Modal particles in Italian

Adverbs of illocutionary modification and sociolinguistic variation

Marco Favaro

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Lisbon, summer 2023

1 Introduction

1.1 Research background

Linguistic interactions flourish on a myriad of grounds and through a multitude of performers. Numerous elements compose the countless situations in which interactions take place and are formed. Along with the language materials (sounds, words, syntactic structures and grammatical rules), linguistic interactions are molded by social, cultural and cognitive factors – that is, extralinguistic factors. Together, these factors compose the *context* that hosts and shapes them.

Context is a basic notion of pragmatics, which – according to mainstream definitions – studies language use in context as well as how context contributes to the meaning of linguistic expressions. Pragmatics explains how the transmission of meaning depends not only on the linguistic knowledge (grammar and lexicon) of speakers and addressees, but also on what surrounds an utterance, namely, context. Even though, from time to time, socio-cultural factors can also be considered, pragmatics often makes use of a narrower notion of context. From this perspective, context indicates a specifically *mental landscape*, where different mental entities meet and coexist. Theories of mind, theories of oneself and others, memories of past and future interactions, the communicative intent of the speaker, the expectations of the hearer, any pre-existing knowledge about those involved, and any pre-existing knowledge about the world.

Fundamentally, languages display linguistic expressions that explicitly refer to this complex tangle of mental entities. The research presented in this volume is rooted in a pragmatic perspective on the negotiation of meaning. It studies linguistic expressions which explicitly code a connection between utterances and mental landscapes – to wit, between speech acts and the contexts of their performance. Drawing on Italian data – both from the standard and regional varieties – I will examine the properties and the behavior of a set of adverbs variously modifying the speech acts in which they appear. Among other functions, they specify the way a speech act should be interpreted in the context of interaction, modify its illocutionary force, and allow the speaker (and the hearer) to refer to presupposed/inferred meanings active in the common ground and shared during interactions.

1.2 Research directions

Dealing with linguistic expressions that code interactional functions, the present work fits into the research field on pragmatic markers, which has been developing and growing for the last forty years and is now represented by many different theoretical and empirical approaches. The research presented in this volume does not fully line up with any specific theoretical framework: rather, it touches upon different aspects of linguistic theory that might be useful to describe the elements under investigation and their functions. Specifically, it relies upon three main theoretical sources to formulate hypotheses on the properties and the behavior of the elements under investigation: firstly, Hansen's (2008, 2012) works on the semantics/pragmatics interface; secondly, Waltereit's (2001, 2006) works on the functions of modal particles (which in turn is rooted in speech act theory); and finally, the theoretical framework developed by Functional Discourse Grammar (Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008) for what concerns illocutionary modification and the layered structure of grammatical categories. Reference to these sources will allow me to spell out the research directions of the present work: (i) studying the different uses of a set of Italian adverbs and distinguishing content-level uses from context-level uses; (ii) examining in detail specific uses of adverbs at the speech-act level and the features of illocutionary modification as a grammatical category; (iii) investigating the relationship between different uses of the same item and the distribution of functions in the grammatical system. Further reference to issues concerning semantic change and sociolinguistic variation complete the framework adopted here. The combination of these different aspects also suggests new directions in the theoretical treatment of modal particles.

Nonetheless, the objectives of the present research are empirical rather than theoretical. The main goal of this study is to provide a description of modal uses of a set of Italian adverbs: among others, I will discuss specific uses of *pure* 'also', *anche* 'also', *solo* 'only', and *un po'* 'a bit'. A terminological note should be made here. I will use different labels to refer to the elements under investigation, depending on what specific aspect I want to highlight. The labels *modal particles* and *modal-particle-like elements* refer to the adverbs under investigation as part of a specific semantic/pragmatic class of elements. The first label is the most common in linguistic research and therefore the one that creates less confusion (because of this, it also appears in the title of this book). The second is sometimes used throughout the volume to highlight that some languages (including Italian) don't display clear paradigms of modal particles but rather adverbs (and other elements) that in specific contexts of use display functions similar to those of modal particles. The labels *modal uses/functions* and *illocutive uses/functions* re-

fer to the semantic and pragmatic properties of the adverbs under investigation in specific contexts of use. The first clearly redirects to the label *modal particles* but it can be misleading since one could interpret it as referring to the grammatical domain of *modality* (which includes the expression of epistemic modality and related categories, which is only marginally relevant for modal particle research). For this reason, I sometimes use the labels *illocutive uses/functions of adverbs*. These are also somewhat problematic, since every speech act has an illocutionary force, which is better understood as the global property of an utterance and not specific to some of its components. Strictly speaking, there are no *illocutive uses of adverbs*. In this sense, these labels should be interpreted as referring to those contexts of use where the specific adverbs express functions related to the modification of a speech act and its illocutionary force.

With reference to Italian, the issues mentioned so far have not yet been (thoroughly) touched upon by previous research. In this respect, the research directions revolve around the following questions: What are modal uses of adverbs in Italian? How can their properties and functions be described? What are their contexts of use? Dealing with such questions, a further research direction has proven to be inevitable, namely the issue of sociolinguistic variation – since some modal uses can only be found in certain varieties of Italian.

To summarize, the goals of the present research are:

- describing the modal uses of a set of Italian adverbs in terms of semantic features and pragmatic functions
- describing the modal uses of a set of Italian adverbs in terms of contexts of use (the kind of speech acts and conversational routines in which they appear)
- connecting this description to the issue of polyfunctionality and meaning description at the semantics/pragmatics interface
- connecting this description to issues of semantic change
- connecting this description to issues of language variation, with a focus on regional varieties of Italian

1.3 Structure of this book

Overall, this research aims at being the first full-length study on modal uses of adverbs in Italian. It consists of two parts: the first part offers a topic-based literature review and sets out the theoretical framework. The second part presents

two case studies on modal uses of adverbs in standard Italian and two case studies on modal uses of adverbs in regional varieties of Italian. In this way, the research features four case studies: although they share a common theoretical framework and similar research methods, they are somewhat independent of each other. Nevertheless, cross-referencing between them ensures that the work is coherent.

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 briefly discusses previous work on pragmatic markers and the place of modal particles in this field of research. Chapter 3 examines modal particles more closely: after introducing three key concepts of pragmatics (speech acts, implicatures and presuppositions), it sets out the functions of modal particles and discusses the grammatical category of illocutionary modification. Chapter 4 examines the issue of how to deal with meaning at the semantics/pragmatics interface and links it to issues of language change (semantic change and reanalysis) and language variation (conventionalization of new functions and sociolinguistic perspectives on pragmatic phenomena).

Opening the second part, Chapter 5 paves the way for the empirical case studies, discussing previous work on modal particles in Italian as well as the sociolinguistic background necessary for describing these elements, and presenting the research methods employed (corpus analysis and sociolinguistic questionnaires). Chapter 6 deals with modal uses of additive focus adverbs: *pure* and *anche*, both meaning 'also'. Chapter 7 deals with modal uses of the quantifier/degree adverb *un po'* 'a bit'. Chapter 8 deals with modal uses of the exclusive focus adverb *solo* 'only', with a focus on the regional variety of Italian spoken in Piedmont (a region in the north-west of Italy). Chapter 9 deals with the broader distribution of modal uses of adverbs in regional varieties of Italian, with a focus on northern varieties. A concluding chapter closes the work, summing up the main findings, highlighting strong and weak points, and suggesting future research directions.

2 Pragmatic markers

2.1 What are pragmatic markers?

In his textbook on pragmatics, Levinson (1983) – discussing discourse deixis – mentions that

> there are many words and phrases in English, and no doubt most languages, that indicate the relationship between an utterance and the prior discourse. Examples are utterance-initial usages of *but, therefore, in conclusion, to the contrary, still, however, anyway, well, besides, actually, all in all, so, after all,* and so on. It is generally conceded that such words have at least a component of meaning that resists truth-conditional treatment. What they seem to do is indicate, often in very complex ways, just how the utterance that contains them is a response to, or a continuation of, some portion of the prior discourse. We still await proper studies of these terms [...] (Levinson 1983: 87–88)

Levinson's choice of introducing these items when discussing discourse deixis says something about the absence at that time of an autonomous research field dedicated to these items.[1] Fifteen years after Levinson's claim that "we still await proper studies of these terms", the research on what have been called in the meantime *pragmatic markers* (PMs) or *discourse markers* (DMs)[2] was defined "a growth industry in linguistics" by Fraser (1999: 932). Some years later – in the introduction of an edited volume that represents a key publication in this field – Fischer (2006) takes up the metaphor and goes even further:

> There are very many studies of discourse particles on the market, and by now it is almost impossible to find one's way through this jungle of publications. For a newcomer to the field, it is furthermore often very difficult to

[1] He also mentions pragmatic markers in the chapters about *conversational implicature* (Levinson 1983: 162–163) and *conversational structure* (Levinson 1983: 365), confirming the pervasiveness of these items across the pragmatic domain.

[2] These are only two of the (almost) countless possibilities to name these items: among them, *pragmatic particles* and *discourse particles*, *pragmatic connectives* and *discourse connectives* can also be found.

> find the bits and pieces that constitute an original model of the meanings and functions of discourse particles. (Fischer 2006: 1)

Similar claims always come back in this research field. In recent times, Fedriani & Sansò (2017) begin the introduction of one of the latest volumes published on these topics in this way:

> In the last decades, research on pragmatic markers (henceforth PMs), discourse markers (DMs) and modal particles (MPs) has produced a generous amount of literature, and a hardly quantifiable number of new approaches and novel insights into their nature and function. A look at this literature is likely to discourage any attempt to edit yet another book on these three elusive entities, and to engage one more time in the often non-rewarding attempt to delimit and define them (both in a standalone fashion and in comparison with one another). (Fedriani & Sansò 2017: 1)

It can be provocatively stated that the growth of research contributions on pragmatic markers is inversely proportional to our understanding of these items or – more gently – that it goes hand in hand with the difficulty of elaborating a shared model for their analysis.[3]

In fact, the number of approaches and terminologies used in this research field are too numerous and often too vague to sum them up, so that even recommending overview works becomes problematic, because they often reflect the same fragmentation and difficulties. This has substantial consequences for the definition and the classification of the phenomena being investigated and – above all – on the comparability of research results, with the consequence that sometimes one has the unpleasant impression of not even knowing what exactly is being investigated. Schourup (1999) sums up the problem this way:

> While it is widely agreed that such expressions play a variety of important roles in utterance interpretation, there is disagreement in regard to such fundamental issues as how the discourse marker class should be delimited, whether the items in question comprise a unified grammatical category, what type of meaning they express, and the sense in which such expressions may be said to relate elements of discourse. (Schourup 1999: 227)

[3] See also Waltereit (2015: 75): "More broadly, though, it is difficult to avoid the impression that despite the great number of publications that have been dedicated to discourse markers (including in a historical perspective) in recent years, progress has been a little slow".

This position has been echoed several times. Some years later, according to Lewis (2011: 419–420), "there is little consensus on whether they are a syntactic or a pragmatic category, on which types of expressions the category includes, on the relationship of discourse markers to other posited categories". Similar claims – as a kind of haunting refrain – persist to the present date, where "there is little to no consensus as to what entities constitute the inventory of PMs and DMs in a single language and cross-linguistically" and as to "the subdivisions within the functional spectrum covered by PMs and DMs" (Fedriani & Sansò 2017: 4).[4]

Other commonplace statements in this research field concern the terminology: Degand et al. (2013: 5) note that "it has become standard in any overview article or chapter on DMs to state that reaching agreement on what makes a DM is as good as impossible, be it alone on terminological matters". In sum, it seems that certainty and consensus are largely overcome by doubt and disagreement in this research field. And yet – perhaps at an intuitive level – the prototypical pragmatic markers are easily identified in various languages:

(1) English (Schourup 2001: 1027)
Well, isn't it beautiful outside!

(2) Italian (Bazzanella 2006: 455)
Ecco, *cioè*, *voglio dire*, non sono del tutto d'accordo.
'Well, that's to say, I mean, I don't completely agree.'

(3) Greek (Nikiforidou et al. 2014: 662)
Ela min arxisis tis grinies pali mu lei ekinos.
'Come on, don't start grumbling again, he says.'

Even without trying to understand what the words in italics have in common – which admittedly isn't an easy task and would immediately lead to classification problems – it might be said that they somehow make the examples sound natural: they do not refer to anything in external reality but they are involved in facilitating spontaneous speech production and in letting the interaction go smoothly.[5]

[4] See also, for instance, Crible (2017: 99): "Discourse marker (DM) research today, after several decades of flourishing productivity, still faces many terminological, theoretical and methodological issues which restrain large-scale progress in the field, despite the multiplicity of theoretical frameworks and approaches taken by many valuable works".

[5] In fact, some of the most creative definitions of pragmatic markers – not really part of the scientific description of these items – are indeed the most convincing, from *discourse lubricant* and *conversational greaser* to *discourse glue* (see Brinton 1996: 1 and references therein).

Leaving aside terminologies and classifications for now, I use the term *pragmatic marker* as a "cover term for a range of seemingly heterogeneous forms" (Hansen & Rossari 2005: 178) that operate at the communicative level rather than at the propositional one.[6] Works like Brinton (1996: 29–40) and Aijmer & Simon-Vandenbergen (2011) – which also use *pragmatic marker* as an umbrella term – provide an insightful overview of this topic (research tradition, delimitation of the research field, comparison of terminologies and classifications, and list of functions), as well as discussions of different approaches and methodologies.

A clarification is needed at this point. The present work does not deal with pragmatic markers as a general category, but rather with a quite limited class of items operating on the illocutionary act (that is modal particles, which could be considered at most as a subset of pragmatic markers). For this reason, the choice of beginning with a broad discussion of pragmatic markers may appear unjustified, a fact of which I am well aware, yet on the other hand – as ought to be clear from what has been said thus far – starting from this point is unavoidable, since the research tradition has often lumped together different issues in one package leading to the establishment of a sort of customary practice which is difficult to overcome. This is not necessarily inappropriate – and indeed there are some good reasons for doing it, first of all the multifunctionality of several items[7] – but the impression cannot be avoided that perhaps some issues are grouped and discussed together as a matter of routine, more than for the real necessity to have a common container (and a cover term) for a highly heterogenous set of items:

> It might seem practical to group elements that are complex to distinguish, but the cognitive soundness and methodological efficiency of such an approach remain to be demonstrated. In fact, to my knowledge, no corpus study has ever identified and analyzed such a large range of items in authentic data. It would seem that the merit of the PM category is therefore mainly theoretical and metalinguistic, and does not correspond to an empirically-founded category of similar expressions in language use. (Crible 2017: 102–103)

[6] The contrasting terms, *communicative* vs. *propositional* are used in a pre-theoretical way for now. Similar contrasts are represented by pairs such as *context-level* vs. *content-level*, *interpersonal* vs. *representational*, *procedural* vs. *conceptual*, *use-conditional meaning* vs. *truth-conditional meaning*. Such pairs are used by different theoretical frameworks and none of them is fully equivalent to the others. Some of them will be discussed in more detail below.

[7] It is quite common that the same linguistic item shows both a use as a discourse marker and a use as a modal particle: many of the case studies collected in Degand et al. (2013) insist on this point. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 4, several issues concerning the meaning and the development of discourse-pragmatic elements are transversal to the whole category.

Bearing these warnings in mind, let's have a look at the whole set and extract what is needed.

2.2 Approaches to pragmatic markers

Even without giving a precise theoretical value to the notion of *pragmatic marker,* there are some features that can certainly be identified as characterizing all linguistic items with discourse-pragmatic functions. The following three points are highlighted by Fedriani & Sansò (2017: 3–4). First, they have a non-truth-conditional value: they can be detached from the utterance in which they appear without affecting its propositional meaning. Second – on a broad behavioral level – their functions may be intended as *procedural*: pragmatic markers are items that place constraints on the interpretation by providing instructions to the hearer as to how the proposition/utterance is to be processed, in order for both participants to co-build a coherent mental representation of discourse. Third – in the normal case – there is typically more than one pragmatic marker that can potentially serve a given function in a given language and – conversely – each marker has more than one function depending on different (socio-)linguistic variables.

Formal features (the position in the utterance, morphological features, intonation contours) should be – at least for now – left aside, since they would immediately force me to deal with the subcategorization of markers and functions or language-specific issues. This means that the category of pragmatic markers – and the same goes for most of the possible subcategories – holds as a consistent group of elements only insofar as they share a global discourse-pragmatic function, and should thus be understood as a functional category, rather than a formal one. As stated by Hansen (2006: 27): "I do not conceive of discourse markers as constituting a part of speech, for it seems that very few linguistic items are exclusively devoted to this function. Rather, a great many, often formally quite different, linguistic items may have one or more discourse-marking uses alongside one or more non-discourse-marking uses". Before shifting the focus to modal particles, I will shortly mention two relevant works on discourse-pragmatic elements, in order to introduce issues related to the description of their functions and their subcategorization.

A first influential approach to discourse markers is represented by Blakemore (1987). This work fits into the larger framework of Relevance Theory (RT), which has been developed since Sperber & Wilson's (1986) book (see Wilson 2017 for a recent overview). Relevance Theory is interested in understanding and describing the linguistic means of encoding information about the inferential processes

that make communication possible. RT is grounded in a Principle of Relevance which consists of a cognitive facet ("Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance") and a communicative one ("Every utterance communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance") (see Wilson 2017: 83–85).

Within this framework, the *conceptual* vs. *procedural* distinction was introduced – a cognitive distinction between "two ways in which linguistic meaning can contribute to the inferential processes involved in utterance interpretation: either it may encode constituents of the conceptual representations that undergo these processes, or it may encode procedural information or constraints on those processes" (Blakemore 2006: 229). In this perspective, discourse-pragmatic elements represent an ideal case study. Relevance Theory has focused mainly on markers with discourse-structuring and textual functions – elements like *but*, *so*, *after all*, *nevertheless* – that is, non-truth-conditional expressions that connect sentences together (Blakemore 1987, 2002; see also Jucker & Ziv 1998). In these studies, discourse markers are analyzed as expressions that restrict the inferential processes in communication – facilitating the speaker's aim of achieving relevance for a minimum cost in processing and guiding the hearer in the correct interpretation of the utterance and its context (Blakemore 2006: 230). Discourse markers in a relevance-theoretic perspective are thus good examples of linguistic expressions that encode procedural meanings: they don't refer to conceptual representations but to inferential processes, encoding information about which of these inferential processes yields the intended interpretation.[8]

A second seminal work on discourse markers dates to the same year, but builds on a completely different framework. Schiffrin (1987) fits in the larger framework of discourse analysis, relying on the assumption that language is context-sensitive and designed for communication. Schiffrin (1987: 21–29) builds her analysis on a model of discourse that identifies five *discourse planes*, to be understood as the different discourse components on which discourse markers work: participation framework, information state, ideational structure, action structure, and exchange structure. This work has contributed to identify the set of English expressions – structurally defined as "sequentially dependent elements that bracket units of talk" (Schiffrin 1987: 31) – which have been at the center of research

[8]Relevance Theory also points out that the distinction between conceptual and procedural meaning is not equivalent to the distinction between truth-conditional and non-truth-conditional meaning (Blakemore 2006: 230), paving the way towards a discussion about how to draw the distinction between pragmatics (traditionally associated with non-truth-conditional meaning) and semantics (traditionally associated with truth-conditional meaning) – and their respective role in the description of conceptual and procedural meaning. I will further discuss this issue in Chapter 3.

on discourse markers in the following years: interjections (*oh*), adverbs (*well*, *now* and *then*), connectives (*and*, *but*, *or*, *so* and *because*) and lexicalized phrases (*y'know* and *I mean*).

Discourse markers are seen to work as *contextual coordinates of talk* with indexical functions: "markers index the location of an utterance within its emerging local contexts. It is the indexical function of markers which is the key to understand why they are used: markers propose the contextual coordinates within which an utterance is produced and designed to be interpreted" (Schiffrin 1987: 315). In this way, the five planes of discourse and the role of discourse markers build a model of discourse coherence, where the markers index their host utterances to one or more of these five planes and thus integrate them, contributing to the production of coherent discourse. In this model, the *multifunctionality* of discourse markers is highlighted, since they can operate simultaneously on different planes of discourse. By doing so, they integrate the many different processes underlying the construction of discourse, and thus help to create coherence.

These works have set the framework for much of the subsequent research. Notions such as *procedural meaning*, *discourse planes* and *multifunctionality* have played an important role in the research on discourse markers to date, and they are regularly employed in very recent accounts of discourse-pragmatic elements such as Ghezzi (2014) and Crible (2017, 2018). In particular, the approach and the terminological choices adopted by Crible (2017, 2018) are largely compatible with the approach taken in the present work. Crible builds on Hansen (2006: 28), using the label *pragmatic marker* as an overall "cover term for all those non-propositional functions which linguistic items may fulfil in discourse". Thus, discourse markers are conceived as a subclass of this overarching category:

> DMs are a grammatically heterogeneous, syntactically optional, polyfunctional type of pragmatic marker. Their specificity is to function on a metadiscursive level as procedural cues to constrain the interpretation of the host unit in a co-built representation of on-going discourse. They do so by either signaling a discourse relation between the host unit and its context, making the structural sequencing of discourse segments explicit, expressing the speaker's meta-comment on their phrasing, or contributing to the speaker-hearer relationship. (Crible 2018: 35)

Other subclasses include interjections, modal particles, response signals, politeness expressions and tag questions.[9] One of them, namely *modal particles*, will be the focus of the coming pages.

[9] For the syntactic and functional criteria used to delimit the subclass of discourse markers from the other subclasses see the detailed discussion in Crible (2017: 105–109, 2018: 34–37).

2.3 Identifying a subclass: Modal particles

While discourse markers (DMs) are an arguably universal category, modal particles (MPs) – also known as *Abtönungspartikeln* in the German linguistic tradition (lit. 'shading particles') – are commonly viewed as specific to certain languages. The presence of modal particles is widely recognized (and exceptionally well-researched) for German (Weydt 1969, 1979; Thurmair 1989; Abraham 1991; Meibauer 1994; König 1997; Waltereit 2001, 2006; Zimmermann 2011; Bayer & Struckmeier 2017) but contested for English and Romance languages.[10] For this reason – adding to the difficulty of clearly describing their functions – modal particles occupy an ambiguous position in the research on discourse-pragmatic elements: sometimes they are seen as "special guests", sometimes as "unwelcome guests", and sometimes even as "gatecrashers".

In recent times, several works have dealt with the controversial relationship between modal particles and other discourse-pragmatic elements, first of all discourse markers (among others, see Hansen 1998b and the papers collected in Degand et al. 2013). With reference to this debate, Detges (2015) gives this clear and concise definition of modal particles:

> While DMs are defined by purely functional criteria, the definition of MPs includes function as well as form. In German, MPs are syntactically integrated, (mainly) unstressed particles; they appear in the middle-field, next to the inflected form of the predicate. Syntactically, MPs have scope over sentences. Functionally, they fine-tune speech acts, by "repairing" problems arising from the violation of some felicity condition (Waltereit 2001, 2006). Unlike DMs which indicate two-place relations between sequentially ordered chunks of discourse, MPs mark a relationship between a speech act and some element in the common ground, usually a belief ("a proposition") attributed to the addressee. (Detges 2015: 132)

[10] The references on this issue are impossible to sum up: for English, see for instance Haselow (2011) and Fischer & Heide (2018). References to modal particle research in Romance languages will be frequent throughout the whole work: a good starting point is Waltereit (2001). More broadly, the cross-linguistic distribution of modal particles is still under-researched and no typological work on this topic has appeared to date. To give a few references, studies on modal particles have appeared for Dutch (Foolen 1993; Vismans 1994), Danish (Davidsen-Nielsen 1996; Hansen 1998b: 41–46), Swedish (Aijmer 1996), Slavic languages (Dedaić & Mišković-Luković 2010), Japanese (Izutsu & Izutsu 2013), Chinese (Li 2006; Fang 2021), Hindi (Montaut 2016) and many other languages. The issue of cross-linguistic distribution is further complicated by the question of whether (and how) it should be distinguished between languages which feature modal particles as a (consistent) word class and languages which feature modal-particle-like elements and/or elements that can be described as modal particles in some of their uses. Among the recent publications that adopt a cross-linguistic-oriented approach see Modicom & Duplâtre (2020), Gergel et al. (2022) and Artiagoitia et al. (2022).

The articles collected in Degand et al. (2013) give an interesting overview of the different ways of treating the relationship between DMs and MPs, from those who sharply separate them to those who give them an equal footing. Even though there are many formal[11] and functional reasons to see them as separate pragmatic categories (as in Detges' definition cited above), the problem of their relationship was not pulled out of thin air, since many linguistic items can cover both functions, giving the impression of a close link between the two categories. Nevertheless, considering the different processes of change through which they emerge (Waltereit & Detges 2007; Detges & Waltereit 2009), they should be better dealt with separately.

Modal-particle-like expressions (or, citing again Detges 2015: 136, expressions with a "certain MP-like flavour" in some of their uses) will be at the center of the present research. The discussion about their functions and their place in the grammar of a language, their diachronic development and their synchronic variation, their relationship with other discourse-pragmatic elements will come up throughout the whole first part of the work. Different views on these categories crucially also depend on how their functions are conceived of and defined, a topic that I will explore further in the next chapter.

[11]These are foremost syntactic criteria. In particular, German modal particles occur exclusively in the so-called *middle field* (the domain between the initial and final verbal elements of the Germanic clause). In Japanese they mostly occur in the sentence-final position instead. Overall modal particles are sensitive to syntactic constraints and tend to occur in fixed sentence positions according to language-specific syntactic structures.

3 Modal particles and illocutionary modification

3.1 Three central topics of pragmatics

To better frame the discussion on modal particles, it is necessary to introduce three core concepts of pragmatic theory which are essential to understand their functions and, generally, the behavior of discourse-pragmatic elements in interaction: speech acts, implicatures and presuppositions. As Levinson (1983: 21) puts it: "Given a linguistic form uttered in a context, a pragmatic theory must account for the inference of presuppositions, implicatures, illocutionary force". When investigating language use in context, speech acts occupy a prominent position, since delivering speech acts can be argued to be the central function of language (Searle 1969): "the rest of the linguistic apparatus, with all of its complex syntax and propositional structure, is there to serve this purpose. For speech acts are the coin of conversation, and conversation the core niche for language use and acquisition" (Levinson 2017: 215–216).

In my perspective, the description of modal particles is closely linked with the speech acts they occur in, and a satisfactory analysis of their functions cannot ignore their role at the level of illocution. On the other hand, implicatures are responsible for the rich overlap of different meaning levels that arise in conversation. The interplay of different meaning levels plays a crucial role in the semantic description of modal particles and their evolution over time: a satisfactory analysis of the emerging of their functions cannot ignore how the contextual reanalysis of implicatures/inferences shapes them. Finally, presuppositions come into play both in the semantic description of modal particles and their source constructions (some of which are presupposition-triggering elements) – and in the description of the conversational context in which they operate as well.

3.1.1 Speech acts

The concept of *speech act* refers to the fact that utterances, in addition to conveying meaning (whatever it may be), perform specific actions (*do things*) and

change reality through statements, orders, promises, warnings and so on. This concept was first developed by Austin (1961, 1962), who pointed out that utterances are not mere meaning-bearers, but they also have specific *forces* that provide the clues to understanding in what ways, in uttering a sentence, one might be said to be performing actions.

Dealing with these subjects, the theory of speech acts describes how utterances have action-like properties, what exactly (and how many) these properties are, and how they are reflected in linguistic forms. When saying something, three kinds of acts are simultaneously performed (see Levinson 1983: 236):

- LOCUTIONARY ACT: The utterance of a sentence with determinate sense and reference.
- ILLOCUTIONARY ACT: The making of a statement, offer, promise, etc. in uttering a sentence, by virtue of the conventional *force* associated with it (or with its explicit performative paraphrase).
- PERLOCUTIONARY ACT: The bringing about of effects on the audience by means of uttering the sentence, such effects being special to the circumstances of utterance.

The illocutionary act – the actual act normally referred to when talking about speech acts – corresponds then to the force associated with an utterance (that is, the force of ordering, warning, promising etc.). This force displays a certain degree of conventionality, depending on the issuance of a certain kind of utterance in an appropriate context and in accord with an established social/communicative procedure. In contrast, a perlocutionary act completely depends on context and on the specific circumstances of issuance, "and is therefore not conventionally achieved just by uttering that particular utterance, and includes all those effects, intended or unintended, often indeterminate, that some particular utterance in a particular situation may cause" (Levinson 1983: 237).

Like all other actions, speech acts can succeed or fail in reaching their goals for a range of reasons. In the case of speech acts, these reasons are named *felicity conditions*: both appropriate subjective states of the speaker as well as appropriate external circumstances are needed for a speech act to be valid. Searle (1969) influentially systematized Austin's work and proposed a typology of speech acts based on the felicity conditions they are bound to: *representatives* (statements and the like), *directives* (questions, requests, orders), *commissives* (threats, promises, of-

fers), *expressives* (thanking, apologizing, congratulating), and *declarations* (christening, declaring war, firing, which rely on elaborate institutional backgrounds).[1]

Closer to linguistic theory is the problem of the *grammar* of speech acts, i.e. how their conventionalized use in achieving a communicative intention matches formal linguistic properties. As Levinson (2017: 202–203) underlines, "one of the central puzzles is that speech acts are not for the most part simply or directly coded in the linguistic form: for example, *Where are you going?* could be an idle question, or a challenge, or a reprimand, or a prelude (a pre-) to a request for a ride or to an offer to give you a ride, and the relevant response depends on the correct attribution". Illocutionary forces are often formally coded in major sentence types (imperatives, interrogatives, declaratives) and by explicit performative verbs, but this is not always the case. In addition, they can also be expressed through idiomatic means (interjections and related expressions). The absence of one-to-one mapping between form and function is further confirmed by indirect speech acts: for instance, prototypically directives are coded by imperative sentences, but interrogative sentences can code them as well.[2]

However, as Levinson (2017: 214) points out, many surface elements can help to narrow down an illocutionary force. For example, adverbs like *please* mark unambiguous requests or pleadings, adverbs like *obviously* or *frankly* mark statements, and interjections like *wow* or *my gosh* mark exclamations. In addition, as noted by Sadock & Zwicky (1985) in their typological overview on syntactic means to distinguish speech acts, there are also minor sentence types that are indeed specialized for signaling a specific illocutionary force.[3] These observations are fundamental also when researching pragmatic markers and modal particles.

[1] Yet another approach working on speech act classification is represented by conversation analysis (see Sacks et al. 1974; Schegloff 2017), which studies all sorts of fundamental organizations for interactive language use: turn-taking, repair and sequence organization. In conversation analysis different types of speech acts can be identified through the sequential position that they hold in conversation: pre-closings (e.g. the exchange of *well* before goodbyes in phone calls), assessments (evaluations of shared events or things), repair initiators (like *Excuse me?*), pre-invitations (*What are you doing on Friday night?*), and so forth (see Levinson 2017: 202).

[2] The standard reference on these issues is Sadock & Zwicky (1985). In the German linguistic tradition, the relationship between illocutionary force, sentence type (*Satzmodus*) and their formal manifestations (for instance, *mood* as a verb category) has been debated in several works (Meibauer 1987; Rosengren 1992; Altmann 1993; Meibauer et al. 2013). Modal particles can be counted among the formal features contributing to mark a specific sentence type (Thurmair 1989).

[3] Citing from their examples, a case in point in English are particular syntactic constructions to express suggestions (*How about a walk?, Why not stay here?, Let's tour the island!*), exclamatives (*What a beautiful day!, Of all the stupid things to do!*) and optatives (*If only I'd done it!, May the best man win!*).

Many of them could in fact count as elements autonomously displaying a specific illocutionary force (Austin 1962: 75) or elements that help to specify/modify the illocutionary force of the speech act in which they appear – as they occur only in particular illocutionary types or display functions related to their modification.

3.1.2 Implicatures

A second fundamental notion in pragmatics is that of *implicature*, as first developed in the work of Grice (1975). He introduced the term *implicature* to separate what speakers explicitly *say* when they utter a sentence and the constellation of further meanings that are *implied* (suggested, meant) by that sentence in a particular context.

The notion of implicature has to be split in two: *conversational implicature* and *conventional implicature*. Huang (2017: 156) defines the first category as follows: "Conversational implicature is definable as any meaning or proposition expressed implicitly by a speaker in his or her utterance of a sentence which is meant without being part of what is said in the strict sense". A conversational implicature is part of what a speaker means, though not part of what a sentence explicitly says: it constitutes, therefore, a component of speaker meaning.

Conversational implicatures are bound to what Grice calls the *cooperative principle*, a basic principle that emphasizes the rational nature of human communication as a shared-goal human activity, where both the speaker and the addressee act as rational and cooperative agents. The cooperative principle comes with four attendant maxims (quantity, quality, relation, manner) which represent general guidelines tacitly recognized by both the speaker and the addressee in order to achieve successful communication (see Levinson 1983: 101–102).

Conversational implicatures arise as a consequence of the interplay (and often of some incompatibility) between the cooperative principle and the maxims, on the one hand, and a specific utterance in its context of occurrence on the other:

(1) Alice: Do you know if George is at the library?
Beth: I haven't seen any red bike in the courtyard.
(+> George isn't in the library)
Alice: He is probably late today.

In example (1), Beth implies (+>) that George has not yet arrived at the library – since she can't see his bike in the courtyard (and she assumes that he would cycle to the library, as usual). The utterance spoken by Beth could be said to contradict the maxim of quantity: the information she provides is more informative than

required. However, relying on the cooperative principle, Alice accepts Beth's utterance as a meaningful contribution to the talk exchange and consequently, she can correctly infer what Beth wants to suggest.

The second category of implicature put forward by Grice is *conventional implicature*: "By conventional implicature is meant a non-truth-conditional meaning which is not derivable in any general considerations of cooperation and rationality from the saying of what is said, but arises solely because of the conventional features attached to particular lexical items and/or linguistic constructions" (Huang 2017: 176). Contrary to conversational implicatures – though not contributing to the truth conditions of the sentence – conventional implicatures are not based on the cooperative principle, but on speakers' knowledge of the language. A conventional implicature is therefore independent from what the speaker wants to express or implicate, but is an integral part of the meaning conventionally attached to words and phrases.

Taking an example from the class of focus particles, in (2) *even* (a scalar focus particle) conventionally implicates some sort of unexpectedness, surprise, or unlikeness.

(2) *Even* Philip now cycles to work: since last summer, he has been very worried about global warming.

This implicature – though part of what the speaker subjectively wants to express – is coded as a fixed component of the conventional meaning of *even*.

Among the linguistic expressions that activate conventional implicatures, there are different kinds of connectives, sentence adverbs, quantifiers, honorifics and many others (see Levinson 1983: 127–130; Huang 2017: 175–180). I will return to conversational and conventional implicatures later on to assess their place across the semantics/pragmatics divide and to discuss the relationship between them from a diachronic perspective.

3.1.3 Presuppositions

A third key-notion of pragmatics is that of *presupposition*. Presuppositions represent pieces of *background information* (or are presented as such by the speaker): they are background assumptions against which the main contribution of an utterance is to be assessed. A useful analogy here is the notion of figure and ground in Gestalt psychology: in a picture, a figure stands out only relative to a background, and there are well-known visual illusions or "ambiguities" where figure and background are reversible, demonstrating that the perception of each is relative to the perception of the other. The analogy is that the figure of an utterance

is what is asserted or what is the main point of what is said, while the ground is the set of presuppositions against which the figure is assessed (Levinson 1983: 180).

In contrast to conversational implicatures – and similarly to conventional implicatures – presuppositions are closely bound to the actual linguistic structure of sentences: they are triggered by certain words and constructions and, in this sense, built into linguistic expressions. There are many of such presupposition-triggering expressions, that is, linguistic elements that function as sources of presuppositions (see Levinson 1983: 181–184; Geurts 2017: 180). An incomplete list includes definite articles, quantifiers, factive verbs (such as *regret* and *realize*), change-of-state verbs (such as *stop* and *continue*), temporal subordinators (such as *while* and *since*), cleft sentences, and focus particles (such as *only* and *too*). Let's see an example:

(3) Alice has stopped writing poetry.
(⟶ Alice has been writing poetry)

In example (3), the fact that Alice has stopped writing poetry presupposes that she has been writing poetry. The fact that presuppositions really form a set of background assumptions can be demonstrated by changing the polarity of the proposition (*Alice has not stopped writing poetry*) or by converting it into a question (*Has Alice stopped writing poetry?*). Both sentences share the presupposition (⟶) that *Alice has been writing poetry*: in both cases, the background assumption remains the same. "Thus the main point of an utterance may be to assert or to deny or to question some proposition, and yet the presuppositions can remain constant, or – to employ our analogy – the figure can vary within limits, and the ground remain the same" (Levinson 1983: 180–181).[4] Put otherwise: "Generally speaking, presuppositions tend to escape from any embedded position in the sense that, whenever a sentence φ contains an expression triggering the presupposition that χ, an utterance of φ will imply that χ is true" (Geurts 2017: 181).

Widening the perspective, it may be said that presuppositions are part of the context in which a speech act is performed. How to better define *context*, however, is not straightforward.[5] As Geurts (2017: 182) puts it: "The standard answer is that presuppositions are part of the common ground between speaker and hearer: by using an expression which triggers the presupposition that χ, the speaker signals (or acknowledges) that χ is already part of the common

[4] This is not the case for ordinary entailments (see Levinson 1983: 191–198; Geurts 2017: 180–181).

[5] For an overview of issues related to this concept, see Fetzer (2017). See also Fetzer & Fischer (2007).

ground (Stalnaker 1973, 1974). At any given moment in the discourse, the common ground consists of the information all participants accept as true at that point".[6] Thus, the common ground represents a mental and interactional space which accounts for the coexistence of different kinds of inferences.

3.2 Modal particles

Broadly speaking – in the languages which display such a class – modal particles (MPs) are usually seen as "conveying certain 'pragmatic presuppositions' about the context of utterance, including in particular the relationship between speaker and hearer" (Hansen 1998b: 42; Diewald 2013: 33). Modal particles establish a link between the speech act they occur in (including the propositional content conveyed) and the interlocutors' expectations based on the previous discourse and the extralinguistic situation.

From this perspective, they count as linguistic means which are used to explicitly manage some implicit content of the communicative exchange: they accommodate what is said (propositional content) and what is performed (a speech act) into the context of conversation – which is formed not only by extralinguistic references (real-world entities), but also by the set of knowledge shared by the interlocutors (the common ground).

This section will give an overview of the semantic/pragmatic domains involved in the description of the functions of modal particles. I will first comment on the idea of the speech-act theoretic approach to the functions of MPs elaborated by Waltereit (2001, 2006), linking it subsequently to the concepts of *common ground* and *illocutionary force*.

3.2.1 The functions of modal particles

The major influence for the approach adopted here is represented by the work of Waltereit (2001, 2006). A fundamental characteristic of this work is the combination of a semantic and pragmatic analysis of the functions of (German) modal particles with a contrastive interest, aimed at detecting the formal manifestations

[6] See also Sæbø (2016: 128) who discusses the relationship between presuppositions and information structure: "Classically, presuppositions have been considered as conditions that the point of evaluation must meet for the sentences that carry them to be true or false. For the phenomena at issue in this article, however, they are more appropriately, in accordance with the dominant picture today, regarded as conditions that the context, or the Common Ground, must meet in order to be updated with the sentence".

of the same functions in languages that do not have a specific class of particles to express them, specifically Romance languages.

As Waltereit (2001: 1391) puts it: "The intuition underlying this article is that if, e.g., the Romance languages have fewer modal particles than German, they should have other means of expressing the same function. It is claimed that this function essentially consists in accommodating the speech act at minimal linguistic expense to the speech situation". Accordingly, this specific function (which is sometimes referred to with the German term *Abtönung* 'shading, modalization') turns out to be a universal category and languages which do not have modal particles as a separate word class utilize a diverse array of linguistic means to express it: specific uses of adverbs, intonation, dislocation, tag questions, specific uses of tense, and diminutive morphology.

Thanks to these characteristics, such an approach seems to be particularly suitable to study modal-particle-like elements in languages that do not have a clearly defined paradigm of modal particles. Waltereit (2001: 1393–1397) develops a speech-act-theoretic approach based on two hypotheses:

- HYPOTHESIS 1: Modalization is essentially a speech-act-level operation insofar as the preparatory conditions of the speech act are modified at minimal linguistic expense.

- HYPOTHESIS 2: Modalization forms modify the preparatory conditions, as they evoke a speech situation in which the desired preparatory conditions are fulfilled. Thereby they enable the speaker to justify her speech act.

This approach makes crucial reference to the preparatory conditions of a speech act, which "describe the way the speech act fits into the social relation of speaker and addressee, and they describe how their respective interests are concerned by the act" (Waltereit 2001: 1397).[7] In this perspective, modalization forms appear in speech situations where the preparatory conditions of a speech act are not (entirely) fulfilled. In the case that speakers wish to perform a speech act that is not sufficiently licensed by the speech situation or that might have undesired side-effects, modal particles and equivalent constructions explicitly signal it, providing clues as to the "justification" of the speech act in the relevant speech situation.

These kinds of circumstances are exemplified through the analysis of the function of the German modal particle *ja* (Waltereit 2001: 1398–1399). This particle

[7]Preparatory conditions count among the felicity conditions of speech acts (see Levinson 1983: 239).

occurs (mainly) in the speech-act class of assertions, which – according to Searle (1969) – display as part of their preparatory conditions that it is not obvious to both speaker and addressee what the propositional content conveyed by the speech act is.

(4) German (Waltereit 2001: 1398)
Die Malerei war *ja* schon immer sein Hobby.
'*(As you know)*, painting has always been his hobby.'

The modal particle *ja* occurs exactly in speech situations in which this condition is not fulfilled, namely the propositional content of the speech act is known to both interlocutors, either because it is part of their previous knowledge or because it is inferable from the external context. By inserting *ja* in the assertion, the speaker signals an inconsistency in the preparatory conditions of the speech act (Hypothesis 1) and – at the same time – "that the assertion counts as a relevant contribution to conversation even if its propositional content is obvious to the addressee" (Waltereit 2001: 1398). By doing so, the performance of the speech act is justified.

Moreover, he relates the modal use of *ja* to the function of *ja* as an answering particle (comparable to English *yes*). The argument he provides is that – used as an answering or confirming particle – *ja* creates a speech situation where speaker and addressee agree on the content of a situationally relevant proposition (i.e., the utterance that it is used to respond to). As Waltereit (2001: 1399) puts it, "the *result* of saying *ja* as a (non-modal) response token (i.e., speaker and addressee agree about the propositional content of the first utterance) corresponds to a *presupposition* or *implicature* of its use as a modal particle (i.e., speaker and addressee agree about the propositional content of the assertion containing the particle, by virtue of there being strong evidence for it)". In other words, the link between the modal particle employed and the non-modal counterpart consists in the fact that the modal particle evokes a speech situation in which the desired preparatory conditions for the utterance containing the modal particle are fulfilled (Hypothesis 2).[8]

[8]The reference to the external speech situation also plays a role in the development of modal particles. Waltereit (2001: 1410–1414) conceives of the diachronic rise of modalization forms as an instance of (metonymic) semantic change involving the speech act domain. In this perspective, some contextual features of typical speech situations belonging to the speech act domain, but not directly bearing on the potential illocutionary force of the relevant items, can also become part of the meaning of these items. For work on metonymic change in the speech act domain (for example the recruitment of speech act verbs) see Koch (1999, 2001).

This approach has been developed in later works (Waltereit 2006; Waltereit & Detges 2007; Detges & Waltereit 2009; Detges & Gévaudan 2018), applying it to the analysis of Romance forms and constructions which display functions similar to those described for German modal particles. In particular, Detges & Gévaudan (2018) highlight the link between *Abtönung* and the theory of *linguistic polyphony* as proposed by Ducrot (1984), according to which "the speaker can evoke different 'viewpoints' (i.e. illocutionary attitudes, propositional viewpoints etc.) and/or different 'voices' (i.e. reference to other speakers' discourse in various forms such as irony, imitation, direct reported speech etc.)" (Detges & Gévaudan 2018: 307).

In this perspective, the function performed by modal particles is redefined as a form of polyphony, aimed at accommodating (integrating) a speech act to the viewpoints active in a specific speech situation (common ground). Integrating speech acts in the common ground, modal particles evoke a viewpoint that is not simply ascribed to the speaker alone, but crucially involves also the hearer. Thus, "they provide clues as to how the speaker's assertion ties in with the addressee's world- and discourse knowledge as hypothesized by the speaker" (Detges & Gévaudan 2018: 308). This is shown in the next example for different modal particles:

(5) German (Detges & Gévaudan 2018: 307–308)
Das ist *ja*/*doch*/*vielleicht*/*aber* großartig!
'That's *MP* great!'

- *ja*: speaker's assertion *is* obvious to addressee
- *doch*: speaker's assertion *should* be obvious to addressee
- *vielleicht*: asserted proposition *unexpected* for speaker and *unknown* to addressee
- *aber*: asserted proposition *unexpected* for speaker but *known* to addressee

3.2.2 The many facets of common ground

The last observations have called into question a set of concepts which need further clarification, such as *common ground*, *speaker-hearer link*, and *viewpoints*. They all refer to the capacity of modal particles of indexing mental representations: "the presence of MPs signals the presence of an active speaker, who wants to stress her own mental representation of a certain fact and to attribute a certain attitude and state of knowledge to the hearer" (Coniglio 2012: 283).

In fact, many works have stressed this aspect of the semantics of modal particles rather than their connection to the preparatory conditions of a speech act. This means that the conceptual space around modal particles (and modal-particle-like elements) can be expanded to include other concepts (see the papers collected in Abraham & Leiss 2012). From this perspective, a fundamental role is played by the notion of *common ground*, cited for example by Grosz (2016): "As a working definition, we can define discourse particles [his term for modal particles] as a closed class of functional elements that contribute to *common ground management* in the spirit of Krifka (2008); that is, they encode specific instructions on how the Common Ground should or should not be modified in the subsequent discourse".

Common ground is defined by Krifka (2008: 245) as "information that is mutually known to be shared in communication and continuously modified in communication". The concept of common ground (henceforth CG) refers to a universe of discourse where the speaker and the addressee share the knowledge of some propositions and formulate assumptions about each other's states of mind. Through this model, it is possible to distinguish presuppositions as requirements for the input CG, and assertions as the proposed change in the output CG. Furthermore, Krifka (2008: 246) separates CG content – that is, the truth-conditional information (propositional content) in the CG – from the CG management – that is, information about the manifest communicative interests and goals of the participants. The identification of the dimension of CG management – understood as the conversational push given by one of the interlocutors so that CG content develops in an intended or desired direction – is fundamental for the analysis of the functions of modal particles.

Citing the modal particle *ja* as a prime example, Grosz (2016: 337) explains that "*ja(p)* triggers a presupposition that the contextually given speaker believes that the modified proposition *p* is true; it furthermore presupposes a belief concerning the contextually given addressee, namely that she either knows that *p* is true, or that the truth of *p* is evident in the utterance context". In terms of common ground management, *ja* conveys that uttering the proposition it scopes over does not have the main goal of updating the common ground, since it is already present in the common ground or evident in the utterance of context. According to this explanation, *ja* acts as a presupposition trigger, that is to say, as a linguistic item signaling that (part of) the conveyed information must be considered as given or taken for granted.

However, in my view, the crucial point is the fact that the particle does not operate as a trigger for presuppositions related to the propositional content *per se*, but it acts as a trigger for presuppositions that influence the way the speech

act must be interpreted in the context of interaction, namely, they are also relevant for the common ground management. From this perspective, this approach is not distant from that of Waltereit (2001) discussed in detail in the previous subsection: preparatory conditions are part of the communicative conditions necessary to successfully perform a speech act (and to convey its propositional content) according to a specific context of interaction. Therefore, modification of the preparatory conditions and activation of presuppositions are both part of the common ground as a dynamic conversational dimension and they both pertain to the functions of modal particles as tools of common ground management.

Moreover, recalling the arguments of Detges & Gévaudan (2018), modal particles should be analyzed as a means to manage the speaker-hearer link. In this respect, it must not be forgotten that modal particles operate in the sphere of a speech act and they thereby relate a specific *illocution* to the common ground. Another strand of research (see for instance Jacobs 1991; Coniglio 2012) has focused specifically on the kind of relation which exists between modal particles and the illocutionary force: "They interact with the illocution and must be anchored to a speaker as the 'author' of a certain speech act and as the possessor of a certain mental representation" (Coniglio 2012: 255).

In this approach, modal particles play a crucial role in the way speakers as performers of a speech act want to achieve their communicative point: particles take up a certain illocutionary type and modify it by restricting and specifying it. For example, as Coniglio (2012: 262–263) shows, a default imperative clause can be further specified as a cogent order (this is the case of the stressed particle *ja*) or a less peremptory order, a request, a suggestion or a piece of advice (this is the case of the particle *mal*). Modal particles can thus be analyzed as operators on the *illocutionary point* of a speech act – that is, that component of the illocutionary force which represents the basic purpose of a speaker in making an utterance. This fact is further proven by the observation that many modal particles tend to be associated with specific illocutionary types: as a rule, each modal particle can only occur in a subset of all illocutionary types available (Jacobs 1991; Detges & Waltereit 2009).

3.2.3 Conditions and intentions

As is clear from the preceding discussion, the status of modal particles is still highly debated and the term covers a wide range of concepts – from common ground to illocutionary force, from presuppositions to preparatory conditions – which cannot all be revised here in detail. Moreover, a large part of this debate has developed through the analysis of German modal particles and thus builds on

categories that cannot always be easily transferred to other languages (especially the syntactic ones): typological work on modal-particle-like elements remains a desideratum.

In this sense, some (first) suggestions can be found in Hengeveld (2004) and Hengeveld & Mackenzie (2008), where the label *illocutionary operator* is used to broadly refer to grammatical items that emphasize or mitigate the force of a specific illocutionary act. The functions of illocutionary operators and their syntactic scope admittedly bring to mind those of modal particles, which could be seen as a language-specific manifestation of this category. Indeed, among the examples they cite, the use of the Dutch *maar* 'only' with a mitigating function in declarative and imperative illocutions appears to be a typical example of modal particle:

(6) Dutch (Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008: 83)
   a. Je moet *maar* gaan fietsen.
      'You should go for a bike ride, you know.'
   b. Ga *maar* fietsen.
      'Why not go for a bike ride?'

Considering the objectives of this research and the fact that I focus on Italian – a language where no definite class of modal particles is found – I will not aim at giving a comprehensive theoretical analysis of modal particles and their functions. Nevertheless, in the previous pages some features of modal particles on which there is a substantial degree of agreement have been highlighted and I would like to close this section with three statements that I will use as guidelines for my analysis.

First, the sphere of action – or "natural habitat" – of modal particles is the speech act: from a syntactic perspective, these elements – having scope over the whole host utterance – operate at the layer of the illocution. Secondly, from a discourse-pragmatic perspective, they operate on the *conditions* under which the speech act is performed: as markers of common ground management, they fine-tune the speech act by repairing problems that arise from the violation of a preparatory condition. Moreover, they contribute to the managing of the information flow with respect to what has been explicitly mentioned in the discourse while also considering what can be indirectly inferred from previous discourse elements, shared knowledge, and world knowledge. Thus, they play a fundamental role in the speaker-hearer link. Finally, they specify the *intentions* with which speech acts are performed: by matching the speaker's communicative tension

with their viewpoint on the hearer's expectations, they refine the illocutionary point of the speech act, adapting it to the context of interaction and facilitating its interpretation in an interpersonal perspective.

In this way, modal particles simultaneously operate on (and show the intertwining of) the different dimensions of a speech act: its felicity conditions, its illocutionary force, and the proposition carried by it. These different aspects define the grammatical domain in which modal particles operate: following Hengeveld (2004: 1192), Waltereit (2006: 22–25) and Narrog (2012: 13) I will name it *illocutionary modification*.

3.3 Illocutionary modification

At the beginning of this chapter notions such as *speech act* and *illocutionary force* were introduced from a broad theoretical perspective. In order to analyze the functions of modal particles and modal-particle-like elements, it is necessary to consider how these notions fit into models of (core) grammatical functions.

On the one hand, this will allow me to better frame the behavior of modal particles as grammatical means that serve as indicators of illocutionary force. On the other hand, it will highlight the boundaries (and the overlapping areas) between illocutionary modification and other grammatical categories.

In the next few pages – combining notions coming from modal particle research (Waltereit 2001, 2006; Coniglio 2012) with notions from the research tradition in functional grammar (Hengeveld 2004; Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008; Narrog 2012) – I will spell out the concept of *illocutionary modification* in more detail, since it represents the bulk of the analytical framework adopted in the present work.

3.3.1 Illocution and illocutionary modification

Introducing the speech-act categories above, I highlighted the absence of a one-to-one correspondence between speech acts and linguistic forms. Rather, a conventional association between sentence types (which are marked by various grammatical means such as verb forms and intonation) and illocutionary forces can be observed: declaratives, in their prototypical function, express assertions, interrogatives express requests for information, imperatives express orders and exclamatives express the speaker's feelings towards a fact.

This can lead us to argue for a basic distinction, mainly for descriptive purposes, between the force component expressed in the form of the sentence (abstract sentential force), which is independent of the context of use as part of

the literal meaning of the sentence, and the force which characterizes the actual illocutionary act (speech act).[9] For instance, Hengeveld (2004) distinguishes between the basic illocution of a sentence and further modifications to it:

> The basic illocution of a sentence can be defined as the conversational use conventionally associated with the formal properties of that sentence (cf. Sadock & Zwicky 1985: 155), which together constitute a sentence type. Apart from word order and intonation, these formal properties may include specific mood morphemes, which may in these cases be interpreted as the morphological markers of basic illocutions. (Hengeveld 2004: 1191)

> Basic illocutions may be further modified by markers of what I here call illocutionary modification. Like basic illocution, illocutionary modification should be interpreted in terms of the conversational use of sentences. But unlike basic illocution, markers of illocutionary modification do not identify sentences as speech acts of certain types, but rather mark much more general communicative strategies on the part of the speaker: they reinforce or mitigate the force of the speech act (Hengeveld 2004: 1192)

The concept of *basic illocution* refers to categories such as declarative, interrogative, imperative, prohibitive, optative and so on. These are abstract illocutionary primitives identified by the grammatical distinctions (morphosyntactic and phonological) represented across languages. Conversely, the label *illocutionary modification* refers to the various grammatical means that modify the illocutionary force of a speech act and further differentiate between communicative intentions (specific illocutionary forces such as making statements and requests, giving orders, warnings and permissions).

Languages display a wide range of constructions to mark illocutionary modification: prosody, word order, syntactic constructions, specific uses of adverbs, and morphology (see Waltereit 2001; Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008: 81–84). Illocutionary modification is not yet an established category in linguistic analysis nor has it been consistently applied to the analysis of modal particles. Nevertheless, it could be a useful category to include modal particles and modal-particle-like elements in a broader cross-linguistic perspective. Moreover, the detailed work already existing on the semantics and pragmatics of modal particles could serve

[9] Many partially overlapping concepts can be found in the literature referring to these distinctions, such as *sentence type*, *sentence mood*, *illocution* and *illocutionary type* (on this, see the short summary presented by Alm et al. 2018: 3–5).

to refine the notion of illocutionary modification and make it a well-established category in typological research.

So far, as already mentioned above, this label has been used mainly within the framework of Functional Discourse Grammar (FDG), a typologically-based theory of language structure (Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008; Keizer 2015). FDG relies on the idea that grammatical categories are organized in layers, connected to each other by scope relations: "in Functional Discourse Grammar scope relations are defined in terms of different pragmatic and semantic layers. Pragmatic layers together constitute the interpersonal level in this model, while semantic layers together constitute the representational level" (Hengeveld 2017: 15). The hierarchical organization of layers and levels is represented in Table 3.1, adapted from Hengeveld (2017: 16).

Table 3.1: Scope relations in FDG

Interpersonal Level								
Discourse Act	>	Illocution	>	Communicated Content	>	Referential Subact	>	Ascriptive Subact
				v				
Representational Level								
Proposition	>	Episode	>	State-of-Affairs	>	Configurational Property	>	Property

The interpersonal level deals with all the formal aspects of a linguistic unit that reflect its role in the interaction between speaker and addressee. At the interpersonal level scope relations are defined in terms of different pragmatic layers, which are the most relevant for the present research. Moving inside out, there are the *ascriptive subact* and the *referential subact*, which are the building blocks of the communicated content; the *communicated content* itself, which represents the message transmitted in an utterance; the *illocution*, which specifies the communicative intention of the speaker; and the *discourse act*, which is the basic unit of communication. In a similar way, the representational level deals with the relation that obtains between language and the non-linguistic world it describes. At the representational level, scope relations are defined in terms of different semantic layers, which range from *property* to *proposition*.

Moreover, the basic content of each layer may be further specified by operators and modifiers: operators capture specification by grammatical means, while mod-

ifiers capture specification by lexical means. At the representational level, categories such as aspect, tense and modality are coded. At the interpersonal level, categories such as mirativity, approximation, reportativity and, in fact, illocutionary modification are coded.[10] From this perspective, illocutionary modification corresponds to specification by grammatical means at the layer of illocution.

3.3.2 Illocutionary modification and its grammatical surroundings

Further reference to FDG notions will take advantage of the layered structure of grammatical categories posited by this framework to include discourse-pragmatic functions in a broader picture of grammatical functions. More specifically, this means that discourse-pragmatic functions will be described not as isolated or marginal points of the grammatical system, but as an integral part of it – neighboring and (partially) overlapping with other grammatical categories.

Discourse-pragmatic functions pertain to the interpersonal level – the "natural" environment of pragmatic markers – where they act as operators on communicated content, illocutions, and discourse acts. However, their largely observed polyfunctionality makes things more complex: many items cross the divide between the interpersonal and representational level and end up in the domain of other grammatical categories. Among other things, the analysis presented in the case studies will seek to highlight how some markers do not cover only discourse-pragmatic functions at the interpersonal level, but can also act as markers of tense, aspect, event quantification, and modality.

In this sense, a further reference is represented by the works of Narrog (2012, 2017), which focus on semantic change in the domain of modality. For the purposes of the present research, the crucial feature of this model is the explicit inclusion of illocutionary modification as a grammatical category bordering the domain of modality: "A further step beyond modality and mood are illocutionary force and illocutionary (force) modification (IM), i.e. the expression of the communicative purpose of an utterance, such as making a statement, a promise, or a prediction, and its modification" (Narrog 2012: 13).

This category is not strictly modal (illocutionary modification usually does not change the factuality of a sentence) and it is further up the scale of speech act orientation than modality: it mainly concerns the interaction of speaker and hearer in discourse. Illocutionary modification is thus firmly envisioned as part of a grammatical system and involved in the change processes affecting it Moreover, it is involved in predictable paths of change which can be empirically tested

[10] A detailed list of the modifiers and operators used in FDG can be found in Hengeveld & Hattnher (2015: 492) and Hengeveld (2017: 17).

through the description of the behavior and the development of single items. Importantly, Narrog (2012) also mentions what kind of items instantiate this category and are concerned in its change dynamics:

> Among the categories related to the domain of modality, hearer orientation and discourse orientation are most obviously at play in the category of illocutionary force. Many discourse markers in English, sentence-final particles in Japanese, and *Modalpartikeln* in German very directly code the speaker's attention to the addressee as a participant in the speech event, or to the discourse context. (Narrog 2012: 50–51).

This quote calls into question exactly the items cited in the previous chapters as members of the overarching category of pragmatic markers, thus including in all respects discourse-pragmatic functions in a broader model of grammatical categories and their development.

Based on a combination of notions used in the research on modal particles and notions used in the research tradition of functional grammar, this concept of illocutionary modification constitutes the main analytical category of the present work. The case studies presented in Chapter 6–Chapter 9 aim precisely at identifying in which contexts of use certain Italian adverbs operate as markers of illocutionary modification. Moreover, they represent a test bench for the hypothesis that illocutionary modification subsumes three main functions: (i) modification of the illocutionary force of a speech act (reinforcement and mitigation); (ii) marking of the communicative intention expressed (specification of the illocutionary point of the speech act); (iii) marking of the conditions under which the speech act is performed (integration of a speech act in the relevant common ground and management of contextual inferences). In addition to this, by exploring the network of functions covered by single items, the case studies will introduce new evidence concerning the position of illocutionary modification in a layered model of grammar and the surrounding categories.

4 At the semantics/pragmatics interface: Meaning, change, variation

4.1 The boundary between semantics and pragmatics

In the last chapter, the main features of modal particles have been defined and illocutionary modification has been identified as the grammatical category that subsumes their functions. On the one hand, the occurrence of modal particles in different kinds of speech acts provides a key to classify their prototypical uses; while on the other, the indexical relationship they establish with the conditions underlying the performance of speech acts provides a key to investigate their effect on illocutionary force.

Nevertheless, reference to speech act theory and to a layered model of grammar that features a category called illocutionary modification is not sufficient to fully grasp the issue of the *meaning* of modal particles. The functional features of these elements – as many other discourse-pragmatic elements – call into question the interplay between coded meanings and different kinds of inferred meanings (both from a synchronic and a diachronic perspective).

While adverbial forms that operate in the discourse-pragmatic domain show a strong conventional meaning that constrains their use, the typical polyfunctionality of these elements reflects different kinds of implicatures which arise from their use in interaction. Thus, exploring the role of contextual inferences is crucial to describe not-fully-conventionalized uses of adverbs in the discourse-pragmatic domain and to hypothesize patterns of semantic change.

As a consequence, the question arises of how to describe the different contribution of conventional and non-conventional levels of meaning to the behavior of discourse-pragmatic elements. These observations lead to the more general issue of defining the boundaries between semantics and pragmatics. For the purposes of the present research, the heart of the matter can be summarized like this: depending on which criteria are chosen to draw the distinction between semantics and pragmatics, the functions of discourse-pragmatic elements can be assigned to one domain or the other.

In the next pages, drawing on works like Hansen (1998b, 2008, 2012) and Ariel (2008, 2010), I will explore the issue of the border between pragmatics and semantics and how this influences our understanding of the meaning of discourse-pragmatic elements.

4.1.1 Drawing the semantics/pragmatics boundary

Following the French tradition initiated by Ducrot (1980), Hansen (2008) doesn't primarily conceive of the distinction between semantics and pragmatics as a distinction between elements that contribute to the truth-conditional meaning of a sentence and elements that do not:

> Rather, semantic meaning is that which is – or appears to be – coded in linguistic expressions, while pragmatic meaning is the interpretative "surplus" that remains when we subtract semantic (or coded) meaning from that which is taken to be the object of a given speaker's communicative intentions in a given context. Pragmatic meaning arises as a result of the interaction between coded meanings and the linguistic co-text and situational context in which they appear. Hearers may be assumed to arrive at an interpretation of the pragmatic meaning of a given utterance by attempting to unify the coded meanings of the words and constructions that make up that utterance with what they know (or have reason to believe is the case) about its co-text and context. (Hansen 2008: 12–13)

In this perspective, the distinction between semantics and pragmatics is redesigned as a distinction between conventional meanings, intrinsically bound to linguistic expressions, and spontaneous meanings, bound instead to the communicative intentions of the speaker and to the interpretations of the hearer in a particular communicative situation, and highly determined by the context of utterance (see also Ariel 2010: 93–119 for an identical position).

In the latter case, they are bound to what is inferentially meant (and not explicitly said) by the speaker. The decisive feature of pragmatic meanings is their inferential and defeasible nature: they arise as a consequence of the interaction between an utterance and the specific context where it is produced but there is nothing really fixed and binding in their status: they can be easily cancelled by some subsequent information added to the discourse. In other words, they represent an inference corresponding to a possible interpretation of what is said by the speaker in a specific context, but not a compulsory one. Following this line of reasoning, among the different types of (commonly classified) pragmatic

meanings illustrated in the previous section (conversational implicatures, conventional implicatures, and presuppositions), only conversational implicatures turn out to be actually pragmatic meanings, due to their inferential nature. Conventional implicatures and presuppositions, due to their coded nature (in the speaker's knowledge of language and in some specific lexical triggers), belong to semantics (Hansen 2008: 26–33).

A further consequence of this view is that certain types of meaning which, because of their non-truth-conditionality, have traditionally been regarded as pragmatic in nature, are redefined here as being semantic meanings due their non-inferential, coded nature. Concerning pragmatic markers, the major consequence of this view on the semantics/pragmatics boundary is that these elements turn out to have a much less "pragmatic" meaning. In this sense, taking for instance the case of Italian, the whole spectrum of uses of linguistic elements defined as "pragmatic" because of their non-truth-conditionality – from the rebuttal-mitigating use of the adverb *veramente* 'really' (Ricca & Visconti 2014) to the more interjection-like use of *guarda* 'look' as a discourse marker (Waltereit 2002) – are actually characterized by a strong conventional ("semantic") meaning: it is coded in the linguistic expressions and as such it must be learned, even if the context of occurrence plays an important role in how the elements are interpreted.

Let's take another example of an element with both a truth-conditional and a non-truth conditional reading:

(1) Italian

a. Lo riassumo *brevemente* qui, domani ne parliamo meglio.
'I sum it up *briefly* here, we'll talk about it better tomorrow.'

b. *Brevemente*, quello che è successo ieri è che Giorgio ha frainteso la mia posizione.
'*Briefly*, what happened yesterday is that Giorgio misinterpreted my position.'

Drawing the boundary between semantics and pragmatics on the basis of truth-conditionality, a sharp distinction should be drawn between the "semantic" use of *brevemente* (10a) and a "pragmatic" one (1b).[1] Such a distinction, however, clouds the evidence that both meanings are *coded* in the linguistic expression. What really counts here is that *brevemente* displays different functions at different levels of the grammar, namely, it acts as a predicate modifier in (1a) and as a

[1]On this issue, see also Van Dijk (1979) and Sweetser (1990: 76–86).

speech-act modifier in (1b). A sharp distinction between the two uses – or even more the definition of *brevemente* in (1a) as an adverb and in (1b) as a pragmatic marker – does not underline the importance of polyfunctional behavior of this and similar items.

4.1.2 Content-level and context-level expressions

In many cases, in fact, it is not a given linguistic item which is either propositional ("semantic") or non-propositional ("pragmatic") in nature, but rather different uses of it. For this reason, Hansen (2008: 14–17, 2012: 592–594) proposes a different terminology:

- CONTENT-LEVEL USE: Any use of a linguistic item in which the meaning of that item bears saliently either on a state-of-affairs in some real or imagined world referred to in its host clause or on the relation between that state-of-affairs and other (real or imagined) states-of-affairs.

- CONTEXT-LEVEL USE: Any use of a linguistic item in which that item primarily expresses the speaker's comment on the relation between a described state-of-affairs and the discourse itself (including, but not limited to, the way it is represented linguistically) or on the wider speech situation (including, but not limited to, the subjective attitudes to the state-of-affairs in question that may be entertained by the speaker, the hearer, or some relevant third party).

Redefining the boundary between semantics and pragmatics in this way means that linguistic items and constructions functioning at the context level do have a semantics (and not only a pragmatics). This division of labor in terms of meaning conventionality – especially in a work that highlights the role of polyfunctionality/polysemy in the description of linguistic meaning – has the advantage of not determining either an a priori distinction between "semantic" and "pragmatic" uses of an item nor absolute evaluations about which level of meaning it should be assigned to (content- or context-level).[2]

[2] As noted by Hansen (2008: 16) herself, this separation is in principle compatible with the hierarchically layered representation of adverbs and adverbial expressions proposed by Functional (Discourse) Grammar (see Hengeveld 1989; Dik et al. 1990; Ramat & Ricca 1998; Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008). In this respect, the distinction between content-level uses and context-level uses roughly corresponds to the distinction between linguistic expressions that operate at the Representational Level and those that operate at the Interpersonal Level – as outlined in the previous chapter.

As a consequence, the question arises of how to describe their semantics, since context-level meanings are not normally referential in nature. Many of the scholars that advocate a uniform handling of encoded meanings as semantic would, however, draw a distinction between *conceptual meanings* vs *procedural meanings* (Blakemore 1987). Conceptual meanings provide contents through which the addressee can construe a representation of reality corresponding to the expressions uttered by the speaker: they match concepts in our mental encyclopedias. Procedural meanings, on the other hand, do not themselves enter the semantic representation of the utterance: they provide instructions to hearers on how the conceptual meanings expressed in an utterance should be combined and processed.[3]

The conceptual vs. procedural distinction, as a basic distinction between meaning that contributes to the contentful structure of the utterance (coding entities, activities, qualities and so on) and meanings that do not, has also been adopted in other research frameworks.[4] Among others, Traugott & Dasher (2002) include the distinction between conceptual (*contentful*, in their terminology) and procedural meanings in their model of semantic change:

> Meanings expressed by nouns, verbs, adjectives, prepositions, and adverbs in some of their uses are usually of the contentful type. By contrast, procedural meanings are primarily indexical of SP/W's [speaker/writer's] attitudes to the discourse and the participants in it; they index metatextual relations between propositions or between propositions and the non-linguistic context. They include discourse markers (*well*, *in fact*, *so* in some of their meanings), various connectives (*and*, *but*), and express SP/W's view of the way these propositions should be understood to be connected. (Traugott & Dasher 2002: 10)

Nevertheless, drawing the pragmatics/semantics divide in this way, and the concept of procedural meaning, are not enough to fully describe the meaning of elements that display uses as pragmatic markers. Rather, many elements show a

[3] It is important to underline that the conceptual vs. procedural distinction does not coincide in any way with the distinction between truth-conditional and non-truth-conditional meaning; on the contrary, it supports the enriched view of semantics that has been illustrated so far (see Blakemore 2006: 230).

[4] Hansen (2012: 594) too refers to this distinction, though again, following the French tradition deriving from Ducrot (1980) prefers to use the term instructional (over procedural): "context-level items are thus seen as providing processing instructions to the hearer, indicating how the contents of the host clause as a whole should be contextualized so as to be integrated into a coherent mental representation of the discourse".

coexistence of both content-level and context-level uses, and their contribution to the meaning of an utterance can quite often be explained only through an overlap of coded meanings and contextual inferences, showing a steady crossing of the extralinguistic/linguistic divide. The next subsection will deal with the *polyfunctionality* of discourse-pragmatic elements, while the entirety of the next section will deal with the relationship between contextual inferences and coded meanings. [5]

4.1.3 Polyfunctionality at the semantics/pragmatics interface

Most commonly, lexemes and constructions displaying context-level uses also display content-level uses or have homophonous counterparts that operate at the representational level. The uses of *brevemente* 'briefly' in example (1) above are a case in point. The same applies for the best-studied English pragmatic markers (*well*, *you know*, *like*): they all have homophonous counterparts in other word classes.[6] In fact, in the case of elements operating at the semantics/pragmatics interface – regardless of the fact that their homophonous counterparts are adverbs, verbal constructions or other sources – this appears to be the rule rather than the exception and this fact should be systematically accounted for in their description. In my view, the best way to do this is to investigate how the different functions relate to each other, both synchronically and diachronically.

Several studies on pragmatic markers adopted this perspective, suggesting that the relation between the different functions of an item is better caught when tracing the emergence of new functions over time. In this sense, the synchronic coexistence of several functions for a single item may reflect a diachronic process of change through which the new functions gradually developed. This fact – well known in grammaticalization studies – is referred to by Hopper (1991: 22–23) as *layering*: "Within a functional domain, new layers are continually emerging. As this happens, the old layers are not necessarily discarded, but may remain to coexist with and interact with the new layers". The result of this process is the polyfunctionality of items operating at the semantic/pragmatics interface, the coexistence of coded and inferred meanings, and – for some items – the coexistence of content-level and context-level functions. This coexistence leads to (at

[5] Undeniably, the issue of how to distinguish between code and context is far more complex than outlined in this chapter – and would require a much longer discussion, which is however outside of the scope of this study. In addition to the references cited so far, see for instance Belligh & Willems (2021).

[6] A classical reference on these three items is Schourup (1985). Studies on single elements include Jucker (1993) and Schourup (2001) on *well*, Östman (1981) on *you know*, D'Arcy (2017) on *like*.

least) two intertwined problems: firstly, how to deal theoretically with polyfunctionality in the description of an item, and secondly, where to place the dividing line between different uses.

The existence of multiple senses or uses of a linguistic unit is a recurrent problem in linguistic analysis affecting all meaningful elements of language alike such as content words, function words (such as prepositions and auxiliaries), and affixal categories (such as affixes marking tense and case), which are sometimes referred to together as *grams* (Bybee et al. 1994). The linguistic analysis of polyfunctionality – the association of a single form with several different interpretations – has long been a highly debated issue and three main positions can be distinguished (see Traugott & Dasher 2002: 11–16; Haspelmath 2003: 212–213; Hansen 2008: 34–40):

- MONOSEMY: According to this view, lexemes and grams have just a vague abstract meaning, and all the various functions that can be distinguished are not linguistically independent but result from the interaction with linguistic or non-linguistic context in order to yield a specific interpretation.
- POLYSEMY: According to this view, there are different senses or meanings attached to each lexeme and gram, but these meanings are related to each other in some fashion that needs to be specified, so that it is by no means an accident that the different senses have the same formal expression.
- HOMONYMY: According to this view, separate meanings (in the sense of underlying representations) are recognized for each of the functions and consequently different homophonous grams or lexemes apply for each different meaning.[7]

From a diachronic perspective, polysemy seems to be the most attractive option. The synchronic coexistence of different functions is typically the result of diachronic sense extensions and – since these synchronic relations are expected to reflect the possible paths of change – it is assumed that these functions are related to one another in ways that can be motivated (Hansen 2012: 598). Therefore, a polysemic approach is preferable since it explicitly aims at highlighting the step-by-step process by which meaning extension takes place over time.

[7] As pointed out by Haspelmath (2003: 212 footnote 2), "from a semantic point of view, polysemy and homonymy are similar in that both involve different senses. The fundamental semantic problem has often been seen as that of distinguishing between *vagueness* (= monosemy) and *ambiguity* (= polysemy or homonymy)". See also Tuggy (1993) and Hansen (2008: 37–39), who discuss a variety of heuristic tools available for this purpose.

However, such analyses of meaning extensions are often a matter of debate and it can be difficult to handle the terms *use*, *sense* and *polysemy* in a consistent way – especially when the issue arises of how to describe the polysemy of an item, distinguishing the different conventional senses and the contextual uses. Moreover, it is important to stress that not every meaning extension of a given form necessarily end up with semanticization (that is, with a coded polysemy). In fact, it is common to find short-term innovations within the context of single speech events, which are better described as specific uses of a form rather than separate senses. Therefore, terminological caution can be useful: "I mostly refer to different functions of an expression, rather than "senses" (= conventional meanings) or "uses" (= contextual meanings), because often it is not easy to tell whether we are dealing with different senses or just different uses. The term "function" is meant to be neutral between these two interpretations" (Haspelmath 2003: 212).

In this work, I also tend to employ the terms *functions* and *polyfunctionality* in this neutral interpretation. By doing so, I do not commit myself to a specific claim about which functions are part of the conventionalized linguistic knowledge and therefore constitute different senses, and which functions only arise in different utterances depending on the pragmatic context – a problem that continuously shows up in the description of pragmatic markers. However, I regularly employ the term *use* in a broad sense as well, to indicate the different readings (*uses*) of linguistic expression and the different contexts (of *use*) in which it can appear.

4.2 Context-level expressions in the light of language change

The effects of the overlap between coded and inferred meanings can be observed both from a synchronic perspective – relevant to the meaning description of pragmatic markers in interaction – as well as from a diachronic perspective – relevant to the emergence of new functions. After having examined the issue of how to describe the meaning contribution of items operating at the semantics/pragmatics interface, I will introduce in the following pages a diachronic perspective on them, with a discussion about semantic change and models concerned with "the possibility that grammar is often pragmatics turned code" (Ariel 2008: 111). This perspective aims at highlighting the fact that meanings that appear in the pragmatic domain first – as inferences arising out of and exploited in the flow of speech – can progressively conventionalize as coded meanings of linguistic items. In other words: different types of meaning (inferred and coded, content-level and context-level) and more broadly the divide between semantics

and pragmatics, are sensitive to language change, and items and meanings can cross the divide moving from one domain to the other.

4.2.1 Dynamizing the semantics/pragmatics interface

As mentioned above, the synchronic coexistence of several functions for the same item may reflect the diachronic process of change through which the new functions gradually developed: synchronic polyfunctionality often reflects diachronic change. In the case of elements operating at the semantics/pragmatics interface, works additionally adopting a diachronic perspective have shown that in most cases the various discourse-pragmatic functions of a linguistic item have developed gradually over long periods, often starting from a relatively content-level source meaning, and progressively developing context-level functions (Waltereit 2006; Hansen 2008).

These findings suggest the existence of strong cross-linguistic tendencies of development, linking diachronic work on pragmatic markers with the broader research field of semantic change. Works like Traugott (1989, 1995, 2010) and Traugott & Dasher (2002) identified regular tendencies of change (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Tendencies of semantic change (see Traugott & Dasher 2002: 40)

i.	non-subjective	>	subjective	>	intersubjective
ii.	content	>	content/procedural	>	procedural
iii.	s-w-proposition	>	s-o-proposition	>	s-o-discourse
iv.	truth-conditional		>		non-truth-conditional

Through different case studies (concerning modal verbs, discourse markers, performatives and honorifics), this strand of research demonstrated that meanings (i) tend to become increasingly subjective (i.e. increasingly grounded in the speaker's subjective perspective), and possibly even intersubjective (i.e. explicitly grounded in the relationship between speaker and hearer). Moreover, (ii) meanings that were conceptual at the outset tend to become increasingly procedural in nature, and (iii) constructions that originally had scope within the host proposition tend to progressively extend their scope to the level of the proposition and then up to the level of discourse. Finally, (iv) meanings that were truth-conditional at the outset tend to become non-truth-conditional. These tendencies clearly match changes from content-level to context-level meanings (Hansen 2012: 599).

In particular, it is fundamental to the idea of "semantic change (change in code) as arising out of the pragmatic uses to which speakers or writers and addressees or readers put language, and most especially out of the preferred strategies that speakers/writers use in communicating with addressees" (Traugott & Dasher 2002: xi). To properly frame this idea, it is useful to build on the proposal of Levinson (1995, 2000) – taken up by Traugott & Dasher (2002: 16–17) – and distinguish three levels of meaning relevant to a lexeme:

- CODED MEANINGS: These are semantic meanings, that is, conventions of a language at a given time. They represent a non-cancelable conventional link between the form of a lexeme and its meaning.
- UTTERANCE-TYPE MEANINGS: These are pragmatic preferred meanings, that is, regular conventions of use in language-specific communities. They represent typical associations between a lexeme and a commonly used implicature, but are nevertheless cancelable.
- UTTERANCE-TOKEN MEANINGS: These are pragmatic nonce meanings, that is, inferences that have not been crystallized into commonly used implicatures. They arise in context at the time, based on encyclopedic or specific situational knowledge.[8]

Traugott & Dasher (2002: 24–25) treat these different kinds of meaning as relevant both on a cognitive level – related to the processing of the information flow in interaction – and on a communicative/rhetorical level – related to the interactional negotiation of meaning between the interlocutors. They consider the meaning of utterances and constructions as deeply rooted in the context of interaction and dependent on the strategic use of language operated by the speakers, these facts constituting the precondition of the origin of language change in discourse strategies. In this view, "the chief driving force in processes of regular semantic change is pragmatic" (Traugott & Dasher 2002: 24) and the main goal of their theory of semantic change is to explain the conventionalization of pragmatic meanings (linked to contextual inferences) and their reanalysis as semantic meanings (coded). This closely reminds us of the claim by Ariel (2008: 111):

[8]Referring to utterance-token and utterance-type meaning, Levinson (2000) uses, respectively, the terms *particularized conversational implicature* (PCI) and *generalized conversational implicature* (GCI). Traugott & Dasher (2002) speak of (G)IIN, that is *(generalized) invited inferences*. The concept of *invited inference* is substantially the same as that of *implicature*, but Traugott & Dasher (2002) use it to emphasize the role of the interactive negotiation of meanings between the interlocutors and the active role of speakers in rhetorical strategizing. Hence the name of their model: *Invited Inferencing Theory of Semantic Change* (IITSC).

"The argument is that pragmatics, together with other extragrammatical triggers, provides the raw materials and impetus for grammar".

In this model, the starting point of semantic change is the innovative use of a lexeme or a construction in an utterance: a speaker may begin to strategically exploit a conversational implicature (utterance-token meaning or invited inference/IIN) associated with a lexeme or a construction and may innovatively extend this use in a new linguistic environment. If the new uses acquire social value and therefore become salient in a community, they are likely to gradually spread to other speakers and to other linguistic contexts where they start to appear regularly (utterance-type meaning or generalized invited inference/GIIN). The last stage of this change is described as follows:

> They are considered GIINs so long as the original coded meaning is dominant or at least equally accessible, but when that original meaning becomes merely a trace in certain contexts, or disappears, then the GIIN can be considered to have become semanticized as a new polysemy or coded meaning. (Traugott & Dasher 2002: 35)

It is therefore expected that the overall diachronic process follows a path from coded meanings to utterance-token meaning (IINs) to utterance-type meanings (GIINs) – which are pragmatically motivated polysemies – to finally reach the status of new semantic polysemies (coded meanings). This model – intuitively very clear (see however the criticism by Hansen & Waltereit 2006) – has the fundamental virtue of recognizing the role played by pragmatic meanings arising in interaction in the emergence of innovative uses of lexemes and constructions. This way, the dynamics of change are placed in the "natural environment" of language use.

The descriptive and analytical approach taken by the present research shares many assumptions of usage-based models of grammar (Hopper 1987; Bybee 2007, 2010; Harder 2012): "In the usage-based approach, grammar is seen as an emergent system consisting of fluid categories and dynamic constraints that are in principle always changing under the influence of general cognitive and communicative pressures of language use" (Diessel 2011: 830). Concerning language change, these models argue that the emergence of new functions must be explained through language usage rather than through reference to a pre-existing language faculty or underlying language structures. From this perspective, non-conventional meaning – that is, meaning associated with *actual usage events* – constitutes the input to a process that has linguistic units at the output end. The following quote from Detges & Waltereit (2016) introduces all relevant concepts for the subsequent discussion:

> We have argued that the triggers for change are recurrent communicative functions. High frequency, in turn, leads to routinization of these items. Routinization, we would argue, is an aspect inherent to language use that affects all modules of grammar. First of all, at the semantics/discourse interface, the original inference wrapped up in the respective argumentative move turns into the new procedural function of the linguistic item. Secondly, at the syntax/discourse interface, the item undergoes reanalysis (Detges & Waltereit 2002). It loses its original syntactic compositionality. (Detges & Waltereit 2016: 654)

The concept of *high frequency* is a core principle of usage-based models of grammar: the more a linguistic sign acquires communicative and cognitive salience, the more it is used, becoming routinized/entrenched in speakers' cognitive systems and communicative habits (see Ariel 2008: 149–211 for a comprehensive discussion about salient discourse patterns). One of the key notions of the quote is *routinization*, and it will be discussed along with *conventionalization* in the coming section. Before that, two additional "interface issues" mentioned in the quote must be addressed. Concerning the semantics/pragmatics interface (semantics/discourse interface in the quote), the role of *discourse inferences* in the emergence of new procedural functions will be discussed. Concerning the syntax/discourse interface, the concept of *reanalysis* will be called into play.

4.2.2 Inferences in interaction

When talking about the motivations for language change, many works invoke factors such as the creative use of language or the urge to communicative successfully (see for instance Haspelmath 1999; Hopper & Traugott 2003 [1993]: 24). Waltereit (2011, 2012) highlights the strong link between processes of language change and the discourse domain, identifying in discourse strategies the motivation for and the starting point of grammatical changes: "What we see, then, is that an important subset of functional change is governed by the patterns of communication the relevant items are being used for creatively by speakers, rather than by the lexical properties of these items themselves" (Waltereit 2012: 65).

Traditionally, the research approaches specifically interested in discourse and interactional dynamics are frameworks like *interactional linguistics* and *conversation analysis* (Levinson 1983: 284–370; Clift 2016; Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 2017). These models are aimed at studying how utterances implement actions in discourse, privileging an empirical analysis of how language acts in communicative

exchanges. They investigate the procedural infrastructure of interaction, examining the sequential placement of utterances in conversation, adjacency pairs, the organization of turns, and the dynamics of turn-taking.

However, these models have rarely been interested in processes of language change (but see Couper-Kuhlen 2011). Ehmer & Rosemeyer (2018) explicitly highlight the connection between research on interaction and research on language change – finding in *pragmatic inferencing* an important contact point:

> From a usage-based perspective on language, it is pragmatic inference that is particularly important to the study of interaction and language change. Whereas entailments are unlikely to be discussed in discourse (e.g., upon hearing *All of my friends are reading* I am unlikely to react by asking *Are some of your friends reading?*), pragmatic inferences are frequently dealt with in interaction and may, for example, become the topic of conversation (e.g., I might react to *ALL of my friends are reading* by saying *So does this mean I am not your friend?*). In addition, it is a commonplace in historical linguistics that meaning change is often derived from pragmatic inferences. (Ehmer & Rosemeyer 2018: 536)

Before continuing, a short remark is needed about the notion of *inference*. In Chapter 3, the notion of *implicature* was discussed in detail. The notion of *inference* could be seen as its counterpart on the hearer side. As Huang (2017) puts it:

> By way of summary, a speaker conversationally implicates, the addressee infers, but a conversational implicature itself is not an inference. The addressee may or may not succeed in figuring out the speaker's m-intended conversational implicature as an inference. Nevertheless, it is the speaker's expectations about the appropriate inferences the addressee can reasonably be expected to draw that make the production and comprehension of a conversational implicature a rational, shared-goal activity. (Huang 2017: 157)

Implicatures are a type of speaker meaning that goes beyond what is (literally) said. Inferences refer to the cognitive processes by which participants figure out meaning beyond what is said. Inferences arise in context – given the utterance and certain contextual conditions – and are responsible for the difference between literal meanings ("what is said") and communicative meanings ("what is meant", which corresponds to what is said plus what is implicated by the speaker – that is, to be inferred by the hearer). Cued by indirectness, they can

represent a grey area in communication: it is up to active discursive negotiation to uncover inferred meanings that have not been meant – or otherwise to accept them as acceptable or even relevant in the context.

This notion of inference lies at the core of an approach to the study of language change which tries to take proper account of conversational dynamics, aimed also at observing in real time (as far as possible) the interactional conditions which favor the emergence of new meanings. Thus – from the perspective of language change research – giving due consideration to interactional dynamics is necessary for detecting the mutual construction of meaning between speaker and hearer and the local management of discourse inferences. Moreover, since pragmatic inferences are frequently dealt with in interaction, interaction turns out to be the locus and in some cases the trigger of language change. As it has been discussed above, many models of language change assign a central role to inferences, conceiving the emergence of new meanings as the gradual conventionalization of inferences arising in discourse. Continuing along this research direction – but somehow reversing the perspective – several studies have argued that meaning change may not only occur as the result of the conventionalization of speaker-based conversational implicatures, but also as hearer-based reanalysis (Detges & Waltereit 2002; Eckardt 2009; Schwenter & Waltereit 2010; Rosemeyer & Grossman 2018).

Taking stock of these studies, Ehmer & Rosemeyer (2018) aim at examining the relations between inferencing, interaction and language change, showing how work with diachronic data has assigned the notion of inference a central place in explanations of meaning change. With this approach, the focus on interaction is not the same as in conversation-analytical approaches – aimed at mapping the relationship between conversation structures and the actions performed by the interlocutors – but is, rather, intended to "demonstrate the importance of employing a contextualized model of the roles of speaker and hearer in the synchronic and diachronic emergence of meaning" (Ehmer & Rosemeyer 2018: 547). In fact, the explicit reference to the respective roles of speaker and hearer in interaction helps to better understand how certain meanings are intentionally suggested on one side of the conversation and how additional meanings are inferred by the other side, shedding light on the continuous process of meaning negotiation between the interlocutors.

The crucial point is when – irrespective of the speaker's original intent – inferred meanings are accepted by the hearer as the most salient ones in a particular context and bound to specific linguistic constructions. The pairing of inferred meanings with novel contexts and specific linguistic forms is the environment

in which change can start to take place. This perspective on language change highlights the role of the hearer:

> Thus, meaning change commonly appears to arise in situations in which the hearer draws an inference on the basis of the use of a linguistic construction in a context in which its use is unexpected [...]. Crucially, the resulting historical change is unmotivated from the perspective of the speaker. Although the speakers exploit the semantic potential of using a linguistic construction in novel contexts and anticipate the inference by the hearers that a divergent reading is intended, they do not necessarily expect the conventionalization of this inference (Ehmer & Rosemeyer 2018: 547)

In this perspective, what needs to be done is to study closely what happens in the continuous exchange of explicit and inferred meanings between speaker and hearer and moreover – trying to include a structural point of view – understand what happens at the syntax/discourse interface. Most of these issues revolve around the concept of *reanalysis*, which I will now explore.

4.2.3 Reanalysis

In the last subsection, pragmatic inferencing was identified as the contact point between interaction and language change, representing an important descriptive and analytical notion for both research directions. Now, pragmatic inferencing provides the link to introduce the concept of *reanalysis*, as they both pertain to the hearer's sphere of activity: inferencing relates to comprehension rather than production and – in a similar way – reanalysis is normally seen as a hearer-driven change (Detges & Waltereit 2002). As Waltereit (2018: 57) puts it: "It is therefore natural to ask what is the relationship between the two".

According to traditional definitions (for instance Langacker 1977: 58), *reanalysis* is that type of language change that assigns a new underlying structure to a surface sequence without overtly modifying that sequence. In their comparison between grammaticalization and reanalysis, Detges & Waltereit (2002) essentially follow this definition. Reanalysis has mainly been used to explain morphosyntactic changes and it is more generally linked to the structuralist-generative view of language change. It involves two abstract syntactic representations and a syntactic ambiguity arising in a particular surface sequence: when reanalysis occurs, there is an abrupt shift between the two representations.

This concept of reanalysis has been intensively debated by recent works (De Smet 2009, 2014; Whitman 2012) and its suitability and usefulness – both on a theoretical and on an empirical level – has been questioned (see Waltereit 2018 for

a summary of this debate). Questioning both abruptness of change and the role of ambiguity, De Smet (2009: 1748–1751, 2014: 28–37) argued that the traditional concept of reanalysis can be broken down into underlying mechanisms of change that better fit into current usage-based models. This perspective argues for gradience of change and structural indeterminacy (uses of linguistic items that cannot be assigned to one single abstract representation). However, the question arises of how long underlying mechanisms can be identified – which are more basic, more specific, and better defined.

Alternatively, reanalysis has also been used in the literature to refer not to a specific *type* of language change, but to the fact that something *has* changed. From this perspective, reanalysis is seen as the formal signal of an innovation, relevant to essentially any kind of language change. Commenting on both these views, Waltereit (2018: 60–61) suggests that – at this point of the discussion – "reanalysis is not a phenomenon in the empirical domain, but an analytical category on the theoretical plane". He also points out that the reason for the overlap of these different readings of *reanalysis* may be that both imply a hearer inference that is not specifically prompted by the speaker.

Whatever interpretation of the concept one can maintain, the local management of inferences in interaction seems to be the common feature that holds together both interpretations of reanalysis – and possibly also other types of language change, from semantic change to grammaticalization. From this perspective, the rise and the management of inferences – as a basic feature of human linguistic behavior – turns out to be the main empirical phenomenon to be closely investigated: for these reasons, it seems reasonable to start from this kind of analysis, no matter what broader type of language change it represents.

There have been many attempts to model the process whereby a context-specific inferential meaning is reanalyzed as a new encoded function. Heine (2002), discussing the role of context-induced reinterpretation in grammaticalization processes, proposes this kind of scenario.[9]

In short, the scenario is as follows. The starting point is the normal use of a construction – referred as the *source meaning* – in an array of different contexts (Stage I). If the use of this construction to imply a certain, non-literal meaning is found to be particularly successful in specific types of contexts, this meaning can, over time, become firmly associated with the construction. In those contexts, there is another meaning – referred as the *target meaning* – which represents a more plausible interpretation of the utterance concerned (Stage II). At this point, as an effect of frequency, the new form-meaning pairing may acquire the conventional character that is the defining feature of grammatical constructions: these

[9]Among other proposals, see for instance Diewald (2002) and Mauri & Giacalone Ramat (2012).

Table 4.2: A scenario of how linguistic expressions acquire new grammatical meanings (Heine 2002: 86)

Stage	Context	Resulting meaning	
I	Initial stage	Unconstrained	Source meaning
II	Bridging context	There is a specific context giving rise to an inference in favor of a new meaning	Target meaning foregrounded
III	Switch context	There is a new context which is incompatible with the source meaning	Source meaning backgrounded
IV	Conventionalization	The target meaning no longer needs to be supported by the context that gave rise to it; it may be used in new contexts	Target meaning only

contexts no longer allow for an interpretation of the construction in terms of the source meaning (Stage III). If this stage is reached, the new form-meaning pairing is freed from the contextual constraints that gave rise to it. It will start occurring in new contexts and eventually generalize to a whole variety of contexts (Stage IV).

What this model highlights is the metonymical character of the changes involved, that is, the progressive shift from one form-meaning association to another which takes place in context (see also Traugott & Dasher 2002: 27–34, 78–81). Koch (2001: 201) defines metonymy as "a linguistic effect upon the content of a given form, based on a figure/ground effect along the contiguity relations within a given frame and generated by pragmatic processes". In the scenario described above, this corresponds to the figure/ground shift between meanings: the source meaning shifts from the foreground to the background while the target meaning (prompted by a context-induced inference) shifts from the background

to the foreground. In a way, metonymy is the conceptual counterpart of pragmatic inferencing, so that – following the process of inferring – lexical expressions or grammatical constructions gradually shift from one conceptual meaning to another, while at the same time they expand from a specific context of use to a greater variety of contexts. Even though this model could represent a good approximation of the dynamics through which a discourse inference can be reanalyzed as coded meaning, it also shows some problematic points to be noticed here.

First, the notion of *bridging context* is problematic: although it is useful at a theoretical level, it is hard to assess its validity at a descriptive level, since bridging contexts can be recognized only retrospectively once a change has already happened. Especially when working with diachronic data, it is the presence of different meanings for the same construction in synchrony that allows us to reconstruct their diachronic relationship and thus identify contexts where both meanings can (hypothetically) be intended. Second, these models do not convincingly deal with the protagonists of interactions: Heine (2002) doesn't say almost anything about the respective roles of the speaker and the hearer, while Traugott & Dasher (2002) focus almost exclusively on the "creative" role of the speaker – capable of inviting inferences and deliberately insert constructions in unexpected contexts – and overlook the role of the hearer.

While the appearance of constructions in unexpected contexts is definitely one of the triggers of reanalysis, it seems more realistic that this happens largely by chance, rather than from an explicit choice of the speaker – and consequently, that hearers compensate this unexpectedness with their inferring activity. Besides the speaker's creative activity, closer reference to the hearer's inferring activity and an accurate inspection of interactional patterns – aimed at identifying which inferred meanings are possibly activated in a specific context – is essential to develop a plausible model of meaning change.

4.3 Context-level expressions in the light of language variation

Referring back to the quote by Detges & Waltereit (2016) mentioned above, a last aspect of reanalysis and language change processes shall be discussed now: conventionalization and the spread of an innovation in the social community of speakers. This section will address this issue and, going in this direction, it will introduce a sociolinguistic perspective to the present research. Discussing the interdependence of variation and change processes in linguistic systems, the

gradual character of reanalysis is reevaluated through a variational perspective – getting to a sociolinguistic-informed notion of conventionalization. This paves the way to the topic of sociolinguistic variation of pragmatic markers.

4.3.1 Argumentative routines and conventionalization

There are different ways of conceptualizing the process through which a new meaning or function gradually comes to be firmly associated with a linguistic expression. Heine (2002) defines it *conventionalization*, including it as the fourth step in the scenario:

> Most context-induced inferences remain where they are: they are confined to bridging contexts, they are what has variously been described as "contextual meanings" or "pragmatic meaning". But some of them, i.e. those acquiring switch contexts, may develop some frequency of use, they no longer need to be supported by context and they turn into "normal" or "inherent" or "usual" or "semantic" meanings. (Heine 2002: 85)

Traugott & Dasher (2002: 35) hold a similar view: "The prime objective of IITSC [Invited Inferencing Theory of Semantic Change; see the discussion in the previous section] is to account for the conventionalizing of pragmatic meanings and their reanalysis as semantic meanings". Following these examples, the term *conventionalization* will be used in the present research to indicate the progressive inclusion of emergent contextual functions in the coded meaning of a linguistic expression. Nevertheless, other terms have also been used in the literature to denote this process or to highlight specific aspects of it.

Opting for a different terminological choice, Detges & Waltereit (2016) talk about *routinization* to explain processes of change. According to them, the driving force linking different kinds of change is to be found in *argumentative routines*, that is, preferred ways of saying something on the part of the speakers. Argumentative routines allow the speaker to reach their communicative goals in a simple but effective way: they represent "familiar paths" in interaction, on which speakers can count to get the desired results. The source of the differences are the speakers' communicative strategies – determined by individual preferences and contextual choices – and the different domains of grammar addressed by them (propositional content, speech act, discourse structure). The common aspect among different kinds of change is represented by the fact that they are all driven by patterns of language use: "Routinization is not a feature of language itself – it is rooted in language use" (Detges & Waltereit 2016: 637). The gradual

rooting of frequent argumentative moves in usage give rise to communicative routines which – in the course of time – are *reanalyzed* as parts of the grammar.

Routinization has both a cognitive and a communicative facet. On the cognitive side, it represents the progressive fixation of language sequences, grammatical patterns, and argumentative moves in the speakers' language knowledge (entrenchment). On the communicative side, it results in the high frequency in discourse of a linguistic item – and in the progressive ruling out of alternatives to perform the same action or express the same meaning. What emerges from this process is the only possible choice in a specific context. In this perspective, routinization is a usage-based-grammar-flavored term: it revolves around the idea that increasing frequency of use of linguistic forms and the simultaneous entrenchment in speakers' competence are the crucial points in language change. Routinization and conventionalization are clearly not equivalent terms, but neither are they entirely dissimilar to each other. They instead represent complementary aspects in processes of language change: on the one hand, the gradual fixation of an expression/function in the speakers' language knowledge – on the other, its progressive acceptance as a coded part of the communicative habits of a community.

Finally, with reference to reanalysis, De Smet (2012, 2014) has discussed in detail the concept of *actualization*, defined as "the process following syntactic reanalysis whereby an item's syntactic status manifests itself in new syntactic behavior" (De Smet 2012: 601) – which can be partially compared to the process of conventionalization, whereby an item spreads to new contexts of use. De Smet (2014) aims at integrating the concept of reanalysis in usage-based models of grammar, showing how it could be less abrupt than usually assumed: he builds a model of gradual – in a way, barely noticeable – change where a new function evolves through a cascade of small steps of reanalysis in slightly changed contexts. Moreover, he highlights how the spread to new syntactic contexts will first affect those contexts that most resemble the original usage contexts of the construction, showing that actualization proceeds from one environment to another on the basis of similarity relations between environments. The logical consequence of this view is a conflation of the two notions: "If reanalysis can be gradual in this way, the temporal primacy of reanalysis over actualization is no longer logically necessary, and the process of reanalysis can be reconceived as simply part of actualization (which then becomes something of a misnomer)" (De Smet 2012: 629).

Echoing this line of reasoning, Ehmer & Rosemeyer (2018) link it to the discussion about the role of inferencing in interaction. They argue that the gradual

affirmation in specific contexts of use – and the expansion to new ones – can also be explained in terms of the degree of expectedness of hearer-based inferences:

> We could thus expect scenarios such as the ones described above in which the original reanalysis is highly unexpected (and consequently, salient) in discourse. However, once reanalysis has taken place, the same inference becomes much less unexpected in those usage contexts that most resemble the original reanalysis context. These contexts are favored in the actualization process because of cognitive ease; the hearers can use an already established reanalysis pattern based on a more or less conventionalized inference to deal with this new utterance type. (Ehmer & Rosemeyer 2018: 548)

The consequence of these observations is the downsizing of the distinction between reanalysis and actualization/conventionalization – and the necessity, instead, of paying greater attention to the degree of expectation of inferences in a given discourse situation and how they are dealt with in intermediate phases of change.

4.3.2 Degrees of conventionalization

Accordingly, reanalysis and conventionalization go hand in hand rather than being two separate phases of a process: a form is reanalyzed while it spreads through the social community of speakers. The more it spreads, the more the new form/function pair becomes fixed as a new convention. Thus, reanalysis is strictly bound to the process of selection and diffusion of innovative usage patterns through the community. Yet how should the diffusion of morpho-syntactic and semantic variants in a speech community be modeled?

Possible suggestions come from the analogy that has been established by some researchers between current models of sound change – and specifically the work of Ohala (1981, 1993) – and models of language change in other domains. Croft (2000, 2010) has discussed these arguments in depth, which have also been taken up by Waltereit (2012), Grossman & Noveck (2015) and Ehmer & Rosemeyer (2018). Ohala (1981, 1993) proposed that sound change is a result of the way hearers perceive the speech signal. In actual speech two instances of the same phoneme are never entirely identical. This is due to a number of phonetic bias factors (mainly related to the mechanical and physiological aspects of sound production and perception) which, in speech production, result in a pool of synchronic variation. This represents the basis for sound change:

> In the perception mechanism, hearers typically filter contextual variation out from the speech signal. However, they sometimes fail to do so, analyze a part of the contextual variation as the articulatory goal and even filter out a part of the signal that was part of the original articulatory goal. Thus, errors in speech perception can in the long run lead to sound change. (Ehmer & Rosemeyer 2018: 543)

Consequently, sound change represents the result of how listeners perceive and represent the speech signal and – at least in some cases – its origin is to be found in this articulatory variation: "In other words, sound change is the result of the selection of a variant out of the range of variation inherent in normal speech, rather than requiring any specific departure from the conventions that are underlying those representations" (Waltereit 2012: 54).

Departing from these ideas, the works cited above have tried to extend this line of reasoning to other areas of language change. The assumption is that – with regard to the semantic level of linguistic constructions – the mechanism of interpreting a contextual feature as a coded one might look very similar to the cases of phonetic variation. For instance, Croft (2010) suggests that morphosyntactic change comes about in the same way, whereby it is triggered by natural variation of lexical choice in discourse. With reference to the above-mentioned model of sound change, the interpretation given to hearer-based reanalysis would arise as a result of failed attempts, or misunderstandings, in the retrieval of the intended meaning – which in turn have the potential to give rise to subtle variation of meaning. This idea is truly fascinating, although it has also received some criticism (see the discussion in Waltereit 2012: 55). However, the reference to inherent variation is important – in my perspective – to better describe the relationship between reanalysis and conventionalization.

In this scenario, the role of a well-identifiable structural reanalysis is downsized, in favor of a dynamic view of synchronic variation – as linguistic constructions gain more and more frequency and contexts of use which are characterized by an inherent meaning variation. In my view, this point has both an empirical motivation and theoretical implications: in the synchronic landscape, variation in usage is something observable and to some extent – however difficult and questionable – measurable. This is not the case with reanalysis – especially if based on the identification of bridging contexts – which, as discussed above, can be interpreted as such only retrospectively.

In this regard, Ehmer & Rosemeyer (2018) introduce the useful concept of *degrees of conventionalization*:

> While the use of a construction in a novel context leads to an ad-hoc inference by the hearer (corresponding to a particularized implicature on the speaker side), repeated exposure to the same novel usage will lead to the conventionalization of this inference. The degree of conventionalization of an inference has an important influence on the perception and management of inferences, as conventionalized inferences are arguably drawn on a less conscious level and are more robust. This may impact the usage contexts of the constructions that the inferences are associated with. [...] This means that assuming degrees of the conventionalization of an inference and observing the reflexes of this process in interaction can be useful in determining at which point an inference has become part of the encoded meaning of a construction. (Ehmer & Rosemeyer 2018: 548)

On this view, reanalysis should be theoretically defined not as a phenomenon clearly distinct from the diffusion of the newly reanalyzed construction, but rather as an integral part of it. Pushing this reasoning further, the degrees of conventionalization should be interpreted (and operationalized) as degrees of variation in the acceptability of constructions which are more or less present in the competence (and in the performance) of speakers as a consequence of the inherent variation of use.

4.3.3 Language variation in the pragmatic domain

The theoretical reasoning about degrees of conventionalization will now be suspended: I will go back to it in the empirical part, supported by the analysis of data. The remainder of this section will be devoted to bringing the above reasoning back to the bigger picture. This is fostered by the concept of *language variation*, which appeared several times in the discussion about different interpretations of reanalysis and conventionalization.

Living language – the language which crowds the multiple spaces of our social interactions – is no static entity. Without wishing to summarize here the main assumptions and findings of variationist sociolinguistics (in this regard, see Bayley 2013), it is a well-established point that language is ineradicably subject to variation (Labov 1963, 1972) and characterized by a structured heterogeneity (Weinreich et al. 1968: 99–100). Moreover, variation is sometimes stable, but sometimes it leads to change in a linguistic system. Thus, variationist sociolinguistics is ultimately concerned with the circumstances – internal and external – which determine the evolution of linguistic systems.

The relationship between language variation and language change has always been a crucial theme for variationist sociolinguistics (again, see the seminal paper by Weinreich et al. (1968), but it has progressively expanded to other theoretical approaches to language change, above all grammaticalization theory (see Nevalainen & Palander-Collin 2011; Poplack 2011). In this respect, a fundamental idea is that change is characterized (and preceded) by variation, proceeding gradually across time and linguistic contexts, with a period of oscillation between conservative and innovative forms: "A does not become B; rather, A and B alternate for a period and the frequency of one (or more) competing variants increases, spreading in both linguistic and social space" (D'Arcy 2013: 485). From this perspective, while variation can be quite stable and its presence does not automatically entail that a change is occurring, the process of change, by contrast, always entails variation.

Variationist sociolinguistics was originally developed for the analysis of phonological variation and has been successfully applied to the analysis of morphosyntactic variation. Discourse-pragmatic features, however, do not easily satisfy the defining criteria of the variationist concept of linguistic variable.

> Because discourse-pragmatic features have unique semiotic and distributional properties, it is not easy to apply the parameters outlined above to their conceptualisation as variables or to their quantitative analysis. Firstly, discourse-pragmatic features are typically semantically bleached and therefore cannot be defined in terms of semantic equivalence between variants. Secondly, they are typically both referentially and syntactically optional, and thus eschew straightforward reporting as non-occurrences (see, however, D'Arcy 2005). Consequently, it is not immediately obvious on what basis to identify co-variants of a discourse-pragmatic variable and how to produce accountable results. (Pichler 2013: 28)

Nevertheless, some studies (Terkourafi 2011; Pichler 2013, 2016; D'Arcy 2005, 2017) have recently argued in favor of extending the variationist analysis to discourse-pragmatic features (quotatives, tags, discourse-pragmatic markers), a task that they consider important and feasible despite its complexity – trying to group different elements under a single functional category which can be treated on a par with the classic variables.

Finally, another approach called *variational pragmatics* has recently emerged (see Barron & Schneider 2009; see also Placencia 2011), aimed at investigating the relationship between language variation and pragmatic phenomena. Despite the

name, this framework does not necessarily take into consideration linguistic variables in the above-described sense: "rather, variational pragmatics investigates how particular speech acts, routines, or even broader notions such as politeness, are realized across varieties of the same language" (Cameron & Schwenter 2013: 466). This approach does not preclude variationist methodology, but it doesn't focus on the variant forms and their internal linguistic conditioning, but rather on the macro-social processes and cultural values associated with speaker strategies for carrying out pragmatic routines in natural discourse. Primarily, it focuses on patterns of macro-social pragmatic variation across dialects and sub-varieties of a given language, thus trying to assess the impact of sociolinguistic and geographical variables on pragmatic aspects.

A discussion related to variation across varieties of Italian (and their impact on pragmatic phenomena) represent the core of the next chapter, which concludes the theoretical part of the present work and introduces the case studies.

5 Modal particles in Italian: Introducing the case studies

5.1 Modal particles in Italian: Preliminary concepts

Before moving to the empirical part of the present work, this chapter introduces the last few theoretical notions necessary to properly frame the case studies and the subsequent discussion as well as the methodological guidelines behind the analysis. In this section, I will first present an overview of previous studies on pragmatic markers and modal particles in Italian. Subsequently, I will outline the sociolinguistic processes that led to the formation/development of regional varieties of Italian and discuss their relevance for the description of modal particles.

5.1.1 Modal particles in Italian: Previous studies

The standard references on discourse-pragmatic markers in Italian are the works of Bazzanella (1995, 2006), the most comprehensive treatment to date of these topics. In these works, the labels *segnali discorsivi* 'discourse signals' and *discourse markers* are used, respectively. Under this heading, Bazzanella (1995: 232–249) groups together items with a vast range of functions, including turn-taking devices (*allora* 'then', *dunque* 'hence', *ecco* 'that is'), fillers and reformulation markers (*ehm* 'uh', *diciamo* 'let's say', *cioè* 'that is'), attention getters (*guarda* 'look'), and agreement devices (*certo* 'of course', *esatto* 'exactly'). A functional taxonomy is also proposed, which encompasses three macro-functions: interactional, metatextual, and cognitive. These macro-functions are subdivided into more specific functions, providing a list which "is not meant to be exhaustive but is merely intended to outline the wide range of possibilities DMs can exploit in Italian and is proposed for comparison with other languages" (Bazzanella 2006: 456–457). Therefore, a general categorization is provided which focuses on a fine-grained description of the functional spectrum of discourse markers: this taxonomy still represents a good introduction to these issues as regards Italian. The model proposed more recently by Ghezzi (2014) also makes close reference to this taxonomy.[1]

[1]Ghezzi (2014) distinguishes three macrofunctions (textual cohesion and coherence, social cohesion, and personal stance) that are substantially comparable to those identified by Bazzanella (2006): metatextual, interactional, and cognitive.

In the general analyses of Italian discourse-pragmatic items mentioned above, little, if any, space, has been devoted to modal-particle-like elements. This is not surprising, since for Italian "the existence of such a group of words as German MPs has never been assumed. It has only been sporadically observed that some Italian lexemes (such as *mai*, *poi* and so on) present peculiar characteristics (phonetic, semantic, syntactic, etc.) distinguishing them from the traditional class of adverbs" (Coniglio 2008: 92). However, it is worth citing those early sporadic observations – mainly by German scholars working on Romance languages – since they were the first to raise the question of whether modalization forms (that is, linguistic items expressing *Abtönung*) can also be found in Italian: Stammerjohann (1980), Held (1985, 1988), Burkhardt (1985), Radtke (1985) and Masi (1996). These works mostly adopt a contrastive perspective, looking for Italian functional equivalents of German modal particles among Italian adverbs, connectives, syntactic constructions, and specific intonation contours. They do not refer to any particular theoretical frameworks and the results are thus hardly comparable with each other. Although they could appear outdated (and in many respects they are), they still constitute a source of interesting examples and early reflections on discourse-pragmatic functions in spoken Italian. Some of these works are also briefly cited by Andorno (2000, 2003: 180–181), who first noticed the modal-particle-like uses of some Italian focus adverbs.[2]

Coniglio (2008), Cardinaletti (2011), and more recently Cruschina & Cognola (2021) are among the few works which explicitly analyze specific uses of Italian adverbs (*mai* 'never', *poi* 'then', *pure* 'also', *ben* 'well', *sì* 'yes') as modal particles. In particular, Coniglio (2008: 107) describes these items as "semantically as well as syntactically very close to German MPs". These papers lie in the wake of several works which have been dedicated to the German modal particles in the framework of generative grammar. From that perspective, they are interesting elements for the study of the syntax/semantics interface, in terms of the relation between functional heads in the left-periphery of the clause and syntactic movement. These approaches mostly analyze modal particles as related to the left periphery of the clause, where the highest functional projections of the clause –

[2]Since the topic was (almost) completely unexplored at that time, Andorno (2000: 54) – who focuses on the acquisition of focus particles in Italian as a second language – does not elaborate on this point: "In mancanza di studi sistematici sulla questione, per non sommare le difficoltà di definizione della categoria a quelle relative all'analisi di una varietà non nativa, in questo lavoro non approfondiremo il tema del possibile uso modale degli avverbi focalizzanti, limitandoci a segnalare l'emergere – o il non emergere – di un tale uso" [In the absence of systematic studies on the issue, in this work we will not deal further with the topic of the possible modal use of focus particles, limiting ourselves to point out the emergence – or not – of such a use].

including illocutionary force (ForceP) – are encoded (Rizzi 1997). Moreover, Italian scholars working within the generative framework were the first to dedicate some attention to modal-particle-like elements which may be found in the dialects spoken across Italy and in regional varieties of Italian (see for instance Cinque 1991; Poletto 2000; Munaro & Poletto 2005).

To properly frame these issues, an overview of the sociolinguistic changes which affected Italian in the last century and are still ongoing is essential. In the following pages, I will briefly outline the composition of sociolinguistic repertoires in Italy, focusing on the relationship between Italo-Romance dialects, regional varieties of Italian, and standard Italian. Subsequently, I will introduce concepts such as *restandardization*, *demoticization,* and *neo-standard*. I will explore how regionally marked and "low" features have started to penetrate the standard norm, how the traditional standard is progressively converging downward to spoken varieties, and what place discourse-pragmatic markers occupy in this process.

5.1.2 Dialect/standard constellations in Italy

The sociolinguistic situation of Italy is remarkably varied. The national language, Italian, is spoken alongside more than fifteen Italo-Romance dialects, about fifteen historical linguistic minorities, and a considerable number of new linguistic minorities (the outcome of past and present movements of people and migrations).[3] As a whole, they compose a wide array of sociolinguistic repertoires, distributed along the peninsula and the islands. The primary work of reference on these topics – with particular attention to the Italian sociolinguistic continuum – is Berruto (2012; see also Berruto 2018 for a recent and briefer recap).

Standard Italian is a continuation of fourteenth-century Florentine, based upon the literary variety used by great authors of that period and codified by grammars at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Italo-Romance dialects (or simply *dialetti* 'dialects') are not dialects of Italian, as they do not result from the geographic differentiation of Italian. In most areas, they are to be understood as linguistic systems separate from Italian: they derive from the Italo-Romance vernaculars spoken across the country ever since the Middle Ages – which were coeval with the Italo-Romance Florentine vernacular from which standard Ital-

[3]On the Italo-Romance dialects see Maiden & Parry (1997), Grassi et al. (1997), and Dal Negro & Vietti (2011). On the so-called "historical linguistic minorities" see Iannàccaro & Dell'Aquila (2011), while on the so-called "new linguistic minorities" see Chini (2011) and Goglia (2018). For a recent overview of sociolinguistic research in Italy, see Alfonzetti (2017).

ian developed – and they evolved in parallel with it. Italo-Romance dialects are hence *primary dialects*, to use Coseriu's (1980) terminology.[4]

Italo-Romance dialects were the only languages for daily use until the end of the nineteenth century – Italian being used at the time almost exclusively in writing and formal styles, and only by an educated minority of the population. Italo-Romance dialects, the low varieties of the repertoire, were hence in a *diglossia* relationship with Italian, the high variety of the repertoire. As Berruto (2018) points out, this situation dramatically changed in the course of the following century.

> The most evident development in the sociolinguistic history of Italy since Unification (1861) is the shift from a situation in which the dialects were largely the most common (if not the only) vehicle of everyday spoken communication while Italian was used almost only in written domains, to a situation in which the dialects are normally used only in informal and in-group situations, mostly by lower socio-economic classes and by older people (indeed, with considerable differences between the regions). To the detriment of dialects, Italian has increasingly gained domains as well as "true" native speakers. (Berruto 2018: 498)

As a result, the relationship between Italian and Italo-Romance dialects evolved into a new one. During the twentieth century – as a consequence of various factors including generalized schooling and the diffusion of mass media, such as radio and television – the standard language spread across speakers and situations: the high variety of the repertoire also became the language for daily use, alongside the low varieties of the repertoire.

In fact, Italian is nowadays regularly used for formal spoken and written purposes, while Italo-Romance dialects, functionally subordinate to Italian, are restricted to the family domain and, more generally, to informal situations – standard Italian is the *Dachsprache* 'roof language' of all Italo-Romance dialects, in the sense of Kloss (1978); see also Ammon (1989). At the same time, Italian is regularly used in informal situations as well, and both Italian and Italo-Romance dialects are employed for ordinary conversation. This type of linguistic repertoire has been termed *dilalia* by Berruto (1989). In this kind of situation – where

[4]Using Maiden & Parry's (1997: 2) terminology, Italo-Romance dialects are labelled *dialects of Italy*, while the varieties which result from the geographical differentiation of Italian – such as the regional varieties of Italian – are labelled *Italian dialects* (i.e. a local variety of standard Italian).

both Italian and Italo-Romance dialects can be employed for ordinary conversation – a massive number of primary dialect speakers shifted to Italian and contact between the varieties in the repertoire became increasingly intense.

Long-standing contact between Italo-Romance dialects and Italian eventually resulted in a range of intermediate varieties between the primary dialects and the standard variety of the national language. A modelling of different dialect/standard constellations in Europe – including dynamics of contact and processes of convergence – is offered by Auer (2005), while a discussion on the Italian situation (with a focus on the North-West) can be found in Cerruti & Regis (2014, 2015).[5] In most areas, this range of intermediate varieties is to be considered as divided into two separate continua: the dialect continuum and the Italian continuum. The former consists of varieties resulting from the *Italianization* of primary dialects, while the latter consists of varieties resulting from the *dialectalization* of Italian. The first kind of continuum – for the sake of simplicity – is composed of rural dialects, dialects of small urban centers, and, if present, a more prestigious urban dialect (usually centered around a big urban center). The second kind of continuum, is composed of regional sub-standard varieties, regional standards, and the standard (national) language.[6]

For the purposes of this research, the second kind of continuum is particularly relevant. Regional sub-standard regional varieties are the most affected by the substrate influence of Italo-Romance dialects, and, as with regional varieties of Italian on the whole, they emerged among a primary dialect-speaking population after the spread of Italian as a common language for everyday purposes.[7] Conversely, regional standard varieties are the least affected by substrate influence and emerged in the wake of the establishment of a standard language ideology through literacy and schooling (see Regis 2017: 148–150). Thus, regional varieties

[5]See also Berruto (2005, 2018), who schematized four major (partially overlapping) classes of structural phenomena giving rise to new varieties in the contact area between the systems of Italian and dialect: (1) dialectization of Italian; (2) Italianization of dialect; (3) koineization; (4) hybridization.

[6]It is worth noting that some areas do not meet the characteristics of the most typical Italo-Romance scenario. In these areas, for historical reasons, primary dialects exhibit a lower degree of structural distance from Italian and a discrete boundary between two different linguistic systems cannot be identified; hence we are not dealing with two separate continua, i.e. the dialect continuum and the Italian continuum, but with a single dialect/standard continuum. Such is the case of Tuscan dialects, as well as with the dialects of Rome and other areas of Central Italy.

[7]An example of regional sub-standard is the variety labelled *italiano popolare* ('popular Italian') by Berruto (2012), defined as a variety with heavy dialect interference, showing many substandard elements which deviate from standard Italian – often spoken by native dialect speakers who acquired Italian as a second language.

of Italian are varieties of the national language that are spoken in different geographical areas. They differ both from each other and from standard Italian at all levels of the language system, but especially with regard to phonetics, phonology, and prosody. They represent the Italian actually spoken in contemporary Italy: common Italian speakers regularly speak a regional variety of Italian, which are termed *italiani regionali* 'regional Italians' (see Cerruti 2011).

In fact, as Italian spread across speakers and situations, it turned into a multifunctional language, and provided itself with a bundle of co-occurring linguistic features which meet the requirement of *immediacy* (Koch & Oesterreicher 1985) of spoken varieties. These linguistic features partly result from the well-known phonological and grammatical processes which arise naturally in many substandard spoken varieties across languages[8] and are partly due to the transfer of linguistic features from Italo-Romance dialects to Italian (as regards the retention of substratum features). Cerruti et al. (2017) sum up the consequent processes as follows:

> In any case, after a probable phase of idiosyncratic and/or inconsistent occurrence of features, the progressive stabilization of both nationwide shared and region-specific traits resulted in the emergence of more or less clearly demarcated varieties. More specifically, the relatively stable co-occurrence of certain substratum features, in various areas depending on the different substrata, gave rise to the emergence of different regional varieties of Italian [...]. In fact, regional varieties of Italian basically resulted from a process of "dialectalization of Italian"; that is, they essentially emerged as a consequence of the retention and subsequent stabilization of features coming from Italo-Romance dialects. Nowadays, common Italian speakers regularly speak a regional variety of Italian (alongside, in some cases, an Italo-Romance dialect). (Cerruti et al. 2017: 7)

The development of regional varieties of Italian may be understood as one of the outcomes of *demotization*, that is the process through which the standard language came to be used by the masses of the population, thus becoming "popular" (see for instance Berruto 2017: 34–35; Coupland & Kristiansen 2011; Auer & Spiekermann 2011).[9] This way, the massive spread of the standard language

[8] On the so-called *vernacular universals* see Chambers (2004) and Trudgill (2011).

[9] The term is inspired by Mattheier's (1997) *Demotisierung* – based on the Greek word *demos* 'people'. Regional sub-standards and regional standards have also been claimed to represent two different phases of demotization (Auer 2017: 367–368), the former resulting from the imperfect learning of the common language by primary dialect speakers and the latter issuing from the inclusion of regional features in standard usage.

to very different communicative domains in the twentieth century has also had effects on the linguistic features of Italian – which until then was basically restricted writing and formal styles – and speakers at all levels of society began to have full access to the spoken standard. This expansion put pressure on the standard language which consequently developed an internal variability which is necessary to serve its manifold functions, leading to a large-scale structural transformation.

5.1.3 Demotization and restandardization: What place for modal particles?

The process of demotization generally entails the influence of the spoken language on the standard variety: the latter, being no longer under the exclusive control of a small intellectual elite, ceases to be conformed only to the written language, and begins to be influenced by the spoken language. Hence, the standard variety has come to converge towards spoken informal varieties: many spoken informal features have come to be used and accepted even in formal and educated speech, as well as partly in formal and educated writing, thus leading to the progressive inclusion of formerly sub-standard features into standard usage (Berruto 2012; Cerruti et al. 2017; Cerruti 2020: 130).

However, this process did not affect the social prestige of the standard variety: as Coupland & Kristiansen (2011: 28) point out, a fundamental characteristic of this type of sociolinguistic change is that "the 'standard ideology' as such stays intact while the valorization of ways of speaking changes".[10] In the Italian case, demotization has thus led the standard norm of Italian to increase in variability and to decrease in codification. Furthermore, a similar situation has been described for other European countries as well, for instance Germany and Denmark (Kristiansen & Coupland 2011; Kristiansen & Grondelaers 2013). Regional varieties, then, are not the only outcomes of demotization: this process also promotes the (on-going) establishment of a new standard norm, which encompasses the traditional literary standard, spoken language features and regional standard features. The outcome is a set of features which are *standard by usage* (see Am-

[10] It should be clear that this process has not been accompanied by the weakening of the traditional, literary, standard variety of Italian, as the latter is still used and maintains official prestige (Berruto 2017: 33–34). For this reason, it cannot be described as *destandardization*. Unlike what typically happens with destandardization (as attested in Switzerland and Norway), there still is no evidence that the traditional standard is losing its official prestige or is replaced by competing varieties. Concerning destandardization and its relationship with demotization, see Auer & Spiekermann (2011) and Coupland & Kristiansen (2011).

mon 2003: 2–5; see also *usage-based standard ideology* in Auer & Spiekermann 2011).

In the Italian case, the clustering of these features has been described as a new standard variety, termed *Italiano neo-standard* 'neo-standard Italian' by Berruto (2012). This label indicates an accepted set of features that, in comparison to the traditional literary standard, "represent a lowering and a consolidation of a partially new norm, regionally slightly varied, closer to the spoken varieties and to the non-learned and non-bureaucratic styles" (Berruto 2012: 27, 2017: 33). The process whereby the traditional standard is converging towards spoken, informal and regional varieties has also been named *restandardization* (Berruto 2017: 33–39) – a label that can also be used to entail "the coexistence between neo-standard Italian and the traditional standard" (Cerruti et al. 2017: 17; Auer 2017: 366). Crucial for the distinction between neo-standard and traditional standard is the remark that the model speakers (and the usage domains) for the old and the new standard are different (Berruto 2017: 36; Auer 2017: 371): grammars and classical authors shaped the traditional standard (which is highly codified), while journalists and politicians play a major role for the new standard (which reflects less prescriptive values). For ordinary speakers, the neo-standard is not restricted to peripheral usage domains as the old standard was, but it is used throughout their everyday life and widespread in mass media. It is therefore "flexible enough to deal with manifold situations, differing in terms of co-participants, topics, speech activities" (Auer 2017: 371).

Given this picture, the issue of the relationship between the neo-standard and regional (standard) varieties is a complex one: admittedly, it is not easy to tell them apart from each other, nor to determine the precise relationship between the two. On this point, opinions can (slightly) diverge. Cerruti et al. (2017: 8) argue that "neo-standard Italian is mainly characterized by regionally unmarked linguistic features, but it also contains region-specific features (viz. features of the regional standards), which are particularly abundant in spoken language", while Auer (2017: 368) – with reference to the German situation – adopts a more radical point of view: "The neo-standard clearly is not a vehicle for the transportation of regional identities" thus identifying the neo-standard as a non-regionalized variety. Regional standard features are hence to be considered as "incorporated" into a large core of nationwide shared neo-standard features. This depends of course on the extent to which oral and informal features can be separated from regional features, but – at least for the Italian case – it is quite certain that neo-standard Italian indeed allows a certain amount of regional differentiation (see Berruto 2012: 62–65).

However, the most interesting point is another one. Although the neo-standard may contain regional features, Auer (2017: 368) insists on the fact that these features are becoming "de-localized". That is, regional features in the neo-standard do not necessarily correspond with the region the speaker comes from – or, in any case, they don't have that specific indexical value anymore: on these issues there is already research evidence for phonetic and phonological phenomena (see Crocco 2017; De Pascale et al. 2017), but phenomena at other levels of analysis are likely also involved. For instance, it has been said that morpho-syntactic features play a role of primary importance in characterizing this partially renewed standard norm of Italian – including syntactic constructions such as right and left dislocations, hanging topic, topicalizations, and clefting (Cerruti et al. 2017: 9; Auer 2017: 371). These constructions are textbook examples of phenomena at the syntax/pragmatics interface, being syntactic realizations of pragmatic relations pertaining to the coding of information structure. More generally, one might ask – besides the phonological, morpho-syntactic and lexical features – what is the place of pragmatic phenomena in neo-standard Italian?[11]

In fact, as already mentioned above, some research papers that have recently dealt with modal particles in Italian include sociolinguistic observations as well. Notable examples are works on *già* 'already' as a backchecking form (Squartini 2013, 2014; Fedriani & Miola 2014; Calaresu 2015) and works on *mica* '(etym.) crumble' as a non-canonical negation form (Pescarini & Penello 2012; Squartini 2017; Ballarè 2020; Cerruti 2020).[12] These papers share the fact that some of the discourse-pragmatic functions under investigation only appear in regional varieties, while they are unknown to standard Italian: for this reason – whether or not in the foreground – sociolinguistic themes necessarily emerge.

This is for instance the case of *mica*, examined by Squartini (2017: 213–222; see also Cerruti 2020: 132–136).

[11]Neo-standards have been described on the basis of some attitudinal components which qualify them as suited and convenient to multiple usage domains and communicative situations (see Auer 2017: 371–373). From this perspective, attitudinal components such as orality, informality and subjectivity are strongly related to the functions that discourse-pragmatic markers express (reformulation, marking of discourse structure, expression of vagueness, expression of subjective attitudes). As a consequence, the question whether pragmatic phenomena and pragmatic markers can also be considered prominent features of neo-standards is well-founded.

[12]These works focused especially on northern regional varieties, as works on discourse-pragmatic markers in central and southern varieties are still underrepresented (see however Scivoletto 2022; Brucale et al. 2022). Moreover, another clarification is needed. Research on discourse-pragmatic markers in Italian which includes sociolinguistic observations does not entail the involvement of the debate about neo-standard. In fact, except for Cerruti (2020), the studies cited above do not mention this issue, focusing rather on the fact that some of the functions described are regionally marked.

(1) Italian (Squartini 2017)[13]

a. "Ciao", mi disse, "verrò a sposarti una notte di queste. […] Non sarai *mica* già sposato?", fece lei. "Purtroppo si", dissi io.

'"Hi", she said, "I'll come down and marry you one of these nights […] Are you not, *by chance*, already married?", she said. "Unfortunately, yes", I said.'

b. Ma tu non eri *mica* già sposato con Derganz?

'But, weren't you *perhaps* already married to Derganz?!'

While the use of *mica* in (1a) seems to be a standard use without special regional specialization, the occurrence of *mica* in (1b) is not generally accepted by all speakers of Italian: "It is in fact a regional phenomenon restricted to varieties of Italian, whose geographical boundaries are not clear yet, but, in a preliminary delimitation, can be located in an area in the North-West of Italy, possibly centered in Lombardy and Northern Emilia" (Squartini 2017: 215).[14]

Regionally marked elements reflect the phase of intense language contact between dialects and standard Italian, when regional varieties emerged retaining and adapting substrate dialectal features. In many cases, they indeed represent dialectal features transferred to regional varieties (see Calaresu 2015; Favaro & Goria 2019; Cerruti 2020), thus providing good case studies for the sociolinguistic processes sketched so far. In this respect, discourse-pragmatic markers are attractive because they can convey both the attitudinal components and the slight regional variability which characterize neo-standard Italian. In addition, they represent a remarkable observatory for the dynamic relationship between standard Italian, regional (standard) varieties, and the neo-standard.[15] To wit, they possibly amount to those dialectal features transferred to the regional (standard) variety and eventually de-localized (in the sense that they are no longer indexical

[13]These examples are adapted from examples (9) and (10) in Squartini (2017: 213–214).

[14]The difference between MICA$_1$ (1a) and MICA$_2$ (1b) can be explained in terms of polarity and mirativity: they signal a mismatch between what the speaker knows and what comes out from the current information flow. The two different uses express different orientations in the polarity contrast that characterize this mismatch. Specifically, MICA$_1$ marks a negative expectation on the part of the speaker while the polarity value attributed in discourse is positive; MICA$_2$ marks a positive expectation, while the polarity value attributed in discourse is negative (see Squartini 2017: 217–222).

[15]Admittedly, as already mentioned above, it is not always easy to distinguish between regional (standard) varieties and neo-standard. In this respect, not being part of the neo-standard clearly does not entail a sub-standard status: for instance, the regional use of *mica* exemplified above is not non-standard; it's regional standard.

signs expressing regional identities) and included into the group of nationwide-shared neo-standard features.

> Several features which were previously limited to the vernacular have indeed extended their reach to the standard. A number of features have moved "upwards" from secondary dialects of Italian, as the latter correspond to the vernaculars of those speakers who were socialized in Italian (e.g., the younger generations). Some were first transferred from primary dialects, which represent the vernaculars of those speakers who were socialised in an Italo-Romance dialect (as is typically the case of the older generations). Others, which were also transferred from primary dialects, have presumably always been used by both uneducated and educated speakers even in formal situations. (Cerruti 2020: 131)

Whether some of these (regional) features have been promoted to the (neo-) standard variety is still in many cases an open research question. These sociolinguistic processes represent the background of the case studies presented in Chapters 8 and 9.

5.2 Data collection and methodology

The last section of this chapter introduces the data sources used in the case studies presented in the next chapters and the methodological choices adopted. Given the differences in objectives and methods between the first two studies and the other two, the discussion is split into two subsections. The case studies of Chapters 6–7 rely on corpus data and qualitative analysis: this is introduced in the first subsection. The case studies of Chapters 8 and 9 rely on data retrieved through sociolinguistics questionnaires and different data visualization techniques: this is introduced in the second subsection.

5.2.1 Corpus-based analysis

The methodological approach used in Chapters 6 and 7 may be described as *qualitative data analysis*. "Qualitative research in applied linguistics takes many forms and may best be defined as research that relies mainly on the reduction of data to words (codes, labels, categorization systems, narratives, etc.) and interpretative argument" (Benson 2013: 1). Qualitative research is descriptive and interpretational: it encompasses attempts to determine the type of features occurring within a data sample and it relies on the grouping of data in different

categories on the basis of bundles of common features. The identification and the fine-grained description of both categories and features – which reflect the interpretation of the data – constitute the core of this methodology.

The analysis of the data is made possible by the comparison between a starting hypothesis (often based on a reference theory) and empirical observations: this means collecting data and evaluating how the data relate to the theory. In particular – considering how data were collected for the present research – this takes the form of *qualitative corpus-based analysis*. Corpus-based analysis employs grammatical categories recognized by a reference linguistic theory, but investigates their patterns of variation and their use empirically (see Biber 2015 among others). The use of corpora for the retrieval and the extraction of linguistic data is based on the conviction that linguistic investigations must be based on "real" data, that is, actual instances of oral or written communication as opposed to "made-up" data or data which is only built on introspection.[16] The corpora used for the data retrieval are briefly described below.

The main source used for the data collection is the KIParla corpus, a recent resource for the study of spoken Italian (see Mauri et al. 2019; Ballarè et al. 2022). Built with conversational data collected in Turin and Bologna, the corpus is constituted by two modules, KIP and ParlaTO.[17] It is completely open-access and it is designed to be shared as a free resource through the NoSketch Engine interface. The parameters taken into account for the creation of the corpus stress "the relevance of extralinguistic factors (regarding both the socio-geographic profile/status of the speakers and the interactional contexts) in order to build a corpus suitable for investigating (socio)linguistic variation in contemporary Italian" (Mauri et al. 2019: 1). The corpus interrogation allows access to the speakers' metadata (age, place of origin and social group) and situational data about the conversational exchange, which are crucial factors for research in sociolinguistics and conversational analysis. So far, the KIParla includes various types of communicative situations (lessons, exams, interviews, and spontaneous conversations) linked to the academic setting. Future extensions will include other settings, but comparability will be ensured by the common classification of the factors defining the type of communicative situation. The different situation types were classified according to the following external factors: (i) the symmetrical vs. asymmetrical

[16] In principle, this also allows the replicability of results: the choice of corpora and analytical techniques is made transparent in order for the results to be verifiable and for follow-up studies to confirm or criticize the findings.

[17] The KIP subcorpus consists of approximately 70 hours of recorded speech collected in Turin and Bologna (35 hours per city approximately) and transcribed between 2016 and 2019. The ParlaTO subcorpus is a collection of spontaneous speech collected in Turin between 2018 and 2020 and it amounts to approximately 50 hours of speech (see Cerruti & Ballarè 2021).

relationship between the participants; (ii) the presence vs. absence of previously established topics; (iii) the presence vs. absence of constraints on turn-taking. The authors believe "that using these three very general features is particularly helpful in the task of integrating new data recorded in other situations, without losing comparability with the other parts of the corpus" (Mauri et al. 2019: 3).

In addition to the data extracted from the KIParla corpus, other examples come from the LIP corpus, one of the most important collections of spoken Italian data (see De Mauro et al. 1993). Consisting of approximately 58 hours of recordings – which amount to a total of approximately 490,000 words – the corpus was collected between 1990 and 1992 in four cities (Milan, Florence, Rome, and Naples). It samples five macro-types of communicative situations and different subtypes of discourse settings.[18] These features (place of data collections, type of communicative situations) make it suitable for sociolinguistic research as well. The corpus is freely accessible through a digital version curated by the Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz (see Schneider 2002).

Beside spoken data, the analysis also deals with examples of written language. These examples are extracted from the *La Repubblica* corpus, a very large collection of newspaper texts (Baroni et al. 2004). This corpus contains all the articles published between 1985 and 2000 by the national daily *La Repubblica*, amounting to about 320 million words. The corpus is tokenized, POS-tagged, lemmatized, and categorized in terms of genre (news-report and comment) and topic (labels such as "culture", "economics", "politics", and so on). It is open-access and searchable through the NoSketch Engine interface.

The categorization and the analysis of corpus examples represent the bulk of Chapters 6 and 7. In order to ensure layout consistency and a better readability, I adapted the examples extracted, leaving aside the transcription conventions specific to each corpus. The detailed reference to the source corpus has been reported under every example. In the examples, relevant adverbs are in italics. In the translations, different strategies have been employed: either a specific adverb/phrase (also in italics) or no translation (using instead the placeholder PTC).

[18] The five macro-types are: (Type A) bi-directional exchange, face to face, with free turn-taking (face-to-face conversations); (Type B) bi-directional exchange, not face to face, with free turn-taking (telephone conversations); (Type C) bi-directional exchange, face to face, with regulated turn-taking (including for instance assemblies, oral exams and interviews); (Type D) unidirectional exchange, with the addressee being present (including for instance lessons and sermons) and (Type E) distanced unidirectional exchange (television and radio programs). The same grid was used to (sub)classify situation types in the KIParla corpus.

5.2.2 Sociolinguistic questionnaires

The case studies presented in Chapters 8 and 9 investigate Italian modal particles characterized by diatopic variation and/or diatopic markedness. The first one is dedicated to *solo* 'only', with a focus on its use in the regional variety spoken in Piedmont (Northwestern Italy). The second one is intended to trace the distribution of a small set of modal particles in different regional varieties across Italy (with a focus on northern varieties). Crucially, both case studies aim at combining a pragmatic account of the items under analysis (grammatical status, illocutionary and common-ground-management functions) and a sociolinguistic account of their distribution (diatopic and, to a lesser extent, diaphasic variation). The details of the case studies will be discussed at the beginning of each chapter: I will now outline some common issues and the research methods applied.

Doing research on discourse-pragmatic markers characterized by diatopic variation raises a few methodological problems. The main one probably concerns the retrieval of data. Scattered instances of regionally marked elements can be found in the available corpora of spoken Italian, but it is rather a matter of chance. Especially in the case of modal-particle-like elements, the occurrences are extremely rare. Other examples can be found through targeted web extractions, but even this does not allow one to build a satisfactory dataset. Moreover, these data are not suitable for every research question. They can be used for a structural analysis of the contexts of use (type of speech acts, syntactic environment) but they give little to no information concerning specific semantic/pragmatic features of the constructions or sociolinguistic information. From a sociolinguistic viewpoint, only if metadata are available in spoken corpora (about the speakers and the communicative situations) is it possible to investigate the variation of these constructions, albeit still facing several difficulties. Data extracted from the web seldom allow us this possibility. In any case, depending on the specificities of the research question, corpora are often not the most-suited tool for sociolinguistic research. [19]

Having at the same time the objective and the necessity of collecting a significative amount of data about regionally marked modal-particle-like elements, I decided to turn to a different research methodology, namely *sociolinguistic questionnaires*. They not only offer the possibility to be designed around a specific

[19] Among the corpora used cited above, the LIP corpus includes metadata about the communicative situation and the geographic context: speeches were collected in four Italian cities (Milan, Florence, Rome, Naples), thus allowing only limited research about diatopic variation. The KIParla corpus offers a rich apparatus of metadata and – even if the data were collected in only two cities (Turin and Bologna) – the hometown of speakers can always be retrieved, thus allowing more detailed sociolinguistic research.

research question, but also to be tailored in order to combine more questions and different needs. Basic references on this methodology, which provided useful insights and suggestions are Schleef (2013), Krug & Sell (2013) and Dollinger (2015). I designed two questionnaires, one for each case study, and they display some common aspects and some differences.

In broad terms, both questionnaires consist of three sections: a metadata introductory section, a section concerning the acceptability of the constructions under investigation, and a section with specific questions that depend on the focus of the case study. In this way, they combine data collection on the sociolinguistic markedness of the constructions and case-specific issues. In the metadata section, the respondents were asked to give general information which can be used to establish correlations between the given answers (linguistic data) and social factors. The following list sums up the social factors taken into consideration in the questionnaires.[20]

- gender
- educational level/degree
- year of birth
- occupation/profession
- native language(s)
- city/place of residence
- linguistic competence in one or more dialects
- city of high school attendance

Metadata are fundamental, since they give information about the respondents which can be subsequently put in relation with their answers – thus making it possible to find significative correlations between linguistic and social variables. For the present case studies, information about the "city of high school attendance" is particularly important. I decided to use this parameter to assess the regional variety spoken by the respondents, integrated when necessary by information about "native language(s)" and "linguistic competence in one or more dialects".[21]

[20] In broad terms, they reflect the metadata model adopted by the KIParla corpus.

[21] Other social factors play no role in the present work, but the data collected may be used in future research highlighting different issues.

High school years (age 14–18) are usually characterized by dense social and linguistic interactions – in varied communicative situations – favoring further development or enrichment of the linguistic and communicative competence. Close contact with peers coming from a relatively limited area (districts of a city or neighboring towns) promotes the acquisition of local linguistic features and sociolects, which are often not (yet) perceived as regionally marked or exclusive of a social group. Later years can witness more movements (to study, work or build relationships elsewhere) and more diverse social and linguistic contacts, all factors which can impact and modify one's own idiolect – integrating features from other varieties. In this sense, the competence developed during youth and school socialization can be said to represent a good indicator of a regional language variety.[22]

The design of the questionnaires has benefited from the models developed during previous research on these topics (Favaro 2019) – and from fruitful discussion and collaboration with colleagues (Favaro & Goria 2019). After a test phase, the questionnaires were spread in digital format through the web via mailing lists and group chats in order to collect answers from different Italian regions. No other specific sample characteristics were required. In the first questionnaire (April–September 2018), 570 answers were collected, and in the second one (October–December 2019), 180 answers were collected.[23] The evaluation of the results – along with theoretical and empirical issues concerning the constructions under investigation – represents the bulk of Chapters 8 and 9.

[22]It should be remembered, however, that geographical varieties as such do not exist, rather, people are always speakers of a socio-geographical variety. Moreover, what environment or age is crucial for the acquisition and differentiation of pragmatic features is an open question. Useful hints on these (and related issues) can be found in Berruto (2003), who critically examines the concept of *native speaker*.

[23]Further details will be discussed in the next two chapters. The original version of both questionnaires (in Italian) can be accessed online at https://zenodo.org/records/10362289.

6 From additivity to illocution: A case study on *pure* 'also'

6.1 *pure*: Overview of the categories involved

This first case study concerns the adverb *pure* 'also', which is widely used in Italian as a focus adverb. Since König's (1991) seminal work, focus adverbs represent a thriving area of study as they are linked to some interesting problems that are debated at different levels of linguistic analysis.[1]

At the semantic level, the meaning of focus adverbs displays a complex interrelationship between semantic and pragmatic values: on the one hand, they have an impact on the propositional level, and on the other hand, they are responsible for the activation of several discourse inferences that can induce the emergence of new meanings. At the level of information structure, the issue of the exact relationship between the category of focus and the contribution of these adverbs to its identification is a delicate one: these items cannot properly induce focus by themselves, but their semantic contribution should be understood as sensitivity to the focus structure of a sentence (König 1993: 978; De Cesare 2010). Regarding semantic change, focus adverbs show synchronic and diachronic overlap with other linguistic categories such as conjunctions, conjunctional adverbs, discourse markers, and modal particles (König 1991: 16; 165).

In this section, an overview of the main functions of *pure* will be provided. In doing this, I will highlight how its functional range covers different linguistic categories, spanning from information structure to illocutionary modification, modality, and concessivity.

6.1.1 Information structure and focus adverbs

Speakers generate sentences appropriate for their communicative needs: in different communicative circumstances and according to the way speakers dyna-

[1]Following Andorno & De Cesare (2017), I use the label *focus adverbs* to refer to this class of elements. Other labels used in recent publications (see De Cesare 2015; De Cesare & Andorno 2017) include *focus markers* and *focusing modifiers*, as well as the "classic" label *focus particles* (König 1991).

mize information, the same propositional content can be expressed by different prosodic and morphosyntactic structures. Utterances that are equivalent in terms of their propositional content but not in terms of how information is integrated into the ongoing discourse, or with respect to how information is packaged according to the communicative situation, display a different *information structure*.

Following Chafe (1976, 1987) and Lambrecht (1994), information structure will be defined here as a discursive dimension expressing the degree of activation that the propositional content of an utterance acquires in the informational flow that builds up discourse. A brief but useful introduction to this subject is offered by Krifka (2008). Taking up Chafe's (1976) suggestion, Krifka (2008: 243) defines information structure as a "phenomenon of information packaging that responds to the immediate communicative needs of interlocutors". Information structure (henceforth IS) motivates the different ways in which linguistic information can be presented by interlocutors according to different communicative situations.

Two major IS categories have been recognized in literature: (i) those involving the mental representations of discourse referents – cognitive categories such as activation and identifiability; (ii) those indicating pragmatic relations between propositions and their elements – pragmatic categories such as topic and focus (Lambrecht 1994: 36). More broadly, IS is linked to the notion of common ground (see the discussion in Chapter 3), the space that hosts the interplay between propositions whose knowledge is shared by the speaker and the addressee, assumptions about each other's state of mind, and new information. This is relevant for IS since – as Lambrecht (1994: 36) points out – information must be molded depending on whether it is presented by the speaker as already available to the addressee's knowledge (presupposition) or as newly introduced by their utterance (assertion). The interplay between presupposition and assertion shapes the notion of *focus*, which is directly involved in the semantic description of focus adverbs. There are two major ways of defining focus.

Lambrecht (1994: 213) considers focus "the semantic component of a pragmatically structured proposition whereby the assertion differs from the presupposition". If, in an utterance, a presuppositional structure is identified that divides the information into presupposed information (the set of propositions that the speaker thinks the interlocutor already knows or could take for granted) and asserted information (the proposition carrying new information that the addressee will share with the speaker once they have heard the utterance), it is possible to define focus as the pragmatic relation that associates an asserted component to an open variable in a presupposed proposition. The other main definition of focus as proposed by Krifka (2008: 247) is that it "indicates the presence of alternatives that are relevant for the interpretation".

Since König (1991) a basic distinction has always been drawn between additive and exclusive focus adverbs, prototypically identified by items such as English *also* (additive) and *only* (exclusive): their Italian equivalents are *anche* and *pure* (additive) and *solo* (exclusive).[2] One of the distinctive properties of focus adverbs is their interaction with the focus structure of an utterance: it is the information structure that determines the semantic contribution of focus adverbs to the utterance and variations in the information structure correspond to variations in their semantic contribution. Related to this, one of the most striking syntactic properties of such adverbs is their positional variability: they may occur in several positions in a sentence.

(1) Italian

a. Giorgio ha comprato *pure* delle mele[FOCUS]
'Giorgio *also* bought some apples'

b. *Pure* Giorgio[FOCUS] ha comprato delle mele
'*Also* Giorgio bought some apples'

In these examples, different positions of *pure* correlate with different positions of the sentence stress (which signals the focus of the sentence, here shown by the words in small caps) and with different interpretations of the relevant sentence. Depending on their position, focus adverbs operate on different sentence constituents: in (1a), the domain of association (on this term, see Andorno & De Cesare 2017: 159–161) is *delle mele* and the remaining part of the sentence is backgrounded; in (1b), the domain of association is *Giorgio* and the remaining part is backgrounded. The part of the sentence that the focus adverb operates on corresponds then to the part of the sentence in focus: changing the focus also changes the domain of association of the focus adverb.

Besides the functional value of operators on the focus of a sentence, focus adverbs also have a lexical meaning: they do not only signal a pragmatic relation, but they enrich it with specific semantic values. According to the description proposed by König (1991: 94–119) for additive focus adverbs – the subclass to which *pure* belongs – there are two features that play a crucial role in the semantic analysis of these expressions. The first one is the quantification effect, through which the value of the focused expression is related to a set of alternatives.

[2]The most important contributions on Italian focus adverbs are Ricca (1999) and Andorno (1999, 2000). In the Italian grammatical tradition, focus adverbs are usually referred to as *focalizzatori* 'focalizers' (Ricca 1999) or *avverbi focalizzanti* 'focusing adverbs' (Andorno 1999).

(2) Italian

a. Giorgio ha comprato *pure* delle mele
'Giorgio *also* bought some apples'

b. Giorgio ha comprato delle mele
'Giorgio bought some apples' [ASSERTION]

c. Giorgio ha comprato qualcos'altro
'Giorgio bought something else' [PRESUPPOSITION]

A sentence like (2a) can be described as the sum of two propositions, represented here by sentences (2b) and (2c). The sentence *Giorgio only bought apples* contains the assertion that *Giorgio bought apples* and builds on the presupposition that *Giorgio bought something else* (which is outside of the scope of the negation, cf. *It is not true that Giorgio also bought apples*, activating the same presupposition), thus suggesting that *apples* are part of a larger set of elements (depending on the context) and that at least one of the possible alternatives satisfies the relevant open sentence. Focus adverbs contribute quantificational force to the meaning of a sentence: they quantify over the set of possible alternatives to the value of the focused expression. The meaning contribution of *pure* is to include these alternatives as possible values for the open sentence in their scope, while at the same time asserting the validity of the sentence it has scope over.[3]

In addition to the selection of alternatives, some focus adverbs may induce a ranking into the set of possible alternatives which means that they induce scalar structures in the domain of quantification. In this case, the alternatives and the focus value are part of a set that is hierarchically arranged. Some adverbs can, by themselves, induce a scalar ordering (for example English *even* and Italian *persino*), others (like Italian *pure*) are compatible with a scalar reading when this is suggested by the context:

(3) [*La Repubblica* corpus – article.id: 2242, comment: education]
E l'accoglienza nelle scuole è stata considerata molto soddisfacente. *Pure* gli studenti meno solerti, racconta chi ha assistito alla sperimentazione, hanno seguito con grande interesse

[3]There is a structural asymmetry in the meaning of the two sub-classes distinguished: additive focus adverbs trigger the presupposition that there is an alternative value under consideration that satisfies the open sentence in the scope of the adverb, while exclusive focus adverbs trigger a presupposition that corresponds to the relevant sentence in the scope of the adverb. In this way, additive focus adverbs do not contribute to the truth-conditional meaning of the sentence, while exclusive focus adverbs do (see König 1991: 52–56).

'And the reception in school has been considered beyond satisfactory. *Even* less diligent students, said someone who witnessed the experiment, followed with great interest'

In example (3), the set of possible alternatives includes other groups of students ordered along a scale, from the less diligent ones to the very diligent ones. In contexts like these, scalar focus adverbs often activate an evaluation inference connected to the scalar ordering – that is, the value of the focus is characterized as ranking "high" or "low" on the scale.

In the case of *pure*, the inference is rather connected with a scale of expectation in discourse, whereby the referent it has scope over can be said to be more or less expected in that context. As a part of its conventionalized meaning – when used in a scalar way – *pure* activates the inference that the focus value ranks lower on the scale of expectation than the alternative values. I now give two more examples of *pure* as a focus adverb:

(4) [*La Repubblica* corpus – article.id: 2438, news-report: sport]
In palio i punti per l'attribuzione del titolo di combinata, che prevede *pure* la disputa di uno slalom speciale. Ha vinto l'immancabile Svizzera

'Points will be awarded/at stake for the attribution of the title of [alpine skiing] combined, which *also* includes the execution of a special slalom. The invincible Swiss won'

(5) [*La Repubblica* corpus - article.id: 2413, news-report: news]
A tale proposito i due enti hanno recentemente organizzato un'iniziativa promozionale comune a New York. Nel corso dei colloqui si è *pure* parlato dello sviluppo dei trasporti marittimi ed aerei per migliorare i collegamenti tra Italia e Jugoslavia

'In this respect the two institutions have recently organized a common sales initiative in New York. During the talks the issue of the development of maritime and air transport to improve the connections between Italy and Yugoslavia was *also* addressed'

As noted above, the semantic contribution of focus adverbs crucially depends on their syntactic scope. Nevertheless, it is not always easy to clearly identify it. In example (4) *pure* clearly has scope over the NP *la disputa di uno slalom speciale*, as also suggested by its syntactic position. In example (5) the situation is different: even though it is quite unproblematic to say that the domain of association of *pure* is the NP *dello sviluppo*, the syntactic scope extends to include the VP *si è*

parlato. This is induced by the syntactic position of *pure* – immediately after the finite verb form – from where it can operate on different sentence constituents.[4] This position is typically found in contexts where the additive focusing value of *pure* is downsized and it is exploited for discourse dynamics rather than for highlighting a referent.

(6) [KIParla corpus - TOD2013]
c'hai ragione sì è vero è vero // c'ha *pure* i suoi difetti Torino eh per carità però // naturalmente // cioè il negativo e il positivo c'è ovunque //
'you're right yes it's true it's true // it *also* has its flaws Turin eh by all means but // of course // I mean you find negative and positive things everywhere'

(7) [*La Repubblica* corpus - article.id: 1795, comment: sport]
Oh sì, gli stranieri sono trattati meglio, ma è *pure* giusto
'Oh yeah, foreigners are treated better, but it's *also* right'

In example (6) the narrow domain of association of *pure* is the NP *i suoi difetti*, but its scope extends on the whole utterance, which is marked as a concessive premise before introducing a contrast (connective *però*). In example (7) it is not easy to identify a single element associated with the focus particle: *pure* marks the whole utterance without evoking a real set of alternatives. These uses could be thought of as peripheral instances of *pure* as a focus adverb. They share some of the features of *pure* used as a modal particle (first of all, the syntactic position), which will be introduced in the next subsection.

6.1.2 Illocutionary modification

Other uses of *pure* are clearly not of the focus-adverb type. Example (8) below is an instance of a connective use of *pure*, where the adverb – along with *ma* 'but' – serves the function of connecting two sentences. The term *conjunctional adverb* is sometimes used to refer to adverbs that operate as sentence connectives: "syntactically they belong to a given sentence, but functionally they do not actually modify it. Rather, they operate on the textual level, giving textual coherence to a sequence of sentences; thus they are functionally very close to conjunctions" (Ramat & Ricca 1994: 308).

[4]This position is sometimes referred to as the position characterized by *weitere Skopus* (Dimroth & Klein 1996: 93) or *portata ampia* (Andorno 2000: 51) – that is the position from where a focus adverb has "wide scope".

(8) [*La Repubblica* corpus - article.id:86, comment: economics]
Naturalmente, nessuno ha o può vantare ricette risolutive in proposito. Ma *pure* qualcosa si poteva fare o, almeno, tentare
'Of course, nobody has or can boast decisive actions in this respect. But *yet* something could have been done or, at least, tried'

Example (9) is an instance of the use of *pure* as a modal particle. In this case, the adverb operates on an imperative verb form with a mitigating function.

(9) [KIParla corpus - TOC1004]
// va bene si accomodi // comodatevi *pure* //
'// all right have a seat // have a seat *please* //'

The fact that items operating as focus adverbs could also cover other functions has been noted since König (1991: 16), who cites the uses as conjunctional adverb and as modal particle: "Both 'extensions' in the use of focus particles can be observed in a wide variety of languages". However, even though many single contributions have been devoted to single items, this is still an underexplored topic – at least from a typological perspective. A promising approach is represented by Eckardt & Speyer (2016), who use the label *focus cline* to refer to possible paths of development in the domain of focus and information structure:

> We find the typical patterns of language change: emergence of new particles as well as bleaching and loss of constructions. The pathway of focus change starts where words develop into focus sensitive particles and associate with focus, it continues where they foster into conventionalized alternative-based constructions, and it ends where reference to alternatives or focus-background structure is lost. We will refer to the later stages as *bleached focus*. (Eckardt & Speyer 2016: 503)

The identification of a focus cline – starting with the emergence of focus sensitive particles and ending when their relation to the focus marking is lost – is one of the possible ways to describe the development of connective and modal uses of focus adverbs, and eventually their stabilization as autonomous senses of the same item (polysemy). One interesting issue then, revolves around the possible outcomes of the bleached-focus constructions. Both discourse markers and modal particles represent possible endpoints of the focus cline: the discourse structure and the coherence relations between sentences on the one hand, as in example (8) above; the relationship between a proposition and the speech act on the other, as in example (9).

A further example of the modal use of additive focus adverbs is represented by the refutational use of *too* that is found in some varieties of US English:

(10) English (Schwenter & Waltereit 2010: 88)
A: You didn't do your homework!
B: I did *too*!

The link between the focus-marking and the refutational use of *too* has to be identified by the role played by additivity in discourse: "Just like the additive *too*, this use makes reference in discourse to a contextually salient proposition, most often one derivable from a previous utterance, namely the syntactically negative proposition it denies. However, it is obvious that this way of referring back to a previous utterance is completely different from the way the additive *too* operates" (Schwenter & Waltereit 2010: 88). The function of *too* in this use is to deny the truth validity of the propositional content of a previous speaker's utterance, reflecting a trajectory of change from a representational use of the adverb to an interactionally-bound interpersonal use.

Another example is the independent use of German *auch* 'too' in questions (11a) or exclamations (11b) to mark pragmatically extreme states-of-affairs.

(11) German (Schwenter & Waltereit 2010: 98–99)

a. Warum *auch* hatte sie mein wichtigstes Wort nicht akzeptiert?
'Why only didn't she accept my most important word?'

b. Was der Kerl *auch* für Einfälle hat!
'Hell, what sort of ideas does this guy have!'

A case of modal use of focus adverbs in Italian is represented by the use of *pure* in (9) above. Even though this use of *pure* could be said to represent the clearest case of the modal particle in Italian, it has not received a great deal of attention. Apart from sparse mentions in the works on Italian focus adverbs (see Andorno 2000; Ricca 2017), Held (1983), Waltereit (2006: 107–108), and Coniglio (2008: 115–118) are among the few contributions which explicitly addressed the issue – but none of these works goes too much into details. Another example is (12):

(12) [LIP corpus – Milan E1]
A: dica *pure* signorina cosa desidera
B: guardavo grazie
A: '*please* miss tell me what you want'
B: 'I was looking, thank you'

To give a preliminary description, in directive speech acts, *pure* operates on the illocution carried by the verb and – depending on the case – it gives the directive the specific character of an invitation or permission to do something. As a pragmatic side-effect, the directive seems more polite/mitigated: this kind of directive may be included in the politeness/mitigation strategies available to speakers of Italian. The exchange in example (12) is cited also by Waltereit (2006), who observes:

> *Pure* is commonly used in offers; the speaker urges the hearer to something that lays in their own control area – for example, a seller can invite a client to express their own desire after they entered the shop. This is a modification of the speech act "directive", because it is part of its preparatory conditions that the addressee would not do the relevant action on their own initiative (Searle 1969: 66). In this way, the hearer expectations which are in the focus of directives are withdrawn. (Waltereit 2006: 107)[5]

This description will be the starting point of the analysis in the following pages. In fact, none of the works cited above – despite containing many useful hints – has tested the theoretical claims on corpus data. As a consequence, the goal of the present case study is to expand this view through corpus examples: it will provide a bulk of examples of modal uses of *pure* – including specific contexts of use not yet discussed, both in the spoken and in the written mode – and it will look at its distribution; it will provide a fine-grained analysis of the functions expressed and it will test the usefulness of the category of illocutionary modification to describe them.

As the examples of illocutive uses of *too*, *auch* and *pure* have shown, the modal functions that (additive) focus adverbs can display are very different from each other and crucially depend on the diachronic trajectories of single items in specific languages – to wit, every case has its own specificities. From this perspective, the category of illocutionary modification tries to string together these items in view of the fact that – beyond the individual specificities – they share these features: (i) the scope on the speech act; (ii) a pragmatic effect on the illocution; (iii) a grammatical (rather than lexical) status. In the framework of Functional

[5]My translation of the original quote in German: "*Pure* wird häufig in Angeboten verwendet; der Sprecher fordert den Hörer zu etwas auf, was in seinem, des Sprechers, eigenen Kontrollbereich liegt – z.B. kann ein Verkäufer damit die Kundin auffordern, ihren Wunsch zu äußern, nachdem sie schon das Geschäft betreten hat. Es handelt sich hierbei um eine Modifikation des Sprechaktes «Aufforderung», denn zu dessen Einleitungsbedingungen gehört es, dass der Angesprochene die jeweilige Handlung nicht von alleine tun würde (Searle 1969: 66). Es wird hier also auf die bei Aufforderungen per se im Fokus stehende Hörerreaktion abgehoben".

Discourse Grammar, these elements would be most likely classified as operators (that is, grammatical elements) at the layer of illocution, where items are found which account for "grammatical emphasis and mitigation of a specific Illocution" (Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008: 83).

Modal instances of *pure* can also be found in declarative sentences expressing assertions, along the lines of examples (6) and (7) above. Since they occur with indicatives, it is more difficult to clearly separate these uses from instances of *pure* as a focus adverb – the illocutionary context being the same: in fact, it is better to think of them as a continuum of uses rather than a clear-cut divide. In this case, *pure* contributes to emphasizing the illocutionary force:

(13) Italian
Deve *pure* esserci una soluzione!
'There must PTC be a solution!'

I will return to this topic commenting on more corpus examples in the next section. Before that, I will give an overview of uses where *pure* cannot be described either as a focus adverb nor as a modal particle: they illustrate the semantic domains bordering the modal uses. This helps to place the expression of illocutionary modification in its broader grammatical environment.

6.1.3 The surroundings: Modality, concessivity, discourse coherence

The last example showed how *pure* can appear in declarative sentences with the main function of highlighting the force of an assertion. In particular, this is often the case of declarative sentences with modal verbs – as in (13) above, where an epistemic use of *dovere* 'must' occurs. Moreover, *pure* appears in several other contexts where categories related to the domain of modality play a major role. Recalling Narrog's (2012) model of modal categories, as set forth in Chapter 3, these uses could be interpreted as the lower threshold of the functional spectrum of *pure*, that is the area where illocutionary modification and proper modality meet. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that in these cases *pure* does not autonomously mark modality, but it rather contributes to it by co-occurring with modal uses of verb forms.

The contribution of *pure* in the marking of modality can be clearly noticed in the modal uses of the Italian future tense discussed by Squartini (2012). Examples (14) and (15) illustrate conjectural uses of the future tense, the second one also marked by *pure*.

(14) Italian (Squartini 2012: 2118)
[Suonano alla porta] Sarà il postino
'[The bell rings] It will be [be:FUT] the postman'

(15) [LIP corpus – Rome B21]
B: sabato è stata 'na giornata nera pe' noi
A: mazza certo ma guarda che se stai a pensa' a quel
B: il presidente sarà *pure* contento
A: a quel quel giocatore che faceva l'ultima partita lì e se n'annava
B: ma il presidente sarà *pure* contento che dici
B: 'Saturday was a bad day for us'
A: 'yes, sure, but look, if you're thinking about that'
B: 'the president will be PTC happy'
A: 'about that player who played his last game there and then left'
B: 'well, the president will be PTC happy, what do you think?'

A second set of modal uses of the future tense is represented by concessive uses, which can be interpreted as a further diachronic evolution of conjectural uses (Squartini 2012: 2119; Bybee et al. 1994: 226–227). Example (16) and (17) illustrate the concessive use of the future tense, the second one also marked by *pure*.

(16) Italian (Squartini 2012: 2121)
Sarà alto quanto gli pare, ma lassù non ci arriva
'He may be [be:FUT] as tall as he likes, but he can't reach there'

(17) [LIP corpus – Rome D14]
l'arroganza e l'impudenza di questo potere che sarà *pure* in disfacimento ma continua ad autoriprodursi nel più totale disprezzo dell'opinione pubblica
'the arrogance and the impudence of this power which *might* be in decay but keeps self-reproducing in total disrespect of the public opinion'

As has already been said, this does not mean that *pure* marks a concessive future, but it seems to be a preferential collocate of concessive futures. In both examples (16) and (17) it is not possible to analyze *pure* as a normal instance of focus adverb: it retains its additive semantics, but there is no marked focus constituent, and no set of alternatives is evoked – thus resulting in a *bleached focus construction* as in the definition given above.

Its (residual) additive semantics can be successfully exploited as soon as concessivity is used in discourse. By using the concessive future with *pure*, the speaker concedes an additional point which is exploited to mitigate a contrast in conversation: this combination represents a common argumentative move (Anscombre & Ducrot 1983). The conceding move is thus introduced to acknowledge the validity of a first statement or point, before going on to claim the validity of a potentially contrasting second statement or point (Squartini 2012: 2123). More generally, the adverb can occur in concessive contexts, most often (but not only) with verbs in the subjunctive mood:

(18) [*La Repubblica* corpus - article.id: 1305, comment: weather report]
A Venezia invece, sia *pure* per un attimo, ha fatto la sua ricomparsa il sole
'In Venice instead, *if only* for an instant, the sun showed up'

(19) Italian (Coniglio 2008: 115)
Ammesso *pure* che riesca a vincere la gara.
'Provided PTC that he manages to win the competition'

These examples show that *pure* can contribute to mark concessive sentences and generally suggest that concessivity plays an important role in many contexts in which *pure* occurs. This is not surprising, considering that additive focus adverbs frequently show up as components of concessive connectives and concessive conditionals (for instance Eng. *even though*, *even if* and Fr. *quand même*; see König 1991: 79–83; Haspelmath & König 1998: 584–589). The use of *pure* as a connective (or as a component of a connective) represents the upper threshold of its functional spectrum, that is, the point where it does not operate inside a sentence (as the focus adverb does) or on the illocution (as the modal particle does), but where it rather serves the function of connecting sentences and expressing coherence relations between them.

6.2 *pure*: Corpus data

So far, I have given an overview of the main functions of *pure* in contemporary Italian. To summarize, the central function is the use as an additive focus adverb at the layer of information structure. Beside this function, at least two modal uses of *pure* have been identified, in different types of speech acts – assertives and directives – supposedly with different pragmatic effects. Among the peripheral uses, I mentioned some examples where *pure* co-occurs with markers of modality,

contributing to the expression of that grammatical category, and examples of *pure* in concessive contexts. A separate set is represented by the connective uses of *pure* which – apart from few mentions – are beyond the reach of this work. At least in present-day Italian, the notional domain of *additivity* (see De Cesare & Andorno 2017) seems to represent the core semantic feature which may be found – to a greater or lesser extent – in the various contexts in which *pure* appears. In the following pages, I will test this distribution against examples extracted from corpora – both from the spoken and the written language. In the final part of this section, I will take up the issue of additivity to address the role of contextual inferences in the emergence of the modal uses.

6.2.1 Spoken language

A comprehensive discussion on the differences between spoken and written varieties of language is far beyond the scope of this work: it is well known that they differ in cognitive (production and processing of language chunks), social and structural terms (see for instance Chafe & Tannen 1987; with reference to Italian, see Berruto 1985; Berretta 1994; Pistolesi 2016). There are not many studies which explicitly address the issue of the differences regarding pragmatic markers in spoken and written varieties, but it is generally acknowledged that they are used differently in speech and writing (see Crible & Cuenca 2017: 149–152 and references therein). This turns out to be particularly relevant for modal particles and other items operating on the illocution.

As already mentioned in Chapter 3, one way of analyzing the function of modal particles is as a tool of common ground management, whereby the reference to the common ground automatically implicates the presence of at least two viewpoints involved in the communication. As a tool of common ground management, modal particles often express a viewpoint that is not ascribed to the speaker alone, but crucially also involves the hearer. This does not exclude written texts, of course – the point being the kind of communicative situation rather than the medium of communication. However, data of spoken language can easily be thought of as the first place to look for linguistic tools of common ground management. This is especially the case with dialogues and conversations which represent communicative environments where the presence of both a speaker and a hearer is particularly manifest.

In order to extract a dataset to use as the basis for this analysis, I extracted all the occurrences of *pure* from KIP and LIP, respectively 235 and 358. The first step of the qualitative analysis consisted in a preliminary annotation of the functions

covered. Table 6.1 gives an overview of the functions of *pure* in these two corpora (absolute and relative frequencies).

Table 6.1: : Distribution of the functions of *pure* in KIP and LIP

	KIP [abs]	KIP [rel]	LIP [abs]	LIP [rel]
FOCUS ADVERB	195	0.82	302	0.84
MP ASSERTIVE	8	0.05	3	< 0.01
MP DIRECTIVE	17	0.07	16	0.04
MP OPTATIVE/HORTATIVE	2	< 0.01	5	0.01
MODAL FUTURE	3	0.01	3	< 0.01
SIA_PURE	3	0.01	12	0.03
CHE_PURE	—	—	8	0.02
CONNECTIVE	3	0.01	3	< 0.01
INTERJECTION	2	< 0.01	3	< 0.01
OTHER	2	< 0.01	3	< 0.01
Total	235		358	

A quick look at the figures shows that the proportions are quite similar, even though the two corpora have been collected in different cities and with almost thirty years between them.[6] The core of the qualitative analysis consists in the examination of the context of occurrence and the evaluation of the semantics and pragmatics of *pure* within it – and their categorization, through an updated classificatory scheme.

I will now go through the labels used for the annotation. Starting from the lower end of Table 6.1, the three labels INTERJECTION, CONNECTIVE, and OTHER refer respectively to the use of *pure* as a focus adverb in isolation – that is, as a holophrastic element – to its use as a conjunctional adverb or as part of a conjunction (like *pure se* 'even if') and to cases of dubious classification.[7] The

[6] A clarification is needed here. The extraction of data from KIP and LIP was aimed at building a general dataset for the subsequent analysis rather than at (quantitatively) comparing the data extracted from the first one with the data extracted from the second one. In this regard, Table 6.1 must be primarily read as an overall presentation of the data and not as a comparison of the two corpora. Besides, despite some shared features, the two corpora were built according to criteria that are not fully comparable. Nevertheless, their dimensions are not so different: KIP consist of 70 hours of recordings/661175 tokens, while LIP consists of 58 hours of recordings/489178 tokens. In this respect, a quick quantitative comparison of the findings is not inappropriate.

[7] Including the occurrences of the omophonous adjective *pure* (feminine plural of *puro*), meaning 'pure'.

labels SIA_PURE and CHE_PURE refer to collocations which – by virtue of their frequency and their relatively non-compositional meaning – may deserve a separate description: they will be dealt with in the next subsection, dedicated to examples of *pure* in the written language. In the first line, the label focus adverb needs no further explanation, apart from the – largely expected – observation that this is the prototypical and more frequent function of *pure* found in both corpora.

The labels MP ASSERTIVE, MP DIRECTIVE and MP OPTATIVE/HORTATIVE represent the modal uses, labeled according to the type of illocutionary force they modify. One delicate aspect of the classification was the (mis-)matching between the grammatical mood marked on the verb, the sentence type expressed, and the kind of illocution carried by it. In Italian, assertive speech acts (including asserting, claiming, stating, etc.) – usually corresponding to declarative sentences – are marked by the indicative mood: these cases are labeled as MP ASSERTIVE in Table 6.1. On the other hand, directive speech acts (including orders, requests, suggestions, etc.) – when expressed by imperative sentences – can be marked both by imperatives and subjunctives. Imperative verb forms are used for the second person, singular and plural, while subjunctive verb forms are used for the third person, singular and plural, and also for the second person as a more polite/distanced form. These cases are labeled as MP DIRECTIVE in Table 6.1.

Declarative sentences with modal *pure* are not so frequent and the examples are often ambiguous, since in many cases – as briefly mentioned in the preceding section – these uses of *pure* could still be analyzed as focus adverbs. One convincing example of an illocutive use of *pure* in a declarative sentence is the following:

(20) [KIParla corpus - TOD2002]
anche perché stavano facendo i lavori a casa mia *dovevano pure* entrarci prima o poi
'also because they were doing the [renovation] works they *did have* PTC to get into my house *anyway*, sooner or later'

Coniglio (2008: 115) explains that "in declarative clauses, *pur(e)* signals that the speaker has no evidence to prove that his assertion is true, but he still thinks it logical to suppose that it must be true".[8] This analysis applies quite well to

[8] Coniglio (2008: 114) claims that "In these contexts, the particle usually lacks its final *-e*. […] Nevertheless, there are cases where both the full and the reduced form are possible". Intuitively, I would say that the choice between the full and the reduced form mainly depends on personal and contextual choices. Still, it could be the case that in some highly conventionalized sentences, the reduced form is more widespread.

example (20), but it may be too narrow for other cases. In particular, I don't find an explanation, in terms of *evidence* to support an opinion, very convincing. I would rather say that this use of *pure* is related to the expression of *assertivity* and to the strengthening of the illocutionary force expressed by the speech act. It contributes to encoding the speaker's subjective expectation/evaluation on the communicated state-of-affairs.[9]

At the same time, by marking the illocutionary force, it gives the assertion a prominent position in the conversational exchange. Specifically, the presence of the additive focus adverb projects the assertion against a set of possible alternative assertions. These assertions, however, do not represent alternative referents or states-of-affairs (as it happens when *pure* works as a focus adverb) but rather contextual assumptions which are backgrounded by the modal use of *pure*. In this manner, the assertion marked by the adverb does not represent an alternative among the others but the most relevant within the actual context. In some cases, the utterance marked by *pure* slightly contrasts with a preceding statement or assumption: depending on contextual features, this can give to the modal use of *pure* a counter-expectational flavor or the character of an assertion made despite lack of evidence.

Therefore, a more general way to analyze these examples is to describe the effect of *pure* in terms of emphatic marking of the illocutionary force. In this respect, König (2017) notes that, despite a very large range of different pragmatic effects, all illocutive uses of focus adverbs have something in common, namely that the markers seem to be associated with a verbal focus:

> The alternatives in question are not denotations of other verbs, however, and so the more plausible analysis that we have instances of a verum focus, i.e. a focus on the assertion of truth, rather than on a specific overt constituent. Such an analysis can only be maintained, however, if we assume that there are several varieties of such focusing. (König 2017: 37)

The seemingly "several varieties of such focusing" depend on the several kinds of contexts in which these constructions can appear, or more precisely on the several kinds of common ground assumptions at work in those contexts – to which the emphatic declarative sentence marked by *pure* represents an alternative.[10]

[9] This use of *pure* usually appears in contexts that already express the speaker's subjectivity. In particular, as example (20) shows, it is a common collocate of uses of the modal verb *dovere* 'must' expressing subjective epistemic modality.

[10] On verum focus, see Lohnstein (2016). I will not go any deeper into the relationship between modal particles and verum focus, which is however an already established research direction: see for instance Repp (2013) and Abraham (2017).

In the second context of use as a modal particle, *pure* occurs in directive speech acts that have the form of imperative sentences:

(21) [LIP corpus – Florence C5]
bene vuole venire Lorenzo a proseguire un attimo non solo l'aspetto fisico passiamo oltre Roberto vai *pure* al posto
'all right Lorenzo wants to come to carry on a bit about not only the physical aspect let's go beyond that Roberto go back to your seat *please*.'

(22) [KIParla corpus - TOA3001]
non c'è problema se non volete venire all'esame mandatemi *pure* un paper
'there is no problem if you don't want to come to the exam *just* send me a paper'

In this kind of context, the directive sounds softened, resulting in most cases as an invitation to do something rather than an order in a narrow sense. This may be said to be the most evident effect of *pure* on directives and the core of its illocutionary-modifying function. In terms of modification of the preparatory conditions, Waltereit (2006: 107–108) explains that *pure* marks a directive in which the speaker invites the hearer to do something that they would actually do by themselves – thus marking an inconsistency in the preparatory conditions of directives, according to which the addressee would not do the relevant action on their own initiative. More generally, directives with *pure* express a granted permission/authorization to the addressee, thus specifying the kind of illocutionary act the speaker wants to perform, like in (21) above. This also gives *pure* the character of a mitigating device. In other cases, the explicit marking of an authorization may sound redundant, since it is already clear that the addressee has the permission (or even the obligation) to do what the speaker asks for. In these cases, directives marked by *pure* acquire the status of invitations/encouragements to do something, like in (22) above.

In Chapter 3, I gave a description of modal particles in terms of linguistic expressions that relate to the *conditions* shaping a speech act and specify the *intentions* in performing it. The natural habitat of directives with *pure* are conversational contexts where it is self-evident that the addressee has the *possibility* of performing some action which lays in the speaker's control area (see Waltereit 2006: 107) but still it is not sure that they will do that. On the speaker's side, the ordinary interpretation of these contexts is that the hearer is waiting for an explicit signal to act. In this way, on directives *pure* marks the speaker's attention to the hearer's expectations: by uttering a directive with *pure* the speaker signals their

active involvement in reading the hearer's state of mind.[11] This shared attention for each other's position in the conversational exchange and communicative expectations is reflected in the intentions of the speech act. Directives marked by *pure* are no longer orders coming out of the blue, but rather invitations which seek to meet certain expectations. In this way, *pure* specifies the aim with which the speech act is performed: the illocutionary point is adapted according to the common ground and the context of interaction.

A modal *pure* also appears in related constructions, which are sometimes described as subcategories of imperative constructions:

> Closely related to imperatives, i.e. constructions expressing directive speech acts such as commands, requests, advice, suggestions, invitations, etc., are formal markers frequently referred to as "hortatives", "optatives", "debitives", "rogatives" and "monitories" […] Moreover, there is a difference in person associated with some of these labels: The label "imperative" is often restricted to second person directives, whereas "hortatives" is found for first and third person directives and "optatives" for directions addressed to third persons. (König & Siemund 2007: 313)

In Table 6.1, the label MP OPTATIVE/HORTATIVE refers to specific uses of the subjunctive mood, when it encodes optative and hortative illocutions. A semantically bleached *pure* can also appear in these contexts, both with the third and the first person, as in examples (23) and (24) below. In optative contexts the speaker indicates to the addressee their wish that the positive situation evoked by the communicated content should come about. In hortative contexts the speaker encourages themselves or an addressee together with themselves to carry out the action evoked by the communicated content.

(23) [LIP corpus – Naples C4]
chi ci vuole eh giocare su questi cosi ci giocasse *pure* io non voglio giocare non ho tempo da giocare penso
'who wants uh to play on these things go ahead *please* I don't want to play I have no time to play I think'

[11] This helps to better understand the "modal" part in "modal particles". A possible paraphrasis of these uses of *pure* is with the modal verb *potere* 'can' – whereby a sentence like *fai pure* is (more or less) equivalent to *puoi (anche) fare* 'you can (also) do'. In this perspective, the modal use of *pure* in directives seems to be related to the proper-modal domains expressed by *potere* 'can' – ranging from ability (participant-internal possibility) to circumstantial possibility to permission (deontic possibility). In the case of *pure*, circumstantial possibility and (especially) permission seem to be the relevant domains.

(24) [KIParla corpus - TOD2014][12]
e ho trovato difficoltà a socializzare // sì no vabbè eh *diciamolo pure* senza vergogna sono // più sociali i quartieri pieni d'extracomunitari che quelli pieni di torinesi
'and I found it difficult to socialize // yeah no well uh *let's say it* PTC without shame // the neighborhoods full of immigrants are more social than those full of Turinese'

Lastly, some peripherical uses of *pure* have been found, corresponding to what have been called in the last subsection the modal surrounding uses of the adverb. With modal futures (conjectural and concessive) – basically corresponding to declarative sentences – *pure* contributes to express specific assertive speech acts such as conjectures/assumptions and to mark the conceding move (premise) of a concessive sentence.

(25) [KIParla corpus - TOD2014]
rispetto al paese // e chiaramente sta frazione *c'avrà pure* un nome suppongo
'compared to the town // and obviously this village *must have* PTC a name I guess'

(26) [KIParla corpus – BOD1006]
perché // il professor paolino *sarà pure* trasparente ma è anche adultero // è anche bugiardo
'because // *it may also be true that* professor paolino is honest but he is also an adulterer // he is also a liar'

6.2.2 Written language

The distribution of the functions of *pure* in written language appears to be quite different. I extracted the first 360 occurrences of *pure* from the *La Repubblica* corpus, to approximately equalize the number of occurrences extracted from the

[12] Example (24) is also very useful to observe the syntactic and functional differences between discourse markers (here occurring in a chain-like sequence: *sì no vabbè eh*), modal particles (*pure*) and adverbial adjuncts (*senza vergogna*). Discourse markers operate on discourse chunks (in this case they introduce a new utterance) while modal particles (grammatically) operate on the illocution conveyed by the verb. In this case the adverbial adjunct also operates the layer of the illocution (it's a speech act adverb of the type of *frankly*) but as a lexical modifier.

LIP corpus and thus enable a broad quantitative comparison.[13] I performed a manual annotation of the functions covered, using the same tag set applied for the spoken data. Table 6.2 shows the distribution of the functions (absolute and relative frequencies).

Table 6.2: Distribution of the functions of *pure* in the *La Repubblica* corpus

	REP [abs]	REP [rel]
FOCUS ADVERB	123	0.34
MP ASSERTIVE	—	—
MP DIRECTIVE	3	<0.01
MP OPTATIVE/HORTATIVE	22	0.06
MODAL FUTURE	11	0.03
SIA_PURE	88	0.24
CHE_PURE	91	0.25
CONNECTIVE	16	0.04
INTERJECTION	—	—
OTHER	6	0.01
Total	360	

As regards the modal uses in directives and assertives, they are almost absent – confined to quotes and pieces of direct speech inserted in newspaper articles. This is not surprising, since these uses of *pure* are the most bound to dialogical situations, which are not so common in the collection of journalistic prose on which the *La Repubblica* corpus has been built. Instead, occurrences of *pure* in optatives and hortatives are more frequent, since they are less dependent on conversational structures. (27) and (28) are two examples:

(27) [*La Repubblica* corpus - article.id: 1675, comment: politics]
E allora? Se il Pci, partendo dal suo 40 per cento, riesce ad aggregare una maggioranza, *governi pure*. Non con noi però.
'So what? If the PCI, starting from its 40 percent, manages to build a [political] majority, it *may govern* PTC. Not with us, though.'

[13] Once more, the idea was to collect a general dataset for the subsequent analysis and not to (quantitatively) compare the written language data with the spoken language data. In this respect, I used the occurrences from the LIP only as a reference amount and I extracted the same number of occurrences as from the *La Repubblica* corpus: a quick quantitative comparison is therefore possible, but it's still a very unbalanced one.

(28) [*La Repubblica* corpus - article.id: 805, comment: culture]
Ciò posto, *chiediamoci pure*: e come siamo messi quest'inverno che è così duro, più duro del solito?
'That said, *let's ask ourselves* PTC: how are we doing in this winter that is so tough, tougher than usual?'

Examples with modal uses of the future tense together with *pure* can also be found, both conjectural (29) and concessive (30):

(29) [*La Repubblica* corpus - article.id: 8, comment: politics]
Però *ci sarà pure* una maniera per evitare l'equazione più industria = più inquinamento?
'But *there must be* PTC a way to avoid the equation more industry = more pollution?'

(30) [*La Repubblica* corpus - article.id: 804, comment: politics]
In Occidente, se ne parla spesso con leggerezza come di una "gerontocrazia". *Sarà pure* così. Sta di fatto che vent'anni fa l'Urss era solo una grande potenza continentale; era, per così dire, confinata nel continente euro-asiatico; mentre, oggi, è una potenza planetaria, capace di intervenire in qualsiasi punto del globo.
'The western world is often carelessly defined as a "gerontocracy". It *may be* PTC like this. But the fact is, USSR was twenty years ago only a big continental power; while today it's a global power, able to intervene everywhere worldwide.'

The use as a focus adverb is the most frequent one, as in spoken data, but the (relative) frequency is lower. In fact, among the examples extracted, two other constructions appear with considerable frequency, labeled as SIA_PURE and CHE_PURE in the annotation schema. The first one is a stable collocation, composed of the third person singular, present tense, of the verb *essere* 'to be' in the subjunctive mood followed by *pure*. It is part of the concessive contexts in which *pure* can appear. The collocation *sia pure* works as a routinized concessive-conditional marker – similarly as the conjunction *anche se* 'even if' – but it does not really introduce a subordinate sentence since it can only hold nominal constituents and not verb phrases.

(31) [*La Repubblica* corpus - article.id: 659, news-report: news]
Gran parte dei mercati rionali sono chiusi. Funzionano, *sia pure* tra tante difficoltà, quelli all'ingrosso.
'Most of the local markets are closed. Wholesale markets, *despite* many difficulties, are still working.'

The label CHE_PURE refers to a collocation composed by a relative marker followed by *pure*: in most cases it introduces an appositive relative clause.[14] In fact, the additive semantics of *pure* lends itself well to appearing in an appositive relative clause, which has the function of adding information about the nominal constituents it refers to. However, in these contexts *pure* can't be analyzed as an additive focus adverb: it rather enriches the relative clause with a contrastive-concessive semantics.

(32) [*La Repubblica* corpus - article.id: 1372, news-report: politics]
La protesta dei liberali, *che pure* fanno parte del governo, non è una novità.
'The protest of the liberals, *even though* they are part of the government, is nothing new.'

Finally, the written data include some occurrences of *pure* as a connective with contrastive meaning. In this case, *pure* should be considered a literate variant of the more common *eppure* 'however, yet' – the result of the univerbation with the connective *e* 'and'. Example (33) below illustrates this use (notice moreover that in this example the connective *pure* is followed by the additive focus adverb *anche* 'also').

(33) [*La Repubblica* corpus - article.id: 427, comment: culture]
Per quanto cercasse, sia negli anni preraffaelliti che dopo, di rappresentare con precisione e fedeltà ogni forma e ogni particolare di ciò che vedeva e che udiva, *pure* anche a lui dovevano sembrare "dolci le armonie udite, ma più dolci quelle non udite".
As much as he tried, both in the Pre-Raphaelite years and after them, to represent with precision and accuracy every form and every detail of what he saw and heard, *nonetheless*, even he must have thought that "sweet were the heard harmonies, but sweeter those unheard".'

Overall, the constructions found across the spoken and the written language are the same, even though they considerably differ regarding their frequency. In

[14]The relative marker *che* 'which, that' is the most frequent one, but other markers such as *il quale*, *del quale*, *con il quale, dove, cui* can also be found.

particular, the collocations *sia pure* (with concessive-conditional meaning) and *che pure* (with concessive-contrastive meaning) can be said to be a prominent feature of the written variety. The same holds for the use of *pure* as a contrastive connective, albeit to a lesser extent. Modal uses of *pure* in optatives and hortatives, as well as with modal futures, are also more common in the written variety – while modal *pure* in directives and assertives are barely found in the written data.

6.2.3 Additivity in interaction

To conclude this section, I will go back to the illocutive uses in order to discuss more examples, dwelling on the role of inferences and interactional dynamics in the emergence of modal functions. In particular, I would like to comment on some examples where the function of *pure* is not so clearly defined – thus providing hints towards understanding the link between its additive semantics and the modal uses.[15] As a starting point, I refer once more to Waltereit (2006), who discusses the issue in this way:

> With the modalization form *pure* the speaker acts as if the relevant proposition would be the second member of a pair of propositions connected by *pure* 'also'. In this way, the action to which the addressee is invited is not considered in isolation, but is portrayed as if it arose self-evidently from another state-of-affairs. It is thus only the second step in a co-oriented (co-occurrent) chain of actions [...] As such, the modal particle *pure* evokes the situation of saying 'also'. (Waltereit 2006: 107–108)[16]

The semantic profile of *pure* as a focus adverb rests on the operation of additivity: as explained in the preceding section, the focus adverb activates the presupposition that something else is involved in the relevant proposition – another proposition or another referent, which can be recovered in the previous context or in the common ground. However, sometimes it is not evident what

[15] In the dataset these cases have mostly been labeled as FOCUS ADVERB with a note specifying their vague status.

[16] My translation of the original quote in German: "Mit der Abtönungsform *pure* tut der Sprecher so, als ob die jeweilige Proposition das zweite Glied eines durch *pure* 'auch' verbundenen Paares von Propositionen wäre. Die Handlung, zu der der Hörer aufgefordert wird, steht so nicht mehr allein, sondern sie wird so *dargestellt*, dass sie sich gleichsam selbstverständlich aus einem anderen Sachverhalt ergibt. Sie ist so lediglich der zweite Schritt in einer ko-orientierten (gleichläufigen) Handlungskette [...] Insofern evoziert die Abtönungspartikel *pure* die Situation des 'auch'-Sagens".

exactly this other proposition or referent evoked is, if any is evoked at all (see Schwenter & Waltereit 2010).

This situation may lead to different strategies to accommodate the presupposition: the hearer must make sense of the presence of *pure* in that context and come up with an explanation of why the speaker used it. This process may induce the hearer to ascribe new shades of meaning to *pure*, to associate it with contextual meanings and thus favor its reanalysis. The situation of *saying 'also'* can be described in this way: additive focus adverbs evoke the presence of another proposition or referent. If the hearer cannot recover these other contents, they have somehow to accommodate them. The elements at play are the shared knowledge in the common ground, further contextual features surrounding the speech act (conditions) and – importantly – what the hearer thinks the communicative goals of the speaker are (intentions). A prominent role is played by the inferential activity of the hearer: piecing together these elements, the presence of *pure* can be justified and – in some cases – a new function can be configured. In the collected data several cases can be identified where the presupposition activated by *pure* does not clearly refer to another proposition or another referent (it could be named a *suspended presupposition*). Many cases labeled as modal uses of *pure* in assertive speech acts are actually of this kind – ambiguous instances where the content of the presupposition is not immediately recoverable:

(34) [KIParla corpus - TOD2012]
mh tra l'altro in quel periodo appunto spesso finivo lavora lavoravo da casa e finivo di lavorare anche alle due tre di notte // eh eh eh ed era un problema perché // magari chi stava nella camera accanto mi mi ascoltava sì disturbava e insomma eh lo posso *pure* capire
'uh by the way at that time in fact I often finished work I worked from home and I finished working even at two three in the night // hmm and this was a problem because // maybe the person who was staying in the room next to mine could listen to me yeah it was annoying hmm I can PTC understand it'

In example (34) there is no other recoverable proposition that the speaker can understand (*lo posso pure capire* 'I can also understand it'): it rather seems that *pure* simply marks the addition of an utterance to the argumentation.[17] Since

[17]The speaker can understand that her late-night working activity can be a problem for the other flatmates, but it is not clear what *else* she can understand. In this case, *pure* serves a clear argumentative function (see Anscombre & Ducrot 1983), marking the host sentence as the premise for a reversal of the argumentation: in the subsequent, the speaker explains how most of the problems in the flat are actually caused by other flatmates (and not from her).

they favor the hearer's inferring activity, similar contexts are the better suited to trigger functional developments. This is more evident in the next couple of examples, where *pure* appears with *bisogna*, a marker of deontic modality.

(35) [*La Repubblica* corpus – article.id: 1352, comment: culture]
Che è, tuttavia, al secolo, un materialista cibernetico, e scrive il suo libro nell'intento primordiale di porre a confronto il cervello e il computer, l'intelligenza neuronale e quella elettronica, per decidere se tra pensiero naturale e pensiero artificiale esista, o no, un confine invalicabile. Ma per decretare in merito, bisogna *pure* capire che cosa è la mente: se no, come parlarne?

'Who is, however, in his life, a cybernetic materialist, who writes his book with the aim of comparing brain and computer, neural intelligence and electronic intelligence, in order to determine whether an insuperable border exists or not, between natural and artificial thought. But to decide on this, we must PTC understand what the mind is: otherwise, how to talk about it?'

(36) [*La Repubblica* corpus - article.id: 1627, comment: culture]
Non più, perché oggi si dà il caso che proprio là dove il socialismo è stato realizzato, proprio là dove gli ideali dei "rossi", dei "sovversivi", degli "extraparlamentari" si sono affermati, la psicoanalisi non c'è, o stenta ad esserci. Dunque: affermando "io sono rosso" (sovversivo, extraparlamentare), e mi compiaccio dell'avvento della psicoanalisi in Cina, ci si impiglia in una contraddizione – culturale – da cui bisogna *pure* uscire.

'Not anymore, because nowadays it turns out that precisely where socialism has been achieved, where the ideals of the "reds", the "subversives", the "extra-parliamentarians" have established themselves, psychoanalysis doesn't exist or is struggling to exist. Therefore: by saying "I am red" (subversive, extra-parliamentarian), and I am pleased by the coming of psychoanalysis in China, one is caught in a – cultural – contradiction from which one has PTC to get out.'

In example (35), again, it is not clear what one should understand in addition to what the mind is (*bisogna pure capire cosa è la mente* "it is also necessary to understand what the mind is"): presumably a lot of things, but none of them is immediately recoverable in the preceding context. The same applies to example (36), but the functional development seems to be already a step forward – with

pure clearly marking emphasis on the illocutionary force. In these cases, two factors are responsible for this. First, the lack of a clear referent for the presupposition to provide the conditions for the inferring of a new function. Second, the occurrence of *pure* in crucial points of the argumentation (in both (35) and (36) it marks the endpoint of a long argument) comes to be linked with the emphatic assertivity of the host sentence.[18]

In these kinds of context, the pragmatic effect of *pure* – by the absence of clearly-identified presupposition – ends up stressing the force of the speech act it has scope over. This is illustrated by the sequence below.

(37) this is *also*$^{\text{add}}$ the case >
this is *also*$^{\text{add/ill}}$ the case >
this is *also*$^{\text{ill}}$ the case

In order to further enrich this point, I will compare the behavior of *pure* with *anche* 'also', which is an additive focus adverb as well. In contemporary Italian, no conventionalized modal function of *anche* is attested, but several contexts can be found, in which a reading as an additive focus adverb is – at least – problematic. I will examine a couple of these contexts to illustrate how the managing of contextual inferences in interaction can pave the way to the emerging of new (modal) functions.

The first example is the use of *anche* in (38), taken from a television advertisement and discussed by Andorno (2003: 185–186). To correctly contextualize the utterance, the following scenario must be imagined. It is nighttime, and a robber is communicating his terms to the police from inside a bank with a megaphone. During the negotiation, a man in his pajamas looks out of a window and warns the police to shut up and let the people sleep. Replying to the disapproving look of the police chief, an inspector says with a conciliatory tone:

[18]The emphatic assertivity expressed by *pure* can be also noticed in this example:

(i) Passi *pure* per le conversioni tardive dopo una vita passata a meditare, ma uno straccio di idea uno deve *pure* averla.
'Late conversions after a life spent meditating are PTC fine, but one must PTC have a shred of idea.'

In this case *pure* emphasizes the illocutionary force of the main sentence (declarative sentence), which is presented as a contrast (it is introduced by *ma* 'but') to a preceding sentence. Quite interestingly, the preceding sentence – which represents a concessive premise to the main sentence – is also marked by *pure*. Thus, the example displays both a concessive *pure* and an illocutive *pure*.

(38) Italian (Andorno 2003: 186)
Sono *anche* le tre.
be:3PL also ART three
'It's PTC three in the morning.'

In this example, *anche* has a mitigating effect and normal focus-particle interpretation is excluded, since it is not possible to identify alternative values to a constituent in focus (as suggested by the unacceptable paraphrases like "It's three a.m. and it's also some other time" or "It's three a.m. and it's cold"). In this way, the additive semantics (that is, the presuppositional potential) of *anche* is at odds with the impossibility of recovering a valid presupposition in the preceding context. Yet *anche* keeps its value of additive particle, but the additive value serves the function of argumentative operator. Depending on the context, it can support the argument of the man in pajamas ("We have good reason to go on with our work, but we have to consider that it's three in the morning") or accept the possible reasons of the detective ("Actually it's three in the morning, but this is only one of the facts we should consider in such a circumstance"). In this way, *anche* doesn't evoke alternative focus values, but alternative utterances and a rough paraphrase of the utterance could be: "Among the different things we can say, we have to say that it's three in the morning".[19]

A second illocutionary context in which *anche* shows a non-prototypical use is exemplified by the directive in (39):

(39) Italian [from a chat group]
A: Rob, passo a prenderti?
B: Ok! Mi faccio trovare a pozzo per le 9 e venti circa
A: Fai *anche* 25 che Mic tanto 5 min ritarda
A: 'Rob, should I pick you up?'
B: 'Ok! I will be at Pozzo [metro station] around twenty past nine'
A: 'You can *also* be there at twenty-five past nine. Mic is 5 minutes late anyway'

[19] In order to explain this use of *anche*, a process of syntactic reanalysis could be posited – from focus modifier to utterance modifier – and a pragmatic re-use of the adverb for argumentative purposes. On the other hand, it doesn't appear strictly necessary to posit a second meaning for the adverb since its mitigating effect could be explained through the interaction of its additive semantics and the particular context of interaction, that is, taking into consideration the background of possible propositions that are at issue in the common ground and the inferences that the interlocutors can draw about the respective mental states. In this perspective, echoing De Smet (2014: 31–33), example (38) could be better described as a *hybrid* use of *anche*, supported by some degree of structural indeterminacy – that is, it could be assigned both to the layer of information structure and to the layer of illocution.

In this case too, a normal focus-adverb interpretation is excluded, since it is not possible to identify alternative values to a constituent in focus: in example (39) *anche* modifies the directive without having scope over a sentence constituent. Typically, this happens in contexts where an inference of invitation or permission for the interlocutor to do something is at play and the semantic contribution of *anche* spans from suggesting a generic set of actions that the interlocutor can do (e.g. wait a bit longer) to the mitigation of the directive.

In both cases, the behavior of *anche* is comparable with the modal uses of *pure* discussed so far and the two adverbs seem to be largely interchangeable in this kind of context. Nevertheless, it cannot be said that this modal use of *anche* has the same conventional status of the modal use of *pure*. In this respect, the different uses of *pure* can be described in terms of polysemy, while for *anche* an explanation in terms of (contextual) polyfunctionality is probably more appropriate. At first sight, it seems that the *degree of conventionalization* in language use represents the major difference between these constructions, rather than functional distinctions in a narrow sense.[20]

6.3 *pure*: Closing remarks

The examples discussed in this chapter confirm the remarkable polyfunctionality that the adverb *pure* covers in contemporary Italian. Even considering only the occurrences as a modal particle, it appears in different types of speech acts and it performs different pragmatic effects: (i) directives can be specified as invitations and permissions; (ii) the illocutionary force of assertives can be reinforced and specified with counter-expectational flavor; (iii) specific illocutions like hortatives and optatives can also be marked by *pure*.

The development of new functions is favored by the specific features of this adverb, which (like most focus adverbs) displays great syntactic variability, can appear in several positions in a sentence, and plays a crucial role in the activation of presuppositions and the management of further contextual inferences. Moreover, the semantic operation it activates – namely, additivity – can easily go beyond the domain of sentence semantics and be transferred to pragmatic

[20]However, it should be noted that – at least in example (39) – *anche* performs a mitigating function, while the prototypical functions of *pure* in assertives is an emphatic one. Furthermore, it could also be the case that *anche* and *pure* in directives activate different inferences, whereby the first operates rather on the part of the speaker (*invitation* to do something) and the second on the part of the addressee (*permission* to do something). This issue is however not clear, and it would need more research.

and discourse/textual phenomena, which is crucial for the development of modal-particle-like functions: anchoring the performance of a speech act to the common ground, modal particles relate the respective illocution to contextual conditions. Overall, the data on *pure* seem to fit well in the models of grammatical categories and semantic change discussed above (Hengeveld 2004, 2017; Narrog 2012, 2017; Traugott & Dasher 2002). On the one hand, they confirm the contiguity of the grammatical domains of modality and illocutionary modification. On the other hand, they confirm that semantic change involves a progressive scope increase at the interpersonal level (context-level functions) – expanding from the communicated content (use of *pure* as a focus adverb) to the illocution (use of *pure* as a modal particle).

A more detailed study of development paths would need further theoretical discussion about the domain of modality (and its subcategories), its relationship with neighboring semantic domains and – importantly – cross-linguistic comparisons. This is however outside of the scope of the present research. In this respect, additivity has been recently approached by works that – from a typological perspective – aimed at drawing a semantic map of this functional domain (Forker 2016; Faller 2020). Even without discussing the details of this map (and its different versions), the contiguity between additivity, epistemic modality, concessivity and discourse coherence has been pointed out by both papers. From this perspective, the data on *pure* discussed above seem to find a broader correspondence (and validation). Neither Forker (2016) nor Faller (2020) include illocutionary modification as a functional category bordering additivity and/or modality. Nonetheless, Forker (2016: 85) mentions that in some languages additive particles convey emphasis or are used to intensify meaning. Future research should further develop the semantic map of additivity to include illocutionary modification as a node in the map (and possibly using examples of *pure* to assess its validity).

7 Boundedness, approximation, illocution: A case study on *un po'* 'a bit'

7.1 *un po'*: Overview of the categories involved

The case study presented in this chapter concerns the expression *un po'* 'a little, a bit', which is widely used in Italian as a quantifier in pseudo-partitive constructions and as an adverbial degree modifier. Throughout the theoretical discussion and the data analysis, I will try to assess if some of its secondary uses can be traced back to the grammatical category of *illocutionary modification* as defined above.

As far as I am aware, no work has been devoted specifically to constructions featuring *un po'* so far. Moreover, compared to the previous chapter on *pure*, there are other difficulties. In the case of focus adverbs, several works have been devoted to their context-level uses: thus, the link between focus adverbs, the marking of information structure and illocutionary modification represents a well-established theoretical point (König 1991: 165–176). In the case of (pseudo-) partitive constructions this link has been studied less – or maybe it is less relevant for this grammatical category. However, some works have contributed to the study of the grammaticalization paths involving similar constructions (see for instance Traugott 2008) and to tracing a map of the grammatical categories covered by the semantic domain of partitivity (Luraghi & Huumo 2014). These observations represent a useful starting point to investigate further pragmatic developments.

In this section an overview of the main functions of *un po'* will be provided. In doing this, I will highlight how its functional range covers different domains and linguistic categories, from partitivity to verbal aspect, approximation and illocutionary modification.

7.1.1 Pseudo-partitive constructions and degree adverbs

To approach the description of *un po'*, I will start from the semantic domain of partitives – since this expression is often used in pseudo-partitive constructions and is functionally close to this semantic domain. Adopting the perspective of Luraghi & Huumo (2014), the understanding of partitives relies on the notions of *indefiniteness* and *quantification*, including forms which have scope either over the nominal phrase or the verb phrase.

Partitives represent a quite heterogenous category. Some languages have a dedicated partitive morphological case (for instance Finnish, Estonian and Basque), providing a good case for a formal definition of partitives. Other languages have a different array of formal means to express the same function: other case markers, adpositions, articles, and verbal morphologies. Among Romance languages, French and Italian feature so-called partitive articles, which are formed with the genitive preposition plus the definite article.[1] Functionally, the marking of indefiniteness (and non-specificity) is considered a defining feature of partitive case markers.

Partitive case markers can also be used to express part-whole relations, but this is not always the case – as they are often expressed by *partitive constructions* such as English *a piece of that cake* (see Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2006; Keizer 2007), indicating a part of a given whole. This generates some confusion in the literature: indeed, the term *partitive* is most often used to refer to partitive constructions, that is, part-whole constructions. Partitive cases can also be found in such constructions, but not necessarily. The difference is exemplified by examples (1) and (2):

(1) Dutch (Luraghi & Huumo 2014: 2)
Fred at van de aardbeien.
Fred eat:PST.3SG of ART.PL strawberry:PL
'Fred ate of the (previously identified, belonging to a given set) strawberries.'

(2) Finnish (Luraghi & Huumo 2014: 2)
Elmeri löys-i mansiko-i-ta.
Elmer find-3SG.PST strawberry-PL-PAR
'Elmer found some (i.e. and indefinite quantity of not previously identified) strawberries.'

[1]Diachronically, such articles can be shown to have originated within partitive constructions. For this reason, the label *partitive article* is still used, even though these articles have little left to do with partitivity (see for instance Stark 2007; Carlier & Lamiroy 2014).

While the prepositional phrase *van de aardbeien* 'of the strawberries' in (1) is a partitive construction and indicates a partition of a previously identified whole, the partitive NP *mansikoita* 'strawberries' in (2) basically indicates indefiniteness, and does not refer to a part of a previously identified whole. This way, partitive constructions indicate a part of a given whole; partitive markers, instead, typically convey, at least in some contexts, the meaning of indefiniteness, which is not characteristic of part-whole relations.

Another distinction must be made between partitive case markers and pseudo-partitives. Partitives refer to a part/subset of a definite superset, while pseudo-partitives are generally taken to refer to an amount or quantity of some indefinite substance: they quantify over the kind of entity indicated by the nominal head of the phrase. In (proper) partitive constructions, the prepositional phrase embeds a (generally definite) nominal, as Italian *due degli studenti* 'two of the students'. Pseudo-partitive constructions feature the same preposition, this time taking a bare nominal complement, as Italian *un bicchiere d'acqua* 'a glass of water'. With reference to pseudo-partitives constructions, Keizer (2007) observes:

> Each of the differences observed can be accounted for by assuming that, unlike in partitives, the second noun in a pseudo-partitive construction does not form an embedded NP, i.e. that the second nominal element is not an independently referring expression. […] It seems therefore plausible to analyse pseudo-partitives as simple NPs headed by the second noun, with the first noun being part of a complex determiner (or quantifier). (Keizer 2007: 111)

Getting to the focus of this chapter, the Italian element *un po'* can be defined in some of its uses as quantifier in pseudo-partitive constructions. An example is represented by (3):

(3) [KIParla Corpus - BOD2017]
ciao // ciao // ti chiami // francesco // okay francesco allora ehm io volevo farti *un po'* di domande // eh innanzitutto volevo chiederti dove vivi attualmente // a bologna
'hi // hi // your name is // Francesco // OK Francesco well uhm I wanted to ask you *some* questions // uh first of all I wanted to ask you where you're currently living // in Bologna'

Beside the use in pseudo-partitive constructions, *un po'* displays also an adverbial use, acting as a degree modifier on adverbs (4a), adjectives (4b) and verbal phrases (4c):

(4) Italian [http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/poco]

a. un po' più, un po' meno; un po' meglio, un po' peggio; l'ho fatto un po' alla svelta

'a little more, a little less; a little better, a little worse; I did it a bit quickly'

b. mi sento un po' stanco; mi sembri un po' pallido; è un ragazzo un po' strano

'I feel a little tired; you're looking a little pale; he's kind of a weird boy'

c. m'ha fatto un po' ridere; mi ha fatto stare un po' in ansia; fa un po' caldo qui dentro

'it made me laugh a bit; it made me feel a bit anxious; it's a bit warm in here'

This fits well into the grammaticalization path proposed by Traugott (2008) for the diachronic development of these expressions:

(5) pre-partitive >
partitive >
quantifier >
degree modifier >
free adverb[2]

In its use as an adverbial modifier, *un po'* doesn't show a uniform semantics – especially when occurring in a post-verbal position. As it has already been noted for focus adverbs, adverbial modifiers in this position often have wide scope: although they may clearly have a syntactic association with the verb, the actual semantic scope may be over the object of the verb or over the entire predicate.

Budd (2014: 240–248) offers a description of the functional domains of post-verbal partitives in Oceanic languages which may provide useful hints also for *un po'*. When post-verbal partitives occur with an object NP there are in theory

[2]The use as a free adverb corresponds to the holophrastic use of *un po'*:

(i) A: sei stanco?
B: un po'
A: 'are you tired?'
B: 'a bit'

two possible readings, which are distinguishable to varying degrees depending on the semantics of the verb and of the object NP, as well as the discourse context (potentially, there is therefore a degree of ambiguity in some cases). In the first reading, only part of the NP's referent is affected, while in the second reading, the object NP's referent is partially affected. In Italian – although it is hard to find contexts showing a real ambiguity (the semantics of the verb or the presence of definite articles is usually enough to disambiguate) – *un po'* can occur in both contexts. Examples (6) and (7) respectively illustrate these two readings.

(6) Italian [AFFECTEDNESS OF A PART OF AN ENTITY]

a. Sposto *un po'* di libri.
'I move *some* books around.'

b. Racconto *un po'* di storia.
'I tell *some* of the story.'

(7) Italian [PARTIAL AFFECTEDNESS OF AN ENTITY/ACTION]

a. Sposto *un po'* i libri.
'I move the books around *a little*.'

b. Faccio *un po'* di spesa.
'I do *some* shopping.'

In the first case, the complete accomplishment of one part of the whole is expressed, while in the second the incomplete accomplishment of a whole action is expressed. These two readings activate different inferences, possibly resulting in functional developments. The first path profiles the partiality of a referent and it can lead to the expression of non-specificity and indefiniteness. The second path profiles the incompleteness of an action (or an attempt to perform an actions) and it can lead to interpretations of aspectual nuance, that is, imperfectivity (see Luraghi & Kittilä 2014: 56–58).

Quite surprisingly, Budd (2014: 545–547) also reports examples of partitive markers apparently expressing the opposite aspectual meaning, that is perfectivity. In this third development path – arising from the reading exemplified by (7) – the meaning develops from "There is a certain amount of such an action" (partitive interpretation) to "Such an action has been done" (perfective interpretation). Finally, Budd (2014: 547–548) reports examples of partitive markers giving a non-assertive tone to the utterance they appear in – such that an element of politeness is associated with their use: in requests and commands particularly, they have

the effect of making the demand seem less impertinent or onerous. This raises the issue of a possible illocutive use of partitive markers/partitive-related constructions.

7.1.2 Illocutionary modification

These last observations suggest that partitive markers can develop non-referential uses in the pragmatic domain. In the case of *un po'* there is no previous literature available, but comparable constructions have been studied for other languages, especially English, and also Italian. Traugott (2008), as mentioned above, is a key reference work that studies the grammaticalization of *NP of NP* patterns (for a Romance/Italian perspective see Masini 2016; Mihatsch 2016). Traugott (2010) touches on the same issues from the perspective of (inter)subjectification – also providing examples of *a bit*, which is close to Italian *un po'*. Neels & Hartmann (2018) have studied the German constructions *ein bisschen* ('a bit_{DIM}') and *ein wenig* ('a little'). Other constructions are comparable not on the basis of structural similarity, but on the basis of functional affinities, for example the Italian item *un attimo* 'an instant' (Voghera 2017) and the German particle *mal* 'once' (König & Li 2018). In this way – even without previous literature specifically dedicated to it – a comparative perspective can provide some hints for the functional analysis of *un po'*. Nevertheless, illocutionary-flavored uses of this item are mentioned even in dictionaries:

> A very peculiar use is showed by *un po'* in imperative sentences, or sentences otherwise containing an order, an invitation, a request, where it sometimes has a mitigating value, sometimes a threatening tone […] in other cases it expresses resentment […] in still other cases it corresponds to an exclamation of encouragement. (http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/poco)[3]

This quote acknowledges a modal use of *un po'* in Italian. The pragmatic effect is described as attributable to two functional domains: the modification of

[3]My translation of the original quote in Italian, which includes some examples: "Un uso particolarissimo ha *un po'* in frasi imperative o comunque contenenti un ordine, un invito, una richiesta, nelle quali ha talora valore attenuativo, talora invece ha tono di minaccia: *vedi un po' tu se ci riesci*; *mi dica un po' cosa farebbe lei al mio posto*; *vieni un po' qua*; *dimmi un po': chi è che t'ha insegnato a rispondere così?*; *dica un po' lei, sì, lei!*; in altri casi esprime risentimento: *senti un po' che discorsi mi viene a fare!*; in altri ancora equivale a un'esclamazione d'incoraggiamento: *indovina un po' che cosa t'ho portato*; *sentiamo un po' ciò che vorresti*; *riferiscimi un po' quello che hai visto* (meno com. con quest'uso la forma *poco*: *guarda un poco qui*; *dimmi un poco*)."

speech acts (mitigating value, threatening tone) and the expression of intersubjective emotional attitudes (resentment, encouragement). Despite providing useful information, these descriptions don't seem to grasp the central features of the modal uses of *un po'* – for which a more detailed description is needed. Throughout the analysis I will consider two main points as decisive for a broad classification: the kind of speech act the adverb occurs in and the kind of pragmatic effect performed. The expression of intersubjective emotional attitudes – which has not played an important role in my analysis so far – will be (partially) included in the speech-act classification. The modal use of *un po'* is particularly clear in directive speech acts, especially those coded on imperative sentences.

(8) [LIP corpus – Naples A1]
E: Anna metti *un po'* là per favore
B: qua Vincenzo
E: dove sta la borsa Franco mettiti *un po'* più vicino a me va
E: 'Anna put it PTC there please'
B: 'here Vincenzo'
E: 'where is the bag Franco move *a bit* closer to me come on'

In the array of directive meanings, example (8) sounds like a request. In such a context, *un po'* contributes to specifying the directive as a request, mildly downtoning the illocutionary force expressed by the imperative. Example (8) contains two occurrences of *un po'*, expressing different functions. Here, the difference between its modal use (*metti un po' là* 'put it a bit there') and its adverbial use (*un po' più vicino* 'a bit closer') can be clearly noticed. In the first occurrence it operates on the verbal predicate – specifically, on the illocutionary layer, while in the second occurrence it modifies an adjective, functioning as a degree modifier construction. Besides mild requests, *un po'* also appears in directives which rather express incitements and stressed requests:

(9) Italian
a. e levati *un po'* questi occhiali
'take off PTC these glasses'
b. e levati *un po'*
'get out PTC of here'

Similar examples are rare in corpora of spoken language, but easily retrievable on the internet. The verb *levarsi* has different meanings when used transitively

(9a) or intransitively (9b): in both cases *un po'* seems to strengthen the force of the directive. In particular, in example (9a), *levati un po' questi occhiali* should not be understood as 'take off your glasses a bit (and let me glimpse your eyes)', but rather as 'come on, take off these glasses!'. Comparing (8) and (9), it seems that the broader illocutionary context has a decisive impact in determining which kind of pragmatic effect *un po'* plays in a directive, an issue I will come back to. Closely related to the directives (see the discussion in Chapter 6), *un po'* can also appear in hortatives:

(10) [LIP corpus – Florence C5]
allora da qui dove andrà vediamo *un po'* che ne so a Berlino forse
'well from where will she go let's see PTC I don't know to Berlin maybe'

Even if not acknowledged by the dictionary quote above, context-level uses of *un po'* cover also another illocutive domain, namely assertions. In example (11) below *un po'* operates on a non-gradable predicate, so that a value as degree modifier seems to be excluded. Significantly, *un po'* occurs with a verb in the conditional mood – that is, an already modalized sentence. One possibility might be that, in such a context, *un po'* further contributes to specify the assertion as a suggestion, giving to the utterance a non-assertive tone. In this perspective, it could be interpreted as a politeness element.

(11) [LIP corpus – Milan A11]
A: subito scusa ma stando così le cose lui non deve chiedere scusa a nessuno
C: questo qui è un atto di lei ha chiamato in causa il diritto quindi lui
A: non deve chiedere scusa infatti
C: cioè lei ha scelto per la risoluzione di diritto invece che
B: secondo me lei ha scelto una la risoluzione di rappresaglia veramente
A: esatto anch' io la chiamerei *un po'* rappresaglia
B: cioè poteva anche semplicemente esprimergli esprimergli il suo disprezzo
A: 'right now sorry but if things are like this he must not apologize to anybody'
C: 'this is an action for her part she called into question the law so he'
A: 'he must not apologize indeed'
C: 'I mean she decided for a legal resolution instead of'
B: 'In my opinion she decided for a reprisal resolution actually'

A: 'That's right I would call it PTC reprisal as well'
B: 'I mean she also could simply express express her contempt to him'

I will further analyze these constructions in the next section. Now, I will introduce a brief comparison that could help the subsequent analysis. In fact, even if there is no available research concerning *un po'*, Voghera (2017) dedicated a short paper to a very similar lexical item, namely *un attimo* 'an instant'. She sums up the semantic development of *un attimo* in this way:

> Starting from the original temporal function, *un attimo* developed multiple functions, which derive from a double path of functional expansion. Firstly, we can recognize a semantic and pragmatic path, which brings to the use of *un attimo* as vague quantifier and then as hedge. Secondly, there is a path towards textual uses, which exploits the possibility of using *un attimo* as alerter in some imperative constructions and then as focuser […]. (Voghera 2017: 1)

According to this explanation, *un attimo* developed from lexical expression indicating a small portion of time to quantifier indicating a small quantity in general (that is, the function of *un po'* in its content-level use).

At this point it spreads to further contexts of use following two different paths. On the one hand, it gets to express information/relational/discourse vagueness as a hedge; on the other hand, it functions as an attention-getter in imperative sentences and as an interjection (Voghera 2017: 392–394).[4] Among the examples cited in the paper, I report three of them where *un attimo* could be easily replaced by *un po'*:

(12) Italian (Voghera 2017: 392–394)[5]
  a. insomma adesso ci pensa *un attimo* e vede un pochino
    'well now he thinks *a moment* about it and sees a bit'

[4]Voghera (2017) does not conduct a proper diachronic study, she rather interprets synchronic data in a dynamic way. In order to explain how vagueness expressions apply to different linguistic levels (proposition, speech act, discourse), she builds on Caffi (2007: 58), who says: "In other words, speakers can use referential vagueness to reduce both their commitment to the precision of denotation, hence of their reference act, and their epistemic endorsement of the truth of the proposition".

[5]These examples correspond respectively to examples (33), (46) and (49) in Voghera (2017: 392–394). Notice that, in the first example, the first verb is modified by *un attimo* while the second one is modified by *un pochino* – the diminutive form of *un po'* – with a similar pragmatic effect.

b. non c'è male // senti *un attimo* io ho chiamato papà in ufficio ma era già andato via

'not bad // listen PTC I called dad in the office but he was already gone'

c. benissimo giriamo la carta e vediamo *un attimo* quali itinerari proporreste

'very good let's turn the map and let's see *a moment* what routes you would suggest'

As these examples show, the contexts of use are the same as identified for *un po'*: assertions (12a), directives expressed by imperative sentences (12b) and hortatives (12c). However, the terminology and the categories used by Voghera (2017) for her analysis of *un attimo* are rather different from the ones adopted in this work. Concerning the overall classification, speech act theory is not referred to for the identification of the contexts of use. Concerning the analysis of the functions, terms like *informational/relational/discourse vagueness*, *hedge* and *alerter* cannot be easily integrated in the present framework.[6] Nevertheless, this brief comparison confirms also for Italian the existence of a development path which brings quantifiers to develop pragmatic functions in different kinds of speech acts.

The data analysis in the next section will try to further describe the pragmatic functions of *un po'* and to assess to what extent the category of *illocutionary modification* can be used to describe these uses. Before moving to the data, I will add something else on the semantic domain covered by (pseudo-)partitive constructions and grammatical categories relevant for their development paths, in order to place their context-level uses in a broader grammatical environment.

7.1.3 The surroundings: Aspect, transitivity and verbal semantics

Following Luraghi & Huumo (2014), I indicated the marking of indefiniteness and expression of part-whole relations as the core meaning of partitive markers and partitive constructions. Moreover, they can express secondary functions related to verbal semantics, such as non-assertive modality, imperfective aspect and low transitivity. To give an overview of the semantic domain covered by partitive markers and partitive constructions, I will refer mainly to Luraghi & Kittilä (2014) who – besides a formal and functional typology of partitive markers – also outline their possible functional developments.

[6]The term *vagueness* has been used in many ways in linguistics and I don't mean to sum them up: see for example Jucker et al. (2003) for vagueness in conversation. Useful hints on the term *hedge* can be found in Kaltenböck et al. (2010).

Among the functions of partitives related directly to verbal meanings, there is aspect marking (Luraghi & Kittilä 2014: 38–40): in Estonian and Finnish, the partitive case contrasts with the accusative case; the partitive expresses imperfective aspect (and/or unbounded activities), while the accusative is associated with perfective aspect (and/or bounded activities). Linked to this, partitive coding is also associated with lower degrees of transitivity.[7] According to Luraghi & Kittilä (2014: 40–46), low transitivity manifests itself in three main ways: as partial affectedness (which means that only a part of an entity is affected); as association with predicates ranking inherently lower for transitivity (for instance mental verbs, verbs of cognition and experience); and as a low degree of agency associated with the agent of the action.

Clearly, *un po'* does not autonomously mark any of these functions in Italian, but some examples show a certain closeness with the semantic domains described so far:

(13) Italian

a. vedo *un po'* che fare [IMPERFECTIVE ASPECT]
'I'll see PTC what to do'

b. ha fatto *un po'* un casino [LOW-TRANSITIVITY]
'he did PTC a mess'

In these examples, *un po'* does not express a quantificational measure over the object of the predicate, but it contributes to mark specific shades of the verbal aspect or to refine the verbal semantics, for instance the degree of transitivity. The presence of *un po'* in sentences like (13a) and (13b) can be related to the expression of an unbounded activity and to a low degree of agency, respectively. As I have already pointed out, these functions are particularly clear when partitive constructions appear after the finite verb form. Luraghi & Kittilä (2014: 56) notice that "different inferences may arise from the occurrence of a partitive construction in the place of a direct object". They trace two possible development paths, both starting from the meaning of partitive constructions ("A part of a referent undergoes the effects of an action/process").

The first inference ("Only a part of a referent is involved", expressing nonspecificity) leads to indefiniteness: this path plays no role in the present analysis of *un po'*. The second inference ("Action/process is partial", expressing partiality) insists on the unboundedness of the event and leads to low transitivity and

[7] Imperfective aspect (on-going events, or events that were not completed successfully) is functionally directly related to low transitivity (see Hopper & Thompson 1980).

imperfectivity. This path seems to be relevant especially for the use of *un po'* in assertions, as unboundedness is transferred from the semantic level to the speech-act level. Moreover, recalling the suggestion by Budd (2014), a third inferential path could be identified ("There is a certain amount of such an action") which, insisting on the boundedness[8] of the event, leads instead to a perfective or punctual interpretation:

(14) Italian
guarda *un po'* chi ha scritto queste parole
'look *a bit* who wrote these words'

In imperative sentences like (14), *un po'* highlights the boundedness of the action expressed by the verb (perfective interpretation) or its punctual semantics, which is often an intrinsic feature of imperatives (Aikhenvald 2010: 126). This could represent the onset of a development path – as the marking of boundedness is transferred from the propositional level to the speech act (or, in FDG terms, from the representational level to the interpersonal level). In particular, in sentences like (14) *un po'* also contributes a mirative flavor (on mirativity, see Delancey 1997; Hengeveld & Olbertz 2012). This can be related to the perfective interpretation of imperative with *un po'*, as the expression of surprise by definition concerns something that is accomplished, that is perceivable in its "perfectivity" (or at least that is perceived as such by the speaker). When *un po'* conveys a mirative reading, it has always scope over a directive (*ma pensa un po'!* 'but guess what/imagine that!', *guarda un po' chi arriva!* 'look who's coming!'), so the mirative value seems to develop as a sort of by-product of the context-level use of *un po'* in directives – and in fact the conventionalized routines expressing surprise all feature an imperative with which the speaker asks the addressee to direct their attention to something (that, in particular, is surprising, and thus deserves to be noticed).

7.2 *un po'*: Corpus data

In the last section, I gave an overview of the main functions of *un po'* in contemporary Italian. Among the content-level uses, it can be used as a quantifier in pseudo-partitive constructions and as an adverbial degree modifier. In some contexts, this element also contributes to the expression of aspectual nuances of the predicate, related through inferential paths to the semantic domain of partitivity. Moreover, it displays uses linked to the illocutionary layer of the utterance. Two

[8] On this category (cognitive before being linguistic), see among others Declerck (1979), Dahl (1981), Jackendoff (1991) and Brinton (1998b).

contexts of use have been identified, corresponding to different types of speech acts – assertives and directives – supposedly with different pragmatic effects. In both cases (assertives and directives) – regardless of the inferential path which is highlighted – the scope shift to the speech-act level may involve a reanalysis of the meaning of *un po'*, which comes to mark new context-level functions. Now, through the analysis of data extracted from corpora – both from the spoken and the written language – I will provide a more detailed description of the contexts of use of *un po'* and further discuss its modal functions.

7.2.1 Spoken language

I extracted 350 occurrences of *un po'* both from the KIParla corpus and the LIP corpus, looking for tokens in post-verbal position. The next step was the manual annotation of the functions covered, following the categories identified in the last section. The extraction was mainly intended to gather a sample of corpus examples for the qualitative analysis – and not as a database for a quantitative analysis.[9] Nevertheless, the annotation of the functions allows us to make a (rough) count of the functional distribution in the samples. Table 7.1 gives an overview of the functions covered by *un po'* (absolute and relative frequencies).

Table 7.1: Distribution of the functions of un po' in KIP and LIP

	KIP		LIP	
	abs	rel	abs	rel
PSEUDO-PARTITIVE	49	0.14	58	0.16
ADVERBIAL MODIFIER	252	0.72	201	0.57
MP DIRECTIVE	5	0.01	46	0.13
MP OPTATIVE/HORTATIVE	6	0.01	26	0.07
MP ASSERTIVE	35	0.10	13	0.04
OTHER	3	<0.01	6	0.01
Total	350		350	

[9] I repeat once more the disclaimer enunciated in Chapter 6. The extraction of data from KIP and LIP was aimed at building a general dataset for the subsequent analysis rather than at (quantitatively) comparing the data extracted from the first one with the data extracted from the second one. From this perspective, Table 7.1 must be primarily read as an overall presentation of the data and not as a comparison of the two corpora. Moreover, the data displayed in Table 7.1 cannot be compared fully with the data on *pure* displayed by Table 6.1 in Chapter 6. In particular, in the case of *pure* I could extract all occurrences from both corpora, while in the case of *un po'* – which is much more frequent – I couldn't extract all occurrences and I limited myself to the arbitrary count of 350 occurrences for each corpus.

The table shows some disparities in the distributions. While the frequency of *un po'* in pseudo-partitive constructions and as an adverbial degree modifier are similar, the distribution of the illocutive uses is quite different. This depends possibly on the samples considered, which feature texts reflecting different communicative situations and sociolinguistic settings in a non-balanced way.[10]

I will now go through the labels used for the annotation. The first two labels refer to the content-level uses of *un po'*, namely the use in pseudo-partitive constructions (PSEUDO-PARTITIVE) and the use as an adverbial degree modifier (ADVERBIAL MODIFIER). As they have both been described in the previous section, I will not add much. The analysis of the sample reveals that the adverbial use of *un po'* is by far the most frequent one. When expressing this function, *un po'* modifies gradable words/concepts: adjectives (15), adverbs (16) and verbal phrases (17).

(15) [KIParla corpus – BOA3013]
mi sa che sei *un po'* stanca // chissà perché poi // c'è freddo // il freddo stanca //
'I think you're *a bit* tired // I wonder why // it's cold // cold makes you tired //'

(16) [KIParla corpus – TOD2011]
e quindi sono mh cose molto molto interessanti e molto profonde da da capire // impari a gestirti *un po' un po'* meglio // *un po'* meglio sì //
'and then they're uh really interesting things and quite deep to to understand // you learn how to handle yourself *a bit a bit* better // *a bit* better yeah //'

(17) [KIParla corpus – TOD2011]
// e mh e e e poi anche per eh uscire la sera magari per svagarsi *un po'* dopo tutta la giornata passata in università //
'// and uh and and and then also to uh go out in the evening maybe to have *some* fun after spending the whole day at university //'

[10] However, it is worth noting that – compared to the relatively stable distribution of the content-level uses – the context-level uses display more variation in frequency. This is in accordance with their behavior, which is more influenced by the contextual features of the communicative environment (participants, kind of interactions, topics of discussion). In other words, content-level uses of *un po'* have a greater probability of appearing across different communicative situations and sociolinguistic settings, while context-level uses of *un po'* heavily depend on them.

Example (18) below is a case of *un po'* in a pseudo-partitive construction, expressing a part-whole relation (referring to an indefinite referent).

(18) [KIParla corpus – TOD2012]
// però sì cioè c'erano *un po'* di rumori appunto per lavori del comune quindi // in definitiva forse // quello quella dove sono stata meglio a livello di rumori // è stato è stato a san donato //
'// but yeah I mean there were *some* noises right for the works of the municipality so // in the end maybe // the one the one where I've felt better in terms of noises // was was in san donato //'

Next to these, modal uses can be found. They have all been introduced in the last section: I will now give more examples and deepen the analysis. The overall classification is based on the kind of speech act in which *un po'* occurs. Three of them have been identified: directives (MP DIRECTIVE), hortatives (MP OPTATIVE/HORTATIVE) and assertions (MP ASSERTIVE). In directive speech acts, *un po'* operates on imperative verb forms (2nd person singular and plural). Looking at the examples extracted, it is perspicuous that a relatively small set of verbs appear with a certain frequency in these kinds of construction as seen in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2: Imperative verb forms occurring with *un po'* in KIP and LIP

	KIP	LIP
sentire 'to hear'	–	5
pensare 'to think'	1	5
vedere 'to see'	–	9
guardare 'to look'	1	12
dire 'to say'	1	5
other	2	10
Total	5	46

In the sample from the LIP corpus, five verbs occur in the majority of examples (36 out of 46): three perception verbs (*sentire* 'to hear', *vedere* 'to see', *guardare* 'to look'), a psychological verb (*pensare* 'to think'), and the verb *dire* 'to say'. The other occurrences are represented by single (or double) occurrences of different verbs (for instance *fare* 'to do', *mettere* 'to put', *chiudere* 'to close', *chiamare* 'to call', *provare* 'to try'). The sample from the KIP corpus contains far less examples

of this kind. A closer look at these examples and their conversational context suggests that constructions with imperative verb forms and *un po'* could be grouped in three different sets. In a first set of examples, *un po'* operates as a mitigating particle: it downtones the illocutionary force of the speech act, specifying directives as requests or invitations.

(19) [LIP corpus – Rome C9]
A: volevo chiedere sempre a Manuela che cosa dunque eh dunque Calvino si è occupato quindi del problema della fiaba eccetera volevo sapere ha fatto eh ha prodotto un'opera interessante sulla fiaba e eh non un testo critico no una
B: una raccolta
A: una raccolta di fiabe intitolate
B: Fiabe italiane
A: Fiabe italiane ah che praticamente ecco raccontami *un po'* di cosa cosa sono
A: 'I wanted to ask Manuela again what well uh well Calvino then worked on the issue of the folktale and so on I wanted to know he made uh he produced an interesting work on folktales and uh not a critical work no a'
B: 'a collection'
A: 'a collection of folktales called'
B: 'Italian folktales'
A: 'Italian folktales right that basically well tell me PTC what what they are'

In the context of an oral exam at university, *un po'* downtones the force of the professor's request (*raccontami un po'* 'tell me a bit'). Obviously, the professor is not asking the student to give a partial answer to question, rather they perform the speech act in a way which should not sound too overbearing: a possible paraphrase could be "I perform a directive speech act *a bit*".

Another example is (20) below. A man asks his partner to phone a friend (*chiama un po'* 'call a bit'). Again, *un po'* does not operate on a referential level – there is no point in giving a partial phone call – but on the illocutionary level: it characterizes the directive as a mild request, as if to say "I am asking you this in a gentle way" (another contextual clue is represented by the expressions at the beginning of the utterance: *amore ti prego* 'sweetie please').

(20) [LIP corpus – Milan B34]
B: amore ti prego chiama *un po'* XYZ perché mi sa che te ne sei *un po'* dimenticata
A: sì me lo sono abbandonato no l'ho chiamato giovedì poi però io ero fuori
B: 'sweetie please call PTC XYZ because I think you forgot PTC about that '
A: 'yes I forgot about it no I called him on Thursday but then I was out'

In a second set of examples, *un po'* performs a rather different function: it operates on commands, requests, and demands, enriching them with a specific incitement or boosting flavor. In example (21) the speaker asks her mother – for the first time in twenty years – to cook beans. The presence of *un po'* in the utterance (*fammi un po' i fagioli* 'cook me PTC some beans'), is apparently not linked to the mitigation of the directive, it rather marks it as an unexpected proposal. Example (22) is even clearer. The speaker is complaining about the quality of a photo he received from a friend (it is crooked and the screen in the picture has dust on it): imagining an exchange of words with him, he utters a marked directive (*togli un po' quel dito di polvere* 'take off PTC that inch of dust'). In this case, along with a specific flavor of casualness/unexpectedness, the utterance clearly sounds like a stressed request.

(21) [KIParla corpus – TOD2009]
eh e infatti ha fatto strano anche a mia mamma perché sono tornata e avevo voglia di fagioli // cosa che non ho mai chiesto in vent'anni di vita // mamma fammi *un po'* i fagioli
'uh indeed my mum was also surprised because I came back and I felt like having beans // a thing that I never asked for in twenty years of life // mum cook me PTC some beans'

(22) [KIParla corpus – BOA3021]
però nel senso almeno fai la foto allo schermo da davanti // non metà // non in diagonale // non con il flash togli *un po'* quel dito di polvere
'but I mean at least take the picture of the screen from the front // not the half // not crooked // not with the flash take off PTC that inch of dust'

These examples are closely linked to a third set of examples. This last set includes almost the totality of examples featuring the five verbs listed in Table 7.2 above. Expressions like *senti un po'* 'listen a bit', *guarda un po'* 'look a bit' or *pensa un po'* 'think a bit' are high-frequency imperatives further marked by

un po'. Together they represent highly-routinized directives displaying a non-compositional meaning. Rather than expressing a directive speech act, they are used as attention-getters, to highlight specific parts in the conversational flow or to segment discourse chunks. In other words, they have reached a discourse-marker status (see Waltereit 2002 on *guarda* 'look').[11]

(23) [KIParla corpus – TOD2003]
// mai io tra l'altro ho anche paura dei cani il mio fidanzato vorrebbe un canelupo cecoslovacco *pensa un po'* // costa il lupo cecoslovacco //
'// never by the way I'm even afraid of dogs my boyfriend would like to have a Czechoslovakian wolf dog *can you imagine that* // a Czechoslovakian wolf is expensive //'

(24) [KIParla corpus – TOD1015]
è l'unico luogo della bibbia in cui sembra che insomma sta trinità c'è // solo che erasmo si rende conto che *guarda un po'* proprio quel pezzetto nelle versioni greche originali non c'era
'it's the only passage of the bible where it seems that well there is this trinity // but Erasmus realizes that *guess what* exactly that tiny piece was not included in the original Greek versions'

The difference between these two uses can be observed in example (25), featuring both a routinized directive with discourse-marking function (*senta un po'* 'listen PTC') and a marked imperative (*faccia un po' il conto* 'you do the math PTC'). The first element is used to introduce a new utterance drawing the attention of the interlocutor. The second occurrence is an actual directive expressing a boosted request.

(25) [LIP corpus – Florence A9]
A: sì appunto ora ecco è una cosa che devo verificare lei è in pensione non è che
B: *senta un po'* noi pensionati abbiamo diritto all' esenzione
A: voi pensionati avete diritto all'esenzione del ticket purché il reddito non superi i diciotto milioni l'anno
B: un milione e due un milione e tre *faccia un po' il conto*
A: 'yeah exactly now well it's a thing that I have to verify you are retired isn't it'

[11] As discussed in the previous section, these constructions often convey a mirative flavor.

B: '*listen here* we pensioners have the right to the exemption'
A: 'you pensioners have the right to the exemption of the ticket so long as your income doesn't exceed eighteen million per year'
B: 'one million and two one million and three *you do the math* PTC'

A similar explanation holds also for hortatives. In this kind of speech act – closely related to directives – *un po'* combines with first person plural subjunctives. The most typical case is *vediamo un po'* 'let's see PTC' (10 total occurrences in KIP, 46 total occurrences in LIP)[12] – also representing a fixed expression with a discourse-marker status.

(26) [KIParla corpus – BOA1015]
mh okay // che cosa possono dire adesso in italiano che prima non potevano dire // okay *vediamo un po'*
'hmm okay // what else can they now say in Italian that they couldn't say before // okay *let's have a look*'

Leaving aside the constructions with *un po'* that have reached a discourse-marker status, one could wonder if there is a common feature linking imperative constructions where *un po'* gives a mitigating flavor to a directive (soft requests along the lines of examples (19) and (20) above) and imperative constructions where *un po'* rather adds a boosting flavor (incitements and stressed requests along the lines of examples (21) and (22) above).

Overall, considering the illocutionary features of these constructions, it seems that *un po'* contributes to specify imperative sentences as requests (of various kinds) – rather than commands or orders. In this respect, the core meaning contribution of *un po'* – directly derived from its adverbial semantics – is to mark the speech act as implying a minimal effort from the addressee to perform the actions. Besides that, contextual features that vary according to each speech event (urgency, unexpectedness, a certain casualness, and so on) contribute to further differentiating between soft and stressed requests, sudden proposals, and incitements. This way, the marking of a speech act/interactional frame where minimal effort is required on the part of the addressee, represents a conventional feature in constructions with *un po'* as a modal particle. Since it explicitly marks the speaker's attention to the addressee's state of mind, this can be interpreted as a feature related to common ground management. That said, the mitigating/boosting flavor appears to be a contextual side-effect.

[12]These numbers refer to the whole corpus, not to the smaller sample based on which I built Table 7.1 above.

I now move on to the other important illocutionary context in which *un po'* operates, namely assertions. Compared to the directives in the sample, the assertions appear less routinized: there are less fixed expressions and more variability. At the same time, these contexts of use show greater continuity with the use of *un po'* as an adverbial degree modifier. However, in that case *un po'* has scope over gradable expressions (adjectives, adverbs, verbal phrases), while – used as an operator on assertive speech acts – it has scope over the illocution. In this context, the scope extends over the finite verb form and, in some cases, over a nominal constituent bound to the verb. Thus, the particle does not modify the degree expressed by an adjective, adverb or verbal phrase, but it modifies the degree of assertivity of the utterance, that is, the illocutionary force expressed by the speech act.

Typically, it is used when speakers want to assert something, but are not completely sure or confident about what they are saying, when they want to limit the conversational impact of their utterance or when they want to give a flavor of uncertainty or vagueness to their assertions.[13] Examples (27), (28) and (29) illustrate this function:

(27) [KIParla corpus – BOA1001]
// periodo di inserimento eccetera // mh // eh mh // questa è la fase esplorativa in cui le cose che raccoglie sono *un po'* vanno *un po'* in più direzioni // mh //

'// settling-in period and so on //hm // eh hm // this is the exploratory phase where the things she collects are PTC they go PTC in several directions // hm //'

(28) [KIParla corpus – TOD1014]
// che ne so esco in pigiama perché sono contro la società i valori borghesi // quindi io adesso andrò in giro vestita solo in pigiama e pantofole per esprimere // i punk facevano *un po'* quello [...] quando arrivò la rivoluzione punk nelle strade di londra // e prima di new york in realtà // poi esplode *un po'* a londra il fenomeno punk // fu una // uno schiaffo in faccia ai borghesi alla borghesia e alla // come dire al senso comune //

'// I don't know I go out wearing my pajamas because I'm against society the bourgeois values // so, I will go around wearing only my pajamas and my slippers to express // punks were doing PTC this [...] when the punk

[13] See Franken (1997) and Allwood et al. (2014) for a discussion of concepts such as *uncertainty* and *vagueness* in pragmatics.

revolution arrived on the streets of London // and before that in New York actually // then it explodes PTC in London the punk phenomenon // it was // a slap in the face to the bourgeois the bourgeoisie and to the // how to say the common sense//'

(29) [KIParla corpus – BOD2015]
// no scherzo però secondo me quella è *un po'* l'età in cui ti rendi conto // mh di cosa vuoi fare davvero // nel senso mh // come spiegare a abbandoni *un po'* l'infanzia
'// no I'm joking but in my view that's PTC the age when you realize //hm what you want really do // I mean hm // how to explain that you leave PTC your childhood'

In example (29), in particular, several contextual clues point to a scarce degree of speaker's commitment with regard to the content being conveyed, namely two pause-fillers (*mh*) and a reformulation marker (*nel senso*); moreover, the process of reformulation itself is indexed explicitly by a question that the speaker perhaps asks himself in passing (*come spiegare*). All these clues point to difficulties in online processing, and this explains the presence of *un po'* marking the low level of assertivity characterizing the speech act. The conspiracy of all these contextual factors – which represent different discourse-pragmatic elements, such as interjections (*mh*), discourse markers (*nel senso*, *come spiegare*), and modal particles (*un po'*) – contribute to convey a broad sense of uncertainty in the interactional situation.

In Chapter 3, it has briefly been mentioned that illocutionary features of speech acts on the one hand, and conversation practices on the other – although closely intertwined – should be investigated through different analytical tools and categories. For this reason – even though taking into account the conversational effects of *un po'* in assertions – I would analyze assertions featuring *un po'* by means of speech act theory. Given that the core meaning conventionally associated with assertions can be described as "the speaker expresses the belief that the propositional content of the sentence is true" (Searle 1969), it can be said that *un po'* appears in utterances for which the speaker assumes little evidence for the propositional content conveyed. This way, *un po'* is used to mark assertions whose felicity conditions are not totally fulfilled. The conversational effects achieved by such utterances may be described through labels such as uncertainty or vagueness, but *un po'* specifically operates on the illocutionary force of the assertion. In this perspective, an explanation in terms of *low assertivity* allows one to hold these assertions together, regardless of the kind of conversational

effect they produce (informational and discourse vagueness, face-saving utterances, mitigation, uncertainty).[14]

Through this explanation, it doesn't seem inappropriate to relate the pragmatic effect of *un po'* in these examples to the category of illocutionary modification as described above. On the one hand, *un po'* modifies the intentions expressed through the performance of a speech act – and it can thus be considered as an operator that specifies the kind of speech act performed. On the other hand, it adjusts the speech act to the preexisting conditions, that is the combination of contextual factors forming the background on which the speech act is performed. Nevertheless, it is not always easy to assess to what extent this particle operates on the illocutionary features of the speech act rather than on the locutionary features of it, that is, on the propositional content evoked by the speech act. Since this is an important issue, I will address it in a separate subsection. Before that, I will briefly comment on the data of written language.

7.2.2 Written language

The distribution of the functions of *un po'* in the data of written language is similar to that of spoken language. I extracted 200 occurrences of post-verbal *un po'* from the *La Repubblica* corpus and I manually annotated the functions covered, using the same tag set applied to the spoken data. Table 7.3 shows the distribution of the functions (absolute and relative frequencies).

Table 7.3: Distribution of the functions of *un po'* in the *La Repubblica* corpus

	REP	
	abs	rel
PSEUDO-PARTITIVE	41	0.20
ADVERBIAL MODIFIER	146	0.74
MP DIRECTIVE	4	0.02
MP OPTATIVE/HORTATIVE	–	–
MP ASSERTIVE	9	0.04
OTHER	–	–
Total	200	

[14] Another possible label is *approximated assertivity*. In particular, the label *approximation* is used in Functional Discourse Grammar to refer to a class of operators (grammatical elements) operating at the layer of communicated content (see Hengeveld 2017: 17; see also Hengeveld & Keizer 2011). I will further discuss this issue in the next subsection.

The relative frequencies are similar to the ones of the spoken data (especially if compared with the sample of the KIP).[15] The prototypical use of *un po'* is the use as an adverbial degree modifier, followed by the use in pseudo-partitive constructions. The illocutionary uses are marginal, but still attested – showing that they are not exclusive to the spoken language. The qualitative analysis of the examples does not add significant detail to the overall picture either. Example (30) is an instance of a directive marked by *un po'*. The explanation given for directives in the preceding subsection also holds for it.

(30) [*La Repubblica* corpus – article.id: 558932, comment: sport]
Quest'ultimo, 37 anni, è un marinaio di foresta, come quasi tutti i grinder cioè quegli Obelix che smanovellano circa duemila giri a regata (fate *un po'* i conti). Viene da Novara, giocava a pallavolo, lanciava il disco e faceva l'Isef alla Cattolica di Milano quando gli proposero di andare per mare.

'The latter, 37 years old, is a forest seaman, like almost all grinders, that is, those Obelix who paddle about two thousand spins per race (do PTC the math). He comes from Novara, he used to play volleyball, he used to do discus throw, and was attending Isef at the Catholic University of Milan when he got the proposal to go to sea.'

Regarding assertions, the situation is quite different. The nine instances annotated as assertive – that is, modal uses of *un po'* in assertive speech acts – could be actually better thought of as bridging contexts. In most of these cases (eight out of nine), *un po'* occurs in predicative construction, between the verb *essere* 'to be' and a nominal constituent. It is not clear whether it already operates on the assertivity of the illocution, or whether it can still be considered an operator on the communicated content (this issue will be further discussed in the next subsection). Example (31) below could be the only convincing illocutive use of *un po'* in assertions found in this small sample: it does not modify the predicate (it's not a partial interpretation), rather, it limits the speaker's conviction expressed in the assertion. To wit, it operates on the illocutionary force of the assertion.

(31) [*La Repubblica* corpus – Comment, Politics]
C'è una vignetta sul "Kurier" che mostra i capi dei due partiti di coalizione che cercano riparo da un temporale i cui fulmini tratteggiano

[15] Also in this case, the comparison must be understood merely as a suggestion, since the samples were collected according to different criteria and they do not contain the same number of tokens.

> due grandi simboli delle SS: nella sua asprezza interpreta *un po'* il senso di delusione e di protesta con cui anche la stampa austriaca – escluso solo il diffuso "Kronenzeitung" – ha accolto la decisione del governo.
>
> 'There is a cartoon on the "Kurier" that shows the leaders of the two coalition parties trying to find a shelter from a storm where lightning is sketched like two big symbols of the SS: in its bitterness, it portrays PTC the sense of delusion and protest with which also the Austrian press – excluding only the "Kronenzeitung" – accepted the government's decision.

Moving on from here, I will further develop the discussion concerning the behavior of *un po'* as a modal particle in assertions and the pragmatic functions expressed. As mentioned above, the problem revolves around the issue of the specific layer on which this particle operates, namely the illocutionary act in a narrow sense (force features of the speech act, including illocutionary point and preparatory conditions) or rather on certain aspects of the locutionary act (features of the propositional content evoked by the speech act). In the following, I will refer to FDG to show that it is not easy to draw a clear-cut divide between the illocution and the communicated content – and that the domain of action of *un po'* in assertions possibly extends to both layers.

7.2.3 Assertions with *un po'*: Non-straightforward communication

The distinction between illocution and communicated content as separate grammatical layers is found in the model of Functional Discourse Grammar as a distinction pertaining to the interpersonal level. This level of analysis deals with the interaction between the speaker and the addressee (Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008: 46–48). Rather than contributing to the semantic content of the expression in which it occurs, it is concerned with the attitude of the speaker towards the information they are transmitting: linguistic expressions operating at this level have no designating force.

As I have already sketched out in Chapter 3, the interpersonal level in FDG is organized in different pragmatic layers expressing scope relations. To briefly summarize, the *move* consists of one or more (sequentially ordered) *discourse acts*. Each act in turn consists of an *illocution*, the *speech participants* and a *communicated content*. Finally, within the communicated content, one or more *subacts of reference* and *ascription* are executed by the speaker, by means of which he refers to entities and ascribes properties to these entities. For the present discussion, the distinction between illocution and communicated content is particularly relevant:

> Whereas the Illocution indicates the conventionalized conversational use of a Discourse Act, and the Participants represent the essential Speaker-Addressee dyad, the Communicated Content contains the totality of what the Speaker wishes to evoke in his/her communication with the Addressee. In actional terms it corresponds to what Searle (1969) calls the "representational act" and corresponds to the choices the Speaker makes in order to evoke a picture of the external world s/he wants to talk about. The Communicated Content is thus the unit within which the mapping to the Representational Level takes place. (Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008: 87)

The communicated content is made up by the execution of a set of subacts (reference and ascription), by which speakers can evoke referents and properties. Moreover, pragmatic relations determining the information structure of an utterance are encoded at this layer, such as focus (vs. background) and topic (vs. comment).

Hengeveld & Keizer (2011) further explore aspects related to the communicated content. Specifically, their paper is dedicated to linguistic elements expressing *non-straightforwardness*, that is "grammatical and lexical strategies that are available to speakers to convey that the message they intend to communicate is not straightforwardly covered by the basic elements contained in their utterance; these include dummies such as *whatshisname*, approximators such as *like*, as well as exactness markers such as *true*" (Hengeveld & Keizer 2011: 1962). Accordingly, the degree of (non-)straightforwardness of a linguistic expression reflects the extent to which speakers are able or willing to provide the exact amount of information needed for successful or felicitous communication. While acknowledging an undeniable link between the linguistic coding of straightforwardness and such representational matters as predication and denotation, Hengeveld & Keizer (2011: 1964) analyze straightforwardness as pertaining foremost to the interpersonal level, i.e. as modifying or specifying the actions performed by the speaker in their interaction with an addressee.

These observations can help to better describe the behavior of *un po'* in assertive speech acts. In the analysis provided above, a distinction has been made between content-level uses of *un po'* (pseudo-partitive constructions, adverbial degree modifier uses) and context-level uses (illocutionary operator). In FDG terms, this distinction is reflected in the separation between a representational and an interpersonal level. The issue now is to further explain the status of context-level uses of *un po'*. The advantage of referring to FDG is that this framework assumes a distinction – within the interpersonal level – between illocution and communicated content. In this respect, the analysis in the previous section

– although favoring an analysis of modal *un po'* in terms of low assertivity – led to the conclusion that labels such as vagueness or approximation may be used to describe the conversational effect brought by assertions with *un po'*. Although very tricky to define in a systematic way, these labels seem to refer to the communicated content – in the sense of the information evoked by a speech act – rather than to the illocution in a narrow sense. Bearing these observations in mind, I will explore some examples in order to assess whether *un po'* in assertions can be described – at least in some cases – as an operator at the layer of the communicated content rather than on the illocution.

Hengeveld & Keizer (2011: 1965–1975) and Hengeveld (2017) report several examples of lexical and grammatical expressions which code different values of non-straightforwardness, applying to each of the units involved at this layer: the two types of subact, ascriptive and referential, and the communicated content as a whole. I give here three examples of *sort of*.

(32) English (Hengeveld 2017: 21–22)[16]

a. We're looking for a *sort-of* manager to book us shows.

b. I think I can more or less understand in general terms what happens up until *sort of* the impressionist time, maybe just post-impressionist.

c. McCain backtracks on gay adoption, *sort of*.

In (32a) *sort of* directly modifies a lexical element and has the function of indicating that this lexical element only approximately designates what the speaker has in mind. In this case, *sort of* operates at the layer of the ascriptive subact, as it is the appropriateness of the ascription of a property that is at stake here. In (32b) *sort of* has scope over the entire noun phrase *the impressionist time*, which in this case serves as a measure that is roughly indicative of the end point of the period about which the speaker has some understanding. In such cases, *sort of* is said to operate on the referential subact, as the unit being modified is referential in nature. Finally, in (32c) *sort of* modifies the entire preceding utterance: it qualifies this utterance as expressing approximately what the speaker has in mind. In this example, *sort of* modifies the entire communicated content, the message transmitted by the speaker. Hengeveld & Keizer (2011) define *sort of* as an expression of *approximation.* Let's compare this distribution with Italian examples of *un po'*.

[16]Examples (32a–c) correspond respectively to examples (12), (13) and (14) in Hengeveld (2017: 21–22).

(33) [LIP corpus – Milan E8]
la prima è che il mondo occidentale è abbastanza abituato a vedere *un po'* dei profili in ogni momento storico e invece ci sono delle situazioni storiche.
'the first thing is that the western world is quite used to seeing *sort of* profiles in every historical moment whereas there are only historical situations.'

(34) [LIP corpus – Milan E11]
vi sono però dei difficili rapporti con gli azionisti tedeschi con la cordata che fa *un po'* da cordone sanitario.
'there are however difficult relationships with the German shareholders with the group acting PTC as a cordon sanitaire.

(35) [LIP corpus – Milan C9]
d'altro canto questo è un po' il problema di tutti i movimenti spontanei eh su questi su questi temi io credo che adesso si apra una fase diversa una fase nuova nella quale eh sostanzialmente gli obiettivi possono essere due primo è *un po'* quello a cui noi cerchiamo di contribuire con questo concerto e cioè quello di tenere alta l'attenzione e la solidarietà
'on the other hand this is kind-of the problem of all spontaneous movements uh on these on these topics I think that now a different phase is beginning a new phase where uh basically the goals can be of two kinds first it is PTC the one we're trying to support with this concert that is keeping up the awareness and solidarity'

These examples from my data sample can be very well analyzed along the lines of the explanation given for (32a), (32b) and (32c). In (33) *un po'* operates at the layer of the ascriptive subact, while in (34) it operates at the layer of the referential subact. In (35) it operates on the whole communicated content. In all three cases, *approximation* seems a good label to describe its pragmatic effect. These examples suggest that the context-level uses of *un po'* – or at least some of them – can be better described as operators at the layer of the communicated content rather than on the illocution. However, doubts remain for examples like (35), where it is not clear whether *un po'* expresses approximation on the communicated content or low commitment on the assertivity. This is not surprising after all, as Hengeveld & Keizer (2011) themselves highlight:

> It would be worthwhile to see to what extent these distinctions are relevant at other layers of the Interpersonal Level (the Illocution or the Discourse

> Act) as well. However, since the same expressions are often used to mark non-straightforwardness at the different layers, it is not always easy to determine to which level these expressions apply. For the same reason, it turns out to be difficult to distinguish between approximation/exactness on the one hand and mitigation/reinforcement on the other. (Hengeveld & Keizer 2011: 1975)

In the absence of clear formal features that distinguish the use of the same element to express different functions at different layers, these kinds of observation leave some space for scope vagueness. They moreover recall the (partially problematic) issue of the exact contribution of *un po'*, which – apart from approximation – has been described as marking reinforcement in some cases.

More precisely, *un po'* seems to operate as a focus marker in some examples, contributing to separate a focused part of the utterance (often new information) from a backgrounded one (Hengeveld & Keizer 2011: 1975). Again, this is not surprising since pragmatic functions such as focus and topic are coded – from an FDG perspective – exactly at the layer of the communicated content and overlapping of functions are to be expected. Consider example (36) below. In this case *un po'* could actually be analyzed as contributing to mark the focus (in a pseudo-cleft syntactic structure), but it is clear that the gap between this kind of construction and the reanalysis of *un po'* as a marker that modifies the illocutionary features of the whole speech act represents a short step:

(36) [KIParla corpus - BOD2001]
// eh la cosa è *un po'* quella che vivi in in una bolla però poi effettivamente sì certo conosci un po' il luogo però forse non lo conosci proprio in tutti i pro e i contro //

'// well, the thing is PTC that that you live in in a bubble but then actually yeah sure you know the place a bit but maybe you don't know it exactly with all the pros and cons //'

These last observations discussed the relationship between communicated content and illocution on the one hand, and between approximation, mitigation and reinforcement on the other – showing that the context-level uses of *un po'* display a complex distribution which cover different pragmatic domains.[17]

[17] It is perhaps important to point out that – despite this underlying complexity – *context-level uses* remains an informative and inclusive enough label, beyond the micro-layers which are detectable at the pragmatic level.

Nevertheless, even if many examples of *un po'* can be interpreted as more relevant for the communicated content layer, the fact remains that many others are clearly involved in the modification of the illocutionary force. Consider example (37) below. In this case, there is no doubt that *un po'* marks low commitment on the assertivity. There are different factors that point to a scarce degree of speaker's commitment with regard to the content being conveyed: the reported information (the fact that Leo is dating someone) could not have been verified, or the speaker does not feel entirely entitled to share it. This being the situation, the speaker uses *un po'* to reduce the level of assertivity of their speech act. In this case, therefore, *un po'* refers to the network of conversational expectations which constitutes the common ground of the conversation, thus qualifying itself as a full-fledged illocutionary operator.

(37) [KIParla corpus - BOD2014]
// leo lo vedo molto bene in 'sto periodo // ho visto *un po'* che ha una tipa che fanno parecchie cose // beh come sempre // solito solito leo // un uomo di successo //

'// leo I see him in good shape at the moment // I saw PTC that he has a girl they do lot of stuff // well as usual // same same leo // a man of success //'

7.3 *un po'*: Closing remarks

The analysis conducted in this chapter has allowed us to describe the polyfunctionality of *un po'* – from the content-level uses in pseudo-partitive constructions and as an adverbial degree modifier up to its context-level use as a modal particle. As in the case of *pure*, it can be noticed that the adverb appears in different types of speech acts and it performs different pragmatic effects: directives can be marked as involving a minimal effort on the side of the addressee and consequently specified as mild requests (with a mitigation flavor) as well as rather sudden incitements (with a reinforcing overtone); the illocutionary force of assertives can be downtoned (low commitment on the assertivity); specific illocutions like hortatives can also be marked by *un po'*.

Moreover, going through the data, I also tried to highlight the connections with neighboring functions: in directives, *un po'* can contribute to specifying aspectual features (perfectivity, low-transitivity), in assertions it operates in different ways on the presentation of information (approximation of the communicated content, focus-marking). Going back to the problematic issue of whether illocutionary modification may be used as a category to define the illocutive uses of

un po' – that is, can *un po'* be considered a modal-particle-like element in its illocutive uses? – it has been suggested that *un po'* can be described as an illocutionary operator, though a non-prototypical one: even though in some cases it has little effect on the common ground management and exhibits, rather, a strong link with the communicated content, in other cases it definitely operates on the illocutionary force of the speech act.

Highlighting the connections among these different functions did not lead to the creation of a semantic map – more typological research would be needed for this – but it can nevertheless give an idea of how different functional domains are close to each other and can be linked by contextual inferences. In its content-level uses (pseudo-partitive constructions, adverbial degree modifier uses), *un po'* expresses part-whole relations and indefiniteness/unspecificity: traces of these meanings can be found also in other uses.[18] As suggested by Luraghi & Kittilä (2014) and Budd (2014), different inferential paths may lead to the expression of new functions, based on what meaning shade is profiled. In the case of *un po',* both boundedness and unboundedness can play a role, depending on which perspective is assumed on the partiality of an action, event or referent (that is, depending on whether what has been done, or what has been left undone, is profiled). These different profiles can lead – among other things – to the expression of aspectual nuances of verb forms, perfectivity on the one hand (boundedness) and imperfectivity and low-transitivity on the other (unboundedness). Finally, these meaning features are sensitive to the illocutive types in which they are inserted: in the context of specific speech acts, the meanings conveyed by *un po'* can be reanalyzed as functions at the pragmatic level. Thereby, *un po'* comes to be used as a marker of specific functions at different pragmatic layers (low commitment on the speaker's side, low effort on the hearer's side, vagueness and approximation, force regulation).

To conclude, a closing note on the relations between my analysis of *un po'* and the Functional Discourse Grammar theoretical framework. As it has been said in the preceding chapters, the grammatical categories assumed by FDG can be useful to describe systematic functions at the interpersonal level – which are often neglected in the description of pragmatic markers – and, at the same time, to highlight the connections with other grammatical categories pertaining to other levels of analysis. This holds also in the case of *un po'*. Specifically, the distinction introduced in FDG between the layer of illocution and the layer of communicated content has allowed a fine-grained description of the context-level uses of *un po'*. Conversely – now with specific reference to the dynamic model elaborated by

[18]In this respect, approximation could be considered a pragmatic counterpart of non-specificity.

Narrog (2012) – it seems that modality plays no role in the description of the uses of *un po'*, or in its functional development. I recall that modality is considered by Narrog (2012) to be the main semantic domain leading to illocutionary modification: forms marking modality can widen their scope relations and move up to express illocutionary functions. My analysis of *un po'* – exactly as the analysis of *pure* – suggests that modality is not the only domain that linguistic expressions can cross to reach the layer of illocutionary modification. Other domains, such as aspect, event quantification, and information structure can also play a role at the semantics/pragmatics interface. Future research will further develop this issue.

8 Modal particles and language variation: A case study on *solo* 'only'

8.1 *solo*: Overview of the categories involved

This chapter deals with the different uses of the adverb *solo* 'only'. In addition to its prototypical use as an exclusive focus adverb, it has developed some secondary uses – among which we find illocutive uses as an illocutionary operator tied to specific speech-act types.

This case study aims at giving an in-depth description of the illocutive uses of *solo* and – on a methodological level – it aims at showing how an integrated approach that combines pragmatics and sociolinguistics is necessary in order to address the different theoretical and empirical issues raised by similar phenomena. In particular – compared to the approach taken for the two previous case studies of the two previous chapters – this case study includes more explicitly the issues concerning language change and variation discussed in Chapter 4. This way, several topics discussed in the previous chapters will be combined to get a comprehensive analysis of the illocutive uses of *solo* and their development: pragmatic categories and their position in the grammar, sociolinguistic variation, semantic change and reanalysis. However, although closely intertwined, each of the three sections specifically examines one of these aspects.

This section – which also relies on previous research (Favaro 2019, 2020) – sets out the background of the case study, discussing the main semantic and pragmatic features of the modal uses of *solo* and describing the questionnaire used to investigate them.

8.1.1 From focus marking to illocutionary modification

In its prototypical use, *solo* belongs to the category of focus adverbs, which count among the linguistic items marking the information structure of an utterance – specifically, the pragmatic relation of focus. Basic notions of information structure – as well as general characteristics of focus adverbs – have been discussed in Chapter 6, so I will not repeat them here. Let us however briefly examine the

semantic features of *solo* as a focus adverb again. Adapting example (2) of Chapter 6, the lexical meaning of *solo* can be described as follows.

(1) Italian
   a. Giorgio ha comprato *solo* delle mele.
      'Giorgio *only* bought apples'
   b. Giorgio ha comprato delle mele.
      'Giorgio bought apples' [PRESUPPOSITION]
   c. Giorgio non ha comprato nient'altro.
      'Giorgio didn't buy anything else' [ASSERTION]

A sentence like (1a) can be described as the sum of two propositions, represented here by sentences (1b) and (1c). The sentence *Giorgio only bought apples* builds on the presupposition that *Giorgio bought apples* (which is outside of the scope of the negation, cf. *It is not true that Giorgio bought only apples*, activating the same presupposition) and contains the assertion that *Giorgio didn't buy anything else*, thus suggesting that *apples* are part of a larger set of elements (depending on the context) and that none of the possible alternatives satisfies the relevant open sentence (*Giorgio bought x*). Recalling the description proposed by König (1991: 94–119), this semantic property of focus adverbs can be described as a quantification effect, which relates the value of the focused expression to a set of alternatives. The meaning contribution of *solo* is to exclude these alternatives as possible values for the open sentence in its scope.

As I pointed out in Chapter 6, some focus adverbs may induce a ranking into the set of possible alternatives, inducing scalar structures in the domain of quantification: the alternatives and the focus value appear as part of a hierarchically arranged set. Like *pure*, *solo* does not induce a scalar ordering by itself, but it is compatible with it when this is suggested by the context:

(2) Italian
   È *solo* un bambino!
   'He is *only* a child!'
   (+> not a boy / not an adult / not an old man)

(3) English (König 1991: 96)
   Is *only* a B grade required?
   (+> not higher grades)

In (2) and (3), the sets of possible alternatives to the focus value (respectively, age groups and academic grades) are *per se* ordered sets. In contexts like these, scalar focus adverbs often activate an evaluation inference connected to the scalar ordering – that is, the value of the focus is characterized as ranking "high" or "low" on the scale. As a part of its conventionalized meaning – when used in a scalar way – *solo* activates the inference that the excluded alternative values rank higher on the scale than the value in focus: in most cases, when *solo* is associated with an order, the value of its focus is evaluated as minimal.

Given the features of the prototypical use, I turn now to uses of *solo* which cannot be described as focus adverbs. Concerning their scope, they do not operate on sentence constituents (like NPs or VPs) but on other units. Concerning their meaning, they do not display the effect of quantification: no set of alternative referents is opposed to a focused one. As Eckardt & Speyer (2016: 503) put it, "reference to alternatives of focus-background structure is lost". Thus, these uses of *solo* represent *bleached focus constructions*, functional developments which occupy a more forward position on the focus cline (see the discussion in Chapter 6).

A first set of functional developments of *solo* consists of functional expansions towards the domains of discourse coherence and conversational structure: these are the uses of the adverb as a *conjunctional adverb* and as a *discourse marker* which I will not develop here (see Favaro 2020: 117–120).[1] A second set of functional developments of *solo* is represented by its illocutive uses – functional expansions towards the domain of speech act specification and common ground management. The involvement of these functional domains – which I discussed together in Chapter 3 under the label of *illocutionary modification* – leads us to the consideration that *solo* in its illocutive uses employs a modal-particle-like element.[2]

Quite importantly, previous research suggested that these uses are unevenly distributed in Italian (Favaro 2019). This fact is probably due to some kind of sociolinguistic markedness (regional and diaphasic variation, for instance) and they are almost absent in digital corpora of spoken Italian. A small questionnaire survey permitted the collection of some real-life examples for analysis and to test

[1]Similar uses of exclusive focus adverbs have been described for other languages, too: König (1991: 106–107, 2017: 34–38) gives a brief description of English *only* and German *nur* as conjunctional adverbs, Brinton (1998a) considers the diachronic evolution of *only* as a conjunctional adverb. With regard to German, Modicom & Duplâtre (2018: 78–81) investigate the use of *nur* 'only' as a connective and Auer & Günthner (2005: 337–338) account for the use of *bloß* 'only' as a discourse marker.

[2]The illocutive uses of *solo* partially bring to mind some functions of English *just* (König 1991: 116–119). See also Lee (1987, 1991), Aijmer (2002: 153–174), Molina & Romano (2012) and Beeching (2016: 76–96, 2017).

them with acceptability judgments and possible paraphrases. Two main contexts of occurrence – directive speech acts and assertive speech acts – were identified for these uses.

8.1.2 Contexts of occurrence: Directive and assertive speech acts

In the first kind of context, *solo* occurs in directive speech acts such as orders, exhortations and instructions. In (4) an example of *solo* in a directive is provided.[3]

(4) Italian (Favaro 2020: 121)
[Silvia's brother has broken his sister's bike which he had borrowed without asking and keeps apologizing to her profusely. Silvia says to her brother:]
Guarda, sparisci *solo*!
'Look, *just* beat it!'

From a syntactic point of view, *solo* is positioned immediately after the finite verb form, and it has scope over the whole utterance: these two features are common to all illocutive uses of *solo*. Concerning the scope, it is problematic to identify an overt sentence constituent in the scope of *solo*: the adverb seems to be associated with a verbal focus, but the alternatives in question are not denotations of other verbs. Related to this, from a semantic point of view, the quantificational effect with exclusive meaning is expressed in a different way: the adverb does not evoke alternative referents as opposed to a focused one, but other propositions activated in the common ground (CG). In this way, the presence of *solo* in the directive seems to require different CG structures compared to the same utterance without it (*Guarda, sparisci!*).

In example (4), the presence of *solo* explicitly points to a set of propositions present in the CG (for instance, the interlocutor' opinion on the appropriateness of continued apologies), which – in the speaker's perspective – are not valid in this specific context. In the case of the directive without *solo*, this connection with the common ground is not explicitly established and the speech act is not

[3]Examples (4)–(9) – which I have already discussed in Favaro (2020) – come from different sources. Some of them were featured in the first questionnaire I developed on these issues (see Favaro 2019), where I relied on personal introspection, spontaneous speech and everyday conversations heard in Turin to collect the stimuli. Other examples were extracted from the internet (social media and forum discussions) and are featured in the new questionnaire discussed later in this chapter. The text in square brackets represents additional contextual information which was provided in the questionnaires to better interpret the stimulus.

projected against a background of other propositions. For these reasons, it is unsatisfactory to define *solo* as an exclusive focus adverb in this kind of construction: at first sight, it rather emphasizes the speech act which acquires a salient position in the conversational exchange.[4] In these uses, *solo* can be considered an *illocutionary operator*, a grammatical item operating at the layer of illocution.

Another example is the brief exchange in (5), where someone is talking about the volleyball team of Bra, a town in northern Italy. In the answer, *solo* operates on the imperative verb form *stai (zitto)* 'stay (quiet)':

(5) Italian (Favaro 2020: 122)
A: Io dico BRA campione d'Italia U16 venendo da due anni di dominio U14. Altre previsioni?
B: Stai *solo* zitto ke porti ancora sfiga!!!
A: 'I say BRA Italian champion U16 after two years of domination in the U14. Other predictions?'
B: '*Just* shut up, you're gonna jinx it!!!'

The meaning of *solo* in this kind of directive constructions may be said to be threefold. First, it contributes to the CG management, marking a contrast between the speech act and a belief attributed to the addressee. In example (5), the speaker attributes a proposition to the addressee's mind (it could be *You can say your predictions as well*): in this sense, the illocutive use of *solo* in directives is *polyphonous* (Ducrot 1984; Detges & Gévaudan 2018: 307), since it targets not only the speaker's viewpoint but also that of the addressee. The speaker contrasts this proposition with the directive, presenting it as the obvious action the addressee should undertake. Second, by highlighting this contrast, *solo* operates on the illocutionary force, giving emphasis to the directive. Finally, as a conversational side effect, it has a closing effect on the conversation: the interlocutor is "discouraged" from continuing the discussion on that topic. Another case in point is example (6):

(6) Italian (Favaro 2020: 123)
[Roberta asks Anna about her schedule for the following day]
R: Hai tanto da fare domani?

[4] Intonation is often a crucial variable to identify the contexts of use where *solo* functions as a modal particle. Nevertheless, although this kind of utterance may be characterized by distinctive intonation patterns, suprasegmental aspects count among the features that contribute to identify modal uses of *solo*, but they are not enough to distinguish them from the prototypical use as a focus adverb.

A: Lascia *solo* stare, sono piena tutto il giorno!

R: 'Are you very busy tomorrow?'

A: 'Don't *even* ask, I'm busy all day!'

In this example, again, the speaker attributes a belief to the addressee's mind (*We could arrange something together*) and contrasts it with an emphatic directive. As a CG management tool, *solo* points to the information ascribed to the addressee and specifies the role of the speech act towards it. Integrating speech acts in the common ground is one of the typical functions of modal particles. As discussed in Chapter 3, Waltereit (2001, 2006) analyzes these forms as linguistic items operating at the speech act level: they signal a speech situation where the preparatory conditions of a speech act are not (completely) fulfilled, specifying how the "defective" speech act should be correctly interpreted in that speech situation.

Following these suggestions, the meaning of *solo* in this context of use can be analyzed in terms of specification of the preparatory conditions of the speech act, in order to integrate the new directive into the assumed CG. According to the preparatory conditions of directives, it is not obvious to both the speaker and the addressee that – in the normal course of events – the addressee should do what is expressed by the directive (Searle 1969: 66; Waltereit 2001: 1403). By contrast, *solo* overtly marks an obvious directive, pointing to (and excluding) a set of propositions activated in the CG, and highlighting the only one – the directive – that the speaker considers to be valid in the speech situation. From the speaker's perspective, in examples like (5) and (6), *solo* signals this friction marking emphasis on a taken-for-granted directive.

In the second kind of illocutionary context, *solo* occurs in assertions conveying evaluations. A first example is (7), taken from a blog discussion about the football transfer market: someone is talking about the possibility that Belotti, a player of the Turin Football Club, might be sold by the club. Here *solo* gives a declarative sentence the character of an exclamation.

(7) Italian (Favaro 2020: 124)

Per me se parte Belotti a certe cifre va *solo* bene: coi suoi soldi si rifarebbe la squadra, modulo offensivo ma con difensori di livello!

'In my view if Belotti leaves for good money it's *just* fine: with his money they could remake the team, an attack formation but with high-level defenders!'

In a similar fashion to its use with directives, *solo* fulfils three functions at once in this kind of assertion. It contributes to the CG management, by signaling a discrepancy between the presented information and some general knowledge that is assumed to be present in the CG (and thus also entertained by the addressee). Second, it strengthens the illocutionary force, marking emphasis on the assertion. Moreover, on the conversational side, the emphatic assertion has a closing potential on the conversation, as if it could express the last word on the current discussion. In the context of (7), the speaker considers a proposition like *Someone thinks that selling Belotti is (not) a good idea* as active in the CG. It is important to note that in this case – as in the next one – both the affirmative and the negative proposition could be at issue, depending on the context. In fact, what the speaker wants to contrast is the possibility that their assertion could be challenged or questioned, and not necessarily one of the two versions (that largely depend on the communicative situation). Another case in point is (8):

(8) Italian (Favaro 2020: 124)
[Giorgio, annoyed by a long discussion with friends]
In effetti, prima di parlare informati, ha *solo* ragione Ceci a dire che ti inventi certe cose!
'Actually, before you talk inform yourself, Ceci is *absolutely* right saying that you make up things!'

In the context of (8), a proposition like *Someone thinks that Ceci is (not) right* is active in the CG. As in the previous example, the speaker corrects this proposition with his emphatic assertion, presenting it as the obvious proposition one should take into account. In terms of speech act specification, presenting an assertion as it should be obvious to the addressee is contrary to the preparatory conditions of assertions (Searle 1969: 66). This is the result of excluding the alternative propositions in the CG as non-valid: this way, the *challengeability* (see Kroon 1995) of the proposition conveyed by the assertion is cancelled – according to which the speaker recognizes that some opinion can't be negotiated with the addressee – and no room is left for possible disagreement. The emphatic assertion marked by *solo* is then the only one that is valid and, in this sense, it should be obvious to the addressee: in the speaker's perspective, in examples like (7) and (8), *solo* marks emphasis on a non-challengeable assertion.

In many cases, the proposition contrasted by the speaker corresponds to a common belief so that the emphatic assertion involves some degree of counter-expectation. These features provide a clue as to the explanation of how and in what kind of conversational contexts this use of *solo* can emerge. Following the

above line of reasoning, example (9) illustrates a possible bridging context from the focus adverb use *solo* to its use as an illocutionary operator:

(9) Italian (Favaro 2020: 125)
A: Non ci credo, questo freddo a maggio!
B: Mah, i tedeschi sono *solo* contenti se anche a maggio ci sono sei gradi, così possono usare ancora un po' le loro giacche colorate e i thermos all'università.
A: 'I can't believe it, such cold weather in May!'
B: 'Well, *actually* Germans are *just* happy if even in May it is six degrees, so that they can still use their colorful jackets and their thermos' at university.'

In (9) it is difficult to ascertain whether *solo* is an exclusive focus adverb. The crucial parameter is again the scope extension, since it is not clear if its scope extends over the predicate or on the whole utterance. The problems of defining the semantics of *solo* in these contexts and the problem of its scope relate to each other: the vagueness of the scope extension (predicate or utterance) corresponds to a vague semantics: its value as a focus adverb and its values as an illocutionary operator are not clearly distinguishable. This meaning vagueness is the consequence of several factors that combine in similar sentences – the starting point being an assertive speech act where an evaluation expressed by the speaker triggers the scalar reading of *solo*. In this evaluative context, there is a mismatch between the conventional meaning associated with the scalar use of *solo* (which – excluding values higher on some scale – is usually associated with low values) and the kind of predicate, that ranks high on a possible scale.[5] This fact contrasts with the normal interpretation of *solo* as an exclusive focus adverb.

Furthermore, (9) constitutes a counter-expectation context since it is assumed that people are not happy for the temperature to be six degrees in May. In utterances like (9) there is a clash between two contextual factors (the evaluative context and counter-expectation context) and two semantic factors (the conventional meaning of *solo* and a high-ranking predicate). This sum of factors constitutes a fixed argumentative move (Detges & Waltereit 2016; see the discussion in

[5]This fact is reminiscent of the phenomenon of scale inversion, which may be displayed by a scalar exclusive focus adverb when the context expresses a sufficient condition (see König 1991: 101; Modicom & Duplâtre 2018: 81–84). However, neither the examples given for *solo* in directives nor the examples for assertive speech acts are cases of contexts expressing sufficient conditions, and the emergence of the illocutive meaning of *solo* must be explained otherwise. In the case of example (9), the ironic context could also play a role.

Chapter 4) through which speakers takes advantage of a slightly deviating use of *solo* to index CG information and correct it with their emphatic assertion. The progressive routinization of this construction is accompanied by the contextual syntactic reanalysis of *solo* from focus adverb at the sentence level to emphatic operator targeting the illocution of the utterance, and pragmatically used for argumentative purposes.

8.1.3 The questionnaire

So far, I have described the semantic/pragmatic features of the modal uses of *solo*, pointing out their contexts of occurrence and their function within the speech act. Nevertheless, there are some questions which this kind of analysis – that is, the description of examples in context, largely based on personal interpretation – cannot answer.

First, the issue about the sociolinguistic markedness of the modal uses, that is, how standard and regional uses can be distinguished and how they are placed along other dimensions of variation. Second, the issue of how to describe the relationship between focusing and modal uses of *solo* – both from a synchronic point of view and with reference to the emergence of the new functions. This touches on topics such as the management of contextual inferences, conventionalization, and reanalysis. In this respect, also the question of whether the uses in directive and assertive speech acts belong to the same evolutionary path or to different ones can be raised.

The research instrument used to investigate these issues is a sociolinguistic questionnaire, aimed at collecting speakers' judgments on the modal uses of *solo*. It consists of 12 stimuli: 6 utterances where the adverb appears in a directive construction and 6 utterances where it appears in assertions. Two stimuli of each category were inserted as controls, as standard uses of *solo* as a focus adverb. Most of the stimuli have been proposed in the form of adapted cartoons, so that there was enough context to clarify what reading we wanted to suggest. The questionnaire collected 570 answers (April 2018 – September 2018).[6]

The questionnaire is divided into two parts. In the first one, for each stimulus, the respondents are invited to comment on the use of specific constructions. Con-

[6]See Chapter 5 for general information about the questionnaire design. In the next pages, the structure of the questionnaire and the stimuli are translated into English: the original Italian version can be accessed online at https://zenodo.org/records/10362289. The questionnaire has been developed in collaboration with Eugenio Goria, a colleague at the University of Turin. I worked with him both for the design of the questionnaire and for a first round of analysis of the results (more focused on sociolinguistic issues). Part of that work has been presented in Favaro & Goria (2019).

cerning this task, I use the label *reported language use* to refer to the (reported) familiarity with these uses – expressed through a personal evaluation of them. This parameter includes an evaluation concerning the "passive familiarity" with a construction ("Have you ever heard such a sentence?") and an evaluation concerning the "active familiarity" ("Do you use such a sentence?"). For four stimuli – two directives and two assertions – the type of sociolinguistic markedness perceived was also asked for ("In what kind of context are you likely to hear similar sentences?").

In the second part, the kind of meaning attached to the utterance was investigated. Two more questions were asked for eight of the stimuli (three directives, three assertions plus the two controls). The first one is an open question ("Would it make a difference if the sentence were without *solo*?") where the respondents can provide a free reading of the proposed stimulus, thus suggesting what kind of inferences and secondary meanings they link to it. This is useful to test if the speakers' insights match our own hypotheses. The second one is a multiple-choice question with three possible answers: a paraphrase expressing emphasis on the illocutionary force, a paraphrase expressing management of the common ground, and finally the possibility to choose both meanings for the proposed stimulus or something else.[7] The general structure of the questionnaire is summed up in Table 8.1.

As discussed in Chapter 5, sociolinguistic issues are often fundamental to giving an in-depth description of Italian modal-particles-like elements. The present case study on *solo* will mainly refer to diatopic variation, but future research on this or similar constructions could take into consideration other social variables – possibly developing questionnaires which focus on specific issues. This questionnaire aimed at collecting data (and give a description) both on the sociolinguistic distribution of these constructions and the development of their functions. In this respect, questionnaires combining acceptability judgments and meaning evaluations represent a promising methodology – and are consistent with the idea that variation and change of linguistic structures are deeply interwoven.

[7]The possible paraphrases necessarily reflect personal choices. Reducing a meaning category to a paraphrase represents a weak point of this methodology. However, it is interesting since it allows us to understand how speakers construe the meaning of the utterance and hence what kind of discourse inferences are activated in that context.

Table 8.1: Structure of the questionnaire on the illocutive uses of *solo*

	Question	Answer
Reported language use	Have you ever heard such a sentence?	— often — sometimes — never
	Do you use such a sentence?	— often — sometimes — never
Sociolinguistic status	In what kind of context are you likely to hear similar sentences?	open response
Meaning evaluation	Would it make a difference if the sentence were without *solo*?	open response
	With this sentence the speaker means…	3 possible alternatives + open response

8.2 Reported language use and regional variation

This section deals with the sociolinguistic features of the modal uses of *solo*. This was investigated in the first part of the questionnaire, which contained evaluations about the acceptability of the constructions and open questions about their sociolinguistic status. Through this, I wanted to collect information about the diatopic variation of these constructions. As mentioned in the last section, the questionnaire consists of 12 stimuli: six directives and six assertions (for each category, one stimulus represents a prototypical use of *solo* as a focus adverb). The distinction between these two illocutive contexts constituted one of the assumptions that shaped the design of the questionnaires (and that was further

confirmed by the answers collected). The discussion in the next pages follows this basic distinction. In this section, I will first show the results concerning the overall reported language use of the modal uses of *solo*. Subsequently, I will deal with the issue of diatopic variation, starting from the hypothesis that the modal uses of *solo* are more common in the regional variety of Italian spoken in Piedmont than in other regional varieties.

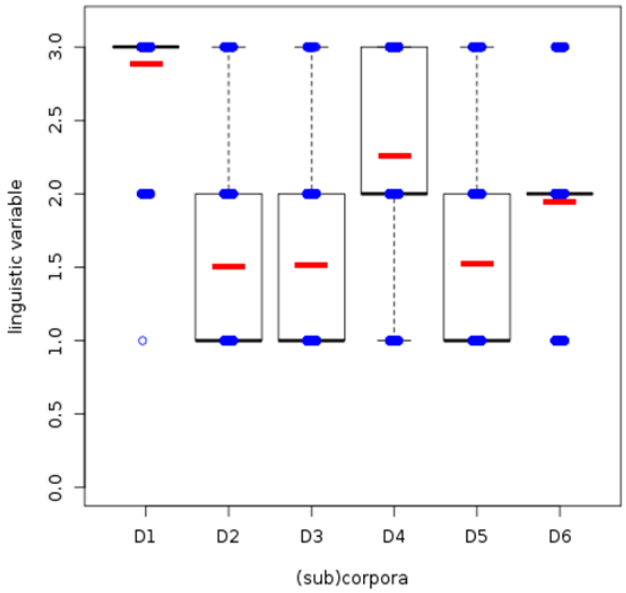
8.2.1 Overall reported language use

In the first part of the questionnaire, the acceptability[8] of the illocutive uses of *solo* was investigated. For each stimulus, the respondents were invited to evaluate both the passive familiarity with the stimulus featuring the adverb ("Have you ever heard such a sentence?") and the active familiarity with it ("Do you use such a sentence?"). There are three possible answers: *spesso* 'often', *qualche volta* 'sometimes' and *mai* 'never'. I will focus here on the results concerning passive acceptability. In fact, the tendency in both sets of answers is substantially the same, with the difference that the results concerning the passive acceptability of the constructions are always slightly higher than those concerning its active use. As can be expected in a sociolinguistic questionnaire, respondents are more likely to admit that they recognize a construction rather than using it actively. The boxplots in Figure 8.1 and Figure 8.2 show the overall results of the (passive) acceptability of the two illocutionary contexts.[9]

In the graphs, the labels D1–D6 and A1–A6 on the horizontal axis (labeled *(sub)corpora*) correspond to the proposed stimuli and the numerical values on the vertical axis (labeled *linguistic variable*) to the possible answers: 1.0 corresponds to "never", 2.0 to "sometimes" and 3.0 to "often". The collected answers are graphically represented by the boxplots, obtained through the Lancaster Stats Tool Online (Brezina 2018). The box graphically represents the area where most answers are concentrated, and the more or less dense blue ovals represent the number of answers for each value. The bold black lines (which allow a quick

[8]For reasons of convenience, I will sometimes use the more common label *acceptability* instead of *reported language use*, which is however not fully suited to describe the kind of judgement that the respondents were requested to give. In this respect, the label *acceptability* must be understood as "familiarity with a construction".

[9]The proposed stimuli are utterances along the lines of examples (91–96) discussed in the previous section, which have been modelled after constructed examples evaluated in previous research, and real examples extracted from the web or heard in every-day conversations. In the presentation of the results – in this and in the following cases – the relevant utterances are shown beside the boxplots. For the whole stimuli, see the original version of the questionnaire (online at https://zenodo.org/records/10362289).



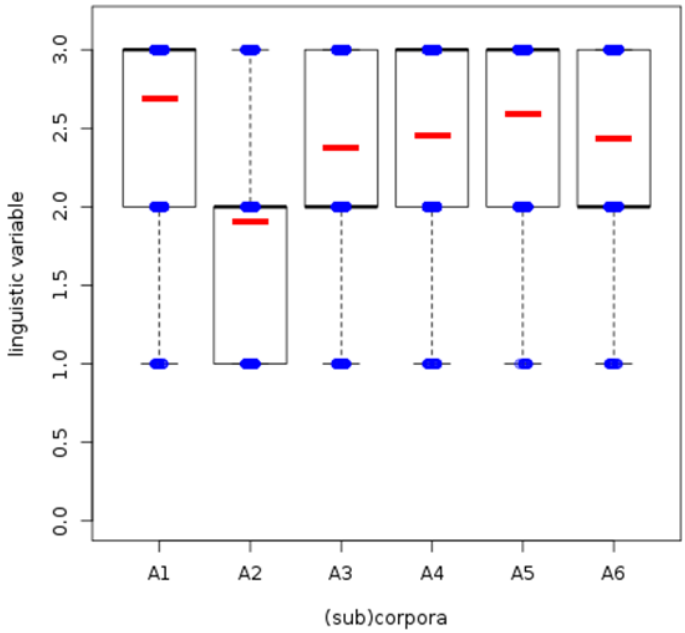
D1 = *devi solo avere pazienza!* 'you only need to be patient'
D2 = *sparisci solo!* 'just beat it, just get out of here'
D3 = *levati solo!* 'just geat out of the way'
D4 = *stai solo zitto!* 'just shut up'
D5 = *lascia solo stare!* 'just give it up, just don't bother'
D6 = *lasciami solo in pace!* 'just leave me alone'

Figure 8.1: Directives with *solo*: "Have you ever heard such a sentence?"

comparison of the results) correspond to the median value of the answers of each stimulus, while the red line represents the mean value.[10]

From the comparison of the two graphs a few important remarks can be made. The first box in each graph corresponds to the control stimulus (standard uses of

[10]The use of numerical values to represent the responses might give the impression that an ordinal variable (the ordered rank "never", "sometimes", "often") has been treated here as an interval scale (1, 2, 3). This is a methodological simplification (equal intervals on the number scale do not represent equal differences between the responses). In this case, numeric values have been associated to each of the possible answers for the purposes of data visualization rather than for an actual quantitative evaluation of the results. In fact, the representation of the mean value – which is quite uncommon for boxplots – represents an in-built feature of the boxplots obtained through the Lancaster Stats Tool online (and for this, the software requires numerical values to work). Moreover, no statistical significance testing has been used for these distributions. In this regard, even if occasional reference to the mean values will be made, the boxplots in the next pages must be interpreted primarily using median values (as well as the position of the boxes).



A1 = *lo spero solo* 'I just hope so'
A2 = *è solo bello* 'it's just nice'
A3 = *sono solo contenti* 'they are just happy'
A4 = *ha solo ragione* 'she is absolutely right'
A5 = *mi farebbe solo piacere* 'I am just glad'
A6 = *va solo bene* 'it's just fine'

Figure 8.2: Assertions with *solo*: "Have you ever heard such a sentence?"

solo as a focus adverb): they clearly result as being more acceptable than the others, as the median value of the answers is 3.0, which corresponds to the answer "often". However, otherwise, the results are quite different across the two series: the use of *solo* in directives is overall less acceptable than its use in assertions. If we focus on the results of Figure 8.1, we notice that the proposed stimuli attained quite mixed values (D2, D3 and D5 have 1.5, D4 is over 2.0 and D6 just below) and they are overall much lower than the control stimulus.

The picture looks different for the answers in Figure 8.2: in fact, the proposed stimuli – with the exception of A2 (*è solo bello* 'it's just nice') – attain values not too far from the value of the controls (mean values are between 2.0 and 2.5, that is, over the threshold of "sometimes"). This observation allows us to draw a first general conclusion: the non-focusing uses of *solo* were evaluated as less

acceptable in utterances expressing directives and more acceptable in utterances expressing assertions. The directives then result in more marked constructions than the assertions, further away from the prototypical use of *solo*, and are probably more prone to show facts of linguistic variation.

As regards the differences within each set, a few observations can be made. In Figure 8.1, examples D2 and D3 are directive speech acts where *solo* appears in simple imperative constructions: *sparisci solo* 'just beat it' and *levati solo* 'just get out of the way'. On the other hand, D4, D5, and D6 correspond to partially conventionalized expressions: *stai solo zitto* 'just shut up', *lascia solo stare* 'just give it up, just don't bother', *lasciami solo in pace* 'just leave me alone'. However, the acceptability values don't allow to clearly separate these two subgroups. In fact, D2, D3, and D5 show a similar value and they rank lower than D4 and D6: this suggests that the acceptability depends primarily on the features of single stimuli.

Moving to Figure 8.2 – in a similar fashion – A2 and A3 are assertive speech acts where *solo* appears in a predicative construction of the type *to be* + ADJ: *è solo bello* 'it's just nice', *sono solo contenti* 'they are just happy'. On the other hand, A4, A5, and A6 represent multi-word expressions – partially conventionalized verbal phrases like *va solo bene* 'it's just fine', *ha solo ragione* 'she is absolutely right', and *mi fa solo piacere* 'I am just glad'. In this case, these expressions turn out to be slightly more acceptable than the non-conventionalized ones: this can probably be explained with higher frequency of occurrence in the common language. Despite this, while A3, A4, A5 and A6 attain similar values, A2 ranks lowest on the scale and thus represents the exception in this group: again, it seems that the acceptability depends primarily on the specific features of each stimulus.

8.2.2 Reported language use across regions

As part of the analysis of the reported language use, I wanted to investigate aspects of the sociolinguistic markedness of these constructions. In particular, an important point is to establish whether the acceptability of these constructions displays regional variation. As pointed out in the preceding section, previous research advanced the hypothesis that the illocutive uses of *solo* are mostly found in the regional variety of Italian spoken in Piedmont (Favaro 2019). The data collected through the questionnaire can be used for this purpose.

Since there were 120 answers from Piedmont, I organized the data in order to get comparable groups. To achieve this, I excluded the regions with less than 30 answers, and I aggregated the remaining answers in two groups based on the region of origin. This way, I got three groups with similar numbers: a set

of answers from Piedmont (120), a set of answers from other northern Italian regions (130, from Lombardy, Veneto and Emilia-Romagna), and a set of answers from central-southern Italy (125, from Lazio, Apulia and Sicily). The results are graphically represented by boxplots, one for each context. Figures 8.3–8.6 show the boxplots of four stimuli containing directives (D2, D3, D4 and D5).

The boxplots show that the median value (bold black line) of the answers from Piedmont ranks higher than the median values of the two other groups for each of the contexts under examination.[11] This way, they confirm the assumption that the modal use of *solo* in directives is more acceptable in Piedmont than in the other two groups. This is particularly evident for the first two contexts (D2 and D3) – corresponding to simple imperatives – and slightly less pronounced in the case of semi-conventionalized multi-word imperatives (D4 and D5). On the other hand, the values extrapolated from the answers of the northern group and those of the central-southern group are very similar across the different stimuli. This provides strong evidence in favor of assigning this specific use of *solo* to the regional variety of Italian spoken in Piedmont.

The picture is rather different when looking at Figures 8.7–8.10, which show the boxplots of four stimuli containing assertive speech acts (A2, A3, A4 and A6).

The boxplots show similar distributions for each group in each of the contexts under consideration. In addition to being more acceptable overall, the modal uses of *solo* in assertive speech acts also show almost no regional variation. Even its use in predicative constructions (A2 and A3) is not considered acceptable in Piedmont. At most, a difference could be identified between northern and central-southern regions: in Figures 8.8, 8.9 and 8.10 the median value corresponds to "often" for Piedmont and the northern group, and to "sometimes" for the central-southern group. Nevertheless, on the basis of these data, the modal uses of *solo* in assertive speech acts cannot be assigned to any specific regional variety of Italian – thus resulting in a feature which can be found in the standard variety and/or in different regional varieties spoken across the peninsula.

These observations contribute to further mark the difference between the two illocutionary contexts where the modal uses of *solo* can be found: both the results concerning overall acceptability and the regional markedness trace a clear division between the two sets. This issue will arise again in the next section, which deals with the meaning of these constructions. Before that, I will briefly conclude this section with some more observations about the sociolinguistic status characterizing the illocutive uses of *solo*.

[11]Note that the other boxes (non-Piedmont) contain different regions each. This grouping (and the method chosen) runs the risk of equalizing the differences between these regions. However, previous research (Favaro & Goria 2019) showed that these differences are not significant. This issue is also addressed by the case study in Chapter 9, which separately considers four regions of northern Italy.

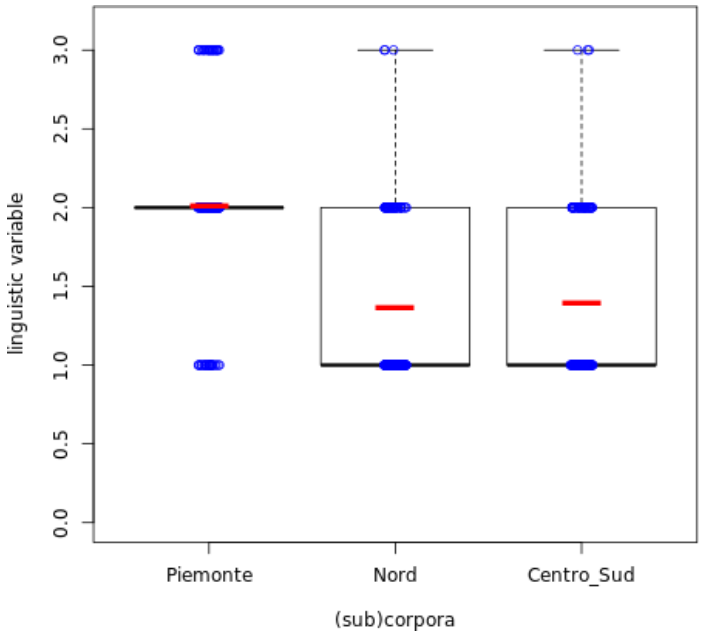


Figure 8.3: D2 (*sparisci solo*): regional variation

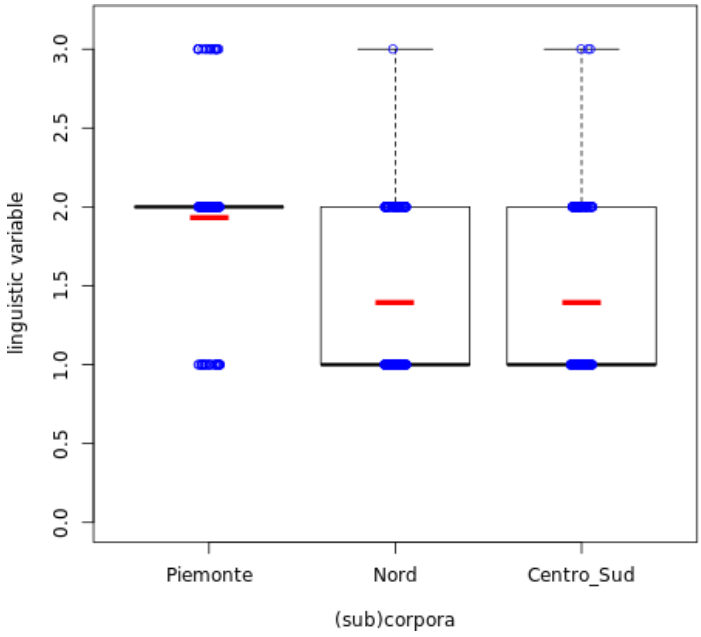


Figure 8.4: D3 (*levati solo*): regional variation

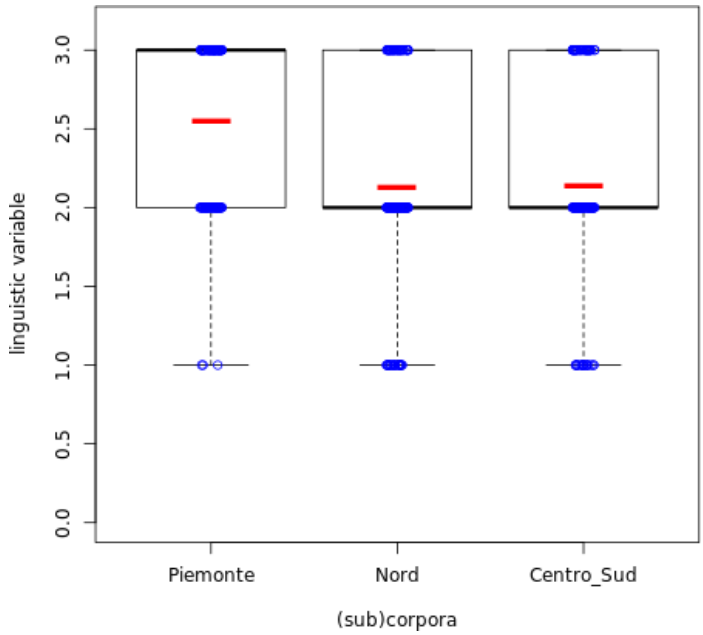


Figure 8.5: D4 (*stai solo zitto*): regional variation

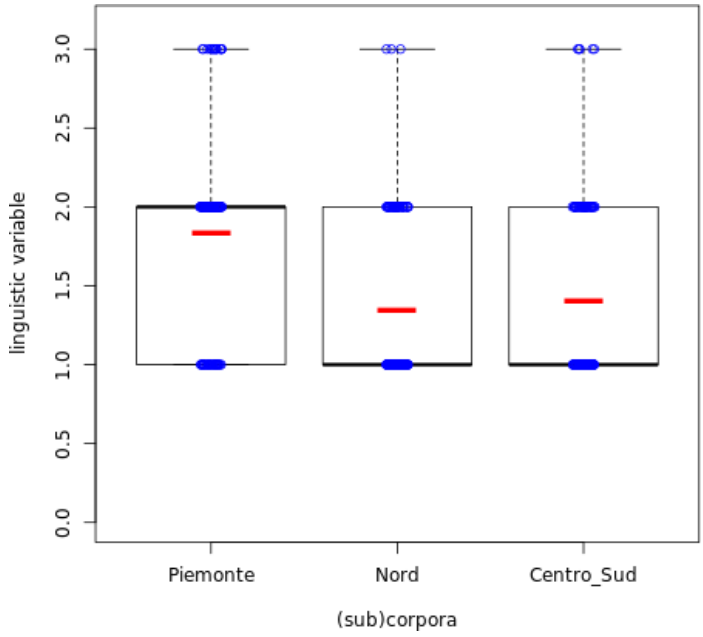


Figure 8.6: D5 (*lascia solo stare*): regional variation

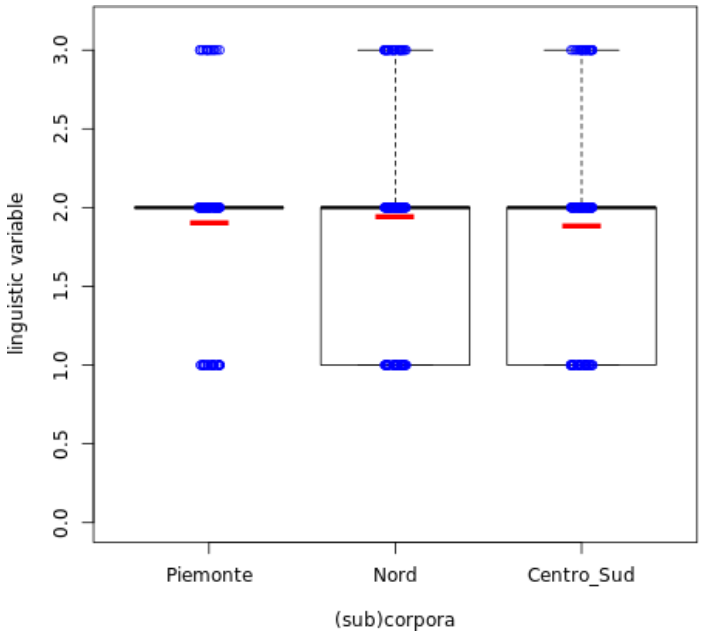


Figure 8.7: : A2 (*è solo bello*): regional variation

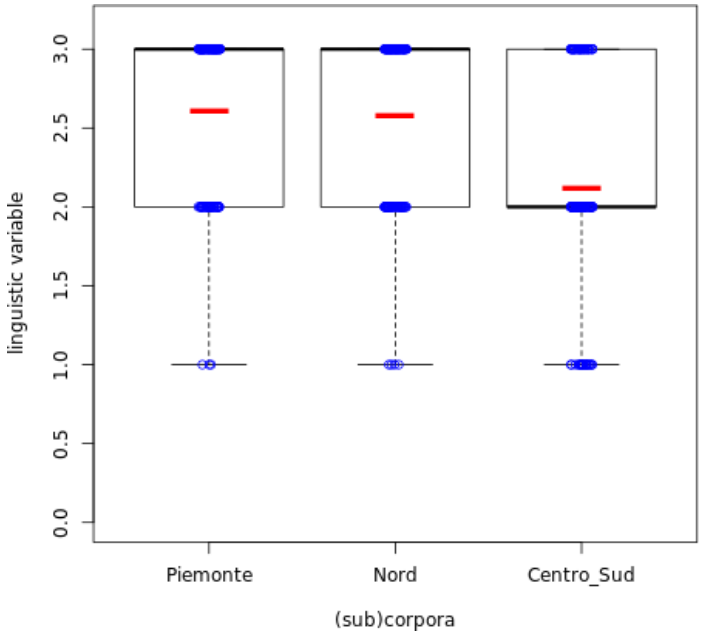


Figure 8.8: A3 (*sono solo contenti*): regional variation

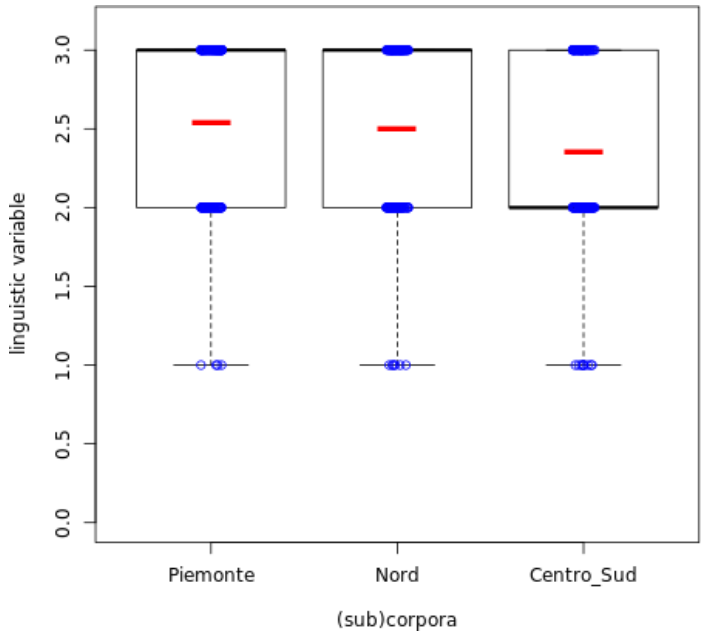


Figure 8.9: : A4 (*ha solo ragione*): regional variation

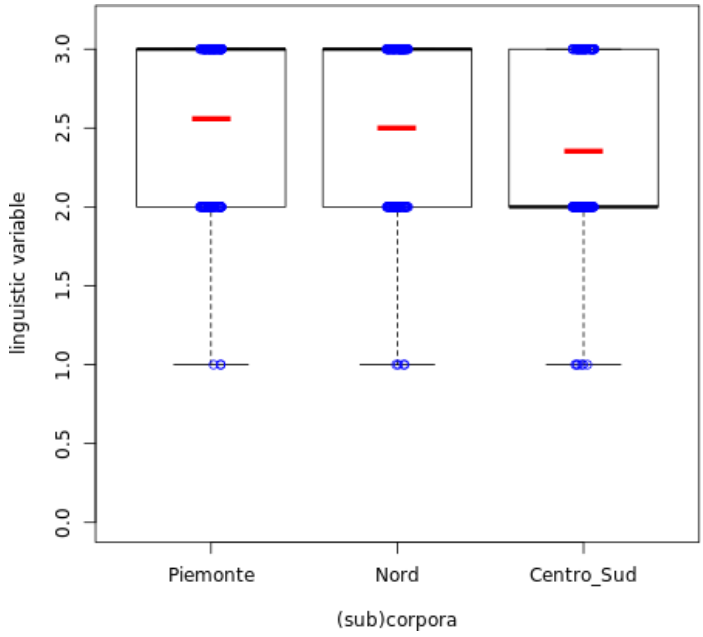


Figure 8.10: : A6 (*va solo bene*): regional variation

8.2.3 What kind of sociolinguistic status?

For four stimuli (D2, D4, A2 and A6) an open-ended question was also proposed, namely "In what kind of context are you likely to hear similar sentences?". The aim of having this question was to collect personal evaluations and direct opinions – influenced by the researcher's perspective as little as possible – on the kind of sociolinguistic markedness attributed by speakers to the illocutive uses of *solo*. Obviously, this was not meant to be a systematic account, but rather a way to get some clues as to various point of views. No prevailing opinion emerged from the answers, but they are interesting in order to get a sense of the respondents' concept of sociolinguistic variation. In fact, the answers – which are very disparate (and often rather playful) – revolve around three main directions, which correspond to actual dimensions of variation described by sociolinguistic theory: diatopic variation, diaphasic variation and variation across age groups.[12]

The only answer which reaches a large consensus concerns the diaphasic variation. Many respondents assign these (and similar) expressions to conversations in informal settings. Some respondents further specify that they are found in conversations among peers. With respect to other dimensions of variation, no answer reaches such a large consensus. Although some respondents assign these expressions to the regional variety of Italian spoken in Piedmont (some of them even describe them as calques of the Piedmontese dialect), a few others assign them to southern varieties. In fact, this seems to correspond to the results of the regional acceptability: although more acceptable in Piedmont, these expressions are not totally ruled out in other varieties. Lastly, some respondents consider these expressions as a feature of the informal varieties used by adolescents and young people. However, other respondents include adults and older people in their answers. To conclude, apart from the right (but not surprising) assignment of the illocutive uses of *solo* to informal conversations – especially among peers – the open-ended question has not provided consistent answers about the sociolinguistic status characterizing these constructions.[13]

[12] I could not find clear mentions to diastratic variation, unless we consider certain social groups as the expression of specific social classes. In fact, a couple of respondents answered that you can hear similar expressions among *zarri* 'thugs, rough guys'.

[13] If nothing else, the answers show that the respondents have a clear idea of the dimensions of sociolinguistic variation to which these and similar expressions can possibly be subjected to.

8.3 A look into the emergent functions of *solo*

The sociolinguistic analysis of the previous section – mainly based on acceptability judgments – gave two main results. First, it revealed a clear difference between the two illocutive contexts – the illocutive use of *solo* in directives resulting less acceptable than its use in assertions. Second, the illocutive use of *solo* in directives – although found across different regions – is more acceptable for speakers from Piedmont and it can be considered an especially widespread feature in Piedmontese Regional Italian. Such a difference was not found for the assertions, which present a more stable distribution across different regions. Keeping this in mind, I now turn to a semantic/pragmatic description of the modal uses of *solo*, by analyzing the answers of the second part of the questionnaire (namely, the part about meaning evaluation). This part of the analysis builds upon a limited dataset. As has already been said, the second part of the questionnaire covers only eight stimuli (D1, D2, D4, D5 for the directives, A1, A3, A4, A6 for the assertions). Moreover, I will only consider the 120 answers of respondents from Piedmont, since they seemed to have more familiarity with these constructions.

The analysis builds upon the concepts discussed in Chapter 4: inferences in interaction, reanalysis and conventionalization. In this regard, synchronic studies have the advantage of enabling the investigation of the actual mechanisms through which inferences are dealt with in the actions of the participants. In fact, compared to diachronic data, they can give a better understanding of the contextual meanings and of the inferences that can be drawn in conversation, allowing one to capture subtle meaning variations and their position in the conventionalization route. In light of this, I use the term *emergent functions* in the sense of "appearing/emerging in specific contexts", that is, a function which is still context-bound and not yet fully conventionalized.

8.3.1 Open questions: Detecting inferences

I focus now on the results concerning the meaning of the constructions, addressed by the second part of the questionnaire. As a first step I analyzed the answers to the open questions ("Would it make a difference if the sentence were without *solo*?"). The goal of this part was to provide a space where respondents could give a free reading of the proposed stimulus, using their own categories and expressing their own insights. Analyzing the answers, the main aim was to identify what kind of interpretation the respondents give to these utterances and their contexts, thus throwing light on what kind of inferences and secondary meanings they link to it. Many suggestions have arisen, and it is not possible to

give an overview of all of them, but the great majority of answers match the working hypothesis of two "clouds" of emerging meanings, the first one related to the emphatic marking of the illocutionary force, the second related to common ground management. Table 8.2 shows some relevant examples.

As expected, for the context D1 (*devi solo aver pazienza* 'you only need to be patient') – that is, the control stimulus – a prototypical exclusive reading is found ("Without *solo* it would mean that patience is not the only thing you need to do that activity") and an emphatic reading ("Here *solo* reinforces the concept"), suggesting that this inference is the first one to come into play. In the other contexts no exclusive reading is mentioned, and most answers suggest an emphatic reading, related to the marking of the illocutionary force: for example, "It has reinforcing value" for D2 (*sparisci solo!* 'just beat it, just get out of here') or "It would be less emphatic" for D4 (*stai solo zitto!* 'just shut up'). At the same time, however, some respondents suggest a different kind of reading, which seems to be related to common ground management, that is, a reference to some proposition activated in the context of exchange or attributed to the interlocutor's mind: for example, "With *solo* we understand that Hobbes has said what Calvin thought" (referring to the two characters in the cartoon) for D2 or "In this case *solo* helps us making sense of the second part of the sentence. Without it there would be no connection [with the first one]" for D4.

This picture also applies to the answers regarding the assertions with some minor differences. In the context A1 (*lo spero solo!* 'I just hope so') – the control context – the emphatic reading clearly prevails over the exclusive one. In the other contexts, the emphatic reading is always present, but many respondents give answers explicitly attributable to a common ground reading, like "Here *solo* implies an unexpected contrast between the two opinions" for A3 (*sono solo contenti* 'they are just happy') and "Without *solo* there would be no direct comparison between what is happening in that moment and what Cecilia says usually happens" for A4 (*ha solo ragione* 'she is absolutely right').

The analysis of the answers to the open question allows us to reach some conclusions. First of all, it confirms the starting hypothesis that the emergent functions of *solo* are linked to two different domains, the marking of illocutionary force on the one hand, and common ground management on the other hand. Overall, the first domain clearly prevails in the answers, but it is remarkable that some respondents explicitly mention the common-ground-related functions.[14] I

[14]This was not necessarily an expected result. Functions related to common ground management are quite elusive and their identification requires some attention. By explicitly mentioning it in the answers, the respondents demonstrate the importance of this feature (as well as a high degree of linguistic self-awareness).

Table 8.2: Answer to the open question: "Would it make a difference if the sentence were without *solo*?"

Stimulus	Exclusive reading	Illocutionary-force reading	Common-ground reading
D1	Without *solo* it would mean that patience is not the only thing you need to do that activity.	Here *solo* reinforces the concept.	—
D2	—	It has reinforcing value.	With *solo* we understand that Hobbes has said what Calvin thought.
D4	—	It would be less emphatic.	In this case *solo* contributes to make sense of the second part of the sentence. Without it, there would be no connection.
A1	—	It would be less emphatic.	—
A3	—	The sentence would be less strong.	Here *solo* implies an unexpected contrast between the two opinions.
A4	—	Here *solo* reinforces her stance.	Without *solo* there would be no direct comparison between what is happening in that moment and what Cecilia says usually happens.

keep on calling them *emergent functions* because it is almost impossible to identify contexts in which a reading based on the notion of exclusiveness (the main semantic feature of the prototypical use of *solo* as a focus adverb) is totally ruled out. Per contra – with the self-explaining exception of the control contexts – this kind of reading is never overtly mentioned by the respondents. For this reason, it is better to explain these emergent functions in terms of contextual meanings, still linked to inferences activated in the context of interaction but already on the conventionalization path.

Now, some more issues need to be considered. Do the inferences equally appear in directives and assertions? Can the two inferences be combined or are they mutually exclusive? What do they reveal about the conventionalization paths of these constructions? In the next section I will try to give some possible answers to these questions.

8.3.2 Multiple-choice questions: Sorting inferences

Moving to a quantitative view of the multiple-choice questions, no major differences in the distribution of the functions across directives and assertives can be found.

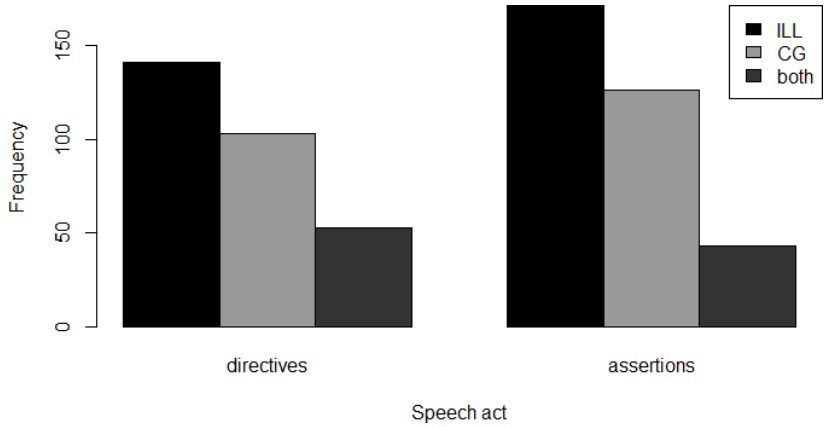
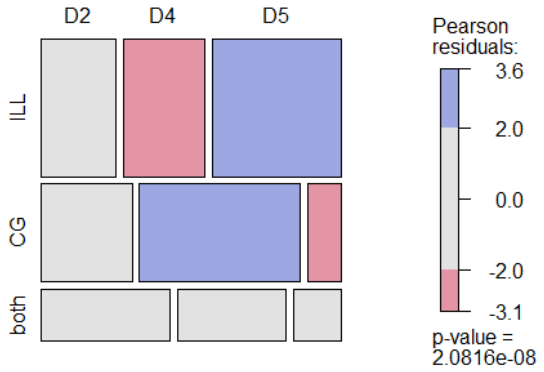


Figure 8.11: Bar plot of the functions of *solo* in directives and assertions

For these counts, I cross-referenced the answers regarding the meaning with the answers about acceptability. I only considered the respondents who stated that they heard these constructions "sometimes" or "often". This slightly reduces the number of answers, but has the advantage of excluding potentially "sloppy" answers from respondents who don't recognize the constructions under analysis.

As for the overall frequency of the answers – now excluding the control stimuli D1 and A1 – both in the directives and in the assertions, the emphatic reading (in Figure 8.11 labeled as ILL, which stands for illocutionary force) prevails over the common ground reading (in Figure 8.11 labeled as CG), which is still well represented.[15]

However, a closer look at the single contexts complicates the picture. The mosaic plots in Figure 8.12 and Figure 8.13 show the distribution of the three possible meaning options for each stimulus.[16] Overall, the results point to an irregular distribution of the three possible meaning options across the contexts. In the case of directives, for example, the common ground reading dominates in context D4 (*stai solo zitto*), whereas in context D5 (*lascia solo stare*) the emphatic reading clearly prevails. Context D2 (*sparisci solo*) shows a more balanced situation.



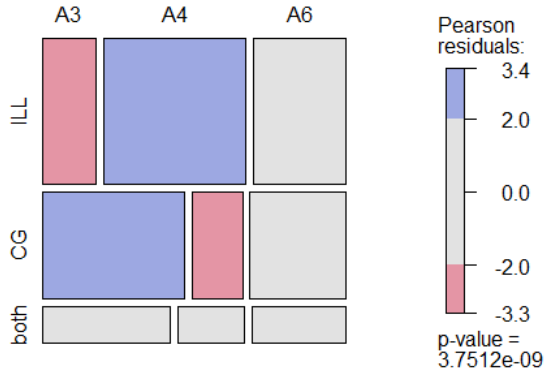
	D2	D4	D5
ILL	37	40	64
CG	32	56	12
both	24	20	9
TOT	93	116	85

Figure 8.12: Mosaic plot of the functions of *solo* in directives

[15]These are the exact values: considering the directives, 141 answers for ILL, 103 for CG and 53 for both; considering the assertions, 171 answers for ILL, 126 for CG and 43 for both.

[16]The mosaic plots use the χ^2-statistic and have been created through the software of statistical analysis R (R Core Team 2020). See also Levshina (2015: 199–222).

The assertions also show an irregular distribution. In this case, the common ground reading dominates in context A3 (*sono solo contenti*), whereas in context A4 (*ha solo ragione*) the empathic reading prevails. Context A6 (*va solo bene*) shows a more balanced situation.



	A3	A4	A6
ILL	32	84	55
CG	62	22	42
both	19	10	14
TOT	113	116	111

Figure 8.13: Mosaic plot of the functions of *solo* in assertions

In these graphs the color of the shading corresponds to the sign of the residuals, that is, the differences between the observed and expected frequency divided by the square root of the expected value. Positive residuals (frequency is greater than what can be expected by chance) are indicated by blue rectangles, negative residuals (frequency is smaller than what can be expected by chance) by pink rectangles. The analysis reveals significant differences in the functions assigned to *solo* by respondents in different contexts.

Nevertheless, also considering the irregular distribution of the functions across the single stimuli and the two broader illocutionary contexts, it is hard to identify an explanatory variable for this distribution other than the specificities of each context of occurrence: some contexts favor an illocutionary force reading (D5, A4), other contexts favor a common ground reading (D4, A3). For this reason, it is not possible to hypothesize a single path of development from the exclusive meaning to the emphatic reading and then to the common ground reading

(or the other way around). It is probably better to conceive two parallel paths – corresponding to different inferences that can both arise from the use of *solo* as a focus particle in specific conversational contexts – leading to different readings. However, they can co-exist in the same construction as different shades of meaning, which can be foregrounded or backgrounded according to the context of interaction.

8.3.3 Closing remarks: Conventionalization in the modal uses of *solo*

The empirical research conducted through the questionnaire gave several results about the distribution and the meanings of the modal uses of *solo*. They appear in two illocutionary contexts – directive speech acts and assertive speech acts – which show both similarities and differences.

The main difference corresponds to their geographic distribution: although both were found across different regional varieties of Italian, the use in directive speech acts is mainly found in the regional variety spoken in Piedmont, while the use in assertive speech acts does not clearly show diatopic markedness. Regarding their meaning, the two illocutionary contexts are rather similar. I have described the properties of two different emerging functions: an emphatic reading – when the adverb mainly strengthens the illocutionary force – and a common ground reading – when the adverb contributes to signal a contrast between its host utterance and some proposition activated in the common ground.

The analysis of the answers of the third part of the questionnaire (open questions and multiple-choice questions about the meanings of these constructions) showed that the emphatic reading is the most frequent one. However, the common ground reading is also well represented and, in some cases (D4 and A3 specifically), it is even more frequent in the answers. The absence of correlation between the kind of speech act (directives or assertions) and a specific reading, supports the hypothesis that the emergent functions differ according to the specific contexts of the stimulus rather than with respect to the speech act they occur in: different inferences arise in different conversational contexts. The emergence of new functions can then be described as the sum of minor semantic changes mediated by the gradual conventionalization of discourse inferences – which correspond to different facets of meaning in the emergent uses: those more linked to the expression of the illocutionary force and those more linked to the management of the common ground.

These observations are linked with the broader discussion on the meaning of focus adverbs, which turned out to be an exemplar case study to investigate structural indeterminacy. These adverbs prototypically have scope over sentence

constituents and act as a modifier of focus, but they can also extend their scope over the illocution – projecting the proposition over a background of other propositions activated in the common ground. Only in few cases is there structural evidence demonstrating that these particles operate at different grammatical layers, but in the clearest ones (for instance in the case of *pure*) they show different meanings according to the layer they operate on. Moreover, the issue of structural evidence is not essential – at least at this point – and it is more informative to focus on how speakers face language usage than on the kind of schematic abstractions they derive from it.

As pointed out by De Smet (2014: 43): "Especially where the evidence is dubious […] the syntactic structure language users assign may simply leave the problematic aspects of structure unspecified". In this respect, the ambiguous uses of *solo* discussed above – characterized by variable syntactic scope – show that underspecified syntactic patterns are an ideal locus for language change. Underspecification also plays a role at the semantic level: the analysis of the answers revealed an overlap of functions, whereby different facets of meaning often coexist with the same stimulus. Illocutionary operators contribute, on the one hand, to the modification of the illocutionary force, and on the other hand, to managing the relationship between the utterance they appear in and the context of interaction. I see this fact as the natural consequence of meaning negotiation in interaction, the locus where the selection of contextual meanings takes place. The simultaneous presence of different readings in context is due to the activation of different inferences, driven by the hearer's attempt to correctly interpret the speaker's utterance.

As shown by the results, the type of conversational context plays a crucial role in defining which meaning prevails. With increase in frequency, some contexts of use can turn into semi-fixed argumentative routines that speakers can use to index common ground information or to modify the illocutionary force of a speech act: this way, the bond between a construction and a specific (interactional) function gets stronger. In conclusion, the new functions of *solo* are interpreted as inferences organized along a cline of conventionalization: arising from the use of focus adverbs in discourse, they are progressively incorporated in its conventionalized meaning.

9 Modal particles in regional varieties of Italian: Expanding the view

9.1 Multiple ways to illocutionary modification

This chapter widens the picture given so far, taking into account other Italian modal-particle-like elements and drawing attention to other functional domains connected to the speech-act level (backchecking, emphasis, mitigation). This chapter is not devoted to the in-depth analysis of a single element, but rather deals with a larger set of adverbs: some of them have already been introduced in the previous chapters (*pure*, *anche*, *un po'*), others will be introduced here for the first time (*già*, *poi*). By doing so, it aims to discuss different functional domains, in order to point out research directions that cross the fields of pragmatics and sociolinguistics.[1]

The empirical analysis revolves mostly around a second sociolinguistic questionnaire, which I used to collect data about the acceptability of specific constructions. Being the last chapter of this study, the final section offers a first round of conclusions concerning the sociolinguistic issues discussed throughout the research.

9.1.1 Backchecking markers

Building upon previous research (Bazzanella et al. 2005; Hansen 2008; Hansen & Strudsholm 2008; Välikangas 2004), Squartini (2013, 2014) studies the discursive uses of Romance phasal adverbs, with a focus on the French adverb *dèjà* and the Italian cognate form *già*, both meaning 'already'. Both adverbs show – among other context-level functions[2] – a backchecking use in interrogative sentences.

[1] While the case study on *solo* presented in the previous chapter adopted a semasiological approach (form-to-function) – picking up a linguistic element to describe its meanings and functions – the present chapter adopts instead an onomasiological approach (function-to-form): given a functional domain, the linguistic elements expressing it are investigated.

[2] French *déjà* can be used as an emphatic marker in directive speech act as in example (4) below, while Italian *già* can be used as an interjection and as a discourse marker (Squartini 2013: 172–181).

Backchecking particles are used in questions to signal that the requested piece of information belongs to common knowledge and, as such, used to be well known also to the speaker, who, however, has forgotten it. In contrast with the phasal use – referring to the temporal constituency of a single situation denoted in the propositional content – in this case "by using *déjà*/*già* the speaker is instead discursively qualifying the speech act (the question itself), in these cases signaling that the question might be considered as redundant and only due to a contingent extralinguistic fact (an accidental tip of the tongue)" (Squartini 2013: 167–168).

(1) French (Squartini 2014: 195)
Quel est *déjà* le nom de cet acteur qui se prénomme Robert et joue au côté de Marilyn Monroe dans Rivière sans retour?
'What is *already* the name of that actor whose first name is Robert, who acts with Marilyn Monroe in River of No Return?'

(2) Italian (Squartini 2014: 200)
com'è *già* che si fa a calcolare la media?
'how do you calculate (lit. 'how is it already that you calculate') the average mark?'

In these examples, the original TAM marker 'already' does not indicate anteriority with respect to a given state-of-affairs denoted in the proposition, it rather refers to the whole informational content of the utterance as already possessed by the speaker and momentarily forgotten due to a contingent extralinguistic fact: it is the speaker's knowledge of the whole propositional content of the question to be marked as information "already" given and shared by the speaker and the addressee (Squartini 2014: 1999).

In order to give a full account of Italian *già*, considering regional varieties is particularly relevant. In fact, as regards contemporary Italian, the occurrence of this interactional *già* is considered a regional feature. Speakers from the northwest of Italy, especially those from Piedmont, seem to behave like their French neighbors in admitting *già* as an interrogative marker, but the same does not hold for other regional varieties of Italian. However, there is some controversy on the actual geographical extent of this phenomenon. Cerruti (2009: 113–114) explicitly lists it among the diatopic-marked features typically characterizing regional varieties of the Northwest of Italy. Conversely, Bazzanella et al. (2005: 55) suggest that the interrogative use of *già* should not be considered as a regional phenomenon, since it possibly extends to the standard variety of Italian.

Fedriani & Miola (2014) document the areality of this phenomenon by extending the analysis to other European languages and pragmatic markers with the same function occurring in other Italian areas neighboring Piedmont. According to their description, the same backchecking function expressed by *già* in the regional variety spoken in Piedmont/Northwest Italy is fulfilled by *più* 'more' in Ligurian Regional Italian and by *pure* 'also' in Emilian Regional Italian. Moreover, they suggest that there is also evidence for a wider area of employment of *già* as a backchecking particle, ranging from northern and western Lombardy to Romagna (Fedriani & Miola 2014: 181). One of the stimuli of the questionnaire is intended to collect empirical data on this point.

In Italian, another element that shows a similar behavior in some contexts is *poi* 'then', as mentioned by Coniglio (2008: 111–114; see also Bazzanella 1995: 226–227; Cruschina & Cognola 2021). According to his explanation, *poi* can be used in questions to "express the speaker's concern or interest with respect to the information being asked for" (Coniglio 2008: 111). More precisely, I would consider *poi* in questions as a backchecking-like element: in fact, it refers to previously given information or to a previously mentioned topic of conversation. The same adverb occurs with a similar function also in (mostly negative) assertions: in this case, apart from marking the whole propositional content as "given", the adverb gives a counter-expectational flavor to the utterance. Coniglio (2008: 112) argues that "by using this particle, the speaker aims at mitigating the too strong assertion that is present in the preceding linguistic or extralinguistic context".

(3) Italian (Coniglio 2008: 112)

a. Ha *poi* cantato alla festa?
'Did PTC she sing at the party?'

b. Non è *poi* così male!
'It's not PTC that bad!'

Through the question marked by *poi* in (3a), the speaker recalls a state-of-affairs known to both them and the addressee, or a previous conversation about the same topic (in this case, the option of singing at the party). This way, *poi* signals that the question is not out of the blue, but rather refers to a piece of knowledge shared by the interlocutors. Similarly, the assertion in (3b) marks a contrast with the previous assumption, corresponding to shared knowledge or information present in the preceding context (in this case, the assumption that something is bad).

9.1.2 Markers of emphasis and mitigation

Regarding French *déjà*, it must be noticed that the modal uses of the adverb are not limited to the tip-of-the-tongue situation, rather, it shows a wider distribution than (Piedmontese Regional) Italian *già*. Hansen & Strudsholm (2008: 497–498) and Hansen (2008: 213–216) point out that *déjà* shows further interactional uses, both in imperative (this use being extremely rare in contemporary French) and interrogative sentences.

(4) French (Hansen 2008: 213–214)

a. Montre-moi *déjà* ce que tu sais faire!
'*Just* show me what you can do!'

b. A. mhm moi j'ai bien aimé ce film-là
C. mhm
A. parce qu'il y a un cadre historique qui est très bien...
B. rendu
A. euh oui
C. c'était quelle guerre *déjà*? // la guerre de cent ans là
A. 'mhm I liked that movie'
C. 'mhm'
A. 'because the historical setting is very well...'
B. 'portrayed'
A. 'er yes'
C. 'what war was that, *now*? // the one-hundred year war'

In the case of imperatives (4a), the adverb "signals that the action requested is seen by the speaker as the first in a potential series of related actions to be carried out by either the hearer or the speaker. As already noted above, it strongly implicates, moreover, that the action marked is a prerequisite to some other action. As such, *déjà* in imperatives may be said to have a slightly boosting effect" (Hansen 2008: 215). In interrogative sentences (4b), on the contrary, *déjà* marks the information requested as previously known but not retrievable at the moment of conversation: "Instead of having the status of brand-new information, which would imply an unequal distribution of knowledge among speaker and hearers, the requested information is transformed, in advance of its production, into a simple reminder, and the interactional equilibrium is thereby preserved" (Hansen 2008: 213–214).

This discussion is summed up by Squartini (2014: 192–197), who also explores the functions of *già*/*déjà* across French, standard Italian and northwestern regional varieties of Italian. The different distribution of the adverb in these three varieties makes it possible to identify two separate subdomains, both in general terms belonging to pragmatics but referring to different functional areas: information state and illocutionary modification. The use of *già*/*déjà* in questions referring to given information (backchecking) represents the first subdomain, while the use of *déjà* in contexts like those of examples (4a) and (4b) represents the second subdomain. In the transition from one to the other the connection to the propositional content of the utterance progressively vanishes, and the adverb comes to operate as a pure illocutionary modifier of the speech act in itself.

> Being connected to information state, backchecking can be conceived as still linked to the propositional content of the utterance (the degree of novelty of the propositional content), and appears therefore reasonable as an intermediate stage between content-level uses and fully-fledged context-level uses (Hansen 2008), the latter being totally anchored to the illocutionary domain of the speech act and more extensively compatible with questions as illocutionary types in general. In this respect, evolving from backchecking to interrogative implies that the connection with information state tends to be loosened as pragmaticalization proceeds, and *déjà* becomes increasingly connected to the speech act in itself, instead of exclusively marking the degree of novelty of the requested information. (Squartini 2014: 207–208)

With reference to the terminology used in Functional Discourse Grammar, information state/backchecking can be interpreted as a transition area, representing a bridge between the representational level (TAM markers) and the interpersonal level (illocutionary modification).[3] Nonetheless, it must be noticed that in other languages phasal adverbs equivalent to *già*/*déjà* can develop illocutionary function without covering the backchecking functional domain. This is the case of US English *already* (5) and Spanish *ya* 'already' (6) in imperative sentences.

(5) English (Hansen & Strudsholm 2008: 497)
'Open your eyes, *already*!'

[3]This closely recalls the issue about the use of *un po'* as a marker of approximation in assertive speech acts, as discussed in Chapter 7. Thus, functions coded at the layer of communicated content such as approximation and backchecking can be kept separated from illocutionary modification, for the former refers to information managing, while the latter directly interfaces to the pragmatics of speech acts.

(6) Spanish (Hansen & Strudsholm 2008: 498)
¡Cállate *ya*!
'Shut up, now!'

In standard Italian, neither the use as a downtoner in interrogatives nor as a booster in imperatives is attested for *già*. However – considering regional varieties – an illocutive use of *già* is found in Sardinian Regional Italian, where it can be used as an assertive modal operator.

(7) Sardinian Regional Italian (Calaresu 2015: 120)
A. Sto ancora aspettando il libro
'I'm still waiting for the book'
B: *Già* te lo porto io domani
'PTC I'll bring it to you tomorrow'

As discussed by Calaresu (2015), in assertive speech acts (always in preverbal position) *già* can be used by speakers to highlight their commitment to the utterance, that is, to endorse their own assertion.[4]

Moving to other elements, the situation is similar. I mentioned in the last subsection a backchecking-like use of the temporal adverb *poi* 'then' in direct questions and assertions. In other contexts, the same adverb seems to have developed a behavior more directly related to the modification of the illocutionary force of the speech act.

(8) Italian (questionnaire data)
[Elena and her sister Lucia must go back to work after lunch, but Lucia seems rather willing to take a nap on the sofa. Elena says]:
Dai Luci, stai *poi* su che dobbiamo fare i lavori in giardino!
'Come on Lucia, get PTC up, we have to work in the garden!'

(9) Italian (questionnaire data)
[Simone to Vittorio, who always chooses original dishes when they go out for dinner]
Vitto, certo che la pizza all'ananas fa *poi* schifo!
'Vitto, you know, pineapple pizza is PTC disgusting!'

[4]In this sense, Calaresu (2015) suggests that this use of *già* underlies performativity and that a possible paraphrase of the use of *già* in example (7) would be: "I assure you already here and now that I'll bring you the book tomorrow". In this case, the phasal value of *già* is transferred from the semantic level of the proposition to the pragmatic/performative level of the speech act.

In both cases – a directive speech act in (8) and an assertive speech act in (9) – *poi* has a boosting effect on the illocutionary force. Moreover, while the backchecking-like uses of *poi* in examples (3a) and (3b) above are featured in standard Italian, the uses mentioned exemplified by (8) and (9) have probably a restricted distribution – possibly corresponding to areas in Romagna (a region in the northeast of Italy).

Since this chapter focuses on sociolinguistics issues, a fine-grained analysis of the illocutive functions of these elements (phasal or temporal adverbs) is out of its scope (see Hansen 2008 on phasal adverbs in French). Nevertheless, it is worth highlighting that they show the great variety of development paths that lead to the functional domain of illocutionary modification and – at the same time – the great variety of outcomes which can derive from the same lexical source. They should be added to the inventory of modal-particle-like elements in Italian and Romance varieties, and they show once more "how peripheral and low prestige diatopic varieties may synchronically exhibit a range of not attested, or only fragmentarily attested uses, in the textual history of more standard varieties, thus helping to reconstruct plausible paths of grammaticalization possibly valid as well for other adverbs and textual varieties" (Calaresu 2015: 113).

9.1.3 The questionnaire

The second questionnaire I designed for this research is aimed at collecting sociolinguistic data on Italian modal particles. Although there have been several references in the literature, no empirical data concerning their distribution is available. The phasal adverb *già* discussed in the preceding subsections is a good case in point. It has been widely studied (Bazzanella et al. 2005; Squartini 2013, 2014), also from a sociolinguistic perspective which considers dialectal data and regional varieties (Fedriani & Miola 2014; Calaresu 2015), but no large-scale data are available that can confirm (or reject) the hypothesis of diatopic markedness and – if the hypothesis is the confirmed – associate this markedness with a specific geographic area. The questionnaire is intended to be a first step in this direction. Moreover, it is intended to be a sociolinguistic counterpart of the corpus analysis of Chapter 6 and Chapter 7: the elements that have been described there (*anche*, *pure*, *un po'*) also appear in the stimuli of the second questionnaire.

I designed the questionnaire with three goals in mind. First, I wanted to collect data on the acceptability/reported language use[5] of modal uses of Italian adverbs. Second, I wanted to collect suggestions about other possible modal-particle-like

[5]For more on these two terms, see the discussion in Chapter 8.

elements not yet described in the literature. Third, I wanted to understand if some of these elements can be considered sociolinguistic variants – that is, if they express the same pragmatic function in different language varieties. The general design of the questionnaire is inspired by the previous one about the modal uses of *solo*. No direct comparison between the two questionnaires was planned, but a similar design has the advantage of giving more coherence to the analysis. In order to do this, the acceptability judgments use the same scale as the first questionnaire (with some minor differences).

The second questionnaire consists of 16 stimuli and it is divided in two parts: the first one has 14 stimuli, the second one only two. In the first part, the respondents are invited to comment on the use of specific constructions through two different questions ("Have you ever heard such a sentence?" and "Do you use such a sentence?"). Moreover, the respondents are invited to suggest possible alternatives ("Is there another word you would use instead of x in the same context?") or leave an open comment ("Do you have any other comment on this sentence?").

In the second part – given a specific context – the respondents are invited to choose the sentence they would use out of different possibilities, or to suggest another one. The general structure of the questionnaire is summed up in Table 9.1.[6]

9.2 Questionnaire data

Having mentioned a few more Italian elements showing illocutionary modification functions, I will now look into the data collected through the questionnaire. In a similar way to the evaluation of the first questionnaire, I will focus on the results concerning the reported language use and the geographical variation they display.

Even though they are based on a limited sample, the results are interesting, and they can be converted into data charts on Italian modal-particle-like elements. In the presentation of the findings, I consider a general picture – answers have been collected from almost every Italian region – which is however unbalanced towards northern Italy, since most answers come from regions in the north (Piedmont, Lombardy, Veneto, Emilia-Romagna).

[6]See Chapter 5 for general information about the questionnaire design. Here, the structure of the questionnaire and the stimuli are translated into English: the original version in Italian can be accessed online at https://zenodo.org/records/10362289.

Table 9.1: Structure of the questionnaire on modal particles in Italian

	Question	Answer
Reported language use	Have you ever heard such a sentence?	— yes, sometimes — no
	Do you use such a sentence?	— yes, often — yes, sometimes — no
Suggestions	Is there another word you would use instead of x in the same context?	open response
	Do you have any other comment on this sentence?	open response
Pragmatic variants	[given a specific context] Which sentence would you use in this context?	Multiple answer options + open response

I will start discussing the first part of the questionnaire (stimuli 1–14) – to compare the usage rate of different illocutionary constructions, represented by specific uses of the adverbs *anche*, *pure*, *un po'* and *poi*. Afterwards, I will discuss stimulus 15 and stimulus 16, respectively dedicated to backchecking markers and to emphasis markers.

9.2.1 Overall reported language use

The results concerning the overall reported language use of a stimulus are represented by the answers to the question "Do you use such a sentence?". In this sense, these results depict the active usage of the constructions by the respondents. The possible answers refer to the same scale used in the first questionnaire: *sì, abitualmente* 'yes, often', *sì, qualche volta* 'yes, sometimes' and *no* 'no'. They have been converted to numeric values (1.0 counts as "no", 2.0 as "some-

times" and 3.0 as "often") for the purpose of data visualization. The collected answers are graphically represented by boxplots, obtained through the Lancaster Stats Tool Online (Brezina 2018). While elaborating the boxplots, I grouped the answers into four different sets based on the featured marker.[7]

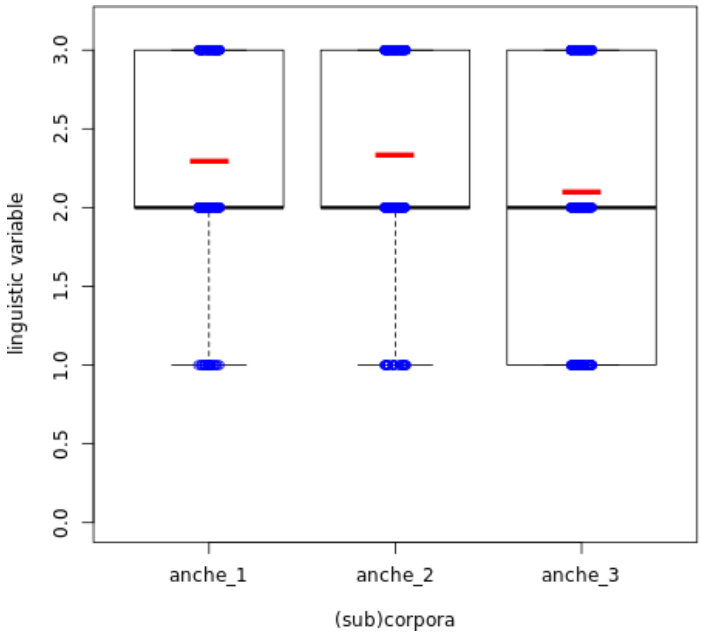
The first group includes the stimuli featuring the modal uses of *anche* 'also'. These uses of *anche* have been thoroughly discussed in Chapter 6: with reference to the labels used in Figure 9.1, "anche_1" and "anche_3" are directive speech acts with imperative verb forms, while "anche_2" is an assertive speech act with an indicative verb form. Broadly speaking, in these constructions *anche* might be said to represent a mitigation marker. Looking at the results, it can be noticed that the illocutive uses of *anche* all attain a median value of 2.0 (bold black line), which corresponds to "sometimes". For each context, some respondents answered "no" (especially in the third context: 49 out of 180 respondents, namely almost one third), but it can doubtless be concluded that these modal uses of *anche* are commonly used.[8]

The second group includes the illocutive uses of *pure* 'also', discussed in Chapter 6 as well. With reference to the labels used in Figure 9.2: "pure_1" represents a directive speech act where *pure* has a mitigating function, "pure_2" is a directive speech act where *pure* marks emphasis[9], "pure_3" is an assertive speech act with an epistemic use of *dovere* 'must' and "pure_4" features a concessive future. The presence of all these uses in the corpus data – although in low numbers – suggested that they are a stable presence in contemporary Italian: the results of the questionnaire confirm this observation. In fact, the four stimuli attain high values. In particular, the median value of "pure_1" and "pure_3" is 3.0, which corresponds to "often". Looking at these results, it can be concluded that the illocutive uses of *pure* represent the most common instances of modal particles in

[7] In the presentation of the results – in this and in the next cases – the relevant utterances are shown beside the boxplots. For the whole stimuli, see the original version of the questionnaire (online at https://zenodo.org/records/10362289).

[8] Concerning the third example (*vedi anche tu*), many respondents further commented that they would rather use the same utterance without *anche*. Possible alternatives to it (also suggested in the comment section) are *pure*, *un po'* and *poi* – namely all other elements investigated by the first part of the questionnaire. I will further discuss this fact – which is interesting for an overall evaluation of Italian modal-particle-like elements – in the conclusion.

[9] These specific uses of *pure* – where the adverb gives the directive the character of a warning or an intimidation – have not been discussed in the Chapter 6, since they sound outdated (or very literate) in contemporary Italian. They can be quite surely traced back to the use of *pur(e)* as an exclusive focus adverb in Old Italian (see Ricca 2017; Favaro 2021: 117–129). In these contexts, the truncated form *pur* is the only acceptable variant. In some respects, the data concerning *solo* discussed in Chapter 8 represent a similar development path.



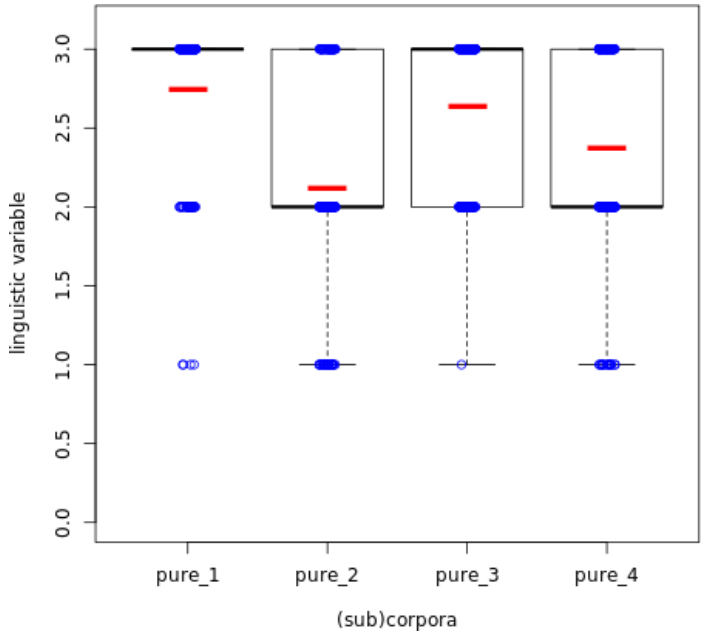
anche_1 = *fai anche le 6* 'you can PTC be there at 6 p.m.'
anche_2 = *sono anche le 3* 'it is PTC 3 a.m.'
anche_3 = *vedi anche tu* 'you can PTC think about that'

Figure 9.1: Reported language use: modal uses of *anche*

Italian. In the case of "pure_1" – that is, *pure* in a directive speech act as a mitigation device – 139 out of 180 respondents answered "often" to the question about the active usage of such an utterance.[10]

The results concerning *un po'* 'a bit' (Figure 9.3) are different. The stimuli proposed in the questionnaire include both its use in directives (labeled "unpo_1") and assertions (labeled "unpo_2"). The utterance represented by "unpo_3" is a case of a directive in a partially fixed expression (*vedi di calmarti* 'calm yourself', literally 'look at calming yourself'). This last example attains the highest value (mean value is between 2.0 and 2.5), while the other two attain lower values (mean values are between 1.5 and 2.0). However, such uses are not that rare in corpus data and these results slightly contrast with the corpus findings. It could be the case that – unlike the illocutive uses of *pure* – these uses are less conventionalized or perceived as such by the respondents. Indeed, looking at the answers

[10] On the contrary, the use of *pure* in directive speech acts as an emphatic marker ("pure_2") attains lower values: as has already been pointed out, it sounds antiquated and it is mainly found in fixed expressions, precisely like *stai (pur) certo* 'be sure'.



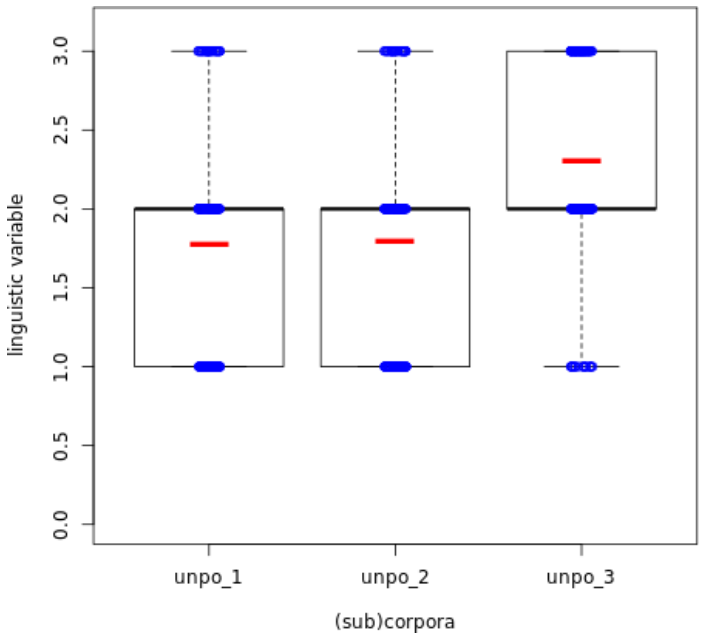
pure_1 = *prendi pure* 'please take it'
pure_2 = *stai pur certo* 'just be sure'
pure_3 = *deve pure esserci* 'there must PTC be'
pure_4 = *sarà pure bravo* 'he may PTC be good'

Figure 9.2: Reported language use: modal uses of *pure*

to the open question "Do you have any other comment on this sentence?" several respondents – who however admit using similar utterances – point out that this use *un po'* is *improprio* 'inappropriate', *non corretto* 'not correct' or *grossolano* 'gross'. Other respondents answered they have just realized the existence of such a use. No similar comments are found for the illocutive uses of *pure*.[11]

The last group includes illocutive uses of *poi* 'then'. This adverb has not been described in detail in this study, but a short outline of its context-level uses has been given in the preceding section. I mentioned two uses related to the pragmatic domain of backchecking, in interrogatives and assertions: they are represented here by the utterances labeled as "poi_1" and "poi_4", comparable to examples (99a–b) above. Moreover, I tentatively included two uses – most probably geographically marked – related to the emphatic marking of speech acts,

[11]Going through the answers to the question "Is there another word you would use instead of X in the same context?", many respondents (25) answer *un attimo* 'a moment'– precisely as has been pointed out in Chapter 7.



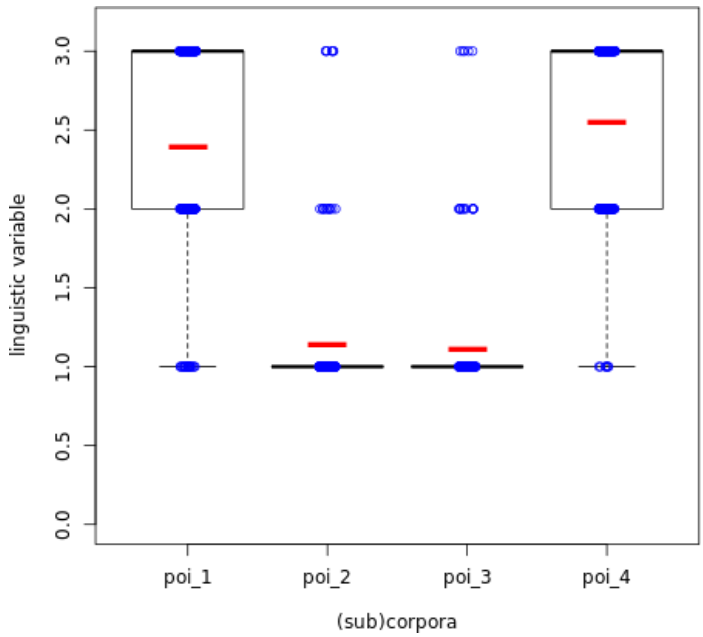
unpo_1 = *provala un po'* 'give it a try PTC'
unpo_2 = *è un po' quello il fatto* 'that is PTC the fact'
unpo_3 = *vedi un po' di calmarti* 'calm PTC yourself'

Figure 9.3: Reported language use: modal uses of *un po'*

in assertives ("poi_2") and directives ("poi_3"), corresponding to examples (8) and (9) above. The results are shown in Figure 9.4. A clear difference emerges between the modal uses of *poi* related to backchecking and those related to emphasis on the illocutionary force. While the first pair attains a median value of 3.0, the second pair attains a median value of 1.0: although some respondents answer "sometimes" or even "often" (7 respondents for "poi_2" and 5 respondents for "poi_3"), most of them don't recognize this use. These results seem to confirm what has been suggested in the last section: the backchecking uses of *poi* are features of standard Italian, while the emphatic uses are probably found only in regional varieties.

In fact, looking at the answers to the question "Do you have any other comment on this sentence?", a few respondents answered – both with regard to "poi_2" and "poi_3" – that these uses are typically found in varieties spoken in Emilia-Romagna.[12] However, the data from Emilia Romagna and from Piedmont are

[12]This fact is in accordance with the starting assumption. In fact, while developing the stimuli and designing the questionnaire, both "poi_2" and "poi_3" have come to my attention thanks to people from Faenza, a city in Romagna, situated southwest from Ravenna and southeast from Bologna.



poi_1 = *sei poi andata?* 'did you go PTC?'
poi_2 = *fa poi schifo* 'it is PTC disgusting'
poi_3 = *stai poi su* 'get PTC up'
poi_4 = *non sono poi così lontane* 'they are not PTC so far'

Figure 9.4: Reported language use: modal uses of *poi*

not so dissimilar, even though they are rated slightly higher in Piedmont.[13] Only "poi_3" shows some more evidence of regional markedness: Emilia-Romagna is represented by three respondents answering "often" and seven respondents answering "sometimes", while for Piedmont no respondent answered "often" and three respondents answered "sometimes". Overall, Emilia-Romagna has thus ten respondents who assert to actively using this construction, Piedmont only three. To conclude, some evidence of the regional markedness of "poi_2" and "poi_3" has been found, but more research is needed to confirm the results.

9.2.2 Backchecking markers in interrogatives

Stimulus 15 of the questionnaire deals with backchecking strategies, which have been introduced in the preceding section. It adopts an onomasiological perspec-

[13] Coincidentally, both regions obtained 36 answers thus allowing a comparison based on an identical sample.

tive (function-to-form): having identified backchecking as a pragmatic functional domain, the different formal strategies which can code it are investigated. In practical terms – that is, in the context of a questionnaire – this means presenting a conversational context in which backchecking strategies can be used and asking the respondents which specific strategy they would choose. The context provided in the questionnaire is the most typical backchecking context referred in the literature, namely a tip-of-the-tongue situation where someone has forgotten the name of a person and asks the interlocutor to provide this information once more.

(10) Italian (questionnaire data)
[Anna does not remember the name of Irene's cousin]
Ire, com'*è che* si chiamava tua cugina? [cleft sentence]
Ire, come si chiamava *già* tua cugina? [*già* 'already']
Ire, come si chiamava *più* tua cugina? [*più* 'more']
Ire, come si chiamava *pure* tua cugina? [*pure* 'also']
'Ire, what was your cousin's name again?'

The respondents could choose one or more of the answers proposed, or also suggest other possibilities. The first option is a cleft sentence, while the other three options display different backchecking particles (see the previous section for a brief description of their characteristics).

As a working hypothesis, the cleft sentence was suggested as a feature found in the standard variety of Italian, while the backchecking particles as features of different regional varieties. This has been substantially confirmed by the collected data. Moreover, many respondents answered that both options are perfectly acceptable. Correspondingly, it must be concluded that cleft structures and specific backchecking particles are both strategies available to speakers, who can contextually choose whether to use one or the other. Nevertheless, they never (or very rarely) appear simultaneously in the same sentence.

The selection of different strategies by respondents results in seven possible groups of answers. Two more are represented by answers of respondents who find acceptable more than one particle (labeled as "cleft+mix") and by answers of respondents who don't find any of the proposed options (labeled as "other") acceptable. In this last category, most of the instances are represented by answers rejecting the use of the backchecking imperfect (see Waltereit 2001: 1405–1407 on this), featured in all the options provided in the questionnaire. As an alternative, many respondents provide an utterance with a cleft syntactic structure and a present tense (*Com'è che si chiama tua cugina?*). In Figure 9.5, the

answers of respondents from four regions of northern Italy are graphically displayed: Piedmont (36 answers), Lombardy (47 answers), Veneto (18 answers) and Emilia-Romagna (36 answers).[14]

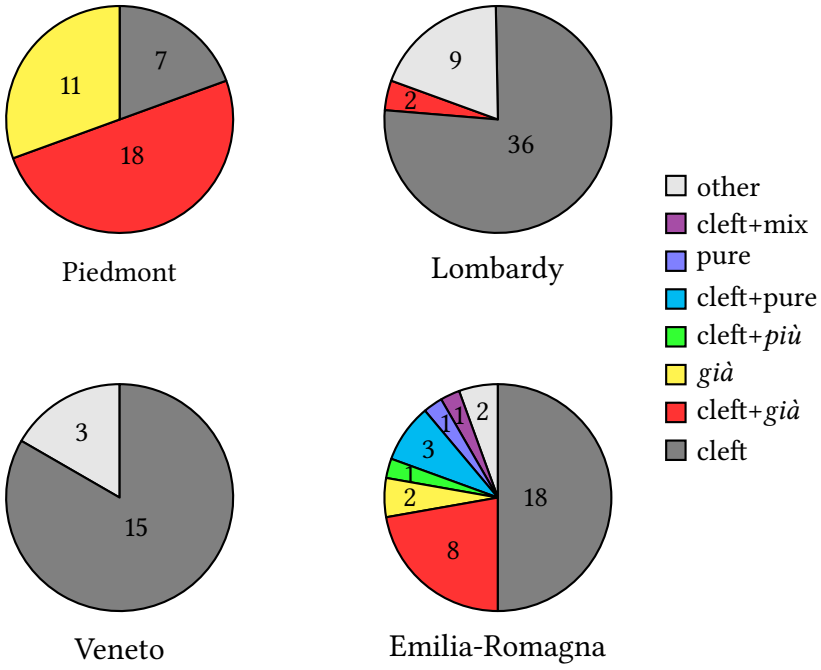


Figure 9.5: Backchecking strategies in four regions of northern Italy

Piedmont offers an interesting and consistent picture: half of the respondents select both the cleft structure and the particle *già* as acceptable backchecking strategies, the other half is divided between respondents choosing either the cleft structure or the particle *già* (almost a third). Overall, the great majority of respondents use the particle *già* as a backchecking strategy, either in alternation with the cleft structure or as a main strategy. These data confirm therefore that *già* is a typical (but not exclusive) feature of Piedmontese Regional Italian.[15]

[14] As has been said above, the analysis of the second questionnaire mostly focuses on data from northern Italy: with the partial exceptions represented by Apulia (10 answers) and Sicily (14 answers), very few data have been collected from regions in central-southern Italy.

[15] Half of the respondents from Piedmont use both a standard feature (the cleft structure) and a regional feature (the particle *già*). This can be interpreted in the light of the formation of regional standard varieties ("dialectization of Italian" in Chapter 5): both nationwide and region-specific traits are featured in regional (standard) varieties.

Also taking into account the different number of respondents, Lombardy and Veneto show a similar situation. The cleft structure is by far the most common backchecking strategy, while some respondents propose alternative answers (labeled "other"): cleft structures without backchecking imperfect, the imperfect without cleft structure, and even the plain question with the present tense and no cleft structure (therefore with no overt backchecking marking, relying only on contextual interpretation). At the same time, two respondents from Lombardy select both the cleft structure and the particle *già* as acceptable backchecking strategies, showing that this particle is used not only in Piedmont.

Lastly, Emilia-Romagna offers the richest and most complex situation: almost each of the nine possible group of answers is featured in its graph.[16] Half of the respondents choose the cleft structure, while another third selects both the cleft structure and other particles as acceptable backchecking strategies (indeed, all the particles suggested by the questionnaire are featured in the answers). Few respondents choose the options with particles only (*già* or *pure*) or suggest different options (no cleft structure, no backchecking imperfect: the label for this group of answers is "other"). Two respondents affirm to use both *pure* and *già* to express backchecking and also add *poi* to the list (the cleft structure is included among the possibilities: the label for this group is "cleft+mix"). Thus, the emerging picture results as being very rich and varied.[17] In particular, the particle *pure* (alone or in alternation with the cleft structure) – which, according to Fedriani & Miola (2014), is typical of this regional variety when used as a backchecking form – has been selected by four respondents.

Overall, it is possible to distinguish three types. In the case of Lombardy and Veneto – apart from a few exceptions – the pan-Italian strategy (cleft structure) is the only option to mark backchecking. In the case of Piedmont, alongside a pan-Italian strategy (cleft structure), a regionally marked strategy is found (the particle *già*), which is recognized by almost all respondents: it represents therefore a regional standard feature. In the case of Emilia-Romagna instead, a pan-Italian strategy is attested (cleft-structure) alongside other strategies linked to a

[16] The only possibility which does not appear in the answers from Emilia-Romagna is the particle *più* 'more' (not in alternation with the cleft structure). According to Fedriani & Miola (2014) this feature is found in the regional variety spoken in Liguria. In fact – although the questionnaire includes only one respondent from Liguria – their answer selects the particle *più* alone as a backchecking strategy.

[17] Emilia-Romagna has a different dialectal history compared to Piedmont and Veneto. In contrast to these latter regions, where cities like Turin and Venezia represented unifying centers for the dialect use (Regis 2011), no dialectal koiné developed in Emilia-Romagna – possibly leaving space for the coexistence of more variants.

strong inter-individual/inter-group variation. From this pool of different strategies – quite interestingly – ten respondents from Emilia-Romagna select *già*, either as an alternative to a cleft structure or by itself. Along with the two answers from Lombardy, this fact confirms that *già* as a backchecking marker actually shows a supra-regional distribution.[18]

9.2.3 Markers of emphasis in imperatives

In the preceding section, I briefly described the use of *già* as a modal operator on assertions (this use is found in the regional variety of Italian spoken in Sardinia) and two uses of *poi* in assertions and directives (possibly limited to the regional variety of Italian spoken in Emilia-Romagna). Here, I focus on directives, considering elements that express boosting of the illocutionary force: Stimulus 16 of the questionnaire deals with elements marking *emphasis* on directive speech acts.

A specification is needed here: as pointed out by Schwenter (2003: 1026), categories such as *emphasis* and *mitigation* are somehow "intuitive and pre-theoretical labels" and a more fine-grained pragmatic analysis should rather avoid them in the description of the function of pragmatic markers, using instead more precise categories. Although I am aware of this, I decided to use it in this section – for two main reasons. First, a fine-grained analysis of pragmatic functions is not the goal of this section, which rather focuses on the usage variation of certain markers. Second, to make possible the comparison, I needed a category broad enough to include different markers which have their own specificities but at the same time also show commonalities (the data of the questionnaire are a strong proof in this sense). In this sense, the intuitive character of the label *emphasis* represents a common thread of the functions of several markers and – even more importantly – its pre-theoretical character makes it easily recognizable to the respondents.[19]

Exactly like the preceding questionnaire example, this stimulus also adopts an onomasiological perspective (function-to-form): having identified emphasis

[18] Recalling the discussion about demotization in Chapter 5, these data allow us to consider the backchecking *già* as involved in the process by which regional features (among them regional standard features) are de-localized and spread across different regions. If included into a larger core of nationwide shared features, backchecking *già* could be considered a candidate feature for neo-standard Italian (which shows different regional standard features in different geographical areas).

[19] Moreover, I am not aware of any better label used in the literature. Functional Discourse Grammar also uses labels such as *emphasis* (or *reinforcement*) and *mitigation* to indicate illocutionary force modification at the speech act level (see Hengeveld 2004: 1192; Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008: 83).

as a pragmatic functional domain, the different formal strategies that code it are investigated. In the questionnaire, a conversational context was given in which an emphatic particle can be used and the respondents were asked which specific strategy they would choose. The context provided in the questionnaire is a typical one where several different elements can appear to mark emphasis, namely a directive expressed by a conventionalized multi-word expression (*stai zitto* 'shut up').

(11) Italian (questionnaire data)
[Giacomo, sick of Mario during a discussion unnecessarily proceeding for a whole hour]
Senti, stai *solo* zitto, che hai torto marcio! [*solo* 'only']
Senti, stai *un po'* zitto, che hai torto marcio! [*un po'* 'a bit']
Senti, stai *mo'* zitto, che hai torto marcio! [*mo'* 'now']
Senti, stai *poi* zitto, che hai torto marcio! [*poi* 'then']
'Look, shut PTC up, you're dead wrong!'

As in the preceding case, the respondents could choose one or more of the answers proposed, or also suggest other possibilities. The first two particles have been described in previous chapters of this study. As shown in Chapter 8, the use of *solo* 'only' in directives is found acceptable by speakers across Italy, but it is used more in the regional variety spoken in Piedmont. The use of *un po'* 'a bit' in directives has been described in Chapter 7 as a feature found in in the standard variety of Italian: the questionnaire data seem to validate this assumption. The particle *mo'* 'now' shows several uses in spoken varieties and/or dialects, but no specific research is available about it.[20] The particle *poi* 'then' has been introduced in the previous section and it appeared in four stimuli in the first part of the questionnaire: its use in directives is likely to be traced back to the regional variety spoken in Emilia-Romagna.

Going through the answers, it became clear that the use of *un po'* in directives is actually a supra-regionally non-marked option: this option was selected by respondents from every region. I outlined nine possible groups of answers. The first four are represented by answers selecting a single particle. Three more groups are represented by answers selecting both *un po'* and one of the other particles as emphatic markers in directives. Two more are represented by answers of respondents who find three or more particles acceptable (this group is labeled

[20] Most probably, its etymology goes back to Latin *modo* 'only, just, now', which was already used as a modal particle in Latin (see Kroon 2011: 177).

as "mix") and by answers of respondents who don't find acceptable any of the proposed options (this group is labeled as "other"). It should be also highlighted that none of these particles can be used in combination with others. In Figure 9.6, the answers of respondents from four regions of northern Italy are displayed.

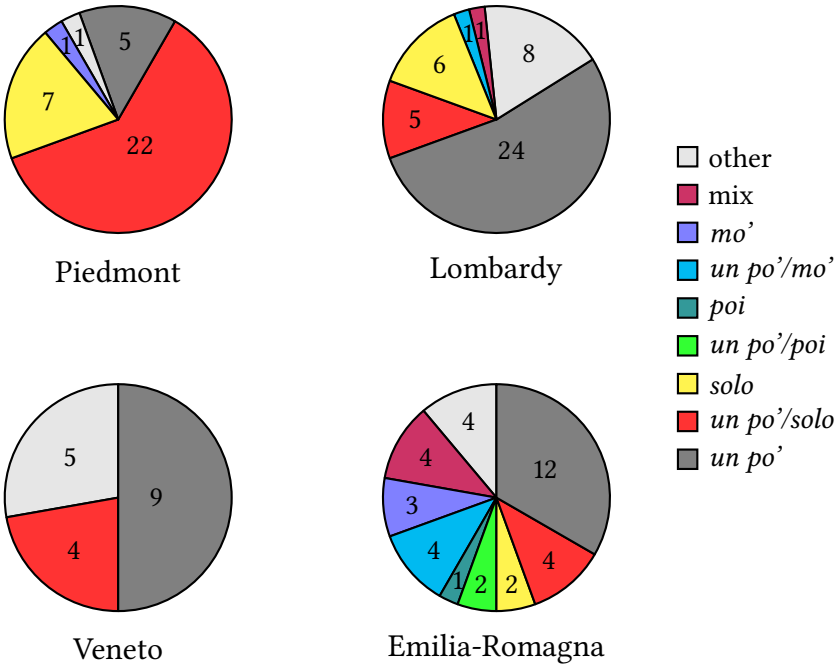


Figure 9.6: Emphatic particles in directives in four regions of northern Italy

Let's start from the results concerning Veneto (18 answers), which displays the simplest picture. Half of the respondents select *un po'* as preferred emphatic marker, while the other half is divided between respondents who select both *un po'* and *solo*, and respondents who don't choose any of the options suggested. In this last case, respondents propose a simple directive without particles as an alternative (labeled as "other").[21]

Lombardy (47 answers) shows a similar but richer picture. More than half of the respondents select *un po'* as their preferred emphatic marker, corroborating the idea that this adverb is the unmarked option. The absence of an overt marking

[21]Some respondents suggested other strategies as well: prosody, additional discourse markers (*vai*, *va'* 'go'), different verbal phrases (*statti zitto*, *vedi di starti zitto* 'shut up') or other particles (*pur* 'also').

of emphasis is also a common option. Moreover, *solo* is selected as an option by eleven respondents, either as an alternative to *un po'* (five answers) or by itself (six answers). Two respondents also select other particles, namely *mo'* and *poi*.

Piedmont (36 answers) shows instead a quite different picture. In fact, the most selected option is not *un po'* (five answers), but both *un po'* and *solo* as equivalent emphatic markers (22 answers). Consistent with the findings of the other questionnaire, the option of selecting only *solo* is also common (seven answers), more than in other regions. Few answers select *mo'* or no particle. Thus, the Piedmontese graph of emphatic markers closely recalls the graph concerning the backchecking strategy, where *un po'* plays the role of the cleft structure and *solo* plays the role of *già*, and most answers select both strategies.

Similar to the previous question, Emilia-Romagna (36 answers) offers the richest and most complex situation: in this case, each one of the nine possible emphatic strategies are featured in the answers from this region. The option *un po'* was selected by one third of the respondents, while four respondents selected the option without particles. Both *mo'* and *poi* were selected by respondents (either alone or as an alternative to *un po'*), and this seems to confirm their regional markedness since – apart from isolated cases in Piedmont and Lombardy – they are chosen with some frequency only in the answers from this region. Nevertheless, *solo* is also selected by some respondents, as a further confirmation of its supra-regional distribution. Lastly, four respondents indicate three or more particles – namely all the options suggested in the questionnaire, in different combinations (labeled "mix" in the graph). These results seem to confirm for Emilia-Romagna what has already emerged in the previous question, namely, the coexistence of different features in a varied linguistic space.

Although they cannot lead to conclusive statements, these results have provided empirical material to different assumptions made in the preceding sections. Speakers of Italian have access to a nationwide-spread emphatic marker, namely *un po'*, which can be used to boost the illocutionary force of directives.[22] This is by no means a compulsory option – in many cases a specific prosodic contour is enough – but a structural possibility that respondents from different regions recognize and actively use. Other emphatic markers also exist, even though they are less common and regionally flavored. Among them, at least *solo* seems to have achieved a supra-regional distribution. Other markers such as *poi* and *mo'* show a more limited distribution, but still contribute to prove the existence of illocutionary operators in different (northern) regional varieties of Italian. Specific contributions which investigate the semantic and pragmatic characteristics

[22]Data from other regions, albeit limited, confirm the use of *un po'* as an emphatic marker.

of these particles in-depth remain a call for future research. For now, however, the use of the category of *emphasis* – although not completely satisfactory for the reasons listed above – has proved useful for a broad comparison of different markers operating on the illocutionary force of directives.

9.3 Sociolinguistic issues: Closing remarks

This section closes the last chapter of the present research and offers a first round of final comments. Before moving to the general conclusions of the research, I want to review the sociolinguistic issues discussed in the last two chapters. In fact, although strictly linked to the broader picture, these issues deserve an individual discussion. I will sum up the main findings of the two questionnaires and I will discuss what these data show about the relationship between modal particles and (contemporary) sociolinguistic changes in Italian. Taken together, these issues show the many challenges and opportunities offered by a sociolinguistic-oriented study of pragmatic phenomena.

9.3.1 Findings from the questionnaires

The second questionnaire had three main goals: collecting data about the usage of a set of adverbs with illocutionary functions, collecting data about their sociolinguistic status (with a focus on geographical variation), and testing the feasibility of adopting an onomasiological (function-to-form) approach to the variation of modal particles. In the design of the questionnaire, these three goals were not dealt with separately, but were rather addressed jointly. The stimuli of the first part integrate the corpus data discussed in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, investigating the usage rate of modal constructions with *anche*, *pure*, and *un po'* previously described, also considering their regional variation. Moreover, data about *poi* – which a few references (Bazzanella 1995; Coniglio 2008) have cited as a modal-particle-like element in Italian – were also collected.

The high values attained by the acceptability judgments and the relative uniformity across regions (excluding two uses of *poi*) allow for the conclusion that these uses are a stable presence in the standard variety of Italian or show at least a pan-national distribution. The issue of geographical variation was addressed more specifically with the last two stimuli, which also test a function-to-form approach to variation of pragmatic markers.

Having identified backchecking interrogatives and emphatic imperatives as pragmatic domains subject to being expressed by diverse pragmatic markers,

these two stimuli investigated their distribution across regions. The results, mainly based on the data from four regions in northern Italy, confirm that variation of pragmatic markers does exist, and it is reflected by the respondents' answers. Regionally marked elements have been found for two regions: a backchecking *già* and an emphatic *solo* in Piedmont, a backchecking *pure* and emphatic *poi* and *mo'* in Emilia-Romagna. Moreover, the results show a supra-regional diffusion of these uses since they also appear in other regions. At the same time, it became clear that speakers have a standard (not-regionally marked) variant at their disposal for both domains, namely the cleft construction for backchecking interrogatives and *un po'* for emphatic directives.

From this perspective, the second questionnaire can be seen as encompassing the first one (or the first one can be seen as an extension of the second one). The first questionnaire focused on the modal uses of *solo* in directive and assertive speech acts, aiming at collecting data about their distribution (reported language use, geographical variation) and their meaning. It therefore represents an in-depth case study on a single particle, which could be used as a model for future research on other elements. The data collected allowed a better understanding of the behavior of *solo* in the two different illocutive contexts: modal uses of *solo* in assertions and directives which differ both in terms of acceptability and geographical distribution.

The results show that the use of *solo* in assertive speech acts is more widespread and it can probably be assigned to the standard variety of Italian, while the use in directive speech acts – generally less widespread – results more acceptable for respondents from Piedmont. The meaning analysis showed that different semantic features of these constructions (emphasis on the illocutionary force and common ground management) are recognized by the respondents and can coexist in the same context. By crossing the acceptability data with the meaning data, hypotheses on the development paths of these constructions have been formulated. This led to the conclusion that the two features do not develop one after the other, but they rather represent different paths of semantic change, which can however intersect if the conversational context allows it. Thus, the conversational context appears to be the main factor in determining both the acceptability values and the specific function of these constructions.

At a general level, the results discussed in Chapter 8 and Chapter 9 demonstrate that questionnaires can be fruitfully used to investigate discourse-pragmatic phenomena. In particular, this methodology proved decisive when collecting data about linguistic expressions and constructions which are difficult to trace or even absent in corpora. It moreover allows the possibility of linking them to a

set of metadata, thus enabling a sociolinguistic study of pragmatic markers – selecting each time the dimension of variation to be explored. In the questionnaires both multiple-choice questions and open questions were used. Multiple-choice questions make it possible to collect significant amounts of data which can also be analyzed from a quantitative perspective. In addition, open questions make it possible to broaden the research assumptions by directly asking the respondents about specific issues, possibly including their personal and pre-theoretical categories in the analysis framework – and thus collecting further hints which would be otherwise difficult to get.

In the presentation of the data, I took advantage of various data visualization possibilities (box plots, bar plots, mosaic plots, and pie charts) which are very effective to render different kinds of data. To conclude, questionnaires have proved to be an adaptable and powerful tool to conduct research on pragmatic markers, also from a sociolinguistic perspective: once the research question is defined, specific designs can be developed in order to investigate a wide array of different aspects.

9.3.2 Modal particles and sociolinguistic changes in Italian

Looking at the results of the two questionnaires, the question arises what they say about the on-going sociolinguistic changes affecting contemporary Italian, that is to say, whether the results reflect the sociolinguistic changes described in Chapter 5 and how. Evidently, as previously stated, it is not possible to draw definitive conclusions from these results: although the sample taken into consideration is not small, more data – especially from central and southern Italy – are needed to further corroborate the findings. Nevertheless, I would like to highlight three interesting points.

The first point concerns the overall reported language use of the constructions described above. Given a certain variation in the acceptability degree, most of the uses have been widely recognized by the respondents who also affirm to actively use them and largely agree on their functions. This fact supports the idea that an average use of these particles does exist. This involves elements which have been present in Italian for a long time (*pure*), elements which are present in the regional standards, most probably transferred from the base dialects (*poi* and *solo* in directives, backchecking *già*), and elements which arguably represent more recent innovations (*un po'*, *solo* in assertions). In this respect, it should be mentioned that no grammar or schoolbook provides indications on these elements which – although also found in written texts – are basically features of spoken

varieties and in particular dialogic speech. In this light, they are evidence of processes leading to the spontaneous fixation of a set of uses ("standard by usage"), some of them at a regional level, others at a pan-Italian level.

The second point concerns precisely the geographical markedness of specific elements. The results of the questionnaires show that some uses are specific to certain regions, while others are found across regions. In the latter case, uses are found which can be in all likelihood assigned to the national standard (*pure*, *un po'*), while in the former the situation could be more complex – and it's not totally clear if all regionally marked elements have the same sociolinguistic status.

While some represent features of the regional standard variety (*già* and *solo* in Piedmont), others could also be features in regional sub-standard varieties (*poi* and *mo'* in directives in Emilia-Romagna): more research is needed on this point. Anyway, the most interesting finding is that the results show evidence for supra-regional circulation of regionally marked uses. The clearest example is perhaps the backchecking use of *già* which, besides being widely used in Piedmont, is also found in Lombardy and Emilia-Romagna – despite being in competition with both a standard alternative (cleft sentence) and other regionally-marked particles (*pure*, *poi* and *più*). Whether this and other features will keep on spreading is an open issue: it cannot be excluded that some of them will further change their sociolinguistic status, coming to be included among the pan-national uses of Italian.

Finally, modal-particle-like elements generally reflect the ongoing process of convergence among the regional varieties of Italian. In fact, the supra-regional diffusion of regionally marked features is consistent with the current tendency represented by a decrease of regional markedness of certain features – which are increasingly used by speakers with different origins. "Due to both internal migrations and increasing exchanges and mobility, regional varieties of Italian are including linguistic features that come from other regional varieties, especially among the younger generation. The regional markedness of spoken Italian is thus noticeably decreasing nowadays. The present younger generation in particular speaks a sort of 'composite' RI [regional Italian], at least in terms of phonetics and phonology" (Cerruti 2011: 23). The modal particles investigated by the questionnaire should also be included in this perspective: pragmatic phenomena have proved to be an interesting viewpoint on variation phenomena and on the on-going sociolinguistic changes affecting contemporary Italian, both with regard to the emergence of a new standard and to the reduced regional markedness of certain features.

9.3.3 Salience and variation: A path for future research

It is clear that, in order to investigate the historical trajectories of single items, fine-grained work should be devoted to the analysis of the language-contact dynamics which involve standard Italian, dialects and regional varieties. This issue has not been addressed in detail by the present research, which focused on the functional positions occupied by discourse-pragmatic elements in the grammatical system rather than on the processes of language contact they reflect. Referring precisely to works on the diffusion of contact-induced changes, Cerruti (2009: 268–269, 2020: 131) points out that the filling of structural gaps seems to facilitate the establishment of some substrate features as part of the standard norm. In this regard, certain constructions have been transferred from substrate dialects to regional varieties of Italian because they represented "useful" and "strategic" features, which provided regional Italian lexical and grammatical constructions absent in the standard.[23] This seems to be the case for at least some of the elements discussed in the last two chapters (specific uses of *solo*, *già* and *poi*).

Future work will further develop this line of research, investigating on the one hand the development paths of single items, and on the other hand the broader sociolinguistic dynamics that constrain them. In this respect, a relevant theoretical contribution to the discussion can be found in the notion of *salience*. Kerswill & Williams (2002) discuss salience as an explanatory concept in language change resulting from dialect contact. They define salience as "a property of a linguistic item or feature that makes it in some way perceptually and cognitively prominent" (Kerswill & Williams 2002: 81): in the analysis of the dynamics of language contact or internal variation, salience can explain why specific features are perceived as more prominent by speakers and are thus more likely to be transferred between varieties. Describing the interplay of linguistic internal and external factors which constitute this notion, they highlight the role of extra-linguistic factors (cognitive, pragmatic, interactional, and sociodemographic factors) as central in defining salience, because they "directly motivate speakers to behave in a certain way" (Kerswill & Williams 2002: 106).

Although salience may be described foremost in cognitive terms (Rácz 2013: 23–43; Schmid 2007; Tomlin & Myachykov 2015), this notion also leaves space for an interpretation in terms of sociolinguistic indexation. For instance, Cheshire

[23] See for instance Cerruti & Regis (2014: 89) on the focus particle *solo più*, literally 'only more', which is a loan translation of Piedmontese *mac pi* (with the same meaning). This construction is a regional standard feature of the Italian spoken in Piedmont and expresses a meaning for which there are no grammaticalized constructions in standard Italian. However, it is now also found in speech productions of speakers coming from other regions.

(1996, 1997, 2009) works with a pragmatically based notion of salience, focusing on the variation of syntactic patterns whose position and interactional roles makes them perceptually salient in the utterance environment. From this perspective, grammatical features are perceived as salient if they are recognized as fulfilling specific pragmatic and interactional functions.[24] The emphasis on the pragmatic character of salience is particularly well-suited for the properties of the markers described in the present work. Combining interactional properties (inferencing, common ground management) and pragmatic functions (specification of the illocutionary force), these items derive their salient character from their prominent role in providing an utterance with specific features that are strategically used in the construction of discourse. Moreover, they often occur in marked syntactic environments (interrogative sentences, imperative sentences) which further makes their occurrence salient to speakers. Thus, discourse-pragmatic markers and analogous constructions meet several criteria which favor their transfer from one variety to another.[25]

In the analysis carried out about *solo*, backchecking markers and markers of emphasis can make a profitable use of this notion. Specifically, I see salience as the contact point between two aspects involved in the description given above. On the one hand, pragmatic markers represent key points in interactions, since they code specific functions on utterances: the conversational exchange between interlocutors also depends on the interpretation of their meaning. Thus, their interactional roles make them perceptually salient in the utterance and in the conversational dynamics. On the other hand, precisely the fact that specific pragmatic functions are perceived as salient by the speakers could represent one of the reasons why (linguistic elements expressing) these functions are charged with indexicality – namely the fact that they *point to* social identities and social meanings (Silverstein 2003). Thus, salience represents a feature leading key points in interaction to develop (social) indexicalities.[26]

[24] See also Ariel (2008: 168–211) for a discourse-oriented discussion of this concept – focusing specifically on the role of salient discourse patterns in shaping grammar. Other important references on these topics are Du Bois (1987, 2003).

[25] For an example on Italian data, Cerruti (2020) uses the notion of salience to explain the diffusion of different constructions where *mica* operates as a non-canonical negative marker across (sub-standard and standard) regional varieties of Italian and into the standard language.

[26] In some streams of contemporary sociolinguistics (see Eckert 2008, 2012), concepts such as *indexicality* and *indexical fields* are used to explain the fluid nature of linguistic variables, interpreted as constellations of general and flexible meanings that become more specific in the context of stylistic practice and performance. For a comparison between this approach to sociolinguistic variables with the variationist (Labovian) approach – as well as their implications for sociolinguistic theory – see Guy & Hinskens (2016).

(12) key points in interaction > salience > (social) indexicality

Salient functions represent linguistic domains which favor the coexistence and turnover of forms: they attract different linguistic elements and so they represent an ideal locus for variation. In some cases, a specific syntactic position can relate to interactional salience. Most of the modal particles described throughout this work appear after the finite verb form. This is consistent with the fact that they have scope over the illocutionary force, which is expressed by the verb.[27] Providing a space for immediate verbal modification and for the coding of pragmatic functions, the postverbal position is perceived as salient: several interactional functions – mitigation, emphasis and common ground management – are coded (by expressions appearing) here. Thus, this position can be filled with different markers, attracting variation phenomena and leading to the development of different social indexicalites.

[27]However, this is not a universal fact. For instance, German modal particles are also mostly found after the finite verb – possibly due to the rigid and regular syntactic structure found in German (Abraham 1991) – but Japanese modal particles mostly appear in the sentence-final position (Izutsu & Izutsu 2013).

10 Conclusions

10.1 A look back at the theoretical framework

This research used a lot of concepts in the attempt of elaborating a theoretical framework for the analysis of modal particles in Italian. The discussion conducted in the first part of this work contributed towards the definition of a flexible framework – not strictly based on a pre-existing theoretical model, but rather composed by a set of connected concepts (coming from different sources) necessary to give an insightful description of modal particles. Let me revise them briefly.

Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 were dedicated to a re-evaluation of the notion of *modal particle*. After briefly introducing the functional category of pragmatic markers (and its subdivisions), I identified the main features of the linguistic expressions I wanted to investigate – namely the "speech-act tuners" variously defined as modal particles, modal-particle-like elements or illocutionary operators throughout this work. In this respect, the fundamental concepts discussed are those of *common ground* and *illocutionary modification*. They served to elaborate a working definition of modal particles as linguistic elements which operate on the *conditions* under which the speech act is performed (integrating the speech act in the common ground and contributing to manage the information flow with respect to the shared knowledge) – and which specify the *intentions* with which speech acts are performed (contributing to refine the illocutionary point of the speech act in an interpersonal perspective). By using modal particles, speakers point both to the underlying conditions that allow the performance of a speech act and to the communicative intention that defines the orientation of that speech act in the interactional space. Thus, modal particles simultaneously operate on (and show the intertwining of) the different dimensions of a speech act: its felicity conditions, its illocutionary force and the proposition carried by it.

Chapter 4 took a step back to consider modal particles and linguistic elements operating at the semantics/pragmatics interface from a broader perspective. In particular, the issue of how to describe their meaning was addressed. Following works like Hansen (2008, 2012) and Ariel (2008, 2010), the distinctions be-

tween pragmatics and semantics was defined as a divide between non-coded vs. coded meanings, that is inference vs. convention. This perspective on the semantics/pragmatics interface led me to draw a distinction between content-level vs. context-level uses of linguistic expressions, that is a distinction between uses having a bearing on a state-of-affairs/proposition (or on the relation between two states-of-affairs/propositions) and uses having a bearing on the relation between a state-of-affairs/proposition and contextual entities (the discourse itself, the mental states of the interlocutors). In this respect, the diachronic tendencies which cross this divide were also considered, discussing how the same linguistic element can display both content-level and context-level uses and how inferential meanings can become coded meanings over time.

The discussion revolved around the concepts of *reanalysis* and *conventionalization*. Following De Smet (2009, 2012, 2014), the relationship between them was redefined as a matter of degree rather than an abrupt step: new constructions/-functions are reanalyzed as they spread to new contexts of use – and alongside their diffusion across a speech community. In this respect, the concept of *degrees of conventionalization* (Ehmer & Rosemeyer 2018) has been employed as a useful concept to describe the gradual diffusion of constructions/functions across a speech community. Specifically, it represents a descriptive tool that helps to empirically address the issue of how to define what is coded and what is non-coded, overcoming the setting of a predefined divide between them and handling it in terms of the acceptability of the constructions/functions across a speech community. The fact that constructions/functions display varying degrees of conventionalization is often reflected in their different sociolinguistic status. Following this line of reasoning, the issue of language variation in the pragmatic domain has been raised and I pointed out that in many cases a sociolinguistic perspective is necessary to give a better description of modal particles and other discourse-pragmatic elements, including their diffusion in different language varieties and their diverse functions across them.

Overall, the concepts that I combined for this research compose a "data-driven" theoretical framework – that is, a framework mainly oriented to the discussion of the data, which calls into play different concepts whenever they can be useful to deal with specific aspects of the data. Such an approach has both advantages and drawbacks. On the one hand, it is flexible and versatile – and it allowed a discussion of modal particles from multiple perspectives, from their grammatical functions to issues of language change and variation. On the other hand, it may lack a certain systematical nature and it somewhat blends the difference between description and analysis of data – which I often addressed together. In this respect, the reference to Functional Discourse Grammar (Hengeveld & Mackenzie

2008) represented an effort to compare my data with an established theoretical framework of linguistic analysis. Albeit not systematical, the reference to the layered model of grammatical categories posited by FDG has allowed me to place the modal/illocutive functions under investigation in a broader picture. This way, the relationship between content-level and context-level uses of the same adverb/element could be reassessed as a relationship between neighboring functions in a layered model of grammatical categories, which are connected to each other by specific scope relations and predictable patterns of development.

10.2 Three outcomes of this research

An overview of the main findings of the single case studies has already been presented at the end of each relevant chapter. I will not repeat them here. Moreover, the conclusions related to the sociolinguistic issues discussed in this work (regional markedness of modal particles, variation in the acceptability, involvement of modal particles in the sociolinguistic changes affecting contemporary Italian) have already been presented in the closing section of Chapter 9. I will not repeat them here, either. What remains to be done is to highlight general conclusions cross-cutting all case studies and revise the research questions presented in the introduction: What are the modal uses of adverbs in Italian? How can their properties and functions be described? What are their contexts of use? The discussion will be divided in three parts.

10.2.1 Modal particles in Italian

The question of whether modal particles can be found in Italian has been addressed by few scholars and hardly ever in a systematic way (Coniglio 2008 and Squartini 2017 count among the rare exceptions). This does not point only to a lack of sufficient scientific consideration: as a matter of fact, Italian does not display a well-identifiable set of modal particles. The same holds for the Romance language family as a whole: despite some well-studied examples (see for instance Hansen 1998a on Fr. *bien*; Waltereit 2004, 2020 on Fr. *quand même*), few "real" modal particles have been identified in Romance languages and – perhaps more importantly – no Romance language displays a coherent paradigm of modal particles comparable to what can be found in German (by far the best-studied case of a language with modal particles). Overall, the results of this research do not question any of these facts.

However, considering things in more detail lead us to partially reassess this situation. This meant – in the context of the present research – to consider the

functions of modal particles in a broader perspective (including cross-linguistic comparison), to adopt a functional perspective on this category, and to include less-studied language varieties (dialects, regional varieties) in the description. I often used labels such as *modal-particle-like elements* and *modal/illocutive uses of adverbs* to refer to the elements under analysis, suggesting a prototype-based approach to this category. The description of data from regional varieties of Italian further increased the inventory of elements interpretable as such. In this respect, it is certain that Italian and regional varieties of Italian do display modal-particle-like elements – and the present research offered a new description of a set of them.

The elements that I have been analyzing are adverbs from different subclasses: focus adverbs (*pure*, *anche*, *solo*), degree adverbs (*un po'*), temporal adverbs (*poi*), phasal adverbs (*già*). All of them display illocutive uses. When used as such, they have scope over the speech act and they contribute to expressing how it must be interpreted in the relevant communicative exchange: they can modify its illocutionary force, they can point out specific aspects of the underlying interactional context, and they can do both. This functional status is common to all these adverbs. Regarding other aspects, more differences can be noticed: these adverbs differ regarding the frequency found in corpora, the degree of conventionalization of their illocutive functions, and in their sociolinguistic distribution. Nevertheless, they all represent clear examples of modal-particle-like elements in Italian. Among them, at least one – *pure* – can even be considered a prototypical example of modal particle: it is highly frequent in spoken data, it shows a firm pan-Italian distribution, and it displays clear conventionalized illocutive functions.

10.2.2 Illocutionary modification as a grammatical category

The central point of my analysis of modal-particle-like elements insists on the acknowledgment of illocutionary modification as a grammatical category. Building upon the cross-linguistic considerations formulated by Waltereit (2001, 2006), Hengeveld (2004), Hengeveld & Mackenzie (2008) and Narrog (2012), I defined illocutionary modification as a category capable of bringing together both (the functions of) modal particles in a narrow, language-specific, sense and similar elements found across different languages. In turn, illocution is recognized as a core grammatical domain, the one that maps communicative intentions onto conventionalized linguistic expressions.

> The Illocution of a Discourse Act captures the lexical and formal properties of that Discourse Act that can be attributed to its conventionalized in-

> terpersonal use in achieving a communicative intention. Communicative intentions include such Discourse Act types as calling for attention, asserting, ordering, questioning, warning, requesting, etc., which may map onto Illocutions such as Vocative, Declarative, Imperative, etc. There is no one-to-one relation between a specific communicative intention and an Illocution, as languages may differ significantly in the extent to which they make use of linguistic means to differentiate between communicative intentions. (Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008: 68–69)

With reference to the quote, modal particles are among the linguistic means that contribute to the differentiation between communicative intentions. As the case studies showed, *pure* can specify imperative illocutions as invitations and permissions, *un po'* can specify imperative illocutions as requests and *solo* can specify imperative illocutions as peremptory orders.

Communicative intentions, however, do not exist as such – out of the blue – but are expressed against a background of previous discourse acts, previous assumptions and future steps in discourse. In this respect, modal particles also refer to the underlying conditions of speech acts, specifying how they should be interpreted in a specific (conversational) context. As the case studies showed, *pure* marks directives that redundantly meet certain expectations on the part of the hearer, *un po'* marks an interactional frame where minimal effort on the part of the addressee is required, and *solo* marks directives that contrast with some assumption active in the common ground that the speaker considers not valid in the relevant conversational context. In summary, these elements enrich a basic illocution with subtler communicative intentions and explicit reference to common-ground conditions. In my view, these represent the core functions of the grammatical domain of illocutionary modification.

Illocutionary modification as a category represents an attempt to include pragmatic facts in a model of grammar. Despite being a profitable approach, it must be reminded that pragmatic facts – by referring to the use of language in real contexts, with countless nuances – are not describable as consistently as semantic facts. Describing pragmatic facts often requires reference to real life situations, unspoken things, inferences. Categories such as communicative intentions and common-ground conditions are (theoretically and empirically) different from present tense and imperfective aspect. Nevertheless, they are all formally coded by human languages and – in this perspective – illocutionary modification is worth exploring.

Future research will further investigate this category, both from a theoretical and an empirical point of view. The compatibility between illocutionary mod-

ification and speech act theory represents a possible research direction. With reference to other grammatical domains, the relationship between illocutionary modification and modality is a key point (Narrog 2012). The relationship between illocutionary modification and information structure also represents an underexplored key point: functional developments of focus adverbs such as *pure*, *anche*, and *solo* suggest a strong link between them. Finally, more typological research and cross-linguistic comparison is needed in order to get a better inventory of the linguistic means expressing it across different languages.

10.2.3 Routines in interaction, inferences and illocutive functions

An essential step in the analysis of modal particles is represented by the description of their contexts of usage. I first focused on the types of speech acts they are featured in – that I used as a decisive factor for the classification – and then on the most salient interactional patterns in which modal particles appear. Both factors contribute to shaping the pragmatic functions expressed. In a sense, illocutive functions emerge precisely from inserting speech acts in interactional routines, that is from the interplay between illocutionary force and interactional context.

This has been shown in the discussion about additivity in interaction in Chapter 6 and in the description of the emergent functions of *solo* in Chapter 8. Especially in the latter case – which could benefit from the analysis of questionnaire data – the interactional context (rather than the illocutive context) has proven to be the most decisive factor influencing the emerging meanings, orienting the choice between the "emphatic reading" and the "common ground reading" of the illocutive use of *solo*. In addition to this, the semantic features of the source constructions represent a third factor since they can constrain the range of contexts in which an element can be used and its spread to new contexts. However, semantic features of source constructions should probably not be interpreted as the decisive factor in shaping the emergence of illocutive functions.

This has been shown by the data of the second questionnaire – and especially by the answers of the last two stimuli (backchecking markers and emphatic markers). What is striking in both cases is that a very diverse set of elements can get to express the same pragmatic function. Backchecking markers can emerge from cleft constructions, phasal and temporal adverbs (*già*, *poi*), focus adverbs (*pure*), and comparative adverbs (*più*). Emphatic markers can emerge from degree adverbs (*un po'*), focus adverbs (*solo*), and temporal adverbs (*poi*, *mo'*). It follows from this that a diverse array of semantic features, when inserted in the relevant illocutive and interactional context (and in the appropriate syntactic slot),

can develop the same pragmatic function – because they are put against the same background of contextual inferences and used in similar conversational routines.

In my opinion, this aspect is the decisive factor in orienting the reanalysis process and defining the development path of an adverb. Some semantic features of the source constructions are progressively bleached under the "pressure" of external factors (such as the communicative intention), which in the long term will define the characteristics of the emerging constructions. Other semantic features shall remain unchanged – like the fact that focus adverbs evoke alternatives, or the fact that *già* evokes a transition between phases – but they are reanalyzed in interaction and transferred to the discourse-pragmatic level. This way, modal uses of focus adverbs evoke alternative propositions in the common ground (and not alternative referents/states-of-affairs) and the backchecking *già* evokes a transition between conversational phases (and not between states-of-affairs).

In this perspective, with reference to the model of hearer-based reanalysis described in Chapter 4, the attempt to infer the communicative intent associated with a speech act – and the way it is encoded on grammatical constructions – is the main factor triggering the process of reanalysis and, at the same time, the one that shapes the emerging functions. This holds for many cases of semantic change – in different domains of lexicon and grammar – but appears to be central in the case of illocutionary operators, since they are precisely markers of communicative intent: in a sense, they come to express the routinized communicative process that shaped their functions. As a result, prototypical uses of modal particles can be in the best way described as stereotypes of conversational exchanges.

10.3 A forward look at future research

This work has identified a set of Italian modal particles, described their functions and contexts of use. Moreover, it has hopefully shown the feasibility of an approach which equally considers the functional domain of these elements (illocutionary modification), aspects related to their development (reanalysis of contextual inferences, routines in interaction), and variation (occurrences in regional varieties, variation in their acceptability). If this basic framework will be considered satisfactory, future research will explore these specific issues more deeply and further develop the main categories used. It will revise the case studies presented and conduct new ones, and it will improve the employed methodologies. Future work will refine the theoretical framework in terms of consistency and

compactness – further developing specific concepts such as illocutionary modification, argumentative routines, degrees of conventionalization, and (pragmatic) salience.

On the "grammatical" side – the one this research mostly focused on – more theoretical and empirical work is needed to get to a comprehensive definition of modal particles, modal-particle-like elements and illocutionary modification. On the "conversational" side – occasionally touched upon in this research – more work is needed to further develop a model of hearer-based reanalysis and to improve the understanding of how inferences are processed and managed in interaction. A close analysis of the diversity of conversational environments is perhaps the best way to understand the behavior of modal-particle-like elements: including a conversation-analytical perspective can tell a lot about their use and development. Finally, behind everything else, the question remains of how to define *conventions* in language: how they are negotiated in conversation, routinized in usage, and coded in grammar.

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Name index

Modal particles in Italian

This study investigates the properties of a set of Italian adverbs (among others: *pure* 'also', *solo* 'only', *un po'* 'a bit') that, in specific contexts of use, modify the speech acts in which they appear. On the one hand, these elements specify the way in which a speech act should be interpreted with reference to the specific interactional context, modifying its illocutionary force. On the other hand, they index presupposed/inferred meanings active in the common ground of the interaction, integrating the speech act in the common ground. These functions closely resemble those of the elements that, especially in the German linguistic tradition, are called modal particles. Drawing on original data from Italian – both from the standard language and regional varieties – the goal of the study is to describe the synchronic features of these elements and to explain the emergence of the modal uses. For this purpose, it jointly employs theoretical notions of pragmatics (speech act theory, inferences in interaction), models of language change (reanalysis and conventionalization) and the descriptive tools of sociolinguistic approaches. Through the presentation of four case studies, integrating corpus and questionnaire data, the present work gives a thorough analysis of the modal functions and the contexts of use of the adverbs under investigation: it explores their role at the semantics/pragmatics interface, it discusses their place in a layered model of grammar and it examines their distribution across different language varieties.