Tracing the emergence of the Italian verb *volerci*

Cinzia Russi

**Summary.** The present article has two major objectives. First, it reveals the results of an original empirical analysis of Old Italian (OI) material (twenty texts from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), which I carried out in order to trace the emergence and reconstruct the early distributional pattern of the Italian verb *volerci* 'be necessary, be required, need', and also 'take', as in 'it takes time', 'it takes patience', etc. The second goal of the study is to put forward a tentative proposal about the type of construction from which *volerci* originated. The OI texts examined are listed in Table 1 below. I start with providing a basic description of the structural properties and the semantic domain of *volerci* (§ 2; a more detailed discussion is found in Russi "On Italian *volerci*"). Next, I introduce, comment on, and discuss the attestations of *volerci* found in the OI corpus I analyzed (§ 3). I then sketch my account of the development of *volerci* from *volere* (§ 4). I conclude summarizing the main points and drawing attention to some issues that call for further investigation (§ 5).

Table 1: Italian 13th and 14th century texts examined (over 7,323 pages of text)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
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</tr>
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<td>c. 1281-1300</td>
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<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13th</td>
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<td><em>Bestiario toscano</em></td>
<td>82</td>
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<td>13th</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td><em>Il libro de sette savi</em></td>
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<td>13th</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td><em>Vita da Jacopone da Todi</em></td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>late 13th</td>
<td>Giamboni</td>
<td><em>Il libro de vizi e delle virtudi</em></td>
<td>50</td>
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<td>13th</td>
<td>Latini</td>
<td><em>La retorica</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1302-5</td>
<td>Giordano da Pisa</td>
<td><em>Prediche</em></td>
<td>485</td>
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<tr>
<td>1310</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td><em>Il Milione di Marco Polo</em></td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1310-12</td>
<td>Compagni</td>
<td><em>Cronica delle cose occorrenti ne tempi suoi</em></td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 1292-3</td>
<td>Aighieri</td>
<td><em>Vita nova</em></td>
<td>65</td>
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<td>1304-7</td>
<td>Aighieri</td>
<td><em>Convito</em></td>
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<td>Aighieri</td>
<td><em>Commedia</em></td>
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<td>1322-48</td>
<td>Villani</td>
<td><em>Cronica</em></td>
<td>1,640</td>
</tr>
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<td>mid 14th</td>
<td>Guido da Pisa</td>
<td><em>I fatti d'Enea</em></td>
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<td>1336-9</td>
<td>Boccaccio</td>
<td><em>Filoboco</em></td>
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<td>1341-2</td>
<td>Boccaccio</td>
<td><em>Commedia delle ninfe fiorentine</em></td>
<td>161</td>
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<td>1349-52;</td>
<td>Boccaccio</td>
<td><em>Decameron</em></td>
<td>886</td>
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<td>revised 1370-1</td>
<td>Boccaccio</td>
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<td>85</td>
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<td>1365-6</td>
<td>Boccaccio</td>
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<tr>
<td>2nd half of 14th</td>
<td>Caterina da Siena</td>
<td><em>Lettere</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1385-92</td>
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<td><em>Prezentonovelle</em></td>
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<td></td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>7,323</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Information on the specific editions is provided in the reference section, under the heading 'Screened texts'.
* The page numbers for these texts are unavailable because they were consulted in electronic format only.

Quaderni d'italianistica, Volume XXX, No. 1, 2009, 169-192
The verb *volerci* derives from the fusion of *volere* 'want' and the clitic pronoun *ci*. As illustrated in (1), *ci* functions as first person plural direct and indirect object pronoun (also reflexive/reciprocal) (1a-d), as locative pronoun ‘here/there’ (1e, f), and pronominalizes different types of oblique complements (1g-i).

(1) Pronominal *ci*

a. *Non ci hanno invitato.*
   “They did not invite us.”

b. *Ci hanno spedito una cartolina.*
   “They sent us a postcard.”

   *Ci siamo vestiti.*
   “We got dressed.”

   *Ci siamo conosciuti al liceo.*
   “We met each other in high school.”

   *Ci andiamo/veniamo domani.*
   “We’ll go there/here tomorrow.”

   *Ci viviamo da due anni.*
   “We have lived here for two years.”

   *A questa storia, non ci, credo, è troppo assurda.*
   “This story, I don’t believe it; it’s too absurd.”

   *Con Carlo, ci, ho parlato ieri.*
   “Carlo, I spoke to/with him yesterday.”

   *Le forbici, sono sporche, ci, ho tagliato il basilico.*
   “The scissors are dirty, I cut basil with them.”
Furthermore, *ci* is found in impersonal reflexive/reciprocal constructions, where it replaces one of the *si*’s, e.g., *ci si lava* ‘one washes oneself’ vs. *si si lava.*

The *ci* of *volerci*, on the other hand, no longer functions as an anaphoric element but has become an obligatory component of the verb, whose omission leads to ungrammaticality.

(2) È importante notare che usualmente *ci vogliono/*vogliono 24-72 ore perché la zecca inoculi l’agente infettivo. (CORIS, EPHEMOpusc)

“It is important to notice that usually it takes 24-72 hours before the tick inoculates the infective agent.”

*Volerci* is a high frequency lexical item in Contemporary Standard Italian (CSI). In fact, it is categorized as a *lemma fondamentale* ‘fundamental lexeme’ in De Mauro *Grande dizionario italiano dell’uso*; that is, it is among the items characterized by very high frequency of use, whose occurrences constitute about 90% of lexical occurrences in the total body of written and spoken texts.²

1.1 Structural properties

The sentences in (3) exemplify the most typical structural patterns in which *volerci* appears.

² Notice that the locative clitics *ci* and *vi* replaced the original (etymological) first and second plural personal clitics *no* (< Lat. NOS) and *vo* (< Lat. VOS), as well as their earlier variants *ne/*ni and *ve* (Rohlfs, §§ 460, 461; Tekav_i, § 563). This replacement, which possibly was due to a process of analogical leveling triggered by the corresponding singular forms *mi* and *ti*, is manifest already the thirteenth century; for further discussion see Russi (Italian Clitics, Ch. 6).

³ The CORIS/CODIS is a corpus of written Italian under development at CILTA (Centre for Theoretical and Applied Linguistics, University of Bologna). It consists of a collection of authentic and commonly occurring texts in electronic format chosen by virtue of their representativeness of modern Italian and includes an assortment of diverse genres, such as press, fiction, academic and legal administrative prose, miscellaneous (e.g., books on religion, travel, cookery, hobbies) and ephemera (letters, leaflets, instructions). Presently, it contains 100 million words.

⁴ “FO: fondamentale; tra i lemmi principali, sono così marcati i vocaboli di altissima frequenza, le cui occorrenze costituiscono circa il 90% delle occorrenze lessicali nell’insieme di tutti i testi scritti o discorsi parlati.” (De Mauro I: xii)
(3) Model structures involving volerci
a. *Ci vogliono circa tre anni prima che i giovani maschi acquistino le superbe penne copritrici della coda.* (CODIS, PRACC_4)
“It takes about three years before the young males get their superb tail feathers.”
b. *Per fare l’investigatore *ci vuole la licenza.* (CODIS, MISCEL_4)
“To be a private detective one needs a license.”
c. *Mi disse che ci volevano 60 mila sterline (150 milioni di lire) per un fegato.*
(CORIS, STAMPAQuot)
“He told me that 60 thousand pounds (150 million lire) would be necessary for a liver.”
d. *A McNab *ci sono voluti sei mesi di cure intensive per riprendersi.*
“It took McNab six months of intensive care to recover.”
(CORIS, STAMPAQuot)
e. *Il povero Pinocchio, …, dove imparare tutte queste bellissime cose; ma, per impararle, gli ci volle tre mesi di lezione, e molte frustate da levare il pelo.*
*(Le avventure di Pinocchio, 137)*
“Poor Pinocchio, …, had to learn all these wonderful things; but it took him three long months and cost him many, many lashings before he was pronounced perfect.”
*(The Adventures of Pinocchio, translated by Carol Della Chiesa)*

On the basis of the examples in (3), a structural-semantic valence frame (based on Fillmore and Kay) can be proposed for volerci, as in (4).

(4) *Volerci* ‘be necessary/required, take (intr.)’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>volerci</th>
<th>[tre anni]</th>
<th>[prima che i giovani maschi …]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[la licenza]</td>
<td>[per fare l’investigatore]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[£ 60,000]</td>
<td>[per un fegato]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[sei mesi…]</td>
<td>[per riprendersi]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[tre mesi …]</td>
<td>[per impararle]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Syntactic category.</td>
<td>NP</td>
<td>Clause (inf/fin) /PP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Grammatical relation:</td>
<td>subject</td>
<td>oblique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Thematic/semantic role.</td>
<td>instrument</td>
<td>goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Frame-specific role:</td>
<td>needed</td>
<td>purpose</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We see in (4) that volerci takes a nominal subject, which is assigned the thematic role of instrument since it denotes an entity that enables the realization of the event or state of affairs expressed by the clausal/prepositional phrase complement. Although all the examples given above involve third person subjects, the subject of volerci shows no person/number restrictions; examples involving first and second person, both singular and plural (e.g., *ci voglio io/ ci vuoi tu/ ci vogliamo noi/ ci volete voi a far riuscire*

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5 Frame-specific roles are identified following Fillmore and Kay and Van Valin.
Teaching the Emergence of the Italian Verb *vole*.

la festa ‘it takes me/you, us/you to make the party a success’), are not very frequently attested but they are absolutely unproblematic. Notice that in canonical (i.e., pragmatically unmarked) structures, the subject constituent must appear in post-verbal position, whereas the canonical subject position in Italian is preverbal.

*Vole* can then take a clausal complement (finite (3a) or non-finite (3b)), or a prepositional phrase complement (3c), which occur in preverbal position or follow the subject. Semantically, this constituent represents a *purpose*, in the sense of motivational goal or contextual endpoint of a predication (Frawley 227). As evinced from (3c), the prepositional phrase constituent can be considered a clausal constituent with an implied predicate, which remains unrealized because context given; for instance *comprare*, ‘buy’ or *procurarsi* ‘get, obtain’ in this case.

Finally, *vole* can take an indirect object complement, which is realized either as a prepositional phrase (3d) or much more typically as a clitic pronoun (3e). The immediate, most natural construal of the indirect object is that of *locus of the state of necessity*, that is, a participant within whose physical domain a given state of necessity materializes. Thus, I will (tentatively) assign to it the thematic role of *locative* and the frame-specific role of *needer*.

To conclude, *vole* appears to be an unaccusative presentational predicate, analogous to *essere* ‘be there, exist’ (Burzio126-32; Salvi 126): while *essere* introduces (the existence of) an entity, *vole* introduces (the existence of) a state of necessity.

1.2 Semantic properties

*Vole* covers a varied semantic domain. Most commonly, it denotes a state of necessity that I would like to refer to as *factual objective* (epistemic) *necessity*. That is, *vole* presents an entity or a situation (the nominal subject), which is perceived as instrumentally required for the realization of another entity (the purpose complement). The condition of necessity stems from empirical factual circumstances over which the speaker (or any other discourse participant) can exercise no control. Let us consider the examples in (5), where the relevant constituents are bracketed and labeled for easier identification:

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6 Comparative frequency rates of prepositional dative vs. clitic pronoun together with a detailed discussion on the conditions under which occurrence of the indirect object complement is allowed are found in Russi “On Italian *vole*”.
(5) Volerci denoting factual objective necessity
a.  Se saltiamo nove o più fusi orari, infatti, ci vogliono [5 giorni]SUBJ [per rimettere in sesto il nostro ritmo biologico.]OBL (CORIS, STAMPA Supp) “In fact, if we skip nine or more time zones, it takes five days to reset our biological rhythm.”

b.  Ci vogliono [almeno 25 litri di quel liquido]SUBJ [per produrre una di quelle fiale che la signora McCaughey si faceva iniettare ogni giorno.]OBL (CORIS, STAMPA Quot) “It takes at least 25 liters of that liquid to produce one of those vials that Mrs. McCaughey had injected every day.”

That a given amount of time in (5a), or a specific amount of some substance in (5b) is necessary to bring about the given events is assessed by means of reference to general laws of nature or facts of the world. In short, the source of the necessity, which is the element or force determining that X is necessary for Y, is simply concrete fact.

The state of necessity expressed by volerci is typically construed as impersonal, in the sense that no individual needer participant is envisioned in the event. In other words, volerci focuses on the expression of the need-ed participant rather than on the participant that experiences the need. Nevertheless, the needer participant can be expressed in the form of a dative constituent, as shown in (3d, e) above (see note 6). It is important to point out though that the fact that volerci most typically denotes an impersonal state of necessity does not mean that it rejects subjects whose referents are human or animate. Although much less frequently, volerci does allow human subjects, as shown in (6). What is crucial is that the subject be perceived as instrumental to the realization of the intended purpose.

(6) Ci voleva [il Papa]SUBJ seduto a pochi metri per vederlo sbarbato di fresco. (CORIS, STAMPA Quot) “It took the Pope, seated few meters from him, to see him [him=Bob Dylan, cr] freshly shaven.”

As the examples in (7) illustrate, volerci is also used to convey the notion of suitability, or desirability (De Mauro VI: 1077) or, as I would like to call it, non-factual subjective necessity.

(7) Volerci denoting non-factual subjective necessity
a.  [Per fare grande la Fiorentina]OBL ci vuole anche [Dunga.]SUBJ (LIP, FE 18 81 C)

7 LIP (Lessico di frequenza dell’italiano parlato by De Mauro et al.) is the most important corpus of spoken Italian currently available; it comprises 496 texts (for a total of about 490,000 words) recorded in Milan, Florence, Rome and Naples, from register differentiated macro-types and subtypes of discourse.
“In order to make Fiorentina great, it takes Dunga too.”

   “I’ll fix you a hot chocolate. One needs something hot in the morning, not yogurt!”

In (7a), *Dunga* is not factually necessary to carry out the intended purpose of making *Fiorentina* a winning team. Rather, it is the speaker who perceives this specific soccer player as necessary; a different player with comparable skills, for instance *Paul Ince*, may serve equally well, possibly even better. Similarly, concerning (7b), a hot tea or coffee will most likely be as great substitutes for yogurt as the hot chocolate: what matters to the speaker, is simply that the beverage be hot.

Finally, *volerci* appears in a number of fixed or semi-fixed phrases, two of which are illustrated in (8). These are semi-idiomatic expressions that actually denote neither necessity nor suitability but carry primarily discourse pragmatic value.

(8) *Volerci* structures with discourse pragmatic value
   a. *E poi quella storia del libretto di risparmio ... Beh, quella proprio non ci voleva!* (CODIS, NARRAT_7)
      “Then that issue with the savings book ... Well, who needed it?”
   b. *Non vorrai che lo trovino qui, no? — dice .... Mi siedo. — Non ci vuole niente — continua. — So dove portarlo, in mezz’ora sistemiamo tutto.* (CODIS, NARRAT_7)
      “You don’t want them to find him here, do you? — he says... I sit down. — It’s as easy as that—he continues.—I know where to take him; we’ll take care of it in just half an hour.”

In (8a), *non ci voleva* (literally, ‘it was not needed’) expresses the speaker’s disappointment at some unfortunate event that has to do with a savings book. The phrase is fixed in that the verb can only be in the third singular imperfect indicative form. In (8b), *non ci vuole niente* (literally, ‘it takes nothing’) highlights the speaker’s dismissive attitude toward the situation, which s/he perceives or intends to present as utterly easy to deal with. This expression has not reached yet the stage of full fixation; variation is allowed in tense and in the choice of the negative indefinite pronoun (e.g., *non c’è voluto nulla* ‘it took nothing’).8

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8 The indefinite pronouns *niente* and *nulla* can also be replaced by indefinite noun phrases that refer to (euphemisms for) the male genitalia, such as *un cazzo, una minchìa, un cavolo* (lit. ‘a cabbage’), etc.
2. The emergence of volerci

2.1 The earliest attestations

The OI corpus I examined yielded a total of seven attestations, which are given in (9) underlined, the relevant constituents bracketed and labeled:

(9) OI attestations of volerci
a. *Chi d’infamia d’alcuna macula si sozza,* [molta acqua]SUBJ vi vuole [a potersi lavare].OBL (Libro de’ vizi e delle virtunità XII 12)
   “Who gets stained with infamy, they need much water to wash themselves.”

b. *E, come tu medesimo sai, che molto meglio le conosci che io non fo, elle non ti metteranno in disputare o discutere* [quanta cenere]SUBJ si (=ci) voglia [a cuocere una matassa d’accia].OBL (Corbaccio 40 36)
   “And as you know yourself, who knows them much better than I do, they will not dispute or discuss how much ash is needed to cook a skein of raw linen.”

c. *Ben è vero che ci vuole [essere il pentimento dei peccati].SUBJ* (Prediche XXI 49)
   “It is true that there must be repenting of one’s sins.”

d. *Questi è un cantore da camera, cioè che non ci vuole [essere rumore].SUBJ* (Prediche XC 344)
   “This is a chamber singer, which means that there must be no noise.”

e. *Così altresì se hai a fare un impiastro, una medicina; puoi ben dire:* [a farne cotan-ta]OBL ci vuole [tre foglie].SUBJ: le due non avrebbono tanta vertude, le quattro sarebbono troppe a questo mestieri. (Prediche I 138)
   “Likewise, if you have to make a concoction, a medicine, you can well say: to make this amount it takes three leaves: two would not have as much virtue, and four would be too many for this purpose.”

f. *Ma [altro remedio]SUBJ ci voleva [per appiaciare Iddio].OBL* (Cronica CXIX 41)
   “But some other remedy was needed to placate God.”

   “Piero, of your peers many would be needed, so that with less than fifty javelins the enemies would be defeated.”

Volerci is the same as volerci: vi (< Lat. ibi ‘there’) was much more common as locative clitic pronoun in OI, where ci and vi retained to some extent their deictic value of ‘here’ and ‘there’ respectively. Eventually, the deictic opposition neutralized and vi has ended up having a very restricted

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9 That si stands for ci in this case is assumed by Battaglia (XXI: 985, §17), certainly one of the most complete and highly reputed dictionaries of Italian, which reports example (8b) as the first attestation of volerci.
distribution in CSI, where it occurs essentially in (highly) formal written registers.

2.2 Discussion of the early attestations

The OI examples require a certain amount of discussion. An anonymous reviewer of an earlier, unpublished study in which I cite the examples in question pointed out to me that two of the occurrences are definitely controversial, and cannot indeed be considered instances of volerci. Precisely, (9b) has been claimed to represent an impersonal construction of volere ‘want’ carrying deontic meaning; that is, _si vuole_ ‘one needs’, in the sense of ‘one must/should’, a structure that was quite widespread in OI, as we will see in the next section. Evidence in support of the impersonal reading, it is claimed, comes from the fact that, as discussed in Stussi, no other instances are found in Boccaccio’s language of _si_ standing for _ci._ If we accept that (9b) does not involve volerci, the relevant clause should then be glossed ‘how much ash _one needs_ to cook a skein of raw linen’. I would argue, though, that the difference between the impersonal reading and the interpretation ‘how much ashes _is needed_’ proposed here is minimal, especially in light of the fact that, as it will be discussed shortly, this type of constructions (i.e., impersonal _volere_) possibly played a role in the development of volerci.

It was also remarked that the same impersonal interpretation could be extended to (9a). Indeed, it was suggested that (9a), repeated below as (10a) for ease of exposition, is also open to a second, actually more plausible, interpretation, which would arise from constructing _molta acqua_ ‘much water’ as the direct object of lexical _volere_, positing a phonologically null subject co-referential with _chi_ ‘who’, and considering _vi_ a pronominal locative that refers to the place of the stain, as shown in (10b).

(10) a. _Chi d’infamia d’alcuna macula si sozza, molta acqua vi vuole a potersi lavare._

   b. _S1[Chi; [si sozza [d’alcuna macula d’infamia]]]S2[pro; [vuole [molta acqua][a potere lavarsi [vi]]]]_

The structure in (10b) would yield the reading in (11):

(11) “Those who get dirty with stains of infamy, they need much water to be able

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10 It should be noted, however, that Stussi deals exclusively with the language of _Decameron_, see also note 9.
to wash themselves there (i.e., 'on the stains', 'on the place where they were stained')."

Yet, the interpretation in (11) is debatable. First of all, as shown in (12), Italian does not allow (at any time in its history) the use of *vi as direct object pronoun with locative reference; that is, *vi does not pronominalize direct objects whose referent is a place, as in (12a), hence the ungrammaticality of (12b). Canonical direct object pronouns are uses instead (12c), or possibly a locative adverbial (12d).

(12) a. _Ho lavato con cura [tutte le aree del pavimento dove c'erano quelle orribili macchie]._; LOC DO.
   "I washed carefully all those areas of the floor that were so horribly stained."
   b. *_Vi ho lavato._
   c. _Le ho lavate._
   "I washed them."
   d. _Ho lavato là._
   "I washed there."

In other words, (12b) can be acceptable only if *vi pronominalizes a locative adjunct; that is, the place in which the event of washing took place.

As Paola Benincà kindly pointed out to me (e-mail, March 26, 2007), additional counterevidence to the interpretation in (11) comes from the following: (a) the reading would imply a volitional construal of _volere_—stemming from the fact that the subject referent is human—which, however, is incompatible with the given context; and (b) the free relative clause _chi d'infamia . . . si sozza_, is an instance of _tema sospeso_ (Benincà, Salvi, and Frison 145-49; _unlinked topic_ in Lambrecht _Information_ 131, 193, "Dislocation" 1057-60) and it is to be understood as corresponding to _per la chi 'for/to whom'.

Final evidence against the interpretation in (11) is provided by clitic climbing facts. For what concerns us here, in OI clitic climbing followed the same rules of application as in modern Italian (Cardinaletti; Egerland). If the referent of *vi were indeed the (place of the) stain, it would not be expected to climb up to _volere_ to which it bears no syntactic relation.11 Therefore, the interpretation in (11) would obtain only with the climbing configurations in (13a, b), or without climbing, as in (13c):

(13) a. _vuole molta acqua a potervisi lavare_

11 I am indebted to Maria Goldbach for pointing out this evidence to me.
b. vuole molta acqua a vi si poter lavare
   c. vuole molta acqua a poter lavarvisi
   “s/he wants much water to be able to wash herself/himself there”

Possibly, *vi* could be interpreted as an ‘abstract locative’, corresponding to ‘for such thing’ or ‘for such people’; but in this case *volere* would still have to correspond semantically to *volervi*, i.e., *vi vuole = è necessario per questa cosa, o per costoro* ‘it is necessary for this thing or for these people’, where ‘these people’ is the referent of the relative clause (Paola Benincà, e-mail, March 26, 2007).

In (9c) and (9d), repeated as (14a) and (14b) respectively, the subject of *volerci* is an infinitival existential clause.

(14) a. Ben è vero che ci vuole [essere il pentimento dei peccati.]\(^{\text{INST}}\)
    (Prediche XXI 49)
   “It is true that there must be repenting of one’s sins.”

   b. Questi è un cantore da camera, cioè che non ci vuole [essere rumore.]\(^{\text{INST}}\)
      (Prediche XC 344)
    “This is a chamber singer, which means that there must be no noise.”

This type of structure is no longer found in contemporary Italian, where *volerci* cannot take a bare infinitive as subject. These two examples could actually be cases of clitic climbing; i.e., *volere essere* ‘want to be there’ instead of *volerci essere*. This, however, would not have any bearing for the semantics of the sentence because no human subject can be assumed for *volere*, since it would lead to a desiderative reading and, consequently, to interpreting the infinitive as a direct object. If the clitic climbing hypothesis is embraced, the examples are to be taken as instances of a structure that involves deontic *volere*, which will be discussed in the next section.

The attestations in (9e-g), on the other hand, are uncontroversial; and so are those in (15), which come from OVI, courtesy of Paola Benincà (e-mail, March 31, 2007).\(^{12}\)

\(^{12}\) *Istituto Opera del Vocabolario Italiano* (OVI), sponsored by *Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche* (CNR, the Italian National Research Foundation) is an exceptionally precious resource for Italian historical linguistics. It is a fairly search-and-reader-friendly database, which at the present time comprises 1,960 geographically diverse vulgar texts dating from the tenth century up to the early fifteenth century, for a total of about 22 million words (occurrences) and 479,000 entries. Unfortunately, I had already completed the screening of my corpus when OVI became available to me.
To conclude, if we embrace the criticism about the (potentially) problematic examples (9a-d) and exclude them, we are left with only five attestations of volerci for the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, namely, (9e-g) and (15a, b). If, on the contrary, we take all the examples in (9) to be unproblematic instances of volerci, we have a total of nine attestations. In either case, it would not seem too controversial to claim that in OI volerci was a very low frequency, emerging predicate.

2.3 The rising of volerci

The occurrence rate of volerci starts to change significantly in the course of the next two centuries. In particular, starting from the seventeenth century, we seem to witness a considerable increase in frequency (Gaskill). Table 2 reports the number of occurrences of volerci found in nine texts from the early seventeenth to the eighteenth century.

Table 2: Attestations of volerci in 17th and 18th centuries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Tokens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1602</td>
<td>Campanella</td>
<td>La città del sole</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1632</td>
<td>Galilei</td>
<td>Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1725-31</td>
<td>Vico</td>
<td>La scienza nuova</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1750-1</td>
<td>Goldoni</td>
<td>La bottega del caffè</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1750-1</td>
<td>Goldoni</td>
<td>Il teatro comico</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1753</td>
<td>Goldoni</td>
<td>La locandiera</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1760</td>
<td>Goldoni</td>
<td>I rusteghi</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1761</td>
<td>Goldoni</td>
<td>Trilogia della villeggiatura</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>Goldoni</td>
<td>Il servitore di due padroni</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>542</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,689</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interestingly, the number of occurrences of *volerci* in one single text, Galileo’s *Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi*, is higher than the total of the “uncontroversial” occurrences found in the OI corpus considered. We then find eighteen occurrences in Goldoni’s comedies, which is a relatively high ratio considered the volume of the texts (542 pages vs. 1,147 pages for the other texts). The frequency rate of *volerci* will continue to grow and, as pointed out previously (§ 2), *volerci* will eventually become a high frequency lexical item.

### 3. Identifying the source(s) of *volerci*

This section aims at finding a preliminary answer to the question of what type(s) of construction(s) *volerci* may have originated from. I will propose that the primary source of *volerci* be identified in structures involving lexical *volere*, which is exemplified through the attestations in (16) and is attributed the valence frame in (17).

(16) Examples of possible sources of *volerci*

a. *[Il regno di Cielo][SUBJ] vuole [fatica e forza grandissima][DO il qual è sommo e perpetual bene all’uomo, e compimento ma’ sempre di tutti i suoi desideri.]

   *(Libro de’ vizi e delle virtù)* 11

   “The reign of the Lord, which is man’s highest and perpetual good and fulfillment of all his desires, wants toil and greatest strength.”

b. *Ma però che non subitaneamente nasce [amore][SUBJ], e fassi grande e viene perfetto, ma [O][SUBJ] vuole [tempo e nutrimento di pensieri.]*

   *(Convidio II 2.3)*

   “But love is not born nor grows big and perfect suddenly; it wants time and nourishment of thoughts.”

c. *[Queste nau][SUBJ] voglion bene [200 marinai.]*

   *(Il Milione 154 17)*

   “These ships well require 200 sailors.”

d. *Perché [ogni cosa di virtù][SUBJ] vuole [perseveranzia.]*

   *(Caterina da Siena, Libro della divina dottrina)* (1378), ch. 49, 95; from OVI)

   “Because any virtuous act requires perseverance.”

e. *Perché [uno muro che da ogni parte inclini][SUBJ], vuole piuttosto [assai puntegli e spessi.]*

   *(Machiavelli, Dell’arte della Guerra)* (1519-20), 64

   “Since a wall that leans from every side rather wants many thick posts.”

(17) *Volere ‘need, require’*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>volere</th>
<th>[ogni cosa di virtù]</th>
<th>[perseveranzia]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Syntax category.</td>
<td>NP1 inanimate</td>
<td>NP2 inanimate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Grammatical relation.</td>
<td>subject</td>
<td>direct object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Thematic/semantic role.</td>
<td>theme</td>
<td>instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Frame-specific role.</td>
<td>desired entity</td>
<td>force</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this case, *volere* carries a meaning of (epistemic) *necessity* or *strong requirement*; the desiderative interpretation is ruled out because the subject is inanimate hence non-sentient. This use of *volere* is captured by the construction schema sketched in Figure 1, which was drawn taking as reference the general construction schema for transitive predicates proposed in Goldberg; see also Croft).

Notice that in all the examples in (16) the direct object denotes an entity that is construed as instrumental for the existence of another entity or, possibly, the accomplishment of a purpose. However, the second entity (the purpose) does not need to be expressed overtly—hence, it appears in gray shadowed boxes in Figure 1—because it either has been previously mentioned in the given discourse, as in (16b), or is contextually inferred by means of direct reference to the subject, as in (16a, c, d). For instance, (16a) denotes the following state of affairs: ‘heaven (subject, theme) requires great sacrifices (object, instrument) in order to be accessed to (implied, presupposed purpose, inherently related to the subject)’. Similarly, in (16b) the unexpressed purpose the 200 sailors are intended to fulfill is to make the ships operative. In short, the referent of the subject NP and the intended purpose stand in a meronymic relationship, given that the same referent functions as object of the predicate of the infinitival clause.

Figure 1. Construction schema for *volere* ‘need, require’

The attestation in (18) exhibit a structure that appears to be the ideal context for the emergence of *volerci* because it includes only one NP and a purpose infinitival clause, exactly like modern *volerci.*

(18) *E à tre ponti — li più belli del mondo — di pietra, lunghi un miglio e larghi bene 8 passi; e sono tutti in colonne di marmo, e sono si belli che [molto tesoro]SUBJ vorrebbe [a farne uno]OBL. (Il Milione 151 19-22)
“And there are [in the city of Quenla[i, CR] three bridges—the most beautiful in the world—made of stone, one mile long and eight steps wide; and they are all made of marble pillars, and they are so beautiful that a big treasure would be needed to make one.”

Establishing the origin of the necessity connotation of volere is rather unproblematic given that, as the examples in (19) reveal, its source, Latin VOLO, VELLE 'want', also carried this meaning.

(19) Latin VOLO 'want' with necessity meaning
a. Versibus exponi tragicis res comica non vult. (Horatius (65-8BCE), Ars 89) “Comedy is not to be used to write tragedy.”
b. Seri non voli hordenum nisi in sicca et soluta terra. (Plinius (23-79CE), Naturalis Historia 18.79) “Barley should not be sown except in dry or dissolved soil.”
c. Viciae modii sex in vetereto bubulcorum duas operas volunt. (Columella (4-70CE), De Rustica 2.12.3) “Six bushels of vicia [a leguminous plant, CR] in fallow soil take two days of work by herdsmen.”

In contemporary standard Italian, on the other hand, this acception of volere is quite marginal. The examples in (20) illustrate its most typical contexts of occurrence.

(20) Volere expressing necessity in CSI (from De Mauro VI: 1077, § 8)
a. Questo genere di piante vuole molta luce. “This type of plants needs a lot of light.”
b. È un malato che vuole continua assistenza. “He is a patient who needs constant assistance.”
c. È un verbo che vuole l'accusativo. “It is a verb that takes the accusative case.”

Sentences like the ones in (20) are rather rare in CSI, they are perceived as obsolete (if not pedantic), and hence restricted to formal written registers. In the spoken language, more specific predicates are used instead of volere, as illustrated in (21):

(21) a. Questo genere di piante ha bisogno di molta luce. (avere bisogno di 'need')
b. È un malato che richiede continua assistenza. (richiedere 'require')
c. È un verbo che regge l'accusativo. (reggere 'take, select')

It should also be noted that volere with the meaning of deontic necessity is also found in Italian dialects, apparently with no specific geographic restriction; for example, we find it in Abruzzese (22a), in Campano (22b),
in Emiliano (22c), and in Venetan (22d).

(22) Volere with deontic necessity meaning in Italian dialects

a. Lò pommadòrò vo na presò dò solò.
   "Tomatoes need a lot of sun." (dialect of Ortona, province of Chieti)

b. E pommarolà vom’ò sol assaie.
   "Tomatoes need a lot of sun." (dialect of Paolisi, province of Benevento; Luisa Nardini, p. c.)

c. Al rosmarein al vol dacqué dimondì.
   "Rosemary needs to be watered a lot." (dialect of Reggio Emilia; Simona Bondavalli, p.c.)

d. El vole magnà.
   "It wants eating, it is necessary to eat it." (Basso Polesano dialect; Benincà and Poletto, “The diachronic development” 102)

The synchronic distribution and strength of the structures illustrated in (22) remain to be assessed, though, and another (related) issue that requires investigation is the fact that different dialects are characterized by different selectional constraints (e.g., volere only selects an NP in Abruzzese and Campano, while it must select a PP in Emiliano and Venetan), as well as different morphosyntactic restrictions (for Venetan vole see Benincà and Poletto “Bisognà”, “The diachronic development”).

The emergence of volerci from volere can then be accounted for in terms of development of a new construal (i.e., a new conceptualization of an event/situation schema; see Langacker), in which the instrumental object Y and the (presupposed) event goal Z are promoted into the foreground while the subject theme X is demoted into the background, as sketched in Figure 2.

The new construal would take place because the subject theme is no longer perceived as a salient element of the event schema; that is, X ceases to instantiate a conceptually salient event participant.

The introduction of the clitic ci/vi was possibly triggered by analogy to presentational/existential esserci/esservi ‘be there’, a predicate that was already well established by the thirteenth century. In fact, esserci/esservi is abundantly attested in all the texts screened (twelve occurrences are found in Novellino alone). The function of ci/vi, I would propose, is to anchor the event schema to an impersonal, generic dimension. The locative clitic
is the perfect element because its function allows the grounding of the necessity into the spatial-temporal dimension of discourse, the ‘here’ and ‘now’, rather than grounding it into an individual participant. This impersonal generic connotation is not lost when *ci* acquires the function of first person plural object pronoun given that cross-linguistically first person plural is known to serve as an impersonal device. Thus, the state of necessity remains marked as relevant to the discourse participants in general, rather than to specific individuals. Finally, it may be assumed that by filling the canonical subject/agent slot, the clitic prevents any potential re-infiltration of a frame-extraneous subject/needier participant.\footnote{Cf. Burzio (Ch. 2, § 2.5.3), who views *ci* as a lexically constrained (because it is found only with *esserci* and *volerci*) pleonastic subject, analogous to English *there*, also Salvi (125), who claims “esiste un altro elemento clitico che ‘occupa’ la posizione di soggetto: il *ci* di [*esserci e volerci*]” (*there exists another clitic element that can occupy the subject position: the *ci* of *esserci* and *volerci*, my translation, *CR*).}

Another construction in which *volere* carries the meaning of (deontic) necessity, which was fairly popular in older stages of the language but is practically non-existent today, is the impersonal *si* construction which was discussed above with respect to Boccaccio’s example (8b) and is re-illustrated for convenience by means of the examples in (23).\footnote{Impersonal *si volere* + infinitive seems to be stronger in Siciliano; it is listed as acception 10 in Piccitto and Tropea *Vocabolario siciliano* (V: 1218-19), where among the examples given are the following: *stu muru si voli auttiguefjari anco- ra* ‘this muro si deve rialzare ancora’, *si voli mmichiliri* ‘si deve rimpicciolire’, *si voli priiunciri di sali* ‘si deve aggiungere del sale’. I thank a QI reviewer for informing me on this point.}
(23) Impersonal volere si-construction in OI

a. *Di volontà de’ miei compagni, io propuosi e consigliai e presi il partito, che a questo signore si volea ubbidire.* (Crónica delle cose 11 13)
   “According to my friends’ wish, I proposed and advised and resolved that we should obey this gentleman.”

b. *Non si può se non con propria moglie, e ancora questo si vuole fare legittimamente, ché essando nel matrimonio si puote peccare molto gravemente, e in molti modi.* (Prediche XXIV 105-08)
   “One can only with his own wife, and even so this one ought to do legitimately, because by not taking matrimony seriously one can sin very gravely, and in many ways.”

c. *E oltre a questo non si vuole quella lealtà tra’ servidori usare e’ signori, che tra amici e pari si conviene, anzi, gli deono così i servidori trattare, in quel che posso, come essi da loro trattati sono.* (Decameron 7 IX 18-21)
   “And besides this, one should not use between servants and masters that same loyalty that becomes between friends and peers; on the contrary, servants should, as much as they may, behave towards their masters in the same way their masters behave towards them.”

d. *E non fate vista di non vedere, ché non si vuole fare così; anzi si vuole vedere li difetti nostri, e li difetti del prossimo nostro, non per mormorazione, né per falso giudizio; ma per una santa e vera compassione, . . . Questo debbe fare ogni creatura che ha in sé ragione, verso del prossimo suo.* (Lettere CCXLIII 16-23)
   “And do not pretend to not see, that it should not be done; on the contrary, we must see our flaws, and those of our neighbors, not to gossip not to falsely accuse, but in order to feel true and holy compassion, [...]. This is what every creature must do, who has reason, towards the neighbors.”

However, I would argue that it is less probable that impersonal volere might have been (at least by itself) the source of volerci because, as the attestations in (23) exemplify, si vuole constructions consistently take a bare infinitive only, and are not accompanied by a nominal constituent that would function as object, e.g. *si vuole ubbidienza a questo signore ‘one needs obedience this gentleman’. In other words, the pattern epitomized by the controversial example from Corbaccio appears to be very rare; indeed, only one comparable example was found in the corpus examined, which is given in (24).

(24) *Questa navi voglion bene 200 marinai, ma elle sono tali che portano 5.000 porte di pepe, e di tali 6.000. E’ vogano co remi; a ciascun remo si vuole 4 marinai.* (Il Milione 154 17-20)
   “These ships well need 200 sailors, but they can carry 5,000 baskets of pepper and 6,000 of tali. They are moved by rowing and at each oar there should be 4 sailors.”
In (24), *si vuole 4 marinai* could be interpreted as comprising an unrealized *ave*re 'have', thus conforming to the attested pattern *si vuole* + infinitive. Alternatively, it could be assumed that here *si vuole* stands for *ci vuole* (25a), possibly but by no means necessarily, with an implied predicate (25b):

   “It takes 4 sailors for each oar.”

   b. *A manovrare ciascun remo ci vuole 4 marinai.*
   “It takes 4 sailors to maneuver each oar.”

The second alternative appears more plausible in light of the fact that *si vuole* is practically juxtaposed to a construction involving *volere* 'need' (i.e., *queste navi vogliono* ‘these ships need’) already given as (16c) above. In any case, the rarity of *si vuole* constructions such as (9b) and (24), then, can be taken as corroborative evidence for the hypothesis that it must have represented a transitional, provisional pattern.

Additional evidence against assuming *si vuole* as a source of *volerci* comes from semantic facts. Precisely, as we can clearly evince from the examples in (23) above, *si vuole* consistently denotes a true deontic meaning because it refers to obligation or strong suggestion, which most typically derive from religious, moral, and/or social practices, and a general, agreed-upon notion of propriety but can also issue from practical, factual purposes, as in the following:

(26) *Kalendi Giennaio quando viene in Sabato il verno sarà ventoso ongni frut to sarà faticoso, la biada si vuole serbare.* (Paolo Gherardi, *Liber habaci* XIV 82; from *OVI*)
   “When the January calends come on a Saturday, forage should be stored.”

In other words, *si vuole* perfectly corresponds to impersonal *dovere* (i.e., *si deve* ‘one must’, *si dovrebbe* ‘one should, ought’), which is often found nearby in the context, as for instance in (23c, d). In contrast, the sense of (propriety-abiding) obligation does not arise in the examples in (14) nor is it available for (16), which denote a more matter-of-fact state of necessity that depends upon concrete, material factors. Indeed, the fact that (9b) and (24) call for a factual (instrumental) necessity interpretation, gives some support to the claim that they are precursors of *volerci*.

**Conclusion**

This article has been concerned with two issues, namely presenting the key syntactic and semantic properties of the Italian verb *volerci* 'need, be
required', and examining the occurrence rate and distribution pattern of volere during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries based on the findings from an original empirical study of twenty OI texts. I have proposed that the origins of volere are to be identified in structures involving lexical volere 'want' with inanimate subjects, which convey a meaning of (epistemic) necessity or requirement as opposed to a desiderative meaning. The emergence of volere from volere was explained in terms of focal adjustment, which led to foregrounding (i.e., made construal salient) the object of the necessity and the purpose it applies to, at the same time grounding the inanimate subject of volere 'need, require'. The claims put forward in the present study, though, are to be considered tentative until a larger body of data - both OI data (which now can be gathered easily thanks to the OVI database) and data from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which seem to be the transitional stage—is examined.

I would like to conclude pointing out some issues that deserve further research. First of all, once the body of OI material has been expanded, a typological survey could be conducted of the texts that show higher occurrence rates of volere, in order to establish whether (and to what extent) text type and/or issues such as geographical origin, register, and so forth, may have played a role in the emergence and expansion of volere.

Secondly, it would be quite interesting to provide a systematic characterization of the semantic domain of volere vis-à-vis that of mettere 'take, employ (time)' (< mettere 'put' + ci). This is another verbo procomplemen
tare (see note 1) involving ci, which instantiate an event schema that resembles very closely the event schema embodied by volere, in that both verbs denote time as an instrument for some achievement. In fact, as (27) shows, they are very close synonyms and apparently interchangeable (see Russi Italian Clitics, for a preliminary discussion):

(27) a. Ci metto dieci minuti a farmi la doccia.
   b. Mi ci vogliono dieci minuti al/per farmi la doccia.
   "I take ten minutes to shower."

A third issue worthy of investigation relates to subject-verb agreement patterns. The fact that one of the early attestations, namely (9e), lacks subject-verb agreement would indicate that it was optional in OI, whereas it is strictly obligatory in CSI. If it is indeed the case that subject-verb agreement was not obligatory in OI, the consolidation of subject-verb agreement in the present-day language points to a phenomenon of lexical strengthening, rather than to grammaticalization (in the specific case, the evolution of lexical verbs into modal/auxiliary verbs) since grammatical-
ization processes typically entail loss or weakening of morphosyntactic properties. In other words, the development (lexical) volere ‘want’ > (lexical) volerci ‘be necessary, be required, need’ would contradict the cross-linguistically well-attested grammaticalization trajectory according to which modal verbs tend to become auxiliaries then functional affixal elements, which is exemplified, for instance, by the development of Lat. volo ‘want’ into a marker of future tense in Romanian voi cinta ‘I will sing’ (voi = ‘want’ 1 sing. present indicative, = cinta ‘sing’ infinitive). Furthermore, attention should be called to the fact that the development of volerci from volere does not conform to the general diachronic trajectories of semantic change attested across languages for desiderative and volitional verbs. The evolution of the meaning of necessity from desiderative meaning, in fact, is found neither in Bybee, Perkins, and Pagliuca nor in Heine and Kuteva. These highly recognized studies, which take into account large samples of genetically and areally unrelated languages, give only the trajectories in (28) and (29) as attested diachronic developments for verbs of desire and volition, and Bybee, Perkins, and Pagliuca (Chapters 6 and 7; 240) mention that the emergence of the notion of volition from the notion of necessity is attested (exemplified, for instance by English want < Old Norse wanat (<wanaton) ‘need’).

(28) a. DESIRE > INTENTION > PURPOSE  
   b. DESIRE > INTENTION > FUTURE  (Bybee, Perkins, and Pagliuca)

(29) a. WANT (PAST) > (1) AVERTIVE  
   b. WANT (‘want’, ‘wish’, ‘desire’) > (2) FUTURE  
   b. WANT (‘want’, ‘like’, ‘love’, ‘desire’) > (3) PROXIMATIVE  
   (Heine and Kuteva 310-13)

15 In a nutshell, grammaticalization indicates a general diachronic process of morphosyntactic change by which a linguistic form undergoes a more or less substantial loss of autonomy accompanied by a concomitant increase of its grammatical function. Ideally, grammaticalization processes start by affecting a full lexical item (most typically a noun or a verb), which, through a combination of linguistic changes taking place at different language levels (i.e., phonetic, morphosyntactic, semantic), end up becoming an affix. A model example of grammaticalization is the development of the Romance synthetic future verb forms from Latin analytic constructions comprising the auxiliary HABERE ‘have’, in the present indicative, and an infinitive: Lat. CANTARE HABET > It. canter-à ‘S/he will sing’. Heine, Claudi, and Hünnemeyer and Hopper and Traugott provide excellent overviews of grammaticalization.
Finally, at the level of applied linguistics (especially translation studies), it would be interesting to research the extent to which the semantic and structural domains of *volerci* and the corresponding English ‘take’ and French *il faut* ‘be necessary’ overlap and, consequently, how these verbs differ.

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