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From passive to impersonal

A case study from Italian and its implications*

Anna Giacalone Ramat[1] & Andrea Sansò[2]

[1]Università di Pavia/[2]Università dell'Insubria, Como

In contemporary Italian, there is a passive *si*-construction in which the patient governs agreement on the verb and an impersonal *si*-construction in which either the verb is intransitive or the patient is not promoted to subject. The coexistence of the two constructions is the result of a long-lasting process by which an impersonal has developed out of (and has progressively differentiated itself from) an original passive. In this paper we focus on the initial stage of this process, namely the extension of the *si*-construction to intransitive verbs, and the emergence of the non-agreeing pattern with transitive verbs. Based on a large corpus of literary and non-literary documents, we argue that both these phenomena require a reanalysis of *si* as a marker of generic human agency as a necessary precondition, and that such a reanalysis starts with patients that are unlikely candidates for subjecthood.

Keywords: reanalysis; impersonal passive; non-promotional passive; impersonalization of passive constructions

1. Introduction: From passive to impersonal

Impersonal constructions derived from passive constructions are known from a number of languages (Polish, Frajzyngier 1982: 272–275, Siewierska 1988; Icelandic, Maling & Sigurjónsdóttir 2002; German, Abraham & Leiss 2006; Vogel 2006). The following examples from Italian, German, and Polish all exemplify constructions displaying

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typically passive morphology (either a past participle – as in (2) and (3)[1] – or a reflexive marker, as in (1)), but in which the patient remains unpromoted to subject:

(1) Italian

In Italia si   mangia spaghetti
in Italy *si*[REFL] eats   spaghetti[PL]
'In Italy, people eat spaghetti (it is usual to eat spaghetti)'

(2) German   (Abraham & Leiss 2006: 511)

Heute abend wird   richtig   Zähne geputzt
tonight   becomes properly teeth   brushed
'Tonight you should brush your teeth properly'

(3) Polish   (Abraham & Leiss 2006: 511)

Dano   mu   ksiazke
given:NEUT   he:DAT   book:ACC.SG.F
'He was given a book'

All these constructions are also possible with intransitive (or intransitively-used transitive) predicates, as in the following examples:

(4) Italian

Qui si   lavora troppo!
here si[REFL] works too much
'Here people work too much!'

(5) German

Es wurde   getanzt
it   became danced
'There was dancing (going on)'

(6) Polish   (Kibort 2008: 265)

Tutaj tańczono
here   danced
'There was dancing here.'/'People danced here.'

Both the constructions in (1)–(3) and the constructions in (4)–(6) are generally subsumed under the same rubric of "impersonal passives", to be intended as constructions in which "the predicate is associated with passive morphology" (past participle, reflexive marker/suffix, etc.; Abraham & Leiss 2006: 509), but in which either there is no patient, i.e. the predicate is intransitive, or the patient does not fill the subject position. Under the subject-based view of impersonality proposed by Siewierska (2008: 116ff.),

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1. *-no* and *-to* are petrified neuter singular forms of the so-called nominal declension of the past participle. The neuter form of the past participle in Polish is now *-ne/-te*.

however, these constructions are all instances of impersonal constructions to full right. Following Siewierska (2008: 116), indeed, an impersonal construction can be defined as one which lacks a canonical subject, i.e. "a verbal argument which is fully referential and manifests the morphosyntactic properties of subjects in a language". This definition includes (i) constructions in which the subject is not fully referential (e.g. *man*-constructions in German, vague *they* in English, and comparable constructions in pro-drop languages); (ii) constructions in which the subject is identified (in one way or another) by means of special morphology, e.g. by means of an originally reflexive marker (as in the case of the so-called Romance and Slavic reflexive impersonals; Siewierska 2008: 117); (iii) constructions with overt expletive subjects (as the so-called "impersonal passive" of German and Dutch), (iv) constructions that lack an overt subject at all (as the *no/to* construction in Polish).[2]

There appears to be little known about the emergence of the impersonal constructions exemplified in (1)–(3), and their relationship with both "promotional" passives and the "impersonal passive" of intransitive verbs exemplified in (4)–(6). Although the nature of this process remains "an open question" (Abraham & Leiss 2006: 511), it is generally stated that the constructions in (1)–(3) represent a rather late development, and the diachronic mechanisms involved in this development are generally described as including two steps:

i.   a promotional passive construction/marker starts being used with intransitive verbs, or with intransitively-used transitive predicates;

ii. on the basis of analogy with these intransitive counterparts, the construction/ marker ceases to be perceived as passive even when the verb is transitive, and acquires impersonal traits.[3]

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2. *Passive constructions*, on the other hand, are minimally defined as constructions in which a non-agent argument has been promoted to subject (or, at least, has taken on a subset of the morphosyntactic properties of subjects in a given language, e.g. it controls agreement with the verb) and the verb is morphosyntactically derived in some way from the form used in the unmarked active voice construction (Haspelmath 1990). The motivation for adopting a purely structural definition of *impersonal* and *passive* constructions has to do with the nature of the process of change described in this paper, which involves the emergence of an impersonal construction out of an originally passive construction. Under a different, functionally-driven view, both passive and impersonal constructions serve the function of defocusing the main initiator of the event (Siewierska 2008: 122), and although it is possible to distinguish between different types of agent defocusing (Myhill 1997; Sansò 2006), these distinctions only loosely correspond to the structural divide between passive and impersonal constructions (see the discussion in Sansò 2006: 265–267).

3. This diachronic sequentiality (impersonal passives of intransitive verbs precede impersonal passives of transitive verbs) is also mirrored by the cross-linguistic synchronic

This process may result in a complete "impersonalization" of the formerly passive construction, which no longer exists as such, or it may be the case that the passive construction continues to exist along with its impersonal "offspring".

Semantically, this process may involve a change in the meaning of the passive marker/construction: whereas in promotional passives the passive marker usually signals a switch in the relative prominence of agent and patient (triggered, e.g. by the topicality/discourse-relevance of the patient), when the same marker is used with intransitive verbs it develops a different function, namely that of expressing that the action denoted by the verb has a loosely specified human agent. The same function can be assigned to the formerly passive marker in the impersonal constructions exemplified in (1)–(3), in which there is a patient that remains unpromoted to subject. This semantic change sets the so-called impersonal passives apart from passive constructions: while the function of passive markers (and their various diachronic sources: reflexives, anticausatives, resultatives, etc.) has generally to do with the affectedness of the patient (signalling, e.g. the resulting state of the patient, as in resultatives, or its being affected by the verbal action, as in anticausatives and middles), the function of impersonal markers derived from passive markers is simply to signal that the agent is generic and human, without any implications of patient affectedness.

From a general point of view, step (i) is usually thought of as an instance of extension of a construction to new contexts, while step (ii) can be characterized as a process of reanalysis without grammaticalization, as "no particular element … become(s) more grammatical(ized) as a result of the change, i.e. no element changes from a lexical item to a grammatical item, and the whole construction does not necessarily become tighter" (Haspelmath 1998: 325, adapted).

Frajzyngier (1982: 274ff.) posits these two steps to explain the emergence of the impersonal *no/to* construction in Polish, which was only possible with intransitive verbs in the oldest Polish texts (Frajzyngier 1982: 275, quoting Brajerski 1979).[4] Siewierska (1988: 266), on the other hand, invokes such a path to account for the

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distribution of these two construction types: as Kazenin (2001: 905) states, "(1) no language has impersonal passive of transitives without having (impersonal) passives of intransitives; (2) no language has (impersonal) passive of intransitives without having some type of passive of transitives".

4. It should be remarked, however, that according to Siewierska's (1988: 271, our emphasis) reconstruction, "impersonal passives with the *no/to* participle **were formed** [in Old Polish, *AGR-AS*] **mainly, but not exclusively from transitive verbs**, in Russiuan (*sic*) predominantly from perfective verbs. Intransitive verbs stopped being used in this construction in literary Russian […] around the eighteenth century, while in Polish they began to be more widely used, and nowadays occur with the same frequency as transitive verbs".

development of the reflexive impersonal construction in Polish. In this construction, illustrated in (7), the patient appears in the accusative rather than in the nominative case and the verb is invariably third singular:

(7)   Polish   (Siewierska 1988: 262)

Traktuje   się   go   jako malarza autentycznej natury ludzkiej
treats:3SG REFL he:ACC as   painter authentic   nature human
'He is treated (one treats him) as a painter of the real people'

Similarly, Maling & Sigurjónsdóttir (2002: 101; see also Maling 2006; Eythórsson 2008) consider the "new impersonal construction"[5] of present-day Icelandic as representing a case of reanalysis of the canonical passive morphology from passive to syntactically active (i.e. impersonal). Unlike the canonical passive in which the direct object is moved to subject position (see (8a)), in the "new impersonal construction" exemplified in (8b) "the null *pro* […] is an external argument which gets interpreted as an 'unspecified human subject'", and the direct object retains object marking:[6]

(8)   Icelandic   (Maling & Sigurjónsdóttir 2002: 98)

a.   *Stúlkan   var lamin   í   klessu*
     the.girl:NOM was hit:F.SG.NOM in a.mess
     "The girl was badly beaten"

b.   *Það   var lamið   stúlkuna   í   klessu*
     it[EXPL] was hit:NEUT.SG the.girl:F.SG.ACC in a.mess
     "The girl was badly beaten"

The explanation proposed by Maling & Sigurjónsdóttir for this reanalysis, however, is somewhat different from the two-step process described above. In their view, the process has been fostered by the fact that only in Icelandic among Scandinavian languages

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5.   This construction is rapidly spreading in the language of young Icelanders, and its acceptance rate is significantly lower in Inner Reykjavík than in other parts of the country (Maling & Sigurjónsdóttir 2002: 109ff.), possibly due to normative pressure. The German construction *Es wird Bücher gelesen* is often cited as a parallel to the new Icelandic construction, but differs from it in several crucial ways. For instance, the German construction seems to allow mainly determinerless, and more generally indefinite and inanimate nouns as patient arguments, while the Icelandic construction also allows animate and definite nouns.

6.   The expletive subject *Það* is not a grammatical subject, but serves only to satisfy the V2 constraint (Maling 2006: 198). As such, it does not appear, for instance, in yes-no questions:

(i)   *Var [*Það] beðið Þig   að vaska upp?*
      was [it]   asked you:ACC to wash up
      'Did they ask you to do the dishes?'

the promotional periphrastic passive is restricted to [+human] agents, and this feature has set the stage for the reanalysis of a thematically empty null subject as a generic human agent. Once reanalyzed, the construction spread first to intransitive verbs and then to transitive verbs via inherently reflexive predicates.[7]

Those who postulate a two-step evolution from passive to impersonal have never discussed why passive morphology should extend to intransitive verbs. As discussed above, passives and impersonals are semantically so markedly different that we must be cautious when postulating a mere extension of a construction to new contexts: impersonal constructions typically have a generic human agent, whereas passive constructions are in general not characterized by any semantic restriction concerning the agent. As Abraham & Leiss (2006: 502, adapted) correctly observe, impersonal passives "do not involve any passive semantics … [and] the demoted subjects of these constructions carry the features [+AGENT], [+HUMAN]". In other words, while in (9b) the intended agent may be only a generic person (= *one*) or a loosely specified set of humans, in (9a) it can coincide with a specific person the speaker does not want to mention, with a generic person, and even with a natural force.

(9)   Dutch   (Kirsner 1976: 387–388)

    a.   *De huizen werden verwoest*
        the houses became destroyed
        'The houses were destroyed' (by the enemies/by the hurricane etc.)

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7.   Vogel (2006: 96ff.) puts forward a model for the development "passive > impersonal" in which the emergence of impersonal passives of intransitives is kept apart from the emergence of impersonal passives of transitives. In her view, the emergence of impersonal passives of intransitive verbs (*es wurde getanzt*) presupposes the existence of passives in which there is a generalized patient ("generalisiertes Subjekt", as in German *gerade wird gegessen*, 'people are eating right now/there is eating going on', in which a transitive predicate is used intransitively and the patient remains unspecified). The emergence of impersonal passives of transitive verbs presupposes the existence of passive constructions with "rhematic" subjects, which are typically indefinite (*es wurden viele Grundsteine gelegt*). Both passive constructions with subjects low in topicality and passive constructions with a generalized patient focus on the event rather than on the subject (in Vogel's terms, they are "event-zentral" rather than "entity-zentral"). As will be discussed later, however, the two structures from which impersonal passives are supposed to arise (passives with subjects low in topicality and passives with generalized patients) share a significant property, i.e. they have patient arguments that represent unlikely candidates for subjecthood, so that it is not strictly necessary to posit two different paths. Moreover, if the two paths of development were independent from one another, there would be no way to account for the cross-linguistic distribution of impersonal passives: given the fact that impersonal passives of transitive verbs always imply the existence of impersonal passives of intransitive verbs across languages, it is more economic to consider the two developments as subsequent steps of a single process.

b. *Er   wordt   gefloten*
    there becomes whistled
    "There is whistling" (= people whistle/someone whistles)

Following Comrie (1977; see also Kirsner 1976; Shibatani 1985), one could explain the extension of passive constructions to intransitive verbs in terms of "spontaneous demotion", i.e. as an instance of defocusing not caused by the promotion of some other argument to subject. Such a hypothesis enjoys wide currency in the literature on "impersonal passives". If this hypothesis is accepted, a passive marker would have a very abstract function, that of defocusing the main participant (i.e. the agent), and the meaning of this marker when used with different verb types would be the result of a process of accommodation: if there is another participant, the defocusing of the agent is only relative, i.e. it depends on the higher topicality of the patient; on the contrary, in impersonal passives the defocusing of the agent is absolute, which is tantamount to saying that the agent is not particularly noteworthy, representing virtually all humanity, or a subgroup thereof (e.g. people in a given location).

Based on the history of the Italian *si*-construction, in this paper we will argue in favour of a context-based reinterpretation of a passive marker as a marker of generic human agency. This reinterpretation *precedes* and *motivates* its use with intransitive verbs, which cannot be simply thought of as a mere extension of a passive marker to new contexts. In other words, we will not postulate a general abstract function of the passive marker that is "accommodated" when this marker is extended to intransitive verbs, and we will propose a different view of the passive-to-impersonal reanalysis, which is at the same time more gradual (i.e. the extension of the passive marker to intransitive verbs does not affect all the verbs at one time) and more "local", i.e. triggered by a bundle of ambiguous contexts which facilitate the reinterpretation of the passive marker as a marker of generic human agency even in the presence of a patient.

In what follows, we will describe the initial stage of the history of the *si*-construction in Old Italian (§2): it will be shown that the prerequisites for the reinterpretation of the passive marker *si* as a marker of generic human agency were already present in the earliest stage of the Italian language. In §3, the Old Italian situation will be compared with the situation of present-day Italian, with a view to underscoring the differences between the two stages. In present-day Italian two different *si*-constructions exist, a passive and an impersonal one; besides them, there is an "inclusive" *si*-construction, structurally indistinguishable from passive and impersonal *si*-constructions, which roughly corresponds to a 1st person plural form of the verb. §4 will sketch the main steps of the passive-to-impersonal development, which is by no means an abrupt process, as testified by the co-existence of two different *si*-constructions in contemporary Italian. Finally, in §5, the main stages of

this process will be briefly recapitulated, and the general implications of the present analysis will be discussed.

2.   The *si*-construction in Old Italian

In this section, the syntactic and semantic features of the *si*-construction in Old Italian will be discussed in detail, with a view to identifying the characteristics that have favoured its reinterpretation as an impersonal construction. Old Italian is to be intended here as a rather arbitrary term covering literary and non-literary Tuscan documents written in the 13th century (more details on the corpus used in the present study are provided in the Appendix).[8]

The construction in question involves the use of the 3rd person reflexive marker *si*, which had grammaticalized into an anticausative and a passive marker already in Late Latin (Cennamo 1998). **In more than 95% of the cases in our Old Italian corpus**, the *si*-construction behaves syntactically as a passive with respect to agreement.[9] This means that the patients in this construction **almost always** control agreement on the verb, as in example (10). This example also nicely shows that the *si*-construction is a functional equivalent of another passive construction of Old Italian, the so-called periphrastic passive (*fu coronato* ≅ *corono-ssi*), used immediately after the *si*-construction to refer to the same event, namely the coronation of Frederick the First. Moreover, Frederick the First, the subject of *corono-ssi* ('crowned-*si*'), is also the main topic of the portion of text from which this passage is taken, which means that both the *si*-construction and the periphrastic passive, in Givónian terms, can be used to introduce

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8.   Impersonal constructions in non-Tuscan texts will not be discussed in this paper. In Old Venetian the *si*-construction was limited to transitive and intransitively-used transitive predicates (*chom **se leze** in la ystoria*, 'as one can read in the history'), while in Old Neapolitan there are examples of *si*-constructions with unergative and unaccusative intransitive verbs (*non se pò plu andare*, 'one cannot go further'). The reader is referred to Cennamo (2000: 94, 98) for a survey of passive and impersonal *si*-constructions in these two vernaculars.

9.   This percentage has been obtained by counting only *si*-constructions with plural patient arguments. In the case of *si*-constructions with singular patient arguments, there is no way to establish whether the singular form of the verb agrees with the patient or is simply the default form (see below). This fact advises us to remove *si*-constructions with singular patient arguments from the statistical count at issue in order to obtain a more realistic picture. The reader should be aware, however, that *si*-constructions such as those exemplified in (10)–(11) are undoubtedly genuine instances of passive constructions, given that the singular patient appears before the verb in these cases (a behavioural property of subjects in Italian).

a non-agent topic (and to maintain it discourse-central as the narration proceeds). An example of *si*-construction with the same function is provided in (11):

(10) *Federigo primo decto Barbarossa imperò anni xxxvij, et* **corono-ssi**
     F.   first   called   B.   reigned   years   37   and   crowned-*si*

     ne-lla chiesa di Sam Pietro ad Roma … Elli **fu coronato** *da*
     in-the church   of   Saint   Peter   at   Rome   he   was   crowned   by

     papa Adriano il dì medesimo ch' elli giunse ad Roma
     pope   A.   the   day   same   that   he   arrived   to   Rome

                                (*Cronica Fiorentina*, 102, 21, 1; 13th century)

     'Frederick the First, called Barbarossa, was emperor for 37 years, and was crowned in the church of St Peter in Rome … He was crowned by pope Adrian on the very same day he arrived in Rome'

(11) *ma il suo filgluolo, il qual era allora co llui, sì llo*
     but the his son   who   was   then   with   him   ᴇᴍᴘʜ   him

     inbalsimò e reco-llo infino a tTiro, e quivi **si soppellio**
     enbalmed and took-him as.far.as T.   and here   *si* buried

                                  (*Cronica Fiorentina*, p. 106; 13th century)

     'But his son, who was with him at that time, enbalmed him and took him as far as Tyre, and he was buried there'

The demoted agent in the *si*-construction is often a specific person or group, and can be overtly encoded by means of a PP headed by *per* or *da*, a possibility definitely excluded in present-day Italian (Sansò 2011), as in (12). This fact shows that the *si*-construction in Old Italian directly concurred with the periphrastic passive in many, if not all, of its contexts of usage:

(12) *Anche fue ordinato la seççaia domenica di giennaio, per*
     also   was   ordered   the   last   Sunday   of   January   by

     Ghese e per Bonaguida capitani e per li loro consiglieri, che
     G.   and by   B.   captains   and   by   the   their   councillors   that

     si dovesse bandire *la nostra processione la primaia domenica di*
     si should   announce   the   our   procession   the   first   Sunday   of

     ciascheuno mese per Angnello banditore
     each   month by   A.   town-crier   (Carmine, §26; 1280–1298)

     'The last Sunday of January the Captains Ghese and Bonaguida and their councillors ordered that our procession should be announced publicly by Agnello, the town-crier, the first Sunday of each month'

On the other hand, the patient NP promoted to subject acquires not the complete set of subject properties, but only a subset thereof. Indeed, in approximately half of

the occurrences (55.94%) of the *si* construction in the 13th century, the patient NP maintains **a behavioural property typical of objects**, i.e. it appears postverbally (*si* + V + N, as in examples (13)–(15)). From a semantic point of view, the preverbal vs. postverbal position of the patient in the *si*-construction tends to correlate with the referentiality/topicality of that participant. In other words, there is a tendency for postverbal patients to be non-topical and non-referential and for preverbal patients to be topical and referential:

(13)   *A   Roma   **si vende**   ogne   cosa   e   a   pochi   è   più   cara   la*
        in   Rome   *si* sells   each   thing and to few:PL is more   valued   the

        fede   che   la   pecunia
        faith   than   the   money

                    (*Fiori e vita di filosafi e d'altri savi e d'imperadori*, p. 170; 1271–1275)

        'In Rome everything is sold, and few care about faith more than about money'

(14)   *Fue   trovato   che   in   Roma   **si trattava**   tradimento*
        was   found   that in   Rome *si* plotted   betrayal

                                            (Brunetto Latini, *Rettorica*, p. 90; 1260–1261)

        'It was found that in Rome people were plotting betrayal'

(15)   *Et   lo   camarlengo   si   debbia   chiamare   comunalmente   per   tutta*
        and the chamberlain *si* should   call   communally   by   all

        *l'   Arte,   là unque   **si trova**   lo   milliore*
        the   Art   wherever *si* finds   the   best

                                    (*Statuto dell'Università ed Arte della lana di Siena*, 1, 9; 1298)

        'And the chamberlain should be elected communally by the whole Art
        (a professional association, *AGR-AS*), wherever one can find the best one'

The passages in (13)–(15) exemplify the kind of contexts that are associated with the reinterpretation of the *si*-construction as an impersonal construction. These contexts are highly ambiguous, both in structure and meaning:

–   from a semantic-pragmatic point of view, while preverbal patients are likely candidates for subjecthood, being topical and persistent referents, those following the verb generally lack the semantic-pragmatic characteristics of subjects, though being syntactically subjects;
–   from a structural point of view, when a singular patient NP appears in postverbal position the construction is ambiguous between a passive and an impersonal interpretation, as the 3rd person singular agreement on the verb might equally well be triggered by the singular patient or be the default choice in the case of lack of agreement.

It must also be added that a generic human agent interpretation is also favoured in many cases in which the *si*-construction is accompanied by a temporal or spatial specification, as in examples (13) and (14) above (*in Roma*, 'in Rome'), in which the spatial or temporal specification induces an interpretation of the agent as a loosely specified set of individuals (e.g. 'people living in Rome').

These characteristics might be considered as the necessary preconditions for the reanalysis of the construction as impersonal. In other words, the reanalysis starts with postverbal patients that are particularly low on the referentiality/topicality scale, as these are unlikely candidates for subjecthood from a semantic point of view, and is favoured by clusters of contextual features that invite a generic human agent reading of the construction (e.g. a spatial/temporal specification, the atemporal present tense, or the imperfective/unbounded aspect). Contexts such as those exemplified in (13)–(15) thus represent the critical contexts (in the sense of Diewald 2002:109) in which semantic and syntactic ambiguity provides "several options for interpretations", among which the innovative impersonal reading appears to be favoured.[10] In contexts such as those exemplified by (13)–(15) the reanalysis of the construction is covert, i.e. there are no formal clues that *si* has been reinterpreted as a marker of generic human agency. During a narrow time span in the second half of the 13th century, however, we find the **first formal symptoms of such a reanalysis**. These include both the extension of the construction to intransitive verbs (and intransitively-used predicates) and the emergence of a new pattern with transitive verbs in which the patient does not agree with the verb. These two new syntactic environments in which the *si*-construction can be found will be discussed in detail in the next two subsections.

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10. An anonymous referee points out to us the possibility that the reflexive pronoun *se* had already become an indefinite pronoun in Late Latin, and quotes examples such as (ii) and (iii) (from Cennamo 1993:58):

(ii) *attendite*   *se ipsis*
     pay.attention:IMP.2PL se self:DAT.PL
     'pay attention to yourselves'   (*Itala*, act. 20, 28 (cod. e))

(iii) *speramus beneficia uber-ior-a*   *pos se consequituros*
      hope:1PL benefits abundant-COMP-NEUT.PL after se obtain:PTCP.FUT
      'we hope to obtain more benefits'   (*CIL IX* 1681; Benevento)

In these examples, however, *se* cannot be considered as an indefinite pronoun under any definition of this term: it is simply a generalized reflexive pronoun, used for all persons, and there are no examples of *se* appearing in subject position as an equivalent of '(some/any)one'.

2.1 The extension to intransitive verbs

As to the extension to intransitive verbs, Salvi (2008: 135) states that "of the intransitive verbs, only the unergatives were possible in this construction" in Old Italian and that "in the works of Dante the construction begins to be used with […] unaccusative verbs too, mainly with verbs of movement". The following examples show, contra Salvi, that this construction was equally possible with both unergative (*questionare* 'discuss, question', *contrastare* 'fight with', etc.) and unaccusative (*andare* 'go', *venire* 'come', *entrare* 'enter') predicates within the same rather narrow temporal span (and that unaccusative verbs were possible well before Dante's works, as examples (20) and (21) show). If our analysis is correct, this is exactly what we expect to find, given that at least a sub-part of unaccusative verbs (especially motion verbs) imply a volitional agent that can be conceptualized as generic.

(16)   *se*   *ne-l*   *paese*   *di Francia*   ***si guadagniase***   *melglio*
       if   in-the   country   of France   *si* earn:SBJV.IMPF.3SG   better

       che   *no*   *vi*   ***si può guadagniare***   *ogi*
       than   NEG   there   *si*   can   earn:INF   today

                             (*Lettera di Vincenti di Aldobrandino Vincenti e compagni,*
                                 da Siena, a Iacomo di Guido Cacciaconti, 1260)

       'if in France one could earn more (money) than one can earn today'

(17)   *quando*   *i*   *farai*   *el*   *pagamento, sì*   *ne*   *fa*
       when   to.him   make:FUT.2SG   the   payment   EMPH   of.it   make:IMP

       fare   *la*   *sc[r]ipta*   *ne· libro*   *di Signiori de'*   *merchatanti,*
       make:INF   the   registration   in   book   of Lords   of   merchants

       chome   ***si chustuma***   *di*   *fare*
       as   *si*   use:3SG   of   do:INF

                          (*Lettera di Vincenti di Aldobrandino Vincenti e compagni, da Siena,*
                                   a Iacomo di Guido Cacciaconti, 1260)

       'when you will pay him, make sure that the registration [of payment]
       be made in the book of the Lords of merchants, as it is customary'

(18)   *La*   *iudiciale*   *constituzione*   *è*   *quella*   *ne-lla quale* … ***si questiona***
       the   iudicial   constitution   is   that   in-which   *si* questions

       sopra *la*   *quantitade*   *o*   *sopra*   *la*   *comparazione*   *o*   *sopra*   *la*
       about   the   quantity   or   about   the   comparison   or   about   the

       qualitade   *d'*   *un*   *fatto*
       quality   of   a   fact   (Brunetto Latini, *Rettorica*, p. 103; 1261)

       'The iudicial constitution is the one in which one questions about the
       quantity or the comparison or the quality of a fact'

(19) *i   fermi   argomenti   ne-l   principio, i   deboli   ne-l   mezzo, i*
      the   strong   arguments   in-the beginning   the weak   in-the middle   the

      *fermissimi,   co'   quali   non   **si possa**   **contrastare** lievemente,*
      strongest   with which   NEG   *si* can:SBJV.3SG   contrast   easily

      ne-lla   fine
      in-the   end   (Brunetto Latini, *Rettorica*, p. 75; 1261)

      'the strong arguments (should be put) in the beginning, the weak ones in the
      middle, and the strongest ones, against which one cannot contrast easily,
      in the end'

(20) *tutte   le   cupidità   [sono porte] de-l   ninferno per   le quali   **si***
      all   the   pleasures are   gates   of-the   hell   through which   *si*

      ***va**   a   la   morte*
      goes   to   the   death   (Andrea da Grosseto, 2, 17; 1268)

      'all the pleasures are gates of the hell, through which **one goes** to death'

(21) *Et   per   la   [necessità]   **si viene**   a   la   povertà***
      and   through the   necessity   *si* comes   to   the   poverty

                                                        (Andrea da Grosseto, 4, 9)

      'and through necessity one comes to poverty'

(22) *Sappi   che   cinque sono le   porti   per   le quali   **s' entra**,*
      know:IMP   that   five   are   the gates   through which   *si* enters

      *anzi che   **andare si possa**   in   paradiso*
      before   go:INF   *si* can:SBJV.3SG   to   paradise

                          (Bono Giamboni, *Libro de' Vizî e delle Virtudi*, 69,2; 1292)

      'Be aware that there are five gates through which **one can enter**,
      before **one can go** to heaven'

(23) *Io   tenni   li   piedi in   quella parte de la   vita di là da*
      I   kept   the   feet   in   that   part   of the   life beyond

      *la quale   **non si puote ire** più   per   intendimento*
      which   NEG   *si* can   go   further through   intention

      di ritornare
      of   come.back:INF   (Dante, *Vita Nuova*, 14, 1; 1292–1293)

      'I have just set foot on that boundary of life beyond which
      no one can go, hoping to return'

(24) ***Legge-si** de-lla   bontà   de-l   re   giovane…*
      read-*si*   about-the kindness   of-the king   young

                                          (*Il Novellino*, 18, 3; end of 13th century)

      '**One can read** about the kindness of the young king'

(25)   *E   ne-l   ricévare   alcuno novizio **si proceda**   in questo modo*
         and in-the welcome:INF any   novice   *si* proceed:SBJV.3SG in this way

                               (*Capitoli della Compagnia dei Disciplinati di Siena*, 11; 1295)

         'and when welcoming a novice, one should proceed in this way'

There is no doubt a relative difference in terms of types (though not in terms of tokens) of unergative vs. unaccusative intransitive verbs that can be used in the *si*-construction, but this difference has possibly an independent explanation: most unaccusative verbs had a *si*-marked counterpart in Old Italian (Jezek 2010); this is especially true of verbs of change of state (*morire* and *morir-si* 'die') and location (*andare* and *andar-si* 'go', *partire* and *partir-si* 'leave'), in which *si* goes back to the Late Latin dative reflexive pronoun *sibi*, used to mark change-of-state verbs and spontaneous processes (Cennamo 1999: 122). The alleged incompatibility of unaccusative predicates with the *si*-construction would thus be motivated by the necessity of avoiding ambiguities between an impersonal (*si va* 'one goes') and a purely intransitive (*[egli] si va* 'he goes') interpretation of these verbs.

More importantly, the earliest examples of this construction with intransitive verbs are **exceptionless** in the (omnitemporal) present tense or in other tenses/moods that are **most compatible with the genericity of the human subject** (as in examples (16)–(25)). Salvi (2008: 136) only talks of a restriction to non-compound tenses, and seems to imply that this restriction only characterizes the use of the *si*-construction with unaccusative intransitives. This is clearly incorrect, as in the 13th century the restriction to non-compound tenses characterizes *si*-constructions with unergative intransitive and transitive verbs as well (see §4.1). The crucial point is that while passive *si*-constructions are equally possible with specific and generic time reference, the first examples of the impersonal *si*-construction with intransitive verbs **all have generic time reference**. The fact that the first contexts in which the *si*-construction is used with intransitive verbs are those in which the genericity of the agent is also independently triggered by other contextual features corroborates our hypothesis that the reinterpretation of *si* as a marker of a generic human agent precedes and motivates its extension to intransitive verbs.[11]

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11.   Another argument in favour of an early reinterpretation of the *si*-construction as an impersonal construction implying a generic human agent is the early attestation of the inclusive reading of this construction, that will be discussed in §4.3: an impersonal/generic reading of the construction is indeed necessary for an inclusive interpretation to emerge.

2.2 The emergence of the impersonal *si*-construction with transitive verbs

During the same temporal interval, we also see the emergence of another impersonal trait, i.e. the **optionality of agreement** with patient NPs. This typically happens in four cases:

– when the patient is a **quantified noun** (example (26)–(28))
– when the patient is a **determinerless plural noun** (example (29)–(30))
– when the patient is a **coordinated noun phrase (N and N)**; (example (31) and (32))
– with **nominals in light-verb constructions**, formed by a semantically bleached verb (mainly *fare*, 'do', 'make') and a nominal contributing a large part of the predicative content (example (33))

(26) *E   ancho vi   **si rameta** tuti i   miei denari   propi, ch'   io*
      and   also   there si recalls   all   the my   money[PL] own   that I

      debo avere di   chostà
      must have from there

                        (Lettera di Iacomo de' Sansedoni da Siena a Goro e Gonteruccio de'
                                                          Sansedoni, in Parigi, 1294)

      'and all my money that I must have back from there is mentioned there
      (i.e. in that letter)'

(27) *andando su   per   questo fiume XII giornate, **si truova***
      going   up   along this   river 12 days   si find.3SG

      città   e   castella assai
      towns   and castles many

                                  (Marco Polo, *Il Milione*, 126, 4; beginning of the
                                                                    14th century)

      'travelling along this river for 12 days, one meets with a good number of
      towns and castles'

(28) *in una cosa **si truova** quattro cause, cioè   la   cagione materiale*
      in one thing si finds   four   causes that.is the cause   material

      e   la   cagione formale e   la   efficiente e   la   finale
      and the cause   formal and the efficient and the final

                                  (Andrea da Grosseto, *Trattati morali di Albertano da
                                                        Brescia volgarizzati*, 1, 5; 1268)

      'in each thing one finds four causes, the material one, the formal one,
      the efficient one, and the final one'

(29)   *uno paramento   da prete, co-l quale   vi   **si debia   dicere***
      one paraments[SG] for priest with-which with.it *si* should[SG] say

      messe per anima del   conte Guido Guerra, mio figluolo
      masses for soul of.the count G.   G.   my son

                                   (*Testamento della contessa Beatrice da Capraia*, 1279)

      'priest vestments, with which masses should be said for the soul of
      Count Guido Guerra, my son'

(30)   *In questa città **si fa**   giambellotti di pelo di camello,*
      in this   city *si* make:3SG camlet:PL   of hair of camel

      li   più   belli   del   mondo
      the most beautiful of.the world   (Marco Polo, *Il Milione*, 72, 1)

      'They make in this city great quantities of camlets of camel's wool,
      the finest in the world'

(31)   *Et   certo la   colpa e   la   cagione **si mette** sopra altrui*
      and surely the fault and the cause   *si* puts   on   others

                                   (Brunetto Latini, *Rettorica*, p. 113; 1261)

      'and surely the blame and the fault are put on others'

(32)   *li   argomenti e   le   legagioni [...] per   li quali **si fa**   la*
      the arguments and the legations   through which   *si* makes the

      confermagione e   la   risponsione
      affirmation   and the answer   (*Fiore di rett., red. gamma*, p. 140; 1292)

      'the arguments and the legations through which confirmations
      and replies are made'

(33)   *tutto   l'   arde   infino che l'   uccide, se non vi   **si***
      whole   him burns until   him kills   if not against.it *si*

      ***fa**   argomenti*
      does   arguments

                                   (*Tesoro di Brunetto Latini volgarizzato [Libri III, IV e V]*, p. 76;
                                   2nd half of the 13th century)

      '[the poison] burns him entirely and kills him if one does not take
      an antidote for it'

According to Salvi (2008: 134–135), cases such as (26)–(33) are not indicative of the reinterpretation of the construction as impersonal. In his view, these non-agreeing postverbal patients are not the direct objects of the verb but the subjects, lack of agreement being "normal in Old Italian with a postverbal Subject in unaccusative constructions" (Salvi 2008: 134), given examples such as (34)–(37):

(34)   *Iddio [...] da-l quale   **nasce**   tutti   e'   beni   e   tutte   le   grazie*
        God   from-whom   is.born   all   the   goods   and   all   the   graces
            (Anonimo, *Navigatio Sancti Brendani, volgarizzamento toscano*, p. 41; 1300)
        'God, from whom all the goods and all the graces derive'

(35)   *E   appresso   **viene**   isperanza   e   disperanza,   che   vanno   innanzi a*
        and   after   comes   hope   and   despair   that   go   before

        paura   e   ardimento
        fear   and   courage   *Egidio Romano volg.*, 1, 3, 2; 1288)
        'and after come hope and despair, which go before fear and courage'

(36)   *De-lla   cattiva   e   rea   volontà,   di   cui   **nasce**   i   sette*
        from-the   bad   and   guilty   will   from   which   is.born   the   seven

        vizî   capitali
        sins   deadly   (Bono Giamboni, *Trattato di Virtù e di Vizi*, Cap. 3, rubr.)
        'from the bad and guilty will, from which the seven deadly sins derive'

(37)   *per   questa   guerra   **nacque**   grandissime   battalgle   e   mortali[ta]te*
        for   this   war   was.born   great   battles   and   mortality

        tra   Guascongnesi   e   Normandi   e   Francesschi
        among   Gasconian.PL   and   Norman.PL   and   French.PL
                                                                (*Cronica Fiorentina*, p. 140)
        'because of this war many great battles arose among Gasconians,
        Normans and the French, which caused many victims'

Salvi fails to acknowledge that the types of patients that do not trigger agreement on the verb in the *si*-construction share a crucial property, i.e. they rank low on the scale of referentiality/topicality. Moreover, the statement that lack of agreement is "normal" with postverbal arguments of unaccusatives invites the inference that we have to do with a rule. On the contrary, this is just a possibility, and examples of postverbal arguments that trigger agreement are easy to find:

(38)   *la   delettanza   de-l   corpo [...]   de   la quale   **nascono**   tradimenti*
        the   delight   of-the   body   from   which   are.born   betrayals

        de   le   Terre
        of   the   lands   (Andrea da Grosseto, 2, 17)
        'bodily delights, from which betrayals of the lands derive'

(39)   *Da   questo   peccato   **vengono**   furti,   symonia,   inganni,   usura,*
        from   this   sin   come:3PL   thefts   simony   deceits   usury

        tradimenti   (et)   deceptioni
        betrayals   and   deceptions   (*Questioni filosofiche*, p. 160; 1298)
        'thefts, simony, deceits, usury, betrayals and deceptions derive from this sin'

Moreover, lack of agreement in the *si*-construction is also attested in a few cases ((40)–(41)) in which the patient appears in preverbal position as the head of a relative clause (but also in other cases: recall example (31)):

(40) *i quali danari si diedero ne-le spese che **si fece** p(er)*
which money *si* gave:3PL in-the expenses that *si* made:3SG for

Baldovino il die che si supelio
B. the day that *si* buried:3SG

(*Libro d'amministrazione dell'eredità di Baldovino Iacopi Riccomanni*, 1278)

'this money was invested in the expenses that were made for Baldovino the day he was buried'

(41) *VII. [soldi] che **si diè** ne la soprasberga di Matasala*
seven coins that *si* gave:3SG in the *soprasberga* of M.

(*Libro di conti di Matasala di Spinello*, 1233–1243; quoted after Wehr 1995: 112)

'seven coins that were paid for Matasala's *soprasberga* [a kind of military vestment]'

To sum up, as a result of the availability of a generic human agency interpretation, the *si*-construction started developing impersonal features already in Old Italian. As will be described in the next section, this process did not lead to the transformation of a passive construction into an impersonal one (as in Polish), and in present-day Italian a passive and an impersonal *si*-construction co-exist. The stages of the process that resulted in the progressive differentiation and divergence between an impersonal and a passive construction will be sketched in §4.

3. The situation in present-day Italian

In present-day Italian, two types of *si*-constructions can be distinguished on structural grounds. One of them can be considered as an impersonal construction, following the definition introduced in §1. The other one can be defined as a passive construction, although it maintains some hybrid syntactic and semantic features that distinguish it from the other passive construction of present-day Italian, formed with the auxiliaries *essere* 'be' and *venire* 'come' + the past participle. A third construction type, formally indistinguishable from the two other constructions, will be labelled 'inclusive *si*-construction': in this construction *si* + 3rd person verb is interpreted as equivalent to a 1st person plural form of the verb. The three constructions will be examined in turn in the

next paragraphs on the basis of two corpora of present-day spoken and written Italian (see Appendix).[12]

3.1 The passive *si*-construction

In the passive *si*-construction the verb agrees with the patient, in gender and number but in the overwhelming majority of cases (more than 70% in our corpus) it appears postverbally, and tends to be inanimate and non-topical. From a semantic point of view, the agent in the passive *si*-construction is typically generic, the construction tends to occur in the present tense and with imperfective aspect, and is often characterized by modal overtones (see e.g. example (42) and (46)), even in the absence of overt modal operators or verbs:

(42) **si annota**   il   trasferimento solo su-l   foglio complementare
       si annotates the transfer   only on-the sheet   complementary
                                          (*Lessico dell'Italiano Parlato*, Naples, 55, 89)
       'The (property) transfer is recorded only on the additional sheet'/
       'The property transfer must be recorded only on the additional sheet'

(43) *La   sicurezza di tutti […]   potrà   essere ottenuta […] se **si***
       the security   of everybody can:FUT.3SG be   obtained   if *si*
       accetteranno   *efficaci   sistemi   di   verifica.*
       accept:FUT.3PL effective systems of   checking
       'the general security can be obtained only if effective checking systems will be accepted'

(44) *Ne-lla zona **si sono**   fatte, a-ll'   inizio   de-gli   anni*
       in-the area si are[AUX.3PL] made   at-the beginning of-the years
       '70,   battaglie famose per la   tutela   de-ll' ambiente
       seventies battles   famous for the protection of-the environment
       'in this area many famous battles for the protection of the environment were made in the early Seventies'

(45) *bruciata come **si bruciavano** le   streghe e   gli   eretici*
       burned   as   si burnt:3PL   the witches and the heretics
       'burnt just as witches and heretics used to be burnt'

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12. Unless otherwise specified, the examples in the following subsections are taken from "La Repubblica" corpus.

(46) *Non **si regolano**   in quarantott' ore […] i   problemi   accumulatisi*
NEG *si* resolve:3PL in 48   hours   the problems piled.up

in cinque anni
in   five   years

'The problems piled up in five years cannot be resolved in 48 hours'

3.2   The impersonal *si*-construction

The impersonal *si*-construction in present-day Italian appears with every kind of intransitive (or intransitively-used) predicates, including reflexives (example (47)), reciprocals (example (48)), the copula (example (49), and the periphrastic passive (example (50)):

(47) *per non sputar-si   in faccia quando **ci**   **si guarda** al-lo*
for not spit-REFL in face   when   oneself *si* watches at-the

specchio, a volte   bisogna   saper-si   accontentare
mirror   sometimes it.is.necessary be.able.to-REFL content:INF

'in order not to spit on your face when you look at yourself in the mirror sometimes you must content yourself'

(48) *In famiglia e   tra   amici **ci**   **si consola** de-lle privazioni*
in family   and among friends RECIP *si* consoles of-the deprivations

e   de-lle limitazioni
and   of-the limitations

'within families and among friends people console each other of deprivations and limitations'

(49) *La vita de-lla pendolare, soprattutto quando **si è giovani,***
the life of-the commuter mostly   when   *si* is young:M.PL

belli   ***e***   ***futuri***   *"dottori" appare   crudele*
beautiful:M.PL and future:M.PL doctors   appears cruel

'living as a commuter, particularly when one is young, beautiful and is going to graduate, looks cruel'

(50) *Poi, a–l   terzo giorno, si spiega   come comportarsi quando **si***
then on-the third giorno, *si* explains how behave:INF when   *si*

viene   ***presi***   *in ostaggio*
comes[AUX] taken:M.PL in hostage

'then, on the third day, they explain how to behave when one is taken hostage'

Unergative and unaccusative intransitive verbs behave differently in compound tenses: whereas the past participle of unergative verbs displays a singular ending (*si è telefonato*, *si* is[AUX] phoned, 'people called'), in unaccusative verbs the past participle has the plural ending (*si è arrivati*, *si* is[AUX] arrived:M.PL, 'one/we arrived').

The impersonal *si*-construction is also possible with transitive verbs. Unlike Old Italian, the impersonal construction is possible with patients of any kind, including specific and definite patients:

(51) *io spero siccome* **si tocca** **anche argomenti** *anche piuttosto*
      I   hope given.that *si* touches.upon also   issues   also   rather

      difficili spero ci sarà una partecipazione anche
      difficult I.hope there will.be a participation also

      da parte de-i professori
      by-the professors   (*LIP*, Florence, 3, 77)

      'I hope … because also **some rather difficult issues will be touched upon**,
      I hope that also teachers will take part in it'

(52) **si è** **agitato** **questa questione** *de-lla fiscalizzazione*
      si is(AUX) raised.M.SG this.F.SG question.F.SG of-the fiscalization

      de-gli oneri sociali
      of-the burdens social   (*LIP*, Milan, 6, 26)

      'This question of the fiscalization of social burdens **has been raised**'

(53) *io volevo fare delle liste tanto per avere un' idea*
      I wanted make:INF some lists just in order to have:INF an idea

      su come come **si svolgerà** *i* **lavori**
      on how how *si* carry_out.FUT.3SG the.PL works   (*LIP*, Florence, 3, 54)

      'I wanted to make some lists, just to figure out how **the activities
      will be carried out**'[13]

With transitive predicates, the impersonal *si*-construction is the only option available when the patient is pronominal:[14]

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13. The context appears to exclude that the *si*-constructions in examples (51)–(53) are instances of inclusive *si*-constructions.

14. With third person plural pronouns a further possibility is mentioned in the literature, namely a construction in which the verb agrees with the patient, although the pronoun itself remains in the accusative form (Lepschy 1989: 112):

(iv) *Le* *si considerano e studiano*
      them:F.PL *si* consider:3PL and study:3PL
      'They are considered and studied'

This possibility appears to be syntactically a blend between the passive and the impersonal *si*-constructions and is quite rare in the corpora we made use of.

(54) *un po' come si fa   con   le   "Sonate" quando le   si*
      a   bit like   *si* does with the *Sonate*   when   them *si*

      suona   *su-l   fortepiano*
      plays   on-the   fortepiano
      'a bit like one does with *Sonate* when one plays them on the fortepiano'

(55) *spero   proprio che   non **mi si accusi**   di falso moralismo*
      I.hope   really   that NEG me *si* accuses of false moralism
      'I hope not to be accused of false moralism'

According to D'Alessandro (2007: 37, and *passim*), lack of agreement between the patient and the transitive verb reflects "an aspectual difference": in particular, *si*-constructions with agreement (passive *si*-constructions in our terminology) encode accomplishments (to be intended as bounded events with a duration and an endpoint), whereas *si*-constructions without agreement encode activities (i.e. unbounded events with a duration but no endpoint). While there may be some correlation between agreement (or lack thereof) and the aspectual properties of the predicate, it must be admitted that the passive *si*-construction is largely more frequent than its impersonal counterpart in the written language, so that it is not difficult to find cases of activity predicates with verb-patient agreement (see, for instance, example (68)). At the same time, the impersonal construction appears to be favoured with a special class of bounded predicates involving the phasal verbs *cominciare/iniziare a*, 'start' and *finire di*, 'finish'. With these phasal verbs both the passive and the impersonal *si*-construction are allowed (as shown by the contrast between (56)–(57), and (58)–(59) respectively); yet, the rate of impersonal *si*-constructions is somewhat higher (e.g. 15.17% with *cominciare/iniziare*; 26,66% with *finire* in the two corpora of spoken and written present-day Italian, see the Appendix) than in other syntactic configurations (*si* + verb + NP; *si* + modal auxiliary + verb + NP). This fact alone shows that the aspectual properties of the predicate are not the only factor at play:[15]

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15. An alternative analysis should be mentioned with regard to what constitutes the subject of phasal and modal verbs. If we take a couple of sentences such as (iv) and (v), we might say that there is agreement in (iv) because in this case the lexical verb (*fare*) is considered to be part of the predicate, whereas it is felt as a phrasal subject together with its object (*fare paragoni*) in (v) (therefore triggering singular agreement):

(iv) *[si possono fare]   [paragoni]*
       si can:3PL   make:INF   comparisons
       'comparisons can be made'

(v)   *[si può]   [fare   paragoni]*
       si can:3SG   make:INF comparisons
       'comparisons can be made'

(56) *su consiglio de-l   segretario di Stato Shultz […]* **si comincia**
      on advice   of-the Secretary of State S.   si starts

      a frenare *le   aspettative*
      at repress the expectations

      'on advice of the Secretary of State Shultz, they are starting to
      repress expectations'

(57) *per il cui   pagamento* **si cominciano a   nutrire** *preoccupazioni*
      for whose payment   si start:3PL   at nurture concerns
      'about whose payment one starts to nurture some concerns'

(58) *finché non* **si finisce   di contare** *tutte le   schede e   di*
      until   neg si finish:3SG of count:INF all   the votes   and of

      riempire tutti i   moduli
      fill.in:INF all   the forms

      'until they finish to count all the votes and to fill in all the forms'

(59) *mentre* **si finiscono di spogliare** *i   voti de-l   Senato*
      while   si finish:3PL of sort.out:INF the votes of-the Senate
      'while they finish to sort out the votes of the Senate'

Moreover, our corpus data show that the crucial property favouring lack of agreement
is one that is superordinate to the aspectual properties of the predicate, namely the

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That there are two alternative constituency relations at play is testified by the impossibility of
(vi–c) and (vi–e) below:

(vi) a. *si può   mangiare le   caramelle adesso?*
          si can:3SG eat:INF   the candies   now
          'can we eat candies now?'/'is it possible to eat candies now?'

      b. *sì,   si può*
          yes si can:3SG
          'yes, you can'/'yes, it is'

      c. **si,   si può   mangiare*
          yes si can:3SG eat:INF
          'yes, you can'/'yes, it is'

      d. *si possono mangiare le   caramelle adesso?*
          si can:3PL eat:INF   the candies   now

      e. **sì,   si possono*
          yes si can:3PL

      f. *sì,   si possono mangiare*
          yes si can:3PL eat:INF

genericity of the event, which subsumes other temporal, aspectual and modal proper-ties. In particular, the impersonal *si*-construction appears to be favoured with modal verbs (*dovere*, 'must', *potere*, 'can/may/be able to'; *volere* 'want'), which significantly correlate with generic human agency. The three modal verbs *dovere* 'must', *potere* 'can/may', and *volere* 'want' behave differently with respect to their preference for the pas-sive vs. the impersonal *si*-construction. While *dovere* and *potere* generally appear with the passive *si*-construction (only 10,35% of the cases of *si* + *potere* + V + N are imper-sonal; even less so – 6,42% – for *dovere*), *volere* appears to admit the impersonal *si*-construction more easily (20,95%):[16]

(60)   *non* **si può** **far** *paragoni* *co-i* *giocatori di cinquanta*
NEG *si* can:3SG make:INF comparisons with-the players of fifty
anni fa
years ago
'One cannot compare (them) with the (football) players of fifty years ago'

(61)   *un risvolto* *tecnologico […]* *di fronte* *a–l quale* **non si può**
a   side-effect technological   in front to-which NEG *si* can:3SG
chiudere *gli* *occhi*
close:INF the eyes
'a technological side-effect in front of which one cannot close one's eyes'

(62)   *Ma quand'anche […]* **si volesse** **ridare** *a-lle* *facoltà*
but even if   *si* want:SBJV.3SG give.back:INF to-the faculties
quelle competenze […] *non si potrebbe far-lo lasciando in piedi*
those competences   NEG *si* could   do-it leaving in feet
la *struttura* *dipartimentale*
the structure departmental
'but even if one wished to give back those competences to the faculties,
one could not do that leaving the departmental structure intact'

3.3   The inclusive *si*-construction

The third construction in question will be labelled inclusive *si*-construction: in this construction, which is structurally indistinguishable from passive and impersonal

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16.   From these counts two cases have been removed in which the impersonal *si*-construc-tion is the only possibility in contemporary Italian:

–   intransitive (both unergative and unaccusative) verbs (*si può andare*, 'one can go')
–   verbs with a pronominal argument (*li si può vedere*, 'they can be seen/one can see them').

si-constructions, the agent is identified as an "unspecified set of people including the speaker" (Cinque 1988: 542):

(63) *In 20   anni in questo paese   non si è   andati a   fondo*
      in   twenty years in this   country NEG si is[AUX] gone   to bottom

      a   uno solo de-i   casi   scottanti
      to   one only of-the cases hot

      'In this country in twenty years we didn't manage to discover the truth about any of the hot cases'

(64) *Quindi, secondo   lei, si è   stati troppo precipitosi?*
      then   according.to You si is[AUX] been too   rash
      'Then, according to You, were we too rash?'

According to Cinque (1988: 542), in independent sentences with specific time reference *si* acquires this new interpretation only when it occurs with unaccusative, psych-, copular and passive verbs.[17] In the following examples (drawn from Cinque 1988: 542), the choice of a predicate that is incompatible with the inclusion of the speaker results in a pragmatically odd sentence:

(65) *%Oggi, a Beirut, si è nati senza assistenza medica*
      'Today, in Beirut, we were born with no medical assistance'

(66) *%Oggi, a Beirut, si è stati uccisi inutilmente*
      'Today, in Beirut, we have been killed in vain'

An inclusive interpretation is not excluded also when the verb is transitive or unergative (as in examples (67)–(68); see D'Alessandro 2007: 144). D'Alessandro (2007: 152ff.), elaborating on Cinque's (1988) seminal proposal, argues that the crucial factor triggering an inclusive reading of a *si*-construction is not time-specificity *per se* but rather the boundedness of the event. The following examples, however, show that the inclusive *si*-construction can also refer to unbounded events, provided that the context facilitates such a reading.

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17.   As Cinque (1988: 544) observes, a pure impersonal interpretation of the *si*-construction is possible if the unaccusative, psych-, copular, or passive verb "is embedded in a context that suspends the specificity of the time reference", as in the following examples:

(vii) *Mi domando se a Beirut si sia nati senza assistenza medica anche oggi*
       'I wonder whether in Beirut one was born with no medical assistance today still'

(viii) *Quando si è sfiniti dalla fame non si ragiona*
        'When one is worn out by hunger one cannot reason properly'

(67) *Ne   ho   fatti   anche sette   contemporaneamente, **si***
      of.them have[AUX:1SG] done:M.PL even   seven   at.the.same.time   si

      lavorava   *a   casa   mia, in ogni   stanza c'   era   un*
      worked:3SG   at   home   my   in every room   there was   a

      gruppo che   scriveva un film   diverso
      group   that wrote   a   movie different

      (Context: a movie director talking about his activity)

      'I worked on even seven movies at the same time, we used to work at my place,
      (and) in every room there was a group working on a different movie'

(68) *L'   indicazione decisiva è   arrivata da   Craxi: "non **si***
      the indication   decisive is[AUX]   arrived   from C.   NEG   si

      fanno   *questioni di uomini […] ma **si affrontano*** *problemi*
      make:3PL   questions of men   but si address:3PL   problems

      politici e   si tiene conto de-i   bisogni […] che
      political and si takes count of-the needs   that

      ha   Milano"
      has Milan

      (Context: Craxi is giving a speech at a political meeting of his party)

      'The final indication has been given by Craxi: "we are not questioning about
      specific persons; rather, we are dealing with political issues and we are taking
      into account the needs of Milan'

Although the inclusive *si*-construction is indistinguishable from the passive and imper-
sonal *si*-constructions, there may be some unambiguous clues pointing to an inclusive
interpretation such as, e.g. the use of the 1st person plural possessive pronoun *nostro*,
'our' (when an inclusive interpretation is excluded, the possessive pronoun triggered
by *si* is *proprio*, 'own'), or the presence of the independent 1st person plural pronoun
noi before *si*. The reader is referred to D'Alessandro (2007: 140–143) for a detailed dis-
cussion of the tests for an inclusive reading of the *si*-construction.

     To sum up, except for the inclusive *si*-construction, both passive and impersonal
si-constructions in present-day Italian share an important semantic feature, namely the
genericity of the agent. In particular, the passive *si*-construction appears to be much
more infused with generic nuances than it was in Old Italian (recall examples (10)
and (11)). As will be argued in §5, this is the result of a long-lasting process in which
(i) the impersonal *si*-construction has progressively emerged and spread, and (ii) the
existence of an impersonal construction formed with the same building blocks has
fostered to some extent the (semantic, if not syntactic) "impersonalization" of the pas-
sive *si*-construction. In the next section, the most important stages of this long-term
development will be discussed in detail.

4.   What happened in the meantime

As discussed in the previous section, the impersonal *si*-construction in Italian has not replaced the passive *si*-construction and is less widespread than it. From a semantic point of view, however, the reinterpretation of *si* as a marker of generic human agency has gone a step further. Such an interpretation holds in most cases in which there is agreement between the patient and the verb, as in examples (42)–(46).

In this section we will sketch the main stages of the diachronic processes leading to the present-day situation. We will mainly focus on three different evolutionary paths, which will be the object of the next three subsections:

i.   the extension of the *si*-construction to intransitive verbs (§ 4.1);
ii.   the development of impersonal *si*-constructions with transitive verbs (§ 4.2);
iii. the emergence and establishing of the inclusive *si*-construction (§ 4.3).

4.1   The extension to intransitive verbs

As discussed above, the earliest examples of the *si*-construction with intransitive verbs all have generic time reference. The first examples of the impersonal *si*-construction with specific time reference are as early as the 14th century, and there are no differences between unergative and unaccusative predicates. In (69) and (70) the verbs are unergative, while in (71)–(73) they are unaccusative:[18]

(69)   *cioè   sacrifici   de' quali   si racontoe   di sopra*
        that.is sacrifices   of which   si told:3sG   above

                                    (Anonimo, *Volgarizzamento B del secondo libro di*
                                    Valerio Massimo, par. 31, glossa x; 1326)

        'that is, the sacrifices discussed above' (lit: about which it was told above)

(70)   *Ma molto   si ragionò   a   quello   mangiare   de-ll'   opere*
        but much   si talked.about   at   that   dinner   of-the   deeds

        di Merlino
        of M.   (Paolino Pieri, *La Storia di Merlino*, 34, 15; between 1310 and 1330)

        'at that dinner people talked a lot about Merlin's deeds'

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18.   *Si racontoe* in (69) is not to be intended as an instance of an inclusive *si*-construction; the example is drawn from a commentary added by a person different from the author on the margins of the manuscript.

(71) *e   co-l   gonfalone de-l   popolo in furia **si corse** a   casa   i*
      and   with-the gonfalon of-the people quickly *si* ran   to   house   the

      Cavalcanti, e   mise-vi-si   fuoco, e   da capo furono cacciati
      C.   and   put:PST.3SG-there-*si* fire   and   again   were   chased

      di   Firenze i   Cavalcanti
      from Florence the C.   (Villani, *Cronica*, 9, 33; 1348)

      'and the crowd ran quickly to the Cavalcanti's house with the
      people's gonfalon, and set it on fire, and the Cavalcanti were exiled
      from Florence again'

(72) *quando **si venne** al-la   battaglia, fu   quell' asprezza   utile*
      when   *si* came   to-the   battle   was   that   harshness useful

                                              (*Deca prima di Tito Livio
                                                volgarizzata*, 8, 8; 1350)

      'when people started to fight, that harshness turned out to be useful'

(73) *Come si sapesse,   vi   **si andò**, e   trovo-ssi,   e*
      as   *si* know:SBJV.PST.3SG   there *si* went   and   found:3SG-*si* and

      fu   preso
      was   taken   (Marchionne di Coppo Stefani, *Cronaca fiorentina*, 830; 1385)

      'as soon as the news spread, people went there, and he was
      found and captured'

On the contrary, there is an important difference between unergative and unaccusative intransitive verbs with regard to the possibility of appearing with compound tenses in the *si*-construction.[19] While unergative verbs appear quite early with compound tenses (see examples (74)–(75); (74) has an inclusive interpretation), the earliest instances of the compound tenses of the *si*-construction with unaccusative verbs are as late as the 16th century (see examples (76)–(78)). In all these instances, unlike in present-day Italian, the past participle displays singular agreement:

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19. The passive *si*-construction could be used with compound tenses already at the beginning of the 14th century, given examples such as (ix):

(ix) *e   ben si sarebbe   auta   la   terra*
      and well *si* be:COND.3SG   have:PTCP.F.SG   the   land

                              (*Cronica fiorentina*, p. 135; beginning of the 14th century)

      'and that land would have been easily conquered'

(74) *benché   di lui   e   de' suoi compagni assai **ragionato***
      although of him and of his fellows   much discussed

      si   sia
      si   be:SBJV.3SG   (Boccaccio, *Decameron*, IX, 3; 1370)

      'although we have (already) discussed a lot about him and his fellows'

(75) *e   sotto lo   steccato medesimo **si sarebbe**   **combattuto***
      and under the fence   same   *si* be:COND.3SG fought
                                  (*Deca terza di Tito Livio volgarizzata*, p. 324; 1400)

      'and they would have engaged battle under the same fence'

(76) *dove   quando l' esercito era   stato meno potente non **si***
      where when   the army   was[AUX] been less mighty NEG *si*

      era   potuto andare* *senza*   *pericolo
      was[AUX] can:PPT go:INF without danger
                                  (Guicciardini, *Storia d'Italia*, 6, 11; 1537–1540)

      'where one could not go with no risk when the army was less mighty'

(77) *Stanno-si a–l   presente pacifiche e   servon […] a-gli*
      stay:3PL-*si* at-the present peaceful and serve:3PL   to-the

      *Spagnuoli […] se ben   per mancar la   gente non **si è***
      Spanish:M.PL although for lack:INF the people NEG *si* is[AUX]

      tornato   *ad abitar   la   terra*
      come.back:PPT to inhabit:INF the land
                                (Ramusio, *Relazioni di Cortés su Nuova*
                                           Spagna, 4, 3; 1550–1559)

      'they are presently peaceful and serve the Spanish Empire, although nobody
      came back to inhabit (those lands) when the populace decreased in size'

(78) *immediate **si è**   **venuto***   *a conoscere che 'l   detto*
      immediately *si* is[AUX] come:PPT   to know:INF that the mentioned

      mappamondo fu   senza   alcuno dubbio cavato da   quello di
      world.map   was without any   doubt drawn from that of

      messer Marco Polo
      Sir   M.   P.
                      (Ramusio, *I viaggi di Marco Polo*, Dichiarazione di Ramusio)

      'Immediately people came to know that the aforementioned world map was no
      doubt drawn from the one sketched by Sir Marco Polo'

In the 16th century, the earliest examples of the *si*-construction with the verb *essere* 'be' are also attested, apparently only with prepositional phrases, as in (79)–(80):

(79) **Si era**   *insino a ora* **stato** *in ambiguo quale   dovesse essere il*
      si   was[AUX]   up to now   been   in doubt   which   should   be   the

      cammino de'   tedeschi
      path   of.the Germans   (Guicciardini, *Storia d'Italia*, 17, 16, 1)

      'Up to now people had been in doubt about which path the Germans
      would have followed'

(80) *mentre* **si era** *su-l   maggior furor de-lla battaglia un' ala*
      while   si was on-the bigger   rage   of-the battle   a   wing

      de cavalaria polona secretamente passò   a-lle   trinciere nemiche
      of cavalry   Polish secretly   passed to-the trenches   enemy[ADJ]

              (Ramusio, *Descrizione della Sarmazia europea*, *Croniche di Polonia*, 38, 3)

      'while the battle raged most (lit.: while one was on the biggest rage of the
      battle), a wing of Polish cavalrymen secretly slipped into the enemy's trenches'

The earliest attestations of the *si*-construction with *essere* + an adjective or a noun in our corpus date to the end of the 18th century. In example (81), drawn from Vittorio Alfieri's autobiography (1790–1803), the adjective displays plural agreement (and the construction has an inclusive meaning). The singular agreement, on the other hand, continues to be attested after the emergence of the plural agreement pattern, as example (82) shows. In this period, the coexistence of singular vs. plural agreement also characterizes the *si*-construction when it occurs with unaccusative intransitive verbs (as shown by the contrast between (83) and (84)):

(81) **si era certi**   *di non poter   più   partire*
      si was sure:M.PL of NEG can:INF longer leave

                                            (V. Alfieri, *Vita*, 4, 22; 1790–1803)

      'we were sure we couldn't leave any longer'

(82) *Ma, se   vi   vuole del   coraggio per dar-si   la   morte,*
      but if there wants some courage for give:INF-REFL the death

      non se ne   richiede uno minore per non dar-se-la,   quando
      NEG si than.it requires one lesser for NEG give:INF-si-it when

      si è certo *di aver-la   da   altri*
      si is sure of have:INF-it from others

              (V. Cuoco, *Saggio storico sulla rivoluzione napoletana del 1799*, 50; 1801)

      'but, if some courage is necessary in order to commit suicide, no less
      courage is required in order not to kill oneself when one is sure to be killed
      by someone else'

(83) *Il   mio curatore,   co-l quale   non **si era**   mai*
      the my   administrator with-whom NEG *si* was[AUX] never

      entrato   *in conti [...] mi   scrisse in quell' occasione de-ll'*
      entered:M.SG in counts   to.me wrote in that   occasion of-the

      ottenuta   permissione
      obtained   permission   (Alfieri, Vita, 3, 3)

      'my administrator, with whom I had never discussed counts, wrote to me on
      that occasion about the permission he had obtained'

(84) *e   raccontò [...] come **si era**   **tornati**   senza*
      and   told:3SG   how   *si* was[AUX] come.back:PPT.M.PL without

      aver   fatto nulla, ma senza   aver   lasciato traccia
      have:INF done nothing but without have:INF left   trace
                                (Manzoni, *Fermo e Lucia*, 2, 7; 1827)

      'and he told how we had come back without doing anything and
      without leaving traces'

Finally, in the early 19th century the earliest examples of the *si*-construction with the
periphrastic passive are attested:

(85) *Quando si tratta d' uomini che   camminano in cadenza e*
      when   *si* treats of men   who   walk:3PL   in rhythm   and

      *gestiscono   invece di parlare, **si è**   **portati**   in*
      gesture:3PL instead of talk:INF *si* is[AUX] brought:M.PL in

      un altro   mondo
      another   world   (*Il Conciliatore*, n.28 [*Sulla poesia romantica*]; 1818–1819)

      'when we have to do with men who walk rhythmically and gesture
      instead of talking, we are brought to another world'

4.2   The development of impersonal *si*-constructions with transitive verbs

As discussed above, in the 13th century optionality of agreement with patient NPs in
the *si*-construction was possible with a limited number of patients, including quanti-
fied and non-referential patients, and nominals in light verb constructions. The exten-
sion to other kinds of patients is quite precocious: starting from the very beginning
of the 14th century, lack of agreement is attested also with definite patients (both

uniquely identifiable referents as in (87) and patients that have been mentioned before, as in (86) and (88)):

(86) *Ne   la   terza   parte   **si pone**   l'   armi   le quali   il   Segnore   prese,   e*
      in   the   third   part   *si* posits   the   arms   which   the   God   took   and

      co   le quali   egli   s'   armò   e   combatté   e   vinse
      with   which   he   REFL   armed   and   fought   and   won

<div align="right">(Giordano da Pisa, Quaresimale
fiorentino, p. 41; 1306)</div>

      'in the third part one posits the arms that our Lord took, of which he armed
      Himself and with which he fought and won'

(87) *Sopra   la   detta   porta   **si è**   **lavorato,**   d'   opera   musaica,*
      over   the   said   door   *si* is[AUX]   worked:M.SG   of   work   mosaic

      santa   Maria   co-l   suo   Figliuolo   in   braccio
      holy   Mary   with-the   her   Son   in   arm

<div align="right">(Niccolò da Poggibonsi, Libro d'oltramare, Cap. 211; 1345)</div>

      'over the aforementioned door someone represented the Virgin Mary
      with her Son in her arms in a mosaic work'

(88) *Ne-lla   detta   chiesa   **si è**   **figurato**   per   ordine   tutta*
      in-the   said   church   *si* is[AUX]   represented:M.SG   through   order   all:F.SG

      questa   storia   di   Moisè
      this:F.SG   story:F.SG   of   Moyses

<div align="right">(Niccolò da Poggibonsi, Libro
d'oltramare, p. B153)</div>

      'in the aforementioned church someone represented this entire story of
      Moyses in order'

The earliest examples of the impersonal construction with 3rd person accusative clitics are also found in the early 14th century (see Wehr 1995: 116):

(89) *ke   'l   mi   debbie   sotterare,   sì che   no-**l**   **si sappia***
      that   he   me   should   bury   so that   NEG-it:OBJ   *si*   know:SBJV.3S

<div align="right">(Volgarizzamento di un frammento della Disciplina Clericalis di
Pietro di Alfonso; 1300)</div>

      'He should bury me so that nobody will know it'

4.3   The emergence and establishing of the inclusive *si*-construction

As discussed before, *si*-constructions with an inclusive meaning are structurally indistinguishable from passive and impersonal *si*-constructions. An inclusive flavour

of the *si*-construction, however, can be safely reconstructed on the basis of the context already in some passages from texts of the 14th and 15th century, as the following examples show. In (90), (91) and (92), for instance, the *si*-construction alternates, respectively, with a 1st person plural pronoun (*noi*), with a 1st person plural possessive (*nostra eletta*), and with a first person plural verb form (*abiamo ricevuto*), whereas in (93) and (94) it is clear from the context (and from previous letters belonging to the same correspondence) that the author is talking about a group of people including herself:

(90) *quest' ultima preghiera, segnor caro, già non **si fa**   per noi,*
this   last   prayer   Lord   dear   now NEG *si* makes for us

ché   non bisogna, ma per color che   dietro a noi restaro
because NEG needs   but for those who behind us   remained

                              (Dante, *Purgatorio*, 11, 23)

'this last request we now address to You, dear Lord, not for ourselves – who have no need – but for the ones whom we have left behind'

(91) *"Se qui per dimandar   gente   **s' aspetta**", ragionava il*
if   here for inquire:INF people *si* waits   argued   the

poeta, "io temo forse   che troppo   avrà   d' indugio
poet   I   fear   perhaps that too.much will.have of delay

nostra eletta"
our   choice   (Dante, *Purgatorio*, 13, 10)

'"If we wait here in order to inquire of those who pass," the poet said, "I fear our choice of path may be delayed too long."'

(92) *e   se meno **si ne**   **fosse**   **ricevuto** di fior.   3200 d'*
and if less   *si* of.it be:SBJV.3SG received than *fiorini* 3200 of

oro per anno sì   gli   ci   dèe   fare   aconpiere d'
gold per year   EMPH to.him to.us must:3SG make:INF fulfil:INF from

altre   sue rendite […] sicchè in capo de   l'   anno […] abiamo
other his incomes   so.that in the end of the year   we.have

ricevuto interamente la   sopradetta   pagha di fior.
received entirely   the aforementioned pay of *fiorini*

3200 d' oro
3200 of gold   (*Libro delle rede di messer Niccholò Gianfigliazzi*, p. 96; 1325)

'and should we receive less than 3200 golden *fiorini*, he should compel him to satisfy us (by drawing money) from other incomes of his, so that at the end of the year we have received the aforementioned pay of 3200 golden *fiorini* entirely'

(93) *Questo dì **si comperorno** gli occhiali, e ti si mandano*
      this day *si* bought:3PL the glasses and to.you *si* send:3PL

      sotto lettere di Niccolò Strozzi
      under letters of N. S. (A. Macinghi Strozzi, *Lettere*, 22 marzo 1463)

      'today we bought the glasses (for you), and we are now sending them to you
      along with letters by Niccolò Strozzi'

(94) *De-lla dota ti **si scrisse**, ch' ella non si poteva avere, se*
      of-the dowry to.you si wrote that it NEG si could have:INF if

      non si pagava el Comune
      NEG *si* paid:3.SG the municipality

                                                  *(*A. Macinghi Strozzi, *Lettere*, 31 agosto 1465*)*

      'as far as the dowry is concerned, we wrote to you that we couldn't have
      it if we hadn't pay the municipality'

It could be remarked that in these examples specific time reference is not a necessary
condition for an inclusive interpretation to hold: while there is specific time refer-
ence in (90) and (93)–(94), in examples (91) and (92) the *si*-construction is under
the scope of the conditional operator *se* ('if') and thus has generic time reference.
The relatively early occurrence of inclusive *si*-constructions is another piece of evi-
dence in favour of the hypothesis discussed in this paper that the reinterpretation
of *si* as a marker of generic human agency occurs at earlier times than assumed by
Salvi (2008), as the impersonal/generic reading is the necessary precondition for an
inclusive interpretation: both interpretations usually refer to groups of people, which
vary in size and composition according to the context, and this semantic overlap
is notoriously the reason why languages often use impersonal forms for 1st person
plural reference.

      Salvi (2008: 140) also tentatively proposes that the use of the construction to
express 1st person plural might have influenced the plural agreement pattern of adjec-
tives and past participles discussed above and exemplified in (81) and (84). In our
view, the availability of the inclusive reading is not directly responsible for the emer-
gence of the plural agreement pattern in the 18th century: although plural adjectives
and participles are a necessary condition for the inclusive interpretation by this time,
the earliest examples of this pattern more often than not have a generic rather than an
inclusive reading:

(95) *Confrontando una pittura ed un ballo, questo ha lo svantaggio*
      comparing a painting and a dance this has the disadvantage

      *di non offrire forme ideali, giacché **si è costretti** a*
      of NEG offer:INF forms ideal because *si* is forced:M.PL to

> *servirsi   di ballerini tali quali sono*
> make.use of dancers   just like   they.are
>
> <div align="right">(*Il Conciliatore*, n. 28; 1818–1819)</div>
>
> 'comparing a painting and a dance, the latter has the disadvantage that it does not offer ideal forms, because one is forced to make use of dancers lust like they are'

(96) *quanto più **si** è **lontani**   da-llo   stato naturale, cioè*
   the more   si is far:M.PL from-the state   natural   that.is

   quanto più si sa
   the more   si knows   (Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, 22 dicembre 1820)

   'the farther one is from the natural state, i.e. the more one knows'

(97) *Ma ne-lla   casetta   di Lucia da-l   momento che il*
   but in-the small.house of L.   from-the moment   that the

   *padre ne   era   partito non **si** **era**   **stati***
   father from.it was[AUX] left   NEG si was[AUX] been:M.PL

   in   ozio
   in   idleness   (Manzoni, *Fermo e Lucia*, 1, 6; 1827)

   'but in Lucia's house from the time her father passed away people had not stayed idle'

We argue on the contrary that the plural agreement pattern in the examples above is, so to speak, the "natural" result of the reanalysis of *si* as a generic human agent: generic human agents often coincide with loosely defined groups of people, and plural agreement functions as a marker of such a plurality.

5.   Conclusions

On the syntactic side, the passive-to-impersonal development sketched in this paper has led to the coexistence of two *si*-constructions in present-day Italian, a passive and an impersonal one. On the semantic side, the process has gone somewhat further: in both the passive and the impersonal *si*-constructions the agent is typically generic in present-day Italian, and both constructions tend to be associated with a cluster of morphosyntactic features that favour a generic interpretation, such as, e.g. the present tense or the imperfective aspect. Table 1 summarizes the main stages of the passive-to-impersonal development described in the previous sections.

Table 1. The main stages of the passive-to-impersonal construction reanalysis of the *si*-construction in Italian

13th century	14th century	16th century	18th–19th centuries	present-day Italian
Impersonal *si*-construction: – possible with unergative and unaccusative intransitive verbs (present tense, or other tenses/moods inducing generic-time reference) – possible with a small subset of non-referential patients, generally indefinite and appearing postverbally	**Impersonal *si*-construction:** – possible with unergative and unaccusative intransitive verbs (past tense and other tenses/moods inducing specific-time reference) – possible with compound tenses of unergative intransitives – possible with definite and referential patients – possible with 3rd person accusative clitics	**Impersonal *si*-construction:** – possible with compound tenses of unaccusative intransitives (the past participle shows singular agreement) – possible with *essere* + PP	**Impersonal *si*-construction:** – possible with *essere* + AP/NP (the N or Adj, as well as the past participle in unaccusative verbs, may show plural or singular agreement) – possible with reflexive verbs and with the periphrastic passive (19th century)	**Impersonal *si*-construction:** – plural agreement of the past participle (with unaccusative verbs) and the N or Adj (with *essere* + AP/NP) is obligatory
Passive *si*-construction: impossible with compound tenses	**Passive *si*-construction:** possible with compound tenses			
	Earliest attestations of the **inclusive *si*-construction** (with both specific and generic time reference)		Specific time reference with unaccusative verbs does not necessarily trigger an inclusive interpretation (see example (96))	The inclusive interpretation has entrenched itself and is particularly favoured (if not obligatory) with unaccusative verbs with specific time reference (though not being excluded in other cases)

As shown in §2, the prerequisites for such a reinterpretation were already available in the earliest written documents analyzed in this paper. This does not amount to saying, however, that these prerequisites represent a sufficient condition, as other factors might equally well have played a role in this development. One of these factors is possibly the existence of another construction, the periphrastic passive, which is functionally comparable to the *si*-construction, in that both can be considered as agent-defocusing strategies. In the earliest stage discussed in this paper, the area of overlap between the two constructions was larger than in Modern Italian: example (10) exemplifies the functional similarity between the periphrastic passive and the *si*-construction. The periphrastic construction was also possible with both unergative and unaccusative intransitives, a possibility definitely ruled out in present-day Italian:

(98) *Veramente per diversi filosofi de-lla differenza de-lle nostre*
truly   by   different philosophers of-the difference of-the our

   *anime **fue** diversamente **ragionato***
souls **was** variously **reasoned**   (Dante, *Convivio*, 4, 21, 2; 1304–1307)

   'Different philosophers, it is true, have held different opinions regarding the difference of our souls'

(99) *quella provincia nel-la quale prima **fu** **andato** da' Romani*
that province in-which first was gone by Romans

                           (*Deca terza di Tito Livio*, 8, 12; early 14th century)

   'that province where the Romans went first'

In present-day Italian the periphrastic construction has usually a specific reading, which is possibly connected with the resultative meaning of the past participle: the past participle contains an intrinsic feature of completion which renders it unsuitable for representing typically imperfective/atemporal states of affairs such as those connected to generic human agency. Throughout the history of Italian, the periphrastic passive has lost its "impersonal" features (ceasing to be employed with both unergative and unaccusative intransitive verbs quite early) and has reinforced its resultative features, resulting in a fully promotional passive construction, typically used when the patient is a discourse-salient entity. In other words, two concurrent and largely overlapping constructions belonging to the same functional space ended up being preferentially associated with the expression of two different situation types, as a result of the emergence of a formal/functional contrast between the two. We may speculate whether this functional/formal contrast was already present at an embryonic stage in 13th century Italian (as the data discussed in §2 seem to suggest; see also Sansò 2011), but what is crucial for the present purposes is that the process sketched in this paper is a clear instance of polarization, to be intended as the functionalization of

an opposition between concurrent and alternative grammatical strategies within the same functional domain.

The diachronic process described in this paper is also language-specific and idiosyncratic, and in other languages different processes of passive-to-impersonal development with different outcomes may have taken place. The present Italian case study, however, may be instructive as to the initial stage of the process, namely the extension of a passive construction to intransitive verbs: although passive and impersonal constructions are functionally similar as agent-defocusing strategies, the different type of agent defocusing that characterizes the two construction types requires us to posit a reanalysis of the passive marker as a marker of generic human agency as a necessary precondition motivating its extension to intransitive verbs.

Abbreviations

1, 2, 3	1st, 2nd, 3rd person	M	masculine
ACC	accusative	NEG	negation
ADJ	adjective	NEUT	neuter
AUX	auxiliary	NOM	nominative
COMP	comparative	OBJ	object
COND	conditional	PL	plural
DAT	dative	PST	past
EMPH	emphatic particle	PPT	past participle
EXPL	expletive	PTCP	participle
F	feminine	RECIP	reciprocal
FUT	future	REFL	reflexive
IMP	imperative	SBJV	subjunctive
IMPF	imperfective	SG	singular
INF	infinitive		

Appendix

Corpora

13th and 14th century Italian

OVI (Opera del Vocabolario Italiano) Corpus – The OVI Corpus is a large-scale corpus of early Italian containing 1849 vernacular texts (21.2 million words, 479,000 unique forms), the majority of which are dated prior to 1375, the year of Giovanni Boccaccio's death. This corpus aims to collect both literary and non-literary texts in a single repository: besides early masters of

Italian literature like Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, lesser-known and obscure texts by poets, merchants, and medieval chroniclers, as well as non-literary texts such as private letters, *Statuti* (statutes) and *Registri* (official records) are well-represented in the database

1200–1900 Italian

LIZ 4.0 (Letteratura Italiana Zanichelli) Corpus – The LIZ 4.0 Corpus contains approximately 1000 works of Italian literature. The works included in this resource span a chronological period of time beginning with Francesco d'Assisi's *Laudes Creaturarum* (12th century) and ending with Italo Svevo's *Coscienza di Zeno* (20th century).

Present-day Italian

LIP (Lessico dell'Italiano Parlato) Corpus – The LIP Corpus is a 500000 word corpus of contemporary spoken Italian, collected by a team of linguists coordinated by Tullio de Mauro. The corpus includes different types of everyday conversation, ranging from spontaneous face-to-face interactions to unidirectional speech such as broadcast news speech. The data have been collected in four major Italian cities (Rome, Milan, Naples and Florence).

La Repubblica Corpus – The "La Repubblica" corpus is a very large corpus of Italian newspaper texts (approximately 380M tokens) developed at the University of Bologna (*Scuola Superiore di Lingue Moderne per Interpreti e Traduttori*, Forlì) and available online at the following address: http://dev.sslmit.unibo.it/corpora/corpora.php. The corpus is tokenized, pos-tagged, lemmatized, and categorized in terms of genre and topic.

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