# RESPonsible attitudes: The case of Italian *considerare*[1]

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**Abstract.** This paper investigates the intentional component of the Italian verb *considerare* ('consider'), distinguishing it from the purely doxastic verb *credere* ('believe') and the experiential subjective attitude verb *trovare* ('find'). Building on linguistic diagnostics proposed by Farkas (1988) and Barker (2002), we show that *considerare* patterns with verbs that encode agentive responsibility and discretionary evaluation. We argue that this component aligns *considerare* with evaluative subjectivity and propose a formal decision-theoretic model to capture its semantics.

**Keywords:** subjective attitude verbs, subjectivity, vagueness, intention, Italian.

## 1. Introduction

Subjective attitude verbs (SAVs), as observed across languages, are known for requiring their complement clauses to reflect the subjective judgment or opinion of the attitude holder (Sæbø, 2009; Stephenson, 2007; Kennedy, 2013; Fleisher, 2013a; Kennedy and Willer, 2022, 2016; Vardomskaya, 2018). Their peculiar selectional properties have prompted research to precisely characterize how language encode subjectivity in grammar Bouchard (2012). This paper gives a novel twist to the discussion, providing new data from Italian and showing how the behavior of Italian SAV *considerare* ('consider'), when compared to *credere* ('believe') and *trovare* ('find'), suggest that one kind of subjectivity involves a deliberative component. Accordingly, a novel account will be proposed, borrowing ideas from work on deliberative modality Cariani et al. (2013). The rest of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 will review the basic empirical patterns discussed in the literature about SAVs; Section 3 will discuss one of the most prominent accounts on SAVs, namely Kennedy and Willer (2022), and its problems in accounting for some new empirical data. Section 4 will review some tests for intentionality in grammar from Farkas (1988) and Barker (2002) and apply them to *credere*, *considerare* and *trovare*. Section 5 will propose a new account and sketch a formal implementation, showing how it can explain the phenomena discussed. Section 6 will conclude.

## 2. Basic patterns

SAVs constitute a cross-linguistic category of propositional attitude verbs that necessitate the complement clause to express a subjective judgment or opinion of the attitude holder, namely the matrix subject. Specifically, embedding an objective clause under SAVs such as English *find* results in strong infelicity, as seen in (1). This behavior stands in contrast to standard doxastic attitude verbs like *believe* or *think*, which allow both objective and subjective clauses, as shown in (2).

(1) a. Alice finds the drink delicious.
b. #Alice finds the drink fermented.

(2) a. Alice believes/thinks that the drink is delicious.

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b. Alice believes/thinks that the drink is fermented.

Similar patterns occur with German *finden* (Sæbø, 2009; Umbach, 2016a), French *trouver* (Bouchard, 2012), Norwegian *synes* (Sæbø, 2009), Swedish *tycka* (Sæbø, 2009; Coppock, 2018), and Italian *trovare* (Fusco, 2022).

Beyond these verbs, the class of SAVs also includes other clause-embedding verbs, such as English *consider* (Fleisher, 2013b; Kennedy, 2013; Kennedy and Willer, 2016, 2022) and Italian *considerare* (Fusco, 2022). These verbs exhibit a nuanced behavior: like *find*-verbs, they prohibit embedding clearly objective complement clauses, as in (3), but they impose more relaxed embedding requirements, especially when discretion is clearly applied. For instance, while *vegetarian* might seem objective, the acceptability of *consider* in (4a) is due to the explicit contextual stretching of its meaning to include those who consume only shellfish (Kennedy and Willer, 2016, 2022). In contrast, *find* does not allow for this type of reinterpretation, as seen in (4b).

(3) #I consider the sum of two and two equal to four.

(4) a. I consider Mary vegetarian, because the only animals she eats are shellfish.
b. #I find Mary vegetarian, because the only animals she eats are shellfish.

Another key difference between *find* and *consider* pertains to their familiarity requirements with respect to the content of the complement clause (Kennedy and Willer, 2022). While both verbs seem to enforce some familiarity constraint, *find* uniquely demands first-hand experience. This is evidenced by the infelicity of (5), where the attitude subject explicitly lacks relevant direct experience.

(5) #Although I haven't tried it, I find this chili tasty (because everyone seems to enjoy it).

This phenomenon has been linked to the acquaintance inference triggered by predicates of personal taste (PPTs) like *tasty*, which inherently imply first-hand experience (Ninan, 2014, 2020; Gunlogson and Carlson, 2016; Crespo and Veltman, 2019). However, this requirement appears to extend beyond PPTs, as seen in (6), adapted from Korotkova and Anand (2021).

(6) **Context 1 (direct)**: The speaker has eaten at this restaurant.
**Context 2 (indirect)**: The speaker read reviews about this restaurant on TripAdvisor.
a. Food in this restaurant is authentic. OK Context 1, OK Context 2
b. I find food in this restaurant authentic. OK Context 1, # Context 2

In contrast, *consider* enforces familiarity with relevant facts rather than requiring first-hand experience. Consider (7), adapted from Kennedy and Willer (2022), which contrasts *consider* with *believe*.

(7) **Context 1 (direct)**: Kim doesn't know the ingredients that went into this cake, but based on its taste...
**Context 2 (indirect)**: Kim hasn't tried the cake, but she knows that it was made using rice flour from a mill that also produces wheat flour, so ...
a. ... she doesn't consider it gluten-free. # Context 1, OK Context 2
b. ... she doesn't believe that it's gluten-free. OK Context 1, OK Context 2

A related asymmetry concerns evaluativity, particularly in aesthetic and moral domains (McNally and Stojanovic, 2017; Stojanovic, 2019; Stojanovic and McNally, 2023). Several studies argue that *find* resists embedding purely evaluative predicates, as shown in (8).

(8) a. ?I find Miró's mosaic on the Rambles mediocre. b. I consider Miró's mosaic on the Rambles mediocre.

Corpus-based studies confirm this tendency: *find* rarely embeds explicitly evaluative predicates like *good*, *bad*, and *beautiful*, whereas *consider* readily does (Stojanovic and McNally, 2023). Further research using the COCA corpus indicates that moral predicates preferentially occur with *consider* over *find*, reinforcing the hypothesis that the subjectivity of moral judgments differs from that of personal taste. Moreover, when aesthetic and moral predicates do appear under *find*, they tend to be coerced into an experiential interpretation rather than a purely evaluative one.

## 3. Previous accounts and shortcomings

### 3.1. Kennedy and Willer (2022)

Starting from Stephenson (2007) and Sæbø (2009), most authors focused on *find*-verbs. In this section we will review one prominent account for the similarities and differences of *consider* and *find*, i.e. Kennedy and Willer (2022), which is based on the concept of *counterstance contingency*. At the core of Kennedy and Willer's analysis is the claim that subjective attitude verbs do not merely report beliefs about facts; rather, they involve judgments that remain unsettled even when factual information is fixed. This is captured through the notion of *counterstances*, which represent alternative information states that align in factual content but diverge in evaluative judgments.

In their formal analysis, Kennedy and Willer assume that an information state $i \subseteq W$ is a set of possible worlds, with the notation $i \models p$ indicating that, for every world $w$ in $i$, the proposition $p$ is true in $w$. Furthermore, an *issue* is defined as a partitioning of the set of all possible worlds $W$, dividing $W$ into disjoint subsets, each representing a different possible state of affairs. Against this background, Kennedy and Willer introduce a function $\kappa_c(a,p)$, termed the *counterstance selection function*. This function maps an individual $a$ (the attitude holder) and a proposition $p$ (the content of the belief) to a set of pairwise disjoint sets of information states. Such alternative information states, i.e. counterstances, preserve objective facts: they do not differ in their commitment to factual truth, but vary in evaluative judgments by applying different linguistic standards or norms. More formally, Kennedy and Willer define a counterstance space as in (9):

(9) **Definition: Counterstance Space**
a. $\kappa_c(a,p) = \{\pi_1, \pi_2, ..., \pi_n\}$
b. $\forall \pi, \pi' \in \kappa_c(a,p) : \pi \cap \pi' = \emptyset$

where each cell $\pi_i$ is a set of information states that share the same evaluative criteria. The set of all counterstance to some individual is then defined as in (10) (where $I$ is the set of information states, i.e., the powerset of W).

(10) $C_c(a) = \{i \in I : i \in \bigcup \kappa_c(a,p) \text{ for some } p \in I\}$

Crucially, to ensure that all counterstances agree on matters of fact, Kennedy and Willer also

posit the constraint in (11).

(11) **Constraint: Preservation of Matters of Fact**
Let $M$ be an issue that counts as a matter of fact in context $c$ and let $C_c(a)$ be the set of counterstances to $a$'s doxastic state. Then:
$\forall p \in M. \forall i \in C_c(a) : (\textsc{Dox}(a,w) \models p \leftrightarrow i \models p)$

In this framework, a proposition $p$ is *counterstance contingent* if its truth value varies across counterstances:

(12) **Definition: Counterstance Contingency**
$p$ is counterstance contingent wrt $\kappa_c(a,p)$ iff $\exists i, j \in \bigcup \kappa_c(a,p)$ such that $i \models p$ and $j \models \neg p$

Since $i$ and $j$ are counterstances (i.e., information states), this states that within the counterstance space, some counterstances affirm $p$ while others reject it. By contrast, a proposition $p$ is *radically counterstance contingent* if its truth remains unsettled even within individual cells of the counterstance space:

(13) **Definition: Radical Counterstance Contingency**
$\forall \pi \in \bigcup \kappa_c(a,p), \exists i, j \in \pi$ such that $i \models p$ and $j \models \neg p$

This is a stronger condition than counterstance contingency: not only do different counterstances disagree about $p$, but even within a single cell, there exist worlds where $p$ is true and worlds where $p$ is false.

Kennedy and Willer (2022) argue that *consider* and *find* both express doxastic attitudes but differ in the type of contingency they require. Their semantics is formulated as follows:

(14) a. $[\![a \text{ considers } p]\!]^{c,w}$ is defined only if $p$ is counterstance contingent with respect to $\kappa_c(a,p)$.
b. If defined, then $[\![a \text{ considers } p]\!]^{c,w} = 1$ iff $\text{Dox}(a,w) \subseteq [\![p]\!]^c$

This states that *consider* presupposes that $p$ is counterstance contingent and asserts that the subject believes $p$. The presupposition ensures that alternative information states exist where $p$ is not true.

(15) a. $[\![a \text{ finds } p]\!]^{c,w}$ is defined only if $p$ is *radically* counterstance contingent with respect to $\kappa_c(a,p)$.
b. If defined, then $[\![a \text{ finds } p]\!]^{c,w} = 1$ iff $\text{Dox}(a,w) \subseteq [\![p]\!]^c$

Unlike *consider*, *find* requires *radical* counterstance contingency. This means that $p$ must remain unsettled even within individual cells. With this formal machinery in place, Kennedy and Willer provide an explanation for the basic contrasts reviewed above. On one hand, objective clauses are ruled out from both *consider* and *find* reports because their presupposition of (radical) counterstance contingency requires that some counterstances differ with respect to the truth of the proposition expressed by the complement clause. However, all of an agent's counterstances, by design, agree on matters of fact, which results in the presupposition failing to be satisfied. For instance, the presupposition of counterstance contingency fails in (3), because all the information states in the counterstance space $\kappa_c(\text{Speaker}, \textit{two plus two equals four})$ entail that the proposition *two plus two equals four* is true in every counterstance.

By contrast, in (4a), some cells of $\kappa_c(\text{Speaker}, \textit{Mary is vegetarian})$ may disagree on whether Mary qualifies as *vegetarian*, despite agreeing on the factual aspects of her dietary habits. This discrepancy arises because different counterstances apply distinct evaluative criteria to determine the applicability of *vegetarian* to Mary, making the complement clause counterstance contingent and thus satisfying the presupposition of *consider*.

On the other hand, the contrast between *consider* and *find* in (4) is explained by the stronger presupposition imposed by *find*, namely *radical counterstance contingency*. This requirement dictates that even within a single cell of the partition $\kappa_c(\text{Speaker}, \textit{Mary is vegetarian})$, where all counterstances agree on criteria of applicability, there must be at least two doxastic alternatives differing as to whether Mary is indeed *vegetarian*. In other words, *find* necessitates not only the existence of alternative counterstances but also the persistence of disagreement despite fixed criteria of applicability for the predicate *vegetarian*. Since criteria of applicability remain stable within a given cell, the radical counterstance contingency requirement fails, making *find* infelicitous in such contexts. This restriction explains why *consider* is compatible with predicates like *vegetarian*, whereas *find* requires predicates like *tasty* or *beautiful*, whose variation persists even under a shared evaluative standard.

### 3.2. Novel observations

In this section, I provide two empirical observations from Italian which challenge existing accounts. First, *considerare* reports appear to be felicitous with rationale clauses, while plain belief reports with *credere* are not acceptable, as shown below.

(16) Per evitare di ridurre la produzione, ...
'in order to avoid reducing the production, ...'

(17) a. il dirigente considera le emissioni trascurabili. OK after (16)
'the manager considers the emissions negligible'
b. il dirigente crede che le emissioni sono trascurabili. # after (16)
'the manager believes that the emissions are negligible'

Second, in contexts in which it is made explicit that the subject is deliberately taking a stance based on some known facts, *considerare* reports are felictious while *credere* is unacceptable, such as (18):

(18) CONTEXT: John knows that Mary does not eat meat nor eggs, but eats dairy products. He is also aware that vegans do not eat dairy products. However, he feels that her consumption of dairy products is so small that she should count as vegan.
a. Gianni considera Maria vegana, perché mangia latticini solo una volta a settimana.
'Gianni considers Maria vegan, because she eats dairy products only once a week'
b. #Gianni crede che Maria sia vegana, perché mangia latticini solo una volta a settimana.
'Gianni believes that Maria is vegan, because she eats dairy products only once a week'

These observations are surprising given existing accounts, which assume that *consider* reports entail belief. For instance, in Kennedy and Willer's (2022) framework, a *consider* report that

*p* triggers the presupposition of counterstance contingency of *p*, i.e. that alternative counterstances exist where not-*p* holds. However, the asserted content is that the attitude subject holds *p* to be true within her doxastic state, just like a plain *belief* report. This predicts that whenever a *consider* report is acceptable, so a corresponding *belief* report should also be acceptable. Therefore, the unacceptability of (18b) and (17b) is unexpected.

One way to explain this asymmetry is by assuming that *credere* has its own requirements, which are not satisfied in the contexts above. For instance, it has been argued that *believe* is typically not felicitous with direct evidence (Stephenson 2007b), and one may wonder if something similar could explain the patterns in (17)/(18). However, no such incompatibility arises here: the relevant information (about the amount of emissions in (17), or about the Maria's dietary habits in (18)) could have been acquired through indirect sources, such as hearsay.

Another possible explanation is to assume that *credere p* requires that *p* is treated as a matter of fact (see (11)), hence *not* counterstance contingent. Although this approach might be on the right track and could be easily implemented, it would require treating the matter of fact requirement for *credere* as an additional presupposition, weakening a theory like Kennedy and Willer's (2022). Furthermore, this would impose a greater burden in determining whether a proposition p counts as a matter of fact in each context, since subjective propositions are typically acceptable in the complement of *credere*.

(19) Maria crede che la torta sia squisita.
'Maria believes that the cake is delicious'

Instead, I would like to propose that the observed acceptability patterns arise naturally from the fact that the domain of quantification of *considerare* might be a subset of the set of *epistemic* alternatives–specifically, the set of epistemic alternatives which are *deliberately chosen* as optimal (in a sense which will be better defined below) according to the attitude subject. Since epistemic alternatives are a subset of doxastic alternatives, this implies that, in asserting *a considera p*, there might be *credere*-worlds in which *p* is not true, which would explain the asymmetry observed in (17)/(18). Before providing a more detailed description of this proposal, in the following section I will review a set of tests which will suggest that, in fact, *considerare* reports are closely related to intentionality.

## 4. Intention in attitudes

### 4.1. The RESP relation: intention in grammar

According to Farkas (1988), sentential modification by rationale clauses is one of a set of linguistic phenomena whose felicity depends on the described event being the result of the intentional action of an individual. Indeed, some events may be seen as the result of an intentional action, whereas others cannot. The event described in (20), for instance, is seen as brought about by the individual denoted by the DP in subject position, i.e., John. On the contrary, (21) describe an event which cannot be seen as occurring in virtue of some intentional action by Mary:

(20) John cooked the meal.

(21) Mary resembles her mother.

Farkas then defines a distinctive responsibility relation, RESP(i,s), holding between an individual i (the Initiator) and a situation or event s "just in case i brings s about, i.e., just in case s is the result of some act performed by i with the intention of bringing s about" (Farkas 1988:36). Accordingly, a situation that satisfies this relation, for some individual, is referred to as an intentional situation. As we mentioned above, the first linguistic phenomenon sensitive to the RESP relation is the distribution of rationale clauses. In particular, as the purpose expressed by this kind of clause is understood to be that of its Initiator, rationale clauses appear to be licensed only when the RESP relation holds between some individual and the event described by the main clause, as in (22). The sentences in (23), on the other hand, are infelicitous because they do not describe an intentional situation and, consequently, there is no Initiator to which the purpose can be attributed. Notice that (22b) is acceptable even though the Initiator is not explicitly expressed in the sentence: the purpose of attracting customers can be attributed to whoever put the sign. This highlights that the Initiator does not need to be one of the arguments of the main verb.

(22) a. John read the book in order to impress Mary. (from Farkas, 1988)
b. The shopwindow has a big sale sign in it in order to attract customers.

(23) a. #John resembles his father in order to annoy his grandmother.
b. #The weather has been good lately in order to please the tourists.

Another linguistic phenomenon that is sensitive to the RESP relation is the imperative construction. Imperatives are typically used by a speaker to issue an order or request, directing the addressee to bring about a particular event (see Kaufmann 2011; Condoravdi and Lauer 2012; Zanuttini et al. 2012). Crucially, for a VP to appear in an imperative sentence, it is not enough that the addressee serves as the grammatical subject of the VP—the addressee must also be the Initiator of an event in which they perform the action described by the VP. In other words, the imperative requires that the addressee has the capacity to intentionally bring about an event of their VP-ing, as in (24). If this condition is not met, the imperative becomes infelicitous (25).

(24) a. Read the book!
b. Be polite!

(25) a. #Resemble your father!
b. #Be tall!

Control constructions are also claimed by Farkas (1988) to involve RESP. Specifically, in object control (26a), the Initiator of the event denoted by the complement clause is understood to be the individual denoted by the DP in object position. Similarly, in subject control constructions (26b), the Initiator must be the matrix subject. In both cases, however, unacceptability arises if the complement clause does not denote an intentional situation, as in (27a) and (27b).

(26) a. John promised (Mary) to read the book.
b. John persuaded Mary to read the book.

(27) a. #John promised (Mary) to be tall.
b. #John persuaded Mary to resemble her father.

Finally, sentential modification with the adverb *intentionally* is also claimed to be related to RESP. According to Farkas (1988), its contribution is precisely to establish that the RESP

relation holds between the individual denoted by the subject and the event described by the (unmodified) sentence, e.g., (28). Again, this predicts the unacceptability of modification with *intentionally* when the sentence describes an event which cannot be intentional, as in (29a) (see also Jackendoff, 1972). Notice, however, that it also explains why sentences describing events which are understood exclusively as intentional are degraded with *intentionally*, as in (29b): since the predicate already encodes intentionality, the contribution of the adverb is redundant.

(28) Mary dropped the glass intentionally.

(29) a. #John resembles his father intentionally.
b. #John cooked the meal intentionally.

Combined together, these tests provide a crucial diagnostic for intentionality in language, specifically determining whether the situations described by particular sentences may, may not, or must be interpreted as intentional and who should be interpreted as the Initiator. However, further refinements can be made by considering a broader set of linguistic patterns that impose specific requirements about volitionality and responsibility. The behavior of *stupid* and *smart* adjectives with infinitivals offers additional distinctions that allow for a more fine-grained classification.

As discussed by Rivière (1983), Wilkinson (1970, 1976), and Barker (2002), a class of adjectives, including *stupid*, *smart* and *lucky*, can select infinitival complements.

(30) Mary was lucky to be born in summer.

(31) John was stupid/smart to sell his house.

Interestingly, these constructions project several presuppositions (Barker, 2002). The first one is the truth of the proposition expressed by the infinitival clause (*modulo* the QUD, see Tonhauser et al. 2020). More relevant to our argument are the entailments regarding the sentience of the subject and her intentional involvement with respect to the event described by the complement clause. Specifically, Barker (2002) argues that adjectives of the *lucky* subclass only require the subject to be sentient, that is, capable of intentional actions but not (necessarily) responsible for the event described by the infinitival clause, as (30) shows. *Stupid* and *smart* adjectives, instead, entail some volitional entailment on the part of the subject: Barker argues that, although both subclasses seem to presuppose Farkas' (1988) RESP relation, this is true only for *smart* adjectives. The reason for this distinction is that, given a situation *s*, RESP conceives the Initiator as 'acting with the intention of bringing *s* about' (recall the definition above), but the subject of a *stupid*+infinitive construction is not necessarily understood as acting with such an intention, as shown in (32) (from Rivière 1983):

(32) John was stupid to fall into that ditch.

This finer-grained distinction motivates for Barker two different requirements. *Stupid* adjectives would be restricted by the weaker requirement of Discretion, according to which 'it is within the power of the subject to choose to bring about the situation described by the infinitive'. *Smart* adjectives, on the other hand, would obey, in addition to Discretion, a stronger requirement of Intentionality, apparently equivalent to RESP: 'the subject intends for the situation described by the infinitive to come about'.

4.2. Diagnosing intentionality in attitudes

In this section, I will use the diagnostics from Farkas (1988) and Barker (2002) to provide novel data from Italian, showing that different attitude verbs, and in particular different SAVs, exhibit asymmetries with regards to those linguistic environments. I will take this as evidence that Italian *considerare* ('consider') is inherently intentional, contrary to *trovare* ('find') and *credere* ('believe'). Such difference, I will argue, motivates a rethinking about the different kinds of subjectivity related to the two verbs. First of all, let us consider rationale clauses again. As we saw earlier, they are not acceptable when the main clause is a *credere* report, while they are perfectly fine with *considerare*. Interestingly, they are also infelicitous with *trovare* reports. Notice that all sentences in (34) are fine in their unmodified form. This shows that, with *considerare*, the event described may qualify as an intentional action.

(33) Per evitare di ridurre la produzione, ...
'in order to avoid reducing the production, ...'

(34) a. il dirigente considera le emissioni trascurabili. OK after (33)
'the manager considers the emissions negligible'
b. il dirigente trova le emissioni trascurabili. # after (33)
'the manager finds the emissions negligible.
c. il dirigente crede che le emissioni sono trascurabili. # after (33)
'the manager believes that the emissions are negligible'

Second, both *credere* and *trovare* are not acceptable with imperatives, while *considerare* is fine (35). This confirms that a *considerare* event may qualify as intentional action, with its subject being the Initiator.

(35) a. Considera le emissioni trascurabili!
consider-IMP the emissions negligible
'Consider the emissions negligible!'
b. #Trova le emissioni trascurabili!
find-IMP the emissions negligible
'Find the emissions negligible!'
c. #Credi che le emissioni sono trascurabili!
believe-IMP that the emissions be-IND negligible
'Believe that the emissions are negligible!'

Third, sentential modification with *intenzionalmente* ('intentionally') is unacceptable with *trovare* and *credere*, but *considerare* reports are also considerably degraded. Recall from the previous section, however, that unacceptability with *intentionally* may also spur from redundancy. Therefore, combining this evidence with the previous ones, we are led to believe that intentionality is not just compatible with *considerare*, but it is hardwired in its meaning.

(36) a. ??Gianni considera intenzionalmente le emissioni trascurabili.
'Gianni considers the emissions negligible'
b. #Gianni trova intenzionalmente le emissioni trascurabili.
'Gianni finds the emissions negligible'
c. #Gianni crede intenzionalmente che le emissioni siano trascurabili.
'Gianni believes that the emissions are negligible'

Control constructions seem to go somewhat against the trend: they are fine with both *considerare* and *credere*, and only unacceptable with *trovare*, as shown in (37). On one hand, this pattern confirms the intentionality of *considerare*, on the other, it suggests that *credere*, contrary to what has emerged so far, may also encode some intentional involvement.

(37) a. Il dirigente ha convinto i dipendenti a considerare le emissioni trascurabili.
'the manager persuaded the employees to consider the emissions negligible'
b. #Il dirigente ha convinto i dipendenti a trovare le emissioni trascurabili.
'the manager persuaded the employees to find the emissions negligible'
c. Il dirigente ha convinto i dipendenti a credere che le emissioni fossero trascurabili.
'the manager persuaded the employees to believe that the emissions are negligible'

Let us now consider embedding under *stupid* and *smart* adjectives. The contrasts in (137) show three different patterns: *considerare* is fine with both classes of adjectives, *trovare* with none, and *credere* is only acceptable with *stupido* ('stupid').

(38) a. Il dirigente è stato stupido/furbo a considerare le emissioni trascurabili.
'the manager was stupid/sly to consider the emissions negligible'
b. Il dirigente è stato #stupido/#furbo a trovare le emissioni trascurabili.
'the manager was stupid/sly to find the emissions negligible'
c. Il dirigente è stato stupido/#furbo a credere che le emissioni sono trascurabili.
'the manager was stupid/sly to believe that the emissions are negligible'

What this means, following Barker (2002), is that a *considerare* report satisfies both Discretion and Intentionality (i.e., RESP), *credere* satisfies only Discretion, and *trovare* neither of them (presumably, just Sentience).

Let us take stock. The linguistic diagnostics applied in this section revealed a systematic asymmetry among *considerare* ('consider'), *trovare* ('find'), and *credere* ('believe'), supporting the claim that *considerare* is inherently intentional, while the other two verbs are not. The evidence from rationale clauses, imperatives, and modification with *intenzionalmente* suggests that *considerare* describes an action that an agent deliberately undertakes, thus aligning with the RESP relation (Farkas 1988). In contrast, *trovare* and *credere* fail these tests, indicating that they do not encode intentionality in the same way. At the same time, the *stupid*/*smart* adjective test further sharpens this distinction: *considerare* is compatible with both evaluative adjectives, *credere* only with *stupido*, and *trovare* with neither. Following Barker (2002), this distribution suggests that *considerare* satisfies both Discretion and Intentionality, *credere* satisfies only Discretion, and *trovare* meets neither of these conditions, presumably requiring only Sentience. Interestingly enough, the pattern observed with *stupid* adjectives parallels the one seen with control constructions like (37), namely acceptability with *considerare* and *credere* on one hand, and unacceptability with *trovare* on the other. We might have reason to conclude, then, that the control diagnostic is really a diagnostic for Discretion, and not for full Intentionality. Taken together, these findings call for a finer-grained characterization of subjectivity in attitude reports.

Before moving on, a methodological note. The battery of linguistic tests adopted here proved

to be a valuable tool for diagnosing fine-grained distinctions in intentionality: its systematic application allowed us to capture subtle semantic differences among mental attitude verbs that would have otherwise gone unnoticed. At the same time, Barker's (2002) distinction between *stupid* and *smart* adjectives can be clearly appreciated in the empirical domain under consideration. Indeed, Barker's original distinction was grounded in theoretical considerations, without providing concrete minimal pairs to demonstrate its descriptive usefulness. The analysis conducted above fills this gap by identifying clear empirical contrasts that validate the distinction: the compatibility of *credere* with *stupid* adjectives but not with *smart* ones. This not only supports Barker's theoretical claims but also provides a new avenue for exploring the interplay between evaluative predicates and intentionality in natural language.

## 5. Proposal

### 5.1. Intention and metalinguistic choices

How does this reconcile with previous observations about the subjectivity of SAV reports? In line with prior analyses of SAVs (Fleisher, 2013a; Umbach, 2016b; Kennedy and Willer, 2016, 2022), I propose that what licenses intentionality in *considerare* reports is the possibility for the subject to arbitrarily choose the metalinguistic criteria for the embedded judgment. This aligns with a broader perspective on subjectivity, which sees evaluative and vague predicates as sites of underdetermination, requiring speakers to make discretionary choices about their application Kennedy (1997); Barker (2002); MacFarlane (2020). A fundamental observation in theories of vagueness is that the meaning of certain expressions—particularly vague predicates—is not fixed once and for all. Instead, speakers must negotiate and establish criteria for their applicability Barker (2013); MacFarlane (2020). Kennedy and Willer (2022) extend this idea to subjective attitude verbs, arguing that subjective judgments are not merely a matter of epistemic uncertainty but also involve practical decisions about linguistic practice. Specifically, they propose that the subjective propositions embedded under verbs like *considerare* depend on "legitimate decisions about linguistic practice in the presence of semantic and pragmatic underdetermination" (Kennedy and Willer 2022: 1412–1413). To formalize this, Kennedy and Willer (2022) introduce the notion of counterstance space, a partitioned set of information states where each cell contains a set of propositions that agree on matters of fact but differ in metalinguistic decisions. In *considerare* reports, the embedded proposition corresponds to one of these cells, meaning that it is counterstance-contingent relative to the entire counterstance space. This means that, when a speaker utters a *considerare* report, they are not simply conveying a belief about the world but also endorsing a specific metalinguistic stance on the interpretation of the embedded predicate. Building on this, I suggest that the RESP relation—defined by Farkas (1988) as the relation between an individual and an event that they intentionally bring about—provides a useful framework for capturing the role of intentionality in metalinguistic decisions. Adapting insights from Barker (2002), I propose that RESP identifies the individual who (i) has the discretionary authority to set metalinguistic criteria in one way or another (discretion) and (ii) actively engages in doing so (intentionality). This explains why *considerare*, unlike *credere* and *trovare*, supports rationale clauses, imperatives, and intentional adverbs—linguistic contexts that presuppose an agent's capacity to exercise discretion and act intentionally. In summary, *considerare* reports encode a kind of subjectivity that involves an explicit commitment to a particular way of resolving semantic underdetermination. By contrast, *credere* and *trovare* reports lack such intentional component, as they do not entail

the subject's active role in shaping the standards of evaluation.

### 5.2. A decision-theoretic approach to *considerare*

In this section, I develop a formal account of *considerare*, building on a degree semantics framework for vagueness (Kennedy 1997) and drawing inspiration from Cariani et al. (2013) decision-theoretic approach to deliberative modality. The goal is to capture the interaction between epistemic access, discretionary evaluation, and intentionality, distinguishing *considerare* from both *credere* and *trovare*. A crucial aspect of this analysis is the assumption that *considerare* does not merely report a belief but involves an active decision about the criteria by which the embedded predicate is applied to its subject. This aligns with Kennedy and Willer's (2022) counterstance model but pushes it further: rather than treating counterstance contingency as a property of the discourse context, I argue that it is ultimately determined by the attitude subject, who selects evaluative criteria based on her epistemic state, her available decisions and her normative priorities. To illustrate how the system works, I will take the sentence in (39):

(39) Gianni considera le emissioni trascurabili.
'The manager considers the emissions negligible'

First of all, I assume a standard degree semantics for vague predicates (Kennedy 1997, 2007), where relative gradable adjectives like *trascurabile* ('negligible') in the positive form denote relations between degree of an entity (e.g., emissions) on a given scale (e.g., amount) and a context-sensitive threshold (e.g., of negligibility) on that scale. Therefore, in a given world $w$, the truth of a proposition like *the emissions are negligible* depends on whether the measured amount of emissions falls below this threshold:

(40) $negligible(x) = \lambda x.\mathbf{amount}(x) \leq \mathbf{s}(negligible)$

I also assume that *considerare* operates within a Kratzer-style modal framework Kratzer (1981), where the epistemic modal base $f$ restricts the domain of accessible worlds. Following Hacquard (2010), I model $f$ as a function that maps an event with content to the set of worlds compatible with the information associated with that content. For instance, if the manager knows that the company's emissions amount to 50 $KtCO_2$-eq/yr, then the epistemic modal base constrains possible worlds to those where this fact holds:

(41) $\bigcap f(e) \subseteq \{w' \in W | \mathbf{amount}_{w'}(emissions) = 50\}$

This ensures that *considerare* operates only within epistemically accessible possibilities, ruling out worlds where the subject's factual knowledge differs. A core feature of *considerare* is that it introduces an element of discretionary choice, which we model through a decision problem $\delta$ Cariani et al. (2013). Unlike epistemic predicates like *credere*, which simply track belief, *considerare* involves deciding which standard applies, even when the factual information is fixed. To model this, I define $\delta$ as a partition over the set of worlds $W$, representing the issue raised by the complement clause. Given that *trascurabile* is a relative gradable adjective, the decision problem partitions worlds according to different possible relations between the amount of emissions and the threshold:

(42) $\delta(e) = \{\mathbf{amount}(emissions) \leqslant \mathbf{s}([\![negligible]\!]), \mathbf{amount}(emissions) > \mathbf{s}([\![negligible]\!])\}$

The decision problem abstracts away from any specifications about the amount of emissions

and chosen standard: it just presents a partition between worlds in which the amount is equal or below with respect to the given standard, and worlds in which the amount of emissions is above the standard. The decision is then integrated with the available knowledge in the filtered problem $[\delta|f]$ Cariani et al. (2013):

(43) $[\delta|f](e) = \{\textbf{amount}(\textit{emissions}) \leqslant \textbf{s}(\textit{negligible}) \cap \textbf{amount}(\textit{emissions}) = 50,$
$\textbf{amount}(\textit{emissions}) > \textbf{s}(\textit{negligible}) \cap \textbf{amount}(\textit{emissions}) = 50)\} =$
$= \{\textbf{s}(\textit{negligible}) \geqslant 50 \cap \textbf{amount}(\textit{emissions}) = 50,$
$\textbf{s}(\textit{negligible}) < 50 \cap \textbf{amount}(\textit{emissions}) = 50\}$

Each cell in this partition corresponds to a metalinguistic choice: adopting a threshold where 50 $KtCO_2$-eq/yr counts as negligible or adopting one where it does not. To illustrate, consider a case where the manager, in assessing whether emissions are negligible, is faced with two competing perspectives. One is an environmental standard, where *negligible* means emissions below 10 $KtCO_2$-eq/yr. The other is a corporate standard, where negligible means emissions below 50 $KtCO_2$-eq/yr. Since his epistemic modal base already tells him the emissions amount to 50 Kt, the choice the manager makes is not about the emissions themselves but about which evaluative standard he adopts. I take the filtered decision problem as a parallel of Kennedy and Willer's (2022) counterstance space, in the sense that different cells agree on matters of fact (in virtue of the epistemic modal base), but differ on (salient) matters of discretion, such as the choice of standards. An important difference, however, is that, in Kennedy and Willer's system, the set of doxastic alternatives, i.e. $\textsc{Dox}(a,w)$, is a *subset* of the counterstance space, whereas in the present decision framwork, the set of doxastic alternatives is a *superset* of the set of decision cells, i.e., the epistemic modal base (since one can have false beliefs): concretely, this means that all of the standards are believed possible and the doxastic state is not committed to any of them.

So, how is the metalinguistic decision determined? In addition to the epistemic base and decision problem, I propose that *considerare* also depends on an ordering source $g$ (see Kratzer, 1981), which encodes the subject's goals, norms, or preferences. Inspired by Cariani et al. (2013), who argue that deliberative *ought* selects the cell of the filtered decision problem where the ordering source propositions are satisfied in *all* of its worlds, I propose that *considerare* behaves in a similar way: it ranks standards according to the subject's priorities. For example, suppose the manager prioritizes maximizing company profits over environmental concerns. Then, his ordering source favors standards that classify emissions as negligible whenever possible:

(44) $g$(e)={production is not reduced}

Given that lowering emissions would require reducing production, we assume that higher threshold values for negligible are ranked more favorably. Following the kratzerian semantics for modality, we let the proposition(s) in the ordering source produce a ranking over possible worlds with different standards:

(45) $(\textbf{s}(\textit{negligible}) < 50) <_{f,\delta,g} (\textbf{s}(\textit{negligible}) \geqslant 50)$

This ranking ensures that the world where 50 Kt emissions count as negligible is preferred over the world where they do not. by We then define a choice function O, which returns the top-ranked alternative:

(46) $O(f,\delta,g,e)$=**s**(negligible)$\geqslant 50$

Finally, we define *considerare* as quantifying over the best worlds selected by O, resulting in the denotation in (47):

(47) $[\![considerare]\!]^c = \lambda\phi.\lambda e.\lambda x : consider(e) \wedge Agent(e,manager) \wedge$
$\forall w' \in O(f,\delta,g,e).[[\![\phi]\!]^{c,w'}]$

This captures the deliberative nature of *considerare*: it does not simply attribute belief, but rather reports a decision-based classification, influenced by factual knowledge ($f$), available options ($\delta$), and subjective priorities ($g$). Notice that, since the event has an agent (i.e., the attitude holder), all the parameters anchored to the event will be indirectly related to the attitude holder. Under this analysis, the sentence in (39) will be given the following denotation:

(48) $[\![(39)]\!]^{c,w} = \exists e : consider(e) \wedge Agent(e,manager) \wedge$
$\forall w' \in O(f,\delta,g,e).[\mathbf{s}_{w'}(negligible) \geqslant 50 \cap \mathbf{amount}_{w'}(emissions) = 50]$

5.3. Predictions

Let us see how the framework sketched above may capture both the basic observations and the novel ones, focusing on the contrasts between *credere* and *considerare*. First of all, as mentioned earlier, we can conceive of the filtered decision problem $[\delta|f]$ as roughly corresponding to Kennedy and Willer's (2022) counterstance space. Therefore, we can easily explain the ban of objective propositions by appealing to something similar to the presupposition of counterstance contingency. In fact, this would come out quite naturally in a deliberative reframing of *considerare*, as it would amount to requiring that $[\delta|f]$ models a non-trivial choice, i.e., that it has at least two propositions which can be chosen. So, while in (49a) there will be a choice between different criteria for vegetarianism, a simple arithmetical sum will not leave space for any decision (49b).

(49) a. Gianni considera Maria vegetariana.
'Gianni considers Maria vegetarian'
b. # Gianni considera la somma di due più due uguale a quattro.
'Gianni considers the sum of two plus two equal to four'

The contrast between *credere* and *considerare* with respect to the acceptability of rationale clauses is easily explained by the fact that *considerare* is sensitive to an ordering source. Assuming that rationale clauses modify the ordering source $g$ by updating it with the expressed proposition (Sæbø, 2001; Huitink, 2005; Nissenbaum, 2005), rationale clause modification non-trivially affects the content of *considerare* reports, since different purposes could motivate the choice of different standards (e.g., environmental purposes vs. profit). This contrasts with a a plain *credere* report, where the truth-value of the embedded proposition is the same across all doxastic alternatives: in this case, a different ordering source would not create any ranking among worlds, since the doxastic alternatives already agree on $p$.

Similarly, in a context like (50), where the subject is deliberately 'taking a leap' from the facts (Kennedy and Willer, 2022), making a metalinguistic choice about the criteria, *credere* is not acceptable because it would entail that all of the doxastic alternatives agree on whether Maria is vegan and that no choice was involved.

(50) CONTEXT: John knows that Mary does not eat meat nor eggs, but eats dairy products. He is also aware that vegans do not eat dairy products. However, he feels that her consumption of dairy products is so small that she should count as vegan.

a. Gianni considera Maria vegana, perché mangia latticini solo una volta a settimana.
'Gianni considers Maria vegan, because she eats dairy products only once a week'

b. #Gianni crede che Maria è vegana, perché mangia latticini solo una volta a settimana.
'Gianni believes that Maria is vegan, because she eats dairy products only once a week'

Before concluding, it is worth noticing that the present account easily handles cases like (51), also discussed by Kennedy and Willer (2022):

(51) The ancient Greeks considered stars holes in the sky.

As Kennedy and Willer note, we naturally take (51) as "signaling that there were some observational facts that the ancient Greeks interpreted in a distinct way, [...]. They took the way the stars looked at night to be sufficient to conclude that they are holes in the sky; we can see the stars the same way and yet draw the opposing conclusion" (Kennedy and Willer, 2022: 1439). Cases like this pose a problem for previous accounts because whether stars are holes or not should count as a matter of fact, and therefore the truth on this issue should be held constant across all counterstances. While Kennedy and Willer (2022) are able to accomodate such cases adopting a flexible view of what constitutes a pragmatic stance and what should be the relevant set of facts, the account proposed here explains it naturally if we observe that here the *consider* worlds are a subset of an *epistemic* modal base. Consequently, in uttering (51), we are attributing to the ancient Greeks knowledge of certain facts, perhaps pertaining to the appearance of stars in the sky, and a *decision* to interpret those facts in a certain way. Formally, we could take the epistemic modal base to contain a proposition, which we assume was known by the ancient Greeks, about how stars appear to the naked eye, something along the lines of (52).

(52) $\bigcap f(e) \subseteq \{w' \in W | \text{stars appear as bright, twinkling points to the naked eye in w'}\}$

We might then attribute to ancient Greeks a decision problem like (53), which, combined with the epistemic modal background, results in (54):

(53) $\delta(e) = \{\text{stars are holes in the sky, stars are not holes in the sky}\}$

(54) $[\delta|f](e) =$
$\{\text{stars appear as bright, twinkling points to the naked eye} \cap \text{ stars are holes in the sky,}$
$\text{stars appear as bright, twinkling points to the naked eye} \cap \text{stars are not holes in the sky}\}$

The contingency of the proposition *stars are holes in the sky* across the filtered decision problem, together with some suitable ordering source proposition triggering the choice, would suffice to justify the acceptability of *consider* in (51) in the framework proposed here. Although it may initially seem counterintuitive to treat such a belief as the result of a choice, we might argue that, in hindsight, it is natural for 21st-century humans to attribute to ancient people this kind of decision. In fact, this would suggest that they *intentionally* used certain facts to support a particular view of the universe, even though those people believed their conclusions logically

followed from their observations. After all, if we now know that stars are not, in fact, holes in the sky, then it means that the appearance was not sufficient evidence for their belief, even though it might have been a reasonable explanation at the time. Notice, in fact, that it is the speaker who, ultimately, "must take the attributee's belief to be based on information that leaves the case underdetermined" (Kennedy and Willer, 2022: 1422).

## 6. Conclusion

This paper has explored the distinctive semantic properties of the Italian verb *considerare* within the broader landscape of propositional attitudes and, in particular, SAVs. Through a detailed comparison with *credere* ('believe') and *trovare* ('find'), it has been shown that *considerare* uniquely combines evaluative subjectivity with intentionality. Unlike *trovare* and *credere*, which fail to accommodate metalinguistic choices, *considerare* allows for a flexible, discretionary evaluation that reflects the agent's deliberate stance. This intentional component aligns *considerare* with verbs that encode agentive responsibility, thus contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of subjectivity in language.

The linguistic diagnostics applied throughout this paper—such as the compatibility with rationale clauses, imperatives, and intentional adverbs—demonstrate that *considerare* inherently involves an evaluative judgment that is both subjective and intentional. This finding challenges traditional views of *considerare* as a purely doxastic verb, suggesting that its semantics should be reconsidered in light of its broader role in subjective discourse. By integrating a decision-theoretic model into the analysis, the paper has provided a formal framework for understanding how *considerare* involves the interaction of an epistemic component and evaluative discretion, distinguishing it from other attitude verbs.

This work opens up new avenues for future research on the role of intentionality in subjective language, particularly in relation to the semantics of attitude verbs. Further empirical and theoretical investigations are needed to refine the proposed model and explore its implications for other languages and constructions.

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