

## ‘Again’ separation in Italian

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**Abstract.** In Italian, *ri-* ‘again’ can be separated from the constituent it is semantically attached to and challenges the structural account for the ambiguity of ‘again’-type elements. To address this issue, this paper proposes a solution through aspectual agreement and suggests a movement and reconstruction analysis for the separation effect of *ri-*. It also provides supporting evidence for this analysis through Coordinate Structure Constraint and Relativized Minimality.

**Keywords.** *again*; restructuring verb; adverb movement; Coordinate Structure Constraint; Relativized Minimality; Italian

**1. Introduction.** Since McCawley’s (1968) work, there has been considerable attention given to the ambiguity of ‘again’-type elements that has been observed in multiple languages. For example, for English sentences like (1), which has an embedding construction and sentence-final *again*, at least two interpretations are possible. Concretely, there is a high reading, where *again* modifies the matrix predicate *want to close the door*, and a low reading, where *again* modifies the embedded predicate *close the door*.<sup>1</sup>

- (1) John will want to close the door again.  
 ‘John will want to close the door, and . . .’
- a. *High reading*  
 ‘John wanted to close the door before.’
- b. *Low reading*  
 ‘John closed the door before.’

The contexts presented in (2) can be used to distinguish between these two readings.

- (2) a. *Context of repeated wanting: High reading*  
 On a certain day, the door to John’s room was left open. John had wanted to close the door, but his mother beat him to it. She then proceeded to open the door again. It is believed that John will, once more, want to close the door.
- b. *Context of repeated closing: Low reading*  
 On a certain day, the door to John’s room was left open. John had no desire to close the door, but his mother compelled him to do so. She then proceeded to open the door again. It is believed that John will want to, once more, close the door.

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<sup>1</sup> Another possible interpretation of *again* is the restitutive reading, which presupposes that the resulting state of the current event has held before. While this paper will not delve into restitutive readings, the analysis provided here could potentially be applied to them.

This ambiguity surrounding *again* is commonly accounted for as a structural ambiguity (Morgan 1969; Dowty 1979; von Stechow 1995, 1996; Beck & Johnson 2004; Beck 2005; Bale 2005, 2007; a.o.). The structural account proposes that *again* presupposes the truth of its preja-cent at a time prior to the utterance time and that its ambiguity arises from its different possible attachment points. In (3), if *again* is attached to the matrix vP, which contains information about the event of wanting to close the door, the high reading is derived. On the other hand, if *again* is attached to the embedded vP, which only contains information about the event of closing the door, the low reading is derived.

- (3) a. *Matrix vP attachment: High reading*  
 John will [<sub>vP</sub>[<sub>vP</sub> want to [<sub>vP</sub> close the door]] again].
- b. *Embedded vP attachment: Low reading*  
 John will [<sub>vP</sub> want to [<sub>vP</sub>[<sub>vP</sub> close the door] again]].

The structural account predicts that in a head-initial language, if ‘again’ comes before the matrix verb, the high reading is possible but not the low reading, since ‘again’ can only modify the matrix vP and not the embedded vP. In other words, sentences like (4) are expected to be infelicitous in a context where the low reading is intended (e.g., (2b)).<sup>2</sup>

- (4) John will again [<sub>vP</sub> want to close the door].

While this prediction is borne out for English *again* (Beck & Johnson 2004; Bale 2007), it does not hold true for the Italian prefix *ri-* ‘again’ (Cardinaletti 2003). In the Italian equivalent of (4) with *ri-*, shown in (5), both high and low readings are possible.<sup>3</sup>

- (5) (Nicoletta Loccioni & Raffaella Zanuttini, pers. comm.)  
 Gianni ri-vorrà [chiudere la porta].  
 Gianni again-want.FUT.3SG close.INF the door  
 ‘Gianni will want to close the door, and ...’
- a. *High reading*  
 ‘Gianni wanted to close the door before.’
- b. *Low reading*  
 ‘Gianni closed the door before.’

<sup>2</sup> The example below features the natural usage of English preverbal *again*:

- (i) (Healy 2013)  
 Rachel Chavkin will again direct.

Some speakers report that preverbal *again* appears to require stress. I would like to point out the contrast between (4) and the following example:

- (ii) John will want, again, to close the door.

Here, emphasis is required on *again*.

<sup>3</sup> Glossing abbreviations: 1 = first person, 3 = third person, CLF = classifier, FUT = future, IMPF = imperfect, INF = infinitive, PRS = present, PFV = perfective, SG = singular.

The structural account is challenged by (5b), where *ri-* is separated from the embedded vP on the surface but still yields the low reading, as if it is attached to the embedded vP. Cardinaletti has termed this phenomenon *ri-separation* (i.e., ‘again’ separation).

In order to address the challenge to the structural account posed by ‘again’ separation, this paper offers an explanation by proposing that *ri-* undergoes movement and reconstruction (cf. Xu 2012, 2016; Liu 2021, to appear). Specifically, I argue that in a construction involving ‘again’ separation, *ri-* is initially base-generated in the embedded vP with an unvalued aspect feature. It then moves to the specifier position of the matrix AspP, where it agrees with the matrix Asp<sup>0</sup>. Finally, it is interpreted at its base-generated position through reconstruction.

Section 2 investigates which verbs allow ‘again’ separation and establishes a correlation between ‘again’ separation and restructuring in Italian. Section 3 lays out the movement and reconstruction analysis for ‘again’ separation and presents evidence in support of this analysis. Section 4 draws comparisons between *ri-* and similar elements in English and Mandarin and discusses the crosslinguistic implications of these comparisons. Section 5 concludes.

**2. Data.** This section provides a more comprehensive data set on ‘again’ separation. It demonstrates that verbs that allow ‘again’ separation are restructuring verbs.

2.1. ‘AGAIN’ SEPARATION AS A RESTRUCTURING TEST. In the introduction, we observed an example of a verb that permits ‘again’ separation. By contrast, in (6), we see a verb that does not allow ‘again’ separation. In this case, the matrix verb is ‘decide’, which is immediately preceded by *ri-*. However, we cannot derive the low reading of *ri-* in this example. Instead, it must be the case that the repeated event is the event of deciding, introduced by the matrix verb.

(6) (Nicoletta Loccioni & Raffaella Zanuttini, pers. comm.)  
 Gianni *ri-*deciderà [di chiudere la porta].  
 Gianni again-decide.FUT.3SG of close.INF the door  
 ‘Gianni will decide to close the door, and ...’

- a. *High reading only*  
 ‘Gianni decided to close the door before.’
- b. \*‘Gianni closed the door before.’

Verbs that permit ‘again’ separation and those that do not are listed in (7), leading us to observe that the former are restructuring verbs.

- (7) (Nicoletta Loccioni, pers. comm.)
- a. *Verbs that allow ‘again’ separation*  
*andare* ‘go’, *dovere* ‘be obliged’, *fare* ‘make’, *potere* ‘be able’, *venire* ‘come’, *volere* ‘want’, etc.
  - b. *Verbs that disallow ‘again’ separation*  
*chiedere* ‘ask’, *credere* ‘believe’, *decidere* ‘decide’, *impedire* ‘impede’, *minacciare* ‘threaten’, *pensare* ‘think’, *permettere* ‘permit’, *raccomandare* ‘recommend’, etc.

Based on (7), I propose ‘again’ separation as a new test for identifying Italian restructuring verbs. To demonstrate the concept of restructuring verbs and gain a better understanding of their syntactic nature, it is helpful to introduce another phenomenon in Italian: clitic climbing.

2.2. CLITIC CLIMBING. Italian restructuring verbs can be identified using the clitic climbing test, which is also applicable to verbs that allow ‘again’ separation. Over the past few decades, extensive research (Rizzi 1978, 1982; Wurmbrand 1998, 2001, 2004, 2015; Cinque 1999, 2006; Matushansky 2006; a.o.) has been conducted on the phenomenon in Romance languages where clitics (e.g., *lo*, the third person masculine singular clitic object pronoun in Italian) can ascend from a nonfinite embedded clause to the matrix clause when the matrix verb is a modal (8a), aspectual (8b), or motion (8c) verb. Examples illustrating a contrast can be seen in (9), which, despite their apparent structural similarity to the examples in (8), do not allow clitic climbing.

(8) (Cinque 2006:11)

- a.  $Lo_1$  volevo                    [vedere  $t_1$  subito].  
     him want.IMPF.1SG see.INF    at.once  
     ‘I wanted to see him at once.’
- b.  $Lo_1$  finisco                  [di vedere  $t_1$  domani].  
     it finish.PRS.1SG of see.INF    tomorrow  
     ‘I finish seeing it tomorrow.’
- c.  $Lo_1$  vengo                    [a prendere  $t_1$  domani].  
     it come.PRS.1SG to pick.up.INF    tomorrow  
     ‘I come to pick it up tomorrow.’

(9) (Cinque 2006:11)

- a. \* $Lo_1$  detesto                  [vedere  $t_1$  in quello stato].  
     him detest.PRS.1SG see.INF    in that    state  
     Intended: ‘I hate to see him in that state.’
- b. \* $Lo_1$  ammetto                [di conoscere  $t_1$  appena].  
     him admit.PRS.1SG of know.INF    barely  
     Intended: ‘I admit that I barely know him.’
- c. \* $Lo_1$  rinuncio                [ad avere  $t_1$  per me].  
     it give.up.PRS.1SG to have.INF    for myself  
     Intended: ‘I give up having it for myself.’

Various approaches have been proposed to explain the distinction between (8) and (9), with Wurmbrand (2004) and many others attributing it to the differing sizes of the complements that the verbs in each group take. According to this view, nonrestructuring embedding verbs take a larger complement that introduces a phrase boundary, which prohibits clitics from moving across it. Conversely, restructuring verbs take a smaller complement that lacks this phrase boundary, enabling clitics to move upwards toward the matrix clause.

In this paper, I make a more specific claim regarding the complement sizes of Italian restructuring verbs and nonrestructuring embedding verbs to support my argument. Specifically, I assume that restructuring verbs can take either AspP or vP complements, while nonrestructuring embedding verbs take CP or TP complements. If this is accurate, the generalization observed in this section can be summarized as (10).

- (10) a. Verbs that take AspP or vP complements allow ‘again’ separation and clitic climbing.  
 b. Verbs that take CP or TP complements disallow ‘again’ separation or clitic climbing.

**3. Analysis.** Building upon the observation that the size of the embedded clause has an impact on the acceptability of ‘again’ separation, I suggest that *ri-* undergoes movement and reconstruction. In this section, I first elaborate on the specifics of my movement and reconstruction analysis regarding ‘again’ separation. Subsequently, I present two supporting pieces of evidence in favor of this analysis.

3.1. MOVEMENT AND RECONSTRUCTION. My proposal (cf. Xu 2012, 2016; Liu 2021, to appear) can be outlined by addressing four primary questions: where *ri-* is base-generated, where *ri-* moves to, where *ri-* is interpreted, and what the circumstances under which the movement of *ri-* is allowed are.

To begin with, where is *ri-* base-generated? While it can be base-generated in other positions, I specifically focus on the cases in which it is externally merged with either the matrix vP or the embedded vP. When it is externally merged with the matrix vP, we obtain the high reading, and when it is externally merged with the embedded vP, we obtain the low reading.

Moving on to where *ri-* moves to, I must first discuss the motivation behind its movement. I propose that *ri-* is base-generated with an unvalued aspect feature that must be valued by the closest Asp<sup>0</sup> probe through specifier-head agreement. This requirement drives *ri-* to move to the specifier position of the closest AspP, which is situated above vP but below TP and is the same position where adverbs like *di nuovo* ‘again’ are located in Cinque’s (1999) cartography.

Where is *ri-* interpreted? It is interpreted in its base-generated position through either syntactic or semantic reconstruction (Lechner 1998).

Finally, what are the circumstances under which the movement of *ri-* is allowed? To answer this question, we need to add one more data point (11).

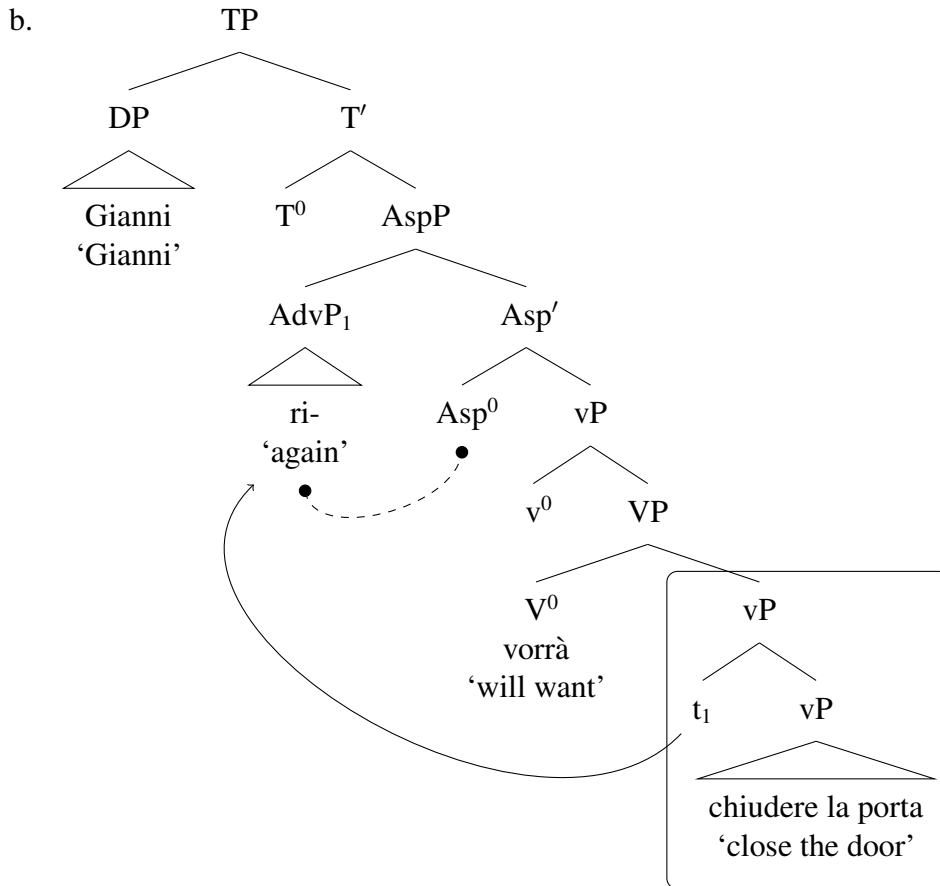
- (11) (Nicoletta Loccioni & Raffaella Zanuttini, pers. comm.)  
 Gianni vorrà [ri-chiudere la porta].  
 Gianni want.FUT.3SG again-close.INF the door  
 ‘Gianni will want to again close the door.’

This data point shows that in an embedding construction, *ri-* can also surface low and yield the low reading. Taking this into account, I propose that *ri-* always moves in the cases that I examine, but the distance may differ. If it surfaces high and produces the high reading or surfaces low and produces the low reading, the distance is rather short. In contrast, if it surfaces high and produces the low reading, the distance is longer.

A follow-up question is when the long-distance movement of *ri-* is permissible. Recall that according to my proposal, in Italian, restructuring verbs embed either an AspP or a vP, whereas nonrestructuring embedding verbs embed a CP or TP. The long-distance movement of *ri-* is allowed when it is base-generated in the embedded vP and is unable to value its feature within the embedded clause. This situation arises when the embedded clause does not have an AspP. This only happens in one scenario: when the matrix verb is a restructuring verb that embeds a vP.

3.2. DERIVATION EXAMPLES. An example of the syntactic derivation of ‘again’ separation is provided in (12).<sup>4</sup>

- (12) a. Gianni *ri-vorrà* [chiudere la porta].  
 Gianni again-want.FUT.3SG close.INF the door  
 ‘Gianni will want to close the door again.’

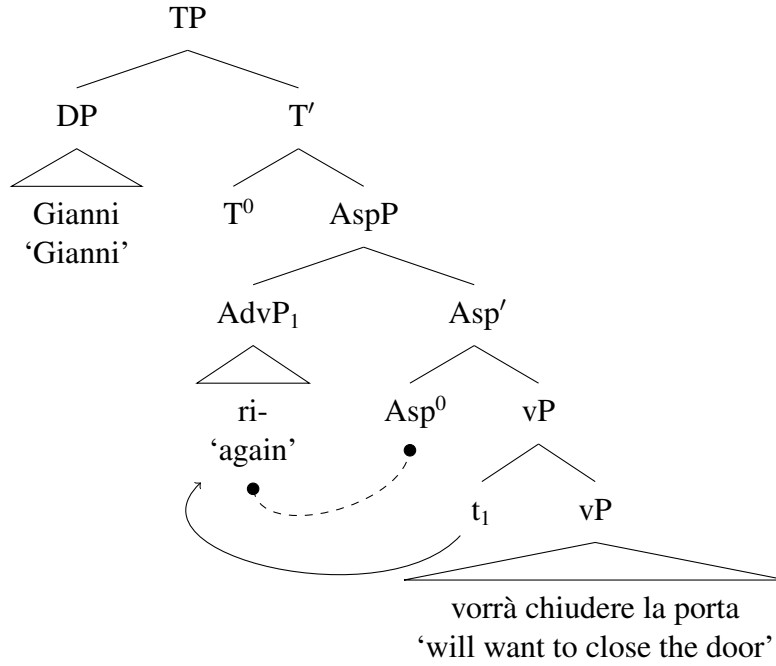


In this scenario, *ri-* is initially base-generated with an unvalued aspect feature in a vP embedded by the matrix restructuring verb. Afterward, as it is unable to value this feature within the embedded vP, it moves to the specifier position of the matrix AspP and agrees with the matrix Asp<sup>0</sup>. Ultimately, it undergoes reconstruction and is interpreted in its base-generated position in the embedded vP, resulting in a low reading.

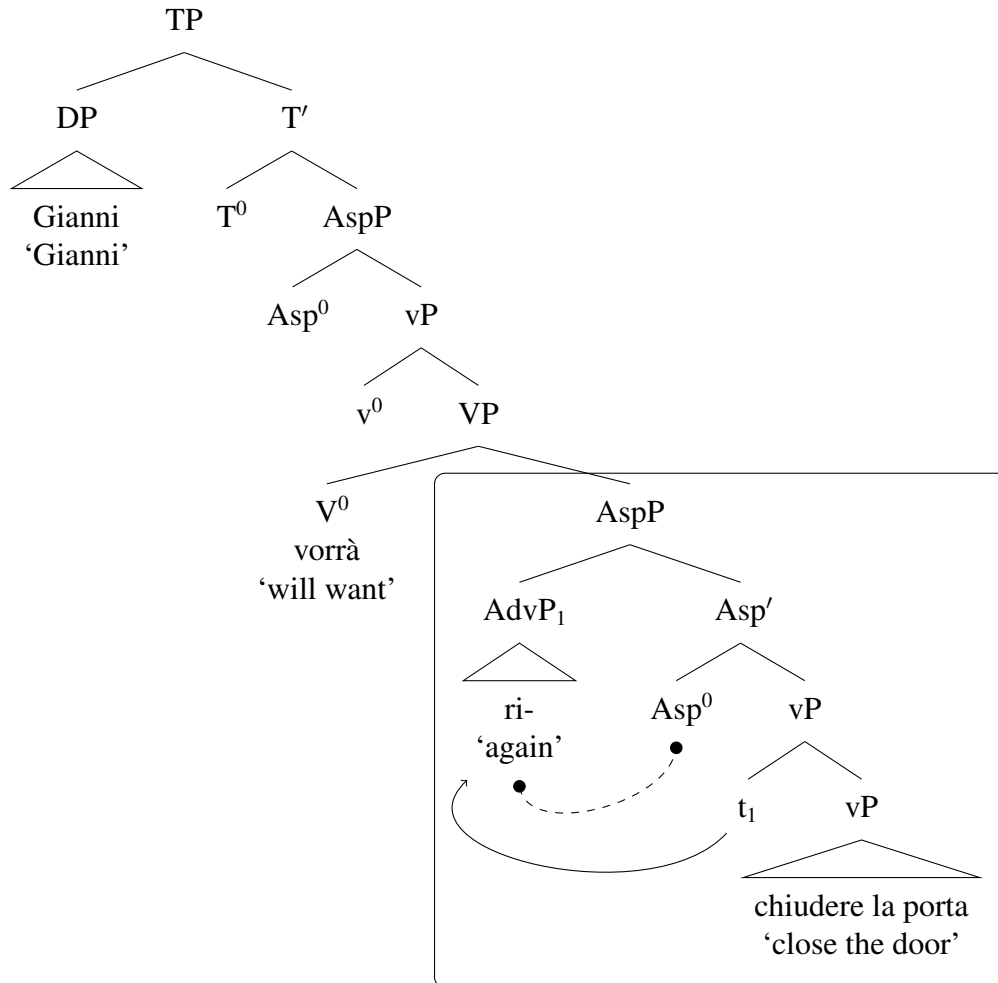
Given below are two additional derivation examples. (13a) sketches how high *ri-* can yield the high reading, and (13b) sketches how low *ri-* can yield the low reading. In both cases, the movement of *ri-* triggered by aspectual agreement is vacuous.

<sup>4</sup> Head movements and subject movement are omitted for simplicity.

(13) a.



b.



In what follows, I present two evidentiary points supporting this movement and reconstruction analysis. That is, Coordinate Structure Constraint (Ross 1967) and Relativized Minimality (Rizzi 1990, 2001, 2004) both apply to ‘again’ separation and provide evidence that *ri-* undergoes movement in an ‘again’ separation construction.

3.3. COORDINATE STRUCTURE CONSTRAINT. The first piece of evidence pertains to the absence of ambiguity of matrix *ri-* when the embedded predicate comprises a conjunction. (14) is similar to the baseline example (5) with the exception that the embedded predicate contains a conjunction. In this case, high *ri-* can only be interpreted as modifying the matrix predicate but not any of the embedded conjuncts.

(14) (Raffaella Zanuttini, pers. comm.)

Gianni *ri-vorrà* [saltare in piedi e chiudere la porta].  
 Gianni again-want.FUT.3SG jump.INF in feet and close.INF the door  
 ‘Gianni will want to jump up and close the door, and . . .

a. *High reading only*

‘Gianni wanted to jump up and close the door before.’

b. \*‘Gianni jumped up (but did not close the door) before.’

c. \*‘Gianni closed the door (but did not jump up) before.’

This phenomenon can be accounted for by Coordinate Structure Constraint (15), which prohibits the movement of *ri-* from an embedded conjunct.

(15) *Coordinate Structure Constraint* (Ross 1967:161)

In a coordinate structure, no conjunct may be moved, nor may any element contained in a conjunct be moved out of that conjunct.

However, it remains unclear why across-the-board movement of *ri-* is unattainable, as (14) does not have the reading ‘Gianni will want to jump up again and close the door again’ (Raffaella Zanuttini, pers. comm.). I leave this issue for future investigation.

3.4. RELATIVIZED MINIMALITY. The second piece of evidence concerns the effect of intervening adverbs on ‘again’ separation. To illustrate this, (16) is almost identical to the baseline example (5) with the exception that an adverb is inserted between the matrix verb and the embedded verb. In this example, the high reading of *ri-* preceding the matrix verb is available, but the low reading is not.<sup>5</sup>

(16) (Raffaella Zanuttini, pers. comm.)

Gianni *ri-vorrà* [completamente chiudere la porta].  
 Gianni again-want.FUT.3SG completely close.INF the door  
 ‘Gianni will want to close the door completely, and . . .

<sup>5</sup> Italian verbs commonly undergo V-to-T movement, which allows an adverb positioned between the matrix verb and the embedded verb, as seen in (16), to modify either of the two verbs. To this end, the inserted adverb in (16), ‘completely’, is carefully chosen so that its semantics is compatible with modifying only the embedded verb and not the matrix verb, thus guaranteeing that the inserted adverb is base-generated in the embedded clause.



- a. *High reading only*  
'Gianni wanted to close the door completely before.'
- b. \*~~'Gianni closed the door before.'~~

This phenomenon may be explained by Relativized Minimality (17): the movement of an adverb (i.e., *ri-*) across another adverb (i.e., the inserted adverb 'completely') is prohibited.

(17) *Paraphrased Relativized Minimality* (Rizzi 1990:1, adapted)

Moving *X* across *Y* is prohibited if *X* and *Y* have certain characteristics in common, such as when *X* and *Y* are both adverbials.

Might we find it unexpected that *ri-*, which appears to be a head, is affected by Relativized Minimality in relation to an adverb, which appears to be a phrase? In the following subsection, I show that *ri-* differs significantly from other prefixes in Italian, and its phrasal characteristics may be explained by Cardinaletti's (2003) suggestion that it is an incorporated form of synonymous adverbs like *di nuovo* 'again'.

3.5. INCORPORATION. Cardinaletti's (2003) evidence suggests that *ri-* is unique among Italian prefixes. It exhibits a phonological independence from the elements that follow it and is distributed in ways that are not observed in other morphological elements. For instance, while other prefixes in Italian cause the immediately following [s] to become voiced in intervocalic contexts (18), *ri-* does not (19).

(18) (Cardinaletti 2003:9, adapted)

- a. \**re[s]istere*
- b. *re[z]istere* 'resist'

(19) (Cardinaletti 2003:9, adapted)

- a. *ri[s]alutare* 'greet again'
- b. \**ri[z]alutare*

Additionally, *ri-* (20b) does not follow the rule of deleting the final vowel of a prefix when the verb stem begins with a vowel (20a).

(20) (Cardinaletti 2003:9)

- a. *rinvviare* 'postpone'
- b. *riinvviare* 'send again'

Given the above discussion, Cardinaletti proposes that *ri-* is the incorporated version of synonymous adverbs such as *ancora*, *di nuovo*, and *nuovamente*, which all convey the meaning of 'again'. This claim is substantiated by two pieces of evidence.<sup>6</sup> First, *ri-* always appears as the outermost prefix when it is combined with other prefixes (21).

<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Cardinaletti (2003) provides comparative evidence from German and Greek, which supports her proposal that *ri-* is an incorporated element. Further details can be found in the original paper.

- (21) (Cardinaletti 2003:15)
- a. *ridisfare* ‘undo again’
  - b. \**disrifare*

Second, *ri-* can be duplicated but only up to two times (22). This aligns with Cinque’s (1999) statement that repetitive adverbs in Italian can appear a maximum of two times within a sentence.

- (22) (Cardinaletti 2003:13)
- a. *ririfare* ‘redo again’
  - b. \**riririfare*

If the movement and reconstruction analysis of ‘again’ separation is on the right track, then Cardinaletti’s proposal reinforces the idea that the movement of *ri-* in an ‘again’ separation construction is most likely phrasal. This, in turn, provides an explanation for the sensitivity of *ri-* to Relativized Minimality in relation to adverbs.

**4. Discussion.** In this section, I draw comparisons between Italian *ri-* and English *again*, English *re-* & Mandarin *you* ‘again’. I also discuss the interesting implications of each comparison.

4.1. COMPARISON WITH ENGLISH *again*. Recall that in English, *again* preceding the matrix verb is unable to produce the low reading. (4), copied below in (23b), would not be felicitous in a context where the low reading is intended, as seen in (2b), copied below in (23a).

- (23) a. *Context of repeated closing: Low reading*  
 On a certain day, the door to John’s room was left open. John had no desire to close the door, but his mother compelled him to do so. She then proceeded to open the door again. It is believed that John will want to, once more, close the door.
- b. #John will again want [to close the door].

If we accept the movement and reconstruction analysis of Italian ‘again’ separation and its correlation with restructuring, the contrast between the behaviors of English *again* and Italian *ri-* can be attributed to differences in the sizes of embedded clauses in these two languages. It is often remarked that in English, there is little to no evidence of restructuring, and verbs like *want* take full CP complements (e.g., Landau 1999). Thus, even if English *again* were base-generated with the same aspect feature and had the same feature checking requirement as Italian *ri-*, it could not move upwards to the matrix clause when embedded, because the embedded clause is large enough to contain an AspP for the feature to be checked within the embedded clause.

4.2. COMPARISON WITH ENGLISH *re-*. Despite both being a prefix and conveying the meaning of ‘again’, English *re-* and Italian *ri-* have significant differences in their distribution. Italian *ri-* is much more productive than English *re-*, as it can modify a wider range of verbs, including causative verbs, detransitivized verbs, locative verbs, particle verbs, and verbs in idiomatic expressions (Cardinaletti 2003). On the other hand, English *re-* is generally limited to transitive or unaccusative verbs with an underlying object (Horn 1980).

In our English baseline example (4), substituting *again* with *re-* makes the matrix verb and the sentence completely unacceptable (24).

(24) \*John will want to close the door.

For more detailed analyses of English *re-*, I refer the readers to Horn (1980), Keyser & Roeper (1992), and Săvescu Ciucivara & Wood (2013).

4.3. COMPARISON WITH MANDARIN *you*. Italian is not unique in the exceptional scopal behavior of ‘again’-type elements or its correlation with restructuring. In Mandarin, matrix *you* ‘again’ can yield a low reading in restructuring contexts as well (25), as reported by Liu (2021, to appear) and Huang (2022).

- (25) Zhe bu dianying you rang wo [xiangxin-le aiqing].  
this CLF movie again let 1SG believe-PFV love  
‘This movie let me believe in love, and ...’
- a. *High reading*  
‘This movie let me believe in love before.’
- b. *Low reading*  
‘I believed in love before.’

This phenomenon and this correlation with restructuring are also observed with the Cantonese suffix *-faan* ‘again’ (Liu & Yip to appear) and the French prefix *re-* ‘again’ (Vincent Homer, pers. comm.).

**5. Conclusion.** Italian *ri-* challenges the structural account for the ambiguity of ‘again’-type elements, as it can be interpreted as if it is adjoined to a lower position in the embedded clause when it surfaces in the matrix clause. To rescue the structural account, I propose that ‘again’ separation is correlated with clitic climbing and restructuring and that *ri-* can move and reconstruct, with evidence from Coordinate Structure Constraint and Relativized Minimality. This analysis suggests that the different behaviors of ‘again’-type elements across languages may be attributed to what we already know about the differences in the sizes of embedded clauses in different languages.

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