

# On Inclusiveness of *si* in Italian

Roberta D'Alessandro  
Kleinwalsertal, June 23-26, 2001

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. The Questions

- Is *si* inclusive or exclusive in Italian?
- Are there arbitrary (*arb*) items in the lexicon or is the arbitrary reading obtained by means of syntactic configuration?

### 1.2. The Arbitrary Reference

Arbitrary reference is the possibility, for one or more lexical items, to refer to an unspecified, generic individual.

There are several constructions in which arbitrary reference is found in Italian. In this talk, I will only deal with *si* impersonal constructions with transitive active verbs.

- (1) Qui *si* mangiano gli spaghetti  
here *si* eat the spaghetti  
'Here people eat spaghetti'

### 1.3. *Si* impersonal constructions with transitive active verbs

There are two possibilities for verb agreement in *si* impersonal constructions with transitive active verbs in Italian:

1. The verb agrees in number and person with the object

- (2) Qui *si* raccontano favole  
here *si* tell (3rd pl.) fairy tales(pl.)  
'Here people tell stories'

2. The verb shows the default agreement ending (3rd ps. sg.)

- (3) Qui si racconta favole  
 here si tells (3rd sg) fairy tales  
 ‘Here people tell stories’

Moreover, *si* is always plural, as shown in example (4) and (5):

- (4) Qui si raccontano favole su se stessi/ \*su  
 here si<sub>i</sub> tell fairy tales on themselves<sub>i</sub> (3rd pl.)/ on  
 se stesso  
 oneself<sub>i</sub>  
 ‘Here people tell stories about themselves’

- (5) ?Qui si racconta favole su se stessi/ \*su  
 here si<sub>i</sub> tells fairy tales on themselves<sub>i</sub> (3rd pl.)/ on  
 se stesso  
 oneself<sub>i</sub>  
 ‘Here people tell stories about themselves’

#### 1.4. The ‘we’ reading

In contexts with specific time reference, the *si* constructions get a 1st ps. pl. reading (inclusive reading):

- (6) Ieri si è mangiata una mela alle 7  
 here si is eaten an apple at 7  
 ‘Here we ate an apple at 7’

## 2. Previous accounts

### 2.1. Cinque (1988)

1. Agreement: Cinque (1988) justified the difference in agreement by simply saying that we are dealing with two different *sis*: an argumental one, see (2), and a non argumental one, see (3), with different syntactic behaviour. *Si* in (3) would simply show up in a sentence for giving the arbitrary reading.
2. ‘We’ reading: “*we* is the best approximation of a specific, referential

pronoun to an arbitrary pronoun”<sup>1</sup>.

*Si* can't get this interpretation with transitive and unergative verbs.

*Comments on Cinque (1988)*

- Conflict with Burzio's generalization
- Restriction on the position where *si* is base-generated
- The semantic correlation between specific time reference and inclusiveness is not explained
- Data show that the 'we' reading is also possible with transitive verbs (see (6))

**2.2. Manzini & Savoia (2000)**

Manzini & Savoia (2000) assume that *si* is base-generated in an object-clitic position, in OriginP (Manzini & Savoia 2000).

*Comments on Manzini & Savoia (2000)*

- *Si* as an object clitic
- Restrictions on the position in which *si* is base-generated

**2.3. Chierchia (1995)**

Chierchia (1995) analyzes *si* as an indefinite, as shown in the following example<sup>2</sup>:

- (7) In campeggio *si* canta  
in camping si sings  
'While camping, people sing'

which has the following logical form:

- (8) GN s [C(s)] [ $\exists$  x sing(s, x)]

---

<sup>1</sup>From Cinque (1988).

<sup>2</sup>From Chierchia (1995).

where GN is a generic operator that quantifies over situations;  
C is the contextual restriction on the situations (the camping situations);  
x is a variable, which ranges over humans, introduced by *si*.

Moreover, Chierchia observes that there can be no antecedence relation between *si* and  $\text{pro}_{arb}$ :

- (9) \* $\text{Si}_i$  è detto che  $\text{pro}_i$  vinceranno  
si is said that pro will win  
'People said that they will win'

His explanation is that *si* is inclusive and  $\text{pro}_{arb}$  is exclusive, as shown in examples (10) and (11):

- (10) Ti pro hanno cercato  
you (Acc) pro have looked for  
'Somebody has looked for you'
- (11) Ti si è cercato  
you (Acc) si is looked for  
'Somebody/we have looked for you'

*Comments on Chierchia (1995)*

- *Si* isn't always inclusive

### 3. On inclusiveness of si

#### 3.1. Syntactic Tools

Let's consider example (12):

- (12) Qui si mangiano gli spaghetti  
here si eat the spaghetti  
'Here people eat spaghetti'

In this example, we see that the object DP doesn't bear Acc Case, but Nom. There are two ways of showing this:

1. In Italian the verb only shows agreement with Nom DPs
2. In Italian personal pronouns bear Case. If we substitute an Acc pronoun to the DP in (12), the sentence turns ungrammatical:

- (13) \*Qui li                    si mangiano  
       here them (Acc) si eat (3rd ps. pl.)  
       ‘Here them are eaten’

This clearly shows that the object DP in (12) bears Nom Case.

Adopting Cinque’s proposal, I suggest that *si* acts as a quasi-passivizer. In my derivation, this means that *si*:

- intervenes before Acc is assigned
- “absorbs” the external  $\theta$ -role, thus blocking Acc

For this to happen, *si* has to be base-generated in a position which is lower or coincident with [Spec, *v*P], which is the locus of assignment of accusative. There are two alternatives:

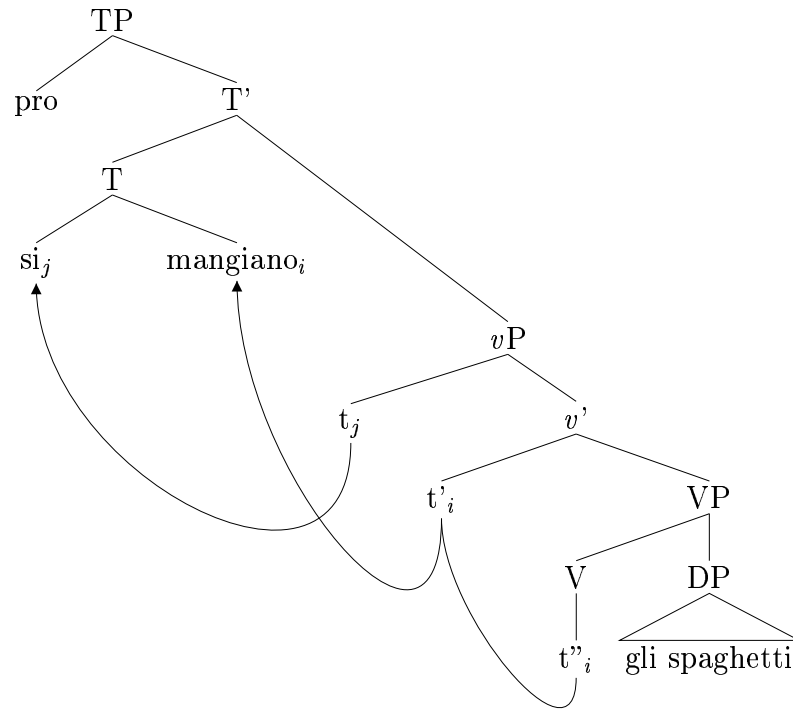
1. **Simple structure** *Si* is simply merged in [Spec, *v*P]. The EPP feature on T is checked by pro, if present in the Numeration.

The derivation:

- (14) a. Merge V, DP : [<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>V</sub> mangiano] [<sub>DP</sub> gli spaghetti]]  
       b. Merge *v*, VP : [<sub>vP</sub> mangiano gli spaghetti]  
       c. Merge DP, *v*P : [<sub>vP</sub> si mangiano gli spaghetti]  $\Rightarrow$  Absorption  
           of EXT  $\theta$ -role, block of Acc Case  
       d. Merge T, *v*P : [<sub>TP</sub> [<sub>vP</sub> si [<sub>VP</sub>mangiano gli spaghetti]]]  
       e. Move V : [<sub>vP</sub> si [<sub>v</sub> mangiano<sub>i</sub>] t<sub>i</sub> gli spaghetti]  
       f. Move *v* : [<sub>TP</sub> [<sub>T</sub> mangiano<sub>i</sub>] si t’<sub>i</sub> t’’<sub>i</sub> gli spaghetti]  
       g. Move DP : [<sub>TP</sub> si<sub>j</sub> mangiano<sub>i</sub> t<sub>j</sub> t’<sub>i</sub> t’’<sub>i</sub> gli spaghetti]

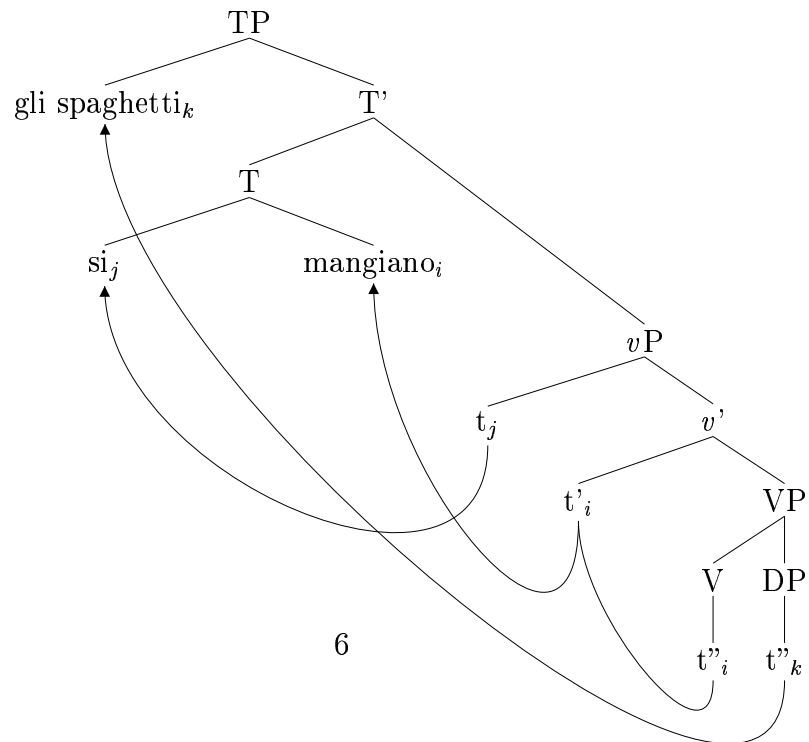
The tree:

(15)



If there is no *pro* in the Num, *gli spaghetti* has to move upwards and check the EPP on T:

(16)

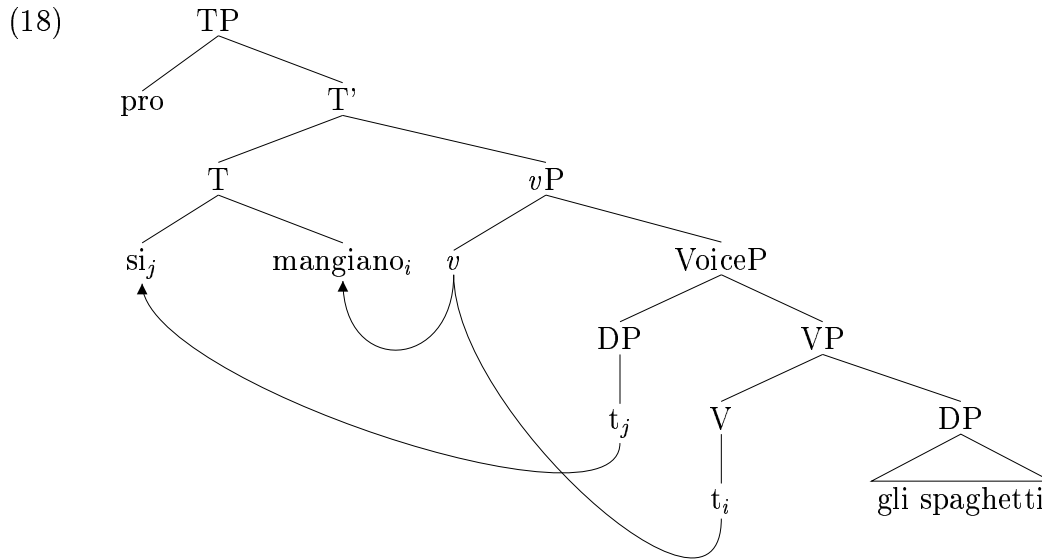


## 2. Complex structure

*Si* is base-generated in a DP position which is lower than [Spec, *v*P]. I assume a structure in which *v* is split into two layers, one of which, *v*, only related to transitivity, and the other, Voice, situated lower, related to voice (active/passive) (Jelinek 1998). *Si* is base-generated in [Spec, VoiceP], and it blocks the assignment of Acc from there, absorbing the external  $\theta$ -role. From this position, *si* acts as a quasi-passivizer and affects the 'type' of *v*, which will now be an unaccusative type of *v*, without a specifier.

- (17)
- a. Merge V, DP : [<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>v</sub> mangiano] [<sub>DP</sub> gli spaghetti]]
  - b. Merge Voice, VP : [<sub>VoiceP</sub> mangiano gli spaghetti]
  - c. Merge DP, VoiceP : [<sub>VoiceP</sub> [<sub>DP</sub> si] [<sub>VoiceP</sub> mangiano gli spaghetti]]  
 $\Rightarrow$  Absorption of EXT  $\theta$ -role, block of ACC Case
  - d. Merge *v* : [<sub>vP</sub> si mangiano gli spaghetti]
  - e. Move V : [<sub>vP</sub> [<sub>v</sub> mangiano] [<sub>VoiceP</sub> [<sub>DP</sub> si] [<sub>VP</sub> *t<sub>i</sub>* [<sub>DP</sub> gli spaghetti]]]]
  - f. Move DP : [<sub>vP</sub> [<sub>DP</sub> gli spaghetti]<sub>*k*</sub>] [<sub>v</sub> [<sub>v</sub> mangiano] [<sub>VoiceP</sub> si *t<sub>i</sub>* *t<sub>k</sub>*]]
  - g. Merge Asp, *v*P : [<sub>AspP</sub> [<sub>vP</sub> gli spaghetti]<sub>*k*</sub> mangiano]<sub>*i*</sub> si *t<sub>i</sub>* *t<sub>k</sub>*]]
  - h. Merge T, AspP : [<sub>TP</sub> gli spaghetti]<sub>*k*</sub> mangiano]<sub>*i*</sub> si *t<sub>i</sub>* *t<sub>k</sub>*]
  - i. Move *v* : [<sub>TP</sub> [ mangiano]<sub>*i*</sub> gli spaghetti]<sub>*k*</sub> si *t<sub>i</sub>* *t<sub>k</sub>*]]
  - j. Merge DP [<sub>TP</sub> pro [<sub>TP</sub> si]<sub>*j*</sub> mangiano]<sub>*i*</sub> gli spaghetti *t<sub>j</sub>* *t<sub>i</sub>* ]]

The tree:



Same story as before for the EPP on T.

About constructions with no agreement with the object:

- (19) Qui si mangia spaghetti  
here si eats spaghetti  
'Here people eat spaghetti'

there's no need to assume that *si* is base-generated lower than [Spec, *v*P]. It can actually be base-generated in a position higher than TP, in a subject or in an object clitic position (Manzini & Savoia 2000).

*Observation* The *si* constructions with no agreement with the object are possible only with bare DPs. This might mean that the syntactic difference corresponds to a semantic difference: the construction with no agreement with the object might be a predicate specification or incorporation-like construction, as suggested by H. Kamp and P. Svenonius (p.c.).

*First achievement* The first advantage of using this analysis is that it requires less constraints than Cinque's and Manzini & Savoia's on the position of *si*, which can be base-generated in any possible DP position in the sentence.

#### 4. Another look at the data

- (20) Qui si mangia  
here si eats (Present)  
'Here people eat'<sup>3</sup> (EXCL)
- (21) Qui si è mangiato  
here si is eaten (Past Perf.)  
'Here somebody/we ate' (INCL)
- (22) Qui si costruiva una casa con i mattoni  
here si was building (Past Impf.) a house with the bricks  
'Here people used to build a house with bricks' (EXCL)

---

<sup>3</sup>EXCL here and in the other examples means 'not specified for inclusiveness'

- (23) Qui si è costruita una casa con i mattoni  
 here si is built (Past Perf.) a house with the bricks  
 ‘Here somebody/we built a house with bricks’ (INCL)
- (24) In passato, si riconosceva la sua umiltà  
 in past si recognized (Past Impf.) the his humbleness  
 ‘In the past, people recognized his humbleness’ (EXCL)
- (25) In passato, si è riconosciuta la sua umiltà  
 in past si is recognized (Past Perf.) the his humbleness  
 ‘In the past, somebody/we recognized his humbleness’ (INCL)
- (26) Quando sono tornato alla pensione, si  
 when am come back to the boarding house si  
 serviva la zuppa  
 was serving (Past Impf.) the soup  
 ‘When I returned to the boarding house, somebody was serving the  
 soup’<sup>4</sup> (EXCL)
- (27) Quando sono tornato alla pensione, si è servita  
 when am come back to the boarding house si is  
 la zuppa  
 served (Past Perf) the soup  
 ‘When I returned to the boarding house, somebody/we served the  
 soup’ (INCL)

*Second achievement* The data show that *si* is not specified for inclusiveness, as Chierchia claims, and that the contrast EXCL\INCL can be found also in sentences with transitive active verbs.

*Important!* EXCL *si* can be in antecedence relation with  $pro_{arb}$ :

- (28) Si costruisce una casa. Fanno un rumore bestiale.  
 $si_i$  builds a house  $pro_i$  make a noise beastly  
 Somebody is building a house. They make a lot of noise

---

<sup>4</sup>Examples (26) and (27) are translations of Kratzer (1995)’s ex.1 on page 6

#### 4.1. The proposal

- *Si* is not always inclusive
  - ⇒ The inclusiveness/exclusiveness of *si* isn't completely determined by adverbs or by specific time reference. By looking at examples (20)-(21), (22)-(23) and (24)-(25), it seems that the crucial element which gives an inclusive/exclusive reading to the sentences is aspect.
- *Si* can get an inclusive interpretation also with transitive verbs
  - Proposal: *Si* as an indefinite (Chierchia 1995). The generic operator is on Aspect, and not in an unspecified position adjoined to the IP. GN shows up only with Imperfective aspect.
- The 'we' reading
  - ⇒ *si* gets the 'we' reading as a consequence of the combination of its PLURAL and its INCLUSIVE marks.
- Minimal assumptions
  - ⇒ My analysis requires 'minimal' assumptions, in that it doesn't need constraints on the position in which *si* is base-generated. *Si*, being a DP, could be base-generated anywhere in the structure where a DP can be merged.
- No *arb* feature
  - ⇒ There is nothing like an 'arbitrary feature' in the lexicon, nor is there an 'arbitrary lexical item': *si* is underspecified, and gets its interpretation by means of syntactic (and perhaps pragmatic) strategies.

#### 5. A strange piece of data

The data in (29) and (30) seem to be a counterexample to my analysis.

(29) Ti                    si è cercato  
you (ACC) si is looked for (Past Perf.)  
'Somebody/we looked for you' (INCL)

(30) Ti                    si cercava  
you (ACC) si looked for (Past Impf)  
'Somebody/we looked for you' (INCL)

However, it seems that the 2nd sg. pronoun links the sentence to the speech act. Compare:

- (31) Ti                    si cercava  
you (ACC) si looked for (Past Impf.)  
'Somebody/we was looking for you' (INCL)
- (32) Li                    si cercava  
them (ACC) si looked for (Past Impf.)  
'Somebody was looking for them'
- (33) Si cercava                    una macchina  
si looked for (Impf.) a    car  
'Somebody was looking for a car' (EXCL)

*Speculation* When there is no operator on Aspect, in order for *si* to be specified, it needs to link to the speech act. The speech act necessarily involves the speaker, hence the inclusive reading.

## References

- Baker, Mark, Kyle Johnson & Ian Roberts (1989): 'Passive Arguments Raised', *Linguistic Inquiry* **20**, 219–251.
- Burzio, Luigi (1986): *Italian Syntax*. Studies in Natural Language and Linguistic Theory, Kluwer.
- Chierchia, Gennaro (1995): The Variability of Impersonal Subjects. In: E. Bach, E. Jelinek, A. Kratzer & B. H. Partee, eds, *Quantification in Natural Languages*. Kluwer Academic Publishers, pp. 107–143.
- Chierchia, Gennaro (2000): 'Indefinite Pronouns', talk, University of Tuebingen.
- Cinque, Guglielmo (1988): 'On *Si* Constructions and the Theory of *Arb*', *Linguistic Inquiry* **19**, 521–582.
- Giorgi, Alessandra & Fabio Pianesi (1997): *Tense and Aspect*. Oxford Studies in Comparative Syntax, Oxford University Press.
- Jaeggli, Osvaldo (1986): 'Arbitrary Plural Pronominals', *NLLT* **4**, 43–76.
- Jelinek, Eloise (1998): Voice and Transitivity as Functional Projections in Yaqui. In: M. Butt & W. Geuder, eds, *The Projection of Arguments*. Number 83 in 'CSLI Lecture Notes', CSLI Publications.
- Kim, Boomee (1991): 'An Indefinite Analysis of  $pro_{arb}$ ', *MIT Working Papers in Linguistics* **14**, 147–162.    11
- Kratzer, Angelika (1995): Impersonal pronouns and passive meaning. h.o. UMASS Amherst.

- Manzini, M. Rita & Leonardo Savoia (2000): The Syntax of Object Clitics: *si* in Italian Dialects. In: G. Salvi, ed., *Festschrift Renzi*. pp. 225–255.
- Reuland, Eric (2001): ‘Backward Anaphora, Tense Interpretation and some Consequences for Variable Binding’, talk, University of Stuttgart.
- Svenonius, Peter (2000): Impersonal Passives: a Phase-based Analysis. In: *Proceedings of the 18th Scandinavian Conference of Linguistics*. Travaux de l’Institut de Linguistique de Lund.