

Voice alternations in Romance clausal complements: evidence from *tough*-constructions

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1. Introduction: This work examines cross-linguistic variation in the syntax of Romance *tough*-constructions (TCs). We assess whether current models of clausal complementation can capture the attested types of TCs, with a particular focus on the Voice properties of different clausal complements. We argue, based on the observed pattern of variation, that in Romance certain reduced embedded clauses do not permit the regular active/passive Voice alternation (unlike control, raising, and restructuring complements), but can only involve a defective Voice head (with default morphology and non-active syntax) provided the matrix head has a suitable lexical predicate that selects it. This proposal makes a twofold contribution to the debate on (Romance) clausal complementation: it (i) addresses the connection between Voice and clause size (cf. Sheehan and Cyrino, 2024); (ii) argues that there are at least two different types of restructuring /clause-union (cf. Rizzi, 1982; Wurmbrand, 2001; Pineda & Sheehan, 2022).

2. Background on clausal complementation: Many theories of Romance clausal complementation (e.g. Ledgeway, 2016; Groothuis, 2019) identify three main types of infinitival complement clauses, depending on their size: CP (control), TP (raising), VoiceP (restructuring). In each case, if the internal argument (IA) of a transitive embedded verb corresponds to the main subject, the infinitive must be passivised, as shown by (1a-c) in Italian.

- (1) Mario {*pretende di / sembra / ci deve*} {*essere invitato / *invitare*} ogni volta.
 Mario demand.3SG DI seem.3SG LOC.CL must.3SG be.INF invite.PPRT invite.INF every time
 a. ‘Mario *demands to* be invited every time.’ (Control, Italian)
 b. ‘Mario *seems to* be invited every time.’ (Raising, Italian)
 c. ‘Mario *must* be invited *there* every time.’ (Restructuring, Italian)

In certain cases of control (2), there is a resumptive object clitic (OCL) instead of passivisation.

- (2) Mario è troppo noioso per {*invitarlo / *invitare*}.
 Mario be.3SG too boring PER invite.INF=OCL.3MSG invite.INF
 ‘Mario is too boring to invite.’ (Control, Italian)

In general, then, when the IA of a transitive verb is targeted by a cross-clausal A-dependency, there must be either passivisation of the verb (1) or resumption via an object clitic (2).

3. Two types of *tough*-constructions in Romance: In TCs, the IA of the embedded transitive verb surfaces as the matrix subject. In a first set of Romance TCs (henceforth Type 1), exemplified by Italian (3), the lower clause has an infinitive lacking any passive/resumptive markers, thus contrasting with the restructuring, raising, and control configurations in (1-2).

- (3) Questi libri sono difficili da {*leggere / *essere letti / *leggerli*}.
 these books be.3PL hard.PL DA read.INF be.INF read.PPRT read.INF=OCL.3MPL
 ‘These books are hard to read.’ (Type 1 TC, Italian)

Conversely, in certain understudied cases, TCs rely on overt passivisation or a resumptive object clitic (Type 2), as shown by Sardinian in (4-5) respectively (similarly to 1-2, unlike 3).

- (4) Cust’ arbure est fazzile a non **esser vidu**.
 this tree be.3SG easy.SG A NEG be.INF see.PPRT
 ‘This tree is easy not to see (*lit.* be seen).’ (Type 2 TC, Sardinian)
 (5) Custas pedras sunt fazziles a **las ciapare**.
 these stones be.3PL easy.PL A OCL.3FPL get.INF
 ‘These stones are easy to get (*lit.* get them).’ (Type 2 TC, Sardinian)

Thus, Type 2 TCs conform to existing typologies of embedded clauses, whereas Type 1 TCs do not fit into any of the known categories of clausal complements. Type 1 TCs have been argued to involve (i) a passive-like A-dependency targeting the IA, and/or (ii) some form of restructuring (Roberts, 1997; Giurgea & Soare, 2010; Bosque & Gallego, 2011; cf. Wurmbrand, 1994 on German). We will argue that the different marking of the infinitive in Type 1 vs Type 2 is indeed linked to different Voice properties, and ultimately to different clause sizes.

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4. Voice and clause size: Type 1 and Type 2 TCs can be shown to involve complement clauses of two different sizes, by comparing them in languages that allow both types. For instance, Eu. Portuguese (6) and Romanian (7) only allow an inflected verb with **Type 2** (an inflected infinitive in Eu.Pt. and a subjunctive in Rom.) but not with **Type 1**, which must involve an uninflected form (a bare infinitive in Eu.Pt. and a supine in Rom.):

(6) Esses relógios são difíceis de {arranjar-(*em)/ ser-em arranjados}.

those watches be.3PL hard.PL DE fix.INF(.3PL) be.INF.3PL fix.PPRT

‘Those watches are hard to fix.’ (Type 1/2 TCs, Eu.Pt.; cf. Raposo, 1987:104-105)

(7) Astea nu-s greu {de (*se) făcut/ să *(se) facă}.

these NEG=be.3PL hard DE PASS make.SUP SA PASS do.SUBJ.3PL

‘These are not hard to make.’

(Type 1/2 TCs, Romanian)

Similarly, in colloquial Catalan (8) and in Neapolitan (9), T-related material like auxiliaries and modal verbs are only possible if there is a resumptive clitic (i.e. in Type 2, not in Type 1):

(8) Les llengües són difícils d' { *haver/ haver-les } après en sis mesos.

the languages be.3PL hard.PL DE have.INF have.INF=OCL.3PL learn.PPRT in six months

‘Languages are hard to learn in six months.’ (Type 1/2 TCs, col. Catalan)

(9) Sta cas'è 'mpussibil' a { *puté/ 'a puté } accattà.

this house be.3sg impossible A can.INF OCL.3FSG can.INF buy.INF

‘This house is impossible to be able to buy.’

(Type 1/2 TCs, Neapolitan)

Such evidence suggests that the embedded clause of Type 1 does not have a T layer and simply consists of a VoiceP, whereas Type 2 involves a bigger structure (TP/CP). Moreover, while Type 2 always has either active Voice (signalled by the object clitic) or passive Voice (signalled by passive markers), Type 1 does not present any marking on the embedded verb. We propose that in this latter case the embedded clause is headed by a defective Voice head which encodes an implicit agent and does not assign accusative (just like passive Voice), but has default active morphology: the DP must then become the matrix subject to get Case. Compare (10-11).

(10) **Type 1:** DP_i T [AP A [VoiceP Voice_{def} [V <DP_i>]]]

(11) **Type 2:** DP_i T [AP A [CP/TP ... T { [VoiceP PRO_{arb} Voice_{act} [V OCl_i]]]]]

{ [VoiceP Voice_{pass} [V <DP_i>]]]]

5. Discussion: A defective Voice head with non-active properties has also been proposed for other configurations with a reduced clausal complement (e.g. Wurmbrand, 2016 *et seq.* on long passives; Manzini, 2022 on causatives). We propose that – at least in Romance - defective Voice can only be found if it is directly selected by a suitable lexical predicate (like a *tough* adjective), whereas active/passive Voice can only be selected by T. First, this analysis captures the fact that Type 1 does not allow any functional material in the embedded clause, whereas Type 2 does. Secondly, it derives the difference between the complement clause of Type 1 and a regular restructuring complement clause (like 1c): both involve a VoiceP infinitival but in Type 1 TCs Voice must be defective as the matrix predicate is lexical (so there can be no passivisation/resumption), while in regular restructuring the matrix predicate realises a T head (Wurmbrand, 2001; Cinque, 2006 a.o.) and can therefore select passive Voice (so the infinitive is passivised). As a result, there exist two types of reduced complements, as has been argued by Rizzi (1982); Wurmbrand (2001) *et seq.*; Pineda & Sheehan (2022), and only ‘functional’ restructuring (like 1c) allows the active/passive alternation because the matrix predicate is a T head. We have proposed that this can be explained by the relationship between Voice and higher functional projections (i.e. which types of Voice T vs a lexical category can select), as motivated by the novel evidence on Romance TCs. Finally, we will also discuss if our analysis can capture configurations sharing properties with TCs like long passives and causatives.

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