How Italians get what they want (or want what they get):
Restructuring and Implicative properties of volere

The Puzzle. Italian volere (want) interacts with viewpoint aspect in a peculiar way: with perfective aspect, the complement clause has to hold in the actual world, and not merely, as one would expect from a standard semantics for desire predicates (cf. Hintikka 1962, Heim 1992, von Fintel 1999, a.o.), in all of the subject’s desire worlds:

(1) Gianni ha voluto parlare a Maria, #ma non lo ha fatto.
    Gianni want-past-pfv talk to Maria, #but not it do-past-pfv.
    Gianni wanted to talk to Maria, #but he didn’t do it.

Thus, contrary to its English translation, (1) seems to entail not only that Gianni had a desire to talk to Maria, but that he actually did talk to her: hence the continuation that he didn’t comes out as a contradiction.

A similar puzzle arises with root modals: as shown in Bhatt (1999), perfective aspect on an ability modal yields what Bhatt calls ‘actuality entailments’, that is, an uncancellable implication that the complement holds in the actual world, as illustrated in the Italian example below:

(2) Gianni ha potuto sollevare questo tavolo, #ma non lo ha fatto.
    Gianni can-past-pfv lift this table, #but not it do-past-pfv.
    Gianni was able to lift this table, #but he didn’t do it.

Bhatt shows that this effect emerges in languages that have an overt distinction between perfective and imperfective aspect (such as French and Italian). However, while both French and Italian show this effect with the ability modal, French vouloir (want), contra its Italian counterpart, yields no such effect: the French equivalent of (1) is not a contradiction. Hence the effect cannot be reduced to some ‘actualization’ feature of perfective aspect.

In this paper, I will argue that the mechanisms involved in actuality entailments associated with root modals also underlie the effect in (1). In a nutshell, actuality entailments result from having a single event quantification by perfective aspect over the matrix (wanting) event and the embedded (talking) event: (1), then, describes a single event of Gianni talking to Maria, willingly. I will show that this single event quantification is due to the Restructuring properties of volere. Restructuring predicates show transparency effects of the clause boundary of their complements. One such effect, I will argue, is the binding of the event described by the complement verb by Aspect in the matrix clause. This link to Restructuring will in turn explain why the non restructuring French vouloir is immune to the effect.

Restructuring. Volere is a proto-typical Italian restructuring predicate. It allows, for instance, clitic climbing, while its French counterpart doesn’t. In (3), the clitic la is selected by the embedded verb, but can appear above volere:

(3) a. Gianni la vuole sposare.
    b. *Gianni la veut épouser.
    Gianni her wants to marry

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1 When the aspect on volere is imperfective, the actuality entailment disappears. Following Bhatt (1999) and Hacquard (2006), I take this lack of actuality entailments to result from an extra layer of modality associated with the imperfective itself.
This kind of clause boundary transparency has been explained by having restructuring predicates and their complements form a single clause (Wurmbrand 2001): they, notably, only have a single Tense projection (in the matrix). I propose that Restructuring predicates not only allow clitic climbing, but *Aspect climbing* as well, that is, the movement of aspect from the embedded clause, in order to combine with a time argument in matrix tense. Thus, contra Wurmbrand 2001, I propose that Restructuring constructions involve a single event quantification.

**Actuality entailments: single aspect quantification.** Actuality entailments arise when perfective aspect takes scope above a modal (cf. Hacquard 2006). The role of Aspect in general is to quantify over the Davidsonian (event) argument of the verb, and to locate the running time of that event with respect to a reference time provided by Tense (perfective, in particular, locates the event within the reference time). Following a proposal by von Fintel (2001) and Hacquard (2006), I take Aspect to start out as the event argument of the verb, instead of being based generated under Tense. Being of the higher quantifier type, it has to move outside of the VP (paralleling QR of a quantifier over individuals in object position), to a position right below Tense, in order to combine with a time argument. If a modal element (e.g., *volere*) appears between Tense and the VP, Aspect has to move above that modal (4a), and thereby forces the event to occur in the actual world, and not just in the worlds being quantified over by the modal. We obtain an actual event of talking to Maria, as shown in the LF schematized in (4b):

(4) a. [ T Asp₁ volere V(e₁) ]

     ↑

b. ∃e₁ in w* & t(e₁) ⊆ t: ∀w’ compatible with G.’s desires,
     e₁ is an event of talking to Maria.

Non restructuring French *vouloir*, however, takes a clausal complement: the event argument of the embedded verb gets bound inside the complement clause, no actual event is forced:

(5) a. [ T Asp₁ vouloir(e₁) [ T Asp₂ V(e₂) ] ]

**Evidence for Aspect climbing.** The phenomenon of *auxiliary switch* with Restructuring predicates in Italian provides further support to the claim that aspect starts out in the embedded clause. Past perfective is morphologically realized in Italian with an auxiliary and the past participle of the verb. Interestingly, if the complement verb is unaccusative, and thus selects for auxiliary *be* instead of *have*, (as in (6)), this is the auxiliary that appears in the matrix, suggesting that aspect does indeed start out in the lower clause:

(6) Gianni è voluto andare al cinema.
    Gianni is want-past-pfv go to the movies

**Conclusion.** This proposal accounts for the implicative behavior of *volere* with perfective aspect, by having the event in the embedded complement be bound outside of the scope of *volere*. It further sheds light on the clausal structure of Restructuring constructions in Italian: if this approach is on the right track, it suggests that restructuring predicates not only involve a single Tense projection, but a single Aspect one as well.