CHAPTER 4

Notes on infinitival relatives in Italian

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Here certain properties of Italian infinitival relatives will be discussed which to
our knowledge have not been addressed in previous work on this topic (Napoli
1976; Cinque 1988: § 1.1.5; Bianchi 1991, 2007). In particular, we will point out
a distinction between two ‘da + infinitive’ relative constructions and a difference
between da infinitival relatives and infinitival relatives introduced by relative
pronouns; furthermore, we will illustrate the bounded vs unbounded nature
of relativization under restructuring, and the properties of restrictive vs non-
restrictive infinitival relatives.

Keywords: da and wh-infinitival relatives, modal force, island constraints,
Restructuring

1. Introduction

Italian infinitival relative clauses have been the object of a number of studies (see
Napoli 1976; Cinque 1988: § 1.1.5; Bianchi 1991, 2007, and others, who will be
quoted in the course of the discussion). On the basis of these analyses Italian in-
finival relative clauses appear to be characterized by the following properties:

When the relativization is on the direct object, the relative clause is introduced
by the invariant preposition da, as in (1):¹

¹ In colloquial Italian da may also be used when an oblique argument is relativized, provided
that the oblique argument is locally bound by a resumptive clitic:

(i) a. Ecco un vaso da metterci i fiori freschi
   here a vase to put-INF LOC DET fresh flowers
   ‘Here’s a vase to put fresh flowers in.’
   b. Ha trovato un ragazzo da uscirci assieme tutte le sere
   have-3SG found a boy to go.out with every DET evening
   ‘S/he’s met a guy to go out with every night.’
(1) a. Ho trovato [un libro da recensire t]
   have-1sg found a book to review
   ‘I have found a book to review.’

   b. [Il libro da recensire t] è lì sul tavolo.
   the book to review is there on DET table
   ‘The book to review is there on the table.’

A relative pronoun (cui or art. + quale) can only be used if it is contained in a larger phrase, as in (2):

(2) a. Ho regalato a Gianni [un libro [con cui i] [passare
   have-1sg given to Gianni a book with which spend-INF
   la serata [pp t]]].
   DET evening
   ‘I have given Gianni as a gift a book to spend the night with.’

   b. Ho presentato a Gianni [una persona [ai cui i amici
   have-1sg introduced to Gianni a person to whose friends
   chiedere consiglio [pp t]].
   ask-INF advice
   ‘I have introduced to Gianni a person to whose friends he can ask for advice’

In this respect, infinitival relatives behave like finite restrictive relatives (compare (3a) with (3)b), and English infinitival relatives, (see (3)c), as they cannot involve a relative pronoun, (as (3)c), unless the DP is embedded in a PP (see (2)).

(3) a. *Il vestito il quale/cui hai comprato non ti
   DET suit which have-2sg bought not 2sg.dat
   sta bene
   fit well

   (Cinque 1978: 35)

   b. *Sto cercando un libro il quale leggere
   stay-1sg looking a book which read-inf

   c. I’m looking for a book (*which) to read vs. ...on which to work

   (Pesetsky 1998: 350)

2. The rationale underlying this pattern remains unclear. For a review of (some of) the accounts that have been proposed see Hasegawa (1998), who adds another piece to the puzzle from Old and Middle English, where the relative pronoun could be deleted stranding a preposition: a foot on to goo (a foot on which to go) or a hous in to drink and ete (a house in which to drink and eat). For a stylistically more marked construction admitting object art + quale pronouns and pied pipings heavier than PP in finite restrictives and infinitival relatives see Cinque 1982: 281f, 1988: § 1.1.4, § 1.1.5.1, respectively).
The complementizer *che*, which in Italian introduces finite relative clauses on the direct object or the subject (see (4)), as well as the complementizer *that* in English (see the translations of (4)a.-b.), are completely impossible in infinitival relatives (see (5)):

\[(4)\]  
a. Il *vestito* che hai comprato ti non ti sta bene  
   det dress that have-2sg bought not 2sg.dat suit well  
   ‘The dress you have bought does not suit you.’

b. Il *vestito* che *era* in vetrina era molto caro  
   det dress that was in SHOP.WINDOW was very expensive  
   ‘The dress that was in the window was very expensive.’

\[(5)\]  
*Il *vestito* che comprare ti era questo.  
   det dress that buy-INF was this

Infinitival relatives can be of the restrictive kind:

\[(6)\]  
a. Lo *studente* a cui affidare l’incarico è  
   det student to whom entrust-INF det-task is  
   purtroppo appena uscito.  
   unfortunately just left  
   ‘The student to whom to entrust the task has unfortunately just left.’

b. Abbiamo scelto la *stoffa* da usare per coprire il divano.  
   have-1pl chosen the cloth to use for cover det sofa  
   ‘We have chosen the cloth we can use to cover the sofa.’

Perhaps the most natural examples of restrictive infinitival relatives are those with an indefinite antecedent (see (7)), and they seem to belong to the class of kind-defining relative clauses, as they do not identify the referent of the antecedent but express its characteristics (see Benincà 2012; Benincà & Cinque 2014):

\[(7)\]  
a. Ho trovato un idraulico a cui affidare il lavoro.  
   have-1sg found a plumber to whom assign-INF det job  
   ‘I’ve found a plumber I can assign the job to.’

b. Ho trovato una *stoffa* da usare per coprire il divano  
   have-1sg found a cloth to use-INF for cover the sofa  
   ‘I’ve found a cloth I can use to cover the sofa.’

c. Ho bisogno di un assistente da assumere con fiducia  
   have-1sg need of an assistant to hire with confidence  
   ‘I need an assistant I can hire with confidence.’
2. **Nonrestrictive da infinitival relatives?**

In Cinque (1988: § 1.1.5), on the basis of sentences like (8), it was assumed that ordinary infinitival RCs are only restrictive:

\[
\begin{align*}
(8) & \quad a. \quad {^*}C'era \quad persino \ Giorgio, \quad a \quad cui \quad parlare \quad di \quad questo. \\
& \quad \text{LOC-be-IPFV-3SG even Giorgio, to whom talk-INF of this} \\
& \quad b. \quad *L'\ \text{ida, di cui \ essere \ fieri, \ è \ qua.} \\
& \quad \text{Lida, of whom be-INF proud, is here}
\end{align*}
\]

It would however seem that some *da* infinitival relatives, like those in (9), can have nonrestrictive usages:

\[
\begin{align*}
(9) & \quad a. \quad Questo \ \text{libro, da \ non \ leggere, \ parla \ di} \ \text{Mozart senza \ alcuna} \\
& \quad \text{this book to not read-INF talks about Mozart without any} \\
& \quad \text{cognizione \ di} \ \text{causa} \quad (\text{Cinque 1988: 455}) \\
& \quad \text{knowledge of cause} \\
& \quad '\text{This book, not to be read, deals with Mozart with no knowledge of the} \\
& \quad \text{facts.'} \\
& \quad b. \quad Il \ \text{su} \ \text{o \ \text{consiglio, da \ prendere \ sicuramente \ sul} \ \text{serio, \ è \ che \ tu} \\
& \quad \text{det poss advice to take-INF surely on-det serious is that you} \\
& \quad \text{not 2SG.ACC move-SBJV.3SG} \\
& \quad '\text{Her/his advice, to be taken seriously for sure, is that you should not} \\
& \quad \text{move.'}
\end{align*}
\]

It is to be noted that, while ordinary infinitival relatives are ambiguous between a root possibility (‘could’) and a root deontic (‘should’) interpretation (see the next section), the interpretation of these nonrestrictive *da* infinitival relatives is necessarily deontic, which makes one think that they are derived through a reduction from a full finite nonrestrictive relative clauses involving the deontic periphrasis *è da* + infinitive:

\[
\begin{align*}
(10) & \quad a. \quad Questo \ \text{libro, che \ è \ da \ non \ leggere,} \ \text{…} \\
& \quad \text{this book which is to not read-INF} \\
& \quad '\text{This book, which is not to be read…’} \\
& \quad b. \quad Il \ \text{su} \ \text{o \ \text{consiglio, che \ è \ da \ prendere \ sicuramente \ sul} \ \text{serio,} \ \text{…} \\
& \quad \text{det poss advice which is to take-INF surely on-det serious} \\
& \quad '\text{Her/his advice, that is to be taken seriously for sure…’}
\end{align*}
\]
3. **Two *da* infinitival relatives in Italian**

Like English (object and oblique) infinitival relatives (Bhatt 2006; Hackl & Nissenbaum 2012), Italian infinitival relatives, as noted, can either have a ‘could’ (possibility) interpretation (cf. (11)a.) or a ‘should’ (deontic necessity) interpretation when they are introduced by strong determiners (like definite determiners in subject position or universal quantifiers) (cf. (11)b-c.) or contain a negation (cf. (11)d). In some cases both interpretations are available (in fact (11)a. admits a ‘should’ interpretation as well).³

(11) a. Ho **finalmente** trovato un libro *da* regalare ai miei figli
    have-1sg finally found a book to give-INF to my children
    ‘I finally found a book to give to my children as a present.’

b. Questo è il **libro da regalare a Gianni.**
    this is DET book to give-INF to Gianni
    ‘This is the book to give Gianni as a present.’

c. Hanno elencato ogni **libro da mettere all’indice.**
    have-3pl listed every book to put at DET index
    ‘They have listed every book to be blacklisted.’

d. Mi **hanno segnalato un libro da non regalare ai miei figli.**⁴
    1SG-DAT have-3pl pointed.out a book to not give-INF to DET my children
    ‘I have been shown a book not to be given to my children.’

³. Cf. Cinque (1988: § 1.1.5.2). Bianchi (1991: 121; 2007, fn.7) in presenting a sentence like (i) says that infinitival relatives introduced by *da* modifying a subject are always interpreted deontically:

(i) [Un cane *da* addestrare] ha morsicato l’istruttore
    A dog to train-INF have-3sg bitten DET-instructor
    ‘A dog to be trained bit the instructor.’

We agree with the judgment for (i), but we find cases similar to (i) to be acceptable with the possibility reading if they have a generic tense (even (i) perhaps can be marginally interpreted as ‘a dog of the kind that can be trained’):

(ii) a. Un libro *da* (poter) leggere a letto non può essere troppo pesante
    A book to (can) read-INF at bed not can-3sg be too heavy
    ‘A book to (be able to) read in bed cannot be too heavy.’

b. Cose **da** (poter) fare senza spendere troppo sì trovano sempre.
    things to (be able to) do-INF without spending too REFL find-3pl always
    ‘Things to (be able to) do without spending too much can always be found.’

⁴. Giurgea and Soare (2010a: 75) note that negation blocks the possibility reading.
Hackl and Nissenbaum (2012: § 1.3.1) argue that under the ‘could’ interpretations the infinitival relative clause involves Raising or Promotion of the internal Head, while under the ‘should’ interpretation the Head can be internal or external. In this paper we do not pursue this aspect of the construction, but point out another difference between the two interpretations. The infinitival relatives with a ‘could’ interpretation are not (necessarily) islands for extraction ((12)a.) while the ones with a ‘should’ interpretation appear to be islands for extraction ((12)b.):

(12) a. i miei figli, ai quali non ho un libro da (poter) leggere det my children to whom not have-1sg a book to (can-inf) read-inf alla sera prima che si addormentino,…
at-det evening before that refl go.to.sleep-sbjv.3pl
‘My children, who I do not have a book to read to at night before they go to sleep.’

b. *I miei figli, ai quali ci sono libri da non regalare,… det my children to whom there are books to not give

4. A difference between the da + infinitive and the P cui/art. + qual- infinitive construction

Clitic Left Dislocation is possible with the latter but not with the former. See (13):

(13) a. Cerco qualcuno a cui di questo poter parlare con calma. look.for-1sg someone to whom of this can-inf speak-inf with calm
‘I am looking for someone I can talk about this calmly.’

b. *Cerco qualcuno da a voi presentare al più presto/
look.for-1sg someone to to you introduce-inf quickly/

b’ *Cerco qualcuno a voi da presentare al più presto.
look.for-1sg someone to you to introduce quickly

5. Another difference between the da + infinitive and the P cui/ art. + qual- infinitive construction

At first sight, in Italian the verb of da infinitival relatives cannot be passive ((14)a), while it can in P cui/ art. + qual- (see (14)b) as well as in English (as shown in the English translation of (14)a)). However, in other examples of da relative clauses (as (14)c) the passive infinitive seems perfectly grammatical:

(14) a. *Gli hanno dato un libro da esser letto entro domani
3SG.DAT have-3PL given a book to be-INF read-ptcp by tomorrow
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b. Cercavano una medicina con cui essere curati.
look.for-IPFv.3pl a medicine with which be-INF cured-M.PL
‘They were looking for a drug with which to be cured.’

c. Cerco un libro da poter esser letto in due ore.
look.for-1sg a book to can-INF be-INF read-PTCP in two hours
‘I am looking for a book I can read in two hours.’

The ungrammaticality of (14)a, which contrasts with the perfect grammaticality of (14)c containing the modal potere, suggests that (14)c is in fact a kind-defining relative clause: the relative in (14)c does not identify the referent of the antecedent, but only expresses its characteristics, as we have seen above in other cases of kind-defining relatives. (14)a qualifies instead as a genuine restrictive relative which identifies the referent of the antecedent.

6. Are there subject infinitival relatives in Italian?

The answer seems to be negative. Cases which in English are often interpreted as subject infinitival relatives (see (15)) are perhaps more accurately analyzed as either purpose control structures (in Italian they are rendered by a modal finite relative clause (see (16)a)) or, in contexts where the noun is modified by ordinals, superlatives, or solo ‘only’, by an infinitive introduced by the preposition a (see (16)b):

(15) a. The man to fix the sink is here.
(16) a. L’uomo che deve aggiustare il lavandino è qua.
‘The man who must fix the sink is here.’

b. The first to walk on the moon visited my school yesterday.
(16) b. Il primo a camminare sulla luna è stato Armstrong.
‘The first one to walk on the moon was Armstrong.’

In fact, Williams (1980: § 2.3.2) takes English subject ‘infinitival relatives’ to involve PRO rather than the trace of an empty operator. The fact that object infinitival relatives ((17)a.) but not subject infinitival relatives ((17)b) permit long-distance extraction in English also seems to suggest that the former but not the latter involve A-bar movement (as the trace is case-marked in the former though not in the latter case):

(17) a. Here’s the book i to try to get John to read t
(16) b. *The man i for us to try t to fix the sink is here

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Maiden and Robustelli (2013: 141) observe another apparent case of subject infinitival relative in English (‘He’s not a man to abandon his friends’, meaning ‘He is not a man of the kind that abandons his friends/who would abandon his friends’) and note that in Italian the same construction is introduced by *da* (*Non è un uomo da abbandonare i suoi amici*), but here there is possibly a silent *tale* “such”, which can actually be overt (*tale da...*); in other words, this is another case of kind-defining relative clause.

A third case of an (apparent) subject infinitival relative in English mentioned in Bhatt (2006: 9) (*The book to be read for tomorrow’s class is kept on the table*) has no counterpart in Italian (*Il libro *da* essere letto per la lezione di domani*...*); it is possibly based on the modal construction containing the *is to* modal periphrasis in English (Kayne 2016), which can contain a passivized verb (*This is to be read by tomorrow*), as opposed to the corresponding modal periphrasis *è da* in Italian, which cannot (*Questo è *da* essere letto per domani*). Maiden and Robustelli (2013: § 7.2.7) note that “in this construction the infinitive may not be passivized […]. However, the passive formed with reflexive *si* is possible” (p. 141): *Questo è *da* leggersi per domani*. Also see Burzio (1986: 77, fn 36), after Belletti (1982): *Sono cose *da* farsi al più presto* ‘(they) are things to do SI as soon as possible’.

7. *Da* infinitival relatives and restructuring

As opposed to English, where (non-subject) infinitival relatives are not clause-bounded (can span across two, or more, clauses) (see (18)), Italian *da* infinitival relatives, as noted in Burzio (1986: 346ff), are clause-bounded (compare (19) with (18)).

(18)a. He is a person

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{to regret to have admired} \\
&\text{to convince Maria to invite} \\
&\text{to suggest that Maria invite}
\end{align*}
\]

(Burzio 1986: 346)

(19) *‘E’ una persona

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{da rimpiangere di aver ammirato} \\
&\text{da convincere Maria a invitare} \\
&\text{da suggerire che Maria invitati}
\end{align*}
\]

(Burzio 1986: 346)

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5. This is also true of French and Romanian (Giurgea and Soare (2010a. 76; 2010b: § 2), though certain examples appear to be acceptable. See Huot (1981: 171), cited in Abeillé, Godard, Miller and Sag (1996, fn.10):

(i) a. Je cherche un projet auquel lui proposer de participer

I look for a project in which to propose to him to take part

b. Je ne vois personne à qui lui conseiller de s’adresser

I don’t see anyone to whom to advise to refer
As Burzio (1986: 346f.) also noted, there are, however, systematic exceptions to the clause-boundedness of *da* infinitival relatives. These are provided by restructuring configurations (but such exceptions are only apparent since restructuring configurations are arguably mono-clausal): 6

(20) a. C’è solo una cosa da **dover fare** per domani.

   *loc-be-3sg only one thing to *need do-INF* for tomorrow*
   
   ‘There’s only one thing we must do by tomorrow.’

b. Ho trovato un libro da **poter leggere** in vacanza.

   *have-1sg find-pctp a book to *can read-inf* on holiday*
   
   ‘I have found a book I can read during my holidays.’

c. L’unica cosa da **sapere** era questa.

   *det-only thing to *know do-inf* is this*
   
   ‘The only thing one needs to know how to do is this one.’

d. Cercavano un problema da **riuscire a risolvere** subito.

   *look.for-ipfv a problem to *manage to solve* immediately*
   
   ‘They were looking for a problem they would be able to solve immediately.’

e. Se c’è una cosa da **provare a fare** subito è questa.

   *if loc-be-3sg one thing to *try-inf to do-inf* immediately is this*
   
   ‘If there is one thing one needs to try to do immediately, it is this one.’

f. Ho trovato qualcosa da **fare**.

   *have-1sg find-pctp something to *make-inf = 2sg.dat do-inf*
   
   ‘I have found something for you to do.’

g. C’è una sola cosa da **cominciare a fare**.

   *loc-be-3sg one only thing to *begin-inf to do-inf*
   
   ‘There is only one thing that we must start doing.’

h. L’unica cosa da **continuare a fare** è questa.

   *det-only thing to *continue-inf to do-inf* is this*
   
   ‘The only thing that we must keep on doing is this one.’

i. L’unica cosa da **andare a fare** subito è questa.

   *det-only thing to *go-inf to do-inf* immediately is this*
   
   ‘The only thing that we should go and do immediately is this one.’

l. l. C’è un solo libro da **finire** di leggere per domani.

   *loc-be-3sg one only book to *finish-inf of read-inf by tomorrow*
   
   ‘There is only one book that must be finished reading by tomorrow.’

m. L’unica cosa da non **tornare a fare** è questa.

   *det-only thing to *not return-inf to do-inf* is this*
   
   ‘The only thing not to do again is this one.’

6. Sentences similar to some of those reported in (20) are also noted in Napoli (1976: 307).
Yet, not all restructuring configurations qualify as exceptions. There appears to be a generalization: only those restructuring predicates which are lower than potere/dovere are possible. All higher ones (according to Cinque’s 2006 hierarchy) are impossible. See (21):

(21) a. *Cercava una cosa da non sembrare apprezzare.
    look-for-ipfv a thing to not seem-inf appreciate-inf
b. *Questa è una cosa da soler fare con calma.
    this is a thing to use-inf do-inf with calm
c. *Un errore da non tendere a fare è proprio questo.
    a mistake to not tend-inf to do-inf is precisely this
d. *L’unico lavoro da finire per accettare è questo.
    det-only job to end-inf for accept-inf is this
e. *Se trovate una cosa da voler/intendere/desiderare di fare
    if find-2pl a thing to want/intend/desire-inf of do-inf
ditemelo.
    tell-imp = 1sg.dat-2sg.acc
    det-only thing to stop-inf of do-inf is precisely this

Acknowledgments

We dedicate this squib to Leonardo, a true friend and an inspiring colleague through the many years we have known one another.

References


