open-ended set of others.

It is also useful to note that *ci-* is traditionally recognized as the routine (if infrequently occurring) impersonal object, as opposed to impersonal subject *si-*. For Example (10.3), below; a gloss and two alternative translations are given:

- (10.3) *come si vagheggia talvolta un gioiello o altro oggetto*
 as (*si-*) cherishes sometimes a jewel or other object
prezioso il cui possesso ancora ci è nuovo. (MR 349)
 precious the whose possession still (*ci-*) is new
 ‘as *one* sometimes cherishes a jewel or other precious object, the possession of
 which is still new *to one*’
 ‘as a jewel or other precious object, the possession of which is still new to us/
 one, is sometimes cherished’

In terms of the present analysis, *si-* here (*si vagheggia*) is like much of what we have already seen (Chapter 5): *Si-* opts out of Control distinctions and subverts the Focus-Control interlock so that Focus can be placed on the ‘jewel,’ which cannot possibly exercise high Control over the event of ‘cherishing.’ By contrast, *ci-* here (*il cui possesso ancora ci è nuovo*) does not opt out of Control distinctions and subvert

the Focus-Control interlock. While *si-* here (with *è nuovo*) would have provided a second reference to *possesto*, *ci-* instead makes a distinct reference. The participant in Focus with respect to *ancora è nuovo* ‘is still new’ is *possesto* ‘possession.’ *Ci-* brings in the participation of a distinct party, and since this reference is highly general, that party could be anyone who has ever owned a new jewel, including the speaker: thus ‘us.’ Indeed, in the immediately preceding context, the narrator refers to herself explicitly:

Quel giorno ... *passai* almeno due ore a vegheggiare la *mia* felicità (MR 349)
 ‘That day ... I spent at least two hours cherishing *my* happiness’

And in the following paragraph (MR 349–350), where the narrator continues her musing on her happiness, she refers explicitly to others who share with her such feelings: *al nostro ozio* ‘at our ease,’ *senza nostro merito* ‘without our merit.’ She describes such persons using the generic-gender plural ending that we have seen (Chapter 2) to be routine for impersonal reference: *leggeri*, *spensierati*, *contenti* ‘light, carefree, happy.’ And she again uses *ci-*: *che tutti i debiti, come dice la preghiera cristiana, ci siano stati rimessi* ‘that all debts, as the Christian prayer says, might be forgiven us/one.’

Without pretending to have a full understanding of *ci-*, one is now in a position to analyze the combination *ci si-* in its impersonal reflexive use. The following example (Example 4.4 repeated as 10.4) reveals the connections linking what were separate traditional categories: first person plural objective *ci* ‘us,’ impersonal objective *ci* ‘one,’ and impersonal reflexive *ci si* ‘one ... oneself’

- (10.4) A lungo ho portato nella memoria una frase di Chateaubriand: *Inutile phare de la nuit*. Credo di averle sempre attribuito un potere di disincantato conforto: come quando *ci si* attacca a qualcosa che *si* rivela un *inutile phare de la nuit* eppure *ci* consente di fare qualcosa solo perché credevamo nella sua luce: la forza delle illusioni. (TD 34)⁷

For a long time I have carried in my memory a phrase of Chateaubriand: *Inutile phare de la nuit* [‘unavailing beacon of the night’]. I believe I have always attributed to it a power of disenchanted comfort: as when *one* attaches *oneself* (*ci si-*) to something that is revealed (*si-*) [to be] an *inutile phare de la nuit* yet allows *one/us* (*ci-*) to do something only because *we* (*-amo*) believed in its light: the strength of illusions.

Working backwards through the example: In the verb *credevamo* ‘we believed’ can be seen the outright reference to SPEAKER AND OTHERS, an explicit first person

7. The phrase *inutile phare de la nuit* was (twice) italicized in the original.

plural. In *ci consente* ‘allows us/one’ can be seen the conceptual bridge between that first person plural and the impersonal object: if it allows everyone, then it necessarily allows us, and if it allows us, then it just might allow everyone. (Note that *si consente* would not do here, because the writer needs two distinct participants.) And, finally, in *ci si attacca* ‘one attaches oneself’, we see the collaboration between two distinct grammatical mechanisms, neither of which is explicitly impersonal or reflexive, but each of which can contribute to messages in which reference is highly general and Control distinctions are neutralized: ‘when anyone in general (including us) attaches himself’ ~ ‘when anyone gets attached through his own effort.’

In strict Columbia School terms now, here is the analysis of *ci si attacca*: The satellite *-a* of *attacca* signals DO NOT ENUMERATE participants, which are NOT limited to SPEAKER OR HEARER and which are in CENTRAL Focus. The satellite *si-* makes reference to a participant or participants in INNER Focus, NOT limited to SPEAKER OR HEARER. This *si-* does not bear meanings from the systems of Degree of Control, Number, Sex, or grammatical Gender. From these facts (Participant Focus, plus so little information being given) comes the inference that a second reference is being made to the participant(s) in Focus. The satellite *ci-* makes reference to participants in INNER Focus, namely SPEAKER AND OTHERS, ranked at NON-HIGH Control. From this fact (plus the lexical content of *attacc-* ‘attach’) comes the inference of two distinct Control roles being played, with the speaker being included. Unless the context suggests – which here it does not – that those two Control roles are played by distinct participants (‘someone attaches to us’), those two roles are played simultaneously by the same participant(s), not identified by Sex or Gender, and including the speaker. The end result, then, is an inference that the message has to do with anyone in general, including the speaker, acting upon himself.

This *ci si-* impersonal reflexive, which is completely general, can be contrasted with another impersonal reflexive, *uno si-*, in Example (10.5) below. From what we have seen (Chapter 2), we can expect *uno si-* to be an *individualized* impersonal reflexive; that is, to use an inspecific person acting in his own interest as representative of some larger group.

- (10.5) Come io non avevo mai dubitato, era stato Natale Aprici a provocare Michele Rende e a farlo poi aggredire nella strada. La ragione sembrava essere semplicemente che Natale Aprici mal sopportava che nel nostro paese *uno si* desse più importanza di quanta se ne dava lui stesso, senza essere un signore (BB 60)
 Just as I had never doubted, it had been Natale Aprici who provoked Michele Rende and then had him attacked in the street. The reason seemed to be simply that Natale Aprici could not tolerate that, in our town, *someone (uno)* should give *himself (si-)* more importance than Natale Aprici gave himself, unless that person was a gentleman.

It might be logically true that the self-important Natale Aprici could not stand for *anyone* to promote his own importance above Aprici's own. Here, though, the writing is more careful. The reference is tied down just a bit by suggesting that, in Aprici's mind, such a person (*uno*) would be unusual, and by alluding to some strange, daring man in particular who did just that: the hero-brigand Michele Rende.

Ci si-, then, may serve as a certain *type* of impersonal reflexive, one with the most general applicability, not alluding to one representative person. The relevant grammatical categories are not *impersonal* and *reflexive* but Discourse Referent, Number, Sex, Gender, Participant Focus, and Degree of Control, all categories which are independently required in the analysis of Italian grammar anyway.

Consider now "inherently reflexive" verbs used impersonally. Recall (Chapter 8) that most of these work just like examples studied in Chapter 6, with their participant *spanning* a range of control, quintessentially from that of agent to patient. There (Example 8.10) we saw that a man made himself stubborn like a dog (*si accaniva*), thus exercising total control over his behavior. So the following contrast:

<i>Egli si accaniva</i>	<i>Ci si accaniva</i>
He made <i>himself</i> dogged	One made <i>oneself</i> dogged
'He persisted'	'One persisted'

That line of reasoning applies as well to *inginocchiarsi* 'kneel,' which is said to be inherently reflexive, and in which the participant placing someone in a kneeling position is the same as the person placed into that position. Here, the person 'kneels' of her own accord. For example, in (10.6) a bride 'kneels' at her wedding ceremony:

- (10.6) Miliella *s'inginocchiò* sul pavimento, seguendo la preghiera ad alta voce.
(BB 202)
- 'Miliella *knelt* (*si-*) on the floor, following the prayer aloud.'

As we saw in Chapter 8, however, the distinction is not neutralized when one person *makes* another person 'kneel,' as in Example (8.8), where an employer makes a housekeeper 'kneel' to clean a corner of the floor: *la fa inginocchiare* 'she makes her kneel.'

If the Control distinction is neutralized *and* the systems of Sex and Number are opted out of, the result is a generalized impersonal with *ci si-*:

- (10.7) Forse questo è il sentimento che si dovrebbe provare ogni volta che *ci si inginocchia* per confessarsi.
(MR 353)
- 'Perhaps this is the feeling that one must have every time *one* kneels (*oneself*) to confess (*oneself*).'

In contrast to Example (8.8), and like Example (10.6) above, here the participant placing someone in a kneeling position and the person placed into that position are the same participant. And here that participant is a generalized impersonal (which includes the speaker). As before (Example 10.4), the two clitics together tell us that distinctions in Degree of Control are being neutralized and that the participant will not be identified.

It remains in this section only to analyze an impersonal inherently reflexive verb in which that highly generalized participant has only *one* level of control, not spanning two levels. Recall (Chapter 8) *accorgersi* ‘notice, be made aware,’ in which the main participant has less than high control and is made aware of something by some external stimulus. If there is only one role, why are there two clitics, *ci si*-? The reason is that there are two communicative problems to solve: Participant Focus and Degree of Control. Who is being talked about? And what level of control does he have in this event? Neither clitic by itself would be capable of doing both jobs. By itself, *si accorge*-3-SG would send us looking to identify the specific participant who is ‘made aware’ (‘he/she is made aware’), the referent of the finite verb ending; but in this case (impersonal) there is no identification to be made (no ‘he’ or ‘she’). And by itself, **ci accorge*-3-SG, without *si*-, would fail to suggest subversion of the Focus-Control interlock: that the participant in CENTRAL Focus (verb ending *-e*) is playing a non-high Control role. The result would be incoherence in the case of this particular verb, a verb which by definition cannot be agentive (cannot be glossed ‘make aware’). But *ci si accorge* allows both inferences: that the participant in CENTRAL Focus is, consistent with this verb, playing a non-high Control role, and that that participant will not be identified. The result: a generalized impersonal non-agentive action: ‘one is made aware.’

Example (10.8) below illustrates. The narrator, his sister, and his mother walk furtively towards an abandoned church where the sister will in secret marry the brigand, Michele Rende.

- (10.8) Noi andammo avanti, la chiesa era ormai vicina.... La luna era proprio bassa sui monti, tra poco sarebbe tramontata.

Michele Rende ci venne incontro davanti alla chiesa. Aveva il mitra in mano. Vide che eravamo soltanto in tre [senza il padre], ma non disse niente. Alla luce della luna *ci si accorgeva* che sorrideva, però non si capiva come fosse il suo sorriso. Senza una parola mi prese sotto il suo braccio e così mi tenne stretto, con silenziosa tenerezza, mentre parlava a mia madre. – Vi ringrazio perché siete venuta, – disse. (BB 199–200)

We went onward; the church was close by now.... The moon was quite low over the mountains; soon it would set.

Michele Rende came up to us in front of the church. He had his rifle in his hand. He saw that we were just three [without the father], but he said nothing.

In the light of the moon, *one became aware* (*ci si-*) that he was smiling, but one couldn't know what kind of smile it was. Without a word he took me under his arm and held me tight like that, with silent tenderness, while he spoke to my mother. "I thank you for coming," he said.

Ci si- accomplishes both the task of signaling the non-high Control status of the CENTRAL-Focus participants who are made aware of Michele's smile by the light of the moon, and the task of generalizing that reference. *Io mi accorgevo* 'I became aware' would have limited the reference to the narrator, but his mother and sister too would have been looking intently at this man; each has a special relationship with him. *Uno si accorgeva* 'one became aware' would have had the same limitation, only less overtly: any guy in my position would have become aware of the smile. And first-person plural *noi ci accorgevamo* 'we were made aware' would have limited the reference to just those three individuals and would have lumped them together in the noticing, as if it had the same effect on each of them and as if the effect were due to some peculiar property of just them. What *ci si-* accomplishes is to allow the inference that anyone would have been made aware, by the light of the moon, of Michele's smile. And it does so without giving first place to the narrator's own impression of that smile (friendship). And it avoids conflating his impression with his sister's (Michele's love for her) and mother's (reassurance in danger).

Ci si-, then, is not an unmotivated construction encoding the syntactic category *impersonal reflexive*, but a collaboration among grammatical meanings that may result in a message something like: At this point I could be focusing on pretty much anyone, not excluding myself, that is affected by participating in this event.

C. A morphemic re-analysis of *si* and *se*

It might appear, superficially, that there are two distinct clitics *si* and *se*, and that – regardless of what exactly *si* is – *se*, like *gli*, is unambiguously dative.

L'uomo <i>se</i> lo dice spesso.	La donna <i>gli</i> dice spesso la verità.
'The man tells <i>himself</i> that often.'	'The woman often tells <i>him</i> the truth.'

But such a morphemic analysis would not hold up to scrutiny.

For one thing, *se* appears sometimes to be not dative but accusative, comparable to not to *gli* but to *lo*:

<i>Se</i> ne libera	<i>Lo</i> liberano dalla trappola
'He frees <i>himself</i> from it'	'They free <i>him</i> from the trap'

Also, it is the case for all clitics, not just *si/se*, that the vowel in the clitic that immediately precedes *l+* or *ne* is not the usual *i* phoneme but instead *e*. Precisely: "*mi*,

ti, si, ci, vi change before *lo, la, li, le* [accusative] and *ne* to *me, te, se, ce, ve...* *Gli* and *le* [dative] change before the same pronouns to *glie*" (Lepschy and Lepschy 1988: 119).⁸ To illustrate with the second-person singular clitic:

<i>ti</i> parla	but	<i>te</i> ne parla
'speaks to you'		'speaks to you about it'

This apparent change of vowel from *i* to *e* cannot be an instance of vowel harmony, because the change also occurs before the clitics *lo, la, li*, which do not contain the vowel *e*:

<i>ti</i> dice	but	<i>te</i> lo dice
'tells you'		'tells you it'

Nor can it be that *ti* and *te* are different grammatical cases, since they both appear to be datives in the examples shown, and since they, like *si/se*, can both be accusatives:

<i>ti</i> vedono	<i>te</i> ne liberano	<i>lo</i> liberano dalla trappola
'They see you'	'they free you from it'	'they free <i>him</i> -ACC from the trap'

The change seems truly capricious.

Actually, though, the confusion results from an elementary mistake in morphemic analysis (Davis 1995b). Since *every* clitic that immediately precedes *l+*- or *ne*- has *e* rather than *i*, and since *only* the immediately preceding one does, and since this happens *only* before *l+*- and *ne*-, a more straightforward analysis is that the *e* phoneme belongs morphemically not to the preceding clitic but to the following *l+*- or *ne*-. The morphemes, then, are actually (*e*)*l+*- and (*e*)*ne*-. When one of these clitics is first in the line-up, it is subject to dropping of the initial *e*:

<i>Lo</i> dice	<i>Ne</i> parla
'He/she says it'	'He/she speaks about it'

Similar apheresis is found in the morphologically related definite articles:

Appare <i>nello</i> specchio	but	<i>Lo</i> specchio è caro
'He/she/it appears in <i>the</i> mirror'		' <i>The</i> mirror is costly'

Furthermore, the apocope of the *i*-vowel of the preceding clitic also has a parallel elsewhere in the language, (optionally) in position preceding verbs that begin with vowels:

8. Lepschy and Lepschy are stating the rule in terms of orthography. The clitic written *gli* is pronounced [li]; the orthography *glie* represents phonologically [le].

m'attraggo
 'they attract *me*'

As a bonus, the apocope, before *(e)ne-*, of the *e*-vowel of feminine singular dative *le-*, and the palatalization of that [*l*] to [*λ*], resulting in [*λe*], bolsters the explanation below (Section D) for why the clitics *(e)l+-* and *(e)ne-* never co-occur. If *(e)lo-*, for instance, ever were to occur immediately before *(e)ne-*, the result would be [*λ ene*], which would be multiply ambiguous, not only with respect to the gender and number of the would-be masculine singular *(e)lo-* but also with respect to case between accusative *(e)l+-* and dative *gli-*. Both distinctions would be lost.

This morphemic solution is no sleight of hand. There is ample historical and comparative support for it in the Classical Latin *ille* and *inde*, the sources of *(e)l+-* and *(e)ne-*, and in modern French *en-*, cognate to *(e)ne-*.

This elementary but far-reaching morphemic re-analysis requires, below, a formal restatement of the systems of Participant Focus (Diagram 10.1) and Degree of Control (Diagram 10.2) and of their interlock (Diagram 10.3). (Compare, respectively, Diagrams 3.2, 4.2., and Appendix diagram.)

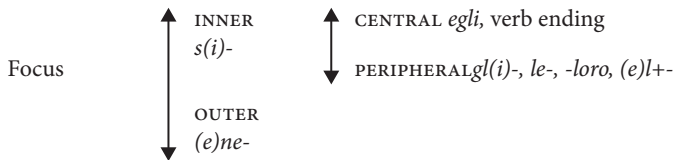
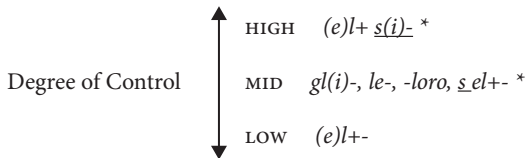


Diagram 10.1 The system of Participant Focus, morphemically accurate



* where the order *(e)l+ s(i)-* signals that the referent of *s(i)-* has HIGH, and the order *s el+-* that the referent of *s(i)-* has MID

Diagram 10.2 The system of Degree of Control, morphemically accurate

D. Some properties of OUTER-Focus (*e*)*ne*

In addition to the change of phoneme in any clitic that immediately precedes it, the clitic (*e*)*ne*- exhibits several properties that appear capricious from the point of view of sentence grammar but that fall into place when the Focus hypothesis and the oppositions of substance are taken into account. These properties include: the lack of co-occurrence of the clitics (*e*)*ne*- and (*e*)*l*+-, the purported restriction of (*e*)*ne*- to association with a direct object, and the adverbial senses of (*e*)*ne*-. These properties will be examined here. For further on (*e*)*ne*-, see Davis (1995b), from which the following is largely taken.

			← Degree of Control →		
			HIGH	MID	LOW
↑ Focus ↓	↑ INNER <i>s(i)</i> - ↓	CENTRAL <i>egli</i> , verb ending	(<i>e</i>) <i>l</i> + <u><i>s(i)</i></u> -		
		PERIPHERAL		<u><i>s</i></u> <i>el</i> +-	
	OUTER (<i>e</i>) <i>ne</i> -		<i>gl(i)</i> -, <i>le</i> -, <i>-loro</i>	(<i>e</i>) <i>l</i> +-	

Diagram 10.3 Interlock of Participant Focus and Degree of Control, morphemically accurate

a. Lack of co-occurrence of (*e*)*ne* and (*e*)*l*+

Alone among the clitics, (*e*)*ne*- and (*e*)*l*+ cannot co-occur on the same verb, at least not in Standard Italian (Lepschy and Lepschy 1988: 212; see also Wanner 1987b: 414). So while *liberarmene* ‘free me from it’ and *liberarsene* ‘free himself/herself/itself/themselves from it’ are acceptable, the hypothetical **liberarlene* (or **liberarlone*, etc.) ‘free him/her/it/them from it’ is not. The Focus hypothesis suggests an explanation.

Clitics are useful only for the simplest of assignments of roles in an event. One consequence of this processing constraint is that, although there are theoretically nine slots for clitics before a verb, multiple clitics are rare. As Lepschy and Lepschy state (1988: 213), multiple clitics are rare “because they are ungainly and unclear, rather than because they are ungrammatical” (in the classic generative sense). In

the data collection for this study, less than two percent of the verbs with clitics have more than one clitic, and there seems to be only one authentic example in the collection, Example (10.9), of a three-clitic verb:

- (10.9) *Gli se ne* conficcarono in tutte le parti del corpo. (MI 72)
 ‘Some of *them* (*ene-*) got stuck (*si-*) in all the parts of *his* (*gli-*) body.’

Of all the possible combinations of two clitics, (*e*)*l*+ (*e*)*ne-* would be the most difficult to process. Both (*e*)*l*+ and (*e*)*ne-* tend strongly to refer to entities (e.g., inanimates) other than the principal driver of events in a narrative. (This skewing is reflected to a large extent in Table 3.2.) Both clitics have extra-clausal antecedents; that is, their referents are not immediately at hand. And neither clitic, in their combination, signals Gender or Number, information that would aid the hearer in identifying the referents.⁹ Given the rarity of double clitics in general, it is hardly surprising that the most challenging combination should fail to be attested.

The cognate combination *l'en-* does occur in French, as in *je l'en avvertis* ‘I warn him/her/it of it’. And here, as in Italian, there is no indication of Gender. But, crucially, Number is signaled by the accusative clitic in French (plural would be *je les en avvertis* ‘I warn them of it’); thus significantly more information is provided about the identity of the referent. Also, the French juxtaposition is a little less challenging to process than the Italian because French *en-* strongly disfavors animate referents, especially human beings, even more so, apparently, than Italian (*e*)*ne-*.¹⁰ That narrowing of the possibilities for reference must be a considerable lightening of the processing burden, relative to Italian.

b. Purported association of (*e*)*ne* with direct object

Burzio (1986: 23, 30) states unequivocally that *ne* cliticization “is possible with respect to all and only direct objects.” The point is taken up by Lepschy and Lepschy (1988: 119) and by Wanner (1987b: 435–6). An example of the acceptable would be:

Giovanni *ne* inviterà molti
 ‘Giovanni will invite many of *them*’

where *ne* refers to the whole of which *molti* ‘many,’ the direct object, is part. By contrast:

9. This is the case if the combination were to appear, as expected, as [*lene*] or even as *lene*; cf. *mene* and *sene*.

10. Without a suitable analysis of French *en-*, this statement can be made only impressionistically. See also, however, Davis (1992: 202–203).

*?Molti *ne* telefoneranno
 ‘Many of *them* will telephone’

with the partitive relationship obtaining between *ne* and the subject, is supposedly ungrammatical. There are grammatical sentences, however, in which *ne* does relate to the subject¹¹; Burzio gives:

Molti *ne* arriveranno
 ‘Many of *them* will arrive’

In order to accommodate these, and noting that the verb in such examples takes *essere* as auxiliary in the perfect tenses, Burzio proposes that they be considered “ergative” or “unaccusative,” with the subject syntactically originating in postverbal position, the position of a direct object.

Burzio’s analysis appears to have been hasty. Saccon (1993) presents as grammatical the following sentence, with auxiliary *avere*:

Ne avrebbero telefonato di più [= clienti] se avessimo fatto pubblicità alla TV.
 ‘More of *them* [= customers] would have phoned, if we had had TV advertising.’

What Burzio perceived as an absolute restriction must instead be only a very strong tendency. But what, then, accounts for the tendency of (*e*)*ne*- to relate to objects, not subjects?

With (*e*)*ne*-, the hearer’s task is to identify some person or thing that might plausibly be associated in some rather remote way with the event named by the verb. Just how the referent relates to the event depends on the individual example; it does not have to be a partitive relationship with the direct object, as we see in (10.10):

(10.10) La balena ferita *ne* [= sangue] inonda il mare. (TD 55)
 ‘The injured whale floods the sea *with it* [i.e., blood].’

Certainly the sea is not contained in the whale’s blood (*ne*-); indeed, the reverse is true.

Still, examples of the syntactic type

Giovanni *ne* inviterà molti
 ‘Giovanni will invite many of *them*’

do seem to be typical. Why? The explanation requires context. Suppose that the speaker has been talking about Giovanni’s friends from New York. Now the speaker

11. Attested examples are not uncommon; e.g., *Ne arrivavano due proprio di lì; Ma ne stavano arrivando chissà quanti; ne sarai l’unica padrona* (CV 24, 24, 63); *ogni tanto ne cadeva uno* (MA 144); *Cinque [monete] ne uscirono dal cerchio* (BB 22).

wishes to zero in on a subset of those friends, just the ones Giovanni will invite to a party. *Molti* ‘many’ will now go into peripheral Focus, adjacent to Giovanni on the Focus field of inviting.¹² But in order to make sense of this *molti*, the hearer will need to relate it to something known, namely the whole set of New York friends. This identification will likely be accomplished if the speaker obliges by referring again to the totality. Now since, at this point in the discourse, the speaker is most interested in Giovanni and the invitees, the only place for the totality is in OUTER Focus, with (*e*)*ne*-. The whole group relates to the event only through the subset that are invited. Similarly, if a camera focuses on just a part of something, the rest of the entity goes out of focus.

Continuing this line of reasoning, we can see that it is the ranking of Focus in three degrees (CENTRAL, PERIPHERAL, OUTER) that is responsible for the effective restriction of such partitive relationships to the direct object. If (*e*)*ne*- related instead to the CENTRAL participant – to Giovanni – then the referent of (*e*)*ne*- could hardly be understood to be farther out on the Focus field than *molti*, which, as a bona fide participant, is at the middle level.

So long as the verb is one whose meaning suggests the possibility of there being a PERIPHERAL participant, this inaccessibility of the CENTRAL participant to (*e*)*ne*- will persist. See Diagram 10.4, below.

Utterance:	Molti <i>ne</i> telefoneranno.		
Acceptable interpretation:	Many will telephone [news?] of <i>them</i> .		
Blocked interpretation:	* Many of <i>them</i> will telephone.		
Focus:	CENTRAL	PERIPHERAL	OUTER
	Molti	[news?]<----->	<i>ne</i> -

Diagram 10.4 Focus field for “transitives” used “intransitively”

Potentially transitive verbs – that is, *avere* verbs – such as *invitare* ‘invite’ and *telefonare* ‘telephone’ resist association of (*e*)*ne*- with the subject even when there is no explicit object. The utterance *Molti ne telefoneranno* is not “ungrammatical”; it

12. Though lacking a full analysis of the finite verb ending and one of the positions of nouns surrounding the verb, this study (Chapter 3) has taken the position that the finite verb ending signals Discourse Referent and Number at CENTRAL Focus. That would facilitate the inference here that *Giovanni* (the noun subject) is effectively at the CENTRAL Focus level of Diagram 10.1. Then, by elimination, the participant not referred to by the verb ending, *molti*, (the noun object) would properly be inferred to be effectively at the PERIPHERAL Focus level.

just lacks the interpretation Burzio requires. Encountering the utterance *Molti ne telefoneranno*, a hearer would likely jump to the conclusion that *(e)ne-* should be associated with some PERIPHERAL participant still to be named in the utterance.¹³ Expecting some message like ‘Many will telephone *news* of them,’ the hearer will not entertain the interpretation ‘Many of them will telephone.’ Consequently, speakers do not attempt to express that message in that way.

Now suppose the verb is one that does not suggest the possibility of a PERIPHERAL participant; the verb is “inherently intransitive,” like *arrivare* ‘arrive.’ These, by the way, are the *essere* verbs. As diagrammed below in 10.5, here there is no obstacle to the hearer’s inferring an association between *(e)ne-* and the CENTRAL participant, because there is no conceivable competitor on the Focus field. There is nothing to block a conceptual link between the outermost and the innermost participants.

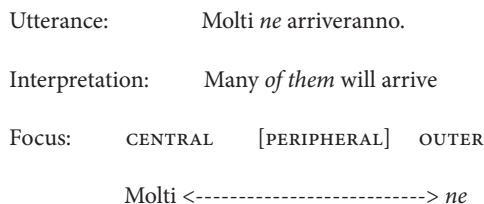


Diagram 10.5 Focus field for “ergatives”

The behavior of *(e)ne-* with respect to direct objects, then, is a function of the meaning of *(e)ne-* and the implications that has for inference.

c. Adverbial *(e)ne*

Though *ne* is typically treated as a pronoun, dictionaries (e.g., Garzanti, Sansoni) also list an adverbial usage with a sense of ‘away,’ a fact that appears inexplicable in the tradition that calls *ne* a partitive. Examples of *(e)ne-* that are traditionally classed as adverbial were discussed in Chapter 6. These include the apparently idiosyncratic *andarsene* ‘go away,’ where *(e)ne-* has no clearly identifiable referent.

A locative sense for *(e)ne-*, with an identifiable anaphor, is illustrated with Example (10.11), below. The example illustrates the link between the pronominal uses of *(e)ne-* and what appear to be its adverbial uses; there is no need to distinguish two “uses.”

13. See Chapter 7, and cf. García (1975:222–223), regarding the tendency of verbs to “strongly suggest” a certain number of participants.

- (10.11) La porta s'aperse e *ne* uscì una donna olivastra (CV 69)
 'The door opened, and an olive-skinned woman came *through it*'.

In (10.11), the referent of (*e*)*ne*- is rather clearly the door, and so this (*e*)*ne*- might be taken as pronominal; yet the effect of the meaning OUTER Focus cannot be ignored and is brought out by the gloss 'through it'. Focus has shifted away from the door onto the woman.

There need not be a sense of movement. In (10.12), below, a girl recognizes signs of the presence of the evil half of the divided viscount of Calvino's story *Il visconte dimezzato*:

- (10.12) Seppe che lí vicino era una grotta, seppur piccola, una cavità appena accennata nella roccia, e vi si diresse. Vide che *ne* usciva uno stivale frusto e rabberciato, e dentro c'era rannicchiato il mezzo corpo avvolto nel mantello nero. Fece per fuggire ma già il visconte l'aveva scorta e uscendo sotto la pioggia scrosciante le disse: (CV 76)

She knew that there was a cave nearby, though small, an opening barely hinted at in the rock, and she headed towards it. She saw that a worn-out and patched-up boot was sticking *out of it* (*ne*-), and that curled up inside was the half body wrapped in the black cape. She started to flee, but the viscount had already seen her, and, coming out into the driving rain, he said to her:

Focus has shifted away from the cave (*ne*- = OUTER) onto the boot (*usciva*-3-SG *uno stivale*), a sign of the presence of the evil half-viscount.

The clitic (*e*)*ne*- need not be treated as polysemous or homophonous. It is simply, in all instances, a signal of OUTER Focus.

Background and theory

This chapter summarizes the analytical and theoretical background of the present work and its contributions to linguistic theory.

A. Background

The preceding chapters have made reference to prior work that bears upon particular points of the present analysis. The purpose of this section is to trace – mainly chronologically and in broad outlines – the development of thought that has led, from its inception, to the present work. That line of thought is now known as the Columbia School (CS).

a. Diver on Latin (1969–1995)

In the 1970s and 1980s, at Columbia University, William Diver taught linguistics courses in Classical Latin grammar (Diver 1984). In these, as he had for Homeric Greek (Diver 1969), Diver rejected sentence structure as relevant to an account of the distribution of forms in texts and proposed instead a number of *grammatical systems* composed of linguistic *signals*, each with its linguistic *meaning*, exhaustively dividing up some *semantic substance*. Thus, he adopted a *communicative orientation*: The very structure of the grammar reflects its use as an instrument of communication.

For the third-person Latin pronouns, Diver proposed a system whose substance was Deixis, or Concentration of Attention, comprised of six meanings, each with a morphological form for its signal.¹ Each of these meanings represented a

1. Actually, each signal of Deixis was a set of morphological forms, because each pronoun (*ipse, hic, iste, ille, is, sē*) constituting a signal of one level of Deixis – i.e., one Deixis *meaning* – “interlocks” with other systems as well, particularly systems that Diver proposed to account for the distribution of case morphology: systems of Focus and Degree of Control. In addition, all of these pronouns except one (*sē*) have forms dedicated to distinctions in grammatical Gender and Number. As will be evident, all of these hypotheses are relevant to the present analysis in some way but particularly, for the moment, the hypothesis of Deixis.

relative level of attention, ranging from a highest to a lowest level. The system of Deixis functioned primarily to disambiguate reference, that is, for referent-finding in discourse. (Traditionally, most of the forms in this system had been called demonstrative pronouns.) The lowest level of Deixis was signaled by *sē* and its related case forms (*sui, sibi*). This *sē* is the historical ancestor, or “precursor” (Diver 1986), of the Romance forms that include Italian *s(i)-*. To account for the distribution of *sē* in texts, Diver rejected the syntactic category *reflexive* – and its variants and offshoots such as the *indirect reflexive* – in favor of a *meaning* chosen by a writer to direct a reader to concentrate the least amount of attention, relative to the other members of the system, in identifying the referent (Diver 1992a/2012). While *sē* fails utterly to satisfy the traditional criteria for a reflexive pronoun, *sē* does refer reliably to the referent that is in some way “easiest to find.” Quite often, the referent that is easiest to find is the one that traditional grammar parses as the grammatical subject of a finite verb, the one that, according to Diver, is signaled to be IN FOCUS at that point in the discourse (Diver and Davis 2012). In the positing of such a semantic substance as Deixis, and in other ways, Diver adopted, in addition to the communicative orientation, a *human factor orientation*: The very structure of grammar reflects characteristics of its human users.

In its fundamental theoretical perspective, Diver’s treatment of Latin *sē* shares with the present work a rejection of sentence structure as relevant to an account of the distribution of forms in texts and, proposed in place of sentence structure for that purpose, a set of hypotheses involving linguistic signals and meanings that are used in discourse. Both treatments, Diver’s and the present one, also make an appeal to a particularly human-driven grammatical system of Focus on participants in events, Diver’s as support for a Latin writer’s choice of the lowest level of Deixis, signaled by *sē*, the present treatment as part of the complex of meaning actually assigned here (Chapters 3, 4) to Italian *s(i)-*.

The two treatments differ, however, in the primary mechanism proposed to account for the distributions. Diver posited oppositions of *value* among meanings exhaustively dividing up a scale of Deixis or Concentration of Attention. The present work proposes no system of Deixis but instead maintains that it is primarily oppositions of *substance* that account for the distribution of Italian *s(i)-*. For Diver, the absence of Gender and Number distinctions with Latin *sē* evidently was seen as a corollary of *sē*’s presence at the extreme low end of the scale of Deixis: The level of attention signaled by *sē* is so low, and its referent so obvious, that no distinctions of Gender and Number are necessary to identify that referent. In the present work, by contrast, the absence of grammatical Gender and Number for Italian *s(i)-* is the prime determinant of the distribution of *s(i)-* with respect to the other third-person clitics. In other words, Diver took the (in the terms of this study) oppositions of

substance to be an effect of an opposition of value, while here the oppositions of substance are taken to be the main cause of the distributional facts.

Through his career, Diver continued to develop this line of thought about language. It is summarized in Diver (1995/2012).

b. García on Spanish (1975)

Contemporaneous and consistent with Diver in both theory (called at the time Form-Content) and the particulars of analysis, García (1975) undertook a full-scale analysis of the modern Spanish clitic *se*, historically derived from Latin *sē* and cognate with Italian *s(i)*.² Like Diver, García (1975) rejected universal, logical syntax in favor of systems of meaningful signals used in discourse by human beings whose peculiar characteristics of intelligence are reflected in the structure of grammar. García (1975: 186) stated boldly that the Spanish clitic “is not a reflexive pronoun” but is instead a signal of meanings that have nothing directly to do with sentence structure, that is, with the relation between subject and predicate. Also like Diver, García (1975) posited a system of Deixis to account for the distribution of the forms in question. Just as, for Diver, the difference between Latin *sē* and *ille* (*inter alia*) was an opposition of value between meanings of Deixis, so for García (1975) the difference in Spanish between, on the one hand, *se* and, on the other hand, *le /lo, la* (plurals *les /los, las*) was an opposition of value between meanings of Deixis: LOW Deixis for *se* and HIGH Deixis for the *l*-forms (p. 65 *et passim*).³ The semantic substance of Deixis has to do with “the force with which the hearer is instructed to seek the referent of the pronoun” (p. 65). With the one meaning LOW Deixis, García (1975) sought to unify what had been treated, in traditional and generative studies, as several homonymous morphemes *se*: the impersonal *se* ‘one’ and the reflexive *se* ‘himself, herself, itself, themselves’ (sometimes further divided into the “true reflexive,” where an agent acts upon himself, and what García termed the “Romance reflexive,” in which *se* is present but the interpretation is closer to an intransitive than a reflexive), plus a *se* ‘him, her, it, them’ that had been treated as a kind of allomorph of dative demonstrative *le(s)* in position immediately preceding

2. It is not possible at this point to say which hypothesis antedated which, although it is known that García had been a student of Diver at Columbia. It is also documented that Deixis was an existing concept in Form-Content work before García (1975), e.g., in Kirsner (1972). But see the chronology in Kirsner (2014: 8–9).

3. Diver had a six-member system of Deixis, which included the other personal and demonstrative pronouns of Latin, while García (1975) had a two-member system.

accusative *lo(s)*, *la(s)*. In other words, García (1975) sought to bring order into what had been something approaching analytical chaos.

In addition to its overall theoretical position and its goal of achieving, where possible, “one form, one meaning” (p. 435), the book contains several truly original insights that bear upon the present work. Many of these have been cited throughout this volume, but a few deserve special mention here. One important insight is that grammatical-type relations can be inferred even when they are not explicitly signaled (pp. 77, 89), so, for instance, a degree of control may be inferred for the referent of a clitic or of a noun that does not signal Degree of Control (cf. Chapter 4 here). This now stands to reason if the grammar is conceived of as a system (or a system of systems), and if both oppositions of value and oppositions of substance are taken seriously as being consequential to distribution. Second, instead of a dichotomy between active and passive, there is in reality “a continuum of ‘activeness’” (p. 10) which depends for interpretation not upon grammar but upon the nature of the participants, the nature of the event, and contextual factors (cf. here Chapters 4–7). A third important insight that is made use of in the present work is that, in lieu of transitivity, particular verbs (lexical items) may “strongly suggest” a certain number of participants (pp. 222–223), and so an inference that multiple participants are involved may be appropriate even in the absence of explicit signaling (cf. Chapter 7).

García (1975) differs from the present work, however, in several respects.⁴

One methodological difference is that García (1975) relied extensively upon native-speaker intuition on constructed sentences in isolation. That technique was commonplace in its day. As García (1975: 8 *et passim*) recognized, however, context is crucial to the discovery and validation of grammatical meanings. That realization has no doubt only grown in the intervening years. Too, García (1975: 238) identified herself as a native speaker of Spanish. I cannot avail myself of native-speaker intuition for Italian but must rely upon attested examples in actual discourse.

The crucial difference with the present work is that García (1975) proposed a different hypothesis. The present work proposes for Italian no system of Deixis in which *s(i)*- and the other third-person clitics are distinguished by an opposition of value (LOW versus HIGH Deixis). Instead, the present work proposes that *s(i)*- differs from the other third-person verbal satellites primarily in oppositions of

4. It perhaps goes almost without saying that the apparent facts of Spanish and Italian are different in many particular points, and so the two analyses should not be expected to be identical in the first place. Most noticeably: Italian has nothing resembling the Spanish “pseudo-*le*” use of *se* (**le lo* but *se lo*); Italian instead readily displays the combination *gliel*+ (cf. García 2009: 37). Italian lacks the so-called accusative use of *a* ‘to’ (cf. García 1975: 420). And Italian does not exhibit the phenomenon known as *leísmo*, whereby males are routinely referred to by datives rather than accusatives (cf. García 1975: 443ff).

substance: *s(i)*-, unlike the others, gives no information about grammatical Sex, Gender, Number, or Degree of Control.⁵ For García (1975), these more transparent differences were explicitly held to be consequences of the Deixis opposition, rather than causative factors in their own right (pp. 65, 117, 192–193). Tellingly, she acknowledged (p. 60) that the difference between clitics “can be handled quite straightforwardly” without Deixis. An important influence in her decision nevertheless to posit a system of Deixis was a desire to accommodate, in addition to the clitics – the object of her analysis – the historically related forms *sí* and *él* (disjunctives); *su* (possessive); *el* and *la* (articles); and *él* (according to her a stressed subject distinct from the disjunctive) (pp. 72, 74).

But the “true advantage” of the Deixis meaning hypothesis was said to be “a clearer understanding of the various *strategies of use* of the clitic pronouns themselves” (García 1975: 74, n. 3, emphasis added *jd*). The consequences of that claim permeate the work, giving such “strategies” a crucial status in her analysis. And the repercussions of that stance in later CS theory have been extensive. The present work has a quite different way of treating the relation between meaning and use, and so the claim requires some scrutiny. Davis (2004b) counters, point by point, the development of the construct of *strategy* in CS as lucidly traced in Reid (1995); below, only criticisms particularly related to the present work will be examined.

Recall the Columbia-School distinction between signaled grammatical *meaning* versus the *messages* that get communicated in usage by speakers through combinations of those meanings and lexical items in context.⁶ In the present work, the *messages* that get communicated are *gestalt* and are as varied and innumerable as the combinations of grammatical meanings and lexical senses that occur in extended discourse. That continuum is surveyed across Chapters 5 and 6. Messages are slippery, arguable, nuanced, and hard to pin down.

For García (1975), by contrast, messages appear to be categorical, identifiable, recognizably “different” one from another. On this matter she was at pains to “insist” (p. 233).⁷ For García (1975), the analyst can typically “know” (e.g., p. 233) which message is conveyed in a particular instance of use of a form. In taking that position,

5. There are also oppositions of value between *s(i)*- and the others within a system of Focus (cf. Chapter 3).

6. Compare Saussure’s (1916/1972) distinction between *la langue* and *la parole*, Chomsky’s (1965) distinction between *competence* and *performance*; contrast the minimizing or even denying of a distinction between structure and use in usage-based linguistics (e.g., chapters in Bybee and Hopper 2001).

7. García (1975) did allow (p. 186) that messages cannot be classified on a universal basis, *a priori*, in advance of a study of a language’s morphology. And she did allow (p. 234) that there exist examples that are “indeterminate” between interpretations. That allowance, however, did not prompt her to challenge the validity of the interpretations.

she was no doubt influenced by a now obsolete contention in Diver (1969/2012: 135) that messages are somehow “observable.” In García’s words (1975: 186, emphasis added, jd): “we take as given, as *observed*, the *indisputable fact* that ‘true reflexive’ messages, ‘Romance reflexive’ messages, and ‘impersonal’ messages are all conveyed with the help of *se*.” Surely if – as so eloquently argued by Otheguy (2002) – linguistic structure, including CS *meaning*, is not amenable to observation but can only be posited, then even more so the infinitely varied communications that language-users convey with the aid of linguistic structure – communications “both elusively ephemeral and staggeringly complex” (p. 390) – are themselves unobservable. Neither meanings nor messages are “given” to the analyst.

García (1975) characterized the relationship between categorical meanings and categorical messages as being mediated through a number of categorical *communicative strategies* or *strategies of utilization*. These were “standardized patterns of inference” or “already ... accepted ways of conveying” a message (García 1975: 50). Thus strategies, reminiscent of Saussure’s *langue*, were by definition communal and psychological. Smaller in number than the myriad contexts in which a given linguistic form is observed, and larger in number than the very limited system of meanings formally hypothesized, these strategies bridged the gap between meaning and message. The strategies of a particular meaning were said to be “motivated by” and “highly congruent with” that meaning (p. 435), but they branched out into the many types of examples that the analyst encountered. For García (1975), a speaker uses a particular meaning “according to” one of that meaning’s strategies. Or, in the words of Reid (1995: 133, emphasis added jd), explicating García (1975), “A communicative strategy is a particular semantic *rationale* for using a meaning to communicate a message.” The speaker’s choices “according to” those strategies are then seen as “resulting” in different senses (García 1975: 194).

Four types of objections arise in the context of the present work.

One, the construct of the *strategy* is theoretically extraneous. There is no need in CS for a “rationale” for using a certain meaning; the meaning *is* the rationale. The meaning is the *explanans* proposed by the analyst to account for the *explanandum* of the observed signal (Reid 2002: ix–x). Meanings do not need strategies in order to “result” in messages. In the present study as elsewhere (Contini-Morava 1995, Huffman 1997; see Chapter 1), CS meanings are taken to be “instrumental,” to “contribute” to the messages communicated. INNER Participant Focus (Chapter 3), for instance, is not a syntactic cipher; it is a semantic ingredient of the communication. With it, the speaker instructs the hearer to pay the amount of attention merited by a true participant in an event, versus a mere bystander to it (OUTER). Whether an analyst can describe the contribution in a particular instance easily or not – more directly or more indirectly – is beside the point; the contribution is made. Meanings are how communication happens.

Two, the *strategy* is methodologically untenable. Neither intuition nor observed distribution will give the analyst a foothold. To illustrate: For García (1975), the meaning LOW Deixis had, among its main strategies of use, the two strategies “person defocussed” (the impersonals) and “double mention” (the reflexives). Because the analyst, according to García (1975), can “know” which message is being communicated, so she can “know according to what strategy [the meaningful form] is being exploited” (p. 233). But if messages cannot be pinned down, then strategies cannot be defined. Is a particular instance of *s(i)*- an impersonal or a passive (Chapters 2, 5)? a passive or a reflexive (Chapters 5, 6)? Distribution would not help. A participant is doubly mentioned (by *se* and by the verb ending) in impersonal as well as reflexive uses. An analysis that depended on such categories would not hold up.

In addition to being theoretically extraneous and analytically untenable, the *strategy* had its origin in a failed theory of language, namely traditional grammar (Diver, Davis, and Reid 2012). Strategies of use, though ostensibly an innovation at the time, were explicitly identified by García (1975: 50) with the uses of a form as recognized since time immemorial by traditional grammarians: uses such as *impersonal* and *reflexive*.

“Person defocussed” would be the strategy responsible for the impersonal (‘one’) uses of *se*. “Double mention” – by *se* and by the verb ending – could be sub-divided into the “true reflexives” (e.g., ‘himself’) and the “Romance reflexives,” which are often translated as intransitives (e.g., *El dulce se quemó* ‘The jam burnt’). García (1975) expended a great deal of effort in linking these strategies to the hypothesized meaning. In making one particularly remarkable link, García proposed that LOW Deixis was used for two “opposite purposes”: both to defocus a person (in the impersonal examples) and to instruct a hearer to pay more attention to a person (in the double-mention strategy). García (1975: 70–71, 194–195, 253–262) acknowledged but defended that contradiction – all the more surprising for a form that is supposedly “neutral to focus.” This, to be sure, was not the first time that the *a priori* categories of traditional grammar had stymied analysis.

That leads to the fourth and last objection to be raised here: The supposed messages that were linked by García (1975) via strategies to her hypothesized meaning were the wrong messages. As we have seen, received categories such as *impersonal* (Chapter 2), *passive* (Chapter 5), and *reflexive* (Chapter 6) miscategorize the examples. *S(i)*- has a different communicative effect than does *uno*; it misses the point to call them both impersonal. Passives and reflexives simplistically dichotomize what is in reality a spectrum of responsibility that participants exercise over events. García’s strategies, like traditional categories, blind the analyst to recognizing the nuances across examples, missing the real points that a language-user is making. Perhaps it is not surprising that, if García (1975) had the wrong message – let alone

the wrong meaning; see below – she would need an extravagant mediator to link that message to her proposed meaning.

Though lacking psycholinguistic evidence, García (1975), had strategies being *real* enough (that is, not just heuristic) to be unified when compatible (p. 138); abandoned when inappropriate (pp. 116–117, 417);⁸ and unattested when mutually contradictory (pp. 254–256 *et passim*). The repercussions in CS work of this reification were extensive. The reification of the strategy can be seen in Kirsner (1989), which purported to show, by means of an arbitrary statistical cut-off, that one strategy might operate only via another, not on its own. For a while (e.g., Goldberg 1995), a large part of the task of a CS analyst was to identify as many strategies as required by the confrontation between hypothesis and interpretation of data. Reid (1995) noted the “reification” (p. 117 *et passim*) of the strategy in García (1975) while calling the strategy “the *crucial* mediating link between a meaning and the distribution of its signal” (p. 149, emphasis added, jd). Yet Reid acknowledged (p. 149) the still questionable “theoretical status” of the strategy vis-à-vis the CS meaning – Is it in or out of the language? – and he expressed some concern that the two might compete for status as *bona fide* theoretical constructs. Reid worried that communicative strategies might “take on lives of their own” (p. 150, cf. Kirsner 2002: 340) and displace meanings as explanatory constructs. Kirsner (2002: 359, 364) saw strategies as valuable in the “intellectual marketplace” and has recently (2014: 218) linked the CS strategy to the *senses* of Cognitive Grammar, notwithstanding their different theoretical statuses.

Though this position is still, unfortunately, associated in the wider linguistic field with Columbia School (e.g. Butler and González-García 2014), it has been challenged even internally. See below for García’s own abandonment of it. For Diver himself (1990/2012: 78), a strategy is merely a “useful” way for the analyst “to group examples.”⁹ For Huffman (1997: 83–84) too, strategies are merely “possible” “heuristic devices,” “broad rubrics” for grouping examples, “simply particular manifestations” of the meanings proposed. Davis (2004b) argues, on analytical and theoretical grounds, against the reliance on strategy and suggests that Columbia School “would be better off altogether without the ill defined and now compromised term.” The present work illustrates how the connection between hypothesis and observations can be made more direct without the intervention of spurious “strategies.”

It is useful to build upon the genuine insights of García (1975) and not be misled by the missteps there.

8. Cf. Kirsner (1969) on the idea of there being a “least inappropriate meaning” for a job.

9. With, to be sure, an implication of “the various methods that are used [by speakers] to exploit this device of communication” (i.e., a meaning).

c. García (1983)

The hypothesis of Deixis for the Spanish clitic *se* that was offered in García (1975) is explicitly rejected (p. 188, n. 6) in García (1983). Naturally, the “strategies” of Deixis disappear as well. The later work, though it concerns the Spanish disjunctives *sí* and *él* rather than the clitics, offers a hypothesis that much more closely resembles the one offered in the present analysis of the Italian clitic *s(i)-*. García (1983) posits that the difference between the Spanish disjunctives *sí* and *él* crucially and systematically involves the fact that only the latter signals meanings of Gender and Number. “Nothing could be more sensible, then,” says García (1983: 187), “than to use *él* where its greater precision is needed, and to reserve *sí* for those situations where information as to gender and number can be done without.” This very much resembles the position taken in the present work regarding the difference between the Italian clitics *s(i)-*, on the one hand, and *gl(i)-*, *le-*, *(e)l+-*, and *-loro*, on the other.

García (1983: 188, n. 6) explains that the later hypothesis shows a “better fit with the data” than did the older Deixis hypothesis. She also claims “increased motivation by the fundamental communicative problem,” by which she apparently intends that statistical facts of usage are more strongly consistent with “a plausible inferential connection [that] links language and language use” (1983: 189). This seems to be an implicit admission that the strategies of García (1975) are *less* motivated by the communicative problem and *less* strongly consistent with a connection between grammar and use.

There remains, however, an important difference between García (1983) and the present work. Rather than propose what has been called here an *opposition of substance*, García (1983) proposes something that might be called an *opposition between substances*. While in the present work the Italian clitics all have certain meanings (of Participant Focus and Discourse Referent) in common – commonalities that provide the basis for comparing the sets to begin with –, for García (1983: 188) there is “no common semantic substance between *sí* and *él*.” We have seen already that for García (1983) only *él* signals meanings from the substances of Gender and Number. Moreover, García (1983: 188) assigns *sí* the meaning THIRD PERSON and *él* the meaning DEICTIC. That is, *sí* has a “person” meaning and is in fact a “personal pronoun,” while “*él* is not a personal pronoun.”

In making that distinction, García (1983: 188, n. 6) cites approvingly the “insightful discussion of ‘grammatical person’” given by Benveniste (1966). Yet that discussion now appears to have been overly philosophical and universalist in, for instance, contemplating, as had Saussure (1916/1972), *le langage* apart from particular facts of *les langues* and, moreover, in accepting traditional parts of speech (cf. Diver 1995/2012).

Furthermore, García (1983) appears to have substantially altered (or else misinterpreted) some ideas in Benveniste (1966). Benveniste (1966) accepted the traditional category *pronom* but his point was to distinguish within it between those pronouns that indicate person in discourse and those that (purportedly) substitute for some other element in the utterance. That is, for Benveniste (1966), the traditional first and second persons (French *je, tu*) operate on the pragmatic level (p. 252), while the third person (French *il, etc.*) is syntactic (p. 256). The first and second persons, said Benveniste (1966), have no constant referent but depend entirely upon the “present instance of discourse” (p. 253); by contrast, the third person, he said, is referential (p. 254). Though Benveniste (1966) did not explicitly mention the French cognates (*se, soi*) to the relevant Spanish and Italian forms, presumably they would be third-person, syntactic, and referential, substituting for some other element in the utterance (*viz.*, often the subject of their clause). Yet García (1983) compares the Spanish *sí* with the *first* person, thereby collapsing a distinction that Benveniste (1966) sought to establish: “It should be clear,” says García (1983: 187, emphasis added, jd), “that as the *discourse* proceeds different third persons may successively qualify as candidates for reference by *sí*, just as in *conversation* different individuals successively qualify for reference by ‘I.’” It would in fact appear that that statement could apply to *él* just as much as to *sí*.

d. García (2009)

In her last work, García (2009) adopts a similar treatment for the Spanish clitic *se*, continuing to appreciate the importance of the absence of Gender and Number information that would identify its referent. That is, her 2009 treatment of the Spanish clitic recalls her 1983 treatment of the disjunctive and anticipates the present analysis of Italian *s(i)-*. Yet García (2009: 136ff.) maintains the position of “inferential routines” (cf. strategies) being discrete, countable, and even “diametrically opposed.” García (2009: 136) continues to rely upon the traditional notions of part of speech and reference.¹⁰ She continues to distinguish crucially between pronouns that necessarily “refer” (first person, second person, and *l*-clitics) versus the form that does not necessarily refer (*se*). And among those that refer, she continues to distinguish between referent-identification by means of the speech situation (first and second persons) versus by means of the discourse context (the *l*-clitics). The present work demonstrates that such *a priori* distinctions are unnecessary and are not actual categories of the grammar.

10. Notions that recall traditional grammar, Bloomfieldian descriptivism, and much modern linguistics, notwithstanding Saussure. See below on Otheguy’s critique of *nomenclaturism*.

e. Gorup on Serbo-Croatian (2006)

Gorup (2006) offers an analysis of Serbo-Croatian *se* (cognate with Italian *si-*) and its “full form” *sebe* that is titled “*Se Without Deixis*.” In doing so, Gorup adopts the idea of the *opposition of substance* (Davis 1992, 1995a, 2000): a systematic difference between grammatical forms in which forms share certain meanings but one has an additional meaning from a different substance.¹¹ In other words, one form signals more semantic substance than the other; the two have different relative semantic loads. Like Italian *s(i)-*, Serbo-Croatian *se* opts out (in the terms of this analysis) of the systems of grammatical Gender and Number and so “has a rather sparse meaning” relative to the other clitics. This fact is the main determinant of its distribution relative to the other clitics, and so Gorup’s analysis is comparable to the present one in that respect. Serbo-Croatian differs from Italian in that *se* signals CENTRAL (not INNER) Focus, and does not distinguish Discourse Referent at all.¹²

f. Stern on English (2001–2006)

As will by now be abundantly clear to readers of this volume, English has nothing at all like Italian *s(i)-*. Yet the traditional and the modern universalist treatments label both Italian *s(i)-* and the English *-self* pronouns *reflexive*. (In terms of sentence structure, which is paramount in those perspectives, both pronouns do often occur in the predicate and refer to the subject.) Stern (2001, 2004a, 2004b, 2006) offers an analysis of the English *-self* pronouns that does not rely upon reflexivity at all. Stern’s hypothesis is that the various *-self* forms (including *himself*, *herself*, *itself*, *themselves*) signal the meaning INSISTENCE ON A REFERENT. The hypothesis unites instances of the *-self* pronouns that are traditionally labeled reflexive and emphatic (plus a variety of other uses). Though Stern stresses that categories of examples are purely heuristic, INSISTENCE may be used to emphasize a comparison or contrast between two parties (“He would be something nondescript, . . . , like *herself*”). Or it may be used to caution the hearer that a single referent simultaneously plays two distinct roles in an event; that is, INSISTENCE may flag a “role conflict” such as when one participant is both the agent and the patient in a single event (“Betty saw *herself* [in the mirror / in her daughter]”).

11. See Kirsner (2014: 43) for a brief, accurate summary of this development.

12. Serbo-Croatian *se* cannot refer to implied subjects of infinitives but only to grammatical subjects of finite verbs (i.e., participants in CENTRAL Focus), and SC *se* is used not just for third person but for all grammatical persons.

Quite plausibly, it is this INSISTENCE meaning which is primarily responsible for the fact that Italian *s(i)*- so rarely translates into English with a *-self* form (cf. Chapter 1). When an Italian writer does need to emphasize a referent, that is typically done with the addition of the lexical item *stess+* ‘same’ to a disjunctive, as in *se stesso*, thus both stressing the identity of the referent and decoupling the reference from any one verb. What the clitic *s(i)*- does, as we have seen, is to signal that no distinction in Degree of Control is being made where such a distinction might have been made. That is, rather than insisting that a referent is simultaneously playing two distinct roles (as in English), the Italian writer is opting out of distinguishing Degrees of Control at all. For this reason, examples of Italian *s(i)*- most often translate not as English reflexives with *-self* as direct object but instead as English intransitives, where only one role, not two, is at play (*egli si alzò* ‘he rose’; *la porta si aprì* ‘the door opened’). In view of the vast differences between Italian *s(i)*- and English *-self*, it is remarkable indeed that the tradition should have given them the same label; such is testament to the stayingpower of the canon of the sentence in grammar.

g. Other treatments

While it is Columbia School studies that have most influenced the present work, studies from other traditions have had an influence too. Such lines of thought should now be put in place in terms of their fit into the overall conceptualization of the problem and the goal of this analysis.

The task is made challenging by the fact that, for different analysts, the goals and the data are different. Columbia School has probably gone farther than any other school of thought in rejecting the view of language that was enshrined in traditional grammar. Granted, even a Columbia-School analyst has *expectations* that are derived from experience with analyses that have come before, but the Columbia-School analyst does not have the *assumption* that universalist, rationalist categories will provide a satisfactory fit with the observations of usage from a particular set of data. Nor does the Columbia-School analyst have the *assumption* that any new set of data will support a hypothesis similar to one offered for a previous set of data. For example, just because Deixis was proposed earlier for Latin, Spanish, and French, that in no way implies that it will need to be proposed for Italian. There is no assumption that “role conflict” will be a useful way to talk about the application of the mechanisms of Italian grammar, as it is in English. Even less – not at all – does the Columbia-School analyst *assume* the categories of traditional grammar, such as sentence, pronoun, accusative, reflexive, or impersonal.

The implicit goal of almost any non-Columbia School study, then, will be to accommodate categories such as *reflexive* into an analysis of whatever counts as data for the analyst. That last remark is no rhetorical slap in the face: What counts as data for a given analyst is a very serious question. Data could consist of: grammaticality judgements by native speakers (or by a native speaker, even by the analyst) upon sentences; survey responses; experimental results; historical change as documented in extant texts; the linguistic output of one speaker or writer; the output of a large demographic of speakers and writers; the output of speakers and writers who are known to be linguistically different (cross-linguistic production); the structure of discourse; and so forth. So the enormous differences in data, goals, and assumptions must be kept in mind. That caveat stated, however, some general influences can be traced.

Whatever one's theoretical orientation, and so one's assumptions and goals, one cannot ignore observation entirely. And so the ideal of "one form, one meaning" has been a constant but elusive goal for researchers who accept, even provisionally, the canonical categories and so who struggle, more or less, to reconcile the morphological unity of *si* with its apparent diversity of function or syntax (e.g., Napoli 1976, Dobrovie-Sorin 1998).¹³ A few studies, just those that are somehow most pertinent, are summarized here.

While Cinque (1988) admits that unity may be "hoped" for within Government-Binding Theory, he in fact proposes "a further distinction" to the existing classes of *si*, viz., an "argument" and a "nonargument" impersonal *si*.

Manzini (1986) seeks to unify into one lexical entry what are supposedly five different types of *si*. Manzini unifies four of these in their attachment to the verb in the syntactic component of the language: the impersonal, the reflexive, the middle (*i bambini si lavano* 'the children wash'), and the middle-reflexive (*gli unici bambini lavatisi* 'the only children [who] washed themselves'). The fifth type, the ergative (*la luce si spense* 'the light went off') – compare the "Romance reflexive" of García (1975) – differs "in that it is attached to a verb not in the syntax but in the lexicon" (p. 260); yet even this type, according to Manzini, is the same *si*.

Brunet (1994) asks the same question – one *si* or two? – and has a different answer. She justifies distinguishing the impersonal *si* from the others, which she groups as the passivizing *si*. Acknowledging interference and indeterminacy between the two categories, she does entertain rhetorically the possibility that the distinction is not truly fundamental, but she sees the retention of the distinction

13. Indicative of this elusive goal of unity amidst all the apparent diversity of *si*, consider the holding of a workshop (at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2015) devoted precisely to "the search for a 'common core'" (<https://publish.illinois.edu/workshop-romance-se-si/>, accessed July 13, 2016).

as analytically more modest than would be its unification. Like the present study, she also uses authentic, cited data.

An approach that specifically sets itself apart from the rules of generative grammar is the “Schema-Based Approach” of Barlow and Kemmer (1994). It also assumes without question the traditional categories and yet, at least implicitly, attempts to render a unified account, one however that includes not just Italian but all Romance reflexes of Latin *sē*. Barlow and Kemmer (1994) is one step closer to the present work in that it aims not only at unity of treatment but also, and explicitly, at a link between “form and meaning” (pp. 19, 26, 28). To these writers, as to others they cite in “the functional / cognitive tradition” (p. 19), schemas are “abstractions over actual instances of language use.” But to these writers, a schema is also “a template or target,” so that “a particular utterance may be modelled on a schema, and yet deviate from it in some manner that is not predictable” (p. 25). This accommodates variation without labeling it ungrammaticality or some sort of deviation from rules. Barlow and Kemmer (1994) take as their starting point Latin *sē*, which had, they claim – ignoring Diver –, various schemas including the direct and indirect reflexives; from these, all the others are historical “developments” or “extensions.”

Also taking a diachronic perspective, but specifically that of *grammaticalization*, also citing a link between form and meaning, and also adopting a “functionalist (cognitive) framework,” is Russi (2008). Here, “the cognitive and psychological processes that govern language are the same [as in] other aspects of human cognitive and social behavior” (p. 2). This framework thus shares with Columbia School a non-autonomy position. And as with CS, that position applies as well to grammar, which reflects “the same” principles as non-linguistic structures. Russi also acknowledges ties to usage-based or emergent grammar, in which knowledge of language, rather than having an innate basis, emerges from language use. This position too is essentially compatible with CS.

Remember the caveats: The goals are different and the assumptions are different. Russi’s goals are to describe a diachronic process; her data will therefore be more heterogeneous than the present collection, even if, as in the present study, the data come primarily from authentic usage. Too, she, like any cognitivist, assumes that linguistic structure reflects cognitive properties. She identifies grammar, specifically, with conceptualization. *In toto*, “language portrays the way we construe reality” (p. 2). In this view, to be sure, she shares with the Columbia School a kind of *human factor* that renders language non-autonomous, but the nature of her human factor is limited *a priori*, not subject to discovery on the basis of the analysis of data. The CS human factor is not limited to cognition and conceptualization, and grammar is viewed more as a tool of communication than a product of conceptualization. More damaging, however, are Russi’s assumptions of all the myriad traditional categories associated with clitic *si*: “third person singular and plural

reflexive or reciprocal pronoun (i.e., direct object pronoun co-referential with the subject); “indirect object pronoun”; “generic subject,” i.e., impersonal; “passive marker”; “ergative” (cf. “Romance reflexive”); and “inherently reflexive” (pp. 51–54). Any investigation that starts out laden with so many assumptions can obviously succeed only if the assumptions are justified. These, unfortunately, are not.¹⁴

Columbia School has enjoyed a fruitful dialogue with Cognitive Grammar (Kirsner 1993, 1996, 2002, 2004, 2014; Janssen 1995; Langacker 2004; Davis 2006a; Huffman 2012). One hopes that, as both schools proceed with actual analyses, as with the present study, that dialogue will continue.

In sum, the one feature that all the studies here have in common is a recognition of the importance of morphological unity. In addition, most of the studies that precede this one favor an account in which some kind of relation between form and meaning plays a part. In some studies, language is viewed as non-autonomous, as related in some way to other aspects of human intelligence. And in some, methodology reflects a preference for data that come from attested usage rather than intuition upon decontextualized, constructed sentences. Among the studies cited here, however, only those within the Columbia School make a concerted effort to reject the failed traditional categories of analysis. That entails: taking morphological unity quite seriously as a starting point; letting one’s data coverage end where the analysis says it must; being open to the possibility that totally noncanonical meanings may play a role in distribution in use; and standing ready to appeal to any aspect of general human behavior that might help in crafting a successful analysis, a “successful analysis” being one in which hypotheses fit observations (Diver 1995/2012).

B. Theory

This section is placed so late in the book, after the full presentation of the analysis, on account of the belief that, in linguistics at least, theory ought to proceed from analysis, not to precede analysis (Diver 1995/2012: 445–448). Whatever understanding of Italian grammar – whatever understanding of language in general – might emerge from the present analysis will consequently be highly aposterioristic. While in many fields this situation might indeed be a weakness – to have a set of hypotheses that are ungrounded in any framework of accepted assumptions – in linguistics the situation is very much called for. That is because the field of linguistics is rife with analytical failure that stems from the assumption of the categories of

14. Like Russi (2008), Mutz (2012) turns to grammaticalization and assumes canonical categories but adds the old error of imagining a former unity that, through diachrony, dissolved into synchronic “difficulties.”

traditional sentence grammar. This failure runs the gamut from traditional school grammars, with their long lists of exceptions to rules, all the way to serious modern works of scholarship in which any genuine insights into the features of a particular grammar or into the properties of a human language faculty are fundamentally compromised by initial assumptions that have gone unexamined.

Granted, any analyst – the present one included – will have *expectations* based on work that has gone before. Even those *expectations* can be too powerful, can blind one to what is really going on in a data set and lead one to put forth a hypothesis prematurely, and then to defend it overzealously.

This section, then, in light of the theory-last principle, can add nothing new to what has already been said during the analysis concerning Italian *s(i)*-; it can only summarize and highlight what has come out of that analysis.

Another reason for modest goals in this section is that there have already appeared several statements of the theoretical position that informs this work. They cannot be improved upon here but can only be summarized.

a. Previous theoretical statements

The most definitive and thoroughgoing statement of the theoretical position that has arisen from this line of work is to be found in Diver (1995/2012).¹⁵ Its many tightly related points can be summarized in one sentence:

The general picture of human language is that of a particular kind of instrument of communication, an imprecise code by means of which precise messages can be transmitted through the exercise of human ingenuity. (Diver 1995/2012: 445)

The wording of the paper being quite careful throughout, the passage just quoted reveals at least three broad, important conclusions: (1) That what we call “language” is both like other things and unlike those things. It is a form of communication – signals with meanings – a behavior that, to be sure, is shared with other species and that takes several forms within the human species; yet it is at the same time a “particular kind” of communication, one with unique characteristics. (2) The analyst must be careful to distinguish between the finite number of imprecise *meanings*

15. The paper, titled “Theory,” was published during Diver’s lifetime, in 1995, in a version that was approved by him. The version published in 2012 was edited posthumously. The complete structure of the 1995 version, and most of its content, was retained, unchanged, in the 2012 version. The editors of the 2012 version added references, revised text for general readability, and updated one short section, on “Quantitative Testing” in light of work that was in progress when the 1995 version went to press.

encoded in linguistic signals and the infinite number of *messages* that can be communicated by combining those meanings in a context. (3) At least two *orientations* are necessary if we are to make a successful grammatical analysis: a *communicative* orientation and a *human factor* orientation. We need to know something about communication if we are to posit signals with meanings. And we need to know something about human intelligence if we are to account for the derivation of infinite *messages* from a limited stock of signaled *meanings*.

To illustrate with the present work: *S(i)-* is one piece of a tool of human communication. *S(i)-* is a signal of meaning in a system of a very small number of signals and meanings. Specifically, *s(i)-* signals the meaning NOT SPEAKER OR HEARER in a system of Discourse Referents (in opposition to the meanings SPEAKER and HEARER) and the meaning INNER in a system of Participant Focus (in opposition to the meaning OUTER). With these very imprecise meanings, in combination with other meanings such as those of the other members of the system and the senses of the lexical items in context, a speaker or writer can suggest inferences as precise as: This is an action or state of being that might well pertain to anyone and everyone, regardless of sex; or, This is an action in which a particular agent treats himself like a patient. Yet neither *generalized impersonal* nor *neutralization of Degree of Control* is a hypothesized *meaning* of *s(i)-*. Those are possible *interpretations* of particular examples containing *s(i)-* along with other linguistic forms. Obviously, the gap between meaning and message is enormous, and it becomes a large part of the task of analysis to address that gap.

Diver (1995/2012 § 3.2.2.5) discusses too the place of “substance and value in linguistic analysis,”¹⁶ thus presaging the main theme of the present work: that oppositions of substance may be as important as oppositions of value in accounting for the distribution of linguistic signals in discourse. Diver’s paper, however, does not use the term *opposition of substance* nor discuss the properties and consequences of that relationship between meanings; such questions were in their infancy in that day. So Diver’s paper would, for instance, recognize the difference between, on the one hand, the substance of Degree of Control and, on the other hand, the several value relations that obtain between meanings *within* that substance, such as the value relation between the meanings MID Degree of Control and LOW Degree of Control. The present work goes beyond that and develops the idea that a linguistic signal standing systematically *outside* such a value relationship can profitably be studied in relation to the signals *inside* the value relationship. So *s(i)-* stands outside the opposition of Degree of Control between MID *gl(i)- / le- / -loro* and LOW *(e)l+-*, and the distribution of *s(i)-* relative to those other clitics can profitably be studied.

16. That was the title of a 1974 paper also republished in the 2012 volume.

Contini-Morava (1995) places Diver and the Columbia School in general within the context of the larger field of linguistics. While acknowledging that all modern schools of linguistics owe a debt to Saussure (1916/1972), Contini-Morava observes that not all have embraced Saussure's theoretical "cornerstone," his *signe linguistique*. To autonomous Chomskyan generative grammar, which has dismissed the importance of communication in linguistic structure, Contini-Morava opposes "functional" schools, including Columbia, the Jakobsonian, and the Guillaumean, to which might well be added, nowadays, Cognitive Grammar, construction grammar, usage-based, and emergent grammar.¹⁷

The main differences that Contini-Morava sees as separating functionalism (or "sign based theories of grammar") from autonomous syntax are (1) the definition of the data and (2) the roles of semantics and pragmatics. Functional schools, she says, ask of data the questions: "Why do linguistic forms occur where they do" and "How do we account for the fact that human beings are able to produce and infer an infinite number of novel messages from a finite number of" meanings? And functional schools tend to see meaning not as *compositional* (The meanings of parts of sentences add up to the meanings of sentences) but as *contributory* (Meanings serve as instructions or mere hints). Furthermore, in functional schools, "there is no *a priori* restriction as to what can count" as a meaning, and so there is no *a priori* distinction between semantics and pragmatics. For a functionalist, the "initial methodological assumption," she says, is "the principle of one-form – one-meaning."

Functionalists differ among themselves, says Contini-Morava, in how they incorporate syntactic categories, some rejecting them altogether, as Saussure did, and others incorporating some of them or treating them as essentially semantic. And among functionalists, she says, only the Columbia School "does not confine its validation to the individual sentence, but also considers the relation between grammatical meaning and the 'macro-level' discourse," an innovation that has necessitated for Columbia School the use of quantitative methods of validation to complement its analysis of authentic examples. Some functionalists, says Contini-Morava, have criticized certain aspects of Saussure's position, and among these criticisms she rightly includes Diver's (1974/2012) objection that Saussure over-emphasized value at the expense of substance, and that substance must in fact be reckoned with (cf. Davis 2004a, Davis 2016b). The present work extends Diver's appreciation of linguistic substance to include the importance of studying the oppositions of substance, not just the oppositions between values within a substance.

17. For further comparative theoretical analysis, see Tobin (1987, 1990), Huffman (2012), and Kirsner (2014 and others cited in this chapter). For a discussion of Diver's debt to Saussure, see Davis (2004a), Reid (2006), and Davis (2006a).

Huffman (2006) sees Diver's "main idea" – what distinguishes Diver from the functionalists – as a radical aposteriorism, an "insistence on an inductive (*a posteriori*) procedure," a refusal to assume categories from the canon of sentence grammar and to search for a starting point for linguistics. For Diver, the search for that starting point takes him to observable distribution, that is, ultimately to the very sound wave of speech itself. Thus Huffman (2006) would appear not to wish to group Diver with the functionalists in a dichotomy opposed to Chomsky's autonomous syntax.

Huffman (2012) repeats the point of Diver's radical aposteriorism and notes similarities and differences between Diver and not only functionalists but also Chomsky.¹⁸ Huffman (2012) also engages in a brief but constructive discussion of Diver vis-à-vis Cognitive Grammar, particularly with respect to what Huffman sees as the beginning of a move within Cognitive Grammar towards a Diver-like distinction between signaled linguistic *meaning* and inferred *message*.

Otheguy (2002), too, distinguishes Diver from both the functionalists and the generativists. Otheguy sees the main difference as being Diver's "anti-nomenclaturism" (rejection of received concepts), which Otheguy sees as Diver's distinguishing debt to Saussure and as Saussure's "central insight." According to Otheguy (and to Diver and Saussure), the categories of analysis and structure cannot be observed or taken for granted *as data* but must be sought out and posited *on the basis of data*.

The closely related concepts of aposteriorism and anti-nomenclaturism can be illustrated with points from the present work. Here, the category *reflexive* has not been taken for granted as a fact of structure amenable to observation, such that one might ask and then set out to discover, What is the reflexive pronoun in Italian? If one begins with that question, then one finds – as shown in this work – that there are several – or else *no* – reflexive pronouns in Italian. Likewise for the category *impersonal*. At the same time, this study did not begin with categories such as LOW Deixis or INNER FOCUS. Here, semantic categories are hypotheses, not givens.

Furthermore, just as *meanings* cannot be observed but must be posited, so too *signals* cannot be observed but must be posited. So, here, it is truly a matter of hypothesis that we have to do with a linguistic *signal* that is characterized as *s(i)-*. Contrary to the *prima facie* phonological evidence, this signal is not the same as the *si* that is often glossed 'yes'; except for clitic position and occasional contraction of the former, they are homophones. Less trivially and less obviously, it is a matter of hypothesis that the *s* of *selo* is the same signal as the *si* of *lo si* and of *s'ingincchia*; and the phonological sequence [se] of *selo* is not the lexical item *se* that is often

18. I would argue, in fact, that it is simplistic all around to set up dichotomies such as Saussure-Chomsky, Diver-Chomsky, functionalism-formalism, and Diver-functionalism. None of the writers summarized here do that, but it is a temptation to be guarded against.

glossed ‘if’ but is in fact *s(i)*- followed by the separately posited signal *(e)l*+- . All categories here, both signals and meanings, are products of analysis, not assumptions.

Back to previous theoretical statements of note.

Reid (2002) offers a brief but trenchant discussion of “meaning as explanation,” in which “linguistic meaning [is] the *explanans* in linguistic theory rather than the *explanandum*” (cf. also Kirnser 2014: 15–16). Meaning is the explanation, not the object of explanation. Meaning is not known in advance but is posited in order to explain the observed distribution of linguistic forms.

Huffman (1997, especially pp. 14–24) provides an excellent statement of the theoretical position taken in that work and here.

Huffman (2001) offers a good introduction to Columbia School.

b. Theoretical contributions of the present work

It remains only to highlight the contributions of the present work to the state of linguistic theory.

The present work advances the idea that oppositions of substance can be as important as oppositions of value in accounting for an observed distribution of linguistic forms. To account for such distribution, it is not always necessary to posit an opposition of value. For instance, the distribution of Italian *s(i)*- with respect to *(e)l*+- can be accounted for quite successfully without positing a system of Deixis which they would subdivide. Instead, the more transparent differences between the two do the job: the fact that *(e)l*+- signals meanings from the substances of grammatical Gender and Number while *s(i)*- does not, plus the claim that *(e)l*+- signals a meaning of Degree of Control while *s(i)*- does not. These oppositions of substance are just as much a part of the *grammar* – just as much a part of the structure – as are the oppositions of value between meanings within a substance.

The present work advances the idea that communicated *messages* are not discrete, countable, and identifiable.¹⁹ Rather, the messages that get communicated are as varied as the utterances that get produced. There is no “impersonal” message distinct from a “reflexive” message. Rather, sometimes the substance of Number is relevant and sometimes it is irrelevant. Sometimes Gender or Sex is relevant and sometimes irrelevant. Sometimes a distinction in Degree of Control is called for; at other times, no such distinction is made, and then we find an entire range of effective degrees of control exercised by the participant in CENTRAL Focus, so that it

19. In 2011, Wallis Reid gave a presentation at the Columbia University Seminar on Columbia School Linguistics in which he made the point that *message* is part of an ongoing communication, created by the analyst during the process of validation.

is not possible to distinguish among “reflexive,” “Romance reflexive,” and “passive” messages, nor “passive” messages from “impersonal” messages. Indeed, it might be better not to speak of “messages” or “a message” or “the message” at all but to limit ourselves to speaking of “message” (with a null article), suggesting the indivisible, holistic, *gestalt* communication that results from the combination in context of several meanings and lexical senses.²⁰

As corollary, the present work advances the idea – consistent with Diver (1995/2012) – that the only components needed in the theory are *observations*, *orientations*, and *hypotheses*. It is at best superfluous and at worst misleading to introduce discrete *strategies* to mediate between hypothesized linguistic meanings and communicated messages. If a meaning hypothesis is successful, and if it is truly understood, then its contribution to the communication – in light of other meanings available in the grammar – should be evident. For instance: The fact that *s(i)*- signals Discourse Referent NOT ON SPEAKER OR HEARER and INNER FOCUS and does *not* signal meanings of Sex and Number accounts perfectly adequately both for the differences in distribution between *s(i)*- and *egli* ‘he’ and for the differences in distribution between *s(i)*- and *uno* ‘one,’ *lui* ‘he,’ *loro* ‘they,’ and *noi* ‘we’ (Chapter 2). There is no need to posit an “impersonal” or “person defocussed” strategy. And the fact that *s(i)*- signals its two interlocked Referent and Focus meanings and does not signal meanings of Gender, Number, and Degree of Control accounts perfectly adequately both for the differences in distribution between *s(i)*- and the *l*-clitics (dative and accusative), and for the differences in distribution between *s(i)*- and *sé* ‘himself, herself, itself, themselves,’ *lui/lei/loro* ‘him/her/them,’ and nothing (potentially transitive verb without overt object) (Chapters 5, 6, 7). There is no need to posit a “reflexive,” a “Romance reflexive,” or a “double mention” strategy. Indeed, such additions to the explanatory apparatus are counterproductive.

A heretofore mostly inexplicit contribution of the present work to the theoretical framework is that this work – one hopes – avoids two perils of data coverage, a Scylla and a Charybdis.

The Scylla: It is a known error to engage in the idealization of discrete “languages,” to pretend that there exist, out there somewhere, “Italian” and “Spanish” and so forth. It is undeniable that people on the Italian peninsula exhibit linguistic heterogeneity, even when mutually comprehensible. Even in the data for the present study, there are scattered examples of, for instance, *gli* referring to a feminine entity, and *si* referring to a first person plural; these usages presumably betray regional differences. It is also undeniable that, overall, people on the Italian peninsula and on the Iberian peninsula – and on the Rockaway Peninsula in New York City – exhibit

20. I am indebted to Wallis Reid (p.c.) for this formulation.

a certain degree of linguistic homogeneity, even to the point of mutual comprehensibility: *si / se, mi / me, tu / tú, lo / lo, la / la, egli / él*. Though the substantial field of sociolinguistics is outside our scope, no one can encounter a work such as, for example, Otheguy and Zentella (2012) and persist in believing in “Spanish.”

The Charybdis: Despite the current interest in usage-based grammar, and whatever insights it and similar approaches have had, it is a mistake to believe that one can achieve analytical success only by avoiding systematicity altogether; that, because “language” is always changing, even for every individual speaker, there is no point in putting forth any hypothesis regarding any definable set of data; that one can only study the dynamic properties of change. On the contrary: The existence of clines in no way precludes the existence of categories (Boye and Harder 2012: 6). Obviously, if the data set behind the present study were to be expanded a bit too far this way or that way, eventually the data set would be too heterogeneous, and the hypotheses here would fail to account for the observed distribution. At the same time, however, the present study does have a data set and does have a hypothesis that fits it. Evidently, it *is* possible to achieve analytical success with some sort of synchronic analysis. Evidently, there is enough systematicity and stability in usage that analysts can develop and defend hypotheses arising out of that usage.

To return, then, to a point raised earlier in this chapter: The question of data coverage is important. One can certainly study the various ways that individuals speak across large expanses of terrain, from Palermo to Venezia, or even from Roma to Buenos Aires. Or one can certainly study the various ways that individuals write across the generations, from Julius Caesar to Cesare Pavese. But this study takes instead, by design, a relatively homogenous body of data, one that makes it possible to devise a hypothesis about the distribution of *s(i)*- that is observed in that data set. Despite frequent appearance of the word in these pages and on the cover, no claim is made here about “Italian.” But a claim is made about the distribution of *s(i)*- observed in this data set.

The aim of this study has been modest: to account for the observed distribution of one linguistic form in a fairly homogeneous data set. The theoretical innovations have been modest: incremental refinements of ideas that have come before. But the analysis, I believe, is successful, or at least successful enough to contribute to our emerging understanding of the nature of human language.

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This book offers an original treatment of the Italian clitic *si*. Sharply separating encoded grammar from inference in discourse, it proposes a unitary meaning for *si*, including impersonals, passives, and reflexives. *Si* signals third-person participancy but makes no distinctions of number, gender, or case role. The analysis advances the Columbia School framework by relying on just these straightforward oppositions, attributing variety of interpretation largely to language use rather than to grammar. The analysis places *si* within a network of oppositions involving all the other clitics. Data come primarily from twentieth-century and more recent published and on-line literature. The book will be of interest to functional linguists, students of reflexivity, and scholars of the Italian language.

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