

Concealed *modality*: The case of Bellinzonese, Italian, and English

Introduction. Bellinzonese (a North Italian Dialect) (1) and Italian (2) have what I call *Have to*-constructions (HTCs) similar in form to the English HTC in (3).

- (1) G ho *(da) lecc (Bellinzonese)
 G have of to.read
 ‘I have the obligation/need to read’/‘I have something to read’
- (2) Ho *(da) leggere ‘I have something to read’ (Italian)
 have of to.read
- (3) I have to read (= I have the obligation/need to read) (English)

Despite their similarity, there are sharp interpretive differences distinguishing (1) – (3). (1) can have both a modal (obligation/necessity) and a non-modal reading. (2) only allows for a non-modal reading, while (3) solely has a modal (obligation/necessity) reading.

In this paper, I provide an account for this contrast by arguing that (2) and (3) have different underlying structures, while (1) can be associated with both the structure of (2) and (3). The data investigated provide strong evidence in favor of postulating null modal nouns as well as to posit difference in behavior among null categories cross-linguistically.

My proposal. I maintain that in (1) and (2) the *da*-clause is an infinitival relative clause whose head is the null noun SOMETHING.

- (4) a. [G ho [SOMETHING [da lecc]]] (Bellinzonese)
 b. [Ho [SOMETHING [da leggere]]] (Italian)
 ‘I have something to read’ / * ‘I have to read something’

Notice that when an overt object is inserted in (1), the object can either be the argument of the infinitive (5a) or of the finite verb (5b).

- (5) a. G ho da lecc un libru (Bellinzonese)
 G have of to.read a book
 ‘I have to read a book’ / * ‘I have a book to read’
- b. G ho un libru da lecc
 G have a book of to.read
 * ‘I have to read a book’ / ^{ok} ‘I have a book to read’

In (2), an overt object can only be the argument of the finite verb ((6a) vs. (6b)).

- (6) a. * Ho da leggere un libro (Italian)
 have of to.read a book
 ‘I have to read a book’
- b. Ho un libro da leggere
 have a book of to.read
 * ‘I have to read a book’ / ^{ok} ‘I have a book to read’

Crucially, the distribution of the overt object in (5) and (6) parallels the availability of a modal or non-modal reading. In (5a), only a modal reading is possible, whereas in (5b) only a non-modal one. (6a) is impossible but this is not surprising since (6a) should be associated with a modal reading that is impossible in (2) already. (6b) can only have a non-modal reading. Importantly, (6a) becomes acceptable when an adverb like *ancora* ‘still’ is inserted (7).

- (7) Ho ancora da leggere un libro
 have still of to.read a book
 ‘I still have to read a book’

Also, it seems that in English HTCs the head of an infinitival relative always needs to be pronounced, hence the contrast between the impossibility of having a non-modal reading in (3) and the well-formedness of (8).

- (8) I have something to eat (English)

When Bellinzonese and English HTCs are modal, I argue that *have* selects a null NEED/OBLIGATION, which takes an infinitival complement (9) and (10), on a par with (11)

and (12) where the overt nouns head the infinitival relative. This explains the ambiguous modal reading in (1) and (3).

- (9) [G ho NEED/OBLIGATION [da [lecc [SOMETHING]]]]
 (10) [I have NEED/OBLIGATION [to [read [SOMETHING]]]]
 (11) G' ho bisögn/l'òblig da legg (Bellinzonese)
 CI have need/the obligation of to.read
 'I need/have to/must read'
 (12) I have a need/an obligation to eat (English)

I argue that the structures in (9) and (10) underlie the Italian example in (2) as well. The difference is that in this particular construction Italian has a wider range of overt modal nouns (13) and when *avere* ('to have') selects for one of their null counterparts, the latter must incorporate into the verb, unless something intervenes as in (6b) or if the noun is overt (13). In (14), NECESSITY incorporates yielding *necessitare* ('to need') (15). The fact that here we have *di* and not *da* depends on the fact that *da* is the complementizer *di* combined with the preposition *a* and the latter incorporates along with the noun.

- (13) Ho bisogno/necessità/l'obbligo di leggere (Italian)
 have need/necessity/the obligation of to.read
 'I need/have to/must read'
 (14) [Ho + [NECESSITY PREP]_i [[di t_i] [leggere [SOMETHING]]]]
 (15) [*Necessito* [t di [leggere [SOMETHING]]]]
 must of to.read something
 'I need to read something' / * 'I have something to read'

When BISOGNO or OBBLIGO incorporate into *avere*, I propose that the complementizer must also incorporate and *bisognare* ('to need') and *dovere* ('must') obtain. We thus get the contrast in (16).

- (16) a. Necessito *(di) leggere 'I need to read' (Italian)
 b. Bisogna (*di) leggere 'One needs to read'
 c. Devo (*di) leggere 'I must/have to eat'

Finally, given that (17a) is ungrammatical, I conclude that in order for a noun to be unpronounced it needs to be high enough in the structure. If it is not, then the noun must either be spelled out (17b) or incorporate into the closest verbal form (17c).

- (17) a. * G ho vù NEED/ OBLIGATION da lecc un libru (Bellinzonese)
 b. G ho vù bisògn/ l'òblig da lecc un libru
 G have had NEED-need/OBLIGATION-the obligation of to.read a book
 c. Ho dùvù lecc un libru
 have must.PAST to.read a book
 'I had to/needed to read a book'

The same judgments hold for Italian and suggest that in (6b) the null noun is high enough not to be pronounced.

Conclusion. I have showed that the discrepancies between (1), (2), and (3) are in part structural and in part dependent on the nature of null categories cross-linguistically. Future development of this theory should consider how other Romance languages fit in.

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