

# Vagueness Markers in Italian

Age variation and pragmatic change

Chiara Ghezzi

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# *Transcription conventions*

## **Sequential structure**

[ ] overlap and simultaneous talk

[ ]

## **In- and outbreaths**

°h / h° in- / outbreaths of appr.  
0.2-0.5 sec. duration

°hh / hh° in- / outbreaths of appr.  
0.5-0.8 sec. duration

°hhh / hhh° in- / outbreaths of appr.  
0.8-1.0 sec. duration

## **Pauses**

(.) micro pause, estimated, up to 0.2  
sec. duration appr.

(-) short estimated pause of appr.  
0.2-0.5 sec. duration

(--) intermediary estimated pause of  
appr. 0.5-0.8 sec. duration

(---) longer estimated pause of appr.  
0.8-1.0 sec. duration

(0.5)/(2.0) measured pause of appr.  
0.5 / 2.0 sec. duration (to tenth of a  
second)

## **Other segmental conventions**

e\_eh cliticizations within units

eh, ehm, etc. hesitation markers,  
so-called “filled pauses”

## **Laughter and crying**

haha / hehe / hihi

description of laughter and crying  
<<laughing> > laughter particles  
accompanying speech with indica-  
tion of scope

## **Other conventions**

<<coughing> > with indication of  
scope

( ) unintelligible passage

(xxx), (xxx xxx) one or two unintel-  
ligible syllables

(may i) assumed wording

(may i say/let us say) possible alter-  
natives

## **Sequential structure**

= fast, immediate continuation with  
a new turn or segment (latching)  
self interruption

## **Other segmental conventions**

: lengthening, by about 0.2-0.5 sec.

:: lengthening, by about 0.5-0.8 sec.

::: lengthening, by about 0.8-1.0 sec.

### **Final pitch movements of intonation phrases**

? rising

, slight rising

. falling

↑ marked upstep in intonation

↓ marked downstep in intonation

### **Loudness and tempo changes, with scope**

CAPITAL emphasis

<<f> > forte, loud

<<pp> > pianissimo, very soft

<<all> > allegro, fast

<<len> > lento, slow

<<acc> > accelerando, increasingly faster

<<rall> > rallentando, increasingly slower

## *Introduction*

This study focuses on vagueness markers (VMs), using evidence from spoken data to better understand how people come to terms with vagueness in their interactions. More specifically, using data from Contemporary Italian and a corpus-based methodology, this research applies a broad socio-pragmatic approach to the study of items and constructions employed by different age cohorts of speakers to be intentionally vague. The use of such means is analysed by focusing on the correlations that emerge between synchronic age-graded variation and diachronic pragmatic change. Specifically, the study concentrates on how VMs are used today (in 2010) and were used in the past (in 1976). To describe the characteristic style of use of VMs of each age cohort, the study is informed by empirical data represented by a corpus of listeners' phone-ins to a local radio based in Milan.

Vagueness has been described as a basic property of human language which manifests itself in a number of different ways. The notion of vagueness is part of different traditions and has received numerous definitions (cf. for instance the philosophical tradition, Russel, 1923, or the formal linguistics one, Kennedy, 2011 for an overview). Within Linguistics, vagueness traditionally connects with creativity and is often considered synonymic with indeterminacy and ambiguity (cf. Bülher, 1965; Wittgenstein, 1953; Labov, 1973).

Vagueness can also represent a property of knowledge having fuzzy boundaries, which results in a lack of more precise information by the speaker (cf. Lakoff, 1973). Similarly vagueness can be described as a property of communication if speakers opt for a less than precise rendering of information, despite having the detailed knowledge required (Channell, 1994; Allwood *et alii*, 2014). Voghera (2012) distinguishes between systemic vagueness, deriving from systemic properties of the language,

and intentional vagueness. Following the same line of research, this study argues for an intentional approach to vagueness, which is here intended not as an inherent property of natural language, but as a strategic use of language, through which speakers choose, more or less consciously, to opt for the use of a less than precise expression for different interactional reasons, despite having at their disposal a more precise alternative. This may happen for different reasons, for instance to facilitate the flow of spontaneous, interactional and social conversation, to signify a vague categorization, to express the speakers' attitude towards the text produced, and, possibly, to be polite in order to make the speakers' contributions acceptable to their interlocutors or to potentially minimize their disagreement (cf. Briz Gómez, 2003; Jucker *et alii*, 2003; Waltereit, 2006; Mihatsch, 2010a).

VMs have a procedural value, a metalinguistic and metadiscourse nuance, by which the speakers procedurally signal to their interlocutors a non-literal resemblance between the codified and the intended concepts, through the use of specific markers (cf. Sperber & Wilson, 1995).

VMs are essentially pragmatic in nature and are typically polyfunctional as they can be used to increase the degree of vagueness in the content of a proposition (*C'erano **più o meno** venti persone* 'There were more or less twenty people') or in the speakers' commitment to its truth (*Marco sta male, **credo*** 'Marco is ill, I think'). Their use may eventually result in a weakening of the illocutionary force of a speech act for politeness reasons (*Sei stato **un po'** scortese* 'You were a bit rude').

The use of VMs in daily interaction may respond to different communication needs associated with pragmatic effectiveness and efficiency, with the speakers' social image and social positioning, and, eventually, with the speakers' and the interlocutors' need to maintain a positive social image. Many uses of VMs can be considered as politeness-motivated (Brown & Levinson, 1987), even if politeness remains just an effective strategy whose aim is agreement between interlocutors in social, interactional, and meaning negotiation, rather than the goal itself.

Given the properties of VMs synthesized above, in this research an onomasiologic approach to the study of linguistic means that codify intentional vagueness in conversation is applied. The description and the analysis of different classes of VMs moves from their vagueness function in the direction of the identification of forms that different age-cohorts select to perform such functions.

Furthermore, the research has a broad socio-pragmatic approach to the study of age-graded variation in the use of VMs and of patterns of change in speakers' preferences of use with time, since such forms seem to operate as elements that contribute to characterize speakers' discourse styles.

Considering that VMs are selected among a rich array of linguistically heterogeneous, but intrinsically ephemeral forms, which are continually replaced, it seems plausible to hypothesize that, differently from structures that operate on the phonological or morphological levels, these elements operating at the discourse-pragmatic level are more available to speakers for their individual and social linguistic choices (cf. Bazzanella, 2006; Coulmas, 2005). Therefore, as pragmatic features, VMs represent quite exotic, but good candidates for a study on language variation and change since there is a stable pragmatic continuity of functions over time, but with a number of forms continually being replaced. This property makes them available to speakers' choices, who exploit them strategically to build their own discourse styles.

The main objective of this study is therefore to describe and analyse patterns of synchronic age-graded variation in the use of VMs, how and if this variation can be correlated with diachronic changes in the preferences of use of VMs by different groups of speakers in a time span of 35 years (from 1976 to 2010), and how the social embedding of this variation can eventually have a role in the propagation of these changes.

The research is based on two different, but comparable and balanced, corpora of listeners' phone-ins to a talk radio program (*Microfono aperto*), broadcast from *Radio Popolare*, a private radio based in Milan. The two corpora consist of a collection of telephone conversations of Northern Italian variety between a radio presenter and a caller, both living in Lombardy. The conversations gathered in the corpora took place between 1976-1980 and in 2010, respectively. Each corpus is stratified by age and gender of the caller according to four age-cohorts (young, young adults, adults, and elderly speakers).

The issues of inter-comprehensibility of language between speakers and over time, and of the relationship between synchronic variation and diachronic change is therefore the focus of this research moving from a particular type of pragmatic variable (i.e. VMs), which seems to be more available to speakers' choices.

One objective of this study is to describe and explain variation in the use of VMs within generations of speakers and in the speech community through time, moving from a socio-pragmatic perspective. A second objective is to identify shallow diachronic processes which can explain the peculiarities of developments of pragmatic units, whose function-forms configurations seem less stable than those belonging to other levels of language.

Moving from these objectives, the volume is organized into five chapters.

The opening Chapter is intended as an overview on the characteristics and properties of intentional vagueness in language and of the linguistic means which speakers use to be intentionally vague (i.e. VMs). Moving from studies within the pragmatic tradition with an onomasiologic approach, which investigate the role of VMs in discourse, the Chapter attempts at delimiting this class of elements and takes into consideration relevant parameters to describe and classify the means and strategies that speakers use as VMs. At the pragmatic level markers that indicate an increased degree of vagueness are heterogeneous at different levels. On one hand they may be embodied through different types of linguistic forms, some of which share qualificatory semantic meanings, on the other they may perform a number of different functions in interaction, moving from semantic approximation to hedging of illocution. Finally, these forms may be derived through different types of strategies (e.g. approximation, metadiscourse relativisation, and deictic reference). What emerges from this overview is that VMs represent a strategic use of language that speakers employ to reach a number of interactional goals in order to seek acceptance from their interlocutors of the propositional content of an utterance, of the act of speaking itself, or of the speakers themselves.

The second Chapter contextualizes the study of VMs within the socio-pragmatic tradition, it considers the peculiarities of VMs as discourse-pragmatic features, and sketches the theoretical framework to investigate how, and if, their use is affected by macro-social pragmatic factors associated with the age of speakers. The study of discourse-pragmatic features within a socio-pragmatic perspective represents a recent line of research which requires *ad hoc* methodologies and reference frames. In this Chapter such methodologies and frames are described in relation to the use of VMs and to the way in which the social embedding of variation, particularly the age of speakers, influences their use. Furthermore, the role of socially indexical constellation of meanings associated with age of speakers, and developed by specific types of VMs in the Italian community, is illustrated in detail. The Chapter also takes into consideration the role of the age-identity of speakers in the distribution and propagation of VMs in different communities at shallower levels of time-depth (approximately thirty-five years). It also describes the apparent and real-time perspectives (Labov, 1994) which are used to correlate synchronic variation, within different age cohorts of speakers, to diachronic change, within the speech community.

The third Chapter is devoted to the methodological perspective applied in the analysis and the management of empirical data. The peculiar nature of VMs presented in the previous chapters require the integration of quan-

titative methodologies of analysis, more qualitative methods, and heuristic interpretation of data. This methodological section discusses how the peculiarities of the pragmatic items in focus may be constrained in order to be analysed from a socio-pragmatic perspective, considering the onomasiologic approach adopted and the properties of pragmatic variables. The Chapter also presents the relevant characteristics of the spoken genre considered and of the contexts of interaction taken into consideration in the analysis of data (i.e. listeners' phone ins to a radio talk). It further describes the methodologies employed for corpora balancing and sampling in the light of both the apparent- and real-time perspectives. The system and the criteria for data transcription are described and motivated in detail. The Chapter closes with the description of the Val.Es.Co. model of segmentation of oral conversation used in the tagging of data and with the presentation of the tag sets employed for the analysis of VMs.

The fourth Chapter presents the quantitative and qualitative analysis, as its main aim is to describe how age-variation and patterns of pragmatic change interact in characterizing the use of VMs in different generations of speakers and in different points of reference over time (1976-1980 and 2010). The analysis of data presents and compares (a) at the synchronic level, characteristic uses of VMs among different age cohorts of speakers in the two communities identified (1976 and 2010), and (b) at the diachronic level, how these uses have evolved in the two communities from 1976 to 2010. Each functional class of VMs described in the first Chapter is taken into consideration on the basis of peculiarities of uses and functions in different generations of speakers (qualitative analysis) and then compared to the quantitative distribution of such uses among the different age cohorts. The quantitative analysis not only considers mere occurrences of one form, but also its contexts of use on the basis of the system of tag sets applied to the analysis of the corpus (e.g. the type of unit of discourse in which the form appears, its scope and its position within the same unit).

The last Chapter investigates in detail five case studies in which the development of VMs through the years and in different generations of speakers is analysed. These case studies have been chosen because they are particularly significant both in relation to understanding how age variation, associated with the use of VMs, and pragmatic change interact with each other and how they can be correlated with social indexicality associated with age. The first two case study have an onomasiologic approach as they include the analysis of VMs derived from discourse and pragmatic markers having an exemplification and metadiscourse function, respectively. For each function different types of markers are considered (e.g. *tipo* 'like', *non so* 'I don't know', or *diciamo* 'let's say', *insomma* 'in short,

so and so') in order to identify specific patterns of age-variation and of change of preferences of speakers in their use with time. The other three case studies have a semasiological approach, as they take into consideration specific forms (i.e. *un po'* 'a bit', and *così* 'so', *cioè* 'that is to say'), describe the functions they have developed, and correlate these functions with age-based social stratification and with changes of preferences of speakers over time.

Finally, the concluding remarks take up different topics dealt with in the preceding chapters and describes how synchronic age-based stratification in the use of VMs can be fruitfully correlated with changes in preferences of speakers with time. Furthermore, it is highlighted how the analysis of VMs within a broad socio-pragmatic perspective has benefited from an onomasiologic approach. In particular the identification of different functional classes of VMs (approximation, metadiscourse relativization, and deictic reference) have proven rewarding, not only in the identification of quantitative variation in frequency of use of specific VMs, but also in the identification of characterizing strategies that different age-cohorts employ to be intentionally vague. In some cases these uses have also developed a highly indexical social value in association with the linguistic style of a specific age-cohort.

## 1. *Intentional vagueness and vagueness markers as strategic use of language*

A number of discourse-pragmatic features can be associated with vague use of language. Broadly speaking, vagueness has been described as a basic property of human language which manifests itself in different ways.

Austin (1962: 121) considers vagueness as the perlocutionary effect that occurs when the information the interlocutor receives from the speaker lacks the expected precision. Speakers may opt for a vague expression, instead of a more precise one, for different reasons which are sometimes difficult to pinpoint. For example they may think their interlocutors judge non-vague contributions irrelevant, lacking precise detail, or offensive (Fraser, 2010: 26). They may worry about being accused of giving false information, they may want to create an informal atmosphere, building on common knowledge shared with the interlocutor, or they may try and accommodate memory loss or take time for online planning.

All these explanations may be plausible for the use of the expressions in bold in (1) where the speaker is trying to describe a potentially embarrassing situation in a telephone call to a radio programme.

- (1) =trovarsi in situazioni↑ **cioè**↓ (.) che cominci↑ (.) **un po': non lo so**↑  
hai capito↓ (-) andare (.) **un po'**↑ fuori↑ **più o meno così**↓ (POP  
15\_25\_d\_u\_02068012)  
'finding yourself in situations **like** you begin **a bit, I don't know, you know, go a bit mad more or less like that**'<sup>1</sup>

1. Although the main objective of this study is the analysis of a corpus of listeners' phone-ins to a radio programme, the examples in the first two chapters, which focus on intentional vagueness in conversation (Chapter 1) and on its socio-pragmatic value (Chapter 2), are from a variety of sources which exemplify the functions and uses of vagueness markers in different types of textual genres; examples in the last three chapters

The focus of this study is precisely on a series of expressions that procedurally indicate the use of vague language, i.e. vagueness markers (henceforth VMs). On a linguistic level, these elements represent a formally heterogeneous class that speakers may use to express their attitude towards the text they are producing, to seek their interlocutors' agreement, or potentially to minimize their disagreement, or simply to gear the flow of speech.

This understanding of VMs, implies that vagueness can and should be considered not only an inherent property of natural language, but also linguistic means that speakers use strategically on an interactional level to make their contributions accepted by their interlocutors for a number of different reasons.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, all expressions which somehow increase the degree of vagueness in an interaction can be understood as having procedural value, in the sense intended by Sperber & Wilson (1995), i.e. a metalinguistic and metadiscoursal nuance, by which the speakers procedurally signal to their interlocutors a non-literal resemblance between the codified and the intended concepts through the use of specific markers. In (2) this is prototypically exemplified by the use of *fai* 'do.2SG' to approximate the number of objects.

- (2) (-) tredicimila↓ (.) **fai↓ adesso non so con precisione↓** (POP 15\_25\_s\_d\_02031001p)  
'around thirteen thousand, **I don't know in detail now**'

VMs may imply an increase in the degree of vagueness in the content of a proposition, as in (2) where vagueness refers to a quantity of objects. Similarly, they may also imply a vague speakers' commitment to the truth of a proposition, as in (3), where the use of *credo* 'I believe' partly hides the speakers' responsibility for uttering the proposition. In this context the increase in vagueness of the speaker's commitment is useful to distance from, and therefore hedge, a criticism which represents a face-threatening act for the interlocutor.

are instead only from listeners' phone-ins. Each source is identified by a specific acronym (see also Reference section): POP = corpus of listeners' phone-ins Radio Popolare; ItTenTen16/20 = the Italian web corpus; C-Oral-Rom: integrated reference corpora for Romance languages (Italian section). Other examples are overheard conversations with indication of place and date. For transcription convention of the POP corpus see the transcription conventions.

2. See also Channel (1994), Briz Gómez (2003), Jucker, Smith and Lüdje (2003), Waltereit (2006), Mihatsch (2010a and 2010b), Zhang (2015) in relation to a similar approach to the study of vagueness.

- (3) Questo è normale, però. Non lo puoi massacrare di essemmesse, **credo**.  
(Bergamo, 10.10.2013)  
'This is normal, though. You can't slaughter him with SMSes, **I think**'

The use of these features, therefore, may eventually result in a weakening of the illocutionary force of a whole speech act, as in (3) where the force of the assertion is mitigated by *credo* 'I believe'.

In summary, all the reasons for using VMs, and all their functions in interaction, seem to have to do with pragmatic effectiveness and efficiency, as speakers want their contributions to be accepted in conversation. Their use can be motivated by different needs of the speakers and of their interlocutors. In this sense VMs can be considered politeness-motivated elements, as intended in Brown & Levinson (1987), even if politeness remains just an effective strategy whose aim is agreement between interlocutors on social, interactional, and meaning negotiation, rather than the goal itself.

### 1.1. Vagueness, intentional vagueness, and vagueness markers

Vagueness connects with linguistic creativity and is often considered synonymic with indeterminacy and ambiguity (cf. Bühler, 1965; Wittgenstein, 1953; Labov, 1973). It is considered a property of knowledge having fuzzy boundaries, which results in a lack of more precise information by the speakers (cf. Lakoff, 1973).

On a theoretical level, the notion of vagueness comes into play whenever discussions arise on the criteria of meaning delimitation and on the extension of semantic fuzziness. Vagueness is at the centre of discussions on how it is possible to delimit, on the basis of formal criteria, the use of words such as *young*, *bald*, or *tall* "whose meanings do not show sharp boundaries" (see Voghera & Collu, 2017: 374). In this respect there seems to be some agreement among scholars on the fact that almost all discussion on vagueness centres on trying to 'solve', in some senses, the puzzle posed by the soritical type of reasoning, by elucidating the nature of the real or apparent phenomenon of borderline cases of application of a term and characterizing what can possibly be an "unsharp" boundary. (Ronzitti, 2011: v).

As Voghera & Collu (2017: 374ff) note, even if most theoretical discussions on vagueness focus on problems related to the vague predicates mentioned above (as *bald*, *tall* and so on), vagueness can also be understood as a central feature of the meaning in itself, as recognized by philos-

ophers and linguists (Russell, 1923; Wittgenstein, 1953; Neustupný, 1966; De Mauro, 1982; Paganini, 2008, among others). On one hand the uncertain application and ‘unsharp’ boundaries are not features of a restricted class of words, on the other it is not possible to delimit the meaning extension of any word, without considering the actual context in which it occurs.

Considered within this perspective, vagueness is a ‘systemic’ feature of human language, it is a semiotic property, which goes beyond the semantic domain, pervading all the levels of codification, form and meaning alike.

In relation to the form of language, speech can vary in every respect, according to the speakers’ characteristics, phonotactic context, rhythm and speed of turn-taking, interactive setting, and so on. Both sounds and prosodic units, such as syllables, can manifest different features in relation to the kind of task the speakers accomplish, and thus linguistic units do not always have the same internal properties and clear-cut edges (Voghera & Collu, 2017: 374). Nevertheless, this variation is not an impediment to a successful communication, as both speakers and interlocutors do not rely on the presence of invariant features to access the meaning of utterances. On the contrary they spontaneously adapt their perception process according to physical and social communicative conditions, when necessary.<sup>3</sup> Production and perception thus are both adaptative processes which also relate to the information speakers can produce and derive from non-verbal sources, as for instance gestures (Hawkins, 2004).

As a matter of fact both the speakers and their interlocutors elaborate meanings through and from different external sources: e.g. the context in which the communication takes place, the interactional factors, as interpersonal relations, degree of free turn-taking alternation, and the cultural and ideational presuppositions on which interlocutors can rely on as members of a community (Voghera & Collu, 2017: 376).

Therefore, natural speech is a multidimensional product, which results from the interaction of different systems of signification: context, language, speaker interaction, and cultural background. All the units populating each of these systems can be highly undetermined from a formal point of view, but adequately determined from a communicative point of view.

The communicative conditions determine the degree of discriminability of signs as speakers tend to be highly specific in controlled and formal situations or less specific in informal ones. Therefore, using the terminology of Björn Lindblom (1990: 405), speakers can go from hypo-

3. Voghera & Collu (2017: 375) cite experiments on phoneme restoration, in which listeners are able to perceive sounds that have been deleted, thanks to their capacity to integrate the omitted sounds.

speech to hyper-speech, depending on their and on their interlocutors' exigencies in the given communicative situation. Whenever a sign falls below the threshold of distinctiveness, it becomes vague.

Although this feature of speech is pervasive in language, its role is generally underestimated as the formal representation of accurate speech tends to be considered the 'basic norm'. On the contrary, the use of vague language, in its manifold manifestations, is not a peripheral usage, mostly limited to less controlled diaphasic registers, but is frequent in all registers in natural conditions (Voghera, 2017a).

In this respect, Voghera (2017a, 2017b, 2012) considers how the extreme flexibility of linguistic units, at all levels of codification, and the plasticity of their boundaries make vagueness an intrinsic property of language. Moving from these premises, she considers this basic feature of linguistic expressions as *systemic vagueness* (De Mauro, 1982: 100).

However, this may not be the only way in which vague language is used in conversation, as vagueness may also derive from speaker's choices, be they conscious or unconscious, when they use underspecified linguistic elements. In these cases vague language is exploited as a linguistic resource even if more precise alternatives are available. To differentiate this use of vagueness from 'systemic vagueness' Voghera uses the term *intentional* or *speaker's vagueness* (Voghera, 2012).

The different manifestations of the two kinds of vagueness can be exemplified in examples (4) to (6) from Voghera & Collu (2017: 376).

- (4) John is **bald**.
- (5) John is – **like** – **bald**.
- (6) John is **bald, you know, something like that**.

In (4) systemic vagueness is prototypically exemplified through the vague predicate *bald*. As Black (1937: 430) notes, speakers do not have alternative symbols in the language, and vagueness is a result of the boundary of its extension, but it is not constituted by the extension itself. This implies that vagueness is inherent to the meaning of the sign, for which the speaker has no alternatives.

Instead, in (5) and (6) the speaker is intentionally presenting the information as uncertain (*like*) or approximate (*something like that*), thus augmenting the overall vagueness of the utterance.

Similarly, the same type of vagueness can be used to convert a precise expression in a vague one as is for instance the case in (7), where *tiramisù*, a typical Italian cake made with mascarpone cheese, biscuits, coffee, and cocoa, is turned into something less precise, i.e. more vague, by the use of

*kind of* which signals to the interlocutor that the expression *tiramisù* is not to be interpreted literally.

- (7) È **una specie di** tiramisù (Pavia, 13.5.2010)  
'It's a **kind of** tiramisù'

It is therefore useful to tell apart systemic vagueness, i.e. the existence of vague terms in a language to refer to vague concepts (*bald*), and intentional vagueness, i.e. uses of language that purposely convey vagueness, including both the use of a vague expression to refer to an otherwise non-vague object, and the use of modifiers in order to turn an otherwise non-vague expression into a vague one.

Considered within this perspective, which is interactional and pragmatic in essence, intentional vagueness can be described as a property of communication when, for a number of different reasons, speakers strategically opt for a less than precise rendering of information, despite having the detailed knowledge required and the linguistic resources to render it.

This may happen for a number of different reasons, which lie outside the scope of this research, as for instance, when they want to facilitate the flow of conversation, to signify a vague categorization, to express their attitude towards the text produced, and to be polite in order to make their contributions acceptable to their interlocutors: “[...] varying the level of vagueness may help guide the addressee to make the intended representation of entities and events and to draw intended implications from them.” (Jucker, Smith & Lüdge, 2003: 1739; see also Channell, 1994; Allwood *et alii*, 2014, among others).

In this applicative perspective, vagueness concerns the relationship between ‘symbols’ and ‘symbolised’ that is found in languages governed by rules to which the lack of precision does not represent an issue.<sup>4</sup> Speakers produce vague propositions and speech acts primarily through forms that aim at producing and inducing a vague interpretation within the semiotic exchange. Whenever speakers signal an increase in vagueness, VMs come into play to procedurally codify intentional vagueness.

As such they constitute a heterogeneous class of macro- and micro-strategies, belonging to different linguistic levels, that are used by speakers to protect their linguistic action from various interactional risks. VMs can be generic and ambiguous elements whose meaning can be understood only in the context of interaction as it is prototypically

4. See also Machetti (2006).

exemplified by Eng. *thing*. However, VMs are also otherwise non-vague expressions which are employed strategically to make the codification of elements preceding or following them more vague as is the case of *kind of* in (7).

Speakers resort to VMs to cope interactionally with various communicative tasks. Vague forms may conversationally implicate semantic indeterminacy at the syntagmatic level, approximating the meaning of features, terms, and expressions that precede or follow them, or whole sequences in which they are contained (propositional vagueness). Vagueness may also imply interactional goals that speakers may want to pursue within specific speech acts (illocutive vagueness). Therefore, VMs may be used to make the propositional content of an utterance more or less approximate, as in (7) where *kind of* is used to increase the degree of vagueness in the categorisation of *a cake*.

They can also be used to convey propositional attitude, as is the case of the degree of the speaker's epistemic certainty in relation to the information conveyed in (8). In this case the speaker is hedging the illocutionary force of a speech act, showing uncertainty on its truth conditions.

(8) Mark is ill, **I think**.

The use of VMs may result, therefore, in an approximation of the speaker's evaluation of a situation or in a hedged propositional attitude (i.e. the speaker's level of commitment to a claim).

Part of a speakers' competence therefore implies their ability to interactionally and strategically vary the precision of utterances through the use of specific forms, and to use this variation appropriately.

Moving from these premises, the present chapter introduces theoretical notions which are considered relevant for the identification of a reference frame which describes the functions that VMs can perform in interaction (§ 1.2), the types of VMs that speakers employ (§ 1.3 and § 1.4), the properties of semantic sources of VMs (§ 1.5), and the strategies through which they are used (§ 1.6).

## **1.2. Vagueness markers between semantic approximation and pragmatic hedging**

Scholars' interest in VMs is not new as they were already described by Matteo Peregrini in his treatise *Delle acutezze* ([1639] 1997), where *particelle temperatrici* 'tempering particles' are defined as all the markers

speakers may use to underline their inaccuracy. Peregrini's list of Italian tempering particles includes forms such as *quasi* 'almost', *come* 'like', *forse* 'maybe', *diresti* 'you might say', *siami lecito* 'if I may say', *pare* 'it seems', and *per così dire* 'so to speak, as it were', etc.

The short list of examples in Peregrini's treatise already shows a series of problems that arise in connection with the definition of the category which entails forms and structures belonging to different grammatical categories such as adverbs (*quasi*, *come*), verbs (*siamo lecito*, *diresti*, *pare*), but also nouns such as Contemporary Italian *tipo* lit. 'type', or entire phrases such as *per così dire* 'so to speak'.

The lack of clearly defined boundaries or of shared repertoires of forms used by speakers also generates a series of questions on both a theoretical and a descriptive level, making it difficult to identify some kind of agreement between scholars on the nature and on the boundary of the category. Different problems arise in connection with the fact that it is difficult to find shared benchmarks, since studies diverge in relation to the definitions, languages, and categories taken into consideration, or to the functions analysed, the issues under examination, and the methodology employed.

Differences are already found in the field-specific terminology, since various terms can be used to describe similar linguistic phenomena associated with vagueness. Notions like "hedge" (Lakoff, 1973), "stance marker" (Atkinson, 1999), "understatement" (Hübler, 1983), "downtoner" (Quirk *et alii*, 1985: e.g. 597) and "downgrader" (House & Kasper, 1981) often appear in the literature interchangeably.

Similarly, phenomena associated with vagueness (Channel, 1994) have in other studies been treated under headings such as "hedging" (Kaltenböck *et alii*, 2010), "attenuation" (Gili Fivela & Bazzanella, 2009), "mitigation" (Caffi, 2001, 2007; Stubbs 1983), "evidentiality" (Chafe, 1986), "indirectness" (Tannen, 1982, Lakoff, 1990), and "tentativeness" (Holmes, 1983).

Different approaches may also diverge in the choice of the semantic and pragmatic models used to describe the functional spectrum of VMs. Because of this great variety of approaches, terminology and definitions in the literature, a brief excursus is needed.

The use of VMs has been discussed extensively in the American tradition, beginning with Weinreich (1963: 163), who argued that "metalinguistic operators such as English *true*, *real*, *so-called*, *strictly speaking*, and the most powerful extrapolator of all – *like* – function as instructions for the loose or strict interpretation of designata".

Many VMs have been described under the label of “hedges”, originally introduced by Lakoff in (1973). The notion started out primarily as a semantic concept, drawing on the developments of prototype theory in the early 1970s (Berlin & Kay, 1969; Rosch, 1973). At the time, interest in the category was concentrated on the semantic properties of the elements involved (including the English expressions *rather*, *sort of*, *strictly speaking* and *technically speaking*) and on their capacity to modify the boundaries of a concept. Lakoff (1973: 195) defines a hedge as a word “whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy”.

As Fraser (2010: 16-17) points out, already in Lakoff’s perspective the notion also involved the weakening or the reinforcement of a particular expression’s membership of a given category.<sup>5</sup> As exemplified in Lakoff (1973) with English *sort of*, the hedged value of the modified unit reveals different layers of category membership (Fraser, 2010: 17):

- |      |                              |                                   |
|------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| (9)  | A robin is sort of a bird.   | [false, no questions it’s a bird] |
| (10) | A chicken is sort of a bird. | [true, or very close to true]     |
| (11) | A penguin is sort of a bird. | [true, or close to true]          |
| (12) | A bat is sort of a bird.     | [false, or very close to false]   |
| (13) | A cow is sort of a bird.     | [false]                           |

The qualification of the truth is rejected in (9), since a *robin* is a prototypical bird, while it is accepted for (10) and (11), because the peripheral and non-prototypical concepts *chicken* and *penguin* can be considered non-prototypical birds owing to the use of the hedge *sort of*; the qualification of truth is again rejected when the animal is not a bird (13) or not much of one (12).

All the examples analysed by Lakoff involve predicate adjectives or nominals in declarative sentences, which also affect the truth value of the whole proposition modified by the hedge. This feature led Fraser (2010: 17) to call this specific type of weakening “propositional hedging”. Lakoff also showed that hedges are context-dependent and have a pragmatic value because “they interact with felicity conditions of utterances and with rules of conversation” (Lakoff, 1973: 213).

These notions were further developed in Fraser (1975) and Brown & Levinson (1987) to include not only the propositional level, but also the speech act level. Specifically, Fraser (1975) examined the concept of

5. Both weakening and reinforcement actually involve scalar rather than discrete membership.

“hedged performative” on the basis of the fact that certain performative verbs, such as *promise* and *say/tell*, can be hedged by modal verbs (as in *I can promise you, I have to say that*) so that they result in a general weakening of the illocutionary force of the whole speech act.

The functions connected with such uses, which Fraser (2010: 18) defines as “speech act hedging”, were also analysed in detail by Brown & Levinson (1987: 145) in connection with politeness phenomena. The prevailing approach in such contributions is that hedges affect the degree of illocutionary force of the speech act and, more generally, the speaker’s commitment towards the utterance. By weakening the illocutionary force of an expression, the speakers are signalling that they are not adhering to one of Grice’s (1975/1979) maxims, as in (14), where the speaker is not adhering to the maxim of quality.<sup>6</sup>

(14) This is where Mark lives, **I think**.

Brown & Levinson (1987) discuss the use of hedges as means of negative politeness, and only marginally do they mention their use as positive politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 116). Today, though, the term *hedge* has a broader meaning and includes expressions that affect the truth value of the propositional content and that can be considered as means of expressing positive politeness (cf. for instance Kaltenböck *et alii*, 2010; Beeching, 2007).

In many studies following Lakoff’s (1973), the emphasis has been on the functions of hedging in social interaction between discourse participants. Hedging has been approached as a pragmatic rather than a purely semantic phenomenon. Phenomena associated with hedging have been perceived as contributing to the interpersonal function of language, by which speakers may “recognize the speech function, the type of offer, command, statement, or question, the attitudes and judgments embodied in it, and rhetorical features that constitute it as a symbolic act” (Halliday & Hasan, 1989: 45).

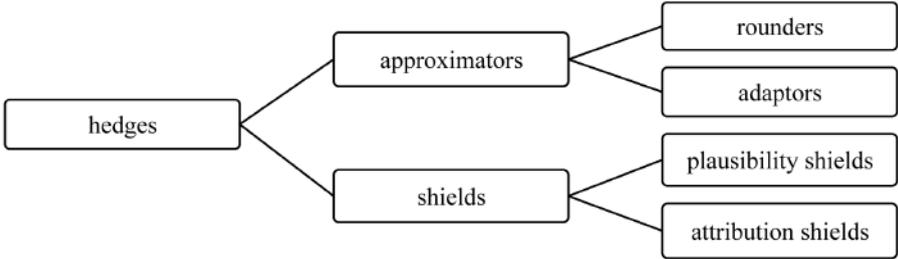
Since hedges also serve to comment on what is being said, they have been studied as a feature of metadiscourse, i.e. “discourse that calls attention either to the relationship between the author and the claims in the text

6. Other uses may imply non-adherence to the maxim of quantity, as in the case of expressions like *ten, more or less*; non-adherence to the maxim of relevance, as in the case of the marker *sorry to interrupt, but* which speakers may use to introduce a change in topic (*Sorry to interrupt, but did you manage to go in that place I told you?*); or non-adherence to the maxim of manner, as in the case of *I mean* and *you know* in *It is the same thing, I mean, you know, it does not change much*.

or to the relationship between the author and the text’s readers” (Geisler, 1994: 11).

This change of perspective is already clear in Prince *et alii* (1982), who contribute to the discussion on hedging through the distinction of two types of fuzziness and the corresponding cognitive and linguistic strategies. The scholars address hedging strategies by dividing them into “approximators” and “shields” (cf. Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1 - Prince et alii’s (1982) model of hedging strategies



Approximators refer to the propositional content proper and contribute “to the interpretation [of the utterance] by indicating some markedness, that is, non-prototype, with respect to class membership of a particular item” (Fraser, 2010: 19). This group of strategies is further subcategorised into: “adaptors”, which refer to class membership and modify a term to suit a non-prototypical situation, as in (15); and “rounders”, which convey a range which is used to round measurements of different kinds, as in (16).

- (15) It was **sort of** blue colour.
- (16) There were **about** fifty people at the conference.

The second group of strategies consists of “shields”, which “affect the pragmatics by inducing implicatures conveying markedness with respect to speaker commitment” (Prince *et alii*, 1982: 86). Shields pertain to the relationship between the propositional content and the speaker or, more precisely, the speaker’s commitment to the truth of the proposition. This type of fuzziness corresponds to Fraser’s (2010) definition of “speech act hedging” (cf. example 17).

- (17) **I think** his feet were blue (Prince *et alii*, 1982: 85).

This second group of strategies is further subdivided into: “plausibility shields”, which relate to epistemic modality by indicating different degrees of uncertainty on the part of the speaker (as in 17); “attribution shields”, which relate to evidentiality by attributing the degree of uncertainty towards a proposition to another party, as in (18).

(18) **Some say** Mark was ill.

The many interconnections between the expression of epistemic modality and evidentiality have been the focus of a number of studies.<sup>7</sup> Halliday (1994: 356) refers to epistemic modality as “the area of meaning that lies between yes and no”, taking in “either yes or no” and “both yes and no”. Hyland (1998: 3) notes that vague reference is part of epistemic modality since “it indicates an unwillingness to make an explicit and complete commitment to the truth of propositions”. The same strategies seem to be at work in relation to degrees of evidentiality. Bongelli & Zuczkowski (2008) underline the fact that epistemic and evidential markers communicate certainty and uncertainty: epistemicity is communicated directly, while evidentiality indirectly. Fetzer (2011) suggests that “when a piece of information is communicated as certain (epistemic modality), it is also communicated as known (evidentiality), thus the speakers can provide evidence to account for the validity of their conversational contribution”.

Moving from Prince *et alii*'s (1982) categorization, Hübler (1983) also considers the reasons underlying the use of hedges to be pragmatic in nature. In particular, he differentiates between “understatements” and “hedges”. In his perspective, the former modify the phrastic level (i.e. the propositional content), the latter modify the neustic level (i.e. the speakers' attitudes towards their utterance).

Quirk *et alii* (1985: 598) similarly focus on the propositional level and the speakers' attitudes towards the utterance by defining “downtoners” as “expression diminishers” (e.g. *somewhat*), which “seek to express only part of the potential force of the item concerned”.

In German literature,<sup>8</sup> the notion of *Abschwächung* ‘attenuation/weakening’ is used to describe a weakening in the degree of the illocutionary force of a speech act; a reduction of the speaker's and hearer's obligations; or, more generally, a weakening of participants' interactional expectations.

7. This is for example the prevailing approach to the analysis of epistemic parentheticals in Chafe (1986) and Simon-Vandenberg (1997, 2000).

8. As for instance in Meyer-Hermann & Weingarten (1982), Langner (1994), and Waltereit (2006).

In this perspective, VMs can have scope over (a) the realisation of the illocution or (b) the truth value of a proposition, implying the weakening of the reference act (e.g. the categorisation of objects or states), and the weakening of the predication (e.g. claims to the truth of assertions about objects or states; Langner, 1994: 57).

The notion of *Abtönung* ‘downtoning’, often associated with studies on *Abtönungspartikeln* ‘downtoning particles’, is also connected with similar vagueness phenomena as Waltereit (2006: 47) notes in relation to the downtoning forms in Romance languages:

*Abtönungsformen im Allgemeinen, haben die Funktion, die illokutive Funktion ihrer Trägeräußerung in Bezug auf den jeweiligen Diskurs zu perspektivieren. Sie zeigen an, in welchem Maße der Sprecher Zustimmung, Widerstand oder andere Reaktionen erwartet und wie er diese Reaktion in Bezug auf den bis dahin erreich[t]en Stand des Diskurses rechtfertigt.*

‘Downtoning forms, in general, have the function of perspectivising the illocutionary function of their referent in relation to the discourse. They indicate to what extent the speaker expects approval, resistance, or other reactions, and how he/she justifies this reaction to the state of the discourse that has been reached’.

The position of Prince *et alii* (1982), Hübler (1983), and Langner (1994) is further developed into a tripartite model by Caffi (2001, 2007), who identifies three different domains involved in the codification of vagueness, which she treats under the term “mitigation”. These domains are represented by the proposition, the illocution in its various dimensions, and the deictic origin of the utterance. Caffi clusters three corresponding classes of strategies around these three domains and identifies “bushes”, which have scope over propositions; “hedges”, which operate over the illocution; and “shields”, which refer to the deictic *origo* of the utterance.

Bushes, which in Caffi’s view (2007: 99) seem to correspond to Prince *et alii*’s approximators, operate on the propositional content by making referring terms or predicates less precise. In bushes, mitigation indexes the propositional content, Austin’s locutionary act, which is typically made less precise. The attenuating operation centres on the interactional parameter of ‘precision’ (Bazzanella *et alii*, 1991), the pragmatic counterpart of Lakoff’s logico-semantic concept of “fuzziness” which is at the basis of his notion of hedge (Caffi, 2007: 98).

Caffi considers bushes to be vagueness-generating devices connected to Austin’s second B-felicity condition, which states that the procedure must be executed completely for the act to ‘take effect’. In (19) for instance, the use of *eccetera* enables the speaker not to make a complete list of all small and medium cities in Italy.

- (19) Il Supercampionato taglierebbe fuori dal grande calcio Bergamo, Lecce, Como, Pisa **eccetera, insomma** tutte le medie e piccole città (ItTenTen 2016)  
'The Super League would cut off from the important football Bergamo, Lecce, Como, Pisa, **etc., in short** all medium and small cities'

In Caffi's model, hedges index the illocution and cover both the speaker's commitment and the indication of the illocutionary force. If hedges are centred around the opposition between precision and imprecision of the propositional content, hedges focus on the contrast between precision and imprecision to reduce or hide responsibility for the utterance, as in the case of (20) where the high price is considered not to be within reach of everyone.

- (20) Tutto ciò che porta con sé il mitico bollino rosso ha prezzi, **diciamo**, non è per tutti, (ItTenTen 2016)  
'All that brings with it the legendary red band has prices, **let's say**, not for everyone'

It is possible to say that Caffi's hedges seem to subsume Prince *et alii*'s (1982) plausibility shields and Fraser (1975)'s hedged performatives.

Shields, which are only partially comparable with Prince *et alii*'s (1982) attribution shields, shift any deictic component of the utterance in various ways, e.g. with the deletion of the 'I-here-now' of the utterance or the introduction of a new speaker. Shields therefore result in an overall dislocation of responsibility, as exemplified in (21).<sup>9</sup>

- (21) **Si deve aggiungere** poi che lo spauracchio di essere mandati nelle città sottomarine ha fatto diminuire immensamente il numero dei delitti (ItTenTen 2006)  
'Moreover **it must be added** that the scarecrow of being sent to the submarine cities has decreased immensely the number of crimes.'

Diewald (2006b) returns to a binary model, referring to Hyland (1998), who distinguishes between content-oriented and reader-oriented hedges. In Hyland's model, the former group of strategies can be further subdivided into "accuracy-oriented hedges" and "reader-oriented hedges". Diewald further develops this model and introduces a distinction between hedges

9. The definition of "shield" is considered by Caffi (2010: 192) herself to fit perfectly with Goffman's (1979) idea of different kinds of footing, typically realized by impersonalization strategies.

which are *perspektivierend*, relating to the referential accuracy of an expression (subsuming Prince *et alii*'s (1982) approximators), and those that are *charakterisierend*, assessing the validity, factuality, or appropriateness of an utterance (reflecting Prince *et alii*'s (1982) shields).

Although the value of each model is not under discussion, in line with Kaltenböck *et alii* (2010: 6), it is believed here that in “actual language use individual linguistic items may prove difficult to pigeon-hole, often as a result of their multifunctionality”.

This idea has led to a progressively more comprehensive view of strategies that come into play in the codification of vagueness. Considering the development through the years, it is possible to notice that the progressive widening of definitions is a result of the increased attention to these strategies from various linguistic disciplines, especially applied linguistics, pragmatics, and lately sociolinguistics, which have approached the notion from different but overlapping perspectives.<sup>10</sup>

The objective of this discussion on the main theoretical approaches to (intentional) vagueness in language has been to highlight how different dimension of analysis often overlap, rendering the description and interpretation of functions of VMs extremely confused. These dimensions, which are nonetheless interconnected, include the interaction between the propositional and the illocutionary levels, as well as the social functions performed by different forms in relation to participants in interaction. Moreover, forms that imply a certain degree of vagueness can be derived through different strategies which are instantiated through linguistic forms belonging to different levels of language.

The class of VMs, therefore, shows functional, formal, and strategic heterogeneity. On this heterogeneity rests the terminological choice “vagueness marker”, which has the advantage of representing a sufficiently general hypernym that subsumes the strategies and forms employed, together with the pragmatic functions performed by them.

### 1.3. Vagueness markers and functional heterogeneity

As regards the functions performed by VMs in interaction, it is relevant to take into account the notion of intensity. In a pragmatic perspective, intensity reunites different strategies that speakers may employ to

10. Consider for example works by Andersen (2001), Tagliamonte & Denis (2010), Tagliamonte & Roberts (2005), Cheshire (2007), and Murphy (2010) on English, Lauwereyns (2000, 2002) on Japanese, Jørgensen (2009) on Spanish, and Bechting (2002, 2009) on French.

modulate the illocutionary force of speech acts (Gili Fivela & Bazzanella, 2009: 14).

Although intensity permeates language use and can be commonly found in spoken language, it is a difficult linguistic feature to define: “At the heart of social and emotional expression is the linguistic feature of intensity. It is a difficult feature to describe precisely. Intensity by its very nature is not precise: first, because it is a gradient feature, and second, because it is most often dependent on other linguistic structures” (Labov, 1984: 43).

According to Gili Fivela & Bazzanella (2009: 15), if intensity is the modulation of the illocutionary force of a speech act in a communicative exchange both in the direction of weakening and in the direction of intensification, then three relevant dimensions result. The first is represented by the propositional content that may be modulated in terms of quantity (as for instance It. *un po’* ‘a bit’ vs *molto* ‘a lot’) or quality (as It. *circa* ‘around’ vs *esattamente* ‘exactly’). The second relates to the speakers’ attitude, which includes the expression of emotions, their subjective stance, epistemic modality, and different degrees of subscription to the truth of the proposition. The third dimension concerns the interactional level, i.e. the sociolinguistic characteristics of participants, the situational and linguistic context, and the perlocutionary effects that speakers may want to obtain.

The functional spectrum of intensity can therefore be considered to be a scale, a gradient phenomenon, moving between the poles of “intensification (or aggravation)” and “mitigation (or minimization)”, and having at its centre the zero, or the “unmarked” expression (Labov, 1984: 40).

The speaker can choose from a range of gradient linguistic expressions, varying in their strength, to weaken or intensify different elements. Speakers may decide to weaken the recipient’s obligation to perform the requested act (i.e. its deontic value) through hedged statements with a weakened illocutionary force (most frequently directive and exertive speech acts, such as orders or requests), thereby reducing the potential face-threat to both the speaker and the interlocutor, as in (22).<sup>11</sup>

- (22) **Fermati un attimo**, solo per dire che Marco non era il ragazzo con la maglietta blu. (Bergamo, 20.3.2018)  
‘**Stop for a moment**, just to say that Mark was not the guy in the blue shirt’

Speakers may also employ hedged statements in inherently face-threatening illocutions (e.g. criticisms or reproaches, as in 23). In these contexts the speaker, through a reduction of the illocutionary force of the speech

11. Caffi (2007: 220) considers this type of weakening as having a “lenitive” value.

act, may aim at protecting the interlocutor's negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). These uses of hedged speech acts can be considered truly politeness (or impoliteness)-motivated phenomena<sup>12</sup>.

- (23) Hai una visione dell'Europa medievale da Alice nel paese delle meraviglie, **scusa se te lo dico** (ItTenTen 2016)  
'You have a vision of Medieval Europe from Alice in Wonderland, **I'm sorry to tell you**'

Speakers may also decide to weaken their own commitment to the truth of the propositional content conveyed in the utterance in order to reduce the validity of assertives and veridictives, and therefore to weaken a judgment or to limit its scope. In these cases VMs have an epistemic and/or evidential value, as in examples (24) and (25) below.<sup>13</sup>

- (24) che piaccia o non piaccia **magari** qualcuno si sente a disagio [a fare quel lavoro] (ItTenTen 2016)  
'Whether you like it or not, **maybe** someone feels uncomfortable [doing that job]'
- (25) Se devo dirla tutta **potrebbero anche** cercare un lavoro. (Pavia, 30.2.2020)  
'If I have to say it all, **they could even** look for a job'

Through this type of weakening speakers reduce the "obligation to take responsibility for what they are saying, which can entail the risk of losing face" (Caffi, 2007: 222).<sup>14</sup> This last strategy fulfils Grice's (1975/1979) second sub-Maxim of Quality: "Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence". As Caffi (2007: 222) suggests, this can either refer "to the validity of the act's propositional content or to an attitude of uncertainty on the part of the speaker toward this content for the interlocutor's benefit". The ambivalence is often difficult to disentangle, as it is clear from (26) in which both interpretations are possible.

- (26)  
A: Carlo non è venuto perché stava male.  
B: Carlo non è venuto perché non aveva voglia, **credo**  
'A: Charles did not come because he was ill.  
B: Charles did not come because he did not want to, **I believe**'

12. On the impolite, or better, on the mock-polite use of this type of strategy in Italian see Ghezzi & Molinelli (2019).

13. Strategies that speakers may use include the use of epistemic modality and evidentiality.

14. Caffi (2007: 222) considers this type of weakening as having a "tempering" value.

The functional spectrum of intensity can be synthesized as in Figure 1.2 below.

Figure 1.2 - Functional spectrum of intensity

	hedging ←	→ boosting	
<b>deontic value</b>	Parla <i>pure</i> . 'You may speak!'	Parla. Speak.	Parla, <i>dai</i> . Come on, speak!'
<b>politeness value</b>	Renditi conto che sei <i>un poco</i> arrogante. 'Realize you are a <b>little</b> arrogant'	Renditi conto che sei arrogante. 'Realize you are arrogant'	Renditi conto che sei <i>davvero</i> arrogante. 'Realize you are <b>really</b> arrogant'
<b>epistemic/ evidential value</b>	I treni oggi sono diversi, <i>mi sembra</i> . 'Trains are different today, <b>it seems to me</b> .	I treni oggi sono diversi. 'Trains are different today'	I treni oggi sono diversi, <i>di sicuro</i> . 'Trains are different today, <b>for sure</b> .

Intensity is of course strictly related to intentional vagueness. As Voghera & Collu (2017: 378) note, many gradable words, traditionally labelled as intensifiers, can be considered VMs. For instance this is the case of the Italian diminutive, which typically scales downwards the properties referred to, but is often used by speakers to render vague the semantic intension of the word it refers to, as in (27) where *oretta* lit. 'hour.DIM' does not refer to a period of time shorter than an hour, but means 'approximately an hour of time', thus implying uncertainty of the speaker between *un'oretta* and *due ore* 'two hours'.

(27)

B: fra quanto ritornate? (Voghera & Collu 2017: 378)

'when will you come back'

A: e credo fra **un'oretta** due ore

'and I think in a **hour. DIM**, two hours'

Voghera & Collu (2017) take into consideration Caffi's model in relation to the functions of vagueness in communication, by identifying different reasons why speakers may choose to be vague in conversation. According to their model, speakers may choose to be vague for three main communicative reasons.

The first, which they label *informational vagueness*, derives from the fact that speakers may lack some information, as they may have missing or

incomplete knowledge on a topic. This type of vagueness often results in a vague propositional content, as in (28).

- (28) Ci **saranno** state **un centinaio** di persone, **non so con precisione**.  
(Bergamo, 27.5.2016)  
'There **might have** been **around** a hundred people, **I do not know exactly**'

The second reason, labelled *relational vagueness*, involves the speakers' attitude towards the text they are producing or the relationship with their interlocutors. Sometimes speakers prefer not to explicate the degree of personal authorship or agreement with their utterance, reducing the overall illocutionary force of the speech act or showing a low degree of commitment.

The first of these functions typically relates to politeness, as in these contexts vagueness is a strategy used to hedge potentially face-threatening acts. In these cases a VM may be used to reduce the force of an assertion, as in (29), or to not to openly accept or refuse invitations or offers, as in (30). Other cases of relational vagueness can be found in reported speech when speakers want to express the role of a messenger rather than that of the author of the information, as in (31).

- (29) siamo **un po'** imbarazzati (Voghera & Collu, 2017: 377)  
'we are **a bit** embarrassed'
- (30) **forse** domenica possiamo mangiarne **un pochettino** allora (Voghera & Collu, 2017: 377)  
'**maybe** on Sunday we can eat **a bit** of it then'
- (31) **pare** sia molto più bello del film (Voghera & Collu 2017: 377)  
'**apparently** it is much better than the movie'

The third reason, i.e. *discourse vagueness*, is related to the fact that speakers may have exigencies due to online planning and production processes, most commonly due to the contemporaneity of planning and speaking in spontaneous conversation. The lack of time in real time communication, often prompts speakers to select multifunctional and general nouns and verbs, as well as polysemic constructions, which tend to have a vague interpretation. This preference is clear at every level of encoding and results in texts with a high frequency of general nouns (*cosa*, *cosa* 'thing'), deictic devices (e.g. *così* lit. 'like this'), discourse and pragmatic markers etc., whose role is often to cover the programming duration time.

- (32) danno più importanza alla religione **no come\_** manifestazione **tipo\_** eh insomma delle feste **così** (Voghera & Collu, 2017: 377-378)  
'they put more relevance on religion **don't they?** **Like** an event **like** ehm well of celebrations **like that**'

Both Caffi's (2007) and Voghera & Collu's (2017) approaches, which represent the theoretical foundations of this study, have much in common, as Caffi's "mitigation" seems roughly to correspond to Voghera's idea of vagueness. For instance Voghera's informational vagueness seems to correspond to Caffi's "bushes", while relational vagueness associated (a) with politeness effects corresponds to Caffi's "hedges", and (b) with reported speech, to Caffi's "shields".

However, regardless of correspondences between labels used in the two approaches, what is relevant to stress here, as Voghera & Collu (2017: 378) themselves note, is the relevance of a 'holistic' approach which does not give importance to the separation between semantic and pragmatic effects of vagueness and /or mitigation.

As Caffi (2007: 49-50) suggests, in specific contexts, propositional approximation leads to illocutionary weakening, just as many bushes can make a hedge. In other words, the commitment to the truth of the proposition in assertive acts is one of the dimensions of the whole speech act, i.e. the dimension of epistemic certainty.

Voghera & Collu (2017) also note that their three types of intentional vagueness can often combine and overlap. On one hand, informational vagueness often occurs in utterances that have a lower degree of illocutionary force, i.e. relational vagueness. On the other hand, speakers may use informational vagueness to cover their commitment; therefore, showing a lack of information can represent a strategy to downgrade responsibility.

In this perspective, VMs can be conceptualised as communicative strategies employed by speakers to obtain the acceptance of their interlocutors not only in relation to the process of uttering (the level of illocution) but also in relation to its product, the utterance, and its propositional content. Consider, for instance, the different interpretation of examples (33) and (34):

- (33) Alla festa c'erano cinquanta persone, **penso**  
'At the party there were fifty people, **I think**'
- (34) Alla festa c'erano **circa** cinquanta persone.  
'At the party there were **around** fifty people'

In (33) the use of *penso*, has scope over the whole utterance and relates to the force of the illocution. In these contexts VMs have the function of reducing the speaker's subscription to the illocutionary force of the utterance. On the contrary, in (34) the marker *circa* has scope over the next noun phrase and is used to reduce the precision of its content. In such contexts, forms have scope over reference and predication (i.e. the propositional level) and aim at reducing the speaker's commitment to the propositional content of the utterance, which is made less precise. However, this imprecision is used pragmatically, not semantically, by the speaker to reduce or hide responsibility for the utterance.

The resulting vagueness is often, but not exclusively, related to categorisation which is approximated to different degrees. These can imply (a) numerical values inside the category (example 35), (b) lexical conceptual meaning of the category (example 36), (c) the process of categorization itself (example 37), or (d) the referent (example 38).

(35) Ha mangiato **tipo** cinque fette di torta.

'He ate **like** five slices of cake'

(36) Questo è un cane **tipo** da caccia.

'This is, **like**, a hunting dog'

(37) Ho comprato la pasta **e cose varie**.

'I bought pasta **and other things**'

(38) Te l'ho spento, **il coso**.

'I switched it off, **the thing**'

Therefore, the focus of markers over the propositional content or the force of the illocution is not always clearly identifiable, as it is not always possible to separate the levels of locution and of illocution. For instance in (39) it is extremely difficult to decide whether the scope of the VM is operating over the propositional content or the illocution. In many cases, therefore, the decision is only a matter of subjective interpretation.

(39) **mi sembra quantomeno un po'** faticosa, la tua proposta.

'your proposal **seems to me at least a bit** tiring'

Thus, it is often inappropriate to sharply delimit the different functions of VMs, as different components of a speech act, cannot always be separated easily. Moreover, if the two levels of locution and illocution are not always neatly separable, it is relevant to stress that different VMs, depending on their nature, may be used with different scope (e.g. over the locution or the illocution). For instance, VMs operating on the propositional level tend to

have scope over smaller units, such as minimal constituents or phrases (e.g. examples 34-38), while markers operating on the illocution level may have wider scope over speech acts or discourse units (example 33).

This working hypothesis is helpful in understanding the dimensions of variation to the analysis of VMs and is based on the systematisation of the spectrum of functional categories of VMs on the basis of a prototype model that considers the degree of integration of an element in an utterance to be a pertinent factor. It involves concentrating on a formally distinct class of items that may rather belong to a much larger functional continuum.<sup>15</sup>

In examples (40-44), depending on the context, the same marker derived from the taxonomic noun *tipo* ‘type’ can have different functions and degrees of integration in the utterance, and, therefore, scope over different discourse units.

- (40) anche dopo **tipo** tre o quattr’ore da [/] dall’operazione / (CORifamd110)  
‘even also after **like** three or four hours after the surgery’
- (41) a parte le aste più particolari / **tipo** quelle che vengono fatte all’Istituto / vendite giudiziarie (CORifammn09)  
‘apart from the more particular auctions, **like** those made at the Institute, judicial sales’
- (42) [<] <anche se si tiene solo per due tre mesi / **tipo**> // (CORifammn09)  
‘even if you keep it only for two three months, **like**’
- (43) **tipo** / uno viene duecentottanta euro / e l’altro trecento / (C-Oral-Rom ifamd118)  
‘**like**, one is two hundred and eighty euros and the other three hundred’
- (44) e lui fa **tipo** ‘Voi facevate aaah. E noi facevamo aaaah!’ Non so se avete capito la scena XD (ItTenTen16)  
‘and he goes **like** “you said aaah and we said aaaah!” I do not know if you have understood the scene’

In (40) and (41), *tipo* is integrated into the structure of the utterance and has scope locally over a phrase (*tre o quattr’ore* and *aste*, respectively), while in examples (42) and (43) *tipo* is less integrated in the utterance (as is signalled by prosody) and has scope over the whole proposition; in (44), however, the same expression has scope over the whole following speech act.

Taking into consideration the specific structure within which VMs are positioned, together with their degree of integration, makes it possible to

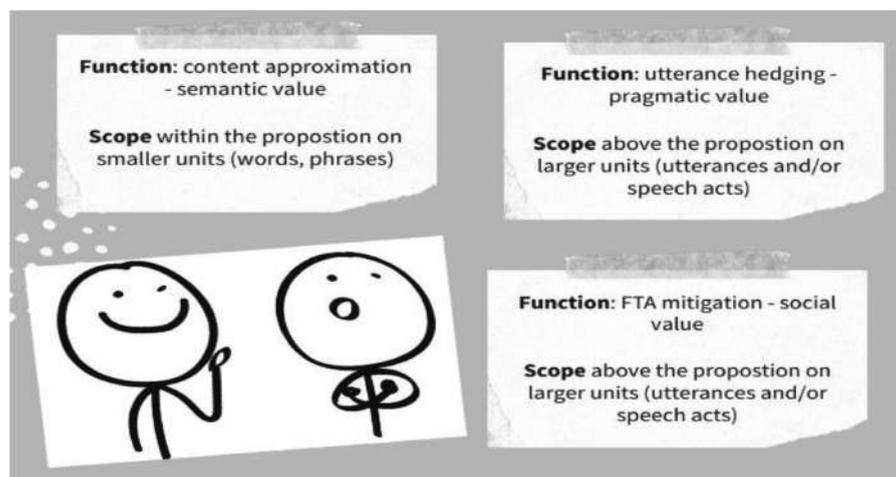
15. In this regard see also Fischer (2006: 4) who suggests that too precise a separation of different forms such as “speech routines, pauses, adverbs, etc., which are functionally very similar, may lead us to too narrow a picture”.

differentiate categories which are more integrated into the syntactic structure of the host utterance and operate as particles locally (as they tend to have scope over a word, phrase or proposition), from those which are syntactically, semantically, and prosodically less integrated and operate with discourse or pragmatic marking functions over speech acts or interventions, domains and levels of reference (i.e. thematic structure, extralinguistic activities, or interactional models).

To summarize, functionally VMs can be considered a heterogeneous class of elements at various levels. Firstly, speakers may use VMs with a number of different motivations, to procedurally highlight that they lack more precise information, they prefer to lessen the degree of personal authorship or agreement with their utterance, they have exigencies due to online planning and production processes that prompt them to use words with a higher degree of vagueness (e.g. multifunctional and general nouns and verbs or polysemic constructions). Secondly, VMs are placed at the intersection between propositional approximation, hedging, and mitigation proper. Hence, they are used to increase the degree of vagueness on the propositional level (semantic value), to weaken the illocutionary force of an utterance or the degree of the speakers commitment to its truth (pragmatic value), and to diminish the risk speakers run when uttering a strong speech act, for instance a strong or firm assertion (social value).

It is possible to schematize the functional spectrum of VMs as in the Figure 1.3 below.

Figure 1.3 - Functional spectrum of vagueness markers



#### 1.4. Vagueness markers and formal heterogeneity

Apart from operating at different levels, VMs are also formally diverse, as they can belong to different grammatical categories, such as nouns (*tipo* ‘type’), adverbs (*circa* ‘around’), verbs (*fai* ‘do.2SG’), etc. Furthermore, these markers may also derive from different levels of language, for instance specific morphological or syntactic choices, such as the use of the plural form in (45), or negation in combination with a pseudo-cleft sentence in (46).

- (45) la zona di porta ticinese↑ **diciamo che** è la zona↑ °h eh: **diciamo**↑ una delle più CARATTERISTICHE↓ di milano. (POP 66\_90\_s\_d09231003)  
‘The Porta Ticinese area, **let us say that** it is the area, **let us say**, one of the most characteristic of Milan’
- (46) e poi: ci son migliaia di situazioni↓ no↑ **non non è che per forza sia così**↓ (15\_25\_d\_u\_02068012)  
‘And then you have a thousand of situations, haven’t you, **it’s not necessarily that way**’

This happens as speakers formally derive VMs through strategies that have a different ‘linguistic codification’ (cf. § 1.6 below).

The types and number of linguistic means that speakers may use to codify vagueness vary depending on the *medium* and the context. For spoken language, the interactional and social dimensions are particularly relevant, especially in relation to peculiarities of the context (i.e. the phonic-acoustic channel and the synchrony of production-reception). However, as Clemen (1997: 6) stresses, in principle there is no limit to the linguistic expressions that can be used as VMs. Almost any item can function as a VM in a specific context, as no item is inherently a VM, but acquires this quality depending on the communicative context and co-text. As a consequence, no clear-cut list of VMs is possible.

However, the use of many VMs clusters around specific linguistic means which explicitly force a vague interpretation of an expression as VM. This class of elements includes heterogeneous forms codified at the interface between grammar and lexicon (cf. also Plank, 2004: 168). In this respect it is relevant to stress that each parameter typically clusters with others and creates ‘compound’ forms. For instance, prosody may combine with specific lexical, morphological, and syntactic choices, often in combination with nonverbal information. Different linguistic levels can play a relevant role as sources of VMs.

Phonetic and phonological aspects, in connection with prosody, have both linguistic and paralinguistic functions. Modification of prosody, tone,

and volume of the voice, for example, can represent important means of communicating variation of intensity (both in terms of weakening and reinforcement).<sup>16</sup> Prosody can encode vagueness, for example in opposing closed and open lists of objects. In the following examples, the rising intonation in (47) invites the interlocutor to add to the list of people an unspecified number of further persons, while the falling intonation in (48) suggests that the list could be limited to the persons named.

(47) I had lunch with Marina, Pippo, Carla ↑  
(rising intonation: = ‘and others’)

(48) I had lunch with Marina, Pippo, Carla ↓  
(falling intonation: = ‘and no others’)

Other strategies may include modulation of tone and rhythm (Vitagliano *et alii*, 2009), intensity (Bazzanella, 2009), number and types of pauses, number of words, and instances of disfluency phenomena (Magno Caldognetto, 2002).

Morphology is also exploited to derive markers that modify the precise meaning of a term toward a vague interpretation. This is the case of diminutives for adjectives, as in (49) (Dressler & Merlini Barbaresi, 1994), or modality markers for verbs, as the use of conditionals or the so-called epistemic use of future tense in Italian in (50).<sup>17</sup>

(49) ENG blue > **bluish** (= ‘approximately blue’)  
ITA giallo ‘yellow’ > **giallognolo** (= ‘approximately yellow’)

(50) ITA **Sono** le tre (*to be* + present indicative = ‘it is three (o’clock)’)  
**Saranno** le tre (*to be* + future indicative = ‘it’s probably around three’)

Syntax is used in the case of marked constructions which imply a deviation from basic word order, as for passives, cleft and pseudo-cleft sentences, often with a focusing and topicalizing function, as in (51) and (52) below (Bazzanella, 1994);

(51) ADR no be’↓ ormai no↓ ho trentacinque anni no be’↓ **a parte è che** io↑ è da quando: ho quindicianni che lavoro↑ (POP 26\_45\_s\_u\_01191002)  
‘Well, not anymore, I am 35, no, well, besides, **the thing is that** I have been working since I was 15’

16. Cf. Gili Fivela & Bazzanella (2009) for the detailed discussion of these aspects in Italian and Gussenhoven (2002) in relation to the speaker’s degree of confidence.

17. In this case, the vague meaning can be seen as a secondary effect of the conjectural value induced by the epistemic modalization. Cf also Bazzanella (2009) and Pistolesi (2009).

- (52) Certo, è sereno, **ma non è che ci sia** questo sole che spacca le pietre.  
 (Vailate, 23.3.2017)  
 ‘Of course, it’s sunny, but **it’s not like it’s** hot like the Devil’s own oven’

Lexicon is employed to select nouns or expressions that imply a certain degree of vagueness (*quattro o cinque* ‘four or five’, *un centinaio* lit. ‘around a hundred’, *tipo venti persone* ‘like twenty people, or the use of *un po’* ‘a bit’ as in (53)).

- (53) PAO c’è stata↑ (.) per un breve periodo↓ **un po’ meno** di repressione in casa mia↑ (POP 15\_25\_d\_u\_1980\_fuga1)  
 ‘for a while there was **a bit less** repression at home’

Idiomatic expressions as *un sacco (di persone)* ‘a lot (of people)’ lit. ‘a bag (of people)’ and collocations as *fare due salti* ‘to dance briefly’ lit. ‘to make two jumps’ may also serve similar functions (Gili Fivela & Bazzanella, 2009: 18). Other strategies may include the use of general nouns, such as Eng. *thing, stuff*, It. *coso, roba*, that are intrinsically vague terms, or a number of vague constructions, such as Eng. *and stuff, and things like that, about, around, kind of, sort of, like*, or It. *eccetera* ‘etcetera’, *e così via* ‘and so on’, *circa* ‘around’, *più o meno* ‘more or less’, *così so’*, etc.

Also some functional units that operate at the discourse-pragmatic level and that index the structure of discourse (discourse markers) or the relation between interlocutors and the speakers’ stance (pragmatic markers) may serve similar functions.<sup>18</sup> For instance in (54) both *come dire* ‘how to say’ and *tipo* lit. ‘type’ operate as markers. The first, procedurally signals a difficulty in discourse planning, while the second stresses the difficult classification of the following noun, thereby, as a result, increasing the degree of vagueness of the utterance (i.e. discourse vagueness).

18. The debate on terminological issues relating to functional units as discourse and pragmatic markers has been intense and long in the last decades. Depending on the theoretical orientation, the terms discourse and pragmatic markers are often used interchangeably to refer to similar functional units (cf. Ghezzi, 2014; Fedriani & Sansò, 2017; Pons Bordería & Loureda Lamas, 2018 for overviews). In this study the term ‘discourse marker’ is used to indicate markers that refer to the structure of discourse, i.e. which stress intra-discourse relations and which specify how the message is related to the foregoing discourse. The term ‘pragmatic marker’ is used to refer to units that have an (inter) personal role and that focus on the speakers and on the subjective expression of their stances or on the relation between the speakers and their interlocutors (cf. also Ghezzi, 2014).

- (54) eh certo↓ però allora era **come dire**↓ **tipo**↓ un modello imperante.  
(46\_65\_s\_u\_04222010)  
'yes of course, but back then it was **how to say, like** a dominant model'

As mentioned earlier in this paragraph, no discourse or pragmatic markers are inherently VMs, but some of them can also be used as such, as is the case of *come dire* and *tipo* in (54). This is one of the properties of discourse and/or pragmatic markers over which scholars agree, since these units are prototypically polyfunctional and can operate with different functions in the lexical or grammatical domains as is the case of *tipo* which can also operate as a full taxonomic noun (*un tipo di torta* 'a kind of cake').

As will be discussed in § 1.6, the use of a discourse or pragmatic marker may more often be associated with a specific type of vagueness. For instance discourse markers, such as *diciamo*, are more frequently used at the metadiscourse level to signal a less than literal resemblance between the codified and the intended referent. On the contrary pragmatic markers are more frequently used as VMs in hedged speech acts or in mitigated FTA as is the case of epistemic parentheticals such as *credo* 'I believe', or *penso* 'I think'. However these correspondences are not the rule.

In sum, the class of VMs is highly heterogeneous also on a formal level, as linguistic devices employed as VMs can be derived from prosody, morphology, syntax, lexicon or from the domain of pragmatics in the form of discourse and pragmatic markers.

Regardless of this heterogeneity, however, it is possible to find trends that characterize formal properties of different VMs, depending on the function they perform. For instance, VMs operating on the propositional level, as for example many approximators as *circa* 'around', *un po'* 'a bit', etc., tend to be derived mostly from the lexicon. Conversely, elements that operate on the illocution level tend to be derived from functional units or from the morphosyntactic level.

In this study we specifically focus on VMs derived from lexicon or discourse-pragmatics, while we do not consider in detail prosody, morphology and syntax. This is mostly due to the objective of this study which considers the correlation between the age of speakers and the use of VMs. Considering prosody, morphology and syntax would imply taking into account individual styles which more deeply affect the use of VMs derived from these levels of language. On a methodological level this would translate into a multiplication of variables which would make it difficult to identify a sample of language use comparable across speakers' generations (see also Chapter 3 for a discussion).

## 1.5. Semantic sources of vagueness markers

Many expressions used to refer to intentional vagueness are not inherently VMs, as mentioned before, but may have other uses in communication (e.g. *tipo* lit. ‘type’). This implies that these forms may be coopted at some point, because of the semantic properties of their lexical sources, to undergo a process of pragmaticalization to various degrees.<sup>19</sup> This process is typically rooted in metonymic and metaphorical extensions, in contextual implications, and more generally in processes of (inter)-subjectification.<sup>20</sup>

As regards the properties of lexical sources of VMs, it is interesting to note how many VMs seem to derive from a semantic ‘qualificatory’ category, since they appear to be typologically recruited from an underlying function of qualification (Beeching, 2007).

In Italian, as in many European languages, many classes of VMs derive from words or structures expressing:

- (a) smallness, e.g. *un po’* ‘a bit’, diminutives with *-ino/-etto* in (55);
- (b) approximation, as in the case of taxonomic nouns, e.g. *tipo* ‘type’, *specie*, ‘species’, *sorta* ‘sort’, but also Fr. *genre* ‘genus’, Eng. *sort*, in (56)-(58), or comparatives, e.g. It. *come*, Germ. *wie*, Eng. *like* or Sp. *como*, in (59)-(62);
- (c) manner deixis, e.g. *così* lit. ‘like-this’, Eng. *so*, in (63)-(64);
- (d) demurrals/tentativeness or correction, e.g. *non so* ‘I don’t know’, *forse*, *magari* ‘maybe’, *insomma* ‘in short’;
- (e) adversativeness, e.g. *comunque* ‘however, anyway, still’;
- (f) addition, e.g. *poi*, ‘then’, *anche* ‘also’.

- (55) ITA Il film è **un pochettino** una delusione  
‘The movie is **a bit** a disappointment’
- (56) FRA Une souffrance horrible **genre** chaise électrique  
‘A horrible suffering **like** an electric chair’
- (57) ITA Le poltrone **tipo** psicologo si chiamano in realtà chaise longue  
‘Armchairs (of the) psychiatrist **type** are actually called *chaise longue*’

19. On the notion of cooptation see Kaltenböck *et alii* (2011) and Heine *et alii* (2017). On the notion of pragmaticalization and on its relationship with grammaticalization see Ghezzi (2014) and Degand & Evers-Vermeul (2015), among others.

20. For an overview on the process of intersubjectification in its various manifestations see, among others, the many works by Traugott, such as (1995), (2003), (2010b), (2012), Traugott and Köning (1991), Traugott and Dasher (2002), Ghesquière *et alii* (2012), Ghesquière & Van de Velde (2011).

- (58) ENG A piece of glass on top, creating **a sort of** bridge
- (59) ENG Her clothes were **like** sixties hippie
- (60) SPA Llevaba **como** una cartera en la cintura  
'He wore **like** a wallet at his waist'
- (61) GER Sie sungen **so** etwas wie ein lied  
'They sang **like** a song'
- (62) ITA Francesco è **come** distratto  
'Francesco is **like** distracted'
- (63) ITA una passione **così** bruciata in un tempo breve  
'a passion **like this** burnt quickly'
- (64) ENG add about a quart **or so** of milk and stir

As for lexical sources of VMs, in classes (a)-(c) the qualification relates to the categorization of referents and has scope over single units within the propositional level, while in (d)-(f) the property relates to the truth value or the hearer's agreement and has scope over the proposition, on the illocution level.

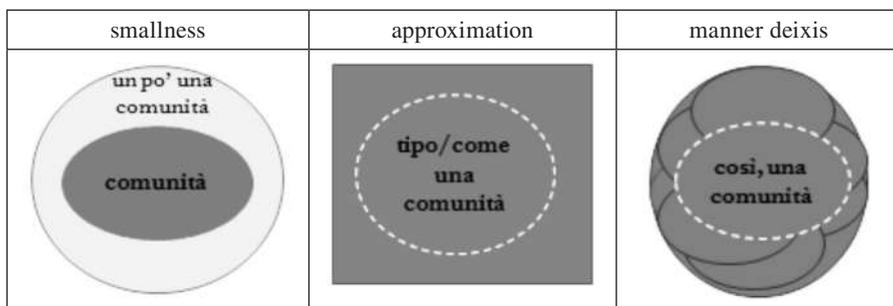
Lexical sources imply a qualification that refers to some 'problematic' categorization of referents. In (65) the speaker, a caller to a phone-in show dedicated to computer-games, is describing the online community of players to which he belongs.

- (65) C'era **un po'** una comunità di giocatori appassionati. (POP 45\_65\_s\_u\_100624)  
'There was **a bit** a community of enthusiast players'

To categorize this community, which he perceives as uncommon, he uses *un po'* 'a bit'. Here the VM signals that the categorization is less than prototypical. Interestingly, *un po'* can here be substituted by a functionally equivalent form with a different semantic meaning such as *tipo* 'type' or *così* 'so', which however are functionally equivalent as they imply some kind of problem in the categorization process.

Such categorization problems can be visualized as in Figure 1.4 below.

Figure 1.4 - Qualification and categorization of referents



In the case of smallness (It. *un po'*), the object referred to as small is to be inferred as particular and non-prototypical; hence, the categorization process positions the referent within the same conceptual category (i.e. from prototypicality outwards). In the other cases, it is the categorization itself which is being approximated. In the case of It. *tipo* or *come* the category to which the referent is ascribed is built *ad hoc* in the course of the interaction, while in the case of *così* one quality of the referent is indexically indicated, and therefore only implied, by the speaker.<sup>21</sup>

A similar interpretation is given by Fleischman & Yaguello (2004: 139) to account for the pragmatic developments of apparently different forms, such as Eng. *like* and Fr. *genre*. As they explain, although the histories of the two forms are not entirely parallel, “at a point in their respective trajectories, each developed a comparative meaning – *something like that, quelque chose de ce genre* – whereby an item is considered in relation to norm or paradigm, or an approximation of that norm”.

By contrast, structures (d)-(f) have another common denominator, i.e. the truth value of the utterance or the interlocutor’s agreement. This may be linked metonymically to hedge a speech act because the categorization is only tentative (demurral), is questioned (adversativeness), or is one among many potential others (addition). As the forms acquire pragmatic value, these common denominators come under the same “qualificatory” heading (Beeching, 2007: 73).

All these expressions seem to share a very similar trajectory of development into VMs: they have different semantic properties, but have

21. See Mauri & Sansò (2017) and (2018) as regards the linguistic expression and the construction of *ad hoc* categories. See also the work carried out within the LEADhoC Project.

attained a qualificatory meaning at the level of the speech act. This happened because the idea of smallness, approximate categorization, indexical indication in non-indexical context, doubt about the truth value of a proposition, and agreement between interlocutors all have the same effect of approximating or hedging an assertion.

As a matter of fact, there is a metonymic link between approximating a proposition and hedging a speech act: all these expressions hedge the assertiveness of the speech act which they accompany, rendering it less direct and more intersubjective. There is a regular application of expressions of qualification, which involves a metonymic/metaphorical extension of a concrete real-world meaning applied metaphorically to the speech act domain. This is a universal relationship based in human cognition. As Sweetser (1990) shows, change in meaning often consists in a metaphorical shift of the kind illustrated below:

sociophysical, content world > mental word of reason (cognitive) > world of speaking (speech acts)

In the case of the expressions under analysis here, the interlocutor understands the linguistic item in an instructional and non-truth conditional way: the speech act or surrounding context is therefore interpreted as being approximated or hedged for non-linguistic, social reasons which mainly have to do with face management and, perhaps, politeness.

A concrete meaning (M1) is progressively transferred metonymically and applied metaphorically to a whole speech act for a number of different reasons.

VMs in particular appear in conceptualized speech events, usually in declarative statements, where a variety of word classes, morphological, and syntactic devices are employed metaphorically to qualify or hedge the assertiveness of these events. Cognitive inferences which speakers employ to perform this task can be considered metonymical extensions which draw on a salient feature and operate economically, as figurative adaptation of real entities. Beeching (2007: 77) asserts that “metonymy, like pragmatics, may enter the arena twice”. First, an expression’s usual referent is invoked to establish a mental contact with its intended referent; second, new (inter)-subjectified senses arise as side-effects or implicatures from the interaction between the expression used and the context in which it is used (Hansen, 1998: 242). These new senses may over time become part of the coded content of a given word as conventionalized, and not contextualised, implicatures.

Therefore, the relationship between form and context is one of metonymic concomitance, the habitual contextual collocations establishing the metonymy as a coded new sense.

In the case of VMs under analysis here, the following processes occur:<sup>22</sup>

- (a) metonymical and prototypical connections between M1 and M2 extract the abstract, salient notion or nuance from the concrete sense, giving rise to approximators (scope over single constituents/phrases at the propositional level);
- (b) the same nuance is applied metaphorically to the whole speech act, giving rise to epistemic hedges (speaker-oriented), deontic hedges, and mitigators (addressee-oriented), which operate on the illocution level and have scope over the whole speech act or intervention;
- (c) a process of metonymical concomitance establishes a new interpretation of the item at the speech act level.

These processes will be exemplified below through the semantic shifts that characterize some classes of VMs.

### 1.5.1. *Smallness*: *un po'*

The use of *un po'* 'a bit' as a VM implies that the categorization of the referent modified by the marker is less than prototypical. Its use as VM derives from the routinization of the expression *un poco*, which in its literal meaning refers to something physically small or partial. Its use as a VM can be considered as a "side effect" (Hansen 1998: 242) or as an implicature of the interaction between *un po'* and the contexts in which it occurs. In time, these senses become part of its coded meaning.

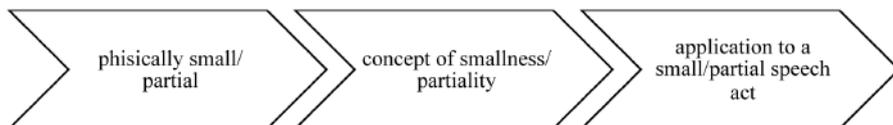
The relationship between the form *un po'* and its context of use is one of metonymic concomitance, as habitual contextual collocations of the marker establish the metonym as a coded new sense (cf. Figure 1.5). This metonymical connection between the literal meaning (M1) and the new coded meaning (M2) extracts the salient nuance of 'physically small or partial' and applies it to the abstract concept of smallness and partiality, which does not necessarily implies actual physical smallness of the referent.

This is applied metaphorically to a speech act. In other words, in the same way that a (physical) element or quantity can be small/partial, the implicature arising from the extended use of *un po'* entails that the speaker's subjective categorization/speech act should be considered as only partial. From this implicature may also develop a polite value of *un*

22. Cf. also Beeching (2007) in relation to the more general category of hedges.

*po'*. Speakers use *un po'* to hedge an assertion which for some reason is perceived as too strong, since a speech act that is 'small' or 'partial' can be considered less offensive or less committing.

Figure 1.5 - Semantic shifts in the use of *un po'*



Different uses of *un po'* can illustrate this pattern (cf. examples 66-71).

- (66) °h eh: ti dirò↓ che ho seguito↑ una: un'assemblea:↑ ho (.) stamattina alle dieci↓ che ci- dove c'erano un: (.) un (.) **un po' di studenti↑ un po' di professori↑** (POP 15\_25\_s\_d\_11151003)  
 'I'm telling you, I attended a meeting, I, this morning at ten, where there were **some** students, **some** professors'
- (67) cerchi un vestito da cupido↓ (.) **un po': oversize↑(.) un po' baggie↓ (.) un po': hip hop.** (POP 15\_25\_s\_d\_02031001p)  
 'You are looking for a Cupid costume, **a bit oversize, a bit baggie, a bit hip hop**'
- (68) (.) tra l'altro↓ sarà anche **un po' l'imbarazzo** della diretta↓ (.) sai com'è (POP 15\_25\_s\_d\_11151003)  
 'In other news, maybe it's also **kind of the embarrassment** of live coverage, you know what it's like'
- (69) ecco↓ questa è **colpa un po' del femminismo↓** perché vanno a casa↑ la moglie non è che: (.) sia: donna al punto di capire i problemi di un uomo- (POP 15\_25\_d\_d\_198001)  
 'Therefore, this is **kind of the fault of feminism**, because [men] go home, their wives are women enough to understand a man's problem'
- (70) ho notato comunque una certa: come dire:↓ stertzata (.) **un po' civettuola↓** (POP 15\_25\_s\_d\_10131001m)  
 'Anyway, I noticed a sort of, how can I say that, **kind of a skittish shift**'
- (71) (.) infatti volevo fare una telefonata (.) **un po' (.) in controtendenza↑** (POP 15\_25\_s\_u\_05281002)  
 'Indeed I would like to make a phone call [to express] **kind of a contrary view**'

In (66) and (67) the marker is still used comparatively ('a bit' vs 'a lot') and modifies a lexical unit. While in (66) the expression still refers to a quantity (the number of people), in (67) it is used metonymically to imply a loose (and therefore partial) categorization (i.e. not prototypically "baggie", "oversize" or "hip-hop").

In examples (68-71), *un po'* is used attributively rather than comparatively. Through a 'partial categorization', the extension implies the hedging of potentially face-threatening acts. In (68) *un po'* is used as a positive politeness strategy to justify the speaker's anxiety, in (69) and (70) it hedges a potential criticism towards groups of women or the interlocutor, and in (71) it introduces, through hedging, the real topic of conversation, which could be perceived by other listeners as a contrary view. In all these contexts, it is the entire speech act which is affected and not just the lexical unit which *un po'* modifies.

As Beeching (2007: 85) suggests, what all these uses have in common is that the VM is deliberately pragmatically ambiguous: "masquerading as an adjective modifying a noun, it serves the function of hedging the speech act".

### 1.5.2. *Approximation, hyponymous or comparative reference: come, tipo*

Expressions used to indicate a hyponymous, e.g. *tipo* 'type', or comparative reference, e.g. *come* 'like', are also frequently used as VMs. These forms usually index that the categorization itself is only approximate. Their use derives from the routinization of taxonomic nouns, as is the case of *specie* 'species', *tipo* 'type', *sorta* 'sort', and *genere* 'genus', or of comparative forms as *come* 'like'. Their uses as VMs are rooted in the routinization of implicatures which arise from the interaction between the taxonomic nouns and the comparison form, and their contexts of use.

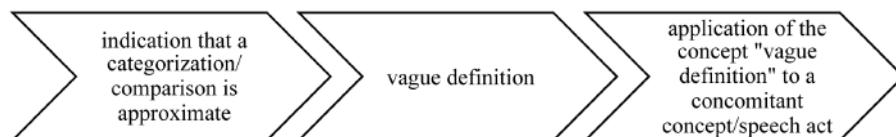
The communicative problem of approximate naming connected with classification and comparison in everyday language is foregrounded: difficulties associated with classification and/or comparison may trigger approximative readings. If a peripheral member is classified as belonging to a superordinate group, then it only vaguely resembles the prototype. This vague resemblance on the level of generalization can then become the main sense of the expression through invited inferencing: categorization is no longer restricted to taxonomy; it just signals similarity within one domain – metonymy – or across two domains – metaphor.

Pragmatically, this can be exploited to categorise membership that depends on subjective or unshared criteria or to 'pretend' that a categoriza-

tion exists, when in fact it is only possible to give examples and, therefore, a rough approximation. This is very convenient in the case of problematic meaning constructions and paves the way to the possible reanalysis of cases of loose, spontaneous, and subjective taxonomic classifications or strategic uses for approximate categorizations.<sup>23</sup>

The vague value of the markers derive precisely from these implicatures, i.e. the inference that a classification or a comparison are less than prototypical and, therefore, only approximate. (cf. Figure 1.6).

Figure 1.6 - Semantic shifts in the use of *tipo* and *come*



The relationship between the forms and their context of use are therefore of metonymic concomitance, as habitual contextual collocations of the marker establish the metonym as a coded new sense.

This metonymical connection between the literal meaning (M1) and the new coded meaning (M2) extracts the salient nuance of ‘loose comparison/categorization’ and applies it to the corresponding abstract concept. This is applied metaphorically to a speech act. In other words, in the same way that speakers flag a vague reference to a lexical category, propositionally, they suggest vagueness concerning the proposition expressed. From this implicature derives the polite value of these forms, when speakers use them to hedge assertions which for some reasons are perceived as too strong, since a speech act that is vague and approximate can be considered less offensive or less committing.

Different uses of *tipo* can illustrate this pattern (cf. examples 72-76).

- (72) non so neanche più qual è il suo comportamento. pero↓ (.) lui↓ per quando lo potevo conoscere meg- cioè quando: era piu sotto un certo **tipo** di controllo↑ °h eh al telefono ci sta↓(POP 46-65\_s\_u\_03011001)  
 ‘I do not know what his behaviour is anymore. But when I knew him better, I mean when he was under a **certain type** of control, he uses the telephone’

23. The development of such functions is highly dependent on the original semantics of the lexical source. The original semantic nuances associated with *tipo* are indeed exploited for *ad hoc* categorization. Cf. Voghera (2012, 2013) and Mihastch (2007).

- (73) (.) per: per uscire dalla comunità europea↑ bisogna pagare **tipo**↓ ottanta euro. (POP 15\_25\_s\_u\_11121101m)  
 ‘to leave the EU you have to pay **around** eighty euros’
- (74) (.) e: (-- ) ehm (.) per donne↑ (-) per donne↑ (-) come si fa a (-- ) trovare un: (.) cioè↓ (-) tipo↓ tipo↓ una donna esce↓ no↑ tipo:↓di una raga:zza giovane↓ no↑ (.) non so **tipo**: elettra↓o te↓ no↑(POP 15\_25\_s\_d\_012611)  
 ‘This is for women, how can I find a, I mean, like, like a woman goes out, doesn’t she, like a young girl, I don’t know **like** Elettra or you’
- (75) giro per la lombardia:: (-) a seconda della sfortuna odierna:↑ **tipo**↓ oggi vado a bergamo:↑ ieri ero a bormio↓ (.) pero: domani magari sono a milano. (POP 15-25\_s\_u\_01211001)  
 ‘I travel around Lombardy, depending on daily luck. Like, today I go to Bergamo, yesterday I was in Bormio, but tomorrow maybe I am in Milan’
- (76) A meno che↑ tu potresti comprarle↑ pero **tipo** in condivisione. (-) potresti (.) metterti insieme a qualche ascoltatore. (POP 15\_25\_s\_d\_02031001p)  
 ‘Unless, you can buy them but **like** sharing. You could buy them with another listener’

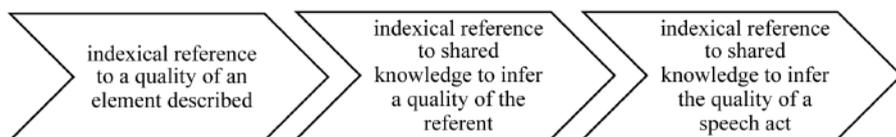
In (72) *tipo* is used comparatively to indicate a hyponymous reference within the category of ‘control’. However, in (73) and (74) it is used attributively to avoid using a more precise term because one does not remember the precise amount of money (73), or because one does not have a specific term that indicates an *ad hoc* category of women (74). In example (75) and (76) the form is used attributively to apply the concept-nuance of a vague definition, which implies the avoidance of a more precise term (75), or approximateness, which implies the reference to ‘something along the lines of’ (76), to the concomitant concept.

### 1.5.3. *Manner deixis*: così

The manner deictic *così* can be used as a VM to refer to some qualities of a categorization. Its use as a VM also derives from a routinization of the corresponding manner deictic which, in its literal meaning, refers indexically to the context of interaction or to the surrounding co-text. Its use as a VM is rooted in the routinization of implicatures which arise from the interaction between the manner deictic and its context of use.

The vague value of the marker derives from the inference that to understand a quality of the referent verbal information is not enough (cf. Figure 1.7).

Figure 1.7 - Semantic shifts in the use of *così*



In its literal meaning, the presence of *così* implies that the interlocutor has to infer from the socio-physical context (or from the surrounding co-text) which quality of the presented item is relevant and salient for correct interpretation in the context of interaction.

From this literal meaning (M1), new extended meanings (M2) develop through metonymic concomitance. This concomitance enables the interlocutors to extract the salient nuance of “inferring a quality from the context of interaction”. This nuance is applied to the abstract domains of knowledge and categorization. From the literal meaning, the manner deictic has evolved to indicate that shared knowledge must be activated to infer the intended quality of referents or of categorizations. From these inferences derive the use of *così* as a VM.

If the same inference is metaphorically applied to a whole speech act, moving from the level of the proposition to the level of the illocution, an implicature of politeness may arise. The interlocutor is asked to infer which quality of the speech act the speaker intended to refer to. In other words, in the same way that the speakers flag a deictic reference to a quality of an entity in the real world or within the text, they may also suggest a reference to a supposed quality of a speech act, which therefore becomes more vague. A side effect of this use may be the increase in politeness of the speech act itself. For instance vagueness on the quality of a criticism makes it less direct and more polite.

Different uses of *così* can serve to exemplify this pattern (cf. examples 77-81).

- (77) (.) cioè↓ si cambia linea totalm- ma gli scioperi↑ **così**↓ di solidarietà↓ capisco il problema↓ (.)ma non servono↑ a niente↓(POP, 46\_65\_d\_u\_01297901)  
 ‘I mean to say, we should totally change the course of actions, but strikes, **like**, of solidarity are useless’
- (78) non gli piaceva la storia la] geografia↑ **così**↑(.) però↑ ad esempio↓ gli piaceva lavorare. (POP, 66\_90\_s\_u\_01221006)  
 ‘He didn’t like history, geography, (**and**) **such**, but for example he enjoyed working’

- (79) voi mi crederete un sovversivo↑ perché assolutamente (.) non la penso come voi↓ anzi la penso in tutt'altro modo↓ cioè sono: mi reputo di destra↑ (-) e: **così**↓ (POP, 15\_25\_d\_u\_01087803)  
 'You may think I am a subversive because I am absolutely not with you on this, rather I have a completely different opinion, I mean I am right-leaning **and so on**'
- (80) **così** un po' snob↑ (.) anche↓ (POP, 15\_25\_s\_u\_11121101m)  
 'Like, a bit snobbish, also'
- (81) cioè↑ adesso↑ prima se la menavano tra di loro↑ e io non c'entravo un cazzo↓ (.) adesso:↑ hanno hanno raggiunto: un patto↑ (.) che la menano solo a me↓ **così**↓ (POP, 15\_25\_d\_g\_1980\_fuga3)  
 'I mean, some time ago they used to blame each other, and they did not blame it on me, now they have reached an agreement that they only blame it on me, **like**'

In (77) *così* has a comparative value. It establishes a comparison which forces the interlocutor to search within the surrounding co-text which quality of a *sciopero* 'strike' the speaker is referring to. In the case of this example this quality is that of 'solidarity'.

In (78) an elliptical comparison is applied to create an *ad hoc* categorization. In the context of the interaction the caller is discussing the reasons why many students dropped school to start working. While discussing why this happened, he sets up an *ad hoc* categorization of "subjects that students who dropped school did not like" (*storia, geografia, così*).

In (77) and (78) the vague meaning of *così* derives from the fact that it is not clear whether the deictic *così* indexes a similarity between the known entities indicated by the interlocutors, or whether the speaker only intended to signal the search for a more precise word (77) or the lack of such a word (78) (cf. also Mihatsch, 2010a).

The same vague value is illustrated in (79) as the use of *e così* implies a reference to shared knowledge to infer which qualities of "being a right-oriented person" are relevant in the context of the interaction.

In the last two examples the same vague inference is applied attributively to the whole speech act (80) or intervention (81). The reference to shared knowledge is extended to infer qualities of face-threatening acts. Interestingly in both cases *così* appears at the beginning (80) or at the closure (81) of the utterance.

In example (80) the speaker is commenting upon a particular style of teenagers which she judges as 'snobbish'. This potential criticism is hedged through the use of *così*, that together with *un po'*, precedes the actual and potentially face-threatening adjective *snob*.

Similarly in (81) a teenager is complaining of his parents' behaviour, which he perceives has changed lately. He closes this very strong complaint adding *così* and implying an inference on qualities of bad parents' behaviour which are not explicitly conveyed.

#### 1.5.4. *Demurring*: *insomma*

A number of expressions used to demur, to raise objections and to show reluctance, as is the case of *insomma* lit. 'in sum' can also be used as VMs. It is relevant to say, in this regard, that none of these expressions have as their literal and primary meaning that of demurring, but may develop such uses in specific contexts. Their use as both demurring and VMs derives from the routinization of implicatures which arise from the interaction of their literal and/or primary meaning with their contexts of use.

The case of *insomma* is particularly telling in this regard as it develops from Old to Contemporary Italian through the following path

*in somma* 'in a sum of' (82) > *in somma* 'in a compendium/summary' (83) > *in somma* 'synthetically' (84) > *in somma/insomma* 'in short' (85)

In this path the expression progressively develops a subjective meaning expressing the speakers' attitude at the discourse level and signalling that what follows is to be interpreted as a short approximation of what precedes.

- (82) [...] et fuoro **in somma** di cinquecento fiorini d'oro che rechò Mino Frederighi da Pisa (OVI, 1277-82, Doc. sen., 142.35)  
'and (they) were (paid) **the sum** of five hundred golden fiorini which were brought by Mino Frederighi from Pisa'
- (83) Ma ora voglio io recare ciò che io ho detto **in una somma** della umanitate e della benignitate e della misericordia tua. (OVI, 1294, fior., Brunetto Latini, Pro Ligario, 181.(15)  
'But now I would like to discuss what I said **in a compendium** of your humanity, goodness and mercy'
- (84) Riconto è quella fine del conto, in che 'l parlator dice brevemente, ed **in somma** riconta tutti suoi argomenti, e le ragioni ch'egli ha contate nel suo detto l'una qua e l'altra là, ed egli le riconta in brevi parole per recarle alla memoria degli auditori più fermamente. (OVI, Tesoro volg. (ed. Gaiter); XIII, fior., L. 8., cap. 64 4, 236.6)  
'The summary is the end of a text/discourse where the speaker says briefly and **synthetically** summarises all his arguments and the reasons he used in

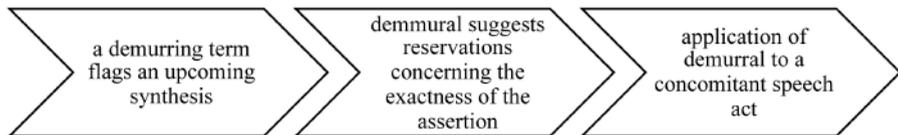
his text/discourse in different moments and he summarises them in brief in order to help the listeners remember them’

- (85) **In somma**, figliuol caro, io non ci ho colpa; la legge non l’ho fatta io. (1841, Alessandro Manzoni, *I promessi sposi*)  
 ‘**In short**, my dear son, I am not responsible for that; I have not made the law’

In Contemporary Italian the form is used as a polyfunctional discourse marker. For instance, Bazzanella (1995: 246) classifies *insomma* as a meta-textual marker used to close a topic.

The vague value of *insomma* derives from the inference that as speakers demur to summarise and approximate the content of a text/discourse, they may suggest some reservations concerning its exactness at the speech act level (cf. Figure 1.8).

Figure 1.8 - Semantic shifts in the use of *insomma*



The form can be used to approximate the propositional content, as in (86), or to hedge a previous utterance which the speaker perceives as too ‘strong’, overemphatic, or likely to offend, as in (87).

- (86) dico due ore↓ possono essere una due tre↑ **insomma**↓ è chiaro↓ adesso non si può prendere alla lettera quello che dico↑ (POP 26\_45\_d\_d\_01297908)  
 ‘I say two hours, they can be one, two, three, **in short**. This is clear. Now you can’t take literally what I say’
- (87) secondo motivo di grave indignazione↑ è il fatto che il comune di milano↓ (-) non voglio dire una cosa retorica <<all>mah **insomma**> di milano città d’oro (.) milano d’oro nella resistenza↑ (.) affitti (.) una sede cioè faciliti in qualche modo il compito (POP 66\_90\_s\_u\_11261006)  
 ‘The second reason for indignation is that the municipality of Milan, I do not want to say something rhetoric, but **in short**, of Milan golden city, Milan golden city in the (fight) for the resistance, rents a space, or facilitates things somehow’

In (86), the literal corrective force of *insomma* comes to be associated with an approximation of the propositional content (*due o tre ore*) and this implicature is explicitly expressed by the speaker's comment *non si può prendere alla lettera quello che dico*.

A similar use is made in (87), where the speaker is commenting on the choice of the municipality of Milan to rent a space to a right-oriented movement. He suggests that this is not appropriate for a city that fought Fascism with strength during the Second World War. The speaker here implies that his comment might be rhetorical (*non voglio dire una cosa retorica*), and hedges the strength of his assertion through the use of *insomma*. In this case, *insomma* serves as a flag of an impropriety on the choice of the argument of the speaker and has scope over the entire speech act.

As Beeching (2007: 89) suggests, “a speaker who is able to qualify what he says is one with whom one can negotiate”. This would be the case of examples like (88), where the marker could be considered a hesitation phenomenon, especially as it is usually followed by a pause before the affirmation is actually made; in such contexts, however, the demurral inference and the idealized cognitive model give it a hedging quality. In other words, the use of *insomma* in these contexts allows speakers to simultaneously hedge – at the level of the speech act – and to hesitate in their speech, through approximation – at the propositional level. This is exactly what enables them to be indirect and, eventually, polite.

- (88) (-) eh: anche da parte di noi giovani↑ serve: (-) un'apertura↑ una: **insomma**↓  
(-) uscire un po' dal proprio orticello↑ (POP 15\_25\_s\_u\_01211005)  
'also for us young people (some kind of) an opening one..., **in short**, getting out of your own backyard'

Other uses of the marker in stand-alone expressions, as *Sei d'accordo?* 'Do you agree?' *Insomma* 'Not very much', which express partial agreement, seem to support the interpretation of the marker as an hedging expression.

By using *insomma* the speaker is marking a discrepancy between what is actually said and something else.

### 1.5.5. *Adversativeness and concession: comunque*

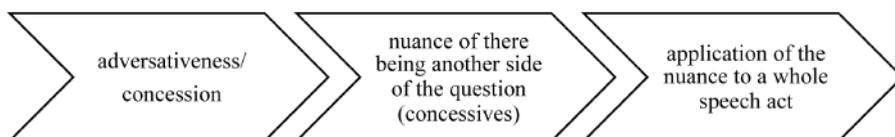
Expressions of adversativeness or concession, e.g. *comunque* 'however, anyway', typically indicate a contradiction, or two concepts which are mutually exclusive. When they are used as conjunctions, these expressions

have a core meaning which implies the bringing together of two opposing views. If the second of these is deleted, the conjunction can be stranded at the end of a clause and recategorized as adverbial.

The adverbial, however, continues to retain a hint of its adversative nature and to hedge what might have been considered an over-assertive view. When the marker has this sense, its position in the sentence becomes freer: again, it is only by metonymical concomitance and metaphorical extension that such a transfer can occur.

As a matter of fact in the same way that two sides of a proposition may be asserted by a concessive element, speakers suggest that there may be two sides to what they are saying or, at least, that they are open to discussion (cf. Figure 1.9).

Figure 1.9 - Semantic shifts in the use of *comunque*



A good case in point for this development in Italian is the use of *comunque* ‘however’.<sup>24</sup>

In (89) the marker expresses both an emphatic quality (paraphrase “really”) and a hedging quality (paraphrase “sort of”), both of which approximate a reservation about the assertion ‘We were a good number’. Although the adverbial appears to modify a noun phrase, its scope is over the entire speech act and it could be paraphrased as “I assert that there were quite a few of us (but you are at liberty to disagree with me)”. In such contexts there are few constraints on the positioning of *comunque*, the meaning remaining the same as if the speaker had said *comunque eravamo un buon numero*. In these contexts the marker retains a nuance of the original adversative meaning which encodes in the co-text the idea that the speaker is refuting a possible counterargument in the mind of the hearer.

- (89) no:↑ il corteo è andato è andato bene↓ eravamo: trentami:la (-) **comunque**↓  
 un buon numero. (15\_25\_s\_d\_10131001m)  
 ‘The rally went, went well. We were thirty thousands. **However** a good number’.

24. Cf. Beeching (2007) on similar functions performed by *quand même* in French, *but* in Glasgow English, and *aber* in German.

- (90) cioè sono: mi reputo di destra↑ e: così↓(.) **comunque** volevo rispondere a un tizio che ha telefonato prima↓ dicendo che noi siamo uomini VIRILI↑ (15\_25\_d\_u\_01087803)  
'In other words I think of myself as a right wing person, and...like that. **However**, I would like to answer a guy who called earlier, saying that we are (true) MANLY men'

*Comunque* can also be used in potentially face-threatening contexts to soften the FTA which is being uttered. This is the case of (90) where *comunque* introduces a criticism and a different point of view in the discussion. In the extract the interlocutors are discussing about some dangerous right oriented groups. The speaker recognises himself as a right oriented person and begins the telephone conversation by provocatively stating that. Then proceeds with the true objective of his call which implies a criticism towards a previous caller. In this case the strategic use of *comunque*, which marks a topic shifts, has also the function of softening the force of the criticism.

#### 1.5.6. *Addition*: anche

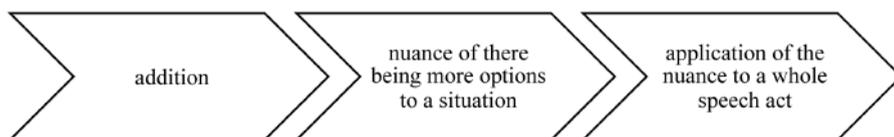
Expressions of addition typically indicate more options to a situation. The elements in focus can be multifarious (single constituents, such as NPs, VPs, PPs, propositions, or utterances), but what they have in common is to formally imply  $\exists!x \neq \text{noun phrase/verb phrase/prepositional phrase/proposition/utterance}$ . When they are used as conjunctions, they have a core meaning which implies the bringing together of more options.

In Italian this is well exemplified by the expression *anche* 'also'. In its literal meaning the presence of *anche* implies that there might be more options to a situation described in the text. From this meaning (M1), a new extended meaning (M2) develops which enables interlocutors to extract the salient nuance of "being more options to a situation" to a whole speech act.

Therefore, in the same way that further options to a proposition may be asserted by an additive element/proposition, speakers suggest there may be more options to what they are saying (cf. Figure 1.10).

This nuance of meaning can be applied to single constituents (91), as well as to whole speech acts and/or interventions (92-93), where *anche* functions as an approximator as well as a hedge at the illocution level.

Figure 1.10 - Semantic shifts in the use of *anche*



- (91) (.) tra l'altro↓ sarà **anche** un po' l'imbarazzo della diretta↓ (.) (POP 15\_25\_s\_d\_11151003)  
 'Among other things, it is **also** a bit the embarrassment of live radio'
- (92) è giusto lasciare il posto↓ (-) **anche** perché↓ °h (.) i i tempi cambiano↑ (POP 46\_65\_s\_u\_06101009)  
 'It is right to leave your place (to somebody else) **also** because times are changing'
- (93) PREAL: eh fo- forse nei tuoi capelli ci starebbe un telefono↓ eh?=  
 ANN: **=anche** no.  
 (POP15\_25\_s\_d\_051911m)  
 'PREAL: ehm maybe there would be a phone in your hair, right?  
 ANN: **also** not'.

For instance, in (91) *anche* refers locally to a noun phrase, *l'imbarazzo della diretta*, while in (92) it indexes a whole subact, *perché i tempi cambiano*, and in (93) to the whole intervention.

### 1.5.7. Discussion

As the developments just outlined show, it is possible to identify multiple paths of development which imply a non-linear progression from more propositional uses towards more illocutional ones.

The basic semantic relationships shared by the multifarious forms that are (some of) the lexical sources of VMs can explain how these function-form relationships have a role in the pragmaticalization patterns triggered.

Metaphorical and metonymic extensions prove central mechanisms in the development of pragmatic functions associated with VMs. Speakers co-opt elements of sentence grammar on the basis of creative metonymic and metaphorical relationships. These new form-function configurations may be instantiated only once for some VMs, but if they are adopted by the speech community, VMs become more frequent and are simplified or phonologically reduced (Lat. *in summa* > It. *insomma* 'in short' > 'somma

‘not exactly’; Lat. *quo modo cumque* > It. *comunque* ‘however’; *un poco* > *un po’* ‘a bit’; *un/del tipo di* > *tipo* ‘type’).

As Beeching (2007) suggests, these expressions would be motivated by five maxims of action (Harspelmath, 1999):

- (1) Hypermaxim 1: talk in such a way that you are socially successful at the lowest possible cost;
- (2) Maxim 2 - Clarity: talk in such a way that you are understood;
- (3) Maxim 3 - Economy: talk in such a way that you do not expend superfluous energy;
- (4) Maxim 4 - Conformity: talk like others talk;
- (5) Maxim 5 - Extravagance: talk in such a way that you are noticed.

As regards Hypermaxim 1 and Maxim 2, in order to be socially successful speakers need to be vague, pragmatically ambiguous, and polysemous. The Maxim of Economy is thus overturned in order to be socially successful. VMs are optional; however, their allusive nature, their multifunctionality, and their vague reference are highly economical, especially in face-management needs. As regards the Maxim of Conformity, to be socially successful speakers must observe generally accepted conventions, including face-work and the hedging of illocutionary force. Therefore, to preserve the speaker’s face, the recruitment of new and different ways of approximating or hedging constitutes a possible solution to communication needs and may eventually prove to be a cause for innovation. Cooptation and, in the long run, pragmaticalization would thus represent a side effect of the Maxim of Extravagance, i.e. speakers’ use of unusually explicit formulations in order to attract the interlocutor’s attention.

Drawing on Harspelmath’s process of the “invisible hand”, which accounts for the development of lexical items into grammatical items, Beeching (2007: 98) suggests adapting the model to the elements which develop procedural and pragmatic functions, as in the case of many VMs. This process can be described as follows:

- (a) a speaker says  $YC_{LF}Z$  in which  $YB_LZ$  and  $YA_LZ$  are exploited metonymically/metaphorically and procedurally in such a way that they have scope-over-discourse (by Maxim 1). This creates a new form-function configuration  $C_p$  ( $X_L$  = lexical element;  $X_F$  = functional element;  $X_p$  = procedural element);
- (b) other speakers follow him and also use  $C_{LF}$  in a procedural manner (by Maxims 5 and 4);
- (c)  $C_{LF}$  increases in frequency in the community’s speech, because  $C$ ’s new meaning is more basic to discourse;
- (d) because of its high frequency,  $C_{LF}$  becomes more predictable;

- (e) because of its predictability,  $C_{LF}$  is pronounced in a (phonologically) reduced manner by many speaker (by maxims 2 and 3);
- (f) because of its high frequency,  $C_{LF}$  (which is now  $C_p$ ) is increasingly automated and recognised in the speaker's mind; and
- (g) through habituation, the meaning or grammatical/word-class contribution of  $C_p$  is no longer perceived as pragmatically salient.

Although this is a somewhat idealised picture, pragmatic ambiguity always represents the unmarked case since M1/M2 and  $C_{LF}/C_p$  coexist as polysemous elements (*un po', tipo, come, così*) or pragmatically ambiguous relationships (*insomma, comunque, anche*).

Seen from this perspective, the strategic use of vagueness as 'economy' principle is often a rewarding strategy in social interaction. Therefore, clarity is deliberately flouted by speakers through a pragmatic ambiguity between the new and the old form-function configurations (bridging contexts) and implies both a metonymic relation between the concrete and the abstract values, and a metaphorical relation between scope within discourse and scope over discourse.

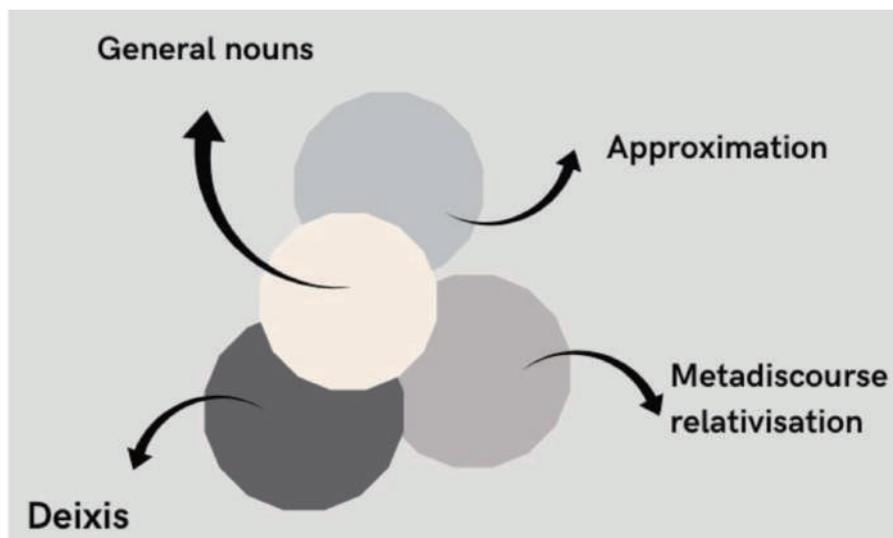
## 1.6. Vagueness markers and strategical heterogeneity

As discussed in § 1.3 and in § 1.4, VMs constitute a functional class of elements which show heterogeneity at various levels. They are formally heterogeneous as they may be instantiated resorting to different linguistic levels, e.g. prosody, morphology, syntax, lexicon, but also to different grammatical categories, as VMs may be nouns, verbs, adverbs, prepositions, etc. They are also functionally heterogeneous since they can approximate the propositional content of an utterance (or of one of its elements) or can hedge its illocutionary force.

VMs are also heterogeneous in the types of strategies that speakers enact to imply a vague interpretation of the referent, the utterance or of the speech act.

It is possible to identify three main groups of strategies (cf. Figure 1.11) that speakers may use to imply a vague reference, namely: strategies based on approximation; strategies based on a metadiscourse relativization of the act of speaking or, more generally, of communication; and strategies based on deixis. At the intersection of these three groups of strategies lies a fourth group, whose function is to imply a totally generic referential vagueness. This is the case of general nouns (Halliday & Hasan, 1976), a group of expressions whose semantic meaning is less important than their pragmatic meaning, such as It. *cosa, roba* 'thing' and *questione* 'matter'.

Figure 1.11 - Strategies to derive vagueness markers



### 1.6.1. Approximation

This group of VMs strategies are based on an approximation which underlines a discrepancy between the concept the speaker has in mind and the actual utterance. This type of strategy implies some sort of “a mismatch between some prototype and the item being described” (Jucker, Smith & Lüdge, 2003: 1746). What is approximated is not the propositional content, but the resemblance between the speaker’s thought and the actual utterance, as in (94) where the use of *un po’* and *del genere* have the function of signalling a rough categorization.

- (94) la storia dei bamboccioni [...] è **un po’ un discorso del genere** (Bergamo, 4.3.2016)  
‘the story of the big babies is **kind of a similar thing**’

All the communicative functions which are derived from the use of this strategy are based on the premise that the inherent pragmatic meaning of forms used signals an approximate relation between the intended referent/concept and the codified referent/concept. As Fetzer (2010: 53) notes: “Approximation is a scalar concept which connects a linguistic object, a linguistic expression and a cognitive prototype”.

In this regard, Prince *et alii* (1982) distinguish between rounders and adaptors on the basis of the meaning of the unit modified: numerical values, including chronological scales, in the case of rounders (95); lexical conceptual meanings in the case of adaptors (96) (see also § 1.2).

- (95) [...] ma questo da **un bel po'** di anni (Bergamo, 5.4.2016)  
'But this [had been happening] for **a while**'
- (96) due provette di questo prelievo di sangue che **un po'**: simboleggia diciamo il nostro sudore (Local radio, 06.10.10)  
'Two test tubes of this blood sample that **a bit** symbolises our sweat, let's say'

From a semantic point of view both uses can be subsumed under one category. For both classes the semantic effect is to widen the extension of the modified unit: the category boundaries are loosened through the elimination of part of the intension and through the widening of its extension. Rounders and adaptors share common properties, since they both underline a discrepancy between the conventional meaning of a linguistic expression and its meaning in a specific context. Widening the extension of the modified expression, they both signal that the lexical choice is not 'perfect', therefore it is less than prototypical. A proof of this is that some VMs can actually be used as both rounders and adaptors, such as *un po'* in the examples above.

In many cases, the distinction between rounders and adaptors may have a cognitive and functional basis, since many markers are restricted to just one function, like preposition-based rounders (such as *intorno* or *circa* 'around') or adaptors derived from taxonomic nouns (such as *del genere* 'of the kind' or *una specie* 'a species'). From a cognitive perspective, quantificational approximation is much simpler than conceptual approximation: rounders operate on a one-dimensional scale and open up a zone above and below the value which is being rounded.<sup>25</sup> This means that the intervals identified tend to be symmetrical. Adaptors, conversely, operate in a multidimensional space, since their function is to underline that the modified lexeme has a wider extension than the corresponding non-approximated one: "Only contextual extra-linguistic knowledge determines which

25. The scope of approximation largely depends on the size of the numeral and on context. Devos *et alii* (1998: 171) show that approximation varies depending on the unit of reference: for seconds, approximation generates an interval of about five seconds; for minutes the interval is five minutes; for hours it is half an hour or an hour, seven days for days, and two weeks for a month.

semantic features have to be eliminated or loosened and, perhaps more importantly, which features are maintained” (Mihatsch, 2010b: 95).

In some cases, adaptors indicate a slight deviation from a prototype which cannot be further specified; in others, modified referents maintain the specification of shape, as in (97), or function, as in (98). However, quite often these semantic relations are utterly unpredictable, especially with abstract nouns, adjectives, and verbs.

- (97) c’hanno una **specie** di tunica / così che / un pochino / così/ li copre (CORifammn03)  
‘They have a **kind of tunic**, like this, that covers them, a bit, so’.
- (98) Il benessere delle comunità cristiane in Medio Oriente non è altro che **una specie di barometro** delle condizioni morali dei nostri paesi (itTenTen16)  
‘The well-being of Christian communities in the Middle East is nothing but a **kind of barometer** of the moral conditions of our countries’

Rounders are used to make guesses as to quantities, especially in situations where greater precision would be required. They can also be used by speakers to be deliberately approximate, since more detailed and precise information may be irrelevant or pedantic for the sake of interaction, as in (99).

- (99) Ma insomma, non é che ora si debba stare attenti ogni volta a non sovrapporsi agli altri **cento / mille / milioni** di foodblogs altrimenti ecco tutti pronti a tacciarti di plagio! (itTenTen16)  
‘But, I mean, I hope we don’t have to be careful all the time now not to overlap with the other **hundred / thousand / millions** of foodblogs otherwise everyone is ready to accuse you of plagiarism!’

Moreover, rounders can perform functions that overlap with those of adaptors. They may be used to reduce the speaker’s responsibility, especially in formal contexts, where a quantitative approximation renders an assertion less direct, as in (100) where *un po’* ‘a bit’ and *tantine* lit.’many.F.PL.DIM’ have the function of approximating the quantity of folders in order to hedge the criticism of the speaker.

- (100) Scusa, ma 13 cartelle mi sembrano **un po’ tantine** per essere leggibili su video (itTenTen16)  
‘Excuse me, but 13 folders seem a **bit too many** to be readable on video’

Adaptors share a series of peculiar functions, which pertain to the expression of a loose correspondence between the intended and the codi-

fied concept. In such contexts the speakers have in mind a concept or referent, but they momentarily or permanently cannot think of the correct form and choose to use a semantically similar, but more common, word to replace the more appropriate, but unavailable, expression (Mihatsch, 2010a). The motivations for their use in language may range over (a) lexical gaps that speakers may have, as in (101); (b) new, rare referents or concepts demanding *ad hoc* classification, as in (102); and (c) word-retrieval problems, especially for highly specific and uncommon lexemes, as in (103).

- (101) verranno spente le luci 2 volte ogni giorno, per far piombare le colline attorno a Pesaro **in una sorta di black-out programmato** e riporteranno indietro nel tempo il borgo medievale a quando tutto era rischiarato dalla luce delle fiammelle (itTenTen16)  
 ‘the lights will be turned off twice a day, to plunge the hills around Pesaro into **a sort of planned blackout** and bring the medieval village back in time when everything was lit by candlelight’
- (102) I suoi generali sono favorevoli ad aspettare la nascita di quest’ultimo, tuttavia Perdicca riprende il titolo di chiliarcos, **una sorta di primo ministro**, che precedentemente gli era stata conferita (itTenTen16)  
 ‘His generals agree on waiting for the birth of this latter [a legitimate son], but Perdicca takes up the title of *chiliarcos*, **a sort of prime minister**, which had previously been conferred on him’
- (103) È una **forma quasi di di, non so, di nichilismo**, ecco. (Bergamo, 24.9.2013)  
 ‘It’s **a kind of, of, I don’t know, of nihilism**, you know.’

Mihatsch (2010a: 96) argues that this last function of adaptors seems to be very common in different languages, a fact which explains why speakers on some occasions use an adaptor even before they have access to a substitute, as in (103). Specific problems of word-retrieval play an important role in the use of adaptors, and this can be one of the reasons why they tend to be so common in spoken language, which is characterized by time restrictions, online processing, and low degree of planning.

Speakers have at their disposal other types of approximating strategies, apart from rounders and adaptors. These elements have the function of opening up “a paradigm and thereby showing that other neighbouring expressions would be equally possible, neighbouring points on a numerical or chronological scale as well as semantically related lexical items” (Mihatsch, 2010b: 108). On some occasions these strategies come to the surface, as for example in contexts where speakers provide the approximate indication of a quantity or synonyms of a vague expression, thus

explicitly opening up the paradigmatic axis within the syntagmatic flow of speech as in (104) and (105).

- (104) Se prima c'era una partecipazione **al cento per cento, all'ottanta per cento**, adesso sta sicuramente diminuendo. (Pavia, 12.3.2011)  
'If previously there was a **hundred, eighty percent** participation, now it is definitely decreasing' (Pavia, 12.3.2011)
- (105) i contratti cococo **non hanno ferie, non hanno malattia, non hanno disoccupazione, non hanno nessun tipo di quelli che dovrebbero essere i diritti** acquisiti (Bergamo, 4.7.2016)  
'Cococo contracts have no holiday leave, no sick leave, no unemployment, no kind of what should be acquired rights'

The same is also true for strategies that operate on the higher level of discourse planning by which speakers signal an open list of possible candidates through specific markers. These can be exemplification markers as *che so io* lit. 'that I know' in (106), as well as *per esempio* 'for example', *tipo* lit. 'type', *mettiamo* lit. 'put.1PL'. Similarly, additive markers, that imply the addition of elements, can operate in similar ways as is the case of *tra l'altro* 'among other things' in (107), *anche* 'also' or *poi* 'then'. Exemplifications represent arbitrary choices, imprecise descriptions, or unreal situations; while elements following additive markers represent the chosen candidate among others potentially available.

- (106) Magari nell'articolo avrei potuto dire anche che hanno uno sguardo tenero ma giusto; **che so io** profondo e buono; stanco. (itTenTen16)  
'Maybe in the article I could also say that they have a tender but fair look; **I don't know**, deep and good; tired'
- (107) Sono i dati che parlano! Altro che il catastrofismo dei comunisti! **Tra l'altro**, giovane, c'è Prodi che va dal fruttivendolo e ordina: "1kg di mele!". Il fruttivendolo risponde: "e io ci do la mortadella! Ah, ah, ah!" (itTenTen16)  
'The data speak for itself! Very different from the communists' catastrophism! **Among other things**, young man, there is Prodi who goes to the greengrocer and orders: "1kg of apples!". The greengrocer replies: "and I give you mortadella! Ah, ha, ha!"

As discussed in § 1.5, the use of a strategy that focuses on the propositional level paves the way for its use with a focus over the illocution level.

### 1.6.1.1. *General extenders*

A subclass of strategies which employ the diversification of a paradigm to express vagueness is that of general extenders.

The primary function of these forms is that of extending the reference of an NP or of a VP, with the subsequent construction of an *ad hoc* category which is relevant in the context of the interaction (Mauri & Sansò, 2017: 225, cf. also Dines, 1980: 22).

General extenders “are typically phrase- or clause-final expressions with the basic syntactic structure, conjunction + noun phrase, which extend otherwise complete utterances (hence, ‘extenders’)” (Overstreet, 2005: 1847).

- (108) Salve a tutti, sono una ragazza che frequenta le scuole superiori... alle prime armi per quanto riguarda i ragazzi, le cotte **e robe del genere** (ITTenTen20)  
‘Hi everybody. I am a girl attending high school. I am a total novice in relation to boys, crushes **and things like that**’

In (108) *e robe del genere* combines with the elements (*ragazzi, cotte*) which belong to a non-specified category, which is however possible to create *ad hoc* through the exemplars mentioned in the context. The presence of the extender *e robe del genere*, thus, suggests that other members belong to the same category and that these members can be inferred from the context (e.g. all things that relate to first experiences with the other sex) (Fiorentini, 2018: 21, Overstreet, 1999: 11). In other words these expressions combine with named exemplar(s) and some nonspecific form of reference (Channel, 1994: 11).

Overstreet’s label, general extenders, although it is based on the English language, captures the essence of the class since these expressions are “‘general’, because they are non-specific, and ‘extenders’ because they extend otherwise grammatically complete utterances” (Overstreet, 1999: 3). The name, furthermore, has the advantage of subsuming formally similar, but conceptually different, uses.<sup>26</sup>

26. Labels used for this class of elements are not always consistent and often depend on the approach taken. These forms have been variously labelled “set marking tags” (Dines, 1980), “vague category identifiers” (Channell, 1994), “approximators” (Erman, 2001), “discourse extenders” (Norrby & Winter, 2002), and “extension particles” (Dubois, 1992). In this study, the choice to call these units “general extenders”, in line with Overstreet (2005, 1999) and Cheshire (2007), is based on the fact that the term may include both the set-marking function and a general reference to shared knowledge.

From a morphosyntactic point of view, general extenders are a heterogeneous class of elements which usually position at the right end of the extended element (be it a NP and a VP, or a whole sentence). For Italian, as Mauri (2014) and Fiorentini (2018: 22) note, it is possible to identify analytic as well as synthetic structures. The first have the structure [conjunction + NP (+ similarity marker)] as *e cose del genere* ‘and things of the kind’, while the second can derive from analytic constructions as is the case of It. *eccetera* ‘etcetera’ originally from the Latin analytic structure ET CĒTĒRA lit. ‘and all-that-is-left’ (cf. Mauri, 2014: 14).

Depending on the conjunction used (*e* ‘and’ or *o* ‘or’), general extenders can perform different functions. Adjunctive structures with *e* suggest the existence of more elements of the same kind and index shared knowledge (Overstreet, 1999: 126), while disjunctive structures with *o* signal the existence of alternatives “with the consequent implications for the speaker’s projected need to be accurate or specific” (Cheshire, 2007: 161, see also Fiorentini, 2018: 22).

It is possible to identify a series of constructions functioning as general extenders in Contemporary Italian which contain some frequent and recurrent expressions such as the deictic *così* lit. ‘like-this’ or the general nouns *cosa/e-roba/e* ‘thing(s)’ both of which can appear in adjunct or disjunct structures. Other forms such as synthetic *eccetera* ‘etcetera’, *e via dicendo* ‘and so on’, and *o che* lit. ‘or that’ are also quite common (cf. Chapter 4 for a detailed analysis of forms in the corpus).

The basic assumption that lies behind the use of these forms is that they combine with a named exemplar (or exemplars) and some nonspecific form of reference (Channel, 1994: 11).

- (109) Naturalmente quando si parla di musica, si intende tutto il pentagramma, pop, rock, jazz, folk, dance, classica, **eccetera** (ITTenTen20)  
 ‘Of course when you talk about music, you mean all the staff, pop, rock, jazz, folk, dance, classical, **etcetera**’

In (109), the marker *eccetera* occurs in the right periphery of a proposition. In the example the reference frame *musica* opens up a list of different types of music. Through the use of the general extender *eccetera*, a potentially open list of types of music is closed.

The more general case can be ‘known’, as in (109), in which the members named are considered illustrative, or else ‘unknown’, in which the example given is only tentative, as in (108) (cf. Dines, 1980: 29). Both the covert and the *ad hoc* categories may indicate the speakers’ assumptions about the different depths of knowledge they share with the interloc-

utor. Therefore, functionally the class may be used to close an open list of elements (as in 109), but also to imply a vague categorisation and a reference to shared knowledge (as in 108).<sup>27</sup>

As loose categorization markers, general extenders highlight a categorization which can be vague for a number of different reasons:

- (a) the category may be a covert one that the speaker agrees exists, but for which there appears to be a lexical gap (Channel, 1994; Jucker, Smith & Lüdge, 2003);
- (b) the speaker may have word retrieval problems (Jucker, Smith & Lüdge, 2003);
- (c) the category may have been created by the speaker during conversation (Barsalou, 1983; O’Keeffe, 2004, 2006; Overstreet, 1999).

Apart from their function of loose categorization markers, general extenders can have further pragmatic functions as discourse markers (Bazzanella, 1995, 2006, 2011) since they index the structure of discourse and the management of interaction. In this respect, their use procedurally signals intentional vagueness, uncertainties of the speakers, and/or reference to common ground (Fiorentini, 2018: 23).

Although the function of indicating loosened categorisation is considered the principal one, these expressions, being pragmatic functional units, are multifunctional in both the linguistic and the non-linguistic contexts, helping to constrain interpretation on particular occasions (Aijmer, 2002: 3; Erman, 2001: 1341; Overstreet, 1999: 11; Stubbe & Holmes 1995: 63). In this regard, Cheshire (2007: 159) suggests that a specific function should not be considered to prevail over another, since these expressions typically and simultaneously refer to different domains, such as information management, interpersonal relationships between interlocutors, textual organisation, speech management (production and processing), and turn-taking.

These functional peculiarities have led various scholars to claim that one relevant function of general extenders is as markers of “intersubjectivity” since speakers use them to index solidarity or assumptions of shared experience (Cheshire, 2007: 158-159; Overstreet, 1999: 66;

27. O’Keeffe (2004), who analyses an Irish radio phone-in programme, shows that people tend to index shared societal information about local customs and culture in order to create and sustain the pseudo-intimacy that is required in this context. Both Labov (1982: 394) and Mendoza-Denton (2008), who analyse general extenders used by adolescent boys in gangs and by Latino girls, respectively, notice that when there is a power differential, the use of general extenders is a way of projecting shared knowledge, whether real or not, and presenting oneself as ‘in’.

Overstreet & Yule, 1997: 250; Stubbe & Holmes, 1995; Mendoza-Denton, 2008).

As Cheshire (2007: 158) suggests, whereas early works on general extenders tended to stress the referential meaning of the forms, with functions which implied the information management component of language, more recent works focus on their functions in the interpersonal domain. This change of perspective may be reflecting an “ongoing development of the meaning of the forms, as they become increasingly based in the speaker’s subjective attitude towards the proposition” (Traugott, 1995).

General extenders have also been considered to be politeness strategies. Erman (2001: 1341) suggests that, like other strategies which are used by speakers to imply a vague categorisation, they have a face-saving function. On a formal level, Overstreet (1999) and Mihatsch (2010a) draw a distinction between functions performed by adjunctive and disjunctive forms. The former would function as positive politeness devices which contribute to the construction of solidarity, while the latter would mainly operate at the level of expression of negative politeness.

### 1.6.2. *Metadiscourse relativisation*

This second group of strategies is based on a metadiscourse relativisation of the validity of the uttering process and, only as an implicature, of the utterance. In (110) the speaker is commenting on the fact that we pass by beggars and do not stop to help them. The statement he makes is a criticism, and therefore a potentially FTA. However, through the use of *in un certo senso* ‘in a certain sense’, the speaker implies that disgust is associated only to a specific sense in which one considers such a situation.

(110) **In un certo senso** c’è da essere disgustati (personal conversation, Vailate 4.12.2015)

‘In a certain sense we should be disgusted’

If approximating strategies focus on the level of content (i.e. the signified) and imply a less than prototypical resemblance to the intended concept, metadiscourse strategies focus on the level of enunciation (also including the level of form, i.e. the signifier) and imply a less than literal resemblance between the uttered unit (e.g. the phrase or speech act) and a potential, indeed more appropriate, alternative.

Mihatsch (2010a) suggests that this strategy is based on metadiscourse comments on naming/uttering which, only as a consequence, implies

an increased degree of vagueness in propositional content, as well as a hedging at the illocutionary level of the force of the utterance, as in (111), or of its validity at the conceptual level, as in (112).

- (111) Ad ogni modo vederli fa un po' effetto perché sono giganteschi!!! La Lonely Planet avvisava dei lati negativi delle Fiji: gli scarafaggi giganti e le zanzare che ti massacrano! Delle seconde neanche l'ombra, dei primi... **diciamo che** li abbiamo visti e sentiti zampettare di notte! (itTenTen16)  
'Anyway seeing them is a little scary because they are gigantic!!! The Lonely Planet warned of the negative aspects of Fiji: the giant cockroaches and the mosquitoes that massacre you! We did not see any of the second, but the first... **let's say** we saw them and heard them scurrying around at night!'
- (112) Andava finito meglio, in effetti, si poteva anche ragionarci su, ma, **come dire**. (itTenTen16)  
'It could've been finished better, as a matter of fact you could think about it, but, **how to say it**'

The functions performed by the expressions selected may explicitly indicate the epistemic limits of validity of the utterance. This is for instance the case of markers like *in qualche modo* 'somehow', *grosso modo* 'roughly', *praticamente* 'practically' in examples (113)-(115) which all relativize the epistemic validity of the content. Similarly, forms like *come si dice* 'how one says it', *dicono* 'they say' in examples (116)-(118) can relativize the degree of evidentiality of the content through the explicit reference to the validity of the source. In this case, the evidential markers introduce vagueness in the utterance, since they imply a deictic shift in the speaker's responsibility from the I-here-now of the utterance.

- (113) la comunicazione è massacrata **in qualche modo** (itTenTen16)  
'Communication is **somehow** massacred'
- (114) siccome si trovano per strada possiamo benissimo **grosso modo** fare un'ipotesi (Bergamo, 13.3.2016)  
'As they can be found on the road, we can easily make **roughly** a hypothesis'
- (115) (-) una cosa a me mi aveva colpito [...] cioè **praticamente** la ragazza è quella che è stata uccisa alla fine (Pavia, 24.5.2016)  
'Something struck me', that is, that the girl is **actually** the one that was killed in the end'
- (116) tu benedetto benedetto zitello, **come si dice**, anche per te zitello è un problema? (Local radio, 9.4.2016)  
'You blessed bachelor, **as they say**, is bachelor a problem for you too?'
- (117) anche se voci **dicono** che è partito (itTenTen16)  
'Even if **some say** he left'

The scope of these strategies is over the deictic origin of the linguistic act. In such cases, vagueness arises as an implicature from the dislocation of the linguistic act, through back-grounding and de-focalizing strategies, and from the deletion of the utterance source.<sup>28</sup>

These metadiscourse strategies can be used to refer to both the propositional content, specifically the connotation or the extended use of a chosen expression, as the potentially offensive word *zitello* ‘bachelor’ in (116), or of the illocutionary force of the speech act, as the use of *in qualche modo*, *grosso modo*, *praticamente* in examples (113)-(115).

A subgroup of these strategies does not imply modification of the propositional content of a speech act, but rather hedges its illocutionary force, strategically exploiting what the speaker linguistically represents as a subjective lack of knowledge. This is the case of many epistemic parentheticals which somehow call into question the speaker’s knowledge, such as *penso* ‘I think’, *credo* ‘I believe’, *immagino* ‘I imagine’, *mi sembra* ‘it seems to me’, as in (118), or of epistemic adverbs, such as *magari*, *forse* ‘maybe’, as in (119).

(118) eh sì↓ **mi sembra** che su questo siamo molto d’accordo↓ **penso**↓ (.) la maggior parte **insomma**. (POP 15\_25\_d\_u\_01087805)

‘Yes, **it seems** we agree on this, **I think. Well**, most of it’

(119) in effetti↑ è una cosa che: sembra un po’:↑ **magari**: qualcuno dice↑ (.) eh sì giochi con le macchinine. (POP 46\_65\_s\_u\_09151004)

‘as a matter of fact, it is something that seems a bit... **maybe** someone says: yes, you are playing with toy cars’

In general, metadiscourse strategies can imply semantic approximation or pragmatic hedging, which can be accomplished with metadiscourse comments. Through these comments the speaker makes use of markers to explicitly refer to the formulation work and potential communication problems that may arise.

### 1.6.3. Reference to deixis

This group of strategies exploits indexical reference to the context of interaction and/or shared knowledge, and can be labelled recognitional deixis (Enfield, 2003: 110-111). The vague interpretation originates in the

28. Brown & Levinson (1987) call these strategies “impersonalization mechanisms” and Caffi (2007) considers them central for mitigation.

fact that the elements/speech acts referred to through deictics are frequently not really ‘available’ in the context of interaction. In these terms, their use is motivated by metaphoric and metonymic extensions which arise as conversational implicatures in the course of speech (cf. also § 1.5.3).

- (120) senti: (-) futura assessora↑ perché mi sembra chiaro che:[sì↓ <<all> sì sì↓> siamo lì↓ siamo lì↓] (POP 15\_25\_s\_d\_02031001p)  
 ‘Listen, future councillor, because it seems clear that yes, yes, yes, we are **there**, we are **there**’

The implicature that arises through the use of the spatial deictic *lì* ‘there’ in (120), is that verbal information is not enough and therefore the interlocutor must activate contextual information. This type of information can have different sources as it can be related to the activation of co-text, as in (121), or shared/encyclopaedic knowledge to infer which referents (examples 122-123), or qualities of referents (124), the speaker intended (see also Mihatsch, 2010a: 75ff.).

- (121) cioè↓ tutt’ora↑ (.) anche oggi↑ anche come è diventata↓ (.) **quella zona lì↓ (.) porta ticinese↑ [(.) eccetera?]** (POP 66\_90\_s\_d09231003)  
 ‘You mean, even now, how **that area** [of Milan] has become, **Porta Ticinese, etcetera?**’
- (122) oppure↑ annozero↑ ballarò↑ <<all> **quelle cose lì>** (POP 46\_65\_s\_u\_11051002)  
 ‘or Annozero, Ballarò, **those things**’
- (123) dopodiché ci sono anche diverse nostre sezioni↑ che non riescono (.) a trovare (.) una sede↑ e: devono appoggiarsi **a questo o a quello↑** (POP 66\_90\_s\_u\_11261006)  
 ‘Therefore, there are many branches [of our party] that cannot find a place [to gather] and have to rely **on this or on that**’
- (124) e allora↑ (-) e allora a me sembra **così↓** molto importante ‘somma↓ riuscire a coinvolgere tutti↑ (POP 46\_65\_d\_d\_01087807)  
 ‘And then, and then, it seems, **so**, important to me, well, being able to involve everyone’

Deictics may be used to prevent the speaker from using a more precise lexeme, to compensate for an imprecise categorisation (*quelle cose lì*), or for possible naming problems (*a questo o a quello*). They may also be used on a social level to imply informality and solidarity, i.e. a common ground to start from, as in the case of general extenders, with which they frequently co-occur.

Deictics, when used as VMs, make the modified unit less precise, but do not refer deictically to it. This is particularly evident when manner deictics are used within general extenders, as in (125).

- (125) però:↑ come uomo (.) cioè:↑ come: figura↑ **e così**:↑ mi sembra: l'uomo al punt- al posto giusto. (POP 15\_25\_d\_d\_04248001)  
 'however, as a man, I mean as a figure **and so**, it seems the man in the right place'

In such contexts the adverb formally closes the list but semantically implies an approximation precisely through the open character of the list itself (Mihatsch 2010a: 76). Hence, deictics used as VMs do not refer to any particular entity, but, within the scope of the conjunction, text-deictically, they refer to a quality of preceding elements which has to be inferred by the interlocutor. It is from this inference that the vague meaning of these expressions arises and the intension of the modified lexemes is extended.

#### 1.6.4. *General nouns*

A last group of features which have a relevant role in the codification of vagueness is that of general nouns (Halliday & Hasan, 1976).

These nouns, which are characterised by “low semantic specificity” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Gassner, 2012: 6), are used to express referential vagueness. The function of these expressions is to enable the speaker to refer to an entity without knowing “exactly which name would be the best to use” (Yule, 1996: 18).<sup>29</sup> On such occasions, the speaker can be so vague as to convey no referential content but invites the interlocutor to infer a referent, as in the case of (126).

- (126) io↑ (.) ti faccio un esempio paradossale↓ (-) ho conosciuto uno che m'ha detto↑ io uso l'eroina↑ perché son curioso↓ ma son più FORTE dell'eroina. (-) non c'è più. (-) cioè le  **cose** ↑ (.) hanno un peso↓ (.) un costo↑(-) e comportano delle mutazioni (.) ANTROPOLOGICHE↑ (POP 66\_90\_s\_u\_03011008)  
 'I'll give a paradoxical example. I knew a guy who told me: “I use heroin because I'm curious, but I'm STRONGER than heroin”. He is dead. I mean, **things** have a weight, a cost, and involve anthropological changes'

Motivations that speakers may have for using a general noun, rather than the corresponding more precise expression, may be different – and derive peculiar pragmatic functions from such differences. For instance,

29. Cf. also Jucker *et alii* (2003), Mahlberg (2005), Hayashi & Yoon (2006), Mihatsch (2006, 2009), Podlesskaya (2010), Andersen (2010), Benninghoven (2018).

the speakers may not know the exact nature of the concept, or they may not be able to refer to the intended concept by name, because they do not know its name. The use of a general noun, however, can also be a choice that enables the speaker to find some time for online processing in order to identify the correct name or to not specify the exact nature of the concept.

As in the case of general extenders and deictics, general nouns may have a social cohesive function, since collaboration is an essential part of their reference, being based on the common ground between interlocutors: speakers may opt for a vague description as part of a cooperative strategy to avoid providing more information than is required in the communicative situation (Andersen, 2010; Jucker *et alii*, 2003; Channel, 1994).

General nouns are expressions which are more frequent in informal settings and relaxed style (Andersen, 2010). Their normalised frequency of occurrence in the context of radio phone-in programmes, which is under analysis in this research, shows that speakers tend to use them more frequently than in face to face interaction (8/1000 words vs 5/1000, respectively).<sup>30</sup>

More common forms such as *cosa* ‘thing’ can be described as atypical members of the class (Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Mihatsch, 2006, 2009), since they act like freely fillable, stable, and well-delimited containers for information, which serve temporary concept formation by conferring a simple label (and conceptually a container) on the propositional content. They are also maximally unspecific in meaning as well as void of lexical features and can therefore be used to refer to any object, entity, or event as in (127) and (128).

(127) spesso ci si prepara: il il sabato e la domenica↓ sono i giorni dove si prepara il cibo per la settimana. quindi le **cose** che poi rimangono nel frigorifero↓ (.) che vengono utilizzate per le varie schiscette del caso↑ per per i vari pranzi della settimana. (POP 26\_45\_s\_u\_10181004)

‘We often prepare ourselves: Saturdays and Sundays are the days when food is prepared for the week. Therefore, **the things** that then remain in the fridge are used for the various lunch boxes of the case, for the various lunches of the week’

(128) be’↓ e:h le reazioni iniziali↑ sono state di shock totale da parte di tutti↓ (-) a parte: alcune amiche↑ che: mie coetanee↑ che (.) l’hanno vista anche questa come **una cosa** un po’ spericolata↓ (POP 26\_45\_s\_d\_01121003)

‘Well, initial reactions were of total shock for everyone, with the exception of some friends, my peers, who considered **this thing** also as a bit reckless’

30. Cf. Ghezzi & Aguiar (2012).

These forms can be used to index a “loose use of language” (Jucker, Smith & Lüdge, 2003), “recognitional deixis” (Enfield, 2003), or “vague reference/categorization” (Channel, 1994).

From a formal point of view, these expressions occupy the syntactic slot that would have been occupied by the target word and constitute a part of the syntactic structure under construction (Podlesskaya, 2010: 11).

Their semantic properties, together with their formal and syntactic characteristics, imply that they are characterised by a minimal lexical content, which is, however, counterbalanced by their strategic syntactic role and pragmatic value.

This implies that their semantic value is in general less important than their pragmatic value. In this sense, it is possible to say that they are maximally vague in meaning and denote an entity of any kind or a matter of an unspecified kind.

In Italian the forms of general nouns are mainly derived from nouns and are characterized by gender and number distinction (*cosa/e* ‘thing.F.SG/F.PL’ vs *cosa/i* ‘thing.M.SG/M.PL’).<sup>31</sup> The repertoire of words (cf. Figure 1.12) includes a variety of expressions which are characterised by different degrees of semantic generalisation, formality, and sociolinguistic connotation.<sup>32</sup>

Figure 1.12 - Repertoire of more frequent Italian general nouns

Referent	Formal	→	Informal	Sociolinguistically connotated <sup>33</sup>
<b>only concrete</b>	<i>oggetto</i> ‘object’		<i>cosa/roba</i> ‘thing’ <i>aggeggio</i> ‘thingmaging’	
<b>concrete and abstract</b>	<i>elemento</i> ‘element’	<i>cosa</i> ‘thing’	<i>roba</i> ‘stuff’ <i>affare</i> ‘business’	<i>cagata/cazzata</i> ‘shit’ <i>cavolata</i> ‘cockup’
<b>only abstract</b>	<i>questione</i> ‘matter’	<i>fatto</i> ‘fact’ <i>discorso</i> ‘discourse’ <i>problema</i> ‘problem’	<i>faccenda</i> ‘matter’	<i>cazzi</i> ‘fucking business’ <i>menata</i> ‘harangue’

31. Forms derived from verbs (such as *cosare*) are rarer, but nevertheless attested (e.g. *Si è messo a cosare, come si dice a provocare uno zingaro*; Podlesskaya, 2010: 15).

32. Cf. also Mihatsch (2009), Andersen (2010) and Geeraerts (2010).

33. The use of general nouns in Italian is also connotated diatopically and diastratically.

Since general nouns have reduced and general semantic values, they can have an exophoric value and acquire their reference from the context of conversation, as in (129), or they can have an endophoric value and acquire it from the preceding or following co-text, as in (130), or from both.

- (129) e↑ (-) non: non ho la speranza di poter cambiare **le cose**↑ dall'italia↓ (-)  
(POP 15\_25\_s\_u\_01211001)  
'I don't have any hope of being able to change **things** from Italy'
- (130) non capisco nemmeno dove sto dove sto andando tra l'altro (21) la gente mi sta guardando↑ e: tutti mi dicono↓ stai barcollando↓ (.) stai barcollando↓ (-) però io dico loro↓ ma non mollo↑ ma non mollo↑ (.) tutte 'ste **cose qui**↓ (.) un po' da deficienti. (POP 15\_25\_03021001m)  
'I don't even understand where I am going. Among other things, people are staring at me and everybody is going like: you are staggering, but I am telling them: I am not giving up, I am not giving up, **and things like that**, a bit silly'

As will be shown in detail in Chapter 4, general nouns often co-occur and cluster with other VMs to increase the degree of vagueness of the unit to which they refer.

### 1.7. Vagueness markers as strategically polite use of language

Within a discourse-pragmatic perspective, where this study belongs, the use of vague language is something with an “intrinsic uncertainty” that can “render the same proposition” with other expressions, and is “purposefully and unabashedly vague” (Channell, 1994: 20; see also Voghera’s conceptualization of intentional vagueness described in § 1.2).

In this perspective, the use of vague language can be considered a multifunctional linguistic phenomenon that “involves imprecision and is employed for certain communicative strategies” Ruzaitè (2007: 28) and is “highly context-dependent” (ibid. p. 53). In this sense the use of VMs would represent a sort of strategic “elasticity” that interlocutors stretch and with which they negotiate on the basis of their communicative needs (Zahng, 2011: 573).

Different types of pragmatic factors may influence the interpretation of VMs including scale effects, the item being modified, expectations (Moxey & Sanford, 1993), and cultural differences (Zhang, 2005). Jucker *et alii* (2003: 1739) affirm that “vagueness is not only an inherent feature of

natural language but also – and crucially – it is an interactional strategy.” They demonstrate that “vague expressions may be more effective than precise ones in conveying the intended meaning of an utterance. That is, vague expressions “may carry more relevant contextual implications than would a precise expression” (ibid. p. 1737). As Zahng (2011: 575-577) exemplifies, the utterance “Most of my friends came to my birthday party” may be more informative than “Twelve friends came to my party,” because “most” conveys more information (e.g. “I am popular”) than the exact number twelve does.

The use of VMs has been connected in the literature with a number of pragmatic functions all of which have been discussed in the course of this chapter.

The first of these relates to *giving the right amount of information* which, most importantly, is suitable to a given situation (Channell, 1994). For instance the speakers may think something is too complicated, or does not need to be made precise. The use of general extenders discussed in § 1.6.1.1 is one example of this pragmatic function as these forms “imply a reference to semantic categories in an open-ended way and help the conversation go smoothly” (Shirato & Stapleton, 2007: 396).

Secondly, VMs may be used for strengthening as in the case of *è una ragazza molto intelligente* ‘she is a very smart girl’ which increases the strength of a claim (Ruzaitè, 2007). By contrast VMs may be used for mitigation purposes, to downtone the force of an illocution so that speech acts “do not appear too direct, unduly authoritative or assertive” (Carter & McCarthy, 2006: 202). For instance VMs can be used to minimize imposition and attenuate negative discursive moves, such as complaint or criticism. Ruzaitè (2007) as well as Beeching (2007) consider vague language use as a politeness strategy to save face “and maintain interpersonal relationships” (Ruzaitè, 2007). The use of forms like *più o meno* ‘more or less’, *un po’* ‘a bit’ convey “imprecision and make statements less assertive and less open to challenge or refutation” (Shirato & Stapleton, 2007: 396).

Moreover the use of VMs may be associated with showing intimacy and solidarity. The reference to shared background and knowledge, creates an informal and friendly atmosphere and marks group membership (Evison *et alii*, 2007). The use of VMs is imbued with social significance (Fairclough, 2003), particularly in everyday conversations (Carter & McCarthy, 2006) “social groups sharing interests and knowledge employ non-specificity in talking about their shared interest” (Channell, 1994: 193). In this perspective, VMs may operate as markers of in groupness to show solidarity and convergence (Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Cutting, 2007b).

Finally, VMs may index *self-distancing* as they may shield the speakers from risks or wrongs by expressing a propositional attitude (Channell, 1994; Jucker *et alii*, 2003; Ruzaitè, 2007). By diminishing the level of commitment, the speakers employ a defensive approach aimed at self-protection. This would be evident in the use of epistemic parentheticals such as *penso* ‘I think’ or of modality words such as *forse* ‘maybe’ which suggest “a lower degree of the speakers’ commitment to the truth of the claim and make the claim less categorical” (Ruzaitè, 2007: 158).

As Zahng (2011: 577) suggests, the characteristic that unites the different pragmatic functions is their typically cooperative tone. Cooperation refers to a joint effort from interlocutors for a common communicative purpose, involving positive and collaborative linguistic behaviour. For example, a person may use a VM to avoid mentioning something directly to maintain privacy, or to save someone’s face out of politeness. Some mechanisms are used by speakers to attain deresponsibilization with a view to meeting their interlocutors’ needs in the first place, to take their feelings into account, but other strategies above all meet the speakers’ needs (cf. Caffi, 2007: 92). It is therefore possible to identify strategies that are hearer-oriented and aim at protecting the interlocutor’s face, versus strategies that are speaker-oriented and aim at protecting the speaker’s face. These functions have divergent social and relational effects, since interlocutor-oriented strategies aim at creating solidarity, immediacy, and empathy, while speaker-oriented ones aim at widening the gap – the degree of power, the asymmetry, and the emotive distance between interlocutors.

On a general level, it is possible to say that vague language use always involves a reduction of obligations for both speaker and hearer (Meyer-Hermann & Weingarten, 1982). These strategies manage speech act responsibility in different ways, since, in the consensus-building process of social interaction, VMs operate in three intertwined fields: knowledge, power, and feelings.

As for the first, VMs may be used to manage the speakers’ commitment to the truth of a proposition; this would be the case of modality markers or of epistemic parentheticals, but also of many evidential markers which shift the deictic origin of the utterance, thereby shifting the speakers’ responsibility for its truth.

As for power and feelings, VMs can be used to downtone the strength of the illocution as they may be used strategically in certain acts that threaten face as is the case of criticisms and disagreement (positive face) or orders and requests (negative face).

Caffi (2007: 93-95), while discussing the more general notion of intensity, suggests that it is possible to consider intensity as a bridging category between linguistic and socio-interactional rules (“system constraints” vs “ritual constraints”, Goffman, 1976). Intensity seems to connect different levels. It may connect illocution and perlocution, as hedging a speech act can be considered a metapragmatic strategy that enables the speaker to decide what is more appropriate in a given context and to act consistently; secondly, it may connect two directions of discourse (i.e. cataphora and anaphora), as hedging can be used either as a preparatory strategy (preparing for the main speech act) or as a form of repair through a series of interactional moves, which are syntactically autonomous and pragmatically subordinated; thirdly, it connects social and individual politeness (i.e. instrumental needs and identity needs) as hedging can aim at interactional effectiveness, thus facilitating the attainment of interactional goals, or at identity building, through the monitoring of distance between interlocutors.

Within the politeness frame, VMs would represent a subgroup of strategies whose function is the protection of the speakers’ or of the interlocutors’ face which are used to modify and modulate the illocutionary force of speech acts in order to protect linguistic action from various interactional risks (Caffi, 2007; Gili Fivela & Bazzanella, 2009: 14; Kaltenböck *et alii*, 2010).

## 1.8. Discussion

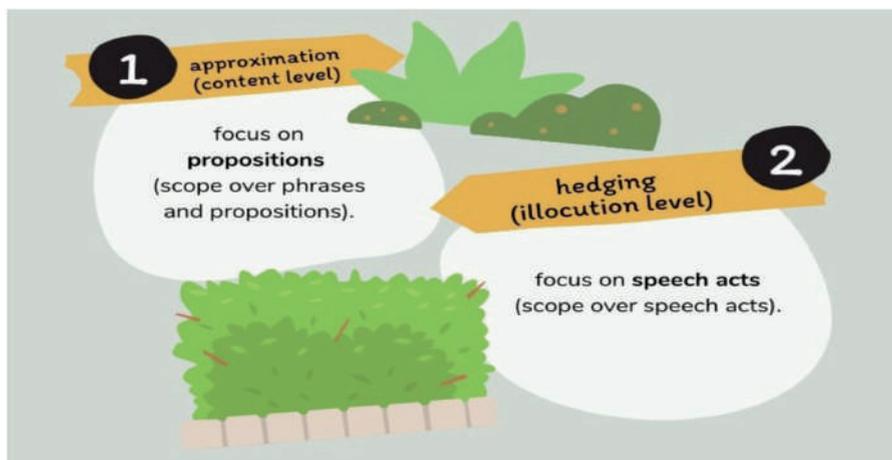
The aim of this Chapter was to describe how vagueness is codified in Italian.

In the use of Italian VMs different levels are intertwined. Functionally VMs can be used as ‘bushes’ to approximate the propositional content of an utterance, or as ‘hedges’ to weaken its illocutionary force or the speaker’s degree of commitment to its truth. Through approximative use, many markers can acquire hedging values (as schematized below in Figure 1.13).

These functions are embodied through forms which can be derived from different levels of language (i.e. prosody, morphology, syntax, lexicon) and which include lexical units, specific morphosyntactic structures, and functional units such as discourse and pragmatic markers.

The use of VMs may also be centred around approximation, meta-discourse relativisation, and deictic strategies. The first imply a less than prototypical resemblance between the codified and the intended concept (through specific markers or the evocation of naming alternatives). The second evokes a less than literal resemblance between the uttered speech

Figure 1.13 - Functions of vagueness markers



acts/propositions/phrases and the intended corresponding concept. The third is based on recognitional deixis and on a vague reference to indexical context. A fourth strategy, which operates at the intersection of the other three, makes use of general nouns.

In some occasions, the use of VMs may be politeness-motivated and pertain to the social relationship between the interlocutors. In this case VMs can be hearer- or speaker-oriented and therefore have different corresponding functions.

On these premises, it is possible to say that VMs represent a formally heterogeneous class of macro- and micro-strategies that belong to different levels of language and are derived through different strategies used by speakers to protect their linguistic action from various interactional risks. It is therefore plausible to consider VMs as belonging to a wider rhetorical strategy “by which a speaker, using a linguistic device, can signal a lack of commitment to either the full semantic membership of an expression or to the full commitment of the speech act being conveyed” (Fraser, 2010: 22).

## 2. *Vagueness markers between pragmatic variation and change*

Moving from the description of VMs outlined in Chapter 1, it is possible to say that they constitute a functional class of features, formally heterogeneous, that operate at the discourse-pragmatic level.

Like many other discourse-pragmatic features, they are polyfunctional and can operate within the interpersonal and/or in the textual domains of language use. For instance, speakers may use VMs to signal their attitudes and stances towards the texts they are producing, as in (1), or towards the interlocutor, as in (2).

- (1) Marco è partito **intorno** alle 7, **credo**.  
'Marco left at **around** 7, **I believe**'
- (2) Parla **un pochino** più forte.  
'Speak **a bit** louder'

Speakers may use VMs for different reasons which all revolve around making their contributions accepted by their interlocutors. The position taken here, which will be explained in detail in the present Chapter, is that this class of features helps speakers in their social positioning and in protecting their social image from various interactional risks.

The hypothesis put forward here is that the wide variety of formal means available to speakers for use as VMs, together with their variable frequency of use in the spoken language, may contribute to creating identifiable discourse styles.

Style is a central notion for the present research especially in relation to the discourse-pragmatic status of VMs. The notion is intended here broadly as the variable expression of discourse, which is influenced by aspects of the context, linguistic and extralinguistic (Schilling-Estes, 2002). It can be considered a holistic and multilevel phenomenon in which

“choices on all levels of semiotic organization relate to social practices and sense making, categorization, and identity management” (Auer, 2007: 11). The present research focuses on the choices that speakers make in relation to the use of VMs and specifically, on how, and if, these choices are constrained by and vary depending on the contextual factor of the age cohort to which the speakers belong.

The study of linguistic variation at the discourse-pragmatic level raises a number of relevant questions for the understanding of speakers’ choices. As a matter of fact, issues pertaining to variation at the discourse-pragmatic level are different from those raised by variable features in the phonological and (morpho)syntactic components of language. One question, which is relevant for the present analysis is whether variation in the frequency of use of VMs by individuals and social groups belonging to different age cohorts may result in variable discourse styles and, eventually, in language change.

The analysis of variation in the use of VMs among speakers of different ages will be carried out by analysing the variable distribution of VMs in different age groups of speakers, from young to old, in two communities of speakers, in two synchronic points of reference in time, specifically in the years between 1976 and 1980, and in 2010. The uses of VMs in these two communities of speakers will be compared diachronically to verify if and how the use of this functional class of features has changed with time, and whether age-graded variation, identified synchronically, may correspond to a generational change in time.

Moving from these premises, this Chapter considers the role of VMs as discourse-pragmatic features in the study of pragmatic variation and change. In § 2.1 the peculiarities of discourse-pragmatic features are described, while in § 2.2 is considered their role in the creation of discourse styles, and in § 2.3 their embedding in the social community. Lastly, in § 2.4 is commented on how age is implicated in language variation and change and in § 2.5 how discourse – pragmatic features are implicated in synchronic variation and in pragmatic change.

## **2.1. Vagueness markers as discourse-pragmatic variables**

Analysing the use of VMs in correlation with the age of speakers means adopting a socio-pragmatic perspective in the study of discourse-pragmatic features.

Although the use of such features is variable, changeable, and accessible to speakers for creating social indices, the number of studies focused

on the correlation between their use and contextual predictors is still modest, if compared with the vast number of studies, which from a socio-linguistic variationist perspective, have dealt with phonological and, to a lesser extent, lower-level morphosyntactic features (see Pichler, 2013 for an overview).

This is probably because of the peculiar properties of units operating on the discourse-pragmatic level, which can mainly be characterised on a functional basis, have an ill-defined grammatical status, a peripheral or extra-sentential position (at least in some occurrences), a variable scope on the linguistic co-text, the sequential, situational and cognitive context, and a lack of truth-functional semantic meaning, but encode a procedural meaning which is not easy to specify in lexical terms and perform multiple pragmatic functions often simultaneously (see the discussion in Chapter 1).

As Pichler (2013: 7) notes, discourse-pragmatic features were considered extra- or a-grammatical elements of language which are not part of sentence grammar. However, with the growing interest in language, independently of sentence or clause, scholars have begun to investigate the role of discourse-pragmatic features in the production, comprehension, and interpretation of discourse. The seminal works on discourse-pragmatic features published in the 1980s (Dines, 1980; Östman, 1981; Schourup, 1985; Blakemore, 1987; Erman, 1987; Schiffrin, 1987) as well as the subsequent proliferation of qualitative studies investigating the distribution and functionality of individual features, have demonstrated that widespread assumptions about their extra-grammatical status and superfluous nature are erroneous. On the contrary these studies have shown that discourse-pragmatic features index social meaning, perform indispensable functions in social interaction, and constitute essential elements of grammar.<sup>1</sup>

These studies consistently highlight that discourse-pragmatic features, like other components of grammar, evince a capacity for change. As this study will try to show, patterns of variation in terms of frequency, strategic use, and formal encoding of discourse features correlate with social and individual internal factors (Cheshire, 1981, 2011; Holmes, 1995; Stubbe & Holmes, 1995; Pichler, 2009, 2013, 2016; Bazzanella, 2001a; Bazzanella, 2001c; Fischer, 2006 on the correlation between the context of interac-

1. As discussed in Chapter 1, the difficulty of defining the grammatical status of many VMs, and more generally of discourse features, has promoted a wider discussion on the relationship between grammar and pragmatics. Two main traditions are characterised by divergent conceptualizations of functional units and, consequently, by different interpretations of the relationship between grammar and pragmatics. In the first, pragmatics lies outside the core grammar; in the second, pragmatics is part of grammar. See e.g. Ghezzi (2014) and Degand & Evers-Vermeul (2015) for overviews of different positions.

tion and textual genres). The peculiar use of discourse-pragmatic elements in correlation with age of speakers has only recently become the focus of a number of studies (Cortés Rodríguez, 1991; Pons Bordería, 1998; Andersen, 2001; Cheshire, 2007; Macaulay, 2005; Tagliamonte, 2005; Tagliamonte & D'Arcy, 2004; Tagliamonte & Denis, 2010; Pichler *et alii*, 2018; Pichler & Hesson, 2016; Tagliamonte, 2016; Bazzanella, 2006 on Italian, among others). Other studies have also shown that diachronically such variables tend to be rather unstable, since new forms are frequently co-opted to perform functions within a few years (Bazzanella, 2001b; Bazzanella, 2003; Bazzanella, 2006).

Nevertheless, despite the evidence that discourse-pragmatic features are systematically involved in patterns of language variation and change, socio-pragmatic-based studies are still at an elementary stage, as the various attempts to provide such evidence are complicated by methodological issues (Macaulay, 2002; Pichler, 2010 and 2013).

The variationist paradigm was originally developed by Labov (1966) for the analysis of phonological variation and has been later applied to morpho-syntactic variation. As higher-level linguistic features, discourse-pragmatic elements do not easily satisfy the main criteria set out by Labov (1972) for variationist analysis. As Pichler (2013: 9) notes, firstly, the operation of semantic-pragmatic and interactional-situational constraints on the use of discourse-pragmatic features regularly affects the frequency critical for quantitative analysis. Secondly, their unique semiotic nature, intrinsic multifunctionality and great context-sensitivity prohibit most discourse-pragmatic variants from being identified on the basis of semantic equivalence (Labov, 1972: 271). Thirdly, the syntactic mobility of discourse-pragmatic features, as well as their multi-faceted meanings, variable scope, and functional overlap with features from other components of language, cause difficulty in defining the scope of analyses.

The theoretical notion of variable is central within the variationist framework. Labov (1966) first developed this construct for the analysis of phonological variation. A variable can be defined as a linguistic feature with two or more identifiable realisations, i.e. variants, which differ in their social and stylistic distribution but are equivalent in referential meaning (“saying ‘the same thing’ in several different ways” Labov, 1972: 271). Pichler (2013: 28) notes that to fully understand the mechanisms underlying the choice process, it is necessary to isolate the whole set of possible variants and calculate each variant’s occurrence out of all possible contexts of occurrence, i.e. those where it did occur and those where it could have occurred but did not (“principle of accountability” Labov, 1972: 72).

As discourse-pragmatic features have peculiar semiotic and distributional properties, it is not easy to apply Labov's parameters to their conceptualisation as variables or to their quantitative analysis. Firstly, they are procedural in nature and, therefore, referentially and syntactically optional, and thus eschew straightforward reporting as non-occurrences. Secondly, discourse-pragmatic features are typically semantically bleached and cannot be defined in terms of pure semantic equivalence. If phonological variables are represented by variants that are equivalent in meaning and function, the same cannot be said for discourse-pragmatic features; establishing functional equivalence beyond the level of phonology is therefore problematic.

For instance, the VMs *non so* 'I don't know', *ad esempio* 'for example', *metti* lit. 'put.2SG' in (3), (4) and (5) below all share an exemplifying function; however, it is questionable whether they represent a mere alternation of variants, or also have a difference in meaning, for instance in terms of style variation.

- (3) Perché anche lì, se, **metti**, vuoi lavorare nell'editoria, imparare a usare le parole e a comporre testi decenti, dovrai studiare sia geografia che glottologia. (ItTenTen 2016)  
'Because even there, if, **for instance**, you want to work in publishing, learn to use words and to compose decent texts, you will have to study both geography and glottology'
- (4) Mi piacerebbe anche lavorare al fianco di un attore come lui, uno di quegli attori come, **non so**, Leonardo DiCaprio, Natalie Portman o Johnny Depp, che fa un sacco di cose strane. (ItTenTen 2016)  
'I would also like to work with an actor like him, one of those actors like, **I don't know**, Leonardo DiCaprio, Natalie Portman or Johnny Depp, who does a lot of strange things'
- (5) [...] è necessario eliminare a monte rumori indesiderati quali quelli generati, **ad esempio**, dall'aria condizionata, dal traffico e da altri rumori indesiderati (ItTenTen 2016)  
'It is necessary to eliminate upstream unwanted noise such as those generated, **for example**, from air conditioning, traffic and other unwanted noise' (ItTenTen 2016)

It is not without problems to try and extend Labov's principles, beyond phonology, to functional units at the level of discourse, as the quality of sameness, which is central in the notion of variable itself, needs be broadened (Lavandera, 1978; Romaine, 1984; Cheshire, 1987; Macaulay, 2002).

Traditional variationist analysis typically begins with the observation that where one variant is used more often, another variant is used less. The

same schema does not hold for discourse pragmatic features, for which the function-form correspondence cannot be sustained, because variables involved within the same interaction may not mean precisely the same thing (*ad esempio, non so* and *metti* are not semantically equivalent) and are optional.

However, if they are members of the same structured set of function-form relationships in the speech community, these patterns can be observed. Sankoff & Thibault (1981: 206) were the first to suggest an accountable manner to approach the study of variation in relation to discourse-pragmatic features, introducing the notion of “weak complementarity”. According to them, linguistic variables at the discourse-pragmatic level can be identified by their distribution across the speech community, rather than by the fact that they mean the same thing (semantic equivalence). Change does occur only through drift and perturbation of grammatical systems, gradually proceeding from one closely related form to another. It also occurs by the forcible juxtaposition of grammatically very different constructions, whose only underlying property in common is their usage for similar discourse functions. It is this relatively violent type of change, which is probably just as prevalent as the gentle diffusion of rule weightings across time and space, which provides so much difficulty for formal grammatical explanation (Sankoff & Thibault, 1981: 207).

In addition, Dines (1980) gives a redefined representation of discourse variables, defining them as all strategies that have the same function in discourse and, therefore, substitutes the condition of semantic equivalence with one of functional comparability within variants (see also Lavandera, 1978). This function-based conceptualisation of discourse-pragmatic variables has proven successful and has been adopted in studies of quotatives (Buchstaller, 2006; Macauley, 2001; Tagliamonte & Hudson, 1999, to name but a few) and intensifiers (Rickford *et alii*, 2007; Ito & Tagliamonte, 2003).

Terkourafi (2011), moving from the notion of procedural meaning, developed within relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995), provides a theoretical justification for the function-based conceptualisation of discourse-pragmatic variables. As such, discourse-pragmatic features encode procedural meanings which constrain the inferential process of comprehension by indicating the type of inference process the hearer is expected to go through (Wilson & Sperber, 1993: 11). Thus, for instance, quotatives instruct the hearers to interpret the speech that follows as attributed to a speaker other than the speaker’s current self, while intensifiers instruct them to interpret the property denoted by the head as one that the speaker wishes to foreground and reinforce. Within this perspective,

a discourse-pragmatic variable can be considered one that varies on the discourse-pragmatic level across varieties of the same language, and whose variants are represented by options made available to different social groups of speakers. For instance, on the actional level a variable may be a speech act for which speakers may have different realization strategies, given the same degree of illocutionary force and propositional content, as is the case of the exemplifying strategies in (3)-(5). On this basis, sameness should be defined in functional terms, in that what varies is not the illocution, but the realization strategy (Schneider, 2010; Tagliamonte, 2011).

However, due to the multifunctionality of discourse-pragmatic variables a purely functional and quantitative approach has been argued to be insufficient in delimiting the variables themselves (Pichler, 2013; Cheshire, 2007). Waters (2016: 41) proposes to select the approach to delimiting discourse-pragmatic variables and their variable contexts depending on the variable. She uses function, form and position to circumscribe the variable in her analysis of discourse-pragmatic adverbs. Cheshire (2007) also uses “functions within local contexts” to account for the various forms of general extenders in English adolescents.

The study of discourse pragmatic variation and change requires therefore some methodological cautions. The analysis of the use of discourse-pragmatic features implies taking into consideration, not only the presence of a form and the frequency with which it appears, but also how it is used, i.e. the structural context in which the new variant appears, its scope, its position, and the function(s) it performs. A key to elucidating the nature of discourse-pragmatic variation and change is not necessarily how often a discourse-pragmatic feature is used but how it is used.

In this study both perspectives are integrated as how a form is used also includes how often it is used. The solution adopted here is to delimit the study of VMs only to elements, words and chunks, deriving from the lexical level. These may include various types of elements (words, phrases, discourse and pragmatic markers, modal particles, etc.) depending on their integration within the syntactic structure of the clause, their freedom of position, and their scope. Given the high number of these different contextual factors which may have an impact of variation in the use of VMs, some methodological choices had to be made. The first implies delimiting the analysis of the context of use of VMs to just one textual genre, i.e. radio telephone conversations, so as to reduce variation related to different text types. The second implies a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches; while the first gives a detailed description of the typology of VMs used, the type of speech unit in which they occur, their scope, and their position within these units, the second gives information on the

frequency of forms (cf. Chapter 3 for a detailed overview of the methodology used for the analysis of data).

Moreover, research on discourse-pragmatic variables has shown that, like other linguistic variables, these features may have meanings that are not socially neutral, but rather index social meaning with connotations which transcend the context of interaction. Precisely because discourse-pragmatic features are often semantically bleached and, some of them, also enjoy a phonological reduction and a syntactic freedom, they are more easily recruited as sociolinguistic markers of an indexical sort (cf. § 2.3 below). In particular, Mendoza-Denton (1999) discusses linguistic stance-taking as “a pragmatic function whereby the speaker’s type and degree of commitment, or stance, on the proposition being expressed is reflected through linguistic means”. As a matter of fact many uses of VMs as hedges can be considered as “stance-taking” in the sense intended by Mendoza-Denton (1999). Stance-taking, she argues, is central to the construction of identity: on the local level, stances display interactional identities as speakers align or de-align with one another by expressing agreement or disagreement with one another’s proposition. On the wider social level, stances reflect and construct aspects of social identity as speakers take up positions associated with particular categories and groups. And how they take up these positions – the pragmatic systems they use – may also be closely tied to identity, for such systems are cultural in origin and may therefore index age, regional, class, or national identifications (Mendoza-Denton, 1999: 273, cf. also Mendoza-Denton, 2004: 491).

However, the optionality of discourse-pragmatic features makes it difficult to connect the local context of interaction with the wider social level. Yet, it is precisely this optionality which is of interest here, as the presence and the choice of a marker can be more or less marked and have different connotations. Moreover, not only may the use of a marker itself be relevant (if compared with its absence or with another marker), but the position it occupies in the utterance and the discourse unit it refers to may also, in turn, eventually carry social meaning themselves.

These peculiarities of discourse-pragmatic features make them non-ideal candidates within a strictly variationist approach, but makes them particularly suitable for studies with a broad socio-pragmatic approach, which is the approach taken here. These structures are relatively free with regard to their place in the sentence, are not subject to many syntactic restrictions, and can show more variability in comparison with phonological or morphological features. These peculiarities let one suppose that because of this freedom of positioning, optionality, and variability, they may be, by their very nature, used by speakers as privileged sites for identity construction.

## 2.2. Style and discourse-pragmatic variation

Discourse-pragmatic features play an essential part in social interaction. As regards VMs, as discussed in Chapter 1, speakers may have different reasons to be vague all revolving around cooperation, which ultimately has to do with creating and maintaining relationships; in doing so speakers, through language use, also project their identities and position themselves on a social level.

Speakers choose and vary their language use according to a number of parameters which have to do with who they are, what they are doing, where they are, who their interlocutors are, but also with more general parameters which have to do with the socio-cultural characteristics of the community where they live (Eckert & Rickford, 2001: 1).

This work is centred on the notion of style, which broadly speaking can be considered as the ability of speakers to change and vary clusters of language forms in interaction. Discourse style is a social construction on a par with other styles, as for instance clothing or hairdo. Style orients what is conventional in any context of language use, but also what is dynamically constructed in acts of contextualization. As such, it connects dialectically normativity and creativity (Mortensen *et alii*, 2017: 1).

Labov (1972: 112) discussed style as a dimension of sociolinguistic variation by referring to “intraindividual variability in speech across contexts of speaking”. In such a view, Bell (1984, 2001) further elaborated Labov’s conceptualization by suggesting that speakers adapt their styles in response to characteristics of addressees by ‘designing’ their audiences (audience design); along similar lines, speakers shape their projected identities and manage their ‘persona’ in interactional situations (Coupland, 1985). In this perspective, style is a dynamic resource for identity performance and a locus for “agentive social action” (Mortensen *et alii*, 2017: 2).

More recent conceptualizations, theorize style as the “complex of interactional processes by which indexical meanings are brought into play in speech events” (*ibid.* 2). Therefore, style has a social meaning relative to normative patterns of association between linguistic and contextual categories. Silverstein (2003) further elaborates this conceptualization and highlights how social meaning can be considered a metapragmatic dimension of language use which amounts to a ‘cultural construal’ of a specific utterance. This construal can itself be interpreted at increasingly abstract levels, which constitute a system of ordered indexicalities (cf. below § 2.3 on the social embedding of pragmatic variation). Similarly, Eckert (2016: 69) considers linguistic variation as a “system of signs, whose meanings emerge in their role in styles that enact social personae or types. These

types in turn are both constrained by, and contribute to, macro-social patterns”.

In sum, it is possible to say that style is a ‘way of doing’ or also a ‘way of being’ and “social styles are woven into the fabric of how any society functions, linguistically and otherwise” (Mortensen *et alii*, 2017: 5). Style points to the creation and negotiation of meanings across different levels of linguistic organization and across linguistic and other semiotic modes. Each style is a fusion of visual self-presentations (e.g. clothes, hair), discourse (ways of talking), demeanour, taste (e.g. patterns of social congregation, musical preferences) (Mortensen *et alii*, 20017: 15).

Linguistic style in particular, points to a stable and durable configuration of linguistic and semiotic usage, and indexes meanings which are stable enough to be identified by at least some members of a society. It is a cultural category that has achieved a degree of cultural recognition, as ‘named’ styles are concepts that allow people to discuss how their culture is organized, how it is and was, how it might be (Mortensen *et alii*, 2017: 5). Moreover, as a distinctive mode of social action, discourse style needs to be enacted, performed in a social environment which it shapes and colours. It is involved in the establishment of distinctiveness of personal and social identities which also include how people relate to others in interactional terms. Therefore, in this perspective, it is (also) a relational style, i.e. a quality of interpersonal relations and of social identities. The idea of stance well exemplifies this conceptualization as the distinctiveness of a way of speaking relates to the design of interpersonal relations (e.g. young speech casual informality) (cf. Du Bois, 2007; Jaffe, 2009).

As ‘sources’ of style, both the micro level of the individual and the macro level of the social have a relevant role. Both these dimensions have been the focus of studies which have alternatively dealt with the importance of one or the other. For instance, Eckert (2008, 2012) highlights the ‘three waves’ of sociolinguistic studies which deal with questions of identity, all of which continue to have currency in contemporary sociolinguistics.

Variationist sociolinguistics has traditionally investigated the ways in which language varies depending on macro-social categories such as the age, sex or social class of the speaker, or the situation in which speech is taking place; in such a perspective, style is considered in terms of the speakers’ degree of control of their own speech, depending on the context of interaction, the identity of their interlocutors, and the topic of conversation (Labov, 1972: 70-109; Cutillas Espinosa & Hernández-Campoy, 2007: 128). However, discontinuities in the expected smooth variation along the class and age *continua* have raised questions about the social forces

behind correlations with these categories (Eckert, 2012: 91-93). As regards the debate within the Italian context, much Italian sociolinguistic tradition considers it reductionist to take into account only social class as the variable on which linguistic styles are dependent (Berruto, 1993a; Berruto, 1993b; Berruto, 2009).

These issues have prompted a second wave of studies with a more ethnographic approach, which investigate language variation in a more situated manner, focusing on ‘speaking’ rather than on ‘speech’ and, therefore, on giving local meaning to more abstract demographic categories. These studies have the advantage of being qualitative, rather than merely quantitative, and of concentrating on genres and contexts of interactions. Such approaches have shifted the attention to variation in relation to participant designed categories (i.e. social networks), which give context-based, local meaning to abstract and not presupposed macro-social categories.<sup>2</sup>

In this regard, a relevant point for the study of variation at the discourse-pragmatic level, is developed in Gumperz (1982: 130-152). From his perspective, the context of interaction is not given *a priori*, but it is actively created by speakers, who, through contextualization cues, routinely signal to interlocutors how aspects of what they say should be interpreted and analysed.<sup>3</sup> In Gumperz’s (1982: 131) perspective, contextualization cues represent links between surface style features and the interpretation of context in relation to activity. VMs, like many other functional units, can be interpreted as contextualization cues through which speakers signal to interlocutors not to take ‘literally’ either the whole utterance (*Partiamo domani, tipo* ‘we are leaving tomorrow, kind of’) or a single expression (*Sono cose che noi mangiamo tipo tutti i giorni* ‘These are things we eat kind of everyday’). These contextualization cues can create contexts also in less consensual ways, as some socially ‘salient’ features of speakers’ styles can lead to conversational inferences, correct or not, about a speaker’s social image (e.g. age), which end up in social labelling, stereotypes and attributions (cf. Gumperz, 1982; Coupland, 2007). The reverse is also true, since the association of a specific stylistic feature with the age of a speaker is made possible through social stereotypes.

A third wave of studies, which are relevant for analysis of discourse-pragmatic variation, is based on linguistic anthropology. These studies have the merit of having provided an account of the agentive use of variation, showing that patterns of variation are not predefined categories, but

2. Consider, to name but two, Milroy (1980) and Rickford (1986).

3. Gumperz’s notion of “contextualization cues” seems to share many properties with the construal of procedural codification described in Sperber & Wilson (1996).

rather resources in the construction of social identity throughout the lifetime of an individual (Eckert, 2012).<sup>4</sup> Differences between social groups are based on ideological concerns, and therefore linguistic variables are not directly attached to social groups of speakers, but are indirectly correlated with them through practices and ideologies. Language variation in this perspective is a means of creating individual and social styles, associated or not with social types, which has the effect of creating a visible linguistic differentiation between groups of speakers. As Beeching (2016: 15) underlines, building on the findings of the first and second waves of variation studies, the third wave focuses on the social meaning of variables. It views styles, rather than variables, as directly associated with identity categories, and explores the contributions of variables to styles. In shifting the focus from dialects to styles, it shifts the focus from speaker categories to the construction of personae.

However different these approaches to style may be, a reconciliation between them is highly desirable, since “there is no inherent clash between macro and micro levels of variation analysis. [... local] processes of meaning making depend on the affordances that socially structured variation in some sense provides” (Coupland, 2007: 8).

The correlation between the micro level of the individual and the macro level of social categories are both involved in the creation and in the variation of linguistic style. What speakers do in the context of interaction is not random or dependent on their creativity, but is in part predetermined by socially structured variation. This is possible because speakers have the ability to reflect on the pragmatic context of interaction, to ‘stylize’ a language, by actively choosing a linguistic style, to ‘perform’ and ‘stage’ the language, basing choices on their metapragmatic awareness in relation to that context of interaction. Stylization and performativity can be considered strategies that speakers employ to resist and challenge social norms, or conversely to conform to them, eventually implying either a break or a continuity with the social contexts in which they occur (Coupland, 2007: 101; Mendoza-Denton, 2004: 487; Rampton, 1995).

The study of discourse-pragmatic features seems particularly rewarding as these features are essential to social interaction and have diverse functions that are often performed simultaneously. For instance, discourse pragmatic features allow speakers to signal the structure of discourse, by marking the end of reported speech, they help organise turn-taking and, especially as regards VMs, enable speakers to index how they want

4. Consider for instance Eckert’s (1989) or Jørgensen’s (2010) studies on adolescent speech, or Coates’ (2004) studies on gender.

their utterance to be understood. Discourse-pragmatic features also mark assumed shared understandings between speakers, show speakers' attitude towards what they are saying, and can be used as fillers to buy time when planning and producing discourse. This makes discourse-pragmatic features different from other types of linguistic features (cf. Cheshire, 2016).

Not all types of variables are equally transparent or available for speakers, as these latter have varying amounts of control over different linguistic features in terms of ability to perceive them, and propensity to evaluate and discuss them metalinguistically. In other words, speakers do not have equal access in terms of perception of attitudes towards different levels of language, so that features belonging to the discourse-pragmatic, lexical, and syntactic levels can be more easily perceived as more or less fashionable or outdated, if compared with features belonging to the phonological or the morphological level (Coulmas, 2005; Niedzielski & Preston, 2003; Preston, 1996). The social meaning attached to phonological variables is not comparable with the social value of discourse-pragmatic ones, and speakers have different degrees of choice and accessibility to these variables.

VMs in this sense represent a privileged point of observation for the behaviour of discourse-pragmatic variables: they are both frequent and integrated into the linguistic and social structure, which make them very 'useful' as variables (Labov, 1972: 78), they are subject to constant change and renewal, are often recycled rather than developed afresh, and are mostly considered to be subject to lexical change rather than a change moving through the grammar (Cheshire, 2016).

Long-term stable variables have clear meanings, while less stable ones, as can be the case with some VMs, move through communities and are therefore more available to speakers to take on social meaning by virtue of their temporariness (Bazzanella, 2006; Labov, 2001; Coulmas, 2005). In this perspective, sound change, if compared with the short life of some VMs, represents the opposite end of the accessibility continuum. It is precisely this 'fluidity' that probably makes discourse-pragmatic features easily available for a variety of social purposes (cf. Eckert, 2012).

Similarly, the social meaning attached to discourse-pragmatic features seems to be rather unstable, as what is considered linguistically not fashionable at one point in time or in one context might well be fashionable in others. Even when speakers operate within a predictable repertoire, they are not limited "to recycling pre-existing symbolic meanings. They can frame the linguistic resources available to them in creative ways, making new meanings from old meanings" (Coupland, 2007: 84).<sup>5</sup>

5. Consider, in this regard, Buchstaller's (2006) investigation on the spread of quotatives *be like* and *go*, where she finds distributional and attitudinal evidence that *go* is a

Moreover, being variables over which speakers have a higher degree of control (if compared with morphological or phonological variants), it is possible to hypothesise that speakers have a certain degree of awareness of the consequences of their stylistic actions and can creatively attend to the form of the linguistic product. Seen from this perspective, style is a motivated choice between alternative linguistic forms, even though speakers may not be fully conscious of alternatives or able to explicitly rationalise the choices they mean: “Our speech is filled with other’s words, and varying degrees of otherness and varying degrees of our-own-ness” (Bakhtin, 1986: 89). This means that speakers can be ‘active’ critics of the social meanings of their own and other people’s speech and can contextualise their speech, creatively designing their style. The awareness of social meaning and the active construction of social contexts become themselves social-cognitive resources for linguistic variation, while socio-historical data, their forms and meanings, become available for re-working and re-contextualising.

Therefore, the properties of style, and the role of discourse-pragmatic variation within it, raise a series of questions for the understanding of variation and change in the use of discourse-pragmatic features if compared with those raised by features in the phonological and (morpho)syntactic components of language. This study aims at contributing to the understanding of such peculiarities. For instance, one question is whether variation in the frequency and the form of VMs used by different individuals and different social groups results in distinct discourse styles. Moreover, whether an approach in terms of discourse style can help explain the frequent emergence of new VMs in the speech of young people, and whether there are general principles involved in the process.

In trying to answer these questions, this research attempts to reconcile variationist, constructionist, and interactionist views and establish a workable conceptual and methodological approach to the analysis of the functional class of VMs. The aim is to provide a nuanced and meaningful interpretation of the way that the markers are used, functionally, by people of different ages and, where possible, to chart the development of specific VMs in time.

more unstable variant at the individual and social levels, if compared with *be like*. In particular *go* seems to have had a latent presence in the repertoire and to have been picked up again as a ‘trendy’ variant after a frequency drop (variable recycling).

### 2.3. The social embedding of discourse-pragmatic variation

If one assumes that language style is a social construction connected with other stylistic systems and with ideological constructions that speakers share and interpret, as part of a common social imagination, then every stylistic move represents the positioning of the speaker with respect to the world. These stylistic moves can be negotiated in the course of interaction, but they connect the linguistic signs to demographic categories that emerge from and constrain context-determined practices (Bourdieu, 1977). As discussed in § 2.2, style is a constant and iterative practice, a process of “bricolage” (Hebdige, 1981: 102-106), in which individual resources can be interpreted and combined with other resources to construct social meaning.

It is possible to find many examples of this process, among variables at the discourse-pragmatic level, which are explicitly discussed, and often stigmatized, in public discussions or books meant for the general public.

In the Italian context, these variables are often labelled *tormentoni* ‘catchphrases’. Stefano Bartezzaghi, the author of the book *Non se ne può più. Il libro dei tormentoni* ‘It’s more than enough. The book of the catchphrases’ gives the following definition of a *tormentone*:

*Dal cioè degli anni Settanta all’attimino degli Ottanta sino ai più recenti piuttosto che e quant’altro; dalle frasi che si leggono sulle magliette ai più logori stereotipi della chiacchiera politica, la scienza tormentologica che qui viene evocata, se non fondata, non intende esorcizzare, censurare o addirittura cancellare i tormentoni, ma solo convincerci della necessità di non lasciarci ipnotizzare dalla loro seduzione. Se in passato è stato possibile dire che l’autore di questo libro ama studiare ‘l’allegria delle parole’, oggi occorre aggiungere che solo una sfumatura separa l’allegria dall’allergia. I ‘tormentoni’ sono parole e altre espressioni allergogene e urticanti che usiamo meccanicamente, perché sono state di moda, perché sembravano azzeccate, spiritose, prestigiose, necessarie, così come i più appiccicosi motivetti dell’estate. Il vaccino non c’è. Ma se, come recita una legge fondamentale, deprecarli è vano; classificarli è improbo; ignorarli è impossibile. I tormentoni vanno conosciuti e manipolati perché è solo così che si può sperare, infine, di superarli. Perché, come dice uno di loro, opportunamente variato, “Se li conosci, li eviti”.*

‘From the *cioè* ‘that is’ of the Seventies, to the *attimino* ‘wee minute’ of the Eighties up to the more recent *piuttosto che* ‘rather than’ and *e quant’altro* ‘and anything else’; from the sentences you read on T-shirts, to the most worn-out stereotypes of political chatter, the tormentological science that is evoked here, if not founded, does not intend to exorcise, censor or even erase catchphrases, but only to convince us of the need not to be hypnotized by their seduction. If in the past it was possible to say that the author of this book loved to study “the joy of words”, today we need to add that only a nuance separates cheerfulness from

allergy. The “tormentoni” are words and other allergic and irritating expressions that we use mechanically, because they were fashionable, because they seemed to be well-chosen, witty, prestigious, necessary, just like the catchiest summer tunes. There is no vaccine. But if, as a fundamental law says, to deprecate them is vain; to classify them is awkward; to ignore them is impossible. Catchphrases must be known and manipulated because it is only in this way that one can hope, finally, to overcome them. Because, as one of them, opportunely modified, recites “If you know them, you avoid them”.

These catchphrases are often described as typical of one particular social group in a specific moment in time and many of them can be considered procedural elements belonging to the discourse-pragmatic domain. Consider for instance the passage below also from Stefano Bartezzaghi’s book. In this chapter the author, who is also a journalist writing a regular column entitled *Lessico e Nuvole* ‘Lexis and clouds’ in the newspaper *La Repubblica*, is explaining how he managed to write a list of catchphrases with the help of the readers of his column. He invited them to play the game “collection of catchphrases”, i.e. those sayings that we find ourselves repeating without even knowing why, and without always being able to indicate the source. The closure of the chapter is the passage below where he describes some discourse-pragmatic features, which are often used with a vagueness marking function.

*Siamo nei valori caldi della hit parade dei tormentoni. Scrive Duccio Battistrada ‘Secondo me come dire e voglio dire sono surclassati da diciamo che’. E ha ragione. Oltretutto questo introduce un tema su cui non voglio dilungarmi troppo ma che comunque va registrato: il tormentone di destra e quello di sinistra. Malgrado i diciamo deformati che Fiorello impiega nell’imitazione di Ignazio La Russa, diciamo che ha qualcosa di sinistra (oltre che di sinistro). Ho l’impressione che diciamo che stia a cioè come la quercia e l’ulivo stanno alla falce e martello. Il giorno che Battistrada mi mandava la sua e-mail, l’allora ministro Giovanna Melandri diede a Repubblica TV un’intervista sullo scandalo poi denominato Calciopoli durante la quale deve aver avuto una specie di crisi allergica perché starnutiva un diciamo che ad ogni singola frase. (Bartezzaghi, 2010: 23).*

‘We are at the top of the hit parade of catchphrases. Duccio Battistrada writes “I think *come dire* ‘you know’ and *voglio dire* ‘I mean’ are outclassed by *diciamo che* ‘let’s say that’”. And he’s right. Moreover, this introduces a topic that I do not want to dwell too much on, but that should be recorded anyway: the catchphrases of the right and those of the left. Despite the deformed *diciamo* that Fiorello uses in the imitation of Ignazio La Russa [an Italian politician], *diciamo che* has a kind of ‘left’ (as well as wicked) flavour. I have the impression that *diciamo che* is to *ciò* ‘that is’ like the oak and the olive are to the hammer and sickle. On the day Battistrada sent me his e-mail, the Minister Giovanna Melandri gave Repubblica

TV an interview on the scandal then called Calciopoli, during which she must have had a sort of allergic crisis, because she sneezed *diciamo che* with every single sentence’

Here Bartezzaghi is commenting on the use of three markers derived from the *verbum dicendi dire* ‘to say’. These forms are typically used by speakers to imply a less than literal resemblance between the expression/speech act they refer to and a more precise alternative and, as such, they can be considered VMs based on a metadiscourse relativisation of speech (cf. § 1.6.2).

Bartezzaghi’s first comments on the fact that both *come dire* and *voglio dire* are, in his opinion, less frequently used today compared to *diciamo che*. Then he goes on to discuss the social meaning which *diciamo che* has, since it is commonly associated with a speaker with a left-political orientation. Moreover, he also comments on how the use of such forms has changed with time as the form *cioè*, which in his opinion was very common in the Seventies, was substituted by *diciamo che*. Specifically, he associates the changes in the use of these forms with the transformations of symbols of the left party in Italy. From the early Nineties the traditional hammer and sickle was abandoned first in favour of an oak tree and then of an olive tree (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 - Symbols of the Italian left party through the years

	1991-1998	1998-2007	From 2007
			

What Bartezzaghi does in his book is very common and frequent. This is related to the fact that linguistic styles and linguistic forms, and more precisely linguistic variables, also carry a social meaning.

As for the first, i.e. linguistic style, Irvine (2001) notes how style is not perceived as a sum of different features, but in the form of features that a stylistic agent separates out for notice. She provides an account of semi-otic processes by which groups of speakers and their linguistic varieties

come to be perceived as distinct, and of the way in which the ideological link between the linguistic and the social is constructed. She suggests that linguistic differences in separate and culturally distant sociolinguistic systems (i.e. a Wolof village in Senegal and a community in Southern Hungary) are interpreted, rationalised, and located on the basis of content which happens to be similar. In both communities morally loaded notions, opposing linguistic austerity to exuberant display, serve as organizing principles that connect linguistic differentiation with social distinctiveness, and that helps members and the community to rationalize the difference between locally available ways of speaking.

Similar processes seem to apply equally well to the construction of meaning for whole styles as well as for individual variables, as in the case of *It. diciamo che* discussed in Bartezzaghi's book. This means that, once speakers isolate and attribute significance to a variable (*diciamo che* is used by speakers with a left-political orientation), the same variable can become a 'co-opted' resource that they can decide, consciously or unconsciously, to incorporate into their own style, if it is judged socially appropriate. This is what the Minister Giovanna Melandri, a representative of the left party at the time, did during the interview cited by Bartezzaghi. It goes without saying that the use of that resource in a new style, and context, would change the meaning both of the resource and of the original style (Eckert, 2008: 457).

This process is particularly relevant in relation to the use of specific discourse-pragmatic variables, such as VMs, since speakers tend to be highly idiosyncratic in their use (Bazzanella, 2001c, 2006). Indeed, it is possible to consider idiosyncratic variation as a social practice, part of a process of construction of identity and social meaning. Personal linguistic style is a "social semiosis [... which] crucially concerns distinctiveness within a system of possibilities" (Irvine, 2001: 21, 23). In other words, although stylistic choices in everyday life can be said to represent acts of identity (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985), they are not independent of the larger social order; rather, they are systematically linked to macro-categories and embedded in practices that produce and reproduce them. In this perspective language variation not only happens naturally within speech communities, but it also represents a resource for styling a meaningful sense of belonging to a place, a group, or an age cohort. As a result, the strategic use of a particular style has the effect that social meanings attached to linguistic variables are not precise and fixed, but constitute a field of indexical and ideologically related potential meanings, which can be activated or not in the context of interaction on the basis of individual (micro-level) and social (macro-level) choice, thus implying that

variables index demographic categories not directly, but indirectly (Eckert, 2008: 454ff). Pragmatic change is inextricably connected with indexicality as social meanings and linguistic choices come to be linked in different ways. For instance, if hearing a word used in a particular way is experienced in connection with a style of dress or grooming or with a social activity, that word may evoke and/or create a social identity, even in the absence of other cues.

The notions of indexicality and of indexical order are extremely relevant in this regard, since they connect macro-sociological facts and individual linguistic practices, providing a theoretical account of the role of context in the process of indexical change.

Indexicality can be defined as the property of a sign to point to (or to index) some object in the context in which it occurs. It was originally introduced by Charles Sanders Peirce who in his semiotic theory describes it as one of the fundamental sign modalities. Labov (1972: 178-180) also highlighted the links between linguistic signs and social features, distinguishing between “indicators” (variables which are present, but not commented upon or even recognised by speakers), “markers” (variables which show consistent stylistic and social stratification but are not open to social awareness) and “stereotypes” (variables which are topics of social comment and which can be subject to correction and hypercorrection, as is the case of *diciamo che* and of many others ‘catchphrases’).

Silverstein generalizes this insight to include a wider range of sociolinguistic phenomena through the introduction of different orders of indexicality. When a variable, which indexes membership in a population (first-order indexical), is “swept up into an ideologically driven metapragmatics”, it develops into second-order indexical (Silverstein, 2003: 219). At this stage speakers notice the linguistic forms and attribute meanings to them that are shaped by ideologies about e.g. age or correctness. In this case the index also describes how speakers stylistically position themselves with respect to the variable selected out (Eckert, 2008: 463). In other words, the feature has been assigned a meaning in terms of one or more ideologies, e.g. the idea that people with a left-political orientation use *diciamo che* a lot. Second-order indexicals, therefore, reflect the status of people who use forms within a socially shared order of popular beliefs, with respect to who uses what forms in what context. Second-order indexicals connect linguistic variables and the metapragmatic meanings they encode.

Third-order indexicals emerge when the feature becomes available for ‘social work’, as it is somehow considered emblematic for a particular socio-demographic context and/or social category. This means the form

has been ‘enregistered’ (Agha, 2003, 2006), i.e. it has become ideologically linked with social identities as it has become associated with a style of speech and can be used to create a context for that style (Johnstone & Kiesling, 2008: 8). This happens when a feature characterized by second order indexicality comes to be perceived as meaningful in terms of another ideological value, for instance political orientation in the case of *diciamo che*, by drawing on the belief that political orientation and linguistic features are essentially linked.

The enregistrement and the development of a third-order indexicality make it possible to ‘stylize’ language, as stylizations are “artistic representations of another’s linguistic style” (Bakhtin, 1986: 362).

These connections between linguistic forms and indexical meanings are highlighted in interactions through metapragmatics (Silverstein, 1993; Agha, 2006), i.e. all the ways in which an utterance can be framed (Goffman, 1986) or contextualized (Gumperz, 1982), that is, linked with a particular context. This implies that in many occasions speakers link forms metapragmatically with social identities. Social values that are attached to linguistic forms may be of various types, political orientation may be one, but also locality or age, as this study will discuss.

When forms become markers for social values, they serve to construct stereotypes by becoming “overt topics of social comment” (Labov, 1994: 78). This process is extremely relevant for the enregistrement of the variable and is made through metapragmatic activities that permeate discourse. These are activities in which “people show one another how forms and meanings are to be linked” (Johnstone, 2011: 657).

Different types of discourse practices may serve this function, such as face-to-face discussions, personal experience narratives, but also a range of public discourses which may include books (as in the case of Bartezzaghi’s book mentioned earlier), social media, performances, etc. For instance, as regards performances, comedians often rely on second-order indexical forms for the construction of humorous personae which, in turn, have a relevant role in ‘enregistering’ particular linguistic forms in multiple ways.

Carlo Verdone, a famous Italian comedian who directed a number movies based on humorous personae, explicitly explains in an interview how he creates one of his characters:

*Per i miei personaggi studio i dettagli vocali, i tic verbali, le pose e gli abiti delle persone intorno a me e traccio il tipo.*

‘For my characters I look at vocal details, verbal tics, poses, the clothing of the people around me and I sketch the type’

For instance, one of his famous characters is Furio, a government employee in an Italian ministry, who can be identified by his logorrhoea and his attention to politeness, among other things. In this sense Furio is likely to be taken as a middle-aged pedantic person who works in a ministry<sup>6</sup> because aspects of the way he talks evoke and create one or more cultural schemas of government employees. The linguistic forms he uses may already be enregistered as indexes of one or another of these schemas for a given listener. For another listener, the performance may enregister them. Probably, what happens in this type of discourse practice is a mixture of the two processes.

Speakers can use forms drawn from stereotyped lists of features to perform an identity, often in ironic, semi-serious ways. This use presupposes that there is a correlation between, for instance, having a left-political orientation and a left-oriented sounding speech or working in the government and having a working-in-the-government sounding speech. It goes without saying that such ‘socially’ loaded forms can thus be used even by people who do not have a left-orientation or that do not work in the government when they want to perform a left-oriented-like or working-in-the-government-like persona.

This recursive work on the indexical value of variables creates an indexical field, which is a representation of a continuous process of reinterpretation and is constituted by a constellation of meanings which are ideologically linked in a totalizing idea of the style of a group of people. As follows from the characteristics of the process just outlined, discourse-pragmatic variables are the ideal candidate for this type of work with their prototypical polyfunctionality, freedom of position, and flexibility of use. Elements that make up persona styles, in turn, gain social meaning through their use across styles, which include combinations they enter into and ways in which they become modified.<sup>7</sup>

It is precisely this indexical value which is at stake in the process of change.

Variability in a speech community is not limited to forms, but also relates to the meanings of forms, and to the ideologies behind them. Social meanings have always proved to be multidimensional. Two of the most productive dimensions along which varieties and speakers tend to be

6. In Italy government employees in ministries are stereotypically associated with rigidity and excessive formality.

7. This idea, which represents the engine of language change, can be correlated with a similar point of view taken in diachronic linguistics, for instance in Traugott & Dasher’s (2002) theory of semantic change, or in Traugott & Trousdale’s (2010) claim of a relationship between synchronic gradience and diachronic gradualness.

judged are prestige/status and attractiveness/likability. Evaluations within one of these systems are accompanied by evaluations within the other system. Individual speech varieties and speakers often attract more positive meanings that compensate for more negative ones, for example posh speakers are considered prestigious but less socially attractive (Coupland, 2007: 95). The same point is summed up by the distinction between ‘overt’ and ‘covert’ prestige, which Trudgill (1974) interprets as the distinctions between what speakers say they think and what they actually think.

Therefore, if Weinreich, Labov & Herzog (1968) argue that the social structuring of variability provides formal orderly heterogeneity in the process of change, Eckert (2008) suggests that the same can be applied to changes in indexical social values and claims the existence of orderly heterogeneity in the changing indexical values of variables.

Each stylistic variable does not have a unique and fixed social meaning; rather, it draws on a social indexical field which speakers employ to reflect or reassert their particular place in the social space, and to make ideological moves. The use of a feature does not simply invoke a pre-existing indexical value, but can also claim to be a new one. This is what happened to the indexical values associated with the expression *cioè* cited in Bartezzaghi’s book, which in the Seventies was associated with left-oriented speech, while today this same value is associated with another form, i.e. *diciamo che*.

As a result of these peculiarities of the indexical fields, changes of the social meanings attached to them can be rapid and decisive, also depending on the rapidity of socio-cultural changes in the society. These transformations may have a role in fostering rapid changes in function-form configurations which are characteristic of many VMs, and of many other discourse-pragmatic features.

As regards the peculiarities of VMs, as discourse-pragmatic variables their role in communication mainly relates to the negotiation of an agreement with the interlocutor (or the reduction of the degree of disagreement), which also includes the negotiation of social acceptance. Conversation on one hand is sociable, as the use of many VMs is often associated with naturalness, friendliness, but conversation is also polite and many VMs can hedge talk, downtoning what might be considered over-strong assertions of opinion. Much interaction is concerned with maintaining face and endangered sociability and many VMs are useful resources for speakers to hide, approximate, hedge, and, perhaps, mitigate their real communicative intentions in order to negotiate a ‘social’ agreement in terms of face.

The function of many VMs would be to make assertive speech acts less direct and help to maintain face and sociality in danger. Brown &

Levinson (1987: 145-172) include hedging opinion under “Positive politeness strategy 6”, since, for instance, speakers may decide to be vague with respect to an opinion in order not to directly express a criticism or a disagreement. Unless the speaker is certain of a hearer’s opinion, a characteristic device in positive politeness is to make one’s opinion safely vague (Beeching, 2007: 74). However, Brown & Levinson’s theory is not only relevant in describing ways in which speakers deal with face-threatening acts, but can also be useful in explaining how speakers encode social status and perform their identities.

Politeness can be relevant in explaining significant changes in use of classes of VMs in relation to speakers’ age. Status is mediated not only through the use of honorifics (*tu* ‘you.2SG’ vs *Lei* ‘you.3SG’) or terms of address (*signore* ‘Sir’ vs *raga* ‘guys’), but also through socially stigmatized forms, as the trajectory of some VMs will show (cf. Chapter 5). Because they hint at uncertainty or approximateness, and because they are often associated with naturalness, friendliness and warmth, many VMs can be both modalising and solidary. VMs are double-edged on a social level: on the one hand, at the level of the speech community, many of them tend to be stigmatized as characteristic of informal registers (see Beeching, 2007 and 2016);<sup>8</sup> on the other, at the level of individual speakers in daily interaction, they are employed meta-pragmatically to signal informality, solidarity, and in-group identity. These uses may represent a variable of a style with possible social meanings in relation to specific groups of speakers. If stereotypes emerge, linking the use of a marker to socio-demographic characteristics of the speaker (e.g. political orientation), then the former may inhibit or accelerate the spread of a form (cf. § 5.2.3).

Considerations of social factors inhibiting or favouring innovations and their spread prove relevant for the analysis of VMs. One of these factors can be connected with politeness, as intended in Brown & Levinson (1987), since the dual conceptualization of politeness as concerning face and social indexation can be related fruitfully to explaining innovation of forms, on the one hand, and their propagation, on the other.

If this is true, as this study will attempt to discuss, it is possible to hypothesise that if speakers of different age groups use the same forms, they do so with variable frequencies, in structurally different contexts and positions, with a variable scope, and with different pragmatic functions.

8. Not all of them are stigmatized, as it happens for other (discourse-pragmatic) variables. For instance, the Italian VM *tipo* ‘type’ is felt as informal, while other hedging devices are stereotypically associated with women’s speech, as in the case of *un attimino* ‘a wee minute’, *un pochettino* ‘a little bit’.

These variations can be correlated with who the speakers are, with their age, and can be explained by considering them to be variables which are not socially equivalent as their meaning may vary according to macrosocial categories and, eventually, change over time.

#### **2.4. Age of speakers as a factor of variation**

The interrelation between synchronic variation and diachronic change is a matter of relationship between tradition and innovation. Language is traditional in nature, since it is handed down from one generation to the next (Coulmas, 2005: 52); however, this process always leaves room for creativity and innovation, since each generation ‘recreates’ the language of its predecessors and creates its own style, often reflecting political, social, and economic transformations in society. These changes are mirrored in changes of linguistic norms.

Age and ageing have a relevant role in this process as they are always perceived individually as well as socially. Eckert (1997: 166) suggests that just as a person’s life stage is used to explain individual behaviours, so is cohort membership, the two being sometimes overlapping. She cites how ‘baby boomers’ or ‘depression babies’ are recognizable age-cohorts in American society and invokes them to explain individuals’ linguistic variation. Moreover, studies like those of Kemp & Yaeger-Dror (1991) or Clermont & Cedegren (1979) on Quebec French, which have examined the relationship between linguistic age-based variation and speakers’ experience of major historical events, have shown abrupt patterns of change in the speech of the population born before or after the years of the American Depression and World War II.

Murphy (2010) points out that research on age variation has shown that ageing can be understood only in dynamic terms for two important reasons. First, it can only be considered within the framework of the total lifespan of an individual, since people do not begin to age at any specific point in life and people of all ages are interdependent in society (Kertzer & Keith, 1984: 8); second, the ageing process cannot be separated from social, cultural, and historical changes that surround it and can therefore be understood only from the perspective of its socio-cultural and patterned variability.

Discourse-pragmatic variables, therefore, like variables belonging to other levels of language, occur in the speech of individuals belonging to different age cohorts only as components of a system which is both individual and social, and which is in permanent flux with durable as well as

ephemeral variables. As Coulmas (2005: 53) notes, teenagers don't speak like octogenarians and every language, as well as every style, comprises expressions, constructions and pronunciations that have been there for a long time, and others of more recent origin. These expressions and constructions are chosen by speakers of different generations at different frequencies.

The space available for variation is of course limited, as any use inserts into existing norms, and speakers use pre-existing scripts that establish the appropriate language for appropriate contexts, and within these schemes they take decisions. Nevertheless, these scripts may be age-biased and speakers belonging to different age-cohorts or to different generations may not be consistent in their use of specific variables. For instance, Andersen (2001) underlines that teen-agers have distinctive high-involvement styles, in which expressive aspects of language are favoured over referential meanings; these styles are also characterized in terms of turn-taking rules, length of turns, faster rate of speech. This recognizable style may be linked to the fact that adolescence is a moment of transition from a basic linguistic competence to more refined skills, and this 'liminal' and threshold-like nature may also have repercussions on other properties of adolescent language, such as the degree of vagueness, attention to modulation of illocutionary force, or choice of specific forms (Rampton, 1997).<sup>9</sup>

Although the variationist paradigm has generated a lot of quantitative data on age differences, age has been mostly of interest because it gives some insight into generational stages of linguistic change, not so much for its being a key identity category that people have to manage and rework throughout their lives.

Age is also a revealing category in the synchronic study of variation as a number of studies underline the existence of a correlation between diachronic changes in the language over the life of an individual (age-specific), and the synchronic varieties of language spoken by different age-cohorts of speakers belonging to the same speech community (generation-specific) (cf. Coupland, 2001; Eckert, 1997; Labov, 1994, among others).

These studies highlight how the differentiation and the interrelation between age-specific and generation-specific language changes has proven

9. Many studies which have focused on discourse variation highlight how teenagers are in the forefront of developments in which lexical items acquire discourse-pragmatic properties. Consider for instance studies on English *like* (Andersen, 2001), on the use of general extenders (Cheshire, 2007; Tagliamonte & Denis, 2010), on quotatives (Buchstaller, 2006; Tagliamonte & D'Arcy, 2004; Tagliamonte & Hudson, 1999) and intensifiers (Tagliamonte, 2005, 2008).

central not only for the description of variation, but also as a methodological and heuristic tool for data analysis and interpretation.

Of course, the identification of age-specific and generation-specific use of language is not always easy. As Eckert (1997: 151) points out, “age and ageing are experienced both individually and as part of a cohort of people who share a life stage, and/or an experience of history”, not to mention the fact that the lenses through which we perceive age vary both intra- and inter-culturally, since ways in which one perceives stages of people’s lives are affected by socio-demographic changes and, therefore, represent culturally shaped classifications. Within the same culture, people have a chronological and objective age, a biological age (which may not correlate with chronological age), and a social age, which is inevitably tied to life events (e.g. family status, job situation, etc.) (Eckert, 1997: 156).<sup>10</sup>

What clearly emerges from studies on the relation between age and language use is that age (and ageing) have an impact on language variation and change. As a matter of fact both age and ageing are a significant part of individuals’ lives as a person’s trajectory across age groups through life “allows the accomplishment of certain age-related landmarks as well as permit the individual to assume certain roles, freedom and responsibilities and give up old ones” (Murphy, 2010: 4). Besides, on a social level people experience pressures to conform to age-appropriate behaviour, which of course has a variety of linguistic instantiations, ranging from conservatism, to conforming to standard varieties in professional lives during adulthood, to pressure towards vernacular features in adolescence (Cerruti *et alii*, 2011; Coulmas, 2005; Radtke, 2005).

Linguistic developments which characterise different stages of life are therefore lifelong but also age-specific, as the speech of members of an age group can socially be considered more or less appropriate to that stage of life. As a matter of fact, ways of speaking in different life stages “are part of the community structuring of language use, and of the linguistic resources employed at any stage in life and social meaning for and within that life stage” (Eckert, 1997: 157-158). Therefore, no age period dominates language development, as there is potential for change in any life stage (Seifert, Hoffnung & Hoffnung, 2000: 15) and people are active agents in shaping their lives in relation to their social environment including family, peers, schools, media and culture.

Sociolinguistic research on age has concentrated more frequently on

10. Coupland, Coupland & Giles (1989) also add a “disjunctive age”, which is the phenomenon of individuals feeling younger or older than their actual chronological age.

early stages of life, namely childhood and adolescence; instead, more recent and rare are studies focused on the linguistic behaviour of older speakers, who, however, tend to be analysed in terms of degenerative diseases with very few exceptions.<sup>11</sup> On the contrary, the language spoken by adults has often been neglected or considered a reference norm, representing the unmarked choice for all age groups: adults command “maximum societal strength and at the same time experience maximal social pressure to conform to existing norms” (Coulmas, 2005: 61). This has given a middle-aged bias to speculations on age-based linguistic variation, as only adults are considered to be ‘doing’ language, rather than learning or losing it (Eckert, 1997; Cheshire, 2005; Coulmas, 2005). The language spoken by adult speakers is often considered the standard against which the language spoken by older or younger speakers can be measured (Cheshire, 2005). As a consequence, children’s language is typically conceptualised in developmental terms, while the elderly’s language is more often considered in terms of degeneration or decline from the middle-aged norm.

Some studies have also stressed that language developments do not gradually and evenly unfold through life, rather they cluster around life events which have a relevant role on social relations and attitudes of individuals.<sup>12</sup> Eckert (1997) suggests that even if Western societies use a chronological age, counting from a person’s year of birth to measure one’s place in the course of life and society, this apparently objective chronological measure is enriched by the meaning of life’s landmarks, which are not necessarily evenly distributed through the course of one’s life.<sup>13</sup>

Among different life stages, adolescence has become increasingly salient culturally, especially in Western societies, beginning from the second half of the 20th century. This might be one of the reasons why an abundance of research has been carried out on childhood and adolescence, and why these two life stages are perceived as more linguistically variable. Eckert (1997) and Cheshire (1987) recognise that people develop language skills throughout their lives and that the skills they are using at any time in life are geared towards that particular life stage. Therefore, a child’s or teenager’s language is not simply a manifestation of an effort to develop

11. Cf. De Bot & Makoni (2005), Paoletti (1998) and Taddei Gheiler (2005).

12. See Sealey (2000) on child language, Coupland, Coupland & Giles (1991) on language of the elderly and ageing in general, Paoletti (1998) on the social construction of older women’s identities in Italy.

13. Eckert (1997) gives examples of birthdays which are associated with a change of personal (65<sup>th</sup> birthday) or institutional (legal majority) status.

real language but a fully mature linguistic form for that particular life stage.

From a linguistic point of view, young age is characterised by different linguistic strategies that are typically associated with a peculiar register or style;<sup>14</sup> a number of studies have focused on stylistic strategies associated with lexicon (Ambrogio & Casalegno, 2004; Radtke, 1993), phonetics (D'Achille, 2005) and phonology (Boario, 2008), morphology (Cortinovis & Miola, 2009; Poletto & Penello, 2006), the use of specific discourse and pragmatic markers (Andersen, 2001; Tagliamonte, 2005), the relationship between young speech and the use of dialect (De Blasi & Montuori, 2006; Fusco, 2007; Radtke, 2005).

Results suggest that the language spoken by younger speakers is characterised by substandard, dialectal and vernacular forms, slang, and innovative expressions that are often very-short-lived. A recurrent observation in a number of studies is that younger speakers from a variety of social backgrounds and mother tongues use a significantly higher number of variables that are socially stigmatised, compared with speakers of all other age groups or of all other ages.<sup>15</sup> The same also seems to be the case with some discourse and pragmatic features, as for some classes of VMs (cf. the data analysis in Chapters 4 and 5).

The reason behind this has been the focus of another field of research, which has analysed the relationship between identity building and the use of language in youth culture (Coulmas, 2005; Jørgensen, 2010). The results seem to suggest that younger speakers tend to appropriate the language for their own purposes, manifest group membership and construct a distinct identity, and resist conforming to societal norms. These studies stress the important role of the adolescent years in language change, especially in relation to grammaticalization and pragmaticalization of features that may have originated in vocabulary.<sup>16</sup> For the Italian context in particular, youth language is of interest since it radicalises some paths of re-standardization of Italian (Radtke, 2005; Ursini, 2005) and represents a source of innovation for other cohorts of speakers (Banfi, 1994; D'Achille, 2005;

14. See for instance Widdicombe & Woolfitt (1997) or, for Italian, Fusco & Marcato (2005).

15. See for instance Chambers & Trudgill (1998) on the *-ng* variable in Norwich; Silva-Corvalan (1981) on clitics in Spanish.

16. Some examples of grammaticalization paths that originate from youth language are given for German in Androutsopoulos (1999), including the grammaticalization of *null*, from the idiom *null block*, into a negative marker; while paths of pragmaticalization of English quotatives have been the focus of a fruitful line of research conducted by Tagliamonte & Hudson (1999), Tagliamonte & D'Arcy (2004), and Buchstaller (2006).

Fusco, 2007), therefore contributing to an acceleration of language change (Cerruti, 2013; Fusco, 2007).

Differently from childhood and adolescence, adulthood has almost been neglected in terms of research, in comparison with the year-by-year approach dedicated to the other two age-cohorts. Although this life stage is generally conceived as a homogeneous age mass (Eckert, 1997: 165), it can be set off linguistically from other age groups in different ways. For example, in Italian the entrance into adulthood is marked linguistically by a change of degree of formality in the system of address (*tu vs Lei*), and differences of one or more generations call for different terms/systems of address (*tu vs Lei, tu vs Lei/Voi/Loro, raga (today) vs compagno* (in the 1970s).

As speakers move through their life stages, they become less dialectal and converge towards the standard; therefore, between the ages of 25 and 60, people more frequently choose standard as opposed to dialectal forms. With advancing age, the pressure of societal norms – or speakers’ willingness to conform to them – decreases. In this sense, it is possible to say that young adults and adults represent age-cohorts between the adolescents and the elderly; however, since their speech represents the norm of what is socially acceptable, they tend not to be perceived as a distinct group.

Explanations relate the adults’ linguistic behaviour to the degree of social pressure that speakers experience at different points of their lives, particularly in Western societies. When speakers are younger, the pressure of overt norms tends to be weak, compared to peer group pressure, so that younger speakers are more influenced by their peers than by anyone else (Cheshire, 2005; Cheshire & Milroy, 1993). When young people enter adulthood, their lives become more public as their social networks expand in their search for personal independence, in the workplace, and in the geographic and social mobility connected with it, all leading to sociolinguistic pressure to adapt to the norms and values of mainstream society (Cheshire, 2005; Coulmas, 2005; Eckert, 1997).

Older speakers on the other hand experience another weakening of such pressure to conform to social norms (Chambers & Trudgill, 1998; Downes, 1998). Coulmas (2005: 62) reports that, after retirement, a return to more dialectal speech forms can be observed. However, as already mentioned, language styles associated with old age have rarely been taken into consideration outside the clinical perspective. Kepmer (1994) in particular describes “elderspeak” as a stylistic variety towards which adults and young people would accommodate when speaking with the elderly (cf. also Cerruti, 2013: 98, who describes this phenomenon as a type of “language crossing”). This accommodation relies on an image of the inter-

locutor which is frequently imbued with social stereotypes. In other words, speakers accommodate not to their interlocutors' communicative needs, but to their own ideas of these needs.<sup>17</sup>

The patterning discussed in relation to different life stages of individuals is extremely relevant from a methodological point of view as it can be applied to entire styles or to individual variables alike. As for the first, research has shown that style-shifting “tends to be sharper for younger speakers than for older speakers, especially between casual and formal styles” (Cheshire, 2005: 1552). As for the second, depending on speakers' levels of social awareness and on the level of indexicality of variables, specific stylistic features are likely to show a consistent change throughout different age groups within communities, with more stigmatised forms peaking in younger speakers and with individuals apparently modifying their use during their lifetime.

Age-grading can be defined as each specific linguistic difference which characterises the language that is considered appropriate and typical of the different stages of life (Coulmas, 2005). It is possible to distinguish between age-exclusive features, which characterise only a life stage, from age-preferential features, which are more common but not exclusive, of a particular age-cohort of speakers. The first are due to maturational factors which reflect biological age, as is for example the case of one-word utterances in small children, or a trembling in elderly speakers (Cheshire, 2005). Rampton's (1995) studies on lexical crossing, however, stress that maintaining a separation between age-exclusive and age-preferential linguistic features may not be relevant. Indeed, features function as social markers and are used, and should be conceptualised, as complementary aspects of the same phenomenon.

Moreover, within the variationist framework, age-based language change and variation posit two opposing systems of speech norms within the community: the first is represented by the overt norms of the dominant social class (middle-aged speakers), to which all other classes ‘aspire’ in their careful speech style, the second by a system of covert norms which, in American variationist studies, implies a street culture producing the vernacular of the urban working class (Labov, 1973). Within this framework, stable sociolinguistic variables show a curvilinear pattern of differentiation, which shows that the less prestigious variants are used more frequently by both younger and older speakers, and that the more prestig-

17. Stereotypical features often associated with speech produced by older speakers include slow production, simplified syntax, avoidance of difficult words, and exaggerated prosody (see Coulmas, 2005; De Bot & Makoni, 2005).

ious variants are used more frequently by middle-aged speakers (Downes, 1998).

Finally, age groups can reflect “the changing social relations across the speakers’ life histories that affect their acquisition and use of linguistic norms and their ability to put them into practice” (Labov, 2001: 101). Stylistic choices are driven by beliefs and attitudes about age divisions and notions of age-specific stylistic suitability: generations not only use language differently, but they also have different beliefs and attitudes towards different speech varieties and styles, and these beliefs reflect social power relations among the age cohorts. As Coulmas (2005: 64) reports, “Those who control the material resources of society determine what is and what isn’t deviant”. An example of this is the well-known stereotype of the clash between the upcoming generation and the older establishment which finds expression in the idea that language is always corrupting, and, from the adults’ perspective, it is always the youngest who are to blame: “‘Youngspeak’ is liable to be branded as deviant, obscene, unsophisticated, if not an insidious attack on the language itself, while ‘oldspeak’ needs not fear a more serious reproach than being quaint” (Coulmas, 2005: 65).<sup>18</sup>

To return to the beginning of this section, acquisition is not a copy, but a reconstruction of a system which mostly, but not completely, overlaps with the previous generation’s system. Youth is a transitory stage of life, so the language spoken at that stage is often ahead of norms; however, intergenerational differences are delimited by the individual need to communicate with other age cohorts, and these constraints determine daily linguistic choices.

## **2.5. Discourse pragmatic features between variation and change**

Language variation and change are intimately linked as variation is an essential part of language, precisely because it can lead to change. Variation is both the end-product of emergence and the very mechanism via which extant structures come into being diachronically. In biology, variation is an essential resource for the development of species (cf. Givón 2002); similarly, for languages, today’s pool of intra-speaker or cross-speaker variants within the speech community are but the inventory of potential diachronic changes and of tomorrow’s emergent types (Givón

18. Consider, for instance, the ‘up-to-date’ stereotype that messaging and computer communication will ruin the standard language.

2002: xvi-xvii). Variation is also a resource that allows speakers to locate themselves and others in a multi-dimensional society where they are constantly constructing (and re-constructing) identities. Age is one of these dimensions, as this research will try to show.

The linguistic, as well as the social, ‘negotiation’ between different generations of speakers, which govern the relationship between tradition and innovation in many aspects of life, has been a major concern in the study of variation, because of its interrelations with language change.

All change involves variability and heterogeneity (Weinreich, Labov & Herzog, 1968: 188); nevertheless, if change presupposes variability, the latter does not necessarily imply the former. Moreover, variation is far from free and haphazard, but is governed by what Weinreich, Labov & Herzog (1968) call “orderly heterogeneity”. Speakers have many choices as to how they assemble any utterance, but these choices often form recognizable patterns within the linguistic systems.

The study of the relationship between linguistic variation and change has prompted scholars to take into consideration a series of problems and, subsequently, to try and answer a number of questions on how speech patterns in a speech community and on what the order is in its orderly heterogeneity. Kiesling (2011: 28ff) notes that the relationship between linguistic variation and change, at any level of language, revolves around five major problems.

First, there is a constraints problem which relates to the set of possible fluctuations and conditions for changes which can take place in a structure of a given type, or to the linguistic and social conditions under which certain changes are (more) likely or unlikely. This implies considering what the linguistic constraints on a form are, and what linguistic conditions have led to a change. For instance, in the case of pragmaticalization of VMs, this involves considering the structural contexts of use of one form, its position, and scope within the utterance by different cohorts of speakers.

Secondly, there is a transition problem which has to do with the different stages that can be observed or must be posited between two (or more) forms of a language defined for a language community at different times. Questions which are relevant for the study of VMs that may arise in relation to this are connected with how a form, which is changing, is spreading through the linguistic system and through the community, at what stage the change is (incipient, accelerating, slowing, almost completed) and why, who adopts the change first and who adopts it last, how one generation moves the change forward.

In the third place there is an embedding problem which relates to how changes are embedded in the matrix of linguistic and extralinguistic

concomitants of the forms analysed, and, therefore, to how a form is patterning in the community and in the language.

Fourthly, there is an evaluation problem which has to do with how it is possible to observe the changes in terms of their effects upon the wide range of non-representational factors involved in speaking. This implies taking into consideration, how speakers evaluate other speakers who use one form more than another, why they use this form in this way, and what effect these evaluations have on this change.

Lastly, the actuation problem which has to do with how and why the change began.

Discourse-pragmatic features, as VMs, are in this regard extremely interesting in the study of language change. Firstly, these features are pervasive in interaction, secondly, they are subject to constant change and renewal, even in a short period of time, and are often recycled (Cheshire, 2016: 256). Barnfield & Buchstaller (2010) also point out that this type of change represents a linguistic ‘fad’ as a particular form becomes fashionable for a while but the next generation then spurns it and finds a new form to use with the same function. Moreover, different forms may be involved in different types of linguistic change, even if they belong to the same functional category, as is the case with VMs. Furthermore, some forms may undergo lexical replacement, while others may not and, if that is the case, it can be relevant to identify which features are affected and what makes them susceptible to this kind of process.

For instance, a change may only take off when it gets evaluated in certain ways by some speech community, or a certain number of speakers have adopted it, but a change happens only when it moves from one generation to the next. This transition suggests that it should be possible to identify not only linguistic changes in progress, but also which forms are involved in change, and which are not, and how.

Moreover, forms may be subjected to different types of changes as pragmatic shifts, where they increase and/or decrease their pragmatic functions, and/or lexical replacements, or where new forms “emerge full-blown with all the functional characteristics of earlier variants in the variable system” (Denis & Tagliamonte, 2016: 93). Therefore, if a VM is undergoing pragmatic shift, younger generations would be expected to use it with a gradually increasing number of new pragmatic functions. By contrast, if some kind of lexical replacement is involved, younger generations of speakers would use a different form from the one preferred by older generations, but there would be no change in the pragmatic functions for which the older and newer forms are used: younger speakers would use the newer form with all the same functions as the older form. Or both

pragmatic shift and lexical replacement could characterize the development of some forms.

Therefore, taking into consideration how variation and change in discourse-pragmatic features can be correlated with the age of speakers, is characterised by theoretical specificities and requires some methodological caution.

In particular, the co-variation between the age of speakers and specific forms needs to be considered both in terms of age-grading behaviour and in terms of generational styles. These different interpretations enable to describe on one hand how speakers use specific forms, in this case VMs, through the different life stages of individuals (age-grading), on the other hand how the use of this class of forms is somehow specific to one (or more) generation of speakers in a particular moment in time (generational style). In order to confront these two patterns of use, in this study data in 'apparent' time, will be confronted with data in 'real' time. As for the first, speakers of different ages (or age-groups) are confronted within the same speech community in one single moment in time. As for the second, the same speech community is confronted in two different moments in time.

Within the apparent-time model, age-stratification is considered in relation to its potential to reflect apparent time. If there are significant differences in the use of a form from older to the younger generations, then a change in the language may be in progress in the direction of the younger generation's usage. The apparent-time hypothesis, first outlined in Labov (1964), implies the use of the present to explain the past, and therefore it represents a strong heuristic construal for reconstructing diachrony on the basis of synchronic evidence (Bailey, 2004; Chambers, 2004). Labov (1972), already in the Martha's Vineyard study, underlined that the effect of age-grading may be a secondary factor involved in change in progress.

This tool seems particularly relevant for the analysis of discourse-pragmatic features that represent instances of rapid language change phenomena, whose form-function configuration can be seen to change in only a few years (Tagliamonte & Hudson, 1999; Bazzanella, 2006); this implies that in apparent time one would expect different age groups to have divergent and dissimilar norms of use of one specific form, or groups of forms (Blommaert, 2003; Buchstaller, 2006; Meyerhoff & Niedzielski, 2003).

However, as speakers do not change substantially beyond the critical period (typically adolescence), their linguistic choices may reflect the state of the language at the time of their critical period. In this regard, Labov (1964) argued that, due to the stability of the linguistic habits of older speakers, their speech patterns reflect the state of language when they first

acquired it. Therefore, on the basis of social and stylistic stability, differences in linguistic output among generations of a speech community can be considered to reflect actual diachronic change. However, what this critical age is and to what degree speakers change their linguistic output in later part of their lives still remains a matter of much debate (Hopper & Traugott, 1993; Sankoff, 2006; Bailey, 2004; Eckert, 2012; Buchstaller, 2006).

Even if one considers more stable phonological variables, rather than discourse-pragmatic variables, there is evidence that children who move to new dialect areas can still modify their phonological systems at least until the age of eight (Chambers, 1992; Payne, 1980); moreover adolescents lead both children and adults in phonetic change and, more generally, in the use of community vernacular features, as mentioned earlier in this Chapter. Likewise, the idea that age represents the smooth passage of linguistic time has been further questioned by increasing evidence that speakers' patterns of phonetic variation can continue to change throughout their lifetimes – becoming either more conservative or more innovative (Sankoff, 2006; Sankoff & Blondeau, 2007).

Labov (1994) himself, showed that the interpretation of apparent-time data requires underlying models of how individuals change during their lives, or of how communities change over time, and what may result from combinations of these possibilities. Sankoff (2005) suggests, in this regard, considering age not in the demographic sense (a gradient variable having to do with year of birth), but rather in terms of the life span of people for whom different periods may involve different sociolinguistic relationships, especially to the standard language (cf. § 2.4).<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, the interrelation of age-grading and apparent time can show two different patterns: if a change is ongoing, older speakers, as they age, may change their speech, to some extent, in the direction of the change; while for stable variables there could be a curvilinear pattern associated with age whereby adult speakers may use a higher number of standard variants.

Consequently, if age-grading is characterised by age-appropriate frequencies that are cyclical in nature, or by change in which individuals over their lifespan change along with historical language change in the wider community, the life span change component does not necessarily imply cyclicity. Labov himself suggests that if generational change repre-

19. See also Gerstenberg & Voeste (2015) on the development of language through the life-span.

sents the ideal model for sound change, age-grading is involved to a greater extent for other variables of which speakers are more socially aware, as is the case with discourse-pragmatic features; in particular it is especially variables that operate at a high level of social awareness that could be modified throughout a speaker's lifetime with consistent age-grading throughout the community (Labov, 1994: 111-112).

In this regard, especially within the variationist perspective, scholars agree on the fact that the best way to disambiguate if language is varying or changing is by examining actual language history. Therefore, although the apparent-time model has proven to be a valid one for some levels of language (e.g. phonology), it should be integrated with real-time evidence especially in studies that focus on discourse-pragmatic variation and change.<sup>20</sup> This integration is helpful especially in addressing the transition problem, as the integration of the apparent- and the real-time models enables to triangulate how transition is actually happening (Kiesling, 2011: 29).

As regards studies in real-time, two different types of longitudinal studies have frequently been undertaken, both involving a comparison at two points in time, namely trend and panel studies (Labov, 1994). The first are carried out with the same population or with a re-sampling of the community (trend studies), while the second follow the same, usually smaller, set of individuals through time (panel studies). In all trend studies, age grading always combines with real-time change. This implies that locating “a gradient age distribution in a new community under study virtually assures [the researcher] of having identified change, whether or not age grading is also involved” (Sankoff, 2006: 113). Instead, most panel studies have underlined that, if in a trend study the data show a modest increase in the direction of a change in progress, individual panelists can be separated into a majority of speakers who remain quite stable, and a minority who change substantially. People who change in later life are usually in their 20s and 30s, sometimes as old as 50, but very rarely do older speakers register significant changes (cf. Ashby, 2001; Sankoff, Blondeau & Charity, 2001).

Finally, two dimensions which seem particularly relevant for the analysis of discourse-pragmatic variation and change depend on social char-

20. Different studies which had originally been undertaken using an apparent-time model were subsequently reproduced and tested against real-time evidence; consider for instance Trudgill's (1988) restudy of Norwich, Cedegren's (1988) restudy of Panama City, Hansen's (2001) trend study of Parisian nasal vowels based on recordings from 1972-74 and 1989-93, and Buchstaller's (2006) study on quotative *be like* and *go* in apparent and real time.

acterization of change and on the status of the variable in the linguistic system. Labov (1966) characterises both stigmatized and prestige features as examples of the pressure of society on language. These forces are applied from above, since they represent the product of overt social pressure which reproduces social hierarchy. This overt process, which can be observed in public performances and discussions, books, teachers' attitudes, and middle-class speakers' reactions, is extremely common for discourse-pragmatic features as discussed in § 2.3. Changes from below, on the other hand, are covert and represent gradual shifts in the behaviour of successive generations.

The linguistic status of the variable itself is also relevant in characterizing how change spreads through the speech community. Isolated features, like many discourse-pragmatic features, which have no implications for the overall configuration of the linguistic system, are easier to learn and therefore can also diffuse among older speakers; conversely, features which are more structurally implicated (such as morphosyntactic variables) tend not to be taken up easily by older speakers. Sankoff (2006) suggests in this regard that such features may be more available to adults, who typically have a wider range of contacts.

## 2.6. Discussion

The aim of this second Chapter was to contextualize the study of VMs within the variationist and socio-pragmatic tradition. Its main objectives were to describe the theoretical notions relevant for the analysis of variation in the use of VMs from a socio-pragmatic perspective.

Firstly, an attempt was made to consider the peculiarities of VMs as discourse-pragmatic variables. The study of variables deriving from the socio-pragmatic level represents a recent line of research within the socio-pragmatic paradigm which requires *ad hoc* methodologies and reference frames, as well as methodological cautions since the traditional notion of sociolinguistic variable cannot be applied *sic et simpliciter* at the discourse-pragmatic level. From a methodological point of view, it implies a redefinition of the notion of variable, which has to do with functional, rather than formal, equivalence, but this also implies a neat delimitation of the parameters taken into consideration for the analysis of variation at the discourse-pragmatic level.

Secondly, the chapter took into consideration the notion of linguistic style as a point of connection between variation at the level of the linguistic community (macro) and at the level of the individual (micro).

It has been argued that elements operating at the discourse-pragmatic level are an essential part of linguistic style, as they are more accessible to speakers in their taking on of social meaning and are therefore more subject to change in the short run.

Thirdly, the chapter focused on the development of socially indexical values by specific linguistic forms and discussed how these meaning can themselves represent a constellation of meanings which may change with time.

Fourthly, the chapter considered the peculiarity of the age of speakers as a factor in the construction of socially indexical values and in linguistic variation, but also in the distribution and propagation of discourse-pragmatic variables in different communities of speakers at shallower levels of time-depth.

Lastly, this Chapter also described the apparent and real-time perspectives (Labov, 1994) which are used to correlate synchronic variation, within different age cohorts of speakers, to diachronic change, within the speech community.

### *3. Corpora and methodologies of analysis*

The strategies that speakers employ to imply a vague reference are the focus of this study whose main aim is to describe the use of these forms by speakers belonging to different age-cohorts in two communities (in 1976 and 2010, respectively). VMs seem particularly significant both for understanding how speakers express vague reference and for describing the social embedding of synchronic variation (apparent time) in relation to diachronic change (real time).

Peculiarities of VMs can be related to their synchronic functional properties in the language, while their synchronic variation can be correlated with their diachronic developments. As discussed in Chapter 1, the use of VMs has to do with the ‘micro’ construction and management of individual identities in the local context of interaction. However, the stylistic value of these forms also implies a connection with the ‘macro’ construction and management of social identities, which in this study are correlated with age of the speakers. Moreover, as mentioned in Chapter 2, forms co-opted as VMs, by virtue of their temporariness, have a higher degree of accessibility and indexicality associated with them.

These peculiarities must be taken into account on a methodological level, especially in relation to the main objective of this study. The methodological issues concerned with the analysis of VMs, which are discourse – pragmatic features, will be described in detail in this Chapter. Such issues mainly have to do with the analysis of variation within the discourse-pragmatic level and relate to the type of approach to take in the data analysis (§ 3.1), to the properties of the context of interaction (i.e. phone-ins to talk radios) (§ 3.2), to the issues related to the constraints of variables, as well as to the type of sampling and representativeness of the two corpora (§ 3.3), to the choice of the transcription system and of the annotation tool that are best suited to analyse the peculiarities of

discourse-pragmatic features (§ 3.4), and finally to the identification of models of discourse segmentation for the analysis of structural contexts of use of VMs and, consequently, for data annotation (§ 3.5).

### **3.1. The analysis of vagueness markers: an onomasiologic and socio-pragmatic approach**

The functional and formal peculiarities of VMs (Chapter 1), as well as their status of discourse pragmatic variables (Chapter 2) require, from a methodological point of view, the integration of different types of approaches for the data analysis.

As discourse-pragmatic variables, VMs cannot be accounted for in purely quantitative terms. However, discourse pragmatic features, as other components of grammar, do evince a capacity for change which has been underlined in a number of studies (e.g. Cheshire, 1981; Holmes, 1995; Macaulay, 2005; Pichler, 2009, 2013, 2016; Beeching, 2016). These studies agree on the fact that the frequency of discourse-pragmatic features, their strategic use, and formal encoding correlate with social and individual factors, and that these factors are motivating forces in discourse change (e.g. Ferrara & Bell, 1995; Tagliamonte & Hudson, 1999; Eckert, 2008). Furthermore, discourse-pragmatic features, if confronted with other features of grammar as phonological or morphological units, tend to be more ephemeral and subject to speakers' choices, as new forms are frequently co-opted to perform functions within a few years (cf. Bazzanella, 2006). Therefore as mentioned in § 2.1, the same peculiarities of discourse-pragmatic features that make them non-ideal candidates for studies within a strictly quantitative variationist perspective, make them particularly suitable for studies, as the one described here, with a broad socio-pragmatic approach. These peculiarities let one suppose that because of their formal and functional properties as (partial) syntactic freedom of position, optionality, and scope variability, VMs may, by their very nature, be used by speakers as privileged sites for identity construction.

As underlined in Chapter 2, most studies on discourse-pragmatic variation have a semasiological approach as it enables the researcher to identify forms unequivocally (e.g. through the use of automatic concordances), and to assign to these forms different pragmatic functions. On the basis of these data, it is often possible to make reliable quantitative considerations. Yet, although this method has been of great benefit to the advances of the study of discourse – pragmatic variation and to the understanding of how it is related to language change (for instance in relation to its cyclical

nature, cf. Hansen, 2020), for VMs in particular considering single forms might not be enough to understand how speakers cope with vagueness in discourse. As discussed in Chapter 1, the use of vague language is a complex and multilevel phenomenon by which words become fluid, stretchable, and stratal. Within the sliding scale of intensity, vague language works to balance strengthening and weakening of speech acts, to firm and soften a speaker's stance, and to reveal and evade the truth. Therefore, for these type of words/forms, by considering single trees, we might miss the woods.

The approach taken here will therefore be eminently onomasiologic in that it considers the category of VMs with the aim of investigating how, within specific strategies, the selection of the forms is governed and what is the correlation between the uses of forms and the age of speakers. Through a comparative analysis of forms, functions, and structural contexts of use the aim of this study is to consider how the social and speech factors impact on the use of vague language.

From this follows that the data analysis cannot be conducted in purely quantitative terms, but needs to be integrated with more qualitative observations, and heuristic interpretations. In other words, a purely quantitative analysis needs to be integrated with more qualitative and interpretational procedures which supply additional information in order to construct a personal interpretation of what speakers say (and/or imply) at a given point in interaction.

Discourse-pragmatic features cannot be accounted for in terms of Labov's (1972) "synonymy principle". For these types of forms the notion of semantic equivalence has to be reconsidered and replaced with the notion of functional equivalence (Dines, 1980). Indeed, variation in the use of VMs in similar structural contexts (*era tipo una comunità vs un po' una comunità* 'it was kind of a community vs it was a bit a community', discussed in § 1.5) does not represent a mere alternation of variants, since the competing forms are also semantically motivated.

For these reasons, on a methodological level the investigation of discourse-pragmatic features cannot consider only the proportional distribution of variants in the corpora, but should also integrate their quantitatively different frequencies of use, with a qualitative analysis of their more frequent structural contexts of use, and with a hermeneutic interpretation of the functions that VMs perform in these contexts. Indeed, the frequency with which a particular feature is used depends upon the complex configuration of the speech event in which it occurs (Hymes, 1974; Macaulay, 2001).

Consequently, the methodological procedure which has been followed for data analysis has required, in the first place, the identification of

relevant strategies through which speakers encode VMs and, only subsequently, the identification of relevant linguistic forms. This is a central methodological point, since not all occurrences of one form can be interpreted as instances of a vague use of language. For instance, as it will be shown in detail in Chapters 4 and 5, in some occurrences in the corpora the marker *cioè* ‘I mean, that is’ cannot be considered a VM, but rather functions more prototypically as a reformulation marker. Nevertheless, some of its uses can be considered a vague use of language and, among these uses, some can be related to the function of exemplification while others are instances of a metadiscourse relativisation. Therefore, purely quantitative comparisons of the token counts of *cioè* may be highly misleading, if one fails to take into account the various functions that can be associated with its use, as well as the different contexts and positions in which the marker can appear. These are aspects of utterance interpretation that must be pragmatically inferred, as an adequate description of social differentiation in the use of VMs must take the prototypical polyfunctionality of these functional units into account.

Moreover, the assignment of linguistic forms to pragmatic functions in spoken data is necessarily a hermeneutic process, which can be highly problematic and, at times, subjective (Andersen, 2001; Holmes, 1995). Indeed, the lack of one-to-one mapping between linguistic form and pragmatic function has significant methodological consequences. Due to the importance of contextual factors, it is an open question whether pragmatic phenomena can be fully described on an empirical basis. The case of VMs is relevant in this respect, since linguistic vagueness can only be described in relation to its context of use as it represents an ‘elastic use of language’ (cf. also Zhang, 2015). Exclusive considerations of formal linguistic properties are not sufficient, since the occurrence of a vague form is not necessarily a reflection of a speaker’s intention to be vague. Although some expressions may explicitly encode vagueness, this is not an inherent feature of these linguistic forms.

From the perspective of this research, these consequences are limited by the integration of a qualitative model of analysis of structural contexts where forms appear, based on a model of discourse-segmentation (§3.5), with a quantitative comparison of their frequencies in these contexts.

Regarding specifically the quantitative approach undertaken in data analysis, some comments are necessary. As quantitative measures of VMs have been based on the frequency of use of linguistic forms in specific structural contexts, high versus low frequency of use, structural contexts being equal, have been considered an indication of a difference in discourse style. As Macaulay (2005: 8) suggests, this approach can

be appropriate for studies on discourse-pragmatic variation in discourse styles, as the latter belongs to the level of *parole* in the Saussurian sense. However, in order to make the comparison between frequencies significant, their count needs to be correlated with the amount of speech produced by different individuals, since the amount per each speaker is often variable. Therefore, in this study the total number of tokens has not been considered relevant per se, but rather it has been considered the relative frequency with which they are used by individual speakers. For this reason, frequencies have always been normalized to 10,000 words (p/10000).

The working hypothesis on which quantitative measures were based is therefore that

- (a) all speakers have the same opportunity to use VMs in their interactions, since conversations are collected under similar conditions, and other variables have been kept as constant as possible (e.g. diatopic variation and conversational genre, cf. § 3.2);
- (b) variation in the frequency of use of any of the forms, which encode these functions, reflects a different discourse style;
- (c) if the differences in the use of a discourse style correlate with (a) membership in an age-cohort or (b) a different historical period of data collection (1976-1980 or 2010), then variation is not simply idiosyncratic.

Thus, moving from these hypothesis, the analysis of data, for both the 1976-1980 and the 2010 corpora, was conducted through a word count of the whole conversation between a caller and a presenter. This required the transcription in its entirety of each conversation and the separation of the quantitative contribution of the caller, from that of the presenter. Tokens were then counted for the amount of speech produced by the caller and this count constituted the base figure for each caller. Both hesitation phenomena such as *ehm* and minimal responses such as *mhm* or *ah* were included, because they have a relevant role in the linguistic codification of vagueness, but also because these forms can regularly be used as acknowledgment or agreement markers in ongoing feedback responses. Relative frequencies were then calculated by dividing the number of occurrences of a given form of VMs by the total number of tokens produced by that speaker during the conversation. These frequencies are always expressed as the number of occurrences per 10,000 tokens in Chapters 4 and 5.

### 3.2. Discourse-pragmatic features and radio phone-in shows

One of the most common problems associated with the interpretation of transcribed spoken data is that the available contextual cues are limited, most frequently to the cues provided by the linguistic form of the utterance (Andersen, 2001). Speech mediated through the radio, and specifically phone-in shows, which have been chosen in this research as the source of data, represent a context of interaction which is not characterised by this limitation. Specifically, this speech genre within the Italian contexts offers some interesting peculiarities both in terms of linguistic ‘traditions’ and social values associated with them.

As for the first, radio phone-ins bring the voice of a community to the community. For those who phone, a radio phone-in provides an interpersonal communication, even if they don’t go ‘on-air’; for the listeners, it offers a form of interpersonal interaction as they feel close to the presenter and are brought into ordinary people’s problems and opinions (O’Keefe 2004). Armstrong and Rubin (1989: 89) comment that a radio phone-in is a type of media that allows some spontaneous interaction and that functions as an alternative to interpersonal interaction. Moreover, Housley & Fitzgerald (2002) demonstrate the importance of the caller and host as identity categories to the flow of the phone-in interaction in its entirety. They also demonstrate that callers create a community, and a shared social public space, which leads to the category of community members.

This speech genre, for the Italian language in particular, is characterised by a series of relevant properties. The so-called *italiano trasmesso* ‘broadcast Italian’ has been the focus of a number of studies stemming from Sabatini (1982).<sup>1</sup> These studies show that broadcast language is characterised by properties which are distinctive of spoken varieties, as the use of voice and its evanescence, and by features which are typical of written varieties, as distance between sender and receiver, and one-to-many communication. The extent of similarity to spoken or written varieties is a matter of degree, which generally is dependent on the ideology of a radio station, on the specific genre (e.g. news, phone-ins, etc.), and on types of communication (e.g. more or less formal).

Broadcast language has other relevant properties for studies on discourse styles (Atzori, 2003: 37). Firstly, it is somehow ‘multiform’ as the presenter, depending on programme formats, may make use

1. Consider for instance Aa.Vv. (1997), Cortelazzo (2000), Cordoni, Ortoleva & Verna (2006), Volpati (2009). These studies eventually prompted the creation of specific *corpora* as Maraschio & Stefanelli (2012) LIR (*Lessico di Frequenza dell’italiano Radiofonico*).

of different registers in similar contexts. Secondly, it is ‘artificial’ as presenters may show different degrees of spontaneity depending on the type of programmes (e.g. listeners’ call-ins *vs* news). Thirdly, language used is strictly dependent on the evolution of the radio as a means of communication in recent years and on the ideology of the radio itself.

Beginning with the birth of local and independent transmissions, radio has been increasingly perceived as “friendly” (Atzori, 2003: 37) and “communal in spirit” (Menduini, 2001) to the point that the Italian broadcast radio language has been defined as a “secondary orality” (Atzori, 2003: 38). From the second half of the Seventies, in Italy the language spoken on the radio shifted from the characteristic formality and written-to-be-read status of the State radio service (*RAI*) towards more informal spoken and diatopically connoted varieties. Yet, as underlined by Ortoleva (1994: 24-25), “much ‘flow’ radio seems to want to belie any possible suspicion of a lack of spontaneity and therefore resorts to an ostentatious conversational register. It thus paradoxically ends up creating its own standards that could be described as hyper-oral”. Therefore, this language variety continues to remain intimately contradictory, in that it is directed towards a vast public but has the simultaneity of face-to-face interaction.

In subsequent years these properties favoured new combinations of distance / otherness and dialogism / privacy (Sabatini, 1997; Menduni, 2002) which had a relevant role in favouring the spread of a new ‘neostandard’ spoken variety of Italian characterised by local pronunciation, dislocated and tropicalised constructions, and specific morphosyntactic traits (Berruto, 1987). Moreover, the role of radio broadcast language in the diffusion of new types of varieties of Italian can also be connected with specific traits, in which the influx of mass-mediated communication has a relevant role, as repetitiveness, borrowing of words or idioms, clichés, and stereotypes (Dardano, 1997).<sup>2</sup>

The importance of mass-mediated communication for the linguistic history of standard Italian is well known (De Mauro, 1963). This importance was deeply rooted in social and technological changes that Italian society experienced since the Sixties.

As for the first, Italy at the time was the arena of large and socially heterogeneous mass movements which included workers, students, intellec-

2. A number of studies which have investigated these aspects highlight that many expressions, extremely common in daily interactions, derive from these sources as *salto di qualità* ‘leap in quality’, *non c’è problema* ‘no problem’, *alla grande* ‘great’, *remare contro* ‘to row against’, *mandare in tilt* ‘to be in a tizzy’, *avere la coda di paglia* ‘to have a straw tail’, *difendersi con le unghie e con i denti* ‘defend yourself tooth and nail’. Cf. Castellani Pollidori (1995) and Masini (2003).

tuals, and ethnic minority groups. These movements, which often formed by spontaneous aggregation, were characterised by a strong charge of protest against the dominant power apparatus and their ideologies. The student's movement was particularly important as it gave the fuse to all other movements. The students' protest had a strong left-political orientation and was characterised by a generational revolt which posed a number of questions to society, including the right to study, and which resulted in demonstrations with marches and occupations of schools and universities especially in big cities as Milan, Bologna, and Rome.

Mass media, and the radio in particular, acted as a megaphones for the claims of these movements on a social as well as on a linguistic basis. As regards the latter, Coupland (2007) stresses how the mass media influence the sociolinguistic resources and the generation of new linguistic means which are used and developed in everyday practices, however short-lived they may be. In the first place, mass media, and the radio particularly in the Italian context, have become increasingly active and relevant in delivering to speakers the extensive experience of language variation.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, mass media construct new social meanings by embedding them in new contexts and genres. In particular, Coupland (2007: 185) suggests that some speech styles and stylisations borrowed from mass media, outside the original context of use, increasingly have the feel of mediated discourse. As a number of studies have underlined, in contemporary life there is a steady accumulation of domains and instances where the mediated quality of talk is discernible.<sup>4</sup>

It is possible to give countless examples of irruption of media-derived forms into ordinary interaction-practices (e.g. It. *nobbuono* 'noo good', from Andy Luotto style in the TV programme *Altra domenica*, or *vaaa beene* 'all right' from the dj Albertino in the TV programme *Zelig, ma vieni!* 'come on!' from a movie by Aldo, Giovanni and Giacomo (cf. Fedriani & Molinelli 2019).

These points do not concern how the mass media might be causally involved in linguistic change, but how people perceive interaction, since stylistic design seems to be crossing over between on-air and off-air contexts (Coupland, 2007). However, the reverse is also true, since institutionally framed talk media (TV and radio) provide a stronger and more interpretable frame for spoken performance, and their relative clarity can

3. Consider for instance Tagliamonte & Roberts (2005) study on the diffusion of intensifier *so* from the TV series *Friends* into young speech in the UK.

4. Cf. Rampton's (2006) analysis of the introduction of media-derived expressive forms in ordinary sociolinguistic practices of teenagers in the UK or studies collected in Jørgensen (2010) on practices of Danish teenagers.

help analyse style at work in spoken performances. Media talk, with its transparent genre structures and repeated formats, is a vivid representation of everyday social interaction. In this respect, media language is not different in kind from face to face interaction and does not necessarily demand specialist semantic concepts (Coupland, 2007: 28).

As for technological changes that the Italian society experienced moving from the Sixties, they also had a relevant role in deeply affecting the functions and audiences of the radio. Firstly, the diffusion of the transistor made radio an economical, portable medium of information and entertainment for the younger generations. Secondly, the spread of new formats in programmes contributed to developing new innovations in language and mass-mediated models of interaction.

Listeners' phone-shows represent one extremely relevant example of these innovations for its informality, prominent regional and spoken characteristics, and recognisable interactional organization (cf. Atzori, 2003). The first programme in which common people had a voice on the radio, going directly on the air with their specific 'regional' language, albeit in a very controlled and filtered manner, was *Chiamate Roma 3131*.<sup>5</sup> The programme was broadcast on the State-owned *RAI* channel and was, at least in its beginnings, characterised by a formal and controlled style, which was gradually lost in favour of a more relaxed interaction with the public.

Due to changes in society, political movements, and the student protests of the late Sixties, a number of local radio stations, the so-called *radio libere* 'free radios', that supported these political movements, began transmitting from a number of Italian cities (e.g. *Radio Alice* 'Alice Radio' in Bologna, *Radio radicale* 'Radical Radio' in Rome, Milan, and Bari, *Radio città futura* 'Future City Radio' in Rome, *Radio popolare* 'Popular Radio' in Milan). In July 1976, through the Government's ending of the State-owned radio service monopoly, a liberalization of the airwaves began which increased the number of local radio stations and the fragmentation of the public. Different stations captured segments of the public through specific language choices, degrees of interactivity, and programme schedules.

One of these 'free radios' is *Radio popolare* which has been chosen for the present research for different reasons. In the first place, the station is based in Milan and instantiates the regional variety spoken around the

5. The first broadcast was on January 7, 1969. The programme was presented by Franco Moccagatta, Gianni Boncompagni, and Federico Taddei.

metropolitan area of the city.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, although its ideology, moving from its origin, as *radio libera* voiced the left-oriented student and union protests, *Radio popolare* was always oriented towards linguistic and communicative strategies which aimed at reaching the widest variety of public that was listening to the radio, not limited to the left wing. As Ferrentino (2006: 9) highlights, describing the ideology of *Radio popolare*

*[...] più si è “efficaci” nella costruzione del messaggio attraverso suoni, ritmi, toni e parole, più si allarga il numero di persone che comprende la nostra comunicazione. [...] Essere, o tentare di essere, solo una radio d’informazione fu sicuramente il segno caratteristico di quegli anni.*

‘The more ‘effective’ one is in the construction of the message through sounds, rhythms, tones and words, the larger is the number of people who understands our communication. [...] Being, or trying to be, just an information radio station was certainly the hallmark of those years’.

Another important peculiarity of the station, which was central in the selection process of candidate radios, can be summarized in its motto *Siamo tutti giornalisti... siamo tutti radiofonici* ‘We are all journalists, we are all radiophiles’ (Ferrentino, 2006: 8). This ideology on the nature of the radio strongly influenced the types of programmes broadcast and the degrees of participation of the audience that represented the backbone of the station throughout its history.<sup>7</sup>

These characteristics led to a special continuity of formats over time that is evident in very successful programmes as *Microfono aperto* ‘Open microphone’. These formats are characterised by listeners calling the radio station to express openly their point of view on a topic and, therefore, imply a constant, informal, direct interaction with the audience. Over time such programmes have diversified in titles, topics discussed, and audience of reference; however, the calling audience has always been central to the radio ideology. *Microfono aperto*, in particular, has been the most characteristic and constant programme through the years and has been on the

6. This variety has not been so well represented in corpora of spoken language so far, for instance the LIP corpus of spoken Italian comprises texts gathered in Milan, but only a few of them consist of listeners’ phone-ins, while C-Oral-Rom collects texts of Florentine Italian, AVIP has material from Naples, CLIPS contains a relevant section of broadcast speech which is diatopically stratified, but not a sufficient number of telephone conversations. The same is also true for the recent LIR (Maraschio & Stefanelli, 2012) and KIParla (Mauri *et alii*, 2019).

7. Frequent listeners of *Radio popolare* not only participate in expressing their point of view through open microphones, but are also reporters in factories, schools, and political demonstrations.

air since the very beginning of *Radio popolare* (at the time *Radio Lina*) in 1976.

These sociological and linguistic peculiarities of *Radio popolare* make it a precious source of data for the present research.

### **3.3. Constraining the variables, managing corpora representativeness, balance and sampling**

Methodological choices in relation to the constraints on variables, the creation of the corpora and their representativeness, balancing, and sampling are directly connected with the more general objectives of this research.

A first direction of research includes the analysis of how speakers of different age-cohorts use VMs with the objective of verifying to what extent variation in the use of VMs correlate with the age of the speakers. A second direction considers the diachronic dimension and aims at verifying whether and how the use of VMs among different generations of speakers has changed over time.

As regards the constraints on the variables, considering the objectives just outlined for this research, phone-ins to talk radio share a series of relevant properties. Firstly, listeners' phone-ins are characterised by the absence of physical context, which reduces the problem of lack of context for the interpretation of spoken data (since speakers and researcher can rely on the same context); secondly, they are representative of more spoken, regional, and informal varieties of language; thirdly, the specifics of *Radio popolare* just outlined in § 3.2 make it possible to constrain the diatopic variability of language, since the telephone conversations gathered for corpora analysis are all from speakers living in Lombardy; fourthly, the continuity of the programme formats yields comparability in time between different generations of speakers; lastly, the choice of including in the corpora only phone-in discussions grants comparability of data in terms of genres of communication and may be relevant for the use of VMs. Speakers may be prompted to pragmatically indicate a vague interpretation of their utterances because of the public nature of radio broadcasting, but also because of the communal nature of *Radio popolare*. This becomes particularly relevant in relation to the use of VMs which may be employed by listeners for a variety of reasons ranging from judging details irrelevant, to worrying about being charged with giving false information, or to wanting to create an informal atmosphere by building on common knowledge shared with their interlocutors.

As regards instead the creation of corpora, the methodological choices relating to both the directions of research (i.e. synchronic variation and diachronic change) are based on the apparent- and real-time models discussed in Chapter 2. The real-time comparison between the two corpora was constructed as a trend study which was carried out through a re-sampling of the speech community of callers to *Radio popolare* in 1976-1980 and in 2010, respectively.

On the basis of these premises, two comparable corpora were built collecting listeners' calls to the programme *Microfono aperto* received (a) from 1976 to 1980, and (b) in 2010. The idea behind this method is that samples of speech are gathered under similar circumstances, from individuals belonging to different age cohorts at relevant moments in time (Macaulay, 2005: 12). From this follows that both the 1976 corpus and the 2010 corpus are 'specialized', in that they only gather texts belonging to a specific genre of conversation, i.e. phone-ins to the same radio programme. The two corpora are, however, balanced, since they not only include different callers, but also different presenters so that they can provide a more representative sample of this variety of Italian.

As for balance, not so much in relation to different genres, but more specifically in relation to different topics of discussion between interlocutors, the choice was made to deal as much as possible (depending on the availability of data) with general themes connected with society and culture, rather than economics or politics. The latter might have been characterized by more specialized language, which could have biased language representativeness.

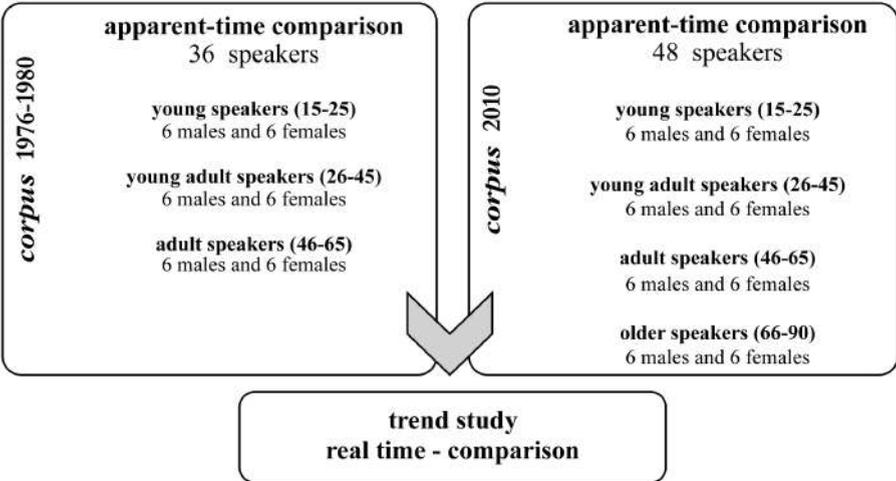
The sampling frame was for the vast majority the programme *Microfono aperto* for both corpora; however, for the 2010 corpus, four conversations from the programme *Mentelocale* 'local mind' were also added. This was necessary because of the scarcity of younger speakers calling *Microfono aperto* in 2010. Differently from *Microfono aperto*, *Mente locale* is intended to provide local information, including information on traffic and weather, through listeners' calls by which callers give their comments on the topic of the day.

Age-cohorts were then identified on the basis of both ethnic and emic principles. Therefore, where necessary, an 'ethnic', and purely chronological, categorization of speakers has been integrated with an 'emic' categorization, based on shared relevant time experiences. For instance, speakers who were above 65, but still working, were considered adult speakers and not elderly speakers (cf. Eckert, 1997; Murphy, 2010 on emic and ethnic consideration for the identification of age-cohorts). Moving from these premises, four different age-cohorts were identified:

- (1) age group 1: young speakers (15-25, student life);
- (2) age group 2: young adult speakers (26-45, early work life – family life);
- (3) age group 3: adult speakers (46-65, final work position – family life);
- (4) age-group 4: older speakers (66 or more, retirement life).

On the basis of the age-cohorts identified, speakers in each corpus were stratified by age and gender into sub-corpora according to the diagram in Figure (3.1).

Figure 3.1 - Corpora and age cohorts of speakers



The selection of speakers was not random but relied firstly on the listeners’ information about their age and, secondly, on available personal information (e.g. education, family background, and city of residence). When speakers gave contact information, they were directly asked for more details on their sociolinguistic situation. Only speakers living in Lombardy were chosen. The same information was also gathered for presenters in the 2010 corpus through direct sociolinguistic interviews.

For each telephone conversation, metadata were created. Each file includes sociolinguistic information on the participants and information on the radio programme (e.g. the type of programme, its topic,

who the presenter is, the date of broadcast, the length of the conversation). A sample of the metadata gathered for each conversation is given in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 - Sample of corpus metadata

---

**Programme:** *Microfono aperto*  
**Timeslot:** evening  
**Topic:** Teenagers and violence  
**Presenter:** Massimo Bacchetta  
**Date:** 11 August 2010  
**Begins:** 00:51:32  
**Ends:** 00:58:14  
**Length:** 6:42

---

**Speaker table**

---

**GOF**

**Sex:** m

**Languages used:** ita

User defined attributes:

**Name:** Goffredo

**Age group:** adult

**Age:** 50

**Job:** employee

**Education:** high school

**Family:** married

**Children:** yes

**Variety:** Lombard

**Residence:** Varese

**PREMA**

**Sex:** m

**Languages used:** ita

User defined attributes:

**Name:** Massimo Bacchetta

**Age group:** young adult

**Age:** 45

**Job:** journalist

**Education:** high school

**Family:** married

**Children:** yes

**Variety:** Lombard

**Residence:** Milan

---

Overviews of speakers, their pseudonyms,<sup>8</sup> ages and respective topics of discussion are given in Table 3.2 (1976-1980 corpus) and in Table 3.3 (2010 corpus).

8. Speakers' pseudonyms were chosen on the basis of the first letter of their real names (Simone > Sandro).

Table 3.2 - List of speakers and topics (1976-1980 corpus)

ID	Topic	Name	Age
15_25_d_d_1980_fuga_01 <sup>9</sup>	<i>Running away from home</i>	Luigia	16
15_25_d_u_01087805	<i>Murder in Accalarentia</i>	Sallustio	17
15_25_d_u_01087803	<i>Murder in Accalarentia</i>	Umberto	17
15_25_d_u_1980_fuga_02	<i>Running away from home</i>	Bartolomeo	17
15_25_d_d_1980_fuga_03	<i>Running away from home</i>	Lucia	17
15_25_d_u_1980_fuga_04	<i>Running away from home</i>	Paolo	18
15_25_d_d_1980_ramones_01	<i>Ramones concert</i>	Viviana	18
15_25_d_u_02068012	<i>Antonio Brambilla</i>	Mario	20
15_25_d_d_04248001	<i>Do you like Pertini?</i>	Cinzia	20
15_25_d_u_05147714	<i>Student demonstration</i>	Edo	22
15_25_d_d_1987801	<i>Girl raping</i>	Luisa	22
15_25_d_d_198001	<i>Being a prostitute</i>	Antonella	23
26_45_d_d_1976_prima	<i>Your first time</i>	Alba	28
26_45_d_u_02068010	<i>Antonio Brambilla</i>	Giancarlo	30
26_45_d_u_05147710	<i>Reports on a demonstration</i>	Fernando	33
26_45_d_d_01297908	<i>Factory strikes</i>	Marta	33
26_45_d_u_05147711	<i>Reports on demonstration</i>	Paolo	34
26_45_d_u_01087807	<i>Young people killing</i>	Mirco	36
26_45_d_d_011017801	<i>Factory strikes</i>	Stefania	36
26_45_d_d_05067820	<i>Hay fever</i>	Laura	38
26_45_d_u_01087802	<i>Young people killing</i>	Ippolito	40
26_45_d_d_04097801	<i>Factory strikes</i>	Giulia	40
26_45_d_u_02068007	<i>Antonio Brambilla</i>	Franco	41
26_45_d_d_02068011	<i>Antonio Brambilla</i>	Noemi	45
46_65_d_u_01087801	<i>Arms and violence</i>	Tullio	46
46_65_d_d_04248012	<i>Presidents and funerals</i>	Vanessa	46

9. Each ID contains the age group of the speaker (15\_25, 26\_45, 46\_65, 66\_90), the corpus code (d = 1976-1980, s = 2010), the speaker's sex (m = male, d = female), the date of the call (8 January 1978) and the progressive number of the telephone call (05). In some cases, in the 1976-1980 corpus, where only the year was available, other relevant information on the topic of the telephone conversation is indicated. For the 2010 corpus, the indication of the other programme (different from *Microfono aperto*) is given (m = *Mentelocale*).

Table 3.2 - Continued

<b>ID</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>
46_65_d_u_05147708	<i>Solidarity</i>	Pino	47
46_65_d_u_01087804	<i>Arms and violence</i>	Uberto	48
46_65_d_d_04248013	<i>Do you like Pertini?</i>	Marina	48
46_65_d_u_01297901	<i>Strikes and solidarity</i>	Petronio	49
46_65_d_u_02068008	<i>Antonio Brambilla</i>	Luca	50
46_65_d_d_04248014	<i>Do you like Pertini?</i>	Domotilla	51
46_65_d_d_01087807	<i>Young people and arms</i>	Silvia	52
46_65_d_u_04248011	<i>Do you like Pertini?</i>	Olivo	53
46_65_d_d_02068004	<i>Antonio Brambilla</i>	Andromeda	53
46_65_d_d_04248006	<i>Do you like Pertini?</i>	Virginia	63

Table 3.3 - List of speakers and topics (2010 corpus)

<b>ID</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>
15_25_s_d_10131001m	<i>Students' protest</i>	Eleonora	17
15_25_s_u_11121101m	<i>Young people</i>	Matteo	18
15_25_s_d_012611m	<i>Daily outfit</i>	Porzia	18
15-25_s_d_09021001	<i>University entry test</i>	Olga	19
15_25_s_d_06230903	<i>Saggers</i>	Annetta	19
15_25_s_u_03021001m	<i>Weather and sexual appetite</i>	Gastone	20
15_25_s_u_12021002m	<i>Students' protest</i>	Michele	20
15-25_s_u_01211005	<i>Young people and commitment</i>	Filippo	21
15_25_s_d_03241004	<i>Illegal work</i>	Martina	23
15-25_s_u_01211001	<i>Is Italy an old country?</i>	Mauro	24
15_25_s_u_05281002	<i>Bamboccioni</i>	Gabriele	24
15_25_s_d_02031001	<i>Carnival</i>	Arianna	24
26_45_s_u_10181004	<i>How do you eat?</i>	Massimo	29
26_45_s_d_07211007	<i>Generation né né</i>	Corinne	30
26_45_s_d_12201001	<i>Work and young people</i>	Federica	34
26_45_s_u_01191002	<i>Mama's boys</i>	Adriano	35
26_45_s_d_11101001	<i>Work and young people</i>	Chiara	35
26_45_s_d_10181012	<i>How do you eat?</i>	Barbara	38
26_45_s_u_03241009	<i>Illegal work</i>	Ugo	40

Table 3.3 - Continued

<b>ID</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>
26_46_s_u_01221005	<i>Young people and commitment</i>	Davide	40
26_45_u_s_12161001	<i>Student protest</i>	Celeste	42
26_45_s_d_11091005	<i>Saviano on TV</i>	Denise	42
26_45_s_d_01121003	<i>When he is older than she is</i>	Berta	43
26_45_s_u_03241005	<i>Illegal work</i>	Clodoveo	45
46_65_s_u_09151004	<i>Adults and videogames</i>	Germano	46
46_65_s_u_11051002	<i>Time for work</i>	Isaia	47
46_65_s_u_08111007	<i>Teenagers an violence</i>	Goffredo	50
46_65_s_d_03011010	<i>Use of mobile phones</i>	Caterina	50
46_65_s_u_06101009	<i>Retirement</i>	Natale	53
46_65_s_d_03091004	<i>State and burocracy</i>	Minnie	53
46_65_s_d_03011003	<i>Use of mobile phones</i>	Fosca	53
46_65_s_d_06101004	<i>Working in hospitals</i>	Ornella	53
46_65_s_d_01191009	<i>Mama's boys</i>	Dafne	54
46_65_s_u_01181004	<i>Excess in children control</i>	Manuele	55
46_65_s_u_03011001	<i>Use of mobile phones</i>	Duccio	55
46_65_s_d_02191009	<i>Teenagers and plastic surgery</i>	Ester	55
66_90_s_u_05121009	<i>Travelling on trains</i>	Paolo	66
66_90_s_d_11051001	<i>Time for yourself</i>	Serenella	66
66_90_s_u_01221006	<i>Young people and work</i>	Giorgio	67
66_90_s_d_03021003	<i>Children and TV</i>	Elena	67
66_90_s_d_05171007	<i>Luck and unluck</i>	Leida	67
66_90_s_d_09231003	<i>What is the heart of Milan?</i>	Lea	67
66_90_s_d_06071011	<i>Where should grandchildren stay?</i>	Leda	68
66_90_s_u_03011008	<i>Use of mobile phones</i>	Dante	69
66_90_s_d_12171006	<i>Cold weather and snow</i>	Clara	70
66_90_s_u_0127101	<i>Second World War</i>	Severo	83
66_90_s_u_11261001	<i>Antifascism and Resistence</i>	Nedo	85
66_90_s_u_11261006	<i>Antifascism and Resistence</i>	Lorenzo	87

There were two main methodological options for the construction of the trend study. The first consisted of the random selection of callers on the basis of a randomly chosen date and time (e.g. 24th May from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. in 2010 and in 1976), as had been done in similar studies investigating interaction in radio phone-ins (O’Keeffe, 2004). This methodology had the advantage of being widespread in several of the investigations in real time mentioned in Labov (1994).

However, this solution proved inapplicable for methodological and practical reasons. Speakers were not stratified by age, but were randomly selected, probably with a clustering of adult speakers (between 46 and 65) in the 2010 corpus and of young adult speakers (between 26 and 45) in the 1976 corpus. Moreover, the radio archive up to 2005 is not digitized, nor was the record of materials available kept regularly before that year. This is particularly true for data that go back to the late Seventies, which were filed on the basis of their interest for the social history of *Radio popolare* and not on the basis of the programme or its air date.

Therefore, a second option was chosen which implied using an age-based stratification. However, the time span over which speakers were selected for the 1976 corpus had to be widened to four years (1976-1980), instead of just one. This choice was determined by the fact that the scarcity of available data made it difficult to identify speakers who gave relevant details on their age and personal circumstances. Even though it was possible to identify enough speakers from the three younger age cohorts, the older age cohorts are not represented, since no elderly speaker could be found in the radio records.

This option had another important methodological advantage, since the two corpora were built on the same criteria and each age group in each corpus can function as a control group for the other age cohorts. An analysis of standard deviation, which confirms the comparability of both corpora, is given in Figures 3.2 and 3.3, respectively.

As tests show, the two corpora show similar values in relation to standard deviation ( $\sigma$  183, variance 483, for the 1976-1980 corpus, and  $\sigma$  159, variance 340, for the 2010 corpus).

Moving from the characteristics of speakers identified above, two corpora were created for a total of 62344 word, a 1976 corpus (30909 words) and a 2010 corpus (31435 words).

Figure 3.2 - Standard deviation in the 1976-1980 corpus

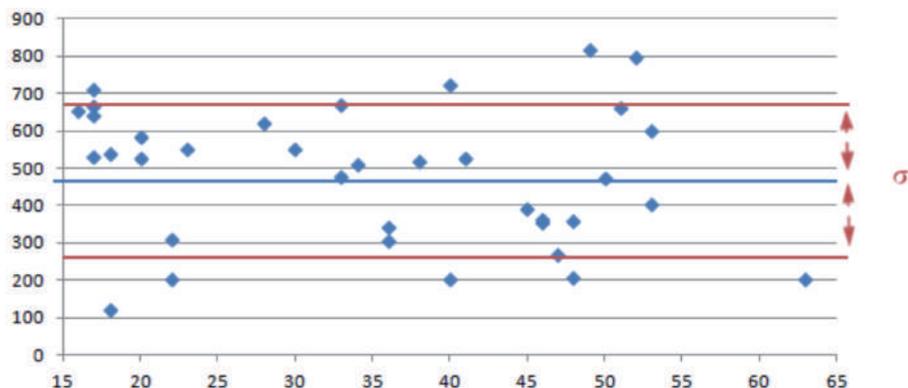
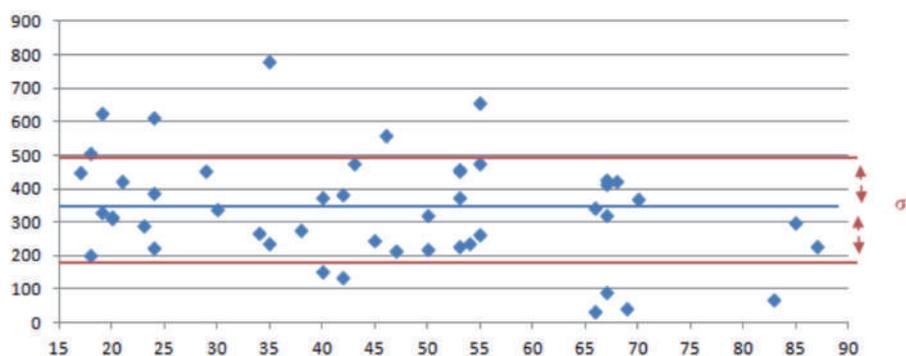


Figure 3.3 - Standard deviation in the 2010 corpus



### 3.4. Corpora transcription and the annotation tool

Two important decisions had to be made with regard to the framework for the analysis of corpora. The first relates to the method for transcription, the second regards the system for the data annotation, including both the markup language for discourse annotation and the theoretical model for discourse segmentation, which will be discussed in detail in § 3.5. All three levels are interconnected as “transcribing talk and interaction is a highly indexical and situated practice that is consistently in a state of flux” (Jenks, 2011: 17).

As regards the transcription, in both corpora each conversation was transformed into an (.mp3) file. For the 2010 corpus this required a selec-

tion of conversations in the file log of *Radio popolare*, which already contained files in (.mp3) format, but for the 1976-1980 corpus, original conversations, which were stored on reels of tape, had first to be transformed into (.mp3) files. Each conversation was then transcribed in its entirety first through orthographic transcription and then using the GAT transcription system (cf. 19-20).

The main objective of the orthographic transcription was to identify the contexts of use and the main functions of VMs in order to classify the relevant parameters for the subsequent annotation. Most of the orthographic transcriptions were made through the speech-to-text automatic conversion software *Vocapia* (VoxSigma) (<https://www.vocapia.com/>).<sup>10</sup> Once automatically processed, the generated output file consisted in an annotated XML document which included speech and non-speech segments, speaker labels, words with time codes, and punctuations. In a second phase the automatically transcribed output was further processed and checked for errors and then imported into the tool identified to host the corpus, i.e. the EXMARaLDA package.

The EXtensible MARKup Language for Discourse Annotation (EXMARaLDA) was developed at the *SFB Mehrsprachigkeit* (Research Centre on Multilingualism) at the University of Hamburg<sup>11</sup> as the core architectural component of a database of multilingual spoken discourse. It is an XML-based framework for the construction and analysis of corpora of spoken language which relies on a data model for time-aligned multi-layer annotations of audio or video data, following the general idea of the annotation graph framework (Bird & Liberman, 2001). The choice to use the EXMARaLDA package was mostly connected to the fact that it offers the advantage of using open standards for data storage (XML, Unicode) and that it is largely compatible with many other widely used media annotation tools (e.g. ELAN, Transcriber, CLAN).

The main software components used for the corpus analysis were the transcription editor (Partitur-Editor), the corpus management tool (Coma) (see Figure 3.4), and the KWIC concordance tool (EXAKT) (see Figure 3.5) (Schmidt *et alii*, 2011).

10. The use of the software was only allowed on a trial basis. I here thank Cécile Woehrling and Lori Lamel for granting me permission to use the transcription system and for their support during the use of the software.

11. The software can be freely downloaded from the website <http://www.exmaralda.org/>.

Figure 3.4 - Screenshot from Coma

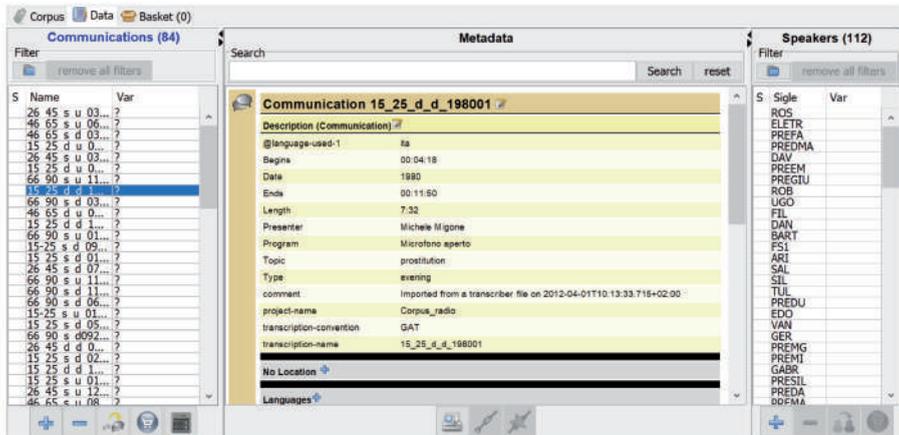
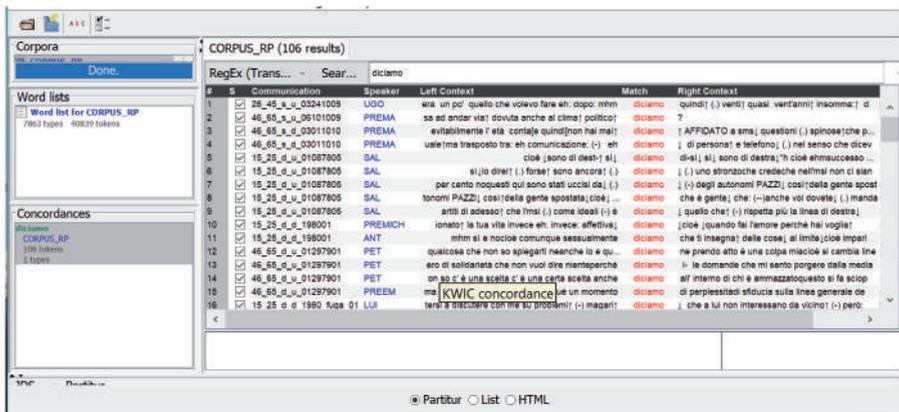


Figure 3.5 - Screenshot from Exakt



This package was chosen as it includes the KWIC concordance EXAKT, whose results always come in a multimodal format, i.e. written texts and corresponding audio segments. The concordance can also be searched on the basis of user-defined criteria, including information gathered in metadata (e.g. age, sex or city of residence of the caller). Moreover, in the transcription editor it is possible to create personalised templates for different types of annotation of data, that can be subsequently searched through user-defined criteria in the KWIC concordance.

An important methodological decision, connected with the choice of the markup language for data annotation, concerned the choice of transcription conventions, as the transcription system had to be supported by the EXMARaLDA system, but it also had to conform to the theoretical model chosen for the discourse segmentation (cf. § 3.5). Moreover, the levels of granularity of transcription conventions needed to reflect theoretical assumptions connected with the specific nature of VMs described in Chapter 1 (cf. also Duranti, 2006; Jenks, 2011; Ochs, 1979). Finally, the choice of a transcription convention is also relevant for the annotation schema, which, for the corpora under analysis here, needed to be supported by the EXMARaLDA system.

This is why an adaptation of the GAT system (*Gesprächsanalytisches Transkriptionssystem*) was considered the best solution. This kind of convention is widely used in German conversation analysis. It uses many elements from the Conversation Analysis transcription, but puts a special emphasis on the detailed notation of prosodic phenomena. Although GAT follows many principles and conventions from the Jefferson style, it also proposes some conventions which are more compatible with linguistic and phonetic analysis of spoken language, especially as regards prosody in talk-in-interaction, which can be relevant in identifying regularities and patterns associated with the use of specific discourse features – as in the case of VMs.

The transcription conventions adopted here are based on the GAT 2 system (Selting *et alii*, 2009), which provides a revised version of the original GAT system, clarifying ambiguities and making amendments in shortcomings (cf. 19-20).

### **3.5. The theoretical model of discourse segmentation**

Another relevant methodological decision for data analysis pertains to the choice of the theoretical model for discourse segmentation, which would then represent the basis for the data annotation system. This is somehow a natural choice as considering discourse-pragmatic features necessarily involves the notion of discourse unit. The need for a model of discourse segmentation becomes particularly evident for more pragmaticalized VMs, as is the case of discourse and pragmatic markers. For these units different criteria may be used, and are used, to distinguish the forms on the basis of the different kinds of units they are ‘bracketing’, which in turn may be defined grammatically, with respect to the host utterance in which the marker occurs (e.g. Fraser, 2006), or interactionally, with respect

to turns (e.g. Wide, 2009). In these approaches, also prosodic information may be taken into account as one of the most important criterion in the definition of units (e.g. Wichman *et alii*, 2009; Barth-Weingarten, 2013). Units of reference may also be non-structural, such as speech acts (e.g. Sweetser, 1990), propositions in discourse memory (Roulet, 2006) or aspects of common ground (Diewald, 2006a; Fischer, 2007; Alm & Larsen, 2015). Therefore, which units are taken to be relevant largely depends on the theoretical background evoked. The polyfunctionality of many discourse-pragmatic features, and specifically of VMs, is largely dependent on the discourse units in which the markers appear, and thus the definition of a discourse unit is an important challenge in the description of discourse-pragmatic features.

The systematization of the description of VMs, which is one of the objectives of this study, needs a model which on one hand is theory-neutral and allows generalizations across different uses of VMs, considering their multilevel polyfunctionality, but on the other it also needs to have explanatory potential.

The model chosen here for this purpose is the Val.Es.Co. (*Valencia Español Colloquial*) model (Briz & Grupo Val.Es.Co., 2003, Grupo Val. Es.Co., 2014), which was developed for the analysis of spontaneous conversations. The model chosen allows to define the units to which VMs refer and in relation to which they can be defined (Pons Bordería & Fischer, 2021: 102).

In Romance linguistics, the last fifteen years have witnessed a blooming of approaches on discourse segmentation (Pons Bordería, 2014b). As Pons Bordería and Fischer (2021: 103) note, current models of discourse segmentation can be classified into monological and dialogical models. The first are mostly based on prosody, as they heavily rely on intonation, which lets them define minor units in very precise terms; the second are information-based and consider structure beyond individual turns in order to account for dialogical phenomena (e.g. instances of irony and humour, or the interactive or intersubjective values of discourse-pragmatic features).

The Val.Es.Co model (VAM), which is a dialogical model, builds on both Conversation Analysis and Roulet *et alii*'s Geneva School (1985, 2001). In contrast to conversation analytical approaches to discourse structure, the VAM focuses on schematic positions and units, and has the advantage of allowing on one hand for the generalization over positional and functional aspects of discourse units, and on the other for the identification of general correlations between discourse units, positions, and functions (Briz & Pons Bordería, 2010; Pons Bordería, 2018a, 2018b).

The model, which has been created for a systematic study of discourse-pragmatic particles, analyses pragmatic units (such as VMs) in relation to a system of structural units of discourse (Briz Gómez & Grupo Val.Es.Co., 2003; Briz Gómez, 2002; Briz Gómez & Pons Bordería, 2010).

The system of discourse units identified by the VAM model can be summarized in Table 3.4.

*Table 3.4 - Discourse units in the VAM model*

Levels	Dimensions		
	Structural	Social	Informational
<b>Dialogic</b>	Dialogue exchange	Turn-taking	
<b>Monologic</b>	Intervention > Act	Turn	Subact

Social, structural, and informational dimensions interact in defining the structure of conversation.

The social dimension is characterised by the system of turns, which can be identified by the change of speaker. This dimension marks the social limit between the monologic and the dialogic dimensions of conversation. Consequently, turns have discrete, easily identifiable limits and represent the maximal monologic unit and the immediate constituent of the minimal dialogic unit.

The structural dimension can be identified on the basis of structures that characterise conversation, i.e. the purely structural fact that speakers have uttered a chain of sounds and that they have produced a structural unit (an intervention), which is automatically delimited by the change of speaker.

The difference between interventions and turns is not structural but social. As Pons Bordería & Estellés Arguedas (2009: 928) explain interventions are ‘natural’ units and can be recognized by the change of speaker; they belong to the structural dimension of talk. Turns, however, are defined by the acceptance of the co-conversationalists. Recognition of them has to do with the presence in the other’s interventions of traces of the previous turn (an answer to a question, anaphoric indices, lexical chains, and so on). Turns are not produced automatically, but are conceded by co-conversationalists; they belong to the social dimension of talk. Interventions and turns are the maximal monological units in the structural dimensions of talk as well as in its social dimensions.

The combination of the social and of the structural dimensions gives rise to the smallest (structural and social) dialogic unit: two interventions combine to constitute an exchange; two turns combine to form an adjacency pair, as in (1) below.

(1)

PREDA (-) federica che dire: **in bocca al lupo veramente.**

FED **crepi.** (26\_45\_s\_d\_12201001)

‘PREDA Federica what can I say, **good luck indeed.**

FED **Thanks**’

Interventions can be (a) initiative when they provoke a (linguistic) reaction and they trigger another intervention, as in (2) where the question *hai qualche soldo in più* triggers a reactive negative response; (b) reactive, if they respond to a previous intervention, as in the case of Federica’s response in (1) and (2); (c) or more commonly reactive–initiative, as in (3), where the presenter is on one hand reacting to Chiara’s comment on her work situation through a synthesis of her thought, but on the other is also asking a clarification.

(2)

PREDA ma tu tu provi (.) invece (.) invidia anche per i tuoi colleghi che hanno qualche soldo più di te? (initiative)

FED n:o↓ no onestamente↑ invidia non direi↑ (reactive) (26\_45\_s\_d\_12201001)

‘PREDA But you feel, instead, envy for your colleagues who have a little more money than you do?’

FED No, no honestly, I wouldn’t say envy’

(3)

CHI (.) °h eppure↑ mi sono resa conto↑ che adesso quando io cerco lavoro↓ ma anche da diversi anni ho un curriculum (.) fatto bene e tutto↑ quindi mi chiamano↑ (.) ma per fare esattamente la stessa identica cosa che faccio ora.

PRECE (.) quindi↓ la possibilità diciamo↓ di cambiare lavoro↑ nel senso anche settore di lavoro↓ diciamo così↑ (.) eh ha un un blocco↓ uno stop? (reactive-initiative) (26\_45\_s\_d\_1110100)

‘CHI Yet, I realised that now when I look for a job, but also for several years, I have a CV done well and everything, so they call me, but to do exactly the same thing that I am doing now.

PRECE So, the possibility, let’s say, to change job, in the sense also sector of work, let’s say so, eh has a block, a stop?’

A segment of conversation limited by an initiative and a reactive intervention forms a dialogue.

Next, interventions can be further divided into acts. For all discourse segmentation models, the immediate constituent of an intervention is the hardest unit to define (Pons Bordería & Fischer, 2021: 105). However different models agree that (a) syntax alone does not suffice to distinguish acts, but at the same time it cannot be completely disregarded; (b) prosody plays a role; (c) illocutionary force is involved in its definition, and (d) semantics can help. Moving from these premises, VAM acts are identified based on illocutionary force, full propositional content, and on three additional properties, which usually co-occur: (1) they are tone units, as in (2) where Federica's response contains three different acts (*n:o*↓, *no onestamente*↑, *invidia non direi*↑); (2) they have clear formal boundaries (identifiability), and (3) they are independent in a given context, i.e. they can stand alone in an intervention of which they bear the illocutive force.

Minor units, below acts, are subacts. These units are not autonomous but clearly distinguishable, e.g. through syntactically delimited boundaries. Subacts are immediate constituents of acts and are characterised by the fact that they cannot be isolable, but they can be identifiable; they may or may not have propositional meaning, and on this basis they can be further subdivided into substantive and adjacent subacts. The former have propositional meaning, while the latter are characterised by procedural and functional value.

Within the VAM model, substantive subacts are further classified into directive substantive subacts, subordinate substantive subacts, and topicalized substantive subacts. The first introduce the main propositional content like, for instance, conclusions; the second, introduce subordinate propositional content, like arguments; the third are detached constituents of an act. However, in this study only the general label of substantive subacts is used, as the type of discourse-units under analysis do not require a further level of granularity.

Adjacent subacts are further classified into three groups according to their function:

- (a) interpersonal, which regulate the speaker-hearer relationship, as in (4) where *capisci?* functions as a backchannel that triggers a response;
- (b) textual, which connect discourse units and organise information, as in (5) where *ripeto* and *insomma* underline the repetition of an information and a synthesis of it, respectively;
- (c) modal, which are constituted by parenthetical constituents showing the speakers' stance towards the message, as in (6) where *penso* is used by the speaker as an epistemic parenthetical.

- (4) ORN abbiamo perso- (.) peredermo↑ SEI ANNI di contratto↓(-) e sei anni di contratto↓ (-) sono pa:ri a circa due mila euro↓ °h (.) negli anni↓(-) non sono↑ non sono↑ (.) pochi soldi↓(-) °h ma↓ (.) c' è ancora questo:↑**capisci?** (46\_65\_s\_d\_06101004)

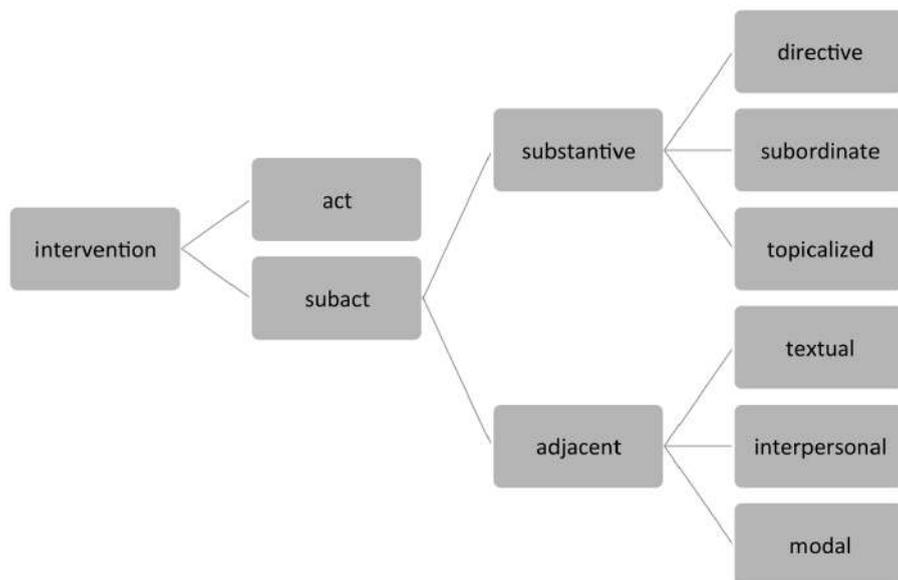
‘We lost-, we will lose six years of contract and six years of contract amount to two thousand euros, over the years, it is not a small amount of money, but there is still this, **understand?**’

- (5) CAR perché↓ io vedo: eh cioè↓ vedo vedo l’OPPOSTO poi in giro. **ripeto**↓ però↑ (.) un po’↑ forse per l’età↑ °h non: a me di fare delle gran discussioni per telefono↓ non non mi piace↓ **insomma**. = (46-65\_s\_u\_03011001)  
 ‘Because I see, I mean, I see the opposite then around. **I repeat**. However, a little maybe because of age, not- to make big discussions over the phone, I do not like (it), **in short**’
- (6) UMB °h io ti chiedo chi ha ucciso sergio ravelli↓(-) cioè↓ (-) non si può fare discorsi terra terra tipo questo↓ **penso**. (15\_25\_d\_u\_01087803)  
 ‘I ask you who killed sergio ravelli, I mean, you can’t make plain speeches like this, **I think**’

Adjacent textual and modal subacts are particularly relevant here as they contain fully pragmaticalized VMs which codify the speaker’s degree of evidential and epistemic commitment on the basis of the different strategies identified in § 1.6.

It is possible to summarize the units in the VAM model as in Figure 3.6 below.

Figure 3.6 - Units in the VAM model (Pons Bordería & Fischer, 2021: 106)



The second constituent of the VAM concerns the positions of elements with respect to the units identified. The VAM distinguishes four positions: initial, medial, final, and independent. Their definitions are, in principle, straightforward; initial is the first word within a unit; final is the last word within a unit, and medial is any other position. Independent, by contrast, is used only in those cases in which a single element stands alone, for instance, in an intervention.

In the present research, considering the nature of VMs which may include single words as *circa* ‘around’, but also structures as *come possiamo dire* ‘how can we say’, we rather consider the position in terms of left and right periphery of a unit, as ‘the first word of a unit’ in some cases may not identify the functional unit under analysis (as the use of *come possiamo dire* shows).

Positions alone are not informative, but they acquire meaning only with reference to the unit to which they belong, forming a unit-position pairing. This implies that there is not one single initial position, but an initial position of an intervention, of an act, and of a subact, and so on.

As it will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4, this is particularly relevant for the functions of VMs both from a synchronic and a diachronic perspectives. As for the first, in some cases forms show a strong preference for some unit - position slots over others; as for the second, an analysis in terms of unit - position provides a more comprehensive explanation of the evolution paths of forms in relation to their specific structural contexts of use.

Moving from the characteristics of the VAM model just outlined and from the properties of VMs identified in Chapter 1, a system of annotation was created taking into consideration the combinations of positions that VMs can occupy and the types of units in which they occur, as synthesized in Table 3.5 below.

Table 3.5 - System of annotation

Unit	Subact		Act	Intervention	
	Subordinate (SS)	Adjacent (SA)	(A)	Initiative (II)	Reactive (IR)
Left periphery	SS_L	SA_L	A_L*	II_L	IR_L
Medial	SS_M	SA_M	A_M	II_M	IR_M
Right periphery	SS_R	SA_R	A_R	II_R	IR_R

\* The shaded cells indicate overlapping between different categories

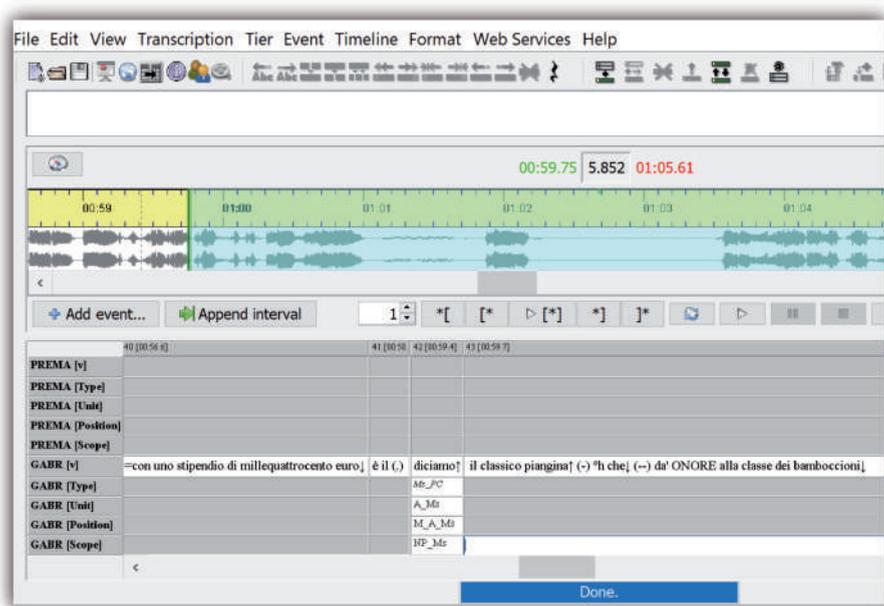
Consequently, the tagging system which was used for data analysis comprises four different searchable levels of annotation:

1. The first level classifies the type of strategy used by the speaker and its focus, which can be over the propositional content (PC) or the degree of illocutionary force (IIF). The data were further coded on the basis of strategies identified in Chapter 1 and include:
  - (a) approximation strategies (As)
  - (b) general extenders (GE)
  - (c) exemplification strategies (Es)
  - (d) addition strategies (Ads)
  - (e) metadiscourse strategies (Ms)
  - (f) hypothetical strategies (Hs)
  - (g) deictic strategies (Ds)
  - (h) general nouns (GN) which were also coded for the type of reference they imply: to (a) previous co-text (GNCo), (b) context (GNCon), or (c) both (GNB).
- b. The second and third levels of annotation relate respectively to the type of unit in which the VM occurs (e.g. an intervention, an act or a subact) and to its position in this unit (e.g. left or right periphery, medial position). In these levels, more pragmatized units are identified as adjacent subacts and separated from less pragmatized markers. The labels used for the annotation are illustrated in Table 3.5 above.
- c. The fourth level of annotation indicates the scope over which the VM operates. Therefore VMs were coded according to their scope over phrases (NP, VP, PP), subacts (SA), acts (A), or interventions (I).

An example of annotation is given in Figure 3.7 below. In the example below *diciamo* is tagged as a metadiscourse strategy (Ms) focused on the propositional content (PC), which appears in an act (A) in medial position (M) and which has scope over the following noun phrase *piangina* (NP).

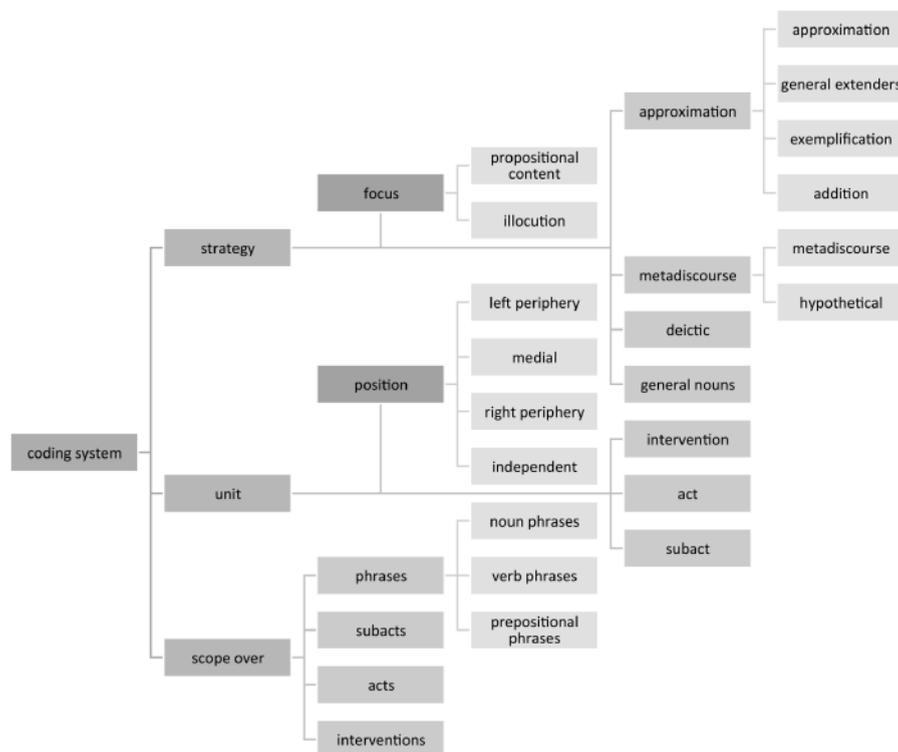
In order to correlate the type of strategy (Ms) with the other three levels, the tag was added also in the other levels.

Figure 3.7 - Example of annotation



Therefore, the coding system for the VMs used in the data analysis can be synthesised as in Figure 3.8 below.

Figure 3.8 - Coding system for the data analysis



Results of data analysis which describe different functions, contexts of occurrence, and frequencies of markers in correlation with different age cohorts of speakers are presented in Chapter 4.

#### *4. The use of vagueness markers between age variation and pragmatic change*

The present Chapter provides a synchronic and diachronic description of the specifics of styles in the use of VMs across different age cohorts in the two communities identified (i.e. 1976-1980, 2010)<sup>1</sup>. On one hand, analysis of the data reveals the strategies characteristic of different age cohorts. On the other, the study draws a diachronic comparison of the strategies employed in the two corpora through a real-time approach (cf. Chapter 2).

The criteria used in the analysis of data are based on the distinction of the three groups of strategies identified and discussed in § 1.6. Each of these is analysed qualitatively in terms of functions performed by VMs, but also quantitatively in terms of (a) more frequent forms selected by the speakers, and (b) most frequent structural contexts of use of these forms, on the basis of the Val.Es.Co. model described and discussed in § 3.5. Therefore, for each strategy group a qualitative analysis of the repertoire of more common forms and of their functions is presented. A quantitative analysis of the forms employed within age cohorts of speakers is then presented for each strategy group. Data are also considered in terms of correlations between the use of VMs and the types of discourse units in which they most frequently appear, the position they occupy, and their scope.

It is relevant to stress that forms can operate at the level of propositional content and/or at the level of illocution, although some may operate more frequently over one or the other. Moreover, forms are extremely polyfunctional and can index different strategies at once, also depending on their contexts of use. In this Chapter the analysis of uses will stress this polyfunctionality.

1. For descriptive purposes the reference to the two corpora will be as follows: corpus 1976-1980 = C1976, corpus 2010 = C2010.

Moving from these premises, the structure of this Chapter will be as follows: in § 4.1 a general overview on the use of different VMs is given, in § 4.2 are presented forms used to approximate quantities and concepts, in § 4.3 the focus is on strategies that metadiscursively relativize the content of a proposition or the choice of a word, while in § 4.4 it is on forms that deictically refer to entities and/or categorizations or word choices. Lastly, in § 4.5 general nouns are described.

#### 4.1. Vagueness markers: functions, forms, and contexts of use in different age cohorts

The three main groups of strategies described in § 1.6 prove relevant in describing the use of VMs in the two corpora considered. The pragmatic trajectory of different VMs can be very different. Therefore, for some of these units their pragmatic value as VMs co-exist with their propositional uses. Instead, other units have completely pragmaticalised, as speakers do not recognize their original meaning anymore. This is the case of some discourse and pragmatic markers which can also be used as VMs (cf. the case of *insomma* and *comunque* whose pragmatic developments have been discussed in § 1.5.4 and § 1.5.5, respectively).

Some forms may be instantiated creatively by speakers only once, while others may be more ‘socially successful’ and spread within the community. Some of these forms may undergo a complete pragmaticalisation, acquiring the status of discourse or pragmatic markers.

The pragmatic functions of these units can range from semantic approximation to pragmatic hedging, including, in some contexts, mitigation. The description of strategies employed by speakers either to approximate propositional contents or to hedge speech acts is therefore a prerequisite for the analysis of their distribution in the corpora.

The array of formal strategies available to speakers is multifarious and includes forms which belong to different levels of language (cf. § 1.4). In the corpora analysed, speakers employ strategies that belong to the syntactic level, as in (1), the morphological, as in (2), and lexical, as in (3), as well as strategies implying the use of functional units which are more pragmaticalised, such as discourse and pragmatic markers, as in (4).

- (1) PRESIL ti ti: (.) tiro un po’ verso: il tema più specifico↑ **non parliamo tanto** di: (.) soddisfazione dei giovani oggi↑ o di possibilità di (.) eh come dire:↑ realizzazione personale↓ **parliamo più** di un impegno↑ (15-25\_s\_u\_01211001)

‘I’m pulling you you a bit towards the more specific topic, **we don’t talk so much** about: satisfaction among young people today or the possibility of what do you call it, how to say, personal fulfilment, **we are talking more** about a commitment’

- (2) ANN dunque↑ niente↓ in pratica↓ il sagger↓ che **sarebbe** la personcina °h che che= (15\_25\_s\_d\_051911m)  
 ‘So, nothing, basically, the sagger who **would be** the little person who...’
- (3) UMB questo giustifica il fatto che siamo (xxx) ragazzi di destra (--) cioè:↓ non-↑ **cose**↑ che↓ d’altronde voi fate **quasi** tutti i giorni↓ mi sembra: manifestazioni **varie**↑ **e così**↓ (15\_25\_d\_u\_01087803)  
 ‘This justifies the fact that we are right-wing guys, that-is not- **things** that, anyway, you do **almost** every day, it seems to me, **various** demonstrations **and so (yeah)**’
- (4) PREAL (.) è: (--) ehm (.) per donne↑ (-) per donne↑ (-) come si fa a (--) trovare un: (.) **ciòè**↓ (-) **tipo**↓ **tipo**↓ una donna esce↑ no↑ **tipo**:↓ di una raga:zza giovane↓ no↑ (.) **non so tipo** elettra↓ o te↓ no↑ (15\_25\_s\_d\_012611)  
 ‘(It’s) for women, for women, how can you find, **that-is, like, like**, a woman goes out, right? **Like**, a young girl, right, **I don’t know, like** Elettra or you, right?’

Table 4.1 provides the normalised frequencies of occurrences of strategies derived from different levels of language in the two corpora.<sup>2</sup> As is evident from the data, strategies which formally employ (a) less pragmatized and co-opted lexical units or (b) more pragmatized functional units (such as discourse and pragmatic markers) outnumber strategies which are derived from morphology or syntax.

Table 4.1 - Vagueness markers in the corpora p/10000

	1976-1980	2010
Morphology	9	11
Syntax	26	22
Lexicon	271	202
Functional units	211	129

2. In all data analysis, frequency has been normalized to number of occurrences per 10,000 words (p/10000).

Given their higher representation in the corpora, strategies which make use of lexical or functional units are the focus of the analysis in this Chapter.

## 4.2. Approximation

The first group of strategies includes mainly lexical units that speakers employ to approximate propositional content, e.g. a quantity (rounders, as in 5) or a categorization (adaptors, as in 6).

- (5) ANT così↓ **un sacco** di cose↑ **un sacco** di problemi. (15\_25\_d\_d\_198001)  
‘So, **a lot** of things, **a lot** of problems’
- (6) PREAL= quindi↓ sei: hai **un po**↑’ uno scompenso↓ (.) non capisci cos’è↓  
(15\_25\_s\_u\_03021001m)  
‘So, you are-, you have **a bit of** an imbalance, you don’t understand what it is’

It is relevant to note that the VMs employed by speakers in approximating quantities or concepts operate locally over single constituents (a noun phrase as in 7; a verb phrase as in 8; an adjective as in 9). Their function is to render the semantic content of the local elements more vague (in terms of quantities, as in 10, or in terms of categorization, as in 11).

- (7) PREFE **un paio di telefonate** fa (15\_25\_d\_u\_01087803)  
‘**a couple of phone** calls ago’
- (8) OLG però poi lasceranno la scelta: definitiva a me↓ (.) e quindi dovrò **un attimo valutare** quale sarà: (.) cioè↓ cosa: cosa preferisco veramente↓ perché ancora non saprei. (15-25\_s\_d\_09021001)  
‘But then they’ll leave the final choice to me and then I’ll have to **evaluate a bit** what it will be, that is what: what I really prefer, because I don’t know yet’
- (9) CLO all’esterno siamo molto bravi↓ siamo molto: (.) siamo molto anche↓ (.) tra virgolette↓ °h cattolici↓ perché la nostra proprietà è **più o meno riconducibile** a certi ambienti, (-) di fatto↓ mhm state tutti attenti↓ perché: perché non c’è più sicurezza↓ tutto qui. (26\_45\_s\_u\_03241005)  
‘From the outside we are very good, we are very- we are also very, in quotes, catholic because our property is **more or less traceable** to certain circles, in fact hhm be very careful because because there is no more security, that’s all’
- (10) FED perché (.) nei contratti cococo↑ (.) comunque sia↓ ci sono (.) **una serie di tassazio:ni**↑ (.) compresa la tassazione sugli assegni (.) familiari↑  
(26\_45\_s\_d\_12201001)

‘Because in the cococo contracts there is **a series of taxations**, including the taxation of family allowances’

- (11) CLO si cominciano a sentire anche nei rapporti personali (.) mhm cose che prima non non succedevano cominciano a succedere (.) mhm trasferimenti: °h improvvisi↑ mhm **altre manovre**:↑ **insomma**↑ che rendono comunque un messaggio abbastanza chiaro. (26\_45\_s\_u\_03241005)  
‘(These things) are also beginning to be felt in personal relationships, things that did not happen before are beginning to happen: sudden transfers, **other manoeuvres, in short**, that make a message quite clear, anyway’

However, the same lexical elements can be employed strategically by speakers to hedge the illocutionary force of a discourse unit, e.g. an intervention like the one in (12), a speech act in (13), or a subact in (14).

- (12) OLG eh **più o meno** sì. (15-25\_s\_d\_09021001)  
‘**uh more or less** yes’
- (13) PRESIL bisogna convincersi↓ insomma↓ anche perché voi siete un bell’esempio di come le vecchie generazioni↓ e qui↓ davvero si può dire vecchi↓ perché in effetti partigiani °h eh: adesso↓ **‘somma**↓ sono: (.) °h hanno: una **certa** età↑(.) come dire↑ (.) e: e vi hanno passato un po’ il testimone↓ no? (15\_25\_s\_u\_01211005)  
‘You have to be sure, right. Also because you are a great example of how the older generations, and here one can really say old, because in fact partisans, now, **in short**, are **rather** old, how can I put it, and have sort of passed the baton, haven’t they?’
- (14) ANT negativa e positiva. cioè positiva↑ perché te l’ho detto↓ impari a vivere↓ no? impari a stare al mondo↓ (-) ti fai largo in tutti i sensi↑ eccetera↓ negativa perché al limite↑ appunto↓ siamo **un po’** ai margini della società↓ lo sappiamo. (15\_25\_d\_d\_198001)  
‘Negative and positive. I mean, positive because, I told you, you learn to live, don’t you? You learn to be in the world, you make your way in all senses, etcetera, negative because at the limit, in fact, we are **a bit** on the fringes of society, we know that’

In such contexts, the forms operate globally on the degree of strength of the illocution, rather than on single constituents. The forms strategically function on the pragmatic level, rendering the discourse unit less direct and therefore enabling the speakers to protect their face from various interactional risks.

This hedging function is more frequently derived from the original rounder, as in (15), but instances of hedging derived from adaptors can be found, as in (16).

- (15) GOF (-) sono d'accordo:↑ (-) (.) **un po'**↑ con quello che: hai appena letto↑  
(46\_65\_s\_u\_08111007)  
'I agree **up to a point** with what you have just read'
- (16) PREBA quell'ascoltatore di prima↓ per esempio↓ (.) non è che (.) diceva:↑  
io: faccio questa vita tranquilla↓ tutto va bene↓ diceva↓ è così↓ (.) e **quasi** lo  
diceva con una punta di vergogna. (46\_65\_d\_u\_02068008)  
'That listener, before, for example it's not that he said: I live this quiet life,  
everything is fine. He said: that's the way it is, and he **almost** said it with a  
hint of shame'

This classification has a purely heuristic value, since a clear separation between the two levels is often difficult to define. This peculiarity has to do with the very nature of functional units which make up the category of VMs, as they pragmatically exploit the original semantics of the source form and, at the interactional level, they employ it strategically through metaphorical and metonymic extensions (cf. § 1.5).

On a formal level, this class of strategies can include lexical units, functioning as theticals, which semantically trigger conversational implicatures relating to (a) the approximation of a quantity (e.g. *più o meno* 'more or less', *un po'* 'a bit') or (b) a less than prototypical categorization (*quasi* 'almost', *del genere* 'of the kind'). Other characteristic formal means employed include specific constructions that, at the level of enunciation, strategically exploit the relationship between the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axis to imply an approximation. The use of these constrictions has the effect of signalling a non-identical resemblance between the idea/concept that is communicated (signified) and the one that is codified (signifier).

According to Mihatsch (2010a: 49), at the lexicon level such uses represent a trace of the paradigmatic choice which is strategically employed by the speakers to approximate a quantity, when they are not sure about some numerical value, as in (17), or to approximate the choice of a lexical item in relation to a particular concept, for which there may not be an appropriate or more precise expression, as in (18).

- (17) ADR sono stato in casa dei miei fino a **ventisei ventisette** anni.  
(26-45\_s\_u\_01191002)  
'I lived at my parents' until I was **twenty-six, twenty-seven** years old'
- (18) GIAN adesso **c'ho la moglie**↑ **c'ho il bambino**↑ (.) **c'ho tante cose** no↑  
(26-45\_d\_u\_01297903)  
'Now **I have a wife, I have a baby, I have many things**, right?'

From a psycholinguistic perspective, the strategy would be activated in the phases of lexical choice and of assignment of a lemma to a specific conceptual representation (cf. Levelt's 1989 model of L1 production).<sup>3</sup> As Caramazza (1997: 203) highlights "the selected lexical-semantic representation activates in parallel all the lexemes of words that share semantic features with the selected lemma".

Therefore, the emergence of the paradigmatic level of choice within the syntagmatic flow of speech has the pragmatic effect not only of signalling problems of reformulation, but also an approximation of the propositional content of the utterance. It is relevant to note that in some cases, especially when they perceive that an approximation is somehow unsatisfactory (cf. Mihatsch, 2010a: 50), speakers may want to signal this approximation through different means which may also include a general noun as *cosa* in (18), a general extender as in (19), or a specific pragmatic marker such as *insomma*, in (20).

Moreover, such strategies can refer to the choice of single lexemes, as in the case of *anni* in (17), or to sequences of speech acts/interventions, as in (19)-(20).

- (19) CAT nel senso che↓ °h è comodo il cellulare↓ perché magari↓ sei in giro↓ per strada↑ chiami un amico↓ chiami un'amica↑ **eccetera**↓ (46\_65\_s\_d\_03011010)  
 'In the sense that, the mobile phone is handy because maybe you are out and about on the street, you call a friend or another person, **etcetera**'
- (20) PREAL pensavo che eh:la: la postura fosse: inficiata dai calci nelle chiappe↑ che si prendono dalle persone normali↑ che li vedono andare in giro↓ o dai genitori↑ **insomma**. (15\_25\_s\_d\_051911m)  
 'I thought that their posture was affected by the kicks in the butt they get from normal people seeing them walking around, or from their parents, **in a nutshell**'

Strategies which exploit strategically the diversification of a paradigmatic choice include co-opted and less conventionalized formal means,

3. In the model of L1 spoken production Levelt (1989) and Levelt, Roelofs & Meyer (1999) describe the different and autonomous components which are responsible for different aspects of speech production. These components include: the conceptualizer, which is responsible for generating and monitoring messages; the formulator, in charge of lexical selection and of grammatical, and phonological shape; the articulator, which specializes in the execution of the message; an acoustic-phonetic processor, which transforms the acoustic signal into phonetic representations; and the speech comprehension system, which permits the parsing or processing of both self-generated and other-generated messages. On the basis of this model, therefore, approximation strategies would represent explicit traces of the formulator's work.

which represent discourse-productive strategies, and more conventionalized formal means, such as discourse or pragmatic markers as *insomma* in (20) (see also Mihatsch, 2010a: 51).

These uses can overlap with a different group of strategies that focus on the metadiscourse and metalinguistic level (cf. § 4.3). It is relevant to note that a similar function can also be accomplished through a metadiscourse relativization of the utterance, as is the case with metadiscourse negation, which, through co-occurrence with *verba dicendi*, as in (21), makes explicit its metadiscoursal character (cf. also Mihatsch, 2010a: 50).

- (21) PET non serve a NIENTE↓ impostato come è impostato adesso↓ la linea attuale↓ (-) o si fa realmen- o si cambia totalmente linea↓ e si fa realmente↑ **non dico** uno sciopero↓ o contro il terrorismo↑(-) cioè↑ o si fa realmente un qualcosa che non so spiegarti neanche io↑ (46\_65\_d\_u\_01297901)  
 ‘It is of no use at all, as it is now, the current line, either one actually does-, or one totally changes the line and actually does, **I’m not saying** a strike, or against terrorism. I mean, or one actually does something, I don’t know how to explain it to you either’

An interesting case in point is represented by the use of the parenthetical *non so* ‘I don’t know’, which can signal both a difficult categorization, as in (22), or word-finding problems, as in (23).

- (22) PET **non so** è: forse↑ guarda↓ è **un po’** un: è **un po’** la stessa **cosa**. (46\_65\_d\_u\_01297901)  
 ‘**I don’t know**, it is, **maybe**, look, it is **kind of, kind of** the same **thing**’
- (23) LUC sì↓ c’è una forma quasi↑ di di: (.) **non so**↑ (.) di nichilismo↓ ecco. (46\_65\_d\_u\_02068008)  
 ‘Yes. There is a form almost of, of, **I don’t know**, of nihilism, there’

*Non so* often clusters with strategies based on approximation or on a metadiscourse relativization as is evident in (22) above and (24) below where different types of strategies cluster together (e.g. *non lo so, comunque, cioè, in pratica, un po’, più o meno, così*).

- (24) MAR va be’↓ **comunque**↑ **non lo so**↓ **cioè** se se è così↑ hai capito↑ (--) è è ancora più bru:tto↓ non **non lo so**↑ hai capito↑ cioè questa qua è rimasta: (-) è rimasta con lui↑ **in pratica**↑ c’è stato (-) l’ha aiutato **un po’**↓ **non lo so**↑ poi l’ha convinto a lasciare quegli altri ostaggi↑ **più o meno così**↓ (15\_25\_d\_u\_02068012)

‘All right, **however, I don’t know, I mean**, if, if it’s like that, look, it’s even worse, **I don’t know**, look, I mean this (girl) stayed, stayed with him, **basically**, there was, (she) helped him **a little, I don’t know**, then persuaded him to leave those other hostages, **more or less like that**’

Different variants of the parenthetical *non so*, such as *che so (io)* ‘what do I know’ or *che ne so* ‘what do I know (about it)’ add to the implicature of the epistemic uncertainty the idea that the justification of the choice (of a categorization or of a particular expression) is not relevant, thus paving the way to its use as an exemplification strategy (cf. § 4.2.2).

Other means of approximation, which indicate uncertainty in categorization or choice of expression, are based on the indication of a preference in the paradigmatic choice; this is for example the case of *piuttosto* ‘rather’. In this case, the expression of preference can have different effects: if it is combined with a gradable adjective, as in (25) the adjective *disastrosa*, it has scope over the illocutionary level, but if it combines with other elements, typically in the form *piuttosto che*, it has value over the propositional content, as in (26) where it combines with *fare l’elettricista* (cf. also Mihatsch, 2010a: 65).<sup>4</sup>

- (25) DAF << all > insomma > le condizioni economiche sono: °h **piuttosto** disastrosa↓ <<laughing> nel mondo della scuola>. (46\_65\_s\_d\_01191009)  
 ‘In short, the economic conditions are **rather catastrophic** in the world of school’
- (26) GIOR <all> per esempio↓> fare il tornitore↑ (.) **piuttosto che** fare l’elettricista↑ così via↓ (66\_90\_s\_u\_01221006)  
 ‘For example, being a turner, **rather than an electrician**, (and) so on’

As regards in detail the repertoire of forms that speakers employ for the approximation of a quantity in the two corpora, these are listed in Tables 4.2 and Table 4.3 below.

4. The polyfunctionality of *piuttosto* in interaction is rather striking. In recent years its value as marker of a preferred alternative in comparative constructions has been rapidly replaced by a general disjunctive value, especially in the variety of Italian spoken in Northern Italy (Bazzanella & Cristofoli, 1998). In this variety of Italian the change has also moved further and *piuttosto che* can also be used as a marker that signals an open list (marker of restricted indefiniteness; Mauri & Giacalone Ramat, 2011).

Table 4.2 - Quantitative approximation, repertoire of forms (C1976), p/10000

	young	young adults	adults
<b>N</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<i>un sacco</i> 'a bunch'	3	0	0
<i>un mucchio</i> 'a heap'	3	0	0
<i>un casino</i> 'a lot' (lit. 'a mess')	1	0	0
<b>ADJ</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>un po'</i> 'a bit'	4	2	3
<b>PREP</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>11</b>
<i>verso</i> 'towards'	0	2	8
<i>circa</i> 'around'	0	2	3
<b>NUM</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<i>centinaia</i> 'hundreds'	2	0	0
<i>migliaia</i> 'thousands'	2	0	0
<i>quattro</i> 'four'	1	0	0
<b>ADV</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>
<i>abbastanza</i> 'rather'	5	0	0
<i>grosso modo</i> 'roughly'	0	2	0
<i>più</i> 'more'	0	6	0
<b>paradigmatic strategy</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>others</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>21</b>

Table 4.3 - Quantitative approximation, repertoire of forms (C2010), p/10000

	young	young adults	adults	elderly
<b>N</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>
<i>tipo</i> 'type'	4	0	0	0
<i>un paio</i> 'a couple'	2	0	0	0
<i>un sacco</i> 'a bunch'	4	1	0	0
<i>per un pelo</i> lit. 'by a hair'	0	1	0	0
<i>la maggior parte</i> 'most'	2	0	2	0
<b>ADJ</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>
<i>un po'</i> 'a bit'	16	4	8	4
<i>ennesimo</i> 'umpteenth'	0	1	0	0
<i>varie</i> 'various'	0	4	2	4
<i>circa/all'incirca</i> 'around'	4	0	2	0

Table 4.3 - Continued

	young	young adults	adults	elderly
<i>minimo</i> ‘minimum’	0	1	0	0
<b>NUM</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>mille</i> ‘thousand’	0	0	2	2
80%	2	0	0	0
<i>decina</i> ‘dozen’	2	0	0	2
<b>ADV</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
<i>abbastanza</i> ‘rather’	0	0	0	6
<i>bene o male</i> lit. ‘well or badly’	0	1	0	0
<i>mediamente</i> ‘on average’	0	0	2	0
<i>soprattutto</i> ‘above all’	0	0	2	1
<i>sufficientemente</i> ‘sufficiently’	0	0	0	0
<i>del tutto</i> ‘totally’	3	0	0	0
<i>più (o meno)</i> ‘more (or less)’	2	1	2	0
<b>paradigmatic strategy</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>others</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>19</b>

The data show that the repertoire of forms includes different types of units (nouns, adjectives, numerals, and adverbs, but also the strategic exploitation of different alternatives within the paradigmatic axis).

From an apparent-time perspective it is relevant to note that in both corpora younger speakers represent the age cohort which mostly uses nouns to approximate quantities, especially through expressive forms like *un sacco* lit. ‘a sack’, *un mucchio* lit. ‘a heap’. As for the overall quantitative distribution of forms in different age cohorts, in the two corpora speakers seem to behave differently: in C1976 the three age groups behave similarly as for the frequency of use of quantitative approximation (21 for all the three age cohorts considered), while the same is not true for C2010, where younger speakers and adults approximate a quantity more frequently than the other two age cohorts (46 and 33, respectively) vs (22 and 19, for young adults and elderly).

From a real-time perspective, on the other hand, the repertoire of forms seems to have qualitatively reconfigured and been enriched with new forms in C2010, especially as regards the use of adverbials with a rounding

function. Quantitatively, speakers in C2010 seem to round quantities more frequently than their peers in 1976.

The qualitative comparison of the repertoire of forms that speakers employ for adapting a conceptual category (see Tables 4.4 and 4.5) shows only a partial overlap with forms for rounding a quantity. An interesting difference relates to the class of nouns; for both corpora it mainly includes taxonomic nouns (*specie* ‘species’, *tipo* ‘type’, *sorta* ‘sort’, *genere* ‘genus’, *razza* ‘breed’).

Table 4.4 - Conceptual approximation, repertoire of forms (C1976), p/10000

	young	young adults	adults
<b>N</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>
<i>forma</i> ‘form’	0	0	0
<i>tipo</i> ‘type’	0	2	3
<i>genere</i> ‘kind’	2	2	3
<i>qualsiasi</i> ‘any’	2	2	0
<i>uno</i> ‘one’	0	0	1
<i>tizio</i> ‘guy’	0	3	0
<b>ADJ</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>un po’</i> ‘a bit’	2	2	3
<i>certo</i> ‘certain’	2	18	3
<i>determinata</i> ‘certain’	2	0	0
<i>solo</i> ‘only’	2	2	0
<i>altro</i> ‘other’	0	5	0
<i>mezzo</i> ‘half’	0	2	0
<b>ADV</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>8</b>
<i>come</i> ‘as’	2	10	1
<i>quasi</i> ‘almost’	2	6	7
<b>others</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>a un certo punto</i> ‘at some point’	2	0	0
<i>quant’altro</i> ‘whatever’	0	0	5
<b>PM</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>non so</i> ‘I don’t know’	4	9	5
<i>boh</i> ‘dunno’ (who knows)	2	0	0
<i>cioè</i> ‘that is’	0	2	0
<b>paradigmatic strategy</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>31</b>

Table 4.5 - Conceptual approximation, repertoire of forms (C2010), p/10000

	young	young adults	adults	elderly
<b>N</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>9</b>
<i>specie</i> 'kind'	0	0	0	0
<i>tipo</i> 'type'	2	4	10	2
<i>sorta</i> 'sort'	0	3	0	0
<i>genere</i> 'kind'	2	0	2	3
<i>razze</i> 'breed'	0	1	0	0
<i>parvenza</i> 'semblance'	0	0	0	0
<i>serie</i> 'series'	4	1	0	4
<i>nei limiti</i> 'in the limits'	0	0	2	0
<b>ADJ</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>un po'</i> 'a bit'	2	4	3	0
<i>certo</i> 'certain'	2	7	7	0
<i>varie</i> 'various'	0	6	0	0
<i>più</i> 'more'	0	0	2	1
<i>altro</i> 'other'	0	1	0	0
<b>ADV</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>0</b>
<i>come</i> 'as'	3	9	3	0
<i>quasi</i> 'almost'	9	0	6	0
<i>esattamente</i> 'exactly'	2	0	0	0
<i>prevalentemente</i> 'mostly'	0	0	3	0
<i>pressoché</i> 'almost'	0	0	2	0
<b>others</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>
<i>a un certo punto</i> 'at a certain point'	0	0	1	0
<i>più che altro</i> 'more than anything else'	0	0	2	2
<b>PM</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>comunque</i> 'however/anyway'	4	1	2	1
<i>insomma / tutto sommato</i> 'in short'	0	4	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>13</b>

As for the quantitative comparison of the overall frequencies, the forms have remained rather stable, what has changed is their distribution among the generations of speakers.

An important element to note in apparent time, and in terms of age-graded behaviour, is that central age cohorts (young adults in 1976 and

adults in 2010) more frequently approximate a categorization, if compared with the other age cohorts. The real-time comparison, on the contrary, shows in both corpora a decrease in frequency of strategies in young adults and an increase in adult speakers.

Finally, if one moves from the approximation of the propositional content of the utterance to the hedging of the illocutionary force of the corresponding speech act (see Tables 4.6 and 4.7), it is possible to notice that the repertoire of forms also includes a relevant number of pragmatic functional units, if compared with other strategies that operate on the propositional content.

Table 4.6 - Approximation and hedging, repertoire of forms (C1976), p/10000

	young	young adults	adults
<b>ADJ</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>59</b>
<i>solita</i> ‘usual’	1	0	0
<i>certo</i> ‘certain’	5	0	0
<i>un po’</i> ‘a bit’	27	25	55
<i>piccolo</i> ‘small’	0	0	4
<b>N</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>
<i>un attimo</i> ‘a wee minute’	0	3	0
<b>ADV</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>11</b>
<i>abbastanza</i> ‘rather’	4	16	8
<i>bene</i> ‘well’	3	0	3
<i>quantomeno</i> ‘at least’	0	3	0
<b>others</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>11</b>
<i>se non sbaglio</i> ‘if I am not wrong’	3	0	0
<i>a un certo punto</i> ‘at a certain point’	3	3	4
<i>come se</i> ‘as if’	0	0	4
<i>più che</i> ‘more than’	3	0	3
<b>PM</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>55</b>
<i>non so</i> ‘I don’t know’	17	5	5
<i>non lo so</i> ‘I don’t know it’	4	5	20
<i>non lo so spiegare</i> ‘I cannot explain it’	0	0	4
<i>cioè</i> ‘I mean’	36	12	14
<i>insomma</i> ‘in short’	7	3	8
<i>tutto sommato</i> ‘all considered’	0	0	2
<i>comunque</i> ‘anyway/however’	0	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>136</b>

Table 4.7 - Approximation and hedging, repertoire of forms (C2010), p/10000

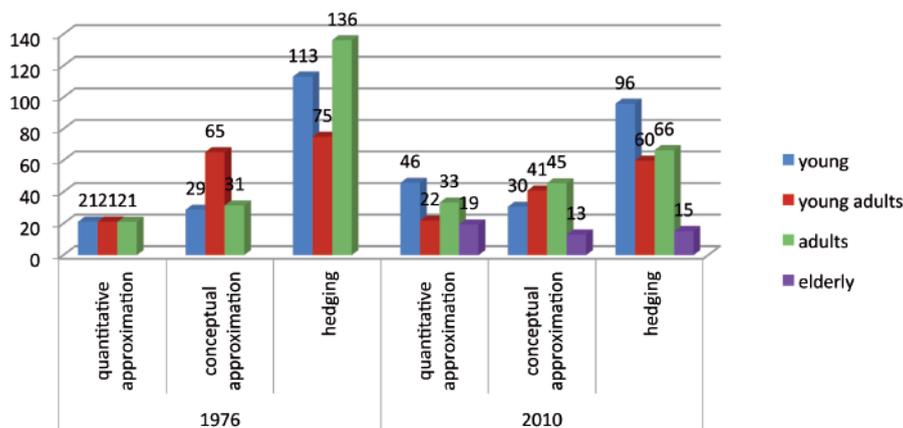
	young	young adults	adults	elderly
<b>N</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<i>un attimo</i> 'a wee minute'	4	0	0	0
<b>ADJ</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>9</b>
<i>un po'</i> 'a bit'	26	15	30	4
<i>certo</i> 'certain'	0	1	2	2
<i>un piccolo</i> 'a small'	0	0	2	0
<i>molto</i> 'a lot'	0	0	0	2
<i>tanto</i> 'a lot'	0	1	0	0
<b>ADV</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>abbastanza</i> 'rather'	17	7	3	4
<i>bene</i> 'well'	4	0	0	0
<i>perfettamente</i> 'perfectly'	2	0	0	0
<i>più o meno</i> 'more or less'	4	4	2	0
<i>più che altro</i> 'more than anything else'	2	0	3	0
<i>probabilmente</i> 'probably'	0	1	2	0
<i>giusto per</i> 'just to'	0	1	0	0
<i>fondamentalmente / sostanzialmente</i> 'fundamentally, substantially'	0	1	7	0
<i>prevalentemente</i> 'mostly'	0	3	2	0
<i>piuttosto</i> 'rather'	0	0	3	0
<b>PM</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>2</b>
<i>comunque</i> 'anyway, however'	9	7	2	0
<i>insomma</i> 'in short'	14	7	2	0
<i>cioè</i> 'I mean'	7	1	3	0
<i>non (lo) so</i> 'I don't know (it)'	5	7	2	2
<i>se non sbaglio</i> 'if I am not mistaken'	2	0	0	0
<i>bah</i> 'bah'	0	0	2	0
<i>alla fine (dei conti)</i> 'at the end of the day'	0	3	0	0
<i>per dare un'idea</i> 'to give an idea'	0	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>15</b>

The repertoires of forms seem richer in C2010, however the quantitative frequency of the strategy is lower in adults, if compared with their peers in 1976.

If one considers in apparent time the quantitative distribution of the strategy within different age cohorts, it is possible to notice that young and adult speakers in C1976 represent the age cohorts which more frequently hedge the illocutionary force of speech acts through approximation strategies. The reverse is true for older speakers in C2010 who, however, are characterized by the lowest frequency of all approximation and hedging strategies (rounding quantities, adapting conceptual categories, hedging speech acts).

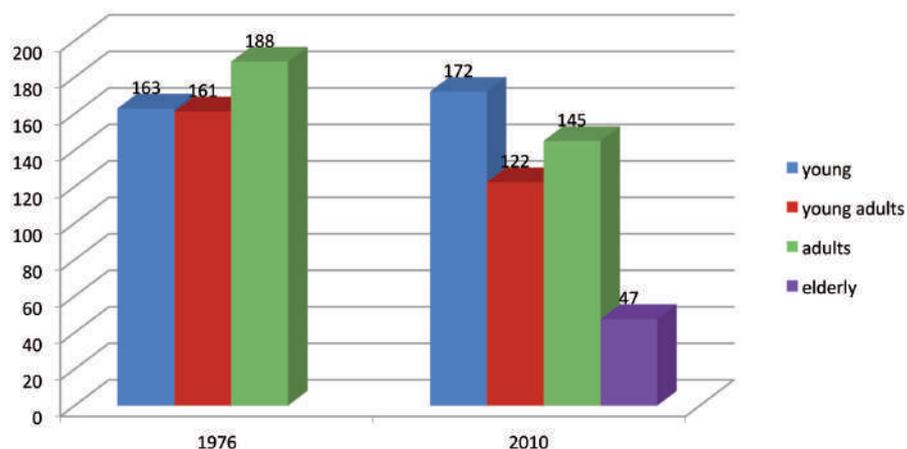
The comparison in real time, conversely, shows a general decrease of hedging strategies in C2010, which is, however, counterbalanced by a slight increase of other strategies operating at the propositional level (both in relation to quantitative approximation and to conceptual approximation).

Figure 4.1 - Types of approximation strategies in different corpora, p/10000



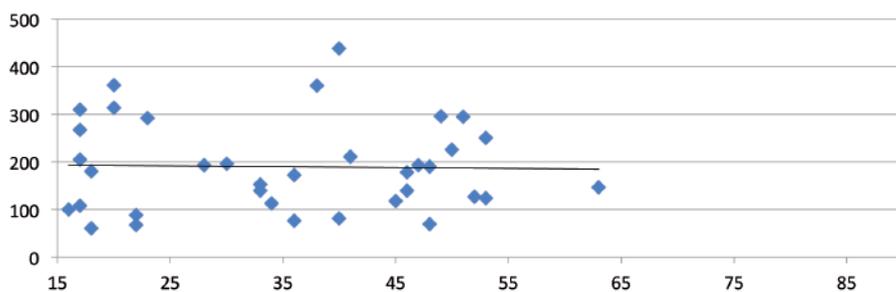
The overall frequency of distribution of approximation strategies (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2) reveals a different picture, in which the quantitative frequency of use seems to have remained quite stable over time, with young adults and elderly speakers (in particular) representing the age cohorts who least frequently employ the strategy.

Figure 4.2 - Approximation strategies and age cohorts of speakers (p/10000)



This trend is evident also if one takes into consideration the individual use of the strategy by different speakers (see Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4). Although speakers are highly idiosyncratic in their choices of using or not approximation, all in all, the comparison of data both in apparent and in real time shows a rather homogeneous use of the strategies up to adulthood and then a decrease in use with old age (see the regression line in Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.3 - Distribution of approximation strategies in C1976, p/10000



The qualitative analysis of structural contexts in which approximation strategies are more frequently used shows a rather consistent picture in both apparent and real time. In particular, the most frequent context of occurrence of this group of strategies is in acts for both corpora, followed by subacts and interventions (see Figure 4.5 and Figure 4.6).

Figure 4.4 - Distribution of approximation strategies in C2010, p/10000

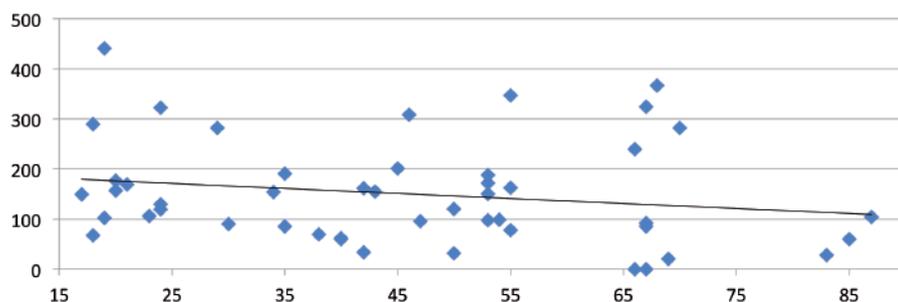


Figure 4.5 - Approximation strategies and discourse unit (C1976)

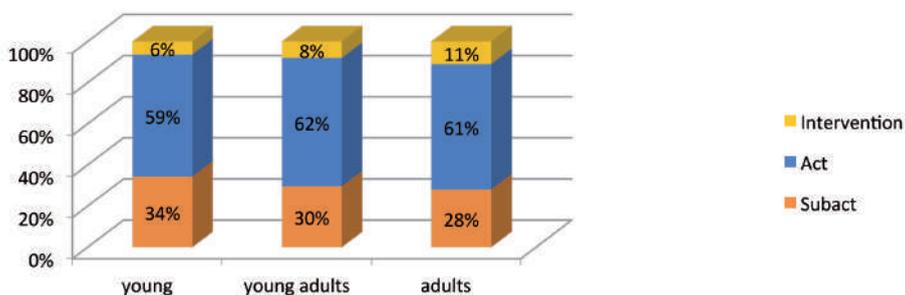
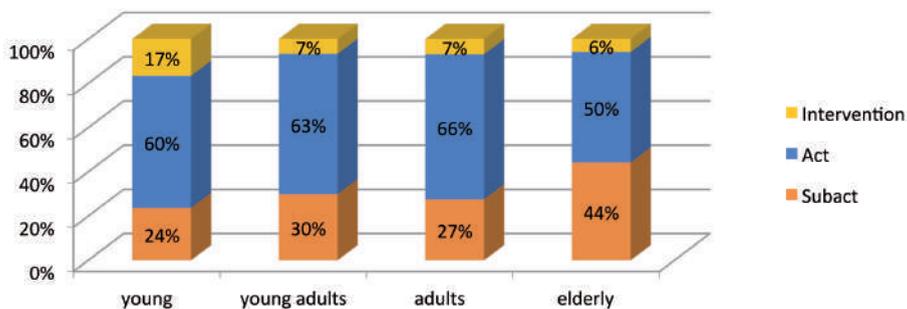


Figure 4.6 - Approximation strategies and discourse units (C2010)



On the contrary, the correlations between the position a marker occupies and the discourse structural units in which it occurs show a more varied picture (see Figure 4.7 and Figure 4.8).

In both corpora younger speakers are the most creative and versatile age cohort, as forms with an approximation function are used in the left periphery, right periphery or in medial position, while young adults and adults employ the strategy more consistently in medial position of acts. Worthy of note is the behaviour of older speakers in C2010, because regardless of the overall lower frequency of approximation VMs, they seem to employ them in a wider variety of contexts, which also includes the right periphery.

The real-time comparison of the two corpora shows a similar behaviour of the two central age cohorts (i.e. young adults and adults) and slight variation in preferences for the younger speakers in 2010, who seem to use less frequently approximation VMs in the left periphery of acts.

Figure 4.7 - Approximation strategies and position (C1976)

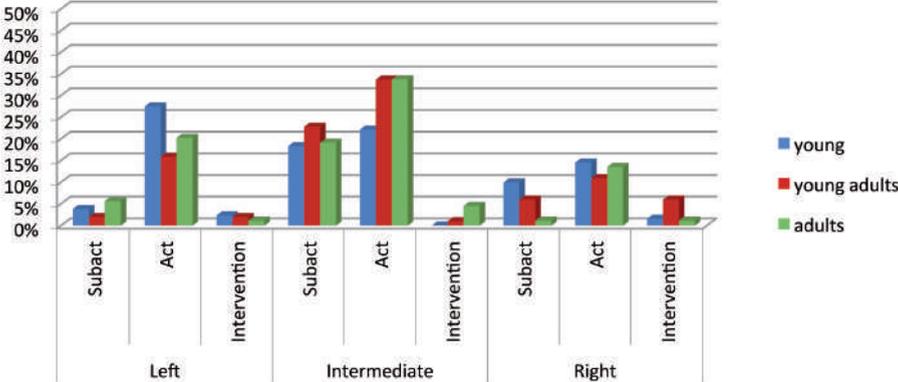
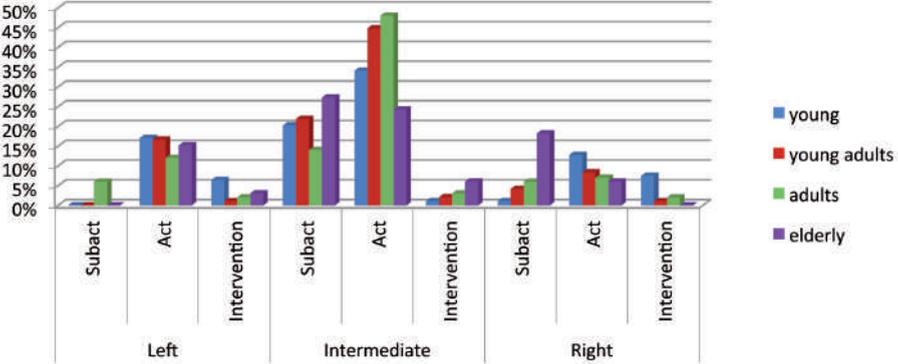


Figure 4.8 - Approximation strategies and position (C2010)



Finally, quantitative data on the units over which approximation VMs have scope again shows a rather consistent behaviour of speakers both in apparent and real time (see Figures 4.9 and 4.10). At least 50% of occurrences of approximation VMs have scope over local constituents. These numbers mostly include strategies that are used to round quantities or to adapt conceptual categories; conversely, hedging strategies mostly have wider scope over acts and, more rarely, subacts or interventions. These frequencies seem to have slightly decreased in C2010, but the results are consistent with the general decrease in the use of the strategy described earlier.

Figure 4.9 - Approximation strategies and scope (C1976)

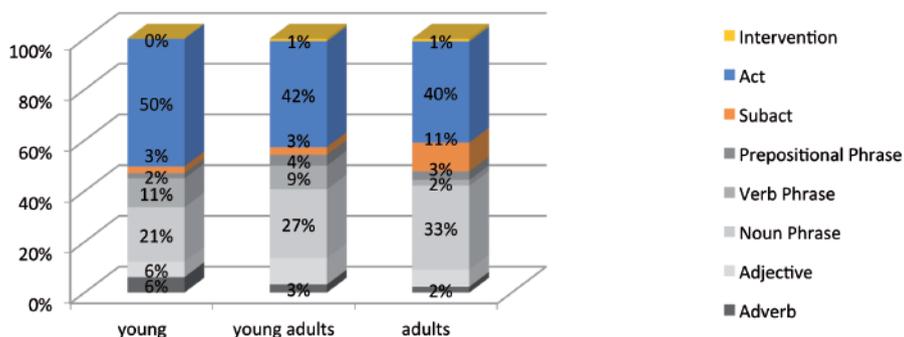
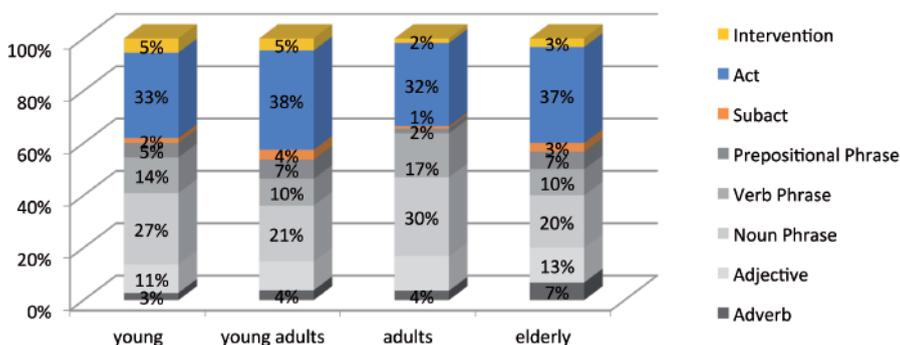


Figure 4.10 - Approximation strategies and scope (C2010)



## Summary

Approximation VMs are used by all speakers, but with variable frequencies. Similar forms are employed to approximate quantities (rounders) and conceptual categories (adaptors) as well as to hedge the illocutionary force of speech acts. Both the repertoire of forms and the overall frequency of the strategy have substantially remained stable in the two communities taken into consideration. The same is also true for the structural embedding of VMs both in terms of age-graded behaviour and in terms of change over time. What is relevant to notice is the decrease in frequency of the use of approximation VMs among older speakers in C2010.

### 4.2.1. General extenders

The second group of VMs that is based on the paradigmatic diversification of linguistic alternatives is that of general extenders. In the corpora it is possible to identify some common and recurrent structures used as general extenders.

A first structure makes use of universal quantifiers (*tutto* ‘everything’, *e tutte queste cose* ‘and all these things’), which deictically refer to the content of the modified list or to the vague *ad hoc* category identified, as in (27).

- (27) ADR poi dopo è stato la convivenza con: (.) la mia attuale compagna↑ (.) poi adesso abbiám preso una casa↓ **e tutto**↑ (26\_45\_s\_u\_01191002)  
‘Then after that it was living together with my current partner, then, now we’ve got a house **and everything**’

Another recurrent structure makes use of co-hyponyms (*e cose così* ‘and things like that’), which refer to preceding elements of the list. These structures, which often also entail general nouns, can be used for adjunctive, as in (28), as well as disjunctive structures, as in (29). In such constructions it is often possible to omit the conjunction as in the case of *robe del genere* in (30).

- (28) ADR però uno pretende↓ no↑ di: avere uno stipendio: (-) facendo quello che risponde al telefono↓ (.) al numeri verde **e a quelle cose lì**↑ (26\_45\_s\_u\_01191002)  
‘But, you expect, right? to get a salary by answering the telephone, the freephone numbers, and **those things there**’

- (29) CHI eh: io il mio sogno↑ era: lavorare nel nel- nei media↑ (.) nella comunicazione↑ oppure nella cultura↑ quindi mi son sempre vista in una redazione↑ eh oppure non lo so: (.)↑ il museo della scienza e della tecnica↑ organizzare eventi↑ **o cose del genere**↑ (26\_45\_s\_d\_11101001)  
 ‘Heh, I my dream was to work in the- in the in the media, in communication or in culture, so I always saw myself in an editorial office, or I don’t know, the museum of science and technology organising events, **or things like that**’
- (30) MICH dunque↓ sì↓ anch’io pensavo: (.) la **protesta** fosse: a colpi: di (.) pennellate↑ **robe del genere**↓ (15\_25\_s\_u\_120221002m)  
 ‘So, yes, I also thought the protest was with strokes of the brush, **stuff like that**’

In the corpus general extenders share the property of indexing that somehow a categorization or a list of elements is not precise and/or complete. However, this information is actualised through different types of strategies which may

(a) instantiate a comparison with the exemplified elements, especially through a co-hyponymous reference, as is the case of *cose/robe simili* ‘things/stuff like that’, *di questo tipo/del genere* ‘of this kind/sort’, as exemplified in (31) (comparative strategies);

- (31) GER più che altro↑ non è che amo molto giochi di: (.) spara tutto↑ **cose del genere**↓ °h simulazione di guida.-- in rete. (46\_65\_s\_u\_09151004)  
 ‘above all, I do not like very much games of shoot everything, **things like that**, online driving simulation’

(b) add other referents to examples given through some kind of quantification (e.g. universal quantifiers as (*e tutto* ‘(and) everything’ as in (32), *o/e altre cose* ‘and/or other things’, *eccetera* ‘etcetera’, as in (33) (addition strategies);

- (32) GER ragazzi olandesi↑ piuttosto che italiani:↑ (.) **di tutto**↓ c’è proprio una vera comunità, (46\_65\_s\_u\_09151004)  
 ‘Dutch boys or Italian, **all kinds**, there is a real community’
- (33) PREAL magari↑ sei un po’ triste quel giorno lì↑ **tutta una serie** di circostanze↓ (.) negative↓ **eccetera**↑ (15\_25\_s\_d\_012611)  
 ‘Maybe you are a little sad that day, **a whole series** of negative circumstances, **etcetera**’

(c) refer deictically to other ‘potential’ referents, through recognitional and textual deixis (e.g. *e così* ‘and so’ as in (34), or *quelle robe lì* ‘those things/ that stuff’) (deictic strategies);

- (34) LUI dice che: (.) lei ha tirato su i figli male↑ che adesso:↑ ad esempio:↑  
 (-) che noi ce ne sbattiamo di nostro padre e non gli diamo retta↑ **così**↑  
 (15\_25\_d\_d\_1980\_fuga\_01)  
 ‘He says that she brought up the children badly, that now, for example, that we don’t give a damn about our father and don’t listen to him, **and so**’

(d) indicate a metadiscourse reference by underlining how potentially other exemplars may be uttered as is the case, for instance, of *e via dicendo* ‘and so on’ in (35), *e via scorrendo* ‘and so forth’, *e bla bla* ‘blah blah blah’. In some cases, the general extender is left implicit, and the extension of the list or the creation of the *ad hoc* category is accomplished through a syntactically unfinished utterance, typically with a rising intonation which can appear with a connector, as in the case of *o che* ‘or what’ in (36), or without it, as in (37). In this latter case the utterance closes with a rising intonation (metadiscourse strategy);<sup>5</sup>

- (35) PET °h si fa↑ non so↓ c’è una scelta c’è una certa scelta anche (.) diciamo↓  
 all’interno↑ di chi è ammazzato↓ questo si fa sciopero↑ quest’altro no↓ **e via dicendo**, (46\_65\_d\_u\_01297901)  
 ‘You do-, I don’t know, there’s a choice, there’s a certain choice as well, let’s say, internally, of the one killed, on this we strike, on this we don’t, **and so on**’
- (36) GIOR ma: gente che finiva proprio la terza media per uno sputo↓ (.) °h e:  
 con fatica **o che**↑ (66\_90\_s\_u\_01221006)  
 ‘But people who finished eighth grade by the skin of their teeth, and with effort, **or that**’
- (37) FIL sì largo ai giovani↑ nel senso↓ guarda↓ qui abbiamo:: abbiamo iniziato  
 due anni fa: (.) in: due o tre ragazzi↓ che si interessavano di: (-) di politica↑  
 ma: non tipo↓ dei partiti↑ ma: (.) di giustizia↓ di pace↓ di diritti **sociali**↑ **e:**↑  
 (15\_25\_s\_u\_01211005)  
 ‘Yes, make way for young people! I mean, look, here we have, we started two years ago, (we were) two or three boys who were interested in, in politics, but not, like, parties, but of justice, of peace, of **social rights**, **and...**’

(e) combine different strategies, e.g. *e così via* ‘and so on’ in (38) which combines a metadiscourse and deictic reference. It is interesting to note that structures may be combined and/or created on the spot idiosyncratically.

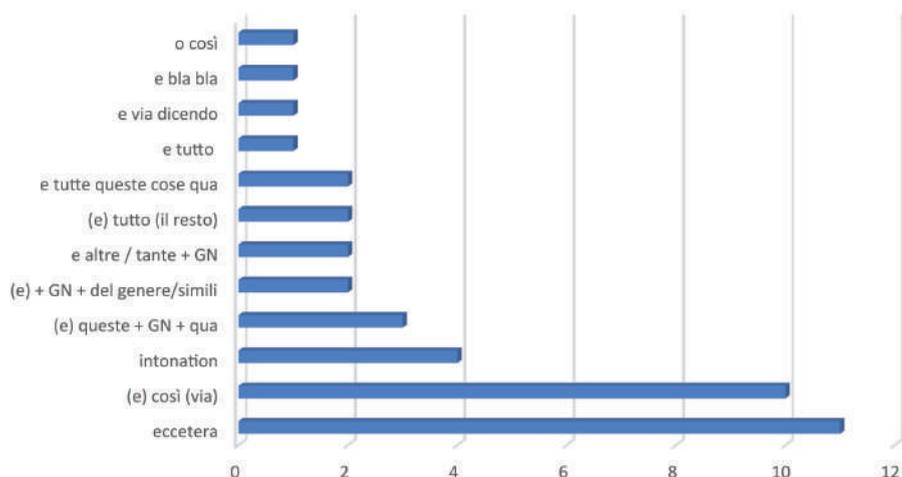
5. When general extenders are used as interrogatives, they function similarly: they are left suspended at the end of a clause, with a disjunctive connector such as *o cosa, o come* ‘or what?’.

cally by speakers, therefore the possibility for combinations is potentially infinite. Consider for instance examples like *e compagnia bella* lit. ‘and good company’, *al porco di boia* lit. ‘to the hangman’s hog’, *e queste puttane qua* lit. ‘and this crap here’, *quelle balle lì* ‘that bullshit there’(mixed strategies).<sup>6</sup>

- (38) NAT qualche anno fa↑ (.) ci hanno regalato cinque anni in più↑ (.) perché: eh ci hanno detto che si- portiamo quarant’anni↓ adesso la porteranno a quarantuno↑ **e così via**↓ (46\_65\_s\_u\_06101009)  
 ‘A few years ago they gave us an extra five years because they told us they brought (it) to forty years, now they will take it to forty-one, **and so on**’

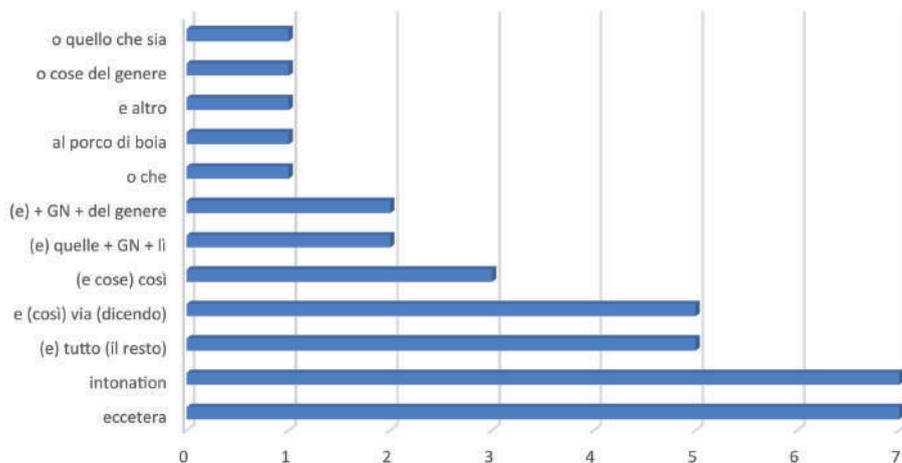
Lists of the most frequent general extenders in the two corpora is given in Figures 4.11 and 4.12.

Figure 4.11 - Repertoire of general extenders in C1976 (p/10000)



6. The same is true for other languages, consider for instance German *oder so 'n Mist*, Spanish *y no sé qué y no sé quanto*, Fr. *patati patata, le diable à sa patte, gnan gnan* (Mihatsch, 2010a: 54; Loureda Lamas, 2000; Dubois, 1992: 202), or Eng. *and crap, the whole bit, and junk like this* (Channel, 1994: 120).

Figure 4.12 - Repertoire of general extenders in C2010 (p/10000)



Although *eccetera* is the preferred form and intonation is one of the three most favoured strategies in both corpora, the forms used seem to be evenly, often idiosyncratically, distributed within classes of functional strategies. This is a consequence of the creative and connotative use of general extenders made by speakers.

As regards the use of general extenders in the different age cohorts, the data show different patterns for the two sub-corpora (cf. Figures 4.13 and 4.14).

Figure 4.13 - Distribution of general extenders in age cohorts (C1976) (p/10000)

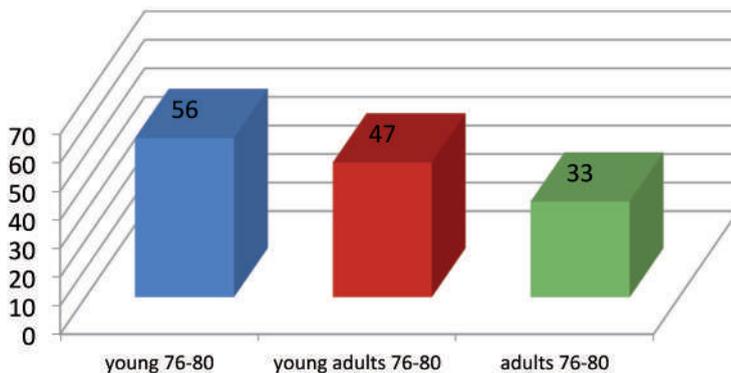
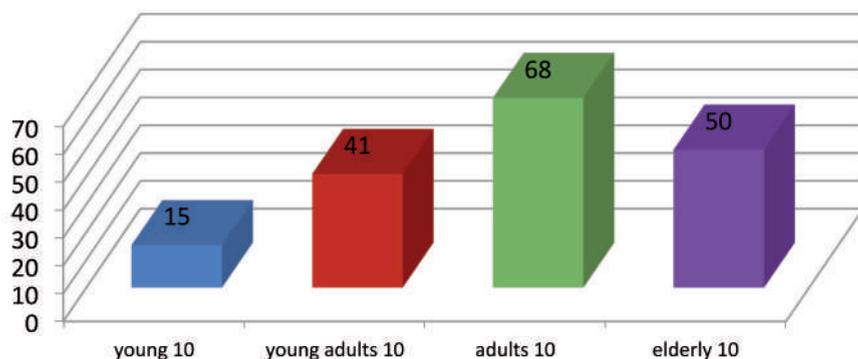


Figure 4.14 - Distribution of general extenders in age cohorts (C2010) (p/10000)



In apparent time, younger speakers in C1976 are the cohort that tends to use the most general extenders (56/10,000), followed by young adults (47/10,000) and adults (33/10,000). The situation is reversed in C2010, where adults are those that most frequently use general extenders (68/10,000), followed by elderly (50/10,000), young adults (41/10,000), and younger speakers (only 15/10,000).

In terms of a diachronic comparison, the total number of general extenders has slightly decreased from 1976 to 2010 (52 p/10,000 in C1976 and 44 p/10000 in C2010).

Some interesting elements emerge from the comparison.

The first relates to the difference in frequency of general extenders in young people's speech in the two corpora, as young speakers in C1976 use general extenders more than their peers in C2010. By contrast, the reverse is true for adults, although less markedly.

The second has to do with the behaviour of older speakers in C2010, since they display the second highest frequency of general extenders among the different age cohorts. In addition, this high frequency of use characterises, almost exclusively, older male speakers (77/10,000 for male vs 15/10,000 for female speakers). However, it is relevant to stress that this trait also characterizes other age cohorts so that the use of general extenders may rather correlate with the gender, rather than with the age, of a speaker.<sup>7</sup> Yet,

7. In the 2010 corpus frequencies are: younger speakers (8/10,000 female vs 24/10,000 male); young adults (17/10,000 female vs 74/10,000 male); adults (49/10,000 female vs 87/10,000 male). Frequencies of occurrence in C1976 are less clear cut in all three age cohorts considered: younger speakers (73/10,000 female vs 25/10,000 male); young adults (24/10,000 female vs 72/10,000 male); adults (79/10,000 female vs 50/10,000 male).

considering the general decrease in the total number of VMs which older speakers seem to share (cf. § 4.6), the higher frequency of general extenders seems to represent an interesting trait of older people’s speech style. Similar trends, were identified by Cheshire (2012) and Palacios Martínez (2011), who indicate that, although general extenders are considered more common in young people’s speech, in actual data analysis they result more frequent in adults and older speakers (cf. also Cheshire, 2007; Dubois, 1992; Stubbe & Holmes, 1995; Tagliamonte & Denis, 2010).

Looking in detail into the preferred strategies used by different age cohorts, it emerges that addition strategies are more common among all speakers, regardless of their age, while comparative strategies tend to decrease in frequency with age in C1976 but have increased from 1976 to 2010 (cf. Figures 4.15 and 4.16).

Figure 4.15 - Distribution of functional strategies for general extenders in age cohorts (C1976)

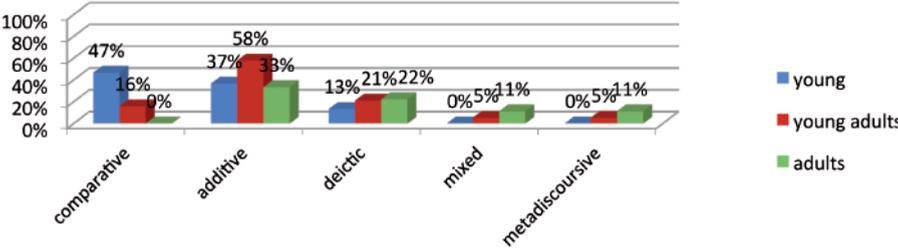
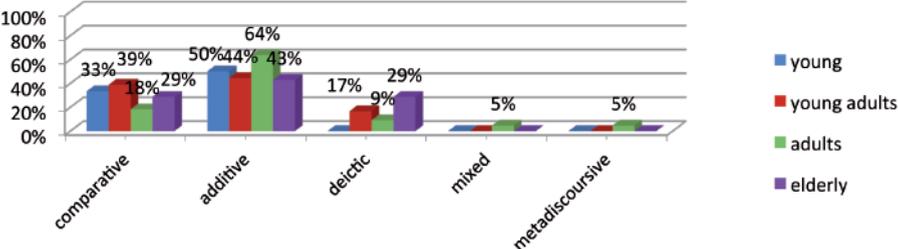


Figure 4.16 - Distribution of functional strategies for general extenders in age cohorts (C2010)



Given the low frequency numbers of general extenders in the corpora, it is difficult to make any quantitative generalizations about their use across different age cohorts. It rather seems that they are used highly idio-

syncratically and creatively, with forms frequently used by one speaker but not by others.

These contradictory results in the literature, as well as in the corpora, may have to do with the functions of these elements in discourse. Most analyses of general extenders deal with the colloquial and informal language of people, who in face to face interactions share considerable familiarity, a deictic context of reference, and a general background knowledge. In a public context like a radio phone-in show, speakers need to rely on shared societal information and general extenders may represent markers of solidarity, rather than mere markers of open lists, that unacquainted speakers may use to establish a relationship between themselves (cf. O’Keeffe, 2004). The reason behind these characteristic styles might be that general extenders often lose their original vague categorizing function in favour of a function which marks a social identity that is built into the context of interaction and is not given *a priori*.

Moreover, the attitudes of speakers towards radio phone-ins might have changed over the years (Cortelazzo, 2000) and radio in Italy may be perceived as a much more formal context today than in 1970s. Although this idea needs to be substantiated with further analysis, it may help explain why younger speakers in C1976 used a higher number of general extenders and continue to do so today as adults.

If one takes into consideration the most frequent structural contexts of use of general extenders, it is possible to notice that they most often appear in the right periphery in subacts rather than in acts (Figure 4.17 and Figure 4.18).

Figure 4.17 - General extenders and structural embedding (C1976)

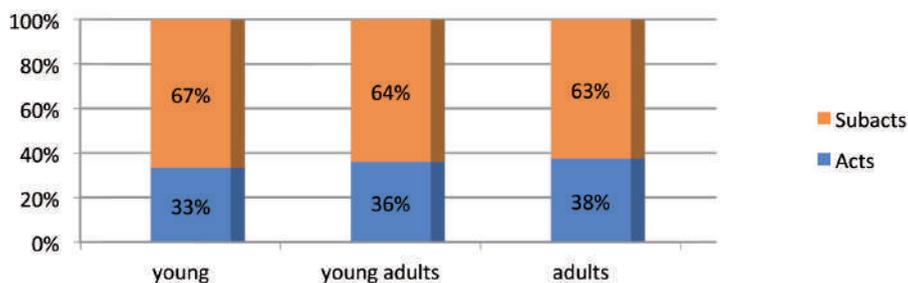
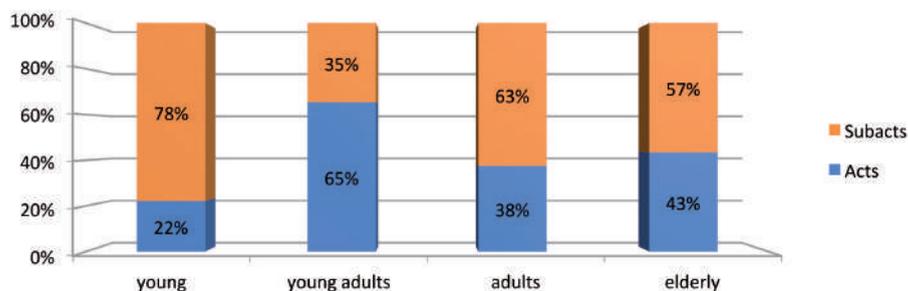


Figure 4.18 - General extenders and structural embedding (C2010).



One reason for the embedding of general extenders in subacts may have to do with their functions in discourse, since they are used to signal that the ‘extended’ information is somehow ‘secondary’ for the progression of the topic, so that it is left not further specified, as the speaker feels it is not necessary to provide further details.

As regards the scope of general extenders within different cohorts of speakers, in the corpora it ranges from modifying local constituents in a list (phrases, as is the case of *associazioni democratiche* and *sedi di partiti* in 39) to modifying whole subacts (such as *mettere sulla difensiva I compagni* in 40) and acts (*han cominciato (ad) aggredirla* in 41) (cf. also Mihatsch, 2010a: 55; Channel, 1994: 132-136 on the scope of general extenders).

- (39) CAR °h sono state (.) delle situazioni così particolari per cui (.) sedi di partiti (.) di associazioni democratiche **eccetera**↑ sono state eliminate. (66-90\_s\_u\_11261006)  
 ‘They were such special situations that seats of parties, democratic associations, **eccetera** were closed’
- (40) IPP cioè↑ voglio dire↓ qui↓ uno:↓ ho sentito tanta gente dice↓ ma questo può rilanciare l’MSI:↓ questo può (.) mettere sulla difensiva i compagni↓ questo può servire a questo↓ questo può servire a quest’altro↓ **eccetera**↓ (26\_45\_d\_u\_01087802)  
 ‘That is, I mean, here, one, I’ve heard a lot of people say: but this can relaunch the MSI, this can put the comrades on the defensive, this can serve this, this can serve that, **eccetera**’
- (41) LUIS (-) allora lei era da sola↓ (.) no↑ (-) così:↑ (.) cioè↓ si sono avvicinati a lei↑ e: han cominciato: (-) aggredirla↑ e **così**↓ (.) no↓ (15\_25\_d\_d\_1987801)  
 ‘So, she was alone, right, like this, that is, (some guys) approached her and they started attacking her, **and so**, right’

As emerges from examples (40) and (41), when the scope of general extenders is over acts or subacts, they not only approximate propositional content, but can also suggest an (inter)subjective interpretation, and operate at the level of illocution (cf. Mihatsch, 2010a: 55; Aijmer, 2002: 279). These intersubjective values are important in conveying speakers' attitudes and/or creating solidarity and informality.

The correlations between the scope of general extenders and the age of speakers show that in both corpora the majority of general extenders have local scope, modifying nouns, verbs or prepositional phrases. This is particularly true for younger speakers especially in C2010 (cf. Figures 4.19 and 4.20).

Figure 4.19 - General extenders and scope (C1976)

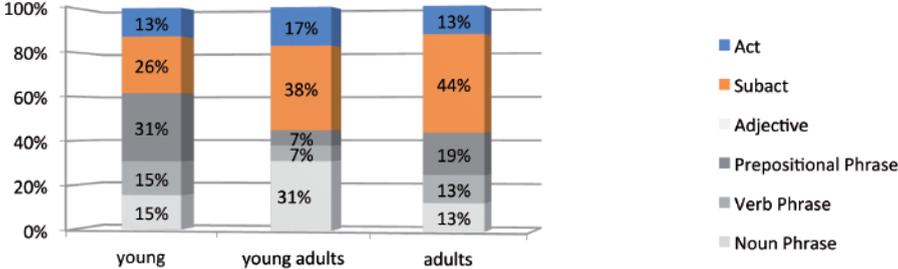
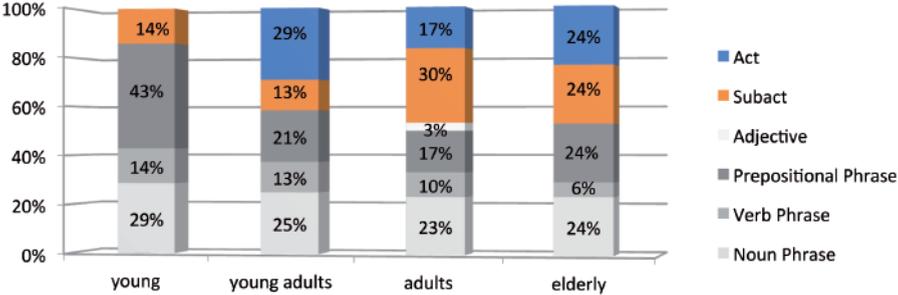


Figure 4.20 - General extenders and scope (C2010)



## Summary

General extenders are employed by speakers to extend the number of members of a list (list markers, Mauri, 2012) as well as to create *ad hoc* categories. As such they activate shared frames of knowledge. These ‘meta-instructions’ are used by speakers to enable their interlocutors to access common knowledge frames by “partially sabotaging strict truth conditionality” (Mendoza-Denton, 2008: 269). These frames dynamically index knowledge or shared assumptions which, in the specific context of radio phone-ins, may vary from one phone call to the next.

Structurally, general extenders appear more frequently in subacts, which codify less relevant information, and have scope over local constituents as well as whole acts.

Older male speakers (i.e. adults and elderly in 2010), use general extenders more frequently than younger age cohorts. It is thus possible to infer that these age cohorts may be more attentive to creating common ground with their interlocutors (i.e. the radio presenter and the audience).

### 4.2.2. Exemplification strategies

Exemplification strategies exploit the differentiation of paradigmatic choice to index the dialogic co-construction of discourse. As for general extenders, these strategies perform a series of communicative functions including the creation of an *ad hoc* categorization. In particular, they create an *ad hoc* categorization through illustration or exemplification (Mihatsch, 2010a: 52). From these functions derive their uses as VMs.

Exemplification strategies are employed to specify abstract, generic, and complex concepts or information. These strategies represent universal procedures through which speakers elaborate and progress through their thoughts. Commenting on the function of exemplification, Manzotti (1998: 108) highlights how “exemplifying means to provide the interlocutor with specific cases (among many other possible ones), i.e. one or more elements of a larger (given or potential) set of entities, activities, situations, problems”.

This characterizing function of exemplification, which is identified by traditional rhetoric, represents the basis for the approximating and hedging functions. What exemplification markers do is to suggest that the subsequent phrase/speech act is to be construed as an exemplification of a wider category. As with adaptors and rounders, markers indicate that there is a slight discrepancy between the linguistically encoded concept and the concept that the hearer is expected to pragmatically infer.

Therefore, rough approximations and exemplifications can be viewed as different subtypes whose common denominator is the inference that there is non-identical resemblance between the encoded and the communicated concepts.

Exemplification is generally signalled by specific VMs which belong to different semantic classes. These can be taxonomic nouns such as *tipo* in (42), comparative markers, such as *come* in (43), and parentheticals like *metti* lit. ‘put.2SG’ in (44), which generally also introduce hypothetical facts (cf. also Schneider, 2007; Mihatsch, 2010a).

- (42) OLG e: ho fatto le parti di cultura genera:le **tipo** chimica↑ matematica↑ e: e biologia↑ sull’alfa test. (15-25\_s\_d\_09021001)  
 ‘I did the parts of general culture **like** chemistry, maths, and, and biology, on the alpha test’
- (43) ELE non si è mai: d’accordo su una stessa cosa↓ ma **come**↑ (-) anche in un collettivo singolo↓ non troverai mai↑ (-) cinque persone che la pensano uguale.= (15\_25\_s\_d\_10131001m)  
 ‘You never agree on the same thing, but **as** even in a single collective, you will never find five people who think alike’
- (44) PREMA cioè↓ quando dici:, (.) adesso arriva↑ **metti**↑(.) un anno con il nove. adesso lo dico↓ perché è appena passato. (66\_90\_s\_d\_05171007)  
 ‘I mean, when you say, now comes, **for example**, a year with a nine, now I can say it, because it has just passed’

The same function is also performed by epistemic markers such as *magari* ‘perhaps/maybe’ which underline the arbitrariness of the example (Manzotti, 1998) and, as implication, at the metadiscourse level, the approximation of an exemplification (Masini & Pietrandrea, 2010). In these cases it is the hypothetical, and therefore hedged, assertion which paves the way to semantic approximation through exemplification, but not the reverse, as can be seen in (45).

- (45) PREMIO perché dicono vedono gli uomini↑ dietro la facciata↓ **magari** dei professori↑ o: uomini: (.) di grido↓ di nome↓ socialmente↑ che poi invece scendono per la strada. (15\_25\_d\_d\_198001)  
 ‘Because they say they see men behind the façade, **perhaps** professors, famous men, with (important) names or socially (relevant), who then take to the streets instead.’

More prototypical is the use of the explicit marker *per esempio* ‘for example’, which, unlike the exemplification markers discussed so far, tends to be employed more frequently as a hedge, operating at the illocutionary

level. More prototypically, *per esempio* hedges strong assertions, as in (46) where it modifies *a un certo momento se ne andranno a fanculo i problemi che stiamo vivendo*. In these contexts the examples are interpreted as the speaker's point of view and are, thus, relativized by being presented as an arbitrary choice among many potential others (cf. also Mihatch, 2010a: 63)

- (46) MIR (.) °h per quello a un certo momento se ne andranno a fanculo↑ i reali problemi che stiamo vivendo↓ **come per esempio**↓ l'unidal↑ **come per esempio**↓ (-) ricordo il casino che è scoppiato↓ (26\_45\_d\_u\_01087807)  
 'For that (reason) at some point the real problems we are experiencing will fuck off, **as for example**, the unidal, **as for example** I remember the mess that developed (after that)'

Other markers which can be used to introduce an exemplification are *cioè* 'that is' as in (47), *non so* 'I don't know', as in (48), together with its variants *non lo so*, *che ne so* and its informal counterpart *boh* (in 49), and *per dire* '(just) to say' in (50).

- (47) PREMIEC per esempio↑ **cioè**↑ **non so**↑ problemi con la famiglia. (15\_25\_d\_d\_198001)  
 'for example, **I mean, I don't know**, problems with the family'
- (48) PET perché se noi proporremo (.) ogni qual volta viene ucciso uno↓ (.) uno sciopero↓ (-) la gente ne troverebbe nel contempo un'altra↑ **non so**↓ una frase↓ un qualcosa↑ per dirmi (.) è così ogni qual volta↑ bisogna fare sciopero e via del genere. (46\_65\_d\_u\_01297901)  
 'Because if every time we were to come up with a strike, every time one of them gets killed, people would find another one at the same time, **I don't know**, a sentence, something, to tell me: it's like this every time one has to go on strike and so on'
- (49) MAS quindi riescono a: a avere un'alimentazione un po' più equilibrata: (.) insomma↑ riescono a: a mangiare più: a mettere le gambe sotto il tavolo↑ quantomeno↓ e a: deputare (.) un momento↑ per **boh**↓ per il pranzo↑ dove non si pensa ad altro e si mangia e basta↓ ecco. (26\_45\_s\_u\_10181004)  
 'So they manage to have a slightly more balanced diet. In short, they manage to eat more, to put their legs under the table, at least, and to set aside a moment for, **I don't know**, for lunch where you don't think about anything else and just eat, that's it'
- (50) PREMA (-) simulazioni di guida in rete↓ ma eh: (.) (-) **per dire**↓ hai comprato:↑ anche un'attrezzatura↑ adeguata↓ perché mi risulta che↓ (-) i simulatori: migliori↑ sono quelli che ti danno: il volante↑ la marcia↑ che tu attacchi al computer e usi. (46\_65\_s\_u\_09151004)  
 'Driving simulations on the net, but eh, **if say**, you also bought proper equipment, because I reckon that the best simulators are those that are sold with a steering wheel, the gear, that you connect to the computer and use'

These uses position at the interface between approximation and meta-discourse strategies. As will be discussed in detail in relation to metadiscourse relativisation (cf. § 4.3), both semantic approximation and pragmatic hedging are often associated with word-finding problems and are easily connected with textual phenomena (e.g. delay) related to formulation work (cf. also Rossari, 2000). These strategies can have a local scope over lexemes or phrases, or a wider scope over whole speech acts.

Frequencies of different forms used as exemplification markers are given in Tables 4.8 and 4.9.

The forms used in the two corpora show that strategies do not drastically diverge; on the contrary, the repertoire of forms has remained quite stable. Instead, what has changed is their distribution in terms of age- and generation-specific use of exemplifications (consider for instance the interesting cases of *cioè*, *magari*, *non so*, and *tipo*, which will be analysed in detail in Chapter 5). Moreover, it is evident how the repertoire of forms is mostly constituted by pragmaticalized units functioning as discourse markers.

As for the frequency of forms, the apparent-time comparison among age cohorts in C1976 shows that younger speakers exemplify more than speakers belonging to other age cohorts, and that there is a general decrease of exemplification with age. Instead, in C2010 the younger age

Table 4.8 - Exemplification strategies, repertoire of forms (C1976), p/10000

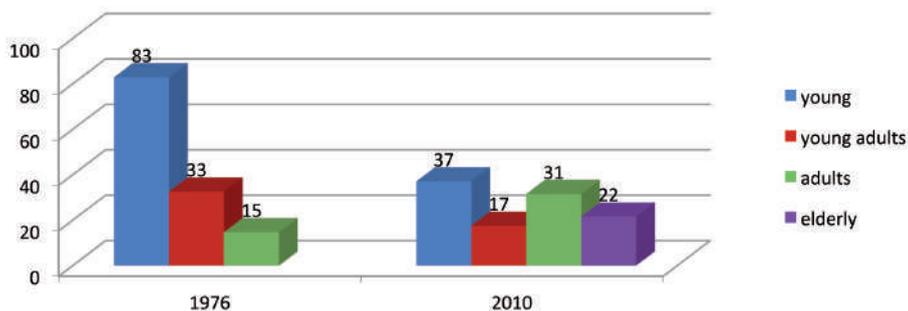
	young	young adults	adults
<i>tipo</i> 'type'	3	0	0
<i>magari</i> 'maybe'	11	0	0
<i>come (se)</i> 'as (if)'	3	0	2
<i>cioè</i> 'I mean'	27	2	6
<i>ad/per esempio</i> 'for example'	5	13	3
<i>un esempio</i> 'one example'	3	0	0
<i>ti faccio l'esempio</i> 'I'll give you one example'	2	0	0
<i>(io) non so</i> '(I) don't know'	25	13	2
<i>che ne so</i> 'I don't know (about it)'	2	0	0
<i>non lo so</i> 'I don't know it'	0	3	2
<i>che so io</i> 'I don't know'	0	2	0
<i>metti</i> lit. 'put.2SG'	2	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>15</b>

Table 4.9 - Exemplification strategies, repertoire of forms (C2010), p/10000

	young	young adults	adults	elderly
<i>tipo</i> 'type'	18	0	2	0
<i>magari</i> 'maybe'	9	8	0	0
<i>come (se)</i> 'as (if)'	2	1	0	0
<i>cioè</i> 'I mean'	0	0	7	4
<i>ad/per esempio</i> 'for example'	4	3	7	10
<i>un esempio</i> 'one example'	0	0	2	0
<i>ti faccio l'esempio</i> 'I'll give you an example'	0	0	2	2
<i>(io) non so</i> 'I don't know'	0	1	5	4
<i>che ne so</i> 'I don't know'	0	0	3	0
<i>non lo so</i> 'I don't know (it)'	0	3	0	2
<i>che so io</i> 'what I know'	0	0	0	0
<i>per dire</i> '(just) to say'	4	0	0	0
<i>boh</i> 'bah'	0	1	3	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>22</b>

cohort tends to use exemplification with a frequency similar to that of adults, while young adults use it less frequently than any other age cohort (including older speakers) (cf. Figure 4.21).

Figure 4.21 - Exemplification strategies in age cohorts of speakers (p/10000)



The comparison in real time between the two corpora indicates that younger speakers in 2010 exemplify less (by almost 50%), if compared

with their peers in 1976. Similarly there is a slight decrease in the overall frequency of exemplification (141/10,000 in the C1976 vs 107/10,000 in C2010).

This trend is also evident in speakers' idiosyncrasies in the use of the strategy (Figures 4.22 and 4.23), which show a decreasing slope in both communities – although more marked in 1976 – and a concentration of the majority of speakers around lower frequency values in 2010.

Figure 4.22 - Distribution of exemplification strategies in C1976, p/10000

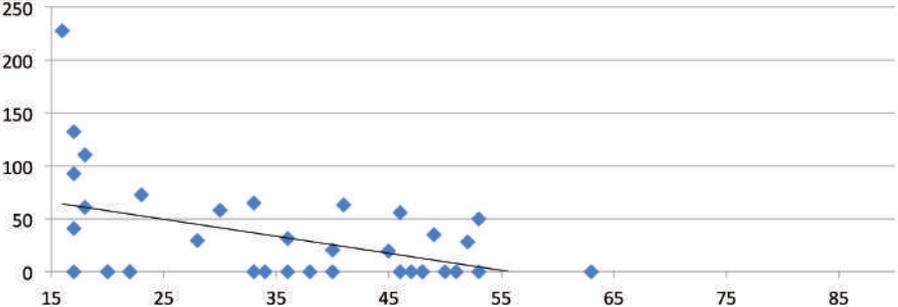
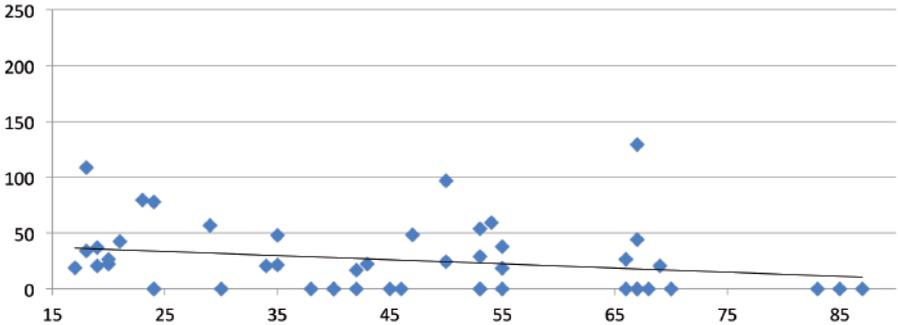


Figure 4.23 - Distribution of exemplification strategies in C2010, p/10000



The analysis of structural embedding of forms indicates that exemplification markers most frequently occur in acts, with the only exception being elderly speakers in C2010 (Figures 4.24 and 4.25). This trend is in line with the function performed by exemplification, which underlines relevant information in discourse.

Figure 4.24 - Exemplification strategies and discourse units (C1976)

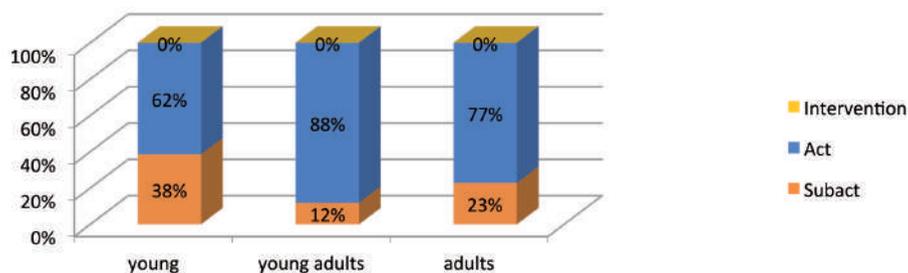
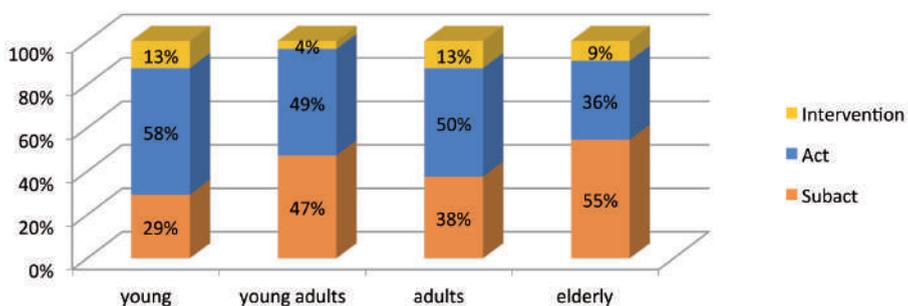


Figure 4.25 - Exemplification strategies and discourse units (C2010)

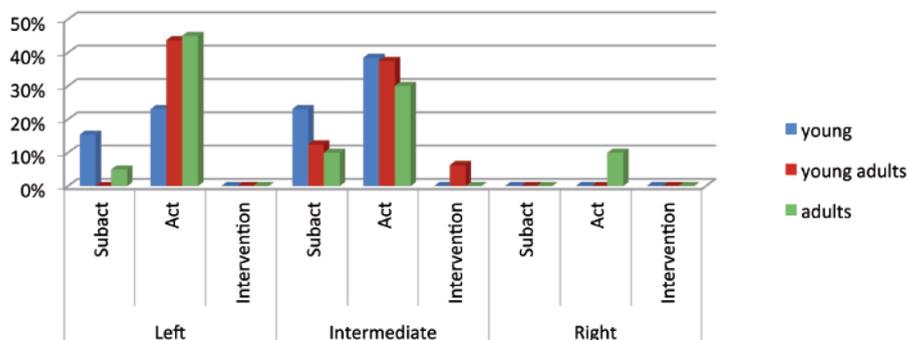


The comparison in real time between the two corpora shows that in C2010 there is a general decrease in frequency of use of the strategy, which is counterbalanced by the fact that exemplification markers are found in a higher number of structural units (subacts, acts, but also whole interventions, as in 51).

- (51) MAT **tipo** che stanno cogli occhiali da sole↑ (.) a lezione.(15\_25\_s\_u\_11121101m)  
 ‘Like they wear sunglasses, in class’

The quantitative data on the positions of the markers show characteristic uses in connection with the age of speakers. In C1976 (Figure 4.26) younger speakers are the most versatile age cohort, as they use more markers in the highest number of positions and units (15% and 23% in the left periphery in subacts and acts, 23% and 38% in medial position in subacts and acts). Conversely, young adults and adults prefer placing markers in acts in the left periphery or in medial position.

Figure 4.26 - Exemplification strategies and position (C1976)

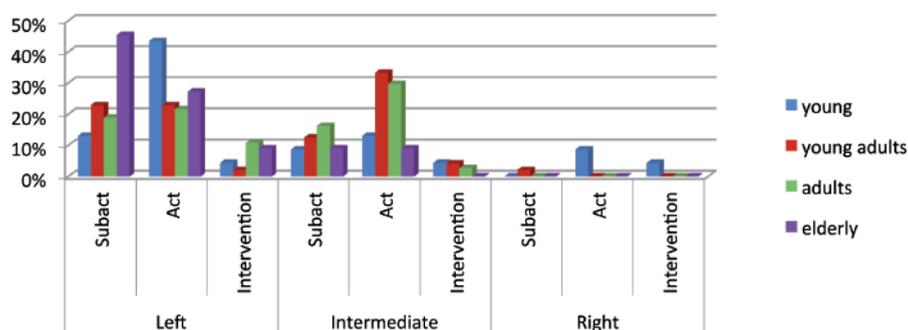


A similar situation can be identified in C2010 (Figure 4.27). Although younger speakers use exemplification less frequently, they use forms in the widest variety of contexts, including the right periphery in acts or whole interventions, as in (52) where *per dire* refers to the whole intervention.

- (52) PREAL no↓ perché: ho notato comunque una certa: come dire:↓ sterzata (.) un po' civettuola↓ con queste unghie (.) PITTATE↓ **per dire**↓ insomma↑= (15\_25\_s\_d\_10131001m)  
 'No, because I noticed, however, a certain, how should I put it, a bit of a coquettish shift with these painted nails, **(just) to say**, in short'

Young adults and adults show in both corpora a consistent behaviour as they more frequently use exemplification markers either in the left periphery of acts or subacts, or in medial position. Elderly speakers in C2010 use exemplification markers in a limited number of contexts, especially in the left periphery of acts or subacts (45% and 27%, respectively).

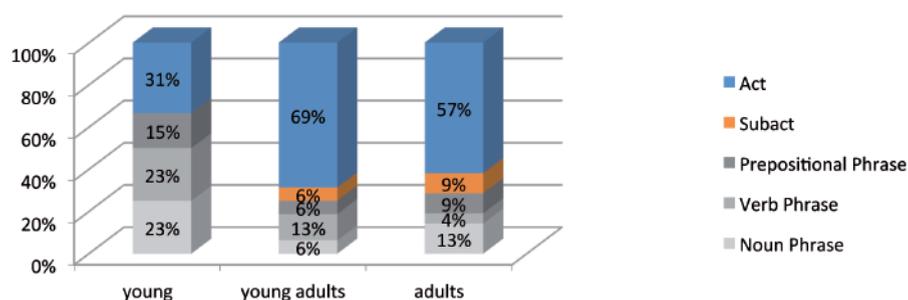
Figure 4.27 - Exemplification strategies and position (2010 corpus)



As for the scope of exemplification markers, it is interesting that in C1976 (Figure 4.28) younger speakers still represent the age cohort which is most versatile in the use of the strategy, employing it mostly with scope over a local constituent (a noun phrase as in (53), a verb phrase as in (54), or a prepositional phrase as in (55)), but also with scope over a whole act as in (56). Conversely, both young adults and adults seem to prefer to use the markers with scope over whole acts.

- (53) VIV m'hanno messo addosso un casino di aggressività↓ ma tanta↓ capito↑ (-) da te:↓ (.) a mio padre:↓ a tutto il posto:↑ **non so**↓ il posto dove lavoro↑ (.) la scuola↑ l'educazione↑ le regole↑ (15\_25\_d\_d\_1980\_ramones\_01)  
 'They dumped a lot of aggression on me, like a lot, right?, from you to my father, to the whole place, **I don't know**, the place where I work, school, education, rules'
- (54) ANT perché passa↓ o perché trova il tipo che: **non so**↓ lo colpisce↓ o perché:↑ (-) per tanti motivi. (15\_25\_d\_d\_198001)  
 'Because she passes, or because she finds the guy who, **I don't know**, hits her, or because, for so many reasons'
- (55) PRECLE no che invece↓ sono il simbolo: de: (.) **per dare un'idea**↓ dei warriors↓ (.) delle bande.(15\_25\_d\_d\_1980\_ramones\_01)  
 'No, (those) are actually the symbol of-, **to give an idea**, of the warriors, of bands'
- (56) ANT **non so** eh: guardi: i minimi particolari↓ mhm **non so**. (15\_25\_d\_d\_198001)  
 '**I don't know**, you look at the smallest details, **I don't know**'

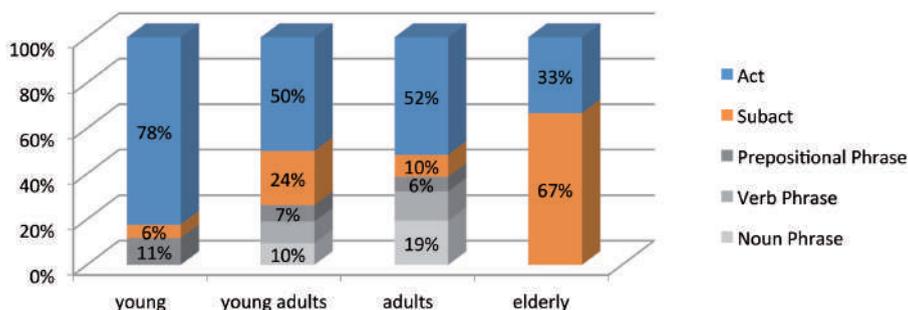
Figure 4.28 - Exemplification strategies and scope (C1976)



The situation is similar for both young adults and adults in C2010 corpus (Figure 4.29). On the contrary, younger speakers use exemplification markers less frequently, if compared with their peers in 1976; at the

same time, they have also reduced the types of structural contexts in which they use the strategy, so that markers mostly have scope over whole acts. The same also seems to be the case for older speakers, who, however, prefer to use the markers with scope over subacts.

Figure 4.29 - Exemplification strategies and scope (C2010)



### Summary

Data analysis shows that exemplification markers occur more frequently in acts, with the only exception of older speakers in C2010. However, in apparent time younger speakers seem to use these markers in a more versatile and creative manner, employing them in a higher number of contexts and positions, while the reverse seems true for older speakers. By contrast, young adults and adults show a preference for left periphery or medial position in both acts and subacts. Real-time data show a general decrease in frequency of exemplification markers, especially among younger speakers in C2010, which also corresponds to a reduction of the types of units over which VMs have scope.

### 4.2.3. Addition strategies

A third group of strategies which exploit the diversification of a paradigm includes items which mostly operate on the illocution level. Unlike exemplification markers, through which speakers hedge speech acts by implying that exemplars are arbitrary choices among other potential alternatives, the use of addition markers is based on the conversational implicature that the reason given is in addition to others (cf. examples 57 and 58).

- (57) NAT è giusto lasciare il posto↓ (-) **anche** perché↓ °h (.) i tempi cambiano↑  
eh: (46\_65\_s\_u\_06101009)  
'It is just fair to leave the place, **also** because times change'
- (58) LUC **poi** le domande: a volte sono molto più specifiche di quello che uno  
si aspetta↓ quindi per quanto puoi essere preparato↓ **poi**↓ magari: sei un  
attimino perplesso. (15\_25\_s\_d\_09272010)  
'**Then** the questions sometimes are much more specific than one expects, so  
however well prepared you may be, **then** maybe you are a little perplexed'

The linguistic means used by speakers may include adverbs, as in (59), pronouns as in (60), nouns as in (61), as well as discourse markers such as *anche* and *poi* as in (57) and (58) above.

- (59) BER ho cercato di sottrarmi **soprattutto** eh: in una prospettiva futura↓ che  
mi terrorizzava↓ (26\_45\_s\_d\_01121003)  
'**Above all** I tried to escape: in a future perspective that terrified me'
- (60) MAT (-) e↓ ci sarebbe una grossa differenza↓ **tra l'altro**↓ però va be'↑  
(15\_25\_s\_u\_11121101m)  
'And there would be a big difference, **among other things**, but never mind'
- (61) LEA °hh e facendo visitare tutto lì. (.) **a parte il fatto**↑ che c'è il museo  
diocesano↓ °h poi:: c'è:: (66\_90\_s\_d09231003)  
'And enabling (them) to visit everything there. **Apart from the fact** that  
there is the diocesan museum, then there is...'

The forms which can be used with an additive function in the corpora are given in Tables 4.10 and 4.11.

Table 4.10 - Addition strategies, repertoire of forms (C1976), p/10000

	young	young adults	adults
<b>ADV</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>
<i>solo che</i> 'only that'	3	2	3
<i>soltanto</i> 'only'	0	2	0
<i>almeno</i> 'at least'	0	0	6
<b>INDF</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>tra l'altro</i> 'among other things'	0	2	0
<i>più che altro</i> 'more than anything else'	0	0	2
<i>se non altro</i> 'if nothing else'	0	0	2
<b>PM</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>37</b>
<i>anche</i> 'also'	15	16	27
<i>poi</i> 'then'	3	6	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>50</b>

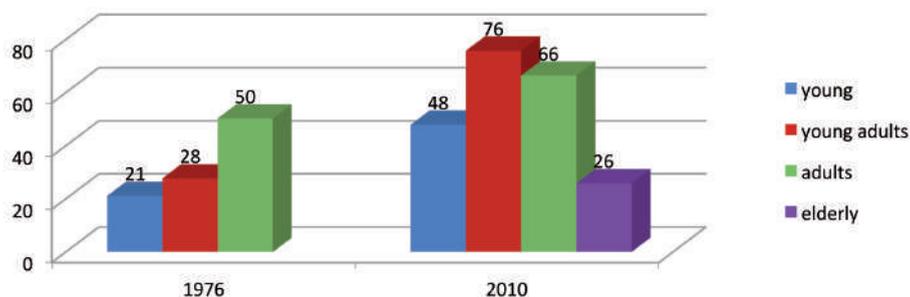
Table 4.11 - Addition markers, repertoire of forms (2010C), p/10000

	young	young adults	adults	elderly
<b>ADV</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>
<i>(non) solo (che)</i> 'not only that'	0	1	5	0
<i>soltanto</i> 'only'	0	0	0	0
<i>almeno</i> 'at least'	0	1	0	0
<i>oltretutto</i> 'at least'	0	3	0	0
<i>soprattutto</i> 'above all'	0	1	0	0
<b>INDF</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>
<i>tra l'altro</i> 'among other things'	11	3	3	0
<i>più che altro</i> 'more than anything else'	0	0	0	0
<i>se non altro</i> 'if nothing else'	0	0	0	0
<b>N</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>a volte</i> 'sometimes'	2	3	0	0
<i>a parte</i> 'apart from'	0	0	0	4
<b>PM</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>22</b>
<i>anche</i> 'also'	29	39	40	18
<i>poi</i> 'then'	4	25	18	4
<i>neanche tanto</i> 'not so much'	2	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>26</b>

Considering the number of forms, in C2010 the repertoire seems richer than its counterpart in C1976. In 2010 both the number of markers and their frequency in each age cohort have increased, although the most common forms are still the markers *poi* and *anche*.

As for quantitative data, the comparison in different generations of speakers in apparent time shows in both corpora an age-grading pattern. However, if the use of addition markers seem to progressively increase with age in C1976, the reverse is true for C2010 (with the exception of the younger age-cohort). The comparison of real-time data indicates a pattern of generational change as there is a generalised increase in frequency of different forms in all age cohorts. This increase in frequency also corresponds to an enriched repertoire of forms (cf. Figure 4.30).

Figure 4.30 - Addition strategies in age cohorts of speakers, p/10000



The linguistic behaviour of adults in C1976 is particularly interesting, since this age cohort shows a higher frequency of use of addition markers versus other age cohorts.

An explanation for this pattern of use, which however needs to be corroborated by further evidence, might be that the frequency of use of specific forms, or more generally of whole strategies, may peak and decline across time. As some studies have highlighted, generations of speakers may co-opt forms and make their use in specific contexts ‘trendy’. These peculiar uses may, however, decrease or be abandoned by another incoming generation and be picked up once more later by a new generation of speakers (see the discussion in § 2.4; cf. also Buchstaller, 2006; Tagliamonte & Roberts, 2005; Beal, 2004; Dubois & Horvath, 1999).

In this case, the change in frequency of use of the forms under analysis would represent an age-graded pattern, as the frequency of the forms increase or decrease with age, but also a generational pattern, as new generations may select different forms as variables. Consequently, the apparent-time patterning would depend on the temporal window employed for analysis, on individual behaviour, and on the behaviour of the whole community at that specific moment. So, speakers may ‘recycle’ from other generations both forms and strategies, possibly due to their salient prestige as traits of ‘trendy’ styles, probably in association with constellations of indexical values associated with their use (cf. § 2.3 on the relevance of salience and constellations of indexicalities).

Looking in detail at how individuals behave in relation to the use of the strategy (cf. Figures 4.31 and 4.32), the difference between the two communities becomes even more evident, as a higher number of speakers in C2010 show higher peaks of frequencies of use of the strategy (especially among young adults and adults).

Figure 4.31 - Distribution of addition strategies in C1976

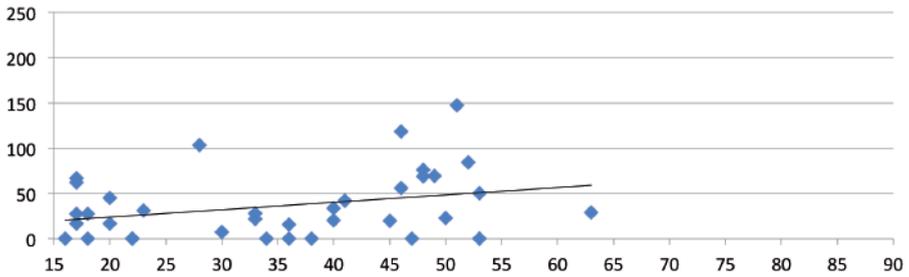
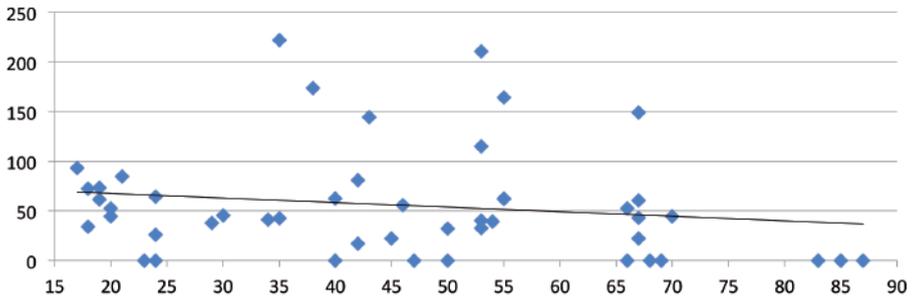


Figure 4.32 - Distribution of addition strategies in C2010



The qualitative analysis of the structural embedding of addition strategies shows that in real time there is a different structural distribution of forms (Figures 4.33 and 4.34). In particular, in 1976 the forms are mainly used in acts, while in 2010 they are employed with more versatility also in subacts and interventions.

Figure 4.33 - Addition strategies and discourse units (C1976)

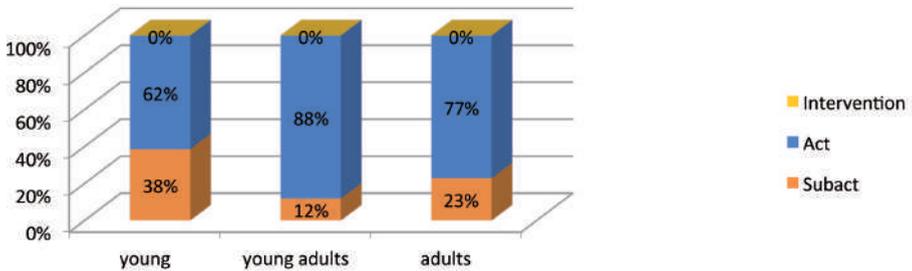
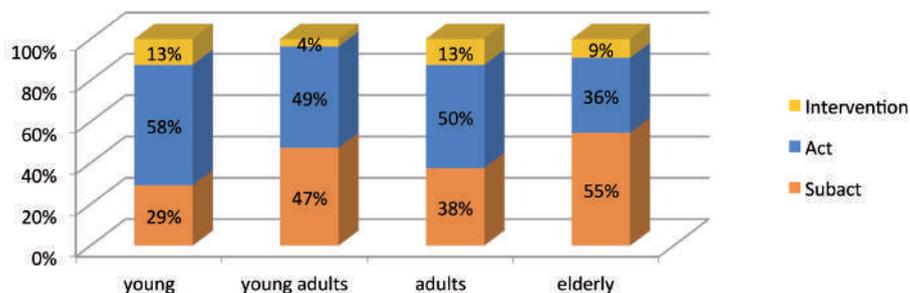


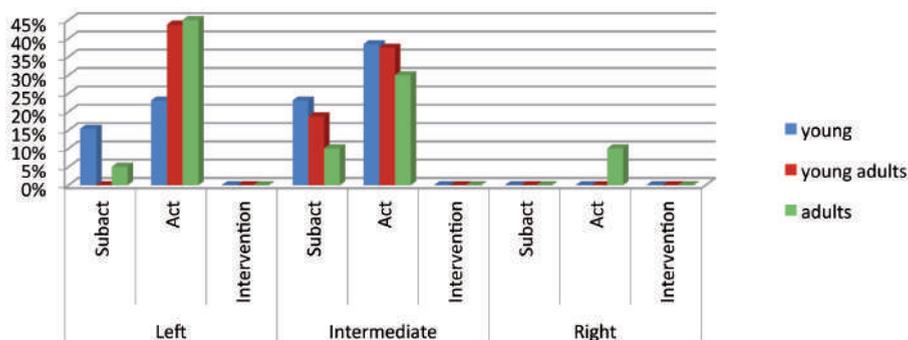
Figure 4.34 - Addition strategies and discourse units (C2010)



This difference is more evident in the analysis of the correlations between the positions of the forms in different discourse units (Figure 4.35). In 1976 addition markers are used by younger speakers in a higher number of different positions, especially in the left periphery in acts and subacts or in medial position in acts and subacts. Conversely, adults and young adults concentrate the use of addition markers in the left periphery in acts or in medial position in subacts. Interestingly, adults also use addition markers in the right periphery of acts, as in (62).

- (62) PET però non lo so↑ (.) le ore impostate così↓ forse dimmi se sbaglio eh↑ può darsi che mi sbaglio **anche**↓ (.) cioè le due ore di sciopero↓ hanno una funzione così↑ di solidarietà e basta. (46\_65\_d\_u\_01297901)  
 ‘But, I don’t know, the hours set like this, maybe, tell me if I’m wrong, maybe I’m wrong **also**, that is the two hours of strike have a function like this, of solidarity, and that’s it’

Figure 4.35 - Addition strategies and position (C1976)

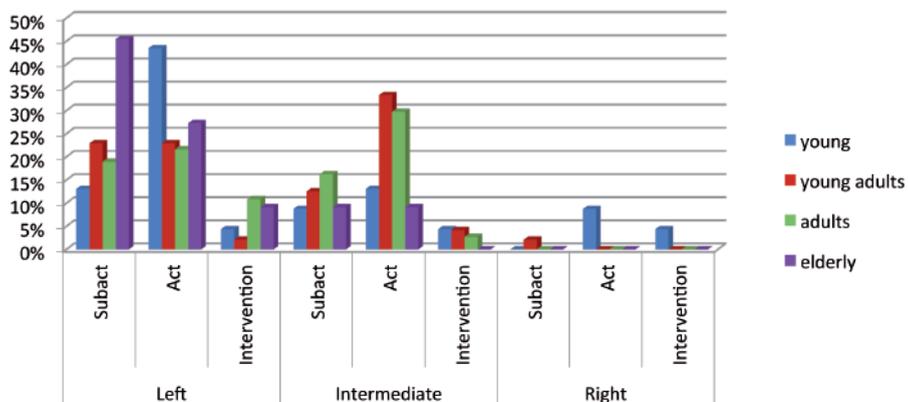


Regardless of the age of the speaker, when the markers are used in acts, they typically hedge the whole utterance. More frequently in this position they introduce a new topic or argument, whose relevance in the overall planning of discourse is, at the same time, hedged as in (63).

- (63) SIL sì↓ no↓ certo↓ ma io non non: dico che non c'è l'odio↑ (.) però:↑  
**anche** il discorso↑ sia dei compagni↓ o non compagni↑ (.) mhm così↑  
 (.) a me sembra che sia molto più importante politicizzarci tutti↓ no↑  
 (46\_65\_d\_d\_01087807)  
 'Yes, no, of course. But I don't, I don't say there is no hate, however **also**  
 the discourse of either comrades or non-comrades, so, it seems to me that it  
 is much more important to politicise us all, isn't it?'

In C2010 the quantitative correlations between the position of the markers and the discourse units in which they occur are more varied (Figure 4.36).

Figure 4.36 - Addition strategies and position (C2010)



Young adults and adults most frequently use forms in medial position in acts (33% and 30%, respectively), but also in the left periphery of acts and subacts. Older speakers also tend to use addition markers in a number of different contexts, which include the left periphery in subacts (45%), acts (27%), and interventions (9%). The most versatile age cohort is the youngest group, which employs the strategy in virtually all positions, except only the right periphery in subacts.

It is interesting that the use of the markers in new structural positions corresponds to new functional values, which are not attested in C1976.

One of these new uses is represented by interventions whose illocutionary force is hedged through the presence of the marker.

One example of this use is given in (64), where Annetta (age 19) and Aloisio (age 34) are talking on the program *Mentelocale*. The topic of discussion is clothing styles in young people, especially sagging (i.e. the habit of boys wearing baggy trousers). Aloisio suggests that this phenomenon was ‘imported’ into Italy from the United States, like many other trends (including hip-hop). In so doing he hedges his utterance by adding the marker *anche* to *qua in Italia*. Annetta goes on arguing that what happened in other contexts was that this imitation of American styles gave rise to important cultural phenomena which have shaped young people’s fashion trends. Aloisio, who in this programme has created a funny persona (cf. § 2.3), at this point mocks Annetta by suggesting that if this is so, then she could just as well pick up extreme trends herself and, why not, put a telephone in her hair. Annetta responds with a negative answer which is, however, hedged through the use of *anche*, and Aloisio replies with a very similar structure, insisting ironically on the opportunity of putting a telephone in her hair.

(64)

01 ALO: e quindi↓ questo cosa: ci porta: a: a dire,

02 ANN: [ci porta-]

03 ALO: [anche qua in Italia] **anche** qua in italia. UNO↑ (.) BASTA con l’imitazione degli degli stati uniti↓ (.) di questi di questi stereotipi.

04 ANN: eh ma:: l’hip hop è in: in cioè↓ è mondiale. è un è un patrimonio dell’umanità↑ lo ascoltano tutti↑ e

05 quindi: insomma↓ h° non lo so↓ (.) chi: ascolta lady gaga decide magari di di farsi bionda↑ o: di andare

06 in giro con un telefono in testa↓ se ne vedono eh↑ cosa [pensi.]

08 PREAL: [eh]fo- forse

nei tuoi capelli ci

09 starebbe un telefono↓ eh↑

10 ANN: **anche no.=**

011 PREAL: = **anche nel ciuffo di oggi sì.**

‘ALO: And so, where are we going with this thing?

ANN: We’re going-

ALO: **Also** here in Italy, **also** here in Italy. One: enough of imitating the United States, these stereotypes.

ANN: Eh but hip hop is in, I mean, it’s worldwide. It’s a, it’s a patrimony of humanity, everyone listens to it, and so, in short, I don’t know, the people who listen to Lady Gaga maybe decide to go blonde or to go walking around with a phone on their head, you see many (things), what do you think?

PREAL: may- maybe a phone would fit in your hair

ANN: **Also no (maybe not)**

PREAL: **Also** in the quiff you’re wearing today, yes’

This use of *anche* is also spreading in other age cohorts (although no occurrence is found in the corpus), as can be seen from the Facebook thread in (65) between Rossana (aged 40) and Emanuela (aged 38).

(65)

ROS: Vi faccio un ottimo prezzo, promesso!



ROS: Anzi... meglio: la regalo! Mi voglio rovinare....

EMA: **Ma anche no**, grazie!!! 😊 (Facebook, 12 June, 2012)

'ROS: I'll give you a great price, I promise!

Image with 'jinx for sale'

ROS: In fact... even better: I'll give it away! I want to ruin myself....

EMA: **But also not**, thank you!! 😊

One of the reasons this usage is not found in the corpus may be due to the formality of the context and to the choice of the topics of discussion in programmes such as *Microfono aperto*, which are designed for adult speakers and in which more informal styles do not easily emerge.

As for the scope of addition strategies (cf. Figures 4.37 and 4.38), it is interesting to note how the use of markers seems to have reconfigured in the course of time at the level of the community (generational change) as well as at the level of individual speakers (age-grading).

This strategy operates on a local level, with scope over single constituents, such as noun phrases as in (66),<sup>8</sup> or more globally, with scope over acts/subacts as in (67) and interventions, as in the case of example (64) discussed above.

(66) MAN =CERTAMENTE↓ ma poi volevo dire↑ **anche** una cosa↓ io mi ricordo↑ °h eh: adesso c'è questa PAU:RA del brutto↑ che prende i bambini e: se li mangia arrosto↑ (46\_65\_s\_u\_01181004)

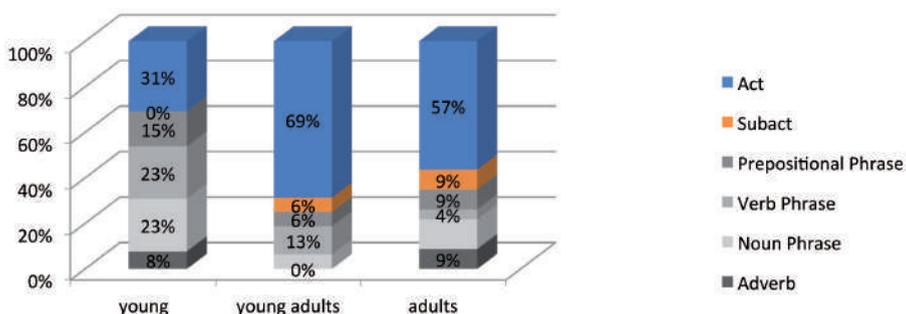
'Certainly, but then I wanted to say **also** one thing, I remember, now there is this fear of the ugly who takes children and eats them roasted'

8. In this example the scope of the marker is over a general noun, and its function is to focus on an upcoming new topic.

- (67) NAT è giusto lasciare il posto↓ (-) **anche perché**↓ °h (.) i i tempi cambiano↑  
 eh: la mentalità cambiano↑ è giusto lasciare il posto a questi ragazzi.  
 (46\_65\_s\_u\_06101009)  
 'It is right to leave the place, **also** because times change, mentalities  
 change, it is right to leave the place to these guys'

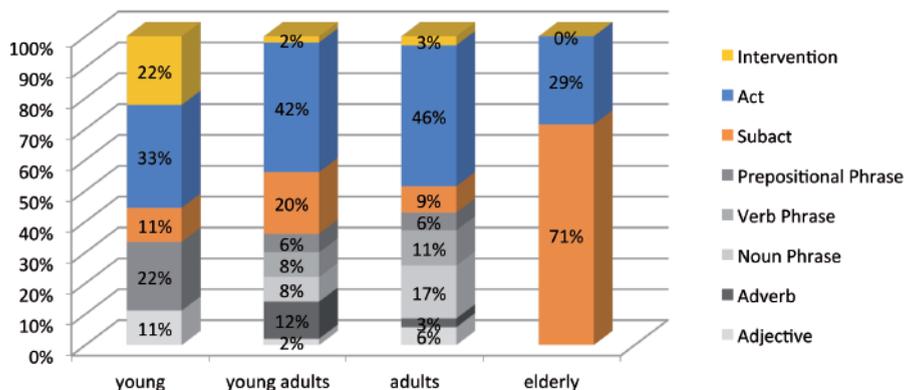
In C1976 (Figure 4.37) younger speakers tend to employ the strategy locally (69% of occurrences), with scope over noun phrases (23%), verb phrases (23%) or prepositional phrases (15%). The reverse is true for young adults and adults (75% and 65% of occurrences have scope globally over acts or subacts).

Figure 4.37 - Addition strategies and scope (C1976)



The use of forms by young people in 2010 is rather different from that of their peers in 1976 (Figure 4.38). The local value of the markers is less frequent (its overall frequency is only 33%), while the frequency of use with wider scope over structural units has increased to 66%. Other age cohorts have remained more stable in their uses with a wider scope (64% in young adults and 56% in adults), while elderly speakers not only use the strategy less often, but also employ it exclusively with a scope on acts or subacts.

Figure 4.38 - Addition strategies and scope (C2010)



### Summary

The use of addition strategies by age cohorts differs in both apparent and real time. As for the former, there is an increase in the use of the strategy with age (up to adulthood) and then a decrease with old age; as for the latter, its frequency appears to have increased in the community over real time. The qualitative analysis of structural contexts has proved rewarding for the understanding of the differences in quantitative distribution, since both the repertoire of forms and their structural embedding have reconfigured with time. In particular, new forms have been added, making the repertoire richer, and contexts have increased to include uses with scope over whole acts or interventions. This implies that speakers creatively co-opt the same markers to perform new functions in different contexts, as is for example the case of younger speakers' use of *anche* to hedge interventions.

### 4.3. Metadiscourse relativization

This macro-group of strategies indexes the enunciation process and relativizes, thereby semantically approximating and/or pragmatically hedging, the validity of an utterance. In such cases, both semantic approximation and pragmatic hedging are accomplished in metadiscourse comments through which the speakers use markers to refer explicitly to their formulation work and to possible communication problems that may arise.<sup>9</sup>

9. Dausenschön-Gay & Krafft (2000: 31) label this process with the term “*Inszenierung*”, referring to the fact that the speakers somehow ‘stage’ their enunciation

The formal means employed by speakers include a number of different forms: adverbs or adverbial expressions such as *relativamente* ‘relatively’ and *nel senso* ‘in the sense’ in (68) and (69); verbs used as parentheticals such as *come dire* ‘how to say (it)’ in (70) or *si dice* ‘they say’ in (71), or as epistemic parentheticals such as *credo* in (72), as well as *immagino* ‘(I) imagine’, *penso* ‘(I) think’, and *mi sembra* ‘(it) seems to me’;<sup>10</sup> pragmaticalized units such as discourse and pragmatic markers mostly derived from adverbial expressions or verbs as *diciamo* ‘let us say’ in (73) (cf. also Dausendschön-Gay & Krafft, 2000: 41; Mihatsch, 2010a).

- (68) ANT **relativamente**. *ciòè↑ si dà la scusa ai soldi↑ si dà la colpa sempre a qualcosa↓ comunque la realtà è diversa.*  
 ‘**Relatively**. That is, you blame it on the money, one always blames it on something, however in reality it’s different’ (15\_25\_d\_d\_1980019)
- (69) PAO *ciòè↓ non sicuramente gente che: era che: era lì per per (.) gente strana↑ nel senso di di evidentemente qualcuno che voleva far casino↑ insomma.* (26\_45\_d\_u\_05147711)  
 ‘I mean, certainly not people who were there for, for- strange people. **In the sense** that someone obviously wanted to mess things up, in short’
- (70) PRESIL [non] *parliamo tanto di: (.) soddisfazione dei giovani oggi↑ o di possibilità di (-) eh come dire:↑ realizzazione personale↓* (15-25\_s\_u\_01211001)  
 ‘We don’t talk so much about satisfaction of young people today or the possibility of, eh, **how to say it**, personal fulfilment’
- (71) GER <<laughing> *spesso.>perché poi sai (.) si dice*, poi si organiz- ci sono dei veri e propri campionati↑ (46\_65\_s\_u\_09151004)  
 ‘Often. Because then, you know, **they say**, then they organiz- there are real championships’
- (72) CLA *questo purtroppo è più un problema credo↓ milanese.* (66\_90\_s\_d\_12171006)  
 ‘This is unfortunately more of a Milanese problem, **I believe**’.
- (73) GABR = *con uno stipendio di millequattrocento euro↓ è il (.) diciamo↑ il classico piangina↑ (-)* (15\_25\_s\_u\_05281002)  
 ‘With a salary of one thousand four hundred euros, he is the, **let’s say**, the classic weeper’

As regards the formal properties of these forms, it is interesting to note that items functioning as metadiscourse markers tend to be syntactically relatively free and to occupy different positions in the utterance.

work. Similarly, some verbs derived from the lexeme *dire* ‘to say’ are labelled as *modalization du dire* ‘modalization of saying’ in Gómez-Jordana Ferary & Anscombe (2015).

10. See also Thompson & Mulac (1991) on the status of epistemic parentheticals.

As regards their functions, they can be used to approximate the propositional content of an utterance or of one of its elements, or to hedge its illocutionary force. This is done by the explicit specification of the epistemic validity of an utterance together with its restrictions, as is for instance the case with epistemic shields such as *relativamente* in (68), *nel senso* in (69) or of *credo* in (72); but it can also be done by an explicit reference to the validity of the source of an utterance as is for instance the case with the attribution shield *si dice* in (71) or of *diciamo* in (73).<sup>11</sup>

Adverbs or adverbial phrases are particularly common with this meta-discourse function. These forms usually derive from a variety of learned or specialized expressions that indicate the limit of validity of the utterance (Mihatsch, 2010a). These limits can be applied both locally to modified terms, as in the case of the adjective *maschilista* in (74) below, as well as to whole speech acts/interventions, as in the case of *grosso modo* in (75). Sometimes adverbial expressions with a relativizing interpretation, as for instance *tra virgolette* in (74), can increase the degree of vagueness of the underlying meaning (*maschilista*). What the expression does is to relate two entities in order to specify one concept in the context of another, in the case of (74) to behave like a chauvinist despite being a woman.

(74) ALB cioè↓ non so↑ a volte quasi mi vengono dei dubbi↑ (.) perché: non so↑ dico↓ forse mi comporto io in modo maschilista↓ **diciamo↓ tra virgolette↓** nei confronti del (-) del compagno col quale faccio l'amore. (26\_45\_d\_d\_1978\_prima)

'I mean, I don't know, sometimes I almost have doubts, because, I don't know, I mean, maybe I behave in a sexist way, **let's say, in quotes**, towards the- of the partner with whom I make love'

(75) MIR siccome si trovano per strada↑ eh: possiamo benissimo (.) **grosso modo** (.) fare un'ipotesi↑ (26\_45\_d\_u\_01087807)

'Since they are on the street, eh, we can very well, **roughly**, make a hypothesis'

As Mihatsch (2010a) notes, if these forms are used without establishing an explicit relationship between two concepts, they always refer implicitly to a shared norm.

Some of these expressions are particularly suitable for approximating downgradable adjectives which can be interpreted only in relation to a shared standard. This is for example the case with the adverb *praticamente* 'practically', which establishes a comparison between a correct theoretical

11. The distinction between epistemic shields and attribution shields is described by Prince *et alii* (1982). For a detailed discussion of different functions of shields see § 1.2.

norm and an approximated and hedged praxis. Typically the adverb hedges gradable adjectives, as in (76), or acquires a telic value, thus indicating a failure to achieve a described state, as in (77) (cf. also Dardano & Trifone, 1997: 358).

- (76) MAR lei↑ (.) è è rimasta↑ per ultima↑ (.) **praticamente** volontaria↓ no↑  
 cioè↓ (.) mi sembrava↓ (15\_25\_d\_u\_02068012)  
 ‘she remained last, **practically** voluntary, didn’t she? that is, it seemed to me’
- (77) ANN °h (.) in in florida↑ (-) è **praticamente** proibita↓ o meglio↓ vogliono proibirlo. (15\_25\_s\_d\_051911m)  
 ‘In Florida (it) is **practically** prohibited, or or rather, they want to prohibit it’

Other adverbs of manner can be employed with a similar function, as in the case of *in qualche modo* ‘somehow’ in (78).<sup>12</sup>

- (78) PREBA noi volevamo sapere se **in qualche modo**↑ effettivamente↑ (.)  
 ad esempio↓ intorno ad esempio intorno a un fatto di questo genere↑ si  
 PUÒ fare qualche cosa↑ (.) e TU sei riuscito a fare qualcosa di diverso.  
 (46\_65\_d\_u\_02068008)  
 ‘We wanted to know if, **somehow**, actually, for example, about, for example, about a fact of this kind, you could do something and (if) you managed to do something different’

As Haspelmath (1997: 189-192) suggests, this type of indefinite determiner often entails a pejorative connotation: when people make things ‘somehow’, they are not doing them properly. This implies that some expressions may develop a third order indexicality over time. Interestingly, Mihatsch (2010a: 68) cites an article by Adriano Sofri, which appeared on the magazine *Panorama*, entitled “Uffa, tutti dicono *in qualche modo*” ‘Phew, everyone is saying *somehow*’. The article suggests that *in qualche modo* may already have developed this indexicality; in particular the author claims that speakers pick up this expression from mass media communication, especially TV.

*L'Italia, cioè, in qualche modo. In qualche modo, l'Italia di oggi può essere descritta così: il paese i cui cittadini dicono «In qualche modo». Lo dicono tutti,*

12. The German correspondents *irgendwie* or *irgendwo* have been studied by Gülich & Furchner (2002). In their study they show how these adverbs are particularly frequent among younger speakers who also tend to use them as markers of a specific type of sociolect.

*e continuamente. Accendete un televisore, una radio: non passerà un minuto senza che la parola d'ordine sia pronunciata: «In qualche modo».*

'Italy, that is, somehow. Somehow, the Italy of today can thus be described: the country whose citizens say 'somehow'. They all say it, and all the time. Turn on a television set, a radio: not a minute goes by without the watchword being uttered: 'somehow''

Panorama, 14.3.2005

However, in the corpora analysed here, *in qualche modo* is scarce (only 6 occurrences, 3 of which are used by the presenter, 1/10,000). Analysis of both the LIP corpus and the C-Oral-Rom corpus<sup>13</sup> shows similar results: in both cases, the expression is more frequent but remains very rare at 2/10,000. This implies that the context of this specific radio talk programme may not favour the use of the adverb; the intuitive perception that may be derived from the abuse of the form by some speakers is generalized to all speakers, regardless of its actual use in the community; and the expression may have been particularly frequent over a very short period of time and after that may have again decreased in frequency.

As for verbs which are used as metadiscourse strategies, they are generally co-opted among forms which express the speaker's lack of knowledge or uncertainty on a metalinguistic level. These meanings imply that, because of this uncertainty, the choice of a word, expression, or speech act is only approximated. For instance in (79) it is the adjective *militare* which is approximated. These forms, therefore, function as "markers of non-literal resemblance" (Andersen, 2001).

(79) AND però↓ anche voi↓ (.) questa cosa degli infiltrati↓ (.) cioè↓ basta parlare degli infiltrati. ci sono↑ non ci sono↑ (.) non deve essere più un problema. (.) perché questa se ci sono↑ (.) è una strategia loro (.) **diciamo** militare↓(.) come vogliamo chiamare↓ eh↑ (26\_45\_s\_u\_12161001)

'However, also you, this thing of the infiltrators, I mean, enough about the infiltrators. There are some, there aren't any, it should no longer be a problem. Because, if there are some, this is their, **let's say**, military strategy, whatever we want to call (it)'

The verbs used as metadiscourse markers usually focus on some formal properties of the modified expression and therefore have local scope over phrases or words. However, the same expressions can also be used to

13. The LIP Corpus dates back to 1990s and comprises various diatopic varieties. The C-Oral-Rom corpus gathers data collected ten years later and contains only the variety of Italian spoken in Florence.

imply an approximate categorization, such as a ‘solid career’ in (80), or to hedge speech acts or interventions, especially (but not exclusively) in the forms *diciamo che / diciamo di*, which are syntactically more integrated, as in (81) and (82); however, similar functions can be performed also by less integrated forms as *diciamo* in (80) and (83).

- (80) CHI e insomma:↑ in otto anni mi sono costruita una carriera (-) abbastanza solida **diciamo**. (26\_45\_s\_d\_11101001)  
 ‘and in short, in eight years I have built up a career, fairly solid, **let’s say**’
- (81) AL cioè↓ sono di dest-↑ si↓ **diciamo di-** si↓ si↓ sono di destra↓ (15\_25\_d\_u\_01087805)  
 ‘I mean, I am right-, **yes, let us say**, yes, yes, I am right-oriented’
- (82) GIOR e poi:↓ **diciamo che**↓ al novanta per cento:↑ erano: poi stati assunti: (66\_90\_s\_u\_01221006)  
 ‘And then, **let us say** ninety percent of them were then hired’
- (83) ORN °h questo **diciamo**↓ è un modo↑ per e:h protestare↑ (46\_65\_s\_d\_06101004)  
 ‘This, **let’s say**, is a way of protesting’

While discussing the functions of *diciamo* ‘let us say’, Bazzanella (1995: 250) notes that it is usually characterised by a phatic involvement of the interlocutor, through the use of the first person plural, that it can perform several functions as marker which index the relationship with the interlocutor as well as text organization. In doing so *diciamo* creates a scale of intensity with respect to illocutionary force, ranging from correction as reformulation, to a predominantly phatic use, when it operates as a marker of uncertainty in the formulation, passing through intermediate degrees of limitation and attenuation.

Similar functions are also performed by expressions such as *chiamiamolo/a/e/i* ‘let us call it/them’, which also imply a conversational implicature of epistemic relevance for the codification of the conceptual/formal category under discussion.

Another group of strategies, which only indirectly refers to epistemic meaning, highlights a deficiency in the knowledge of the speaker, by strategically exploiting questions. This is the case of *come (posso/possiamo) dire* ‘how (can we) say’, and of *come si dice* ‘how they say’, *come si chiama* ‘what is it called’. These strategies, as with general nouns, imply in origin an uncertainty in the choice of a word; through their use the speakers ask for the interlocutors’ cooperation in the construction of discourse (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1986: 63). This enables them to gain some time for language processing and eventually to find the more suitable expression, as in the case of (84). These questions are often explicitly

formulated by the speaker, but they do not so often result in real help from the interlocutor.

- (84) PREAL uno s'aspetta che: la protesta universitaria abbia: h: s: ehm **come dire**↓ (-) assuma delle forme:↑ (-) eh: diverse↓ rispetto a quelle VERBALI↑ (.) o: delle delle altre diversità↓ (15\_25\_s\_u\_120221002m)  
'One expects that the university protest will have, **how- how to say (it)**, take some forms eh different from the verbal (protest) or other, other differencies'

It is relevant to highlight the importance of the interplay between the metadiscourse indication that the enunciation process is relativized (and therefore conceptually approximated or hedged at the illocution level) and the metalinguistic indication of a non-literal resemblance between a chosen expression or speech act, and a potentially more precise alternative. It is precisely this interplay that more pragmatized expressions such as *diciamo* 'let us say', *insomma* 'in short', *niente* 'nothing', *praticamente* 'practically', and *cioè* 'that is' are based on (see Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion).

Markers derived from adverbial expressions, such as *cioè* and *insomma*, or from verbs, such as *diciamo*, are traditionally classified as metatextual markers with a corrective value (*indicatori di correzione*, Bazzanella 1995: 248) or more generally as indicators of paraphrase. The use of *cioè* is indeed associated with an explicative value which can often be paraphrased with "I mean to say", "this means", "more precisely", as in (85); conversely, *insomma* 'in short' is associated with a summarizing function which indicates the closure of an argumentative sequence, as in (86).<sup>14</sup>

- (85) CAT °h eh:m se tu parli:↑ appunto al cellulare:↓ o mentre stai guidando:↑ o stai facendo altre cose↓ (.) che che profondità ci può essere↑ **cioè** come fai a dire quello che pensi? (46\_65\_s\_d\_03011010)  
'Ehm, if you are talking infact on your mobile phone or while you are driving or doing other things, what depth can there be? **I mean**, how can you say what you think?'
- (86) VAN qualcheduno DEVE anche andare ai funerali. °h perché devono sentire un po' anche: eh (.) non so↑ sono problemi della nazione anche quelli↓ perché tutti 'sti↓ morti tutti 'sti poliziotti↓ tutta 'sta gente che muore↓ (.) tutta 'sta italia che va in rovina↓ (.) **insomma**↑ (.) non vedo perché i giovani non devono sentire queste cose. (46\_65\_d\_d\_04248012)

14. Cf. also § 1.5.4 in relation to different functional values associated with *insomma*.

‘Some people must also go to the funerals. Because they must also feel a little bit, eh, I don’t know, these are the nation’s problems too, because all these dead people, all these policemen, all these people who die, all this Italy that’s going to ruin, **in short**, I don’t see why young people shouldn’t feel these things’

As is clear from the examples above, there is no doubt that these markers perform these functions in language, but they do not represent their sole contexts of use. Consider for instance examples (87) and (88), where *insomma* and *cioè* perform different functions which can be interpreted as having an approximating or hedging value. In these contexts the markers are interchangeable with other metadiscourse VMs, as for instance *diciamo*.

- (87) UGO (.) eh: °h adesso per la prima volta l’anno scorso↑ lavoro fortunatamente↑ (.) sono riuscito a trovar lavoro in un’organizzazione non governativa che era un po’ quello che volevo fare↓ °h eh: dopo: mhm **cioè** quindi↑ (.) venti↑ **quasi quasi vent’anni**↑ **insomma**:↑ (26\_45\_s\_u\_03241009)  
 ‘Eh, now for the first time last year, I work fortunately, I managed to find a job in a non-governmental organisation which was a bit what I wanted to do, eh after, mhm **I mean**, so, twenty, **almost almost twenty years, in short**’
- (88) SAL così↑ della gente spostata↓ *cioè*↓ °h diciamo che è gente↓ che: (-) anche voi dovete↓ (.) mandar fuori dalle vostre file↓ *cioè* cercare di eliminare↓ *cioè*↑ a un certo punto↑ °h impostarlo così il discorso↓ (.) sarà un discorso vecchio↑ ma dire↓ (-) noi non c’ entriamo con questo↓ **insomma**↓ **cioè**↑ noi↓ andiamo contro l’MSI↓ (15\_25\_d\_u\_01087805)  
 ‘So, some screwed up people, I mean, let’s say these are people that you too must chuck out from your ranks, I mean, try to eliminate, I mean at a certain point, set the rules, it will be old rules, but they say: we don’t have anything to do with this, **in short, I mean**, we are going against the MSI’

As for *insomma*, the topic-closing function can itself be considered a means of expressing lexical approximation, since it is most typically found in lists which feature the repetition of semantically related elements, especially co-hyponyms, as is the case of (86) discussed above;<sup>15</sup> in such contexts the marker can be paraphrased with “in short > approximately speaking”, and its function represents the other side of the coin of the vague categorization performed by general extenders (§ 4.2.1).<sup>16</sup>

15. See also Masini & Pietrandrea (2010).

16. Whereas general extenders imply that categorization is vague because not all members are named, *insomma* implies vague categorization since it is based ‘only’ on the examples given.

As discussed in §1.5.4, apart from being used as a discourse marker (i.e. as a text sequencing device or marker of topic closure), *insomma* can also function as a pragmatic marker: with an intersubjective value, especially at the beginning of a turn, to synthesize the interlocutor's intervention; or with an interjective value (with a reinforcing, injunctive value, *Insomma, smettila!* 'In short, stop it!') or with a hedging value, *Ti senti bene? Insomma...* 'Are you feeling alright? In short...', which has precisely the meaning of 'approximatively speaking (I would say yes or no)').

A similar case is represented by *cioè* lit. 'that-is', which, together with other less pragmaticalized adverbial expressions (such as *nel senso (che)* 'in the sense that'), can be used by speakers to imply a relativisation of the propositional content of the utterance. In specific contexts, the markers signal a non-identical resemblance between a codified linguistic expression/speech act and a potential alternative expression/speech act with the same reference. The markers have a metadiscourse value which signals an interpretive resemblance in form rather than in content. It is precisely this metadiscourse value which is at the origin of both vague and hesitation uses. The common denominator between the two lies in the fact that the conversational implicature that arises is that the speaker, through the use of *cioè*, may suggest that a particular reformulation of a speech act or word may not be the most appropriate one to use (e.g. for social or stylistic reasons, as in 89 where *cessi* 'loo' has a negative connotation).

- (89) LUIS un'altra ragazza↑ insomma↓ aveva detto che: (-) sai↓ quella che t'ho detto prima↑ che è andata al gabinetto↓ a mezzanotte↑ (-- e tre si erano già messi d'accordo↑ (-) di di prenderla↑ e: (.) di- **cioè**↓ (-) di fare quello che c'han voglia loro↑ (1.7) ai cessi. (15\_25\_d\_d\_1987801)  
 'Another girl, in short, had said that, you know, the one I told you before, that she went to the toilet, at midnight, and the three of them had already agreed to, to take her and... to, **I mean**, to do what they want (with her), in the **loo's**'

There are also other hesitational uses which signal that the speakers have something on their minds, but they do not know how to put it. This seems a fitting paraphrase when *cioè* occurs in connection with false starts and self-repairs. Evidently, the relation between these two types of use must be construed as a continuum relation rather than as discrete and clearly identifiable functions.

The common denominator between these VMs is that they restrict the meaning of the modified unit to a specific scope, which relaxes the illocutionary force of the speech act, the category boundaries, or the linguistic

connotation of the chosen expression. This is particularly evident in the marker *diciamo* in the examples (90)-(93) (cf. also Hölker, 2005).

- (90) PREC (.) quindi ha trovato: **diciamo una sua collocazione?**  
(26\_45\_s\_d\_07211007)  
'so he found, **shall we say, his place?**
- (91) GABR ma: allora↓ **diciamo↓ (.) che vedere nero:↑** è una caratteristica un po' comune: all': (.) all'ottanta per cento de- dei giovani↓ (15\_25\_s\_u\_05281002)  
'But then, **let's say that seeing black** is a somewhat common characteristic in eighty per cent of young people'
- (92) IPP °h bene↓ io dico↑ cioè↓ può essere a quest- a queste persone↑ non non può voler dire↓ **diciamo↓ mettersi su questo terreno↑** no↓ cioè↓ (--)  
(.) non- questa roba↑ non ti porta a niente↓ no↑ (---) (26\_45\_d\_u\_01087802)  
'well, I say, I mean, it can be to this-- to these people, it can't mean, **let's say, put yourself in this position**, don't you, I mean, because not- this stuff, (it) won't get you anywhere, will it?'
- (93) COR dunque io ho una sorella che: adesso è grande↑ ha trentatrè anni↑ però↓ è stata in una **situazione diciamo↓ simile↓** anche se (.) allora non si parlava di né né. (26\_45\_s\_d\_07211007)  
'So I have a sister who, now she is grown up, she is thirty-three years old, but she was in a, **let us say, similar situation**, although at that time there was no mention of neither nor'

In (90) *diciamo* functions as an adaptor and approximates a categorization, while in example (91) it functions as a hedge and attenuates the illocutionary force of the speech act (note also the co-occurrence with *un po'* 'a bit' and with the rounder *ottanta per cento* 'eighty per cent'), but in (92) what is called into question is the linguistic suitability of the expression *mettersi su questo terreno*, which in that context is used metaphorically. However, in example (93) it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to single out a specific function: it is not clear whether the marker refers metalinguistically to the choice of the adjective *similare* (paraphrase, "loosely speaking 'similar'"), to an approximate categorization (paraphrase, "approximately 'similar'"), or to the loosened force of the speech act (paraphrase, "it can loosely be said that she has been in a similar situation").

In many such cases it is extremely difficult and often unrewarding to isolate specialized uses. What is more interesting is to analyse how different strategies are intertwined and exploited to obtain the same function.

An important subgroup of strategies which also focus on the meta-discourse level includes evidential markers. In the corpus, such strategies include forms which are mostly derived from verbs, as with *si dice* lit. 'it is said' in (95), *dicono* '(they) say' in (94), but also *voci dicono* 'rumors say', *come dicono loro* 'as they say', and *sembra* or *pare* 'it seems'.

- (94) COR forse:↓ anche le telefonate che ci son state prima↓ no↑ quando **dicono** i fannulloni io lo capisco perchè rispetto (.) agli standard co- co- possono essere quelli dei nostri genitori↓ (26\_45\_s\_d\_07211007)  
 ‘Maybe, also the phone calls that came before, right?, when **they say** slackers I understand it because compared to the standards, they might be those of our parents’
- (95) SEV cioè↓ (.) quando **si dice**↑ °h la giornata della memoria ventisette↑ che i sovietici arrivano davanti al primo campo (.) a auschwitz e via↑ (66\_90\_s\_u\_01271001)  
 ‘I mean, when **you say**, memory day, twenty-seven, when the soviets arrive in front of the first camp, at auschwitz, and so on’

In these uses, the implicature of a vague reading arises because some sources of information are considered more reliable than others, so unreliable sources can also signal semantic approximation (as with *sembra* or *pare*, which are also defined as “evidential conditionals”, Aikhenvald, 2003: 18).

These strategies do not operate on the propositional and semantic level; rather, they are employed strategically by speakers as erasable implicatures that deictically shift the *origo* of the enunciation, implying a shift in the speaker’s responsibility from the I-here-now (see the discussion in §1.2).

A similar function, although not strictly evidential, is performed by strategies which problematise the act of speaking (Dausendschön-Gay *et alii*, 2007) as with *dico* ‘I say’, *non dico* ‘I don’t say’, and *direi* ‘I would say’. Through a reference to the metacommunicative level, the speaker implies both an increase in subjectification and an illocutionary weakening of the speech act as in (96) and (97).

- (96) DANT però mi fregano col telefonino. (-) con tutto che **non dico** che bisogna buttarli tutti a mare. ma che in italia abbiamo il record dei telefonini↑ e che crediamo tutti di essere TANTO più furbi del telefonino↓ (-) le cose ci FANNO. (66\_90\_s\_u\_03011008)  
 ‘But they cheat me with the mobile phone. With all that, **I am not saying** that we should throw them all overboard, but in Italy we have the record number of mobile phones and we all believe we are much smarter than the mobile phone, things do make us’
- (97) CAR mhm io: uso (.) molte ma- uso le mail↑ diciamo all’ottanta per cento↓ per lavoro↑ e poi: ho mantengo i contatti con: delle persone-QUELLI sì anche (.) di carattere privato↑ (-) con: °h eh: sia con facebook che con: eh: **poco**↓ **direi**↑ ma: eh soprattutto con: ehm con skype↓ (46-65\_s\_u\_03011001)  
 ‘Mhm, I use mai a lot-, I use e-mail, let’s say, eighty percent for work and then I keep in touch with some people. Those yes also of a private nature, both with facebook and with, **a little, I would say**, but mostly with skype’

What these strategies have in common is that they all imply an increased degree of vagueness, since through their use the speaker creates an explicit distancing from the level of the enunciation and from the actual content of the speech act.<sup>17</sup>

The repertoire of forms that speakers employ as metadiscourse strategies in both corpora is given in Tables 4.12 and 4.13.

Table 4.12 - Metadiscourse strategies, repertoire of forms (C1976), p/10000

	young	young adults	adults
<b>ADV</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>
<i>nel senso/in un certo senso</i> 'in the sense / in a certain sense'	0	7	2
<i>tra virgolette</i> 'in quotes'	0	2	0
<i>relativamente</i> 'relatively'	2	0	6
<i>in pratica</i> 'in practice'	4	0	0
<i>grosso modo</i> 'roughly'	0	2	0
<b>VB</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>47</b>
<i>chiamiamolo/la/le/li (pure)</i> 'let us call it'	4	0	0
<i>non (lo) so</i> 'I don't know (it)'	3	0	10
<i>come posso dire</i> 'how can I say'	2	0	4
<i>come la chiamo io</i> 'as I call it'	0	0	2
<i>come dicono loro</i> 'as they say'	2	0	0
<i>come si vuol chiamare</i> 'as you want to call it'	0	2	0
<i>sembra</i> 'it seems'	2	0	2
<i>dicono</i> 'they say'	7	0	4
<i>dico/non dico/direi</i> 'I say / I don't say / I wouldn't say'	8	11	25
<i>pare</i> 'it seems'	0	2	0
<b>DM</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>43</b>
<i>niente</i> 'nothing'	10	24	0
<i>praticamente</i> 'practically'	5	2	0
<i>insomma</i> 'in short'	7	23	17
<i>cioè</i> 'I mean'	74	26	11
<i>diciamo (così)</i> 'let us say (so)'	9	8	13
<i>non mi viene la parola</i> 'I don't get the word'	0	0	2
<b>others</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>98</b>

17. A similar function is performed by expressions such as *cosiddetto* 'so-called'.

Table 4.13 - Metadiscourse strategy, repertoire of forms (C2010), p/10000

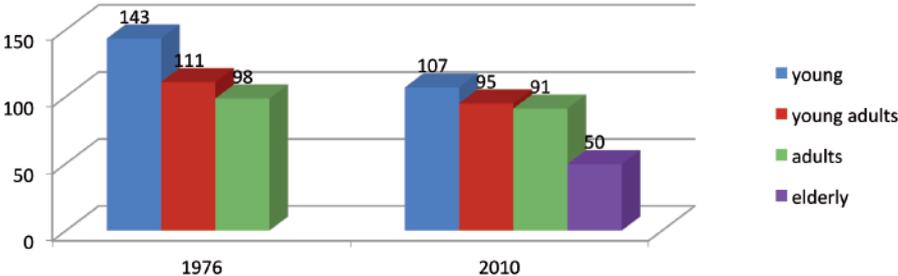
	young	young adults	adults	elderly
<b>ADV</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>10</b>
<i>tra virgolette</i> ‘in quotes’	2	0	2	0
<i>relativamente</i> ‘relatively’	0	1	0	1
<i>in pratica</i> ‘in practice’	2	0	0	0
<i>in qualche modo</i> ‘somehow’	0	0	3	2
<i>pseudo</i> ‘pseudo’	2	0	0	0
<i>nel senso</i> ‘in the sense’	13	28	21	7
<b>VB</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>24</b>
<i>chiamiamolo/la/le/li</i> (pure) ‘let us call it’	2	4	0	0
<i>per intenderci</i> lit. ‘to agree (on a meaning)’	0	0	2	0
<i>sembra</i> ‘it seems’	0	0	3	3
<i>si dice</i> ‘one says’	0	1	3	4
<i>dicono</i> ‘they say’	4	3	3	0
<i>dico/non dico /direi</i> ‘I (don’t) say / I would say’	2	3	3	17
<b>DM</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>16</b>
<i>niente</i> ‘nothing’	9	6	0	2
<i>praticamente</i> ‘pratically’	9	0	2	0
<i>insomma</i> ‘in short’	16	13	22	8
<i>cioè</i> ‘I mean’	7	12	3	3
<i>diciamo</i> let us say’	31	17	6	1
<i>come dire</i> ‘how to say’	8	7	18	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>50</b>

As the comparison of Tables 4.12 and 4.13 shows, the repertoire of forms of VMs used with a metadiscourse function is characterized by a rich array of pragmatic functional units. Some of these function as discourse markers, whose repertoire has remained quite similar over the years, with the exception of *come dire*, which is today more frequent in its simplified structure (*come posso dire* ‘how can I say’> *come dire* ‘how to say’).

Other forms show a higher degree of variation in the two corpora, with some forms no longer attested (*grosso modo*) and others added to the repertoire (*in qualche modo*, *pseudo*).

The comparison of the frequencies of the strategies in apparent time shows that metadiscourse strategies seem to be characterized by age-grading in both corpora, with a progressive decrease of frequency of the strategy with age. This is particularly evident for older speakers in 2010 and for younger speakers in 1976 (cf. Figure 4.39).

Figure 4.39 - Metadiscourse strategies in age cohorts of speakers (p/1000)



The comparison of the two corpora in real time indicates that metadiscourse strategies, compared with other strategies, remain rather stable over time, although there is a slight decrease of frequency in the 2010 corpus which is more evident among younger speakers (351/10,000 in C1796 and 342/10,000 in C2010).

Similar patternings also characterize the distribution and frequencies in individual speakers (Figures 4.40 and 4.41). However, while in C1976 data are more dispersed and speakers are more idiosyncratic in the frequencies of their use of the strategies, in C2010 they tend to be more consistent with each other.

Figure 4.40 - Distribution of metadiscourse strategies in C1976 (p/10000)

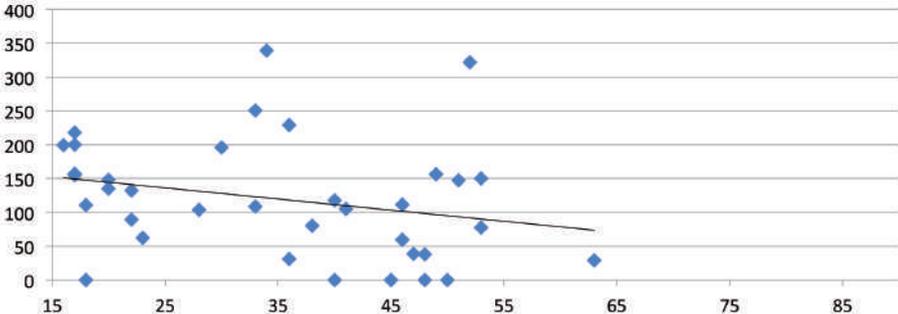
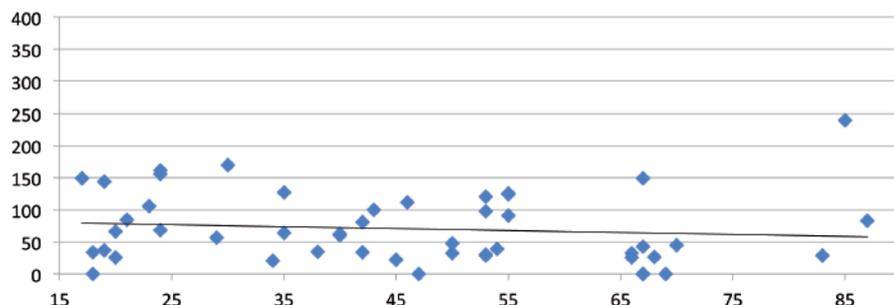


Figure 4.41 - Distribution of metadiscourse strategies in C2010 (p/10000)



The analysis of the distribution of frequencies of use of more common discourse markers (Figures 4.42 and 4.43) shows some patterns of variation in the preferences of speakers for the use of particular forms: more macroscopic variations relate to *cioè*, which has had a neat decrease, while the forms *dico* ‘I say’, *non dico* ‘I don’t say’, *direi* ‘I would say’ show a less marked decrease over time. By contrast, *nel senso* ‘in the sense’, *diciamo* ‘let us say’, and *come dire* ‘how to say’ have increased with time.

The forms *dico*, *non dico*, *direi* show interesting generational patterns as their frequency is higher in adults in C1976 as well as in elderly speakers in C2010, thus making it plausible the fact that this represents a characteristic generational style of that age cohort. On the contrary, *nel senso* is more common in C2010 among young adults, while *diciamo* and *come dire* are frequent among the young and young adults.

Figure 4.42 - Frequency of metadiscourse markers (C1976), p/10000

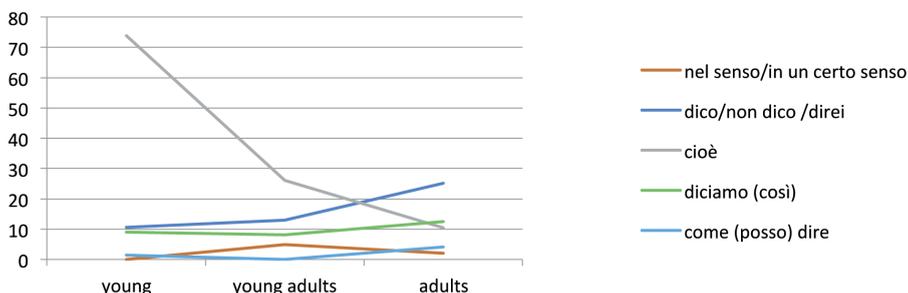
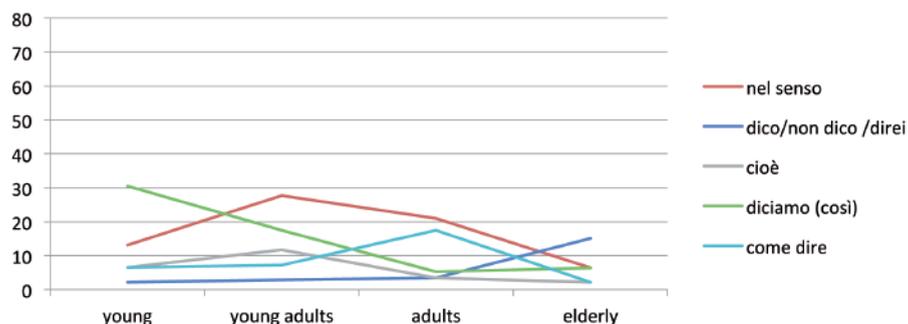


Figure 4.43 - Frequency of metadiscourse markers (C2010), p/10000



Qualitative data on the structural embedding of the metadiscourse strategies (Figures 4.44 and 4.45) show that they can be found in subacts, acts, and interventions in both corpora. Its highest frequency of use is in acts for the majority of speakers, except for younger speakers in 1976 and adult speakers in 2010.

The comparison of data in apparent time shows that younger generations once more seem to be more versatile, since in both corpora they show the most consistent distribution of the strategy in different discourse units (interventions, acts, and subacts). However, the real-time comparison with the youngest generation in C1976 indicates that speakers in 1976 use the strategy more frequently in interventions, differently from their peers in 2010, who prefer to use it in acts. Interesting in this regard is also the behaviour of adults, who in 1976 and 2010 show different preferences for structural embedding of the strategy, favouring acts in 1976 and subacts in 2010.

Figure 4.44 - Metadiscourse strategies and discourse units (C1976)

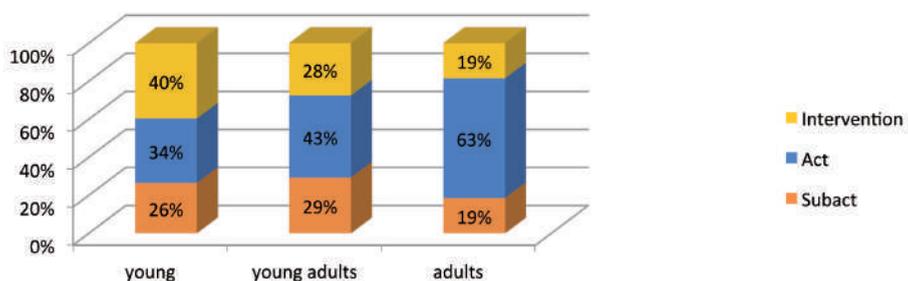
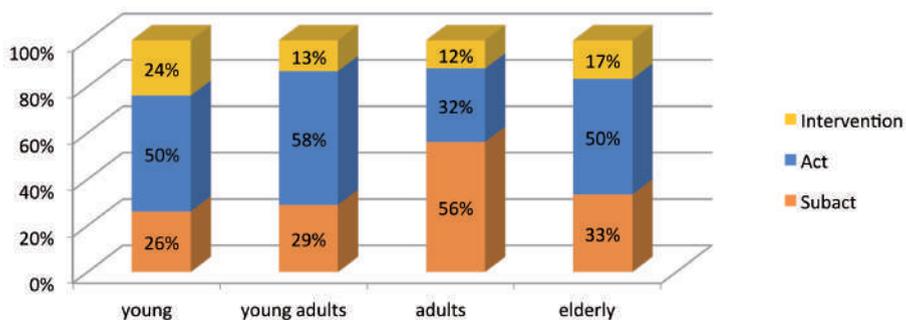
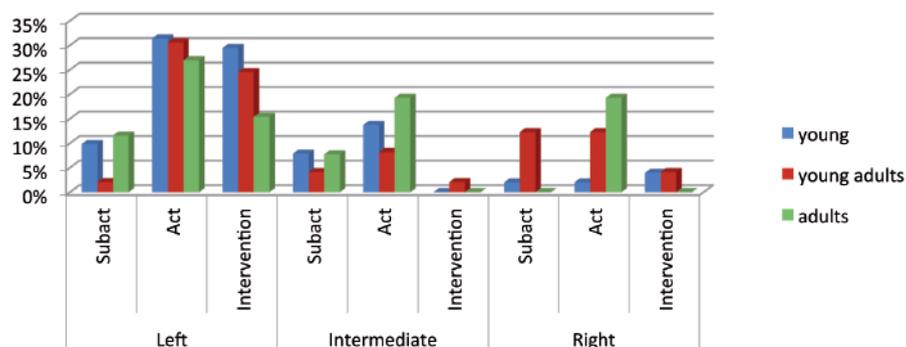


Figure 4.45 - Metadiscourse strategies and discourse unit (C2010)



Correlations between position of markers and their structural embedding show different pictures for the two corpora. In C1976 (Figure 4.46) the most typical positions are in the left periphery of acts (for all age cohorts) and interventions (especially in younger speakers, who frequently use *cioè* or *niente* in this position, see Chapter 5 for a detailed analysis). Young adults and adults more frequently employ markers (especially *insomma*) in the right periphery, mainly in subacts or acts.

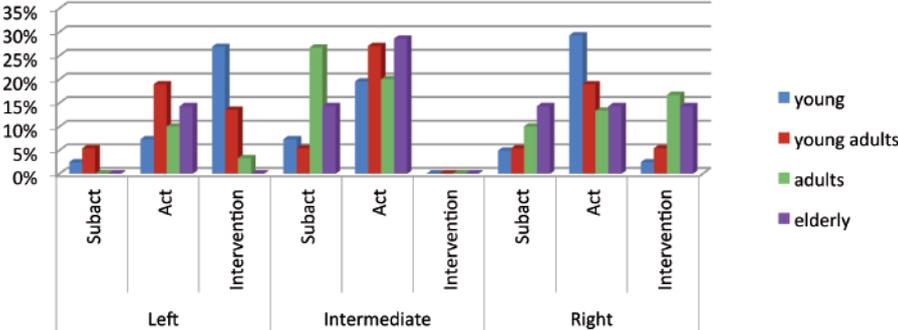
Figure 4.46 - Metadiscourse strategies and position (C1976)



A different picture can be drawn for the 2010 corpus (Figure 4.47), as age cohorts show more marked characteristic styles. Younger speakers prefer the left periphery in interventions and the right periphery in acts; young adults, who represent the more versatile age cohort, show the most varied and consistent distribution of the strategy in different positions and

discourse units; adults favour the medial position in subacts and acts; and elderly speakers prefer the medial position in acts and the right periphery in all three discourse units.

Figure 4.47 - Metadiscourse strategies and position (C2010)



As for the scope of metadiscourse markers (Figures 4.48 and 4.49), data on their frequency offer an interesting insight into their use. The apparent-time comparison shows that in both corpora age-grading does not seem to play a role in the use of different markers, on the contrary age cohorts are quite consistent in this regard. However, differences emerge in real time: in particular in C1976, speakers (especially the youngest age cohorts) more frequently employ strategies with scope over discourse units, as acts or interventions, and less frequently strategies with local scope over phrases. The reverse is true for the 2010 corpus, in which speakers, regardless of age, seem to employ strategies in a more balanced manner, either with local scope over phrases or with wider scope over discourse units.

Figure 4.48 - Metadiscourse strategies and scope (C1976)

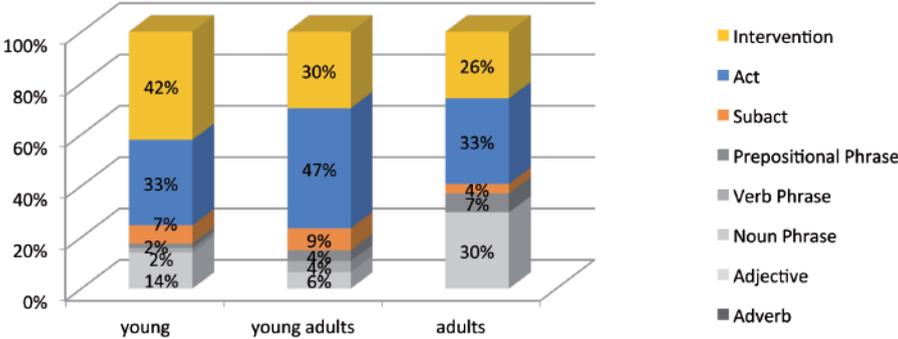
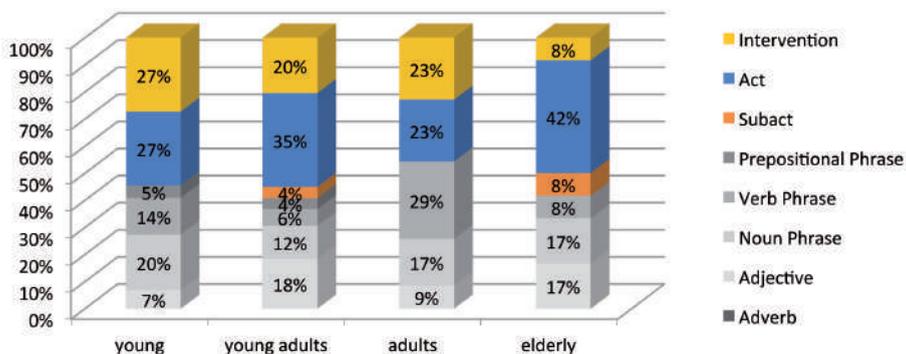


Figure 4.49 - Metadiscourse strategies and scope (C2010)



### Summary

The apparent-time comparison of data shows that metadiscourse strategies are quantitatively characterized by age-grading, since their frequency seems to decrease with age. Real-time comparison, on the other hand, shows that over time the frequency of the strategy is rather stable. Qualitative data, though, show a more varied picture. The strategy most frequently occurs in acts, but the two communities of speakers analysed in real time show a characteristic behaviour in relation to both the positioning of markers in discourse units and the scope of the markers. Speakers in C1976 seem more homogeneous in the use of the strategy, while speakers in C2010 show a more marked age-grading pattern. To explain this apparent contradiction, it is relevant to take into consideration the distribution of more common forms to verify whether these quantitative results can be given a more satisfactory explanation, to this topic will be devoted Chapter 5.

#### 4.3.1. Hypothetical strategies

A subgroup of metadiscourse strategies is represented by forms, mostly epistemic markers, that highlight how the content of an utterance is (just) an hypothesis. In many cases such strategies do not imply a modification of the propositional content of a speech act, but rather hedge its illocutionary force, exploiting strategically what the speaker linguistically represents as a subjective lack of knowledge. Many of the epistemic markers used derive mostly from parentheticals such as *penso* 'I think' in (98),

*credo* ‘I believe’ in (99), *immagino* ‘I imagine’, and *mi sembra* or *mi pare* ‘it seems to me’, as well as from adverbs such as *magari* or *forse* ‘maybe’ in (100) and (101) all of which in some way call into question the speaker’s knowledge.

- (98) IPP no↓ io ho sentit- ho sentito:↓ **penso**↓ solo metà della (.) trasmissione↓ no↑ (26\_45\_d\_u\_01087802)  
 ‘No. I hear-, I heard, **I think**, only half of the programme, right’
- (99) GIU io **credo**↑ tra l’altro↓ che rispetto a un po’ di anni fa↓<sup>h</sup> in cui comunque↓ i modelli di: eh: come dire↓ l’immagine- alcune immagini femminili erano forti. (46\_65\_s\_d\_02191009)  
 ‘**I believe**, by the way, that compared to a few years ago when however the models of- eh, how to say, the image- some female images were strong’
- (100) BART se gli dicevo che andavo in manifestazione↓ era un casino della madonna↓ (.) che **magari**↑ erano andati anche loro↓ (15\_25\_d\_g\_1980\_fuga3)  
 ‘If I told them that I was going to the demonstration, it was a mess. That **maybe** they had gone too’
- (101) PET cioè↓ ci stanno raggiungendo↓ **forse** i terroristi stessi↓ non lo so guarda. (46\_65\_d\_u\_01297901)  
 ‘I mean, they are getting us, **maybe** the terrorists themselves, I don’t know, look’

Markers derived from verbs, in contrast to other deverbal markers discussed earlier, express a lower degree of certainty on behalf of the speaker and are easily employed as mitigating strategies. The conversational implicature which arises in such contexts is that a criticism is flagged through a supposed lack of certainty on the part of the speaker. These verbs also show a somewhat higher degree of pragmaticalization (cf. also Pietrandrea, 2005; Waltereit & Detges, 2007; Mihatsch, 2010a).

Epistemic adverbs, typically markers of non-factuality such as *forse* and *magari* ‘maybe’ or *probabilmente* ‘probably’, may also be used with similar functions. Their original non-factual value is what enables speakers to employ them to hedge the illocutionary force of speech acts, as is the case of *forse* in (102).

- (102) LUC °h ma↓ io penso che:↑ deve: ehm **forse**↑ con sua mamma↑ lui ha: ha un discorso più aperto↓ no↑ ma dovrebbe tenerlo↑ anche con suo padre↓ questo rapporto. (15\_25\_d\_d\_1980\_fuga\_02)  
 ‘But I think that he has to, um **maybe** with his mum, he has, he has a more open dialogue, hasn’t he, but he should have that with his father too, that relationship’

The Italian adverb *magari*, in particular, is highly polyfunctional and syntactically versatile, since it can occur in a variety of illocutionary acts (assertions, questions, orders, and exclamations).<sup>18</sup> This versatility, which is explained in Masini & Pietrandrea (2010) as “regular topological patterning”, is characterized by lists containing the element focused through *magari* ‘maybe’, as in (103). This may explain why *magari* can also be employed as marker in exemplification strategies (cf. § 5.1.1).

- (103) ANT perché adesso↑ senti una cosa↓ chiunque↓ io vedo un ragazzo di ventidue anni↑ che ha bisogno di far l’amore con noi↓ **magari**↑ perché passa↓ o perché trova il tipo che: non so↓ lo colpisce↓ o perché:↑ (-) per tanti motivi↓ (15\_25\_d\_d\_198001)  
 ‘Because now, listen to this, anyone, I see a twenty-two year old boy who needs to make love with us, **maybe** because he passes by, or because he finds the guy who, I don’t know, strikes him, or because... for so many reasons’

The repertoire of VMs, derived both from verbs and from adverbs, that speakers use in the two corpora is given in Table 4.14 and Table 4.15.

Table 4.14 - Hypothetical strategies, repertoire of forms (C1976), p/10000

	young	young adults	adults
<b>ADV</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>19</b>
<i>magari</i> ‘maybe’	35	14	0
<i>forse</i> ‘maybe’	10	19	19
<i>probabilmente</i> ‘probably’	2	13	0
<i>almeno</i> ‘at least’	2	0	0
<i>perlomeno</i> ‘at least’	3	0	0
<b>VB</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>46</b>
<i>si vede</i> ‘it can be seen’	0	0	4
<i>chissà</i> ‘who knows’	0	3	0
<i>mi sembra</i> ‘it seems’	6	9	25
<i>penso</i> ‘I think’	9	12	4
<i>credo</i> ‘I believe’	3	3	13
<i>immagino</i> ‘I imagine’	0	2	0
<b>others</b> (conditional)	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>67</b>

18. The polyfunctionality of this marker has attracted attention in Italian linguistics, see for instance Pietrandrea (2007), Arcaini (1997), Licari & Stame (1989), and Schiemann (2008).

Table 4.15 - Hypothetical strategies, repertoire of forms (C2010), p/10000

	young	young adults	adults	elderly
<b>ADV</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>magari</i> 'maybe'	11	10	9	2
<i>forse</i> 'maybe'	9	10	13	2
<i>probabilmente</i> 'probably'	2	6	0	0
<i>nel caso</i> 'in case'	2	0	0	2
<b>VB</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>
<i>può darsi</i> 'it can be'	4	0	0	0
<i>mi pare</i> 'it seems'	0	1	0	0
<i>mi sembra</i> 'it seems to me'	7	0	5	11
<i>penso</i> 'I think'	2	5	3	0
<i>credo</i> 'I believe'	7	8	8	5
<i>immagino</i> 'I imagine'	2	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>22</b>

As is evident from Tables 4.14 and 4.15 above, the repertoire of the most common forms employed has remained rather stable in both corpora and includes the adverbs *magari* and *forse* 'maybe', and epistemic parentheticals *credo* 'I believe', *penso* 'I think', and *mi sembra* 'it seems to me'. It is interesting, however, that different forms display different frequencies in both apparent and real time. Significant are the frequencies of *magari* among younger speakers (36/10000) and *mi sembra* among adults (25/10000) in C1976; the same forms display a more homogenous distribution in C2010.

As for the distribution of strategies within age cohorts (Figure 4.50), the apparent-time comparison of age cohorts within the two corpora shows that the frequency of use of the strategy – regardless of the forms employed – has a rather consistent distribution across the different age cohorts, excepting only elderly speakers in C2010, who seem to display the lowest frequency of use. The real-time data comparison also shows a general decrease in frequency (214/10,000 in C1976 corpus and 146/10,000 in C2010) which is consistent in all age cohorts.

However, taking into consideration the individual frequencies in different speakers, provides a somewhat different picture in C1976, since the trend line seems to be decreasing with age, leading to the inference that speakers use this type of strategy more idiosyncratically and that the higher numbers in C1976 may be due to this (Figures 4.51 and 4.52).

Figure 4.50 - Hypothetical strategies in age cohorts of speakers, p/10000

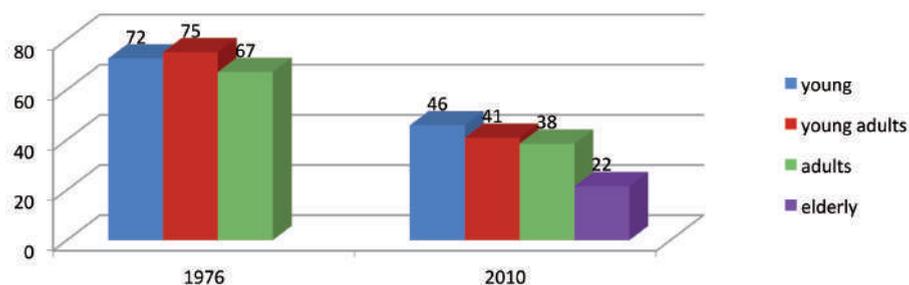


Figure 4.51 - Distribution of hypothetical strategies in C1976 (p/10000)

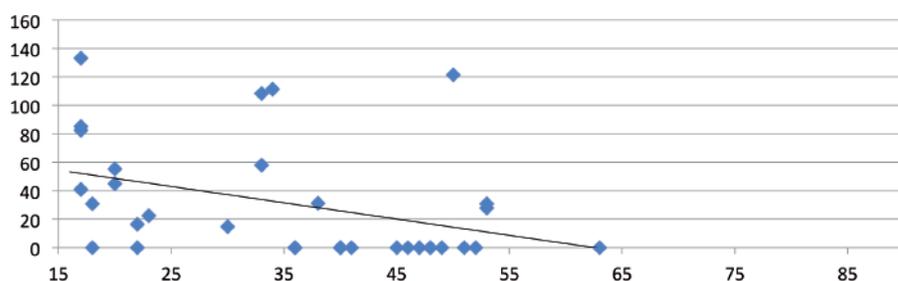
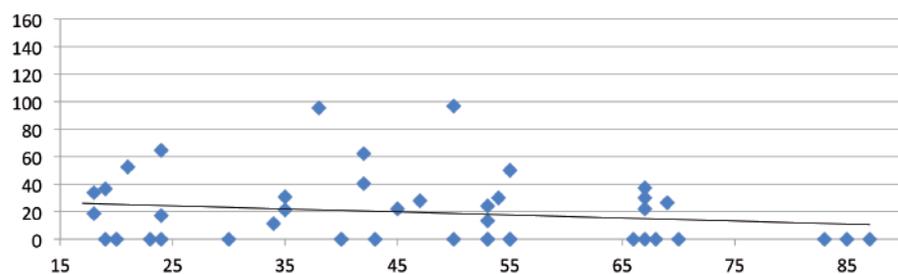


Figure 4.52 - Distribution of hypothetical strategies in C2010 (p/10000)



Qualitative data on the structural embedding of the strategy (Figures 4.53 and 4.54) show that speakers in both corpora most frequently use the strategy in acts, regardless of age. It is relevant, however, that both younger and older speakers in C2010 are the two age cohorts who most frequently use the strategy in interventions. Once again, younger speakers in both corpora seem to be the most versatile age cohort, since they use

the strategy most frequently in the highest number of discourse units. Also noticeable is the high preference of adults in 1976 for using the strategy in acts.

Figure 4.53 - Hypothetical strategies and discourse units (C1976)

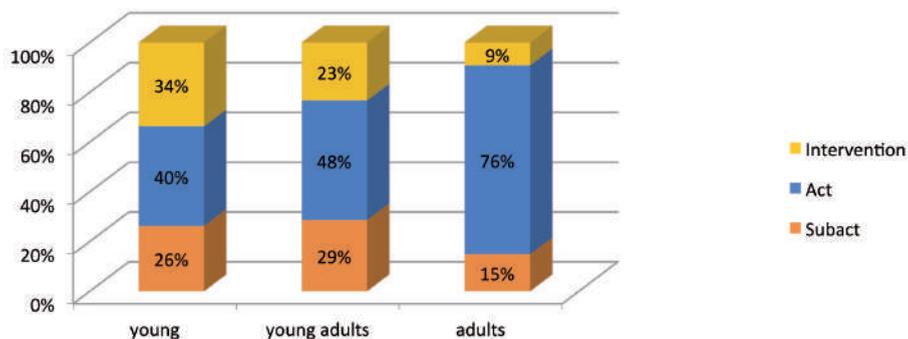
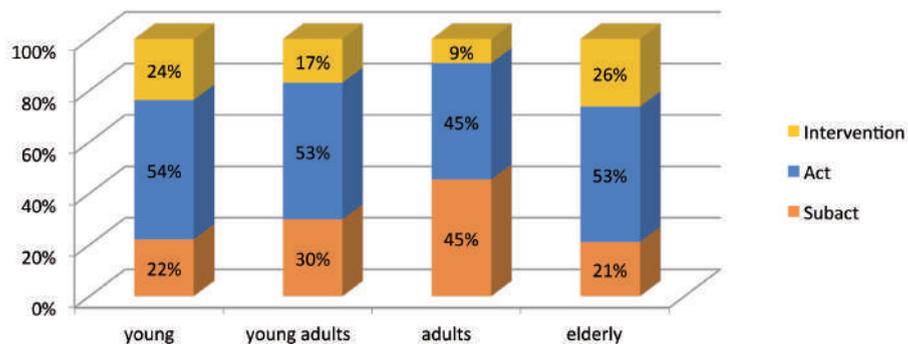


Figure 4.54 - Hypothetical strategies and discourse units (C2010)



Correlations between the position of the marker and its structural embedding (Figures 4.55 and 4.56) show that the left periphery is the preferred position in acts for all speakers in both corpora. However, some differences can be identified both in relation to age-grading phenomena and to developments over time.

Younger speakers prefer to place markers in the left periphery of interventions, especially in C2010, and in the medial position or the right periphery of acts. More versatility is shown consistently by young adults in both corpora, while adult speakers, especially in C2010, seem to more

frequently employ the strategy in the right periphery of acts (especially via epistemic parentheticals) or subacts. Older speakers, conversely, employ the strategy in contexts that are also prototypical of other age cohorts, but in a less varied types of contexts, namely the left periphery of acts or interventions, or medial position in acts.

Figure 4.55 - Hypothetical strategies and position (C1976)

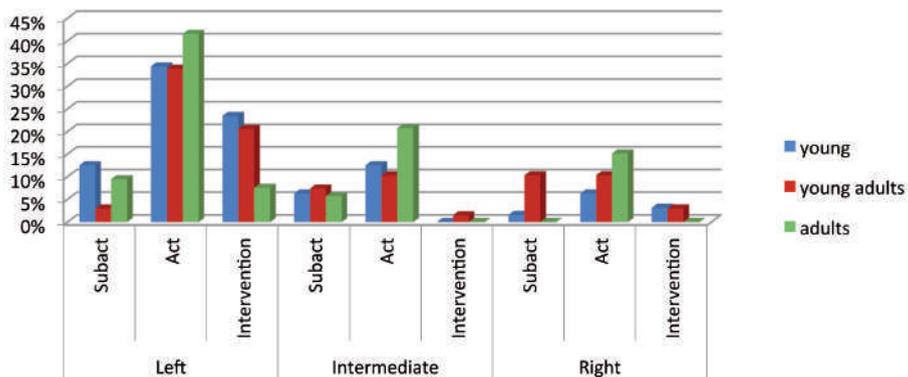
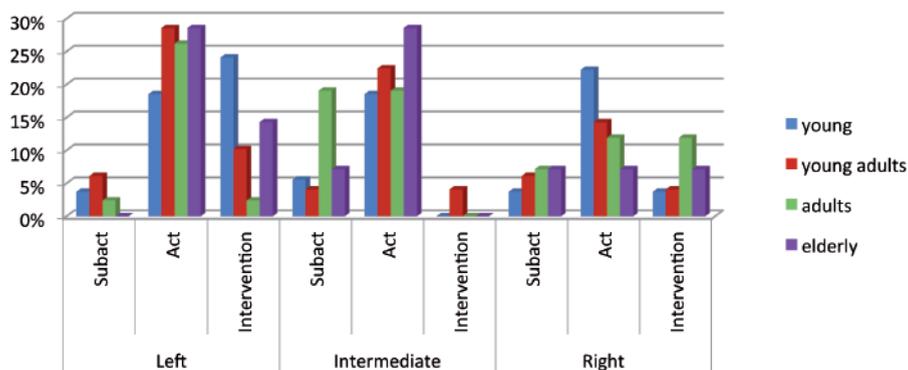


Figure 4.56 - Hypothetical strategies and position (C2010)



As for the scope of the markers (Figures 4.57 and 4.58), speakers are rather consistent in both apparent and real time. In particular, on the illocution level, the strategy most frequently has scope over units of discourse, acts or interventions, and more rarely on local constituents.

Figure 4.57 - Hypothetical strategies and scope (C1976)

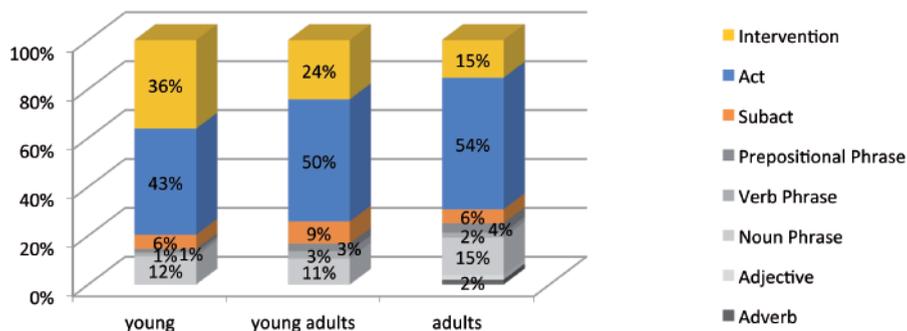
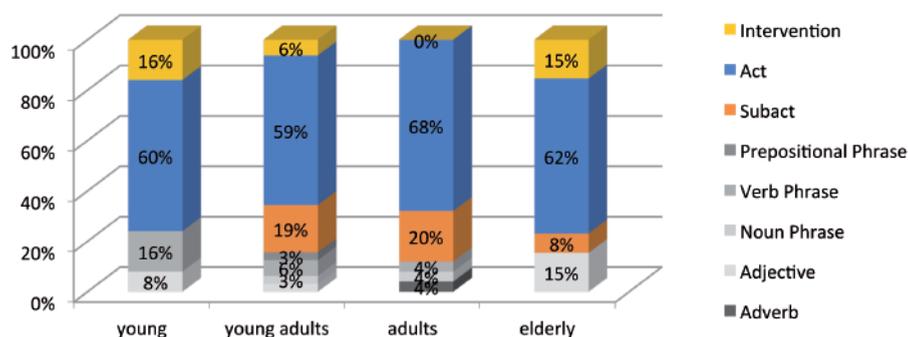


Figure 4.58 - Hypothetical strategies and scope (C2010)



### Summary

The use of hypothetical strategies seems to decrease slightly with age, but unlike other metadiscourse strategies it has also decreased over time in both communities. As for its role as a hedge of the force of an illocution, the strategy is employed rather consistently by speakers of all ages, who use it most frequently in acts, especially in the left periphery or in the medial position. However, some speakers, especially in younger age cohorts (in C2010), also employ it with high frequency to hedge interventions, both in the left and the right (in C2010) periphery. The scope of markers is again consistently on discourse units, rather than phrases.

#### 4.4. Reference to deixis

Indexical reference to the context of interaction represents the last macro-group of strategies that speakers employ to increase the degree of vagueness in their utterances. The role played by deictics in the codification of vagueness is based on metaphoric and metonymic extensions which arise as conversational implicatures (cf. § 1.6.3); their use implies that verbal information is not enough and that interlocutors must therefore activate the co-text, as in (104), or shared/encyclopaedic knowledge to infer which referents or qualities of referents were intended by the speaker, as in (105) and (106), respectively.

- (104) UMB dicendo che noi ci siamo uomini VIRILI↑ per il semplice fatto che (.) domani (xxx) stasera la nostra emittente↑ ha annunciato: (xxx) mobili- mobilitazione no↑(-) °h e: proprio per **questo qui**↓ dice che noi siamo esseri virili↓ e così ci reputiamo↓ **questo qua**↑ non è vero↓ (15\_25\_d\_u\_01087803)

‘Saying that we are manly men for the simple fact that tomorrow, tonight our broadcaster has announced mobil-, mobilisation, right? and precisely for **this here** he says that we are manly men and we consider ourselves to be such, **this here** is not true’

- (105) SEV °h (.) i compagni della Pirelli↑ mi mettono piano piano al corrente della (.) °h della vita politica↑ (.) antifascismo↑ e via↑ io ero già d’origine comunista↑ mi sono arricchito di **tutta ’sta roba**. (66\_90\_s\_u\_01271001)

‘The comrades at Pirelli gradually put me in the picture about political life, antifascism and so on, I was already a communist, it enriched me **all this stuff**’

- (106) LUI e allora tante volte↑ (.) cioè↓ a: ho pensato davvero↑ cioè: (-) di: quando ero: triste↑ magari↑ nei momenti **così**↓ che l’unico è: prendermene andarmene↑ e sbattermene. magari↑ davvero↓ fare la barbona. (15\_25\_d\_d\_1980\_fuga\_01)

‘And so many times, I mean, I really thought, I mean, of when I was sad, maybe in times **like these**, that the only thing (to do) is to pick up and leave, and fuck off, and maybe actually be a tramp’

In (104) for instance, the use of *questo qui* lit. ‘this here’ refers to the intervention of a boy saying that right-oriented people tend to be violent, in the same stretch of discourse the use of *questo qua* refers instead to the co-text and to all that was mentioned before. The indexical reference to the co-text also explains why in many cases deictics have an endophoric value, anaphoric in this case. In such contexts the use of deictics as VMs overlaps with the notions of “intensional anaphor” (Cornish, 1986) and/or *incapsu-*

*latore anaforico* ‘anaphoric encapsulator’ (D’Addio, 1988; cf. also Schmid, 2000).

The procedural activation of shared knowledge makes deictics suitable strategies for implying an increased degree of vagueness in conversation at the propositional level. However, this inference may extend metonymically to a whole speech act when deictics, especially manner deictics such as *così* ‘like this’, are positioned at the beginning or end of speech acts. In such contexts they metonymically apply to the whole speech act through a similar inference and result in a hedging of the whole speech act itself, as in (107).

(107) PAO (--) è successo↓ cioè è successo anche abbastanza tempo fa↓ per cui↑ non mi ricordo abbastanza bene↓ poi sono i so:liti↑ i problemi che: (-) cioè↓ che hai con un genitore non è molto difficile↓ **così**↑ (15\_25\_d\_u\_1980\_fuga1)

‘It happened, I mean, it also happened quite some time ago, so I don’t remember that well, then they are the usual problems, I mean, that you have with a parent, it is not very difficult, **so**’

The rise of such conversational implicatures renders manner deictics a strategically versatile category. They can be used to avoid more specific lexemes, e.g. to imply a less than literal or metaphorical interpretation of an expression, as is the case in (108) where *così* ‘like this’ could be easily replaced by a metadiscourse marker such as *diciamo* ‘let us say’. Similarly, the same forms can also imply a vague categorization or an open list, as is the case in (109).

(108) PET ho boicottato uno sciopero. me ne vergogno↓ ti dico la verità. ma nel contempo↓ fare lo sciopero **così**↓ della nocciolina↓ come lo chiamo io↓ non serve a NIENTE. (46\_65\_d\_u\_01297901)

‘I boycotted a strike. I’m ashamed (of it), I’m telling you the truth, but at the same time going on strike **like this**, of peanuts, as I call it, it’s useless’

(109) UMB anzi la penso in tutt’altro modo↓ cioè sono: mi reputo di destra↑ **e: così**.

‘Rather I think the opposite way, I mean, I am- I consider myself to be right-oriented, **and so**’

Manner deictics, as discussed in § 1.6.3, have a qualificatory nature which entails similarity with the intended referent. As König (2010) notes “one of the most elementary ways of pointing out similarity both in the phylogenetic and in the ontogenetic development of language is through the use of deictic expressions accompanied by pointing gestures, more

specifically, through lexemes expressing deixis of manner, of quality or of quantity”.

This qualificatory nature is strategically exploited in similitive comparisons. In such contexts the conversational implicature often arises that the comparison may only be approximative, as “Similitive comparison is never perfect, but always approximative” (Haspelmath & Buchholz, 1998: 278).<sup>19</sup> Deictic expressions employed as VMs are often derived from manner adverbs.

Spatial deictics can also be used with a similar function, as is the case of forms as *qui/qua* ‘here’ and *lì/là* ‘there’. Their uses as VMs derive from the original meaning of spatial constraints, again through conversational implicature. In a radio conversation where, in most cases, no actual reference to a shared physical spatial context is possible, once again their use entails a procedural encoding which asks the interlocutor to metaphorically infer a shared mental space and knowledge, as exemplified in (110) and (111) below.

- (110) STE cioè↓ arrivo a casa alla sera↑ mi guardo il mio telegiornale↑ (.) mi guardo magari↑ qualche: °h fiction↓ di **quelle di ade:sso↓** (.) **lì che ci sono ade:sso↓** (46\_65\_s\_u\_11051002)  
 ‘I mean, I get home in the evening, I watch my news, I watch maybe some fiction, **of those of today, there, that there are today**’
- (111) PET se ogni qualvolta cioè si attende↑ cioè (è stato ammazzato uno↑) (-) si fanno le due ore di sciopero ma tutto finisce **lì** (.)↓ (46\_65\_d\_u\_01297901)  
 ‘If every time, I mean, you wait, I mean, (that someone is killed), you do the two-hour strike but everything ends **there**’

In addition, a much more frequent use of these forms, which overlaps with a focusing function and with intensional anaphor, implies the occurrence of spatial deictics in contexts in which text-deictically they refer to entities, events, or parts of text. In (112) *qui* ‘here’ points back to a previous turn where interlocutors are discussing racism in towns. *Qui* in this context can be paraphrased with “in regard to this topic, i.e. racism”.

- (112) FIL sì↓ sì↓ sì↓ assolutamente↓ °h tra l’altro↑ anche **qui↓** insomma↓ la provincia di brescia↑(-) specialmente negli ultimi tempi↑ è sempre pensata come: (-) la provincia del razzismo↓ la provincia dove: (-) sono successi episodi: DEPLOREVOLI↑ (15\_25\_s\_u\_01211005)  
 ‘Yes, yes, absolutely. By the way, **also here**, in short, the province of Brescia, especially in recent times, is always thought of as the province of racism, the province where terrible episodes have occurred’

19. See also Mihatsch (2009, 2010b) and Andorno (2012).

It is interesting that these expressions frequently cluster with distal (*quello/a/i/e* ‘that/those’) and/or proximal (*questo/a/i/e* ‘this/these’) demonstratives to imply vague reference, as is the case of (113) and (114), or vague list/categorisation as in (115). In these contexts, whether they appear or not in general extenders, they do not refer to entities, but text-deictically to a quality of the following/preceding element, extending the intension of the modified lexeme and therefore rendering it more vague (Mihatsch, 2010a: 76 and Waltereit, 2006: 105).

- (113) FER e poi↑ sai↓ **in quei momenti lì**↓ ehm insomma↓ succede un po’ di casino↓ ci si prende un po’ di vista↑ insomma↓ (26\_45\_d\_u\_05147710)  
 ‘And then, you know, **in those moments there**, well, a bit of a mess happens, you lose sight of each other a bit’
- (114) PREAL (-) che non avet- NO↓ << laughing> non è **quella roba lì**> no↑ (-)  
 è portare i pantaloni.= (15\_25\_s\_d\_051911m)  
 ‘That you don’t have-, no! It is not **that stuff there**, it is wearing the trousers’
- (115) TUL poi↓ alla sinistra (.) che è intenzionata ad andare al governo anche sulle nostre spalle↓ sulle spalle dei giovani↓ dei lavoratori↑ (-) così↓ per (.) dire bene (.) **Mils e quelli lì** stanno andando verso la clandestinità↓ (46\_65\_d\_u\_01087801)  
 ‘Then, to the left which is intent on going into government even on our shoulders, on the shoulders of the young workers, so, to say well, **Mils and those there** are going underground’

When demonstratives cluster with spatial deictics, they can also imply a vague reference to people as in (116) and (117).

- (116) AND ho detto↓ (.) **questo qui** finisce che si che si uccide lui↑ e ammazza anche le altre due↑ sicuramente. (46\_65\_d\_d\_02068004)  
 ‘I said, **this one** ends up killing himself and also kills the other two, surely’
- (117) LUI bah↓ (.) ormai↑ cioè↓ nel mio caso non c’è più niente da fare↓ (.) l’unico↑ è fargli prendere un bello spaghetti↓ **a quelli lì**↓ **a quei due lì**↓ (15\_25\_d\_d\_1980\_fuga\_01)  
 ‘Bah, by now, I mean, in my case there’s nothing else to do, the only thing to do is to scare **those there, those two there**’

The repertoire of VMs derived from deictic expressions that speakers use in the two corpora is shown in Tables 4.16 and 4.17.

Table 4.16 - Deictic strategies, repertoire of forms (C1976), p/10000

	young	young adults	adults
<b>ADV</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>46</b>
<i>così</i> 'so'	14	36	46
<b>DEM</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>27</b>
<i>questo/a/i/e</i> 'this/these'	5	0	7
<i>quello/a/i/e</i> 'that/those'	2	2	20
<b>SPATIAL DEICTICS</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>17</b>
<i>qui/qua</i> 'here'	5	0	7
<i>lì/là</i> 'there'	2	2	10
<b>DEM + DEICTIC</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>15</b>
<i>questo/i/a/e qui/a/lì/à</i> 'this/these here/there'	8	14	8
<i>quello/i/a/e qui/a/lì/à</i> 'that/those here/there'	3	4	7
<b>DEM+Noun+DEICTIC</b> ( <i>quelle persone lì</i> 'those people there')	<b>3</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>DEM + General Noun + DEICTIC</b> ( <i>quelle cose lì</i> 'those things there')	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>119</b>

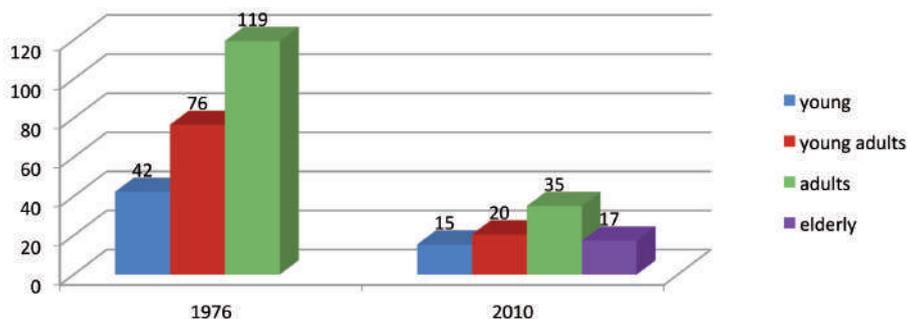
Table 4.17 - Deictic strategies, repertoire of forms (C2010) p/10000

	young	young adults	adults	elderly
<b>ADV</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>così</i> 'so'	3	3	10	5
<b>DEM</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>questo/a/i/e</i> 'this/these'	0	4	3	0
<i>quello/a/i/e</i> 'that/those'	2	0	4	4
<b>SPATIAL DEICTICS</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>
<i>qui/qua</i> 'here'	2	3	2	0
<i>lì/là</i> 'there'	2	6	5	0
<b>DEM + DEICTIC</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>
<i>questo/i/a/e qui/a/lì/à</i> 'this/ these here/there'	0	0	0	0
<i>quello/i/a/e qui/a/lì/à</i> 'that/ those here/there'	4	0	2	0
<b>DEM+Noun+DEICTIC</b> ( <i>quelle persone lì</i> 'those people there')	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>DEM + General Noun + DEICTIC</b> ( <i>quelle cose lì</i> 'those things there')	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>17</b>

As the data in Tables 4.16 and 4.17 show, the repertoire of forms has remained stable over time. What has drastically changed is the frequency of forms, not only in speakers belonging to different age cohorts within the same corpus (especially C1976), but also in the two communities.

The quantitative analysis of the distribution of strategies within age cohorts has proved particularly rewarding (Figure 4.59).

Figure 4.59 - Deictic strategies in age cohorts of speakers, p/10000



The analysis of the distribution of deictic strategies in apparent time shows clear age-grading patterns in C1976, with the age cohorts opting for deictic strategies more frequently with age. This trend is less marked, but also evident in C2010. Interesting in this case is the behaviour of older speakers, who also seem to have lessened their use of the strategy, but they would be expected to represent the age cohort with its highest frequency within that corpus.

Real-time data also show a generalized and significant decrease of use of the strategy in the 2010 community (238/10,000 in 1976 vs 88/10,000 in 2010). The comparison between the apparent- and real-time data in the case of deictic strategies seems methodologically relevant, since frequency of use of such strategies can be accounted for in terms of generational change, rather than merely as age-grading. In other words, not only the frequency of deictic strategies is less conspicuous in younger generations, but also older generations, who in their teen years used them a lot, progressively abandon them as time progresses. This means that the whole community gradually reduces its use of deictic strategies as time goes by, thus supporting the hypothesis that speakers may change their frequency of use of pragmatic strategies throughout their lifetimes long after the end of the critical period.<sup>20</sup>

20. Cf. also the notion of lifespan change described in § 2.4, cf. also Sankoff *et alii* (2001) and Sankoff & Blondeau (2007).

The trend becomes more evident if one considers individual speakers' use of the strategy in both corpora (Figures 4.60 and 4.61).

Figure 4.60 - Distribution of deictic strategies in C1976, p/10000

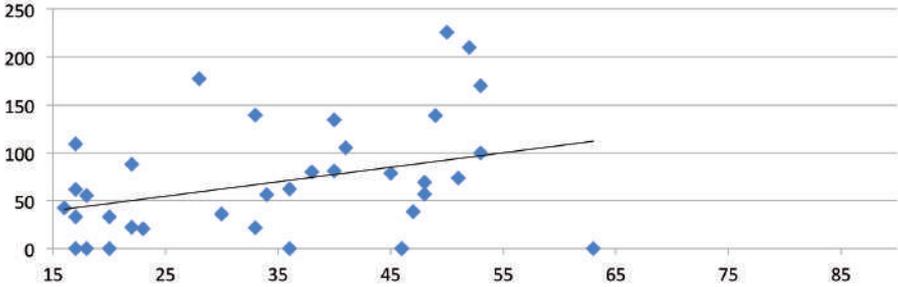
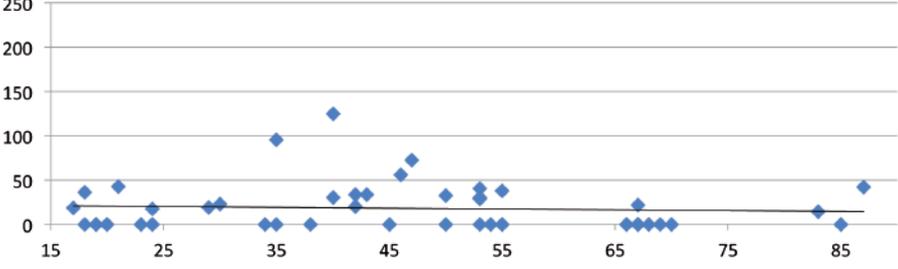


Figure 4.61 - Distribution of deictic strategies in C2010, p/10000



As for the structural embedding of the strategy (Figures 4.62 and 4.63), it most frequently occurs in acts, in various age cohorts, although in C2010 young adults and elderly speakers also use it frequently in subacts. It is interesting that younger speakers in 2010, the age cohort which uses the strategy the least, are those with the highest percentage of its use in interventions and with no use in subacts.

Data on the correlations between the position of VMs and their structural embedding show a rather interesting picture (Figures 4.64 and 4.65). Deictic strategies, unlike other strategies, frequently appear in the right periphery, regardless of the age of speakers. This peculiarity is of course connected with the functions performed, which often overlap with those performed by general extenders, and relate to a vague categorization or reference to shared knowledge.

Figure 4.62 - Deictic strategies and discourse units (C1976)

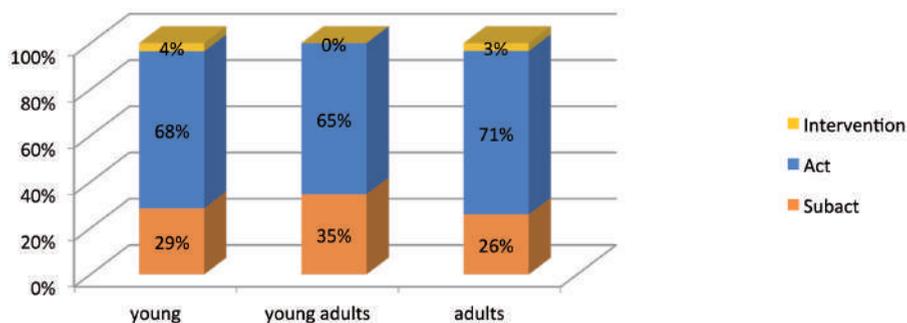
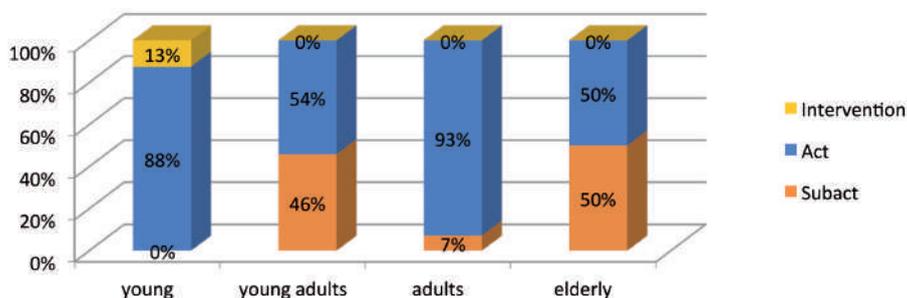


Figure 4.63 - Deictic strategies and discourse units (C2010)



As for analysis of data in apparent time, in both corpora younger speakers are not the most versatile age cohort, a characteristic which is instead shared by young adults and adults who employ the strategy in the highest number of different positions. All three positions in acts (left periphery, medial position, and right periphery) are frequent in all age cohorts; the only exceptions are represented by young adults and elderly in C2010, who favour the medial position and the right periphery of acts (young adults), or the right periphery of acts and subacts (older speakers).

Real-time data do not offer clear patterns of age-graded behaviour. However, speakers in the 2010 community tend to use the strategy in a lower number of positions (in the medial position or right periphery in acts); on the other hand, speakers in 1976 tend to distribute the strategy more evenly in a higher number of different positions and contexts.

Figure 4.64 - Deictic strategies and position (C1976)

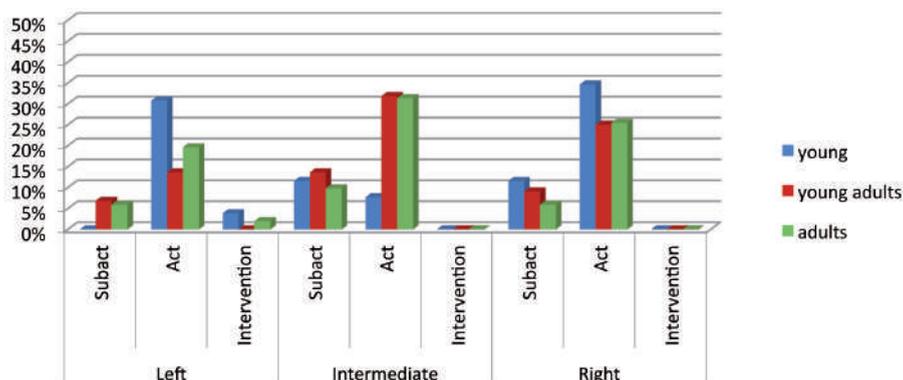
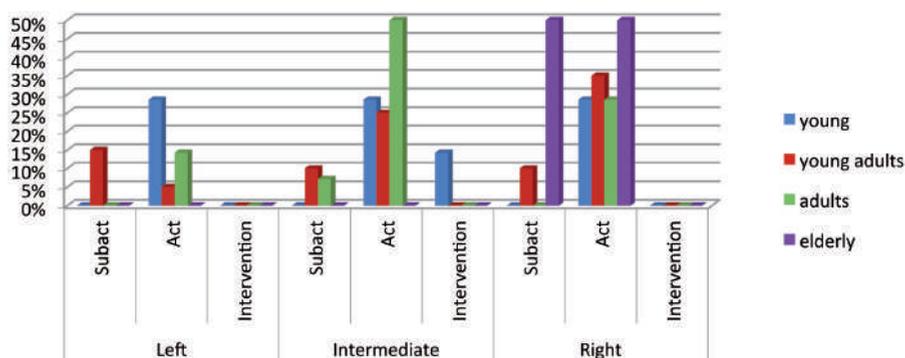


Figure 4.65 - Deictic strategies and position (C2010)



Deictic strategies are mainly employed locally with scope over noun phrases, as in (118), or other local constituents, and less frequently with scope over acts, interventions, or subacts.

- (118) GER eh: ogni tanto: qualche sguardo: **un po': così**↓ <<laughing>come dire↓> °h ma non dicono più di tanto↑ perché poi↑ va be'↑ alla fine↓ devo dirti la verità↑ io non sono appassionato di calcio↑ compenso un po' con questo. (46\_65\_s\_u\_09151004)

'Eh, every now and then, a few glances **a bit like this**, how to say, but they don't say much because then, well, in the end, I have to tell you the truth, I'm not keen on football, I compensate a bit with this'

The scope of different markers is not constrained by age-grading in apparent time (Figures 4.66 and 4.67), but real-time data show that, together with a general decrease in frequency, speakers in 2010 also seem to have reduced the variability of scope of markers. Apart from being the age cohort who employ the strategy less frequently, younger speakers also represent those who use it with scope over either noun phrases or whole acts.

Figure 4.66 - Deictic strategies and scope (C1976)

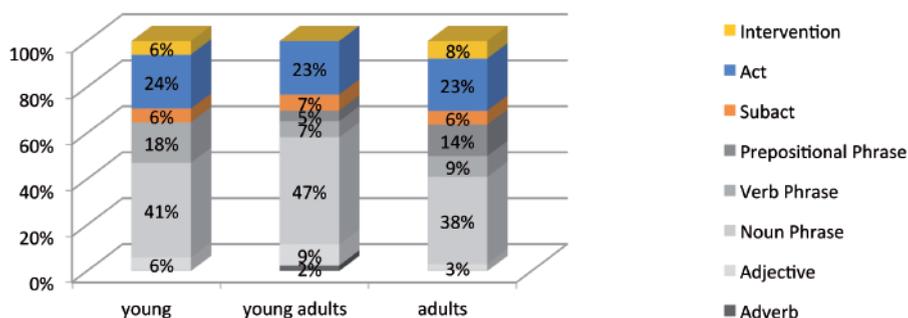
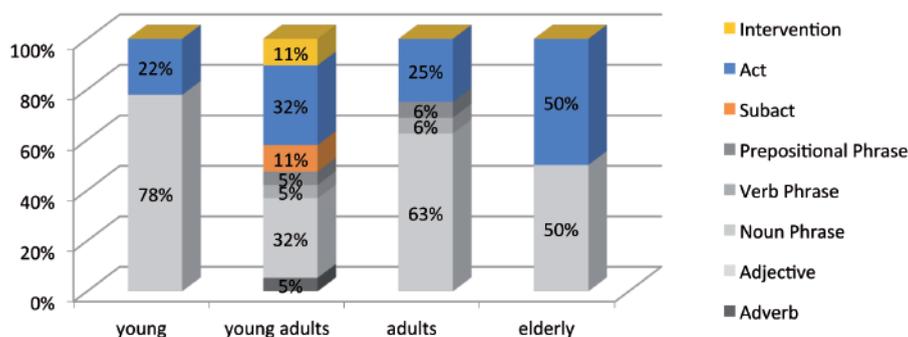


Figure 4.67 - Deictic strategies and scope (C2010)



Speakers who have more consistently dropped the use of the strategy are also those who show fewer idiosyncrasies in individual conduct in relation to the contexts of use of markers and more homogenous patterns in the use of markers in relation to their scope.

## Summary

Deictic strategies are retreating in both apparent and real time. Also elderly speakers today have a low frequency of use of these strategies. This is an indication that speakers may change their function-form configurations and, consequently, their repertoire of pragmatic strategies throughout their lives. The analysis of structural embedding has also shed light on the fact that the more a variant is in retreat, the less variety of contexts it is used in, and the less idiosyncratic the behaviour of speakers tends to be.

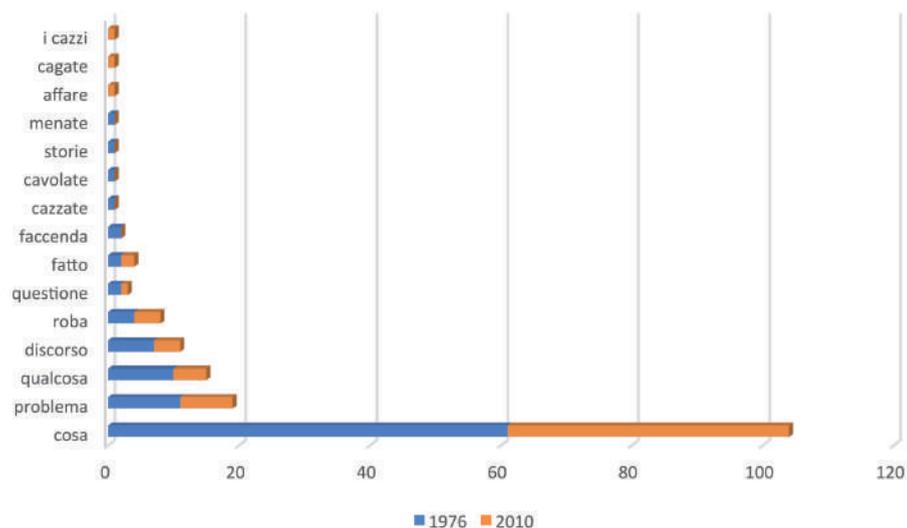
### 4.5. General nouns

As is implicit in the description of the strategies above, general nouns represent formal elements that speakers use in combination with other strategies (for instance with general extenders).

Their occurrences in the corpora include more pragmaticalized forms (such as *cosa/o* ‘thing’, *roba* ‘stuff’, and *questione* ‘matter’), other general nouns (*problema* ‘problem’, *fatto* ‘fact/event’, *discorso* ‘dialogue/discussion’, *faccenda* ‘matter’, *affare* ‘business’), and sociolinguistically connotated forms (*menate* ‘harangue’, *cazzi* ‘crap’, *cagate* ‘shit’, *cazzate* ‘bullshit’).

The repertoires of different forms, with their normalized frequencies and distributions in the corpora, are given in Figure 4.68.

Figure 4.68 - General nouns in C1976 and C2010, p/10000



The most frequent general noun in both corpora is *cosa/e* ‘thing(s)’ which is also the most pragmaticalized form in the language (Ghezzi & Aguiar, 2012). Interestingly, more negatively connotated words do not appear in C2010, another indication of the fact that the radio context is perceived as more formal in 2010.

The pragmatic functions performed by this class of nouns can be ascribed to four main groups which imply the use of a general noun (most frequently *cosa*, and less frequently *roba* or *questione*) as a place-holder, an approximation device, a general extender, or a discourse marker.

General nouns employed as place-holders serve as heads of noun phrases, in which they function as conceptual place-holders that temporarily replace a delayed referent/constituent for word retrieval problems (Andersen, 2010: 38). In such contexts the noun participates in the syntactic structure of the unfolding utterance and is used as a referential expression which focuses the interlocutor’s attention on a particular entity. As Hayashi & Yoon (2006: 22) note, “the speaker invites the hearer to share a common focus of attention on the subsequent activity (i.e. the activity of specifying the referent). It creates a prospective link and focuses the hearer’s attention on it. It therefore organizes the speaker’s as well as the hearer’s conduct in the ensuing course of interaction, including the hearer’s co-participation in the search for the missing word”.

Thus, general nouns have a pragmatic ‘pointing’ function which cataphorically draws the interlocutor’s attention to the referent as is the case of *problemi* in (119) or *dover fare un lavoro in cui sei costretta a fare l’amore* in (120).

(119) ANT così↓ un sacco di **co:se**↑ un sacco di **problemi**↑ (15\_25\_d\_d\_198001)  
 ‘So, a lot of **things**, a lot of problems’

(120) PREMICH ma questo **fatto di**↑ eh: **dover far- fare un lavoro in cui sei costretta a fare l’amore**↓ pensi che ti abbia↑ eh: condizionato↑ (15\_25\_d\_d\_198001)  
 ‘But **this fact of having to do a job where you are forced to make love** do you think it has influenced you?’

The place-holder can also be employed with social cohesive functions to anaphorically refer to a preceding element, as in (121).<sup>21</sup>

(121) <un arrivista / **un coso**> // (CORifamcv22)  
 ‘a careerist, **a thing**’

21. This function, however, is not attested in the corpus and the place-holding function itself, contrary to expectations, is not very frequent.

By using a general noun the speakers fill the grammatical slot of a word – for which a referent or means of expression has not yet come to mind – with a cataphoric element. The speakers create a sense of syntactic closure while leaving the semantic content of the slot unfilled, thus indicating the possibility that more is to come; this would enable them to potentially maintain the floor in order to complete the thought when the appropriate information or expression has come to mind.

Such a pragmatic function of general nouns displays the impact of syntax on interactional pressure, since place-holders are forms that speakers use when retrieval becomes difficult and delays the progressivity of turn (cf. also Schegloff, 1979). Similarly, general nouns can be used by speakers to strategically imply an anaphoric vague reference with the aim of inviting the interlocutor to collaborating in the co-construction of interaction or to maintaining an informal atmosphere, as in (121) above.

Place-holders therefore provide a schema that guides the hearer, through general nouns with non-specific readings, and signal that the utterance is in need of pragmatic enrichment (i.e. the hearer should process the following string of text to find a more precise referent in order to be optimally relevant, cf. Sperber & Wilson, 1995; Andersen, 2010).

However, in the corpora general nouns are more frequently and more typically employed as approximation devices. This means that their use does not imply a later substitution, but suggests an approximate nomination which the speaker considers sufficient at the moment of communication, as is the case of examples (122) and (123) below.

(122) PRESIL eh che abbiamo↓ appunto↓ incontrato in queste- abbiamo abbiamo visto in questi questi giovani (.) che sono radunati a Bari↑ di un impegno↑ per cambiare **un po' le cose**↓ ecco↓ (.) diciamolo con una formula un po'generale↓ mi rendo conto↑(15-25\_s\_u\_01211001)

'Ehm, that we have indeed met-, in these-, we have seen in these young people who gathered in Bari a commitment to change **things a bit**, here. Let's say it in a somewhat general formula, I realise (that)'

(123) ANT <<laughing> e allora> è un problema. devi stare attenta su quello↓ devi stare attenta su: come ti comporti↓ (.) °h eh: dipende da che uomo trovi↓ dipende da PERCHÈ lo trovi↓ dipende: (-) da un mucchio di **cose**↓ insomma. (15\_25\_d\_d\_198001)

'And then, it's a problem. You have to be careful about that, you have to be careful about how you behave, it depends on which man you find, it depends on why you find him, it depends on **a lot of things**, in short'

In such uses they convey no referential content but invite the listener to infer a referent. Expressions can invite the hearer to infer a referent in

context or in the co-text. In the former case, the speaker may not know the appropriate and more precise name or may not want to use one, as a strategy of social inclusion, as in (122) where *cose* can mean generally ‘the world’; in the latter case, the speaker may use the general noun to create cohesion in the text, as in (123) where *cose* closes a list of reasons to be careful on the choice of a mate. In this second function, as already mentioned for deictic strategies, the approximation use overlaps with intensional anaphoric functions.

In these contexts the nouns partially lose their deictic force and speakers may use them not because of ignorance of the correct word, but because they may employ the noun strategically as a dummy noun, for adjective support, as in (124), as an equivalent to an indefinite pronoun, as in (125), or as a propositional concept, as in (126).

- (124) PREAN bah↓ cerchiamo di capire (.) se siamo di fronte ad una **cosa** nuova↓ oppure no. (26\_45\_s\_u\_12161001)  
 ‘Bah, let us try to understand whether we are dealing with **something** new or not’
- (125) ANT comunque↑ sessualmente↑ diciamo che ti insegna **delle cose**↓ al limite↓ (-) cioè impari a essere più: più donna:↑ (-- ) ANCHE non sessualmente. cioè↓ in tanti sensi↓ impari ad essere più r-realista↑ donna:↑ e: tutto questo↓ insomma. (15\_25\_d\_d\_198001)  
 ‘However, sexually, let’s say that it teaches you **things**, to the limit. I mean, you learn to be more: more of a woman, not just sexually. I mean, in many senses, you learn to be more of a realist, woman, and all that, in short’
- (126) SAL °h impostarlo così↓ (.) **il discorso**↓ (.) sarà un discorso vecchio↑ ma dire↓ (-) noi non c’entriamo con questo↓ insomma↓ (15\_25\_d\_u\_01087805)  
 ‘Set it like this, **the discourse**, it will be an old discourse, but saying: we have nothing to do with this, in short’

General nouns are also frequently employed in general extenders, where they signal that the noun phrase refers to a conceptually and semantically open set or to a vague class of referents as in the case of (127) below.

- (127) STE ecco↓ voglio dire↑ oppure↑ annozero↑ ballarò↑ <<all>**quelle cose lì**> (x x) fine. il mio- la mia televisione che guardo è questa qua. (46\_65\_s\_u\_11051002)  
 ‘There, I mean, or Annozero, Ballarò, **those things there**, stop. My- my television that I watch is this one’

The same expressions can be used as approximation devices or in general extenders, but the forms which appear in general extenders show

more morphosyntactic idiosyncrasies in comparison with their uses as approximation devices; for instance general extenders may include constructions like *e/o cose così* ‘and/or things like these’, *(e/o) quelle cose lì* ‘(and/or) those things there’, *(e/o) cose di questo genere* ‘and/or things of this kind’, and *e robe così* ‘and stuff like this’ (cf. § 4.2.1).

Finally, general nouns can also be used as discourse markers to signal the beginning of a turn or of a speech act. On a functional level the structure in which the general noun is embedded signals that the speaker is going to take the floor in conversation, as in the case of (128).

(128) GAS no↓ è che: (.) **sai cosa**↑ è che zara↑ son trenta gradi↓ qua siamo ancora a sedici gradi↓ non sono ancora del tutto abituato.= (15\_25\_03021001m)  
‘No. (It) is that, **you know what**, (it) is that Zara, it’s thirty degrees, here it’s still sixteen degrees, I’m not quite used to it yet’

In these contexts general nouns are used as presentational strategies which pragmatically guide the hearer to focus on the enunciation level. They therefore function as “utterance-launchers” (Biber *et alii*, 1999: 1073), i.e. as discourse-structuring devices that focus the interlocutor’s attention on the upcoming utterance.

As regards the quantitative frequencies of general nouns in the two corpora (Figures 4.69 and 4.70), regardless of their ages, speakers most frequently use general nouns as conceptual or textual approximators. This is in line with the use of these forms in face-to-face conversations (see Ghezzi & Aguiar, 2012).

As for intergenerational patterns in the use of general nouns, results are not consistent in the two corpora. Indeed, in C1976 general nouns are more common as approximators in young adults, while in C2010 they appear more often in younger speakers. In this regard, the high frequency of use of general nouns in older speakers is interesting to note, if compared with other types of strategies, which tend to be reduced in frequency. It is also relevant to note the increase of use of the discourse-marking function in 2010 youth speech (11/10,000).

The real-time comparison of the two corpora shows that while types of function are quite stable and similarly represented over time, the same is not true for the overall quantitative distribution of general nouns; in particular speakers in 2010 have reduced their overall frequency of use.

Figure 4.69 - General nouns and functions in C1976, p/10000

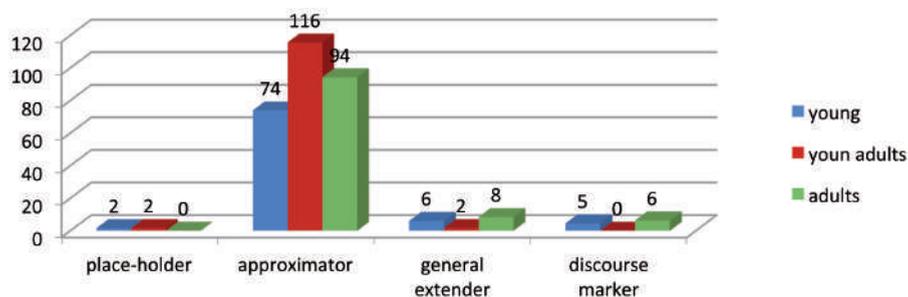
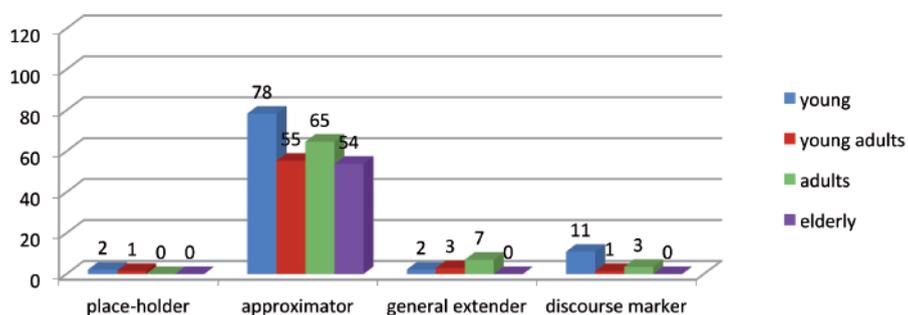


Figure 4.70 - General nouns and functions in C2010, p/10000



### Summary

The repertoire of general nouns, together with their frequencies of occurrence in the two corpora, represents a rather stable class of VMs. Different functions performed by the markers (i.e. place-holding, approximation, general extending, discourse-marking) are evenly represented in the two corpora and within different generations of speakers. It is remarkable that general nouns do not represent a regressing variable in older speakers in 2010 and that their discourse-marking function seems to be increasing in frequency in younger speakers today.

## 4.6. Discussion

The functions, contexts, and frequencies of use, together with the structural embedding of forms selected by speakers as VMs, show that different

generations do not drastically diverge in quantitative terms in relation to the strategies employed.

Taking into consideration the overall distribution of the different types of strategies that speakers use (i.e. approximation, metadiscourse, and deictic strategies), along with general extenders and general nouns (Figure 4.71 and Figure 4.72), one notices that general nouns and general extenders represent the strategies to be less frequently employed by all speakers, regardless of age and points of reference in time. However, younger speakers in C2010 have significantly reduced their uses of general extenders, if confronted with their peers in C1976. By contrast, young adults in C2010 have reduced their uses of general nouns, if compared to the community in C1976.

Figure 4.71 - Overall distribution of different strategies (C1976), p/10000

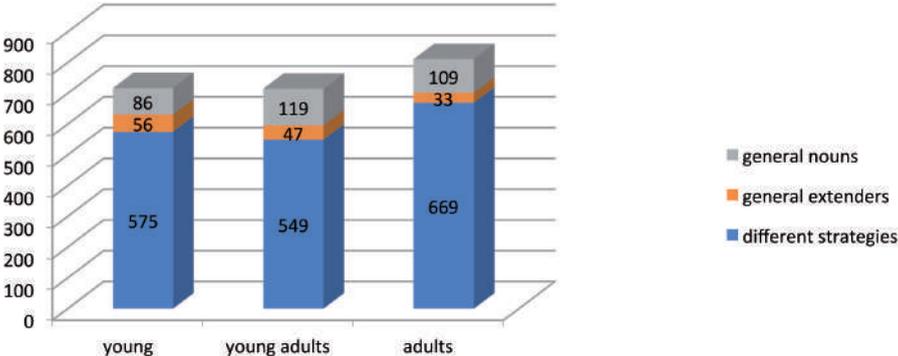
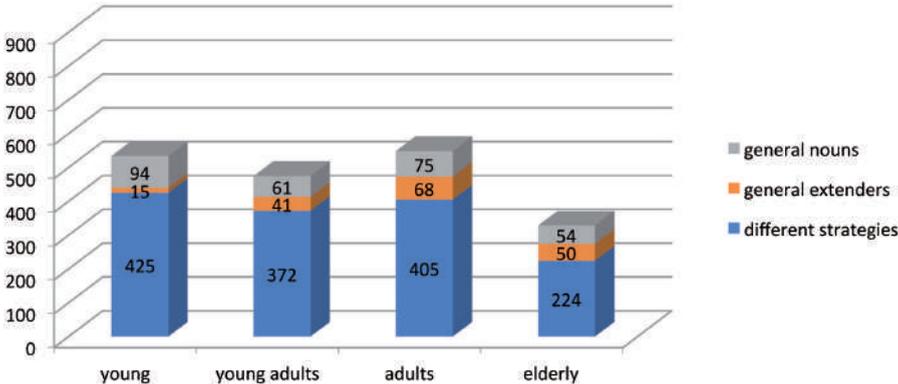


Figure 4.72 - Overall distribution of different strategies (C2010), p/10000



Two other relevant tendencies seem to emerge from the data analysis. On one hand, in terms of generational styles, the frequency of different strategies (with the exception of general nouns, and partially of general extenders) is significantly lower for older speakers in C2010. On the other hand, the whole community in C2010 uses overall a lower number of VMs than speakers in C1976.

The comparison of the frequency of forms in correlation with their function, according to the strategies identified on the basis of age cohorts, shows very interesting results (Figure 4.73 and Figure 4.74).

In terms of intergenerational variation, general patterns that emerge, in terms of discourse style, is that younger speakers do not use more VMs than the other age-groups, such as adults, and that older speakers are the age cohort that uses VMs the least.

Moreover, as regards the use of specific strategies, approximation is used consistently in both communities: younger speakers use it the most, followed by adults, younger adults, and elderly speakers (only in 2010). Along similar lines, reference to deixis is characterised by an inverse trend as it increases with age, with the exception of the elderly speakers in 2010. However, while the overall frequency of approximation is rather stable, the same is not true for deictic reference which is characterised by a neat decline in frequency, with each new generation of speakers using it less frequently. It is also relevant that this decrease also concerns older speakers in 2010.

Figure 4.73 - Strategies and age cohorts of speakers (C1976), p/10000

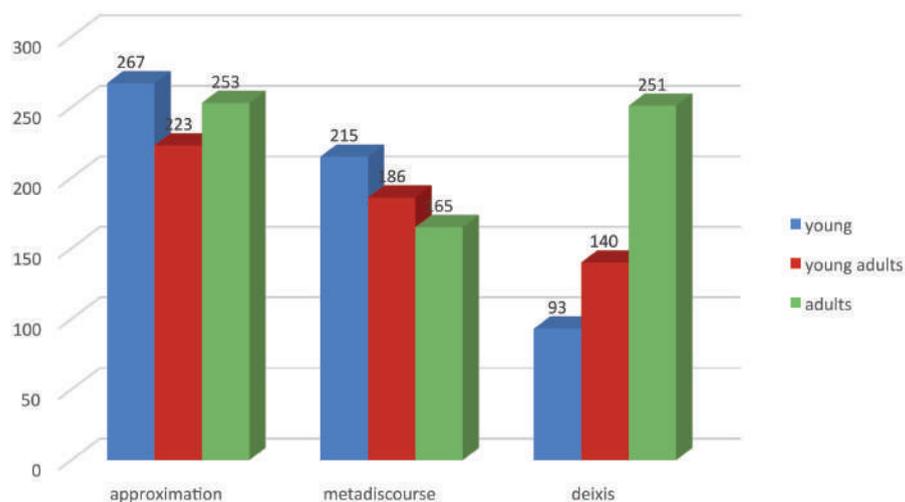
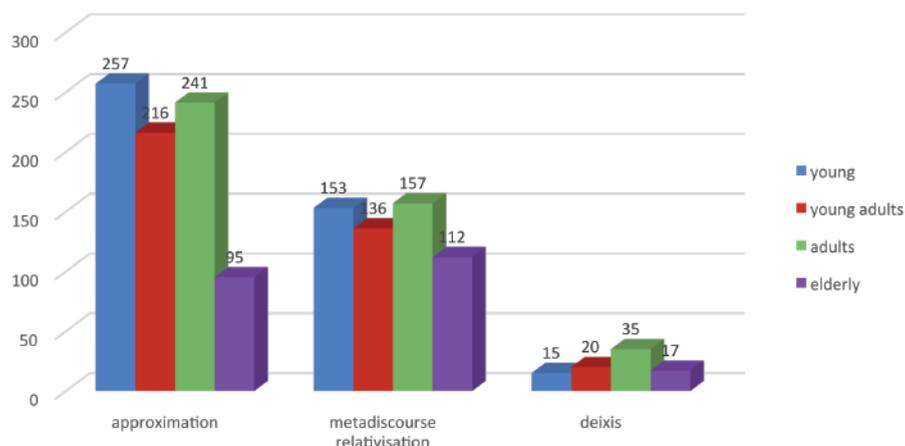


Figure 4.74 - Strategies and age cohorts of speakers (C2010), p/10000



Therefore, if in apparent time the use of deictic strategies is characterized by an age-grading pattern in the two communities considered, in real-time data its use also implies generational change as it decreases with time in a uniform manner in all age cohorts, elderly included. This finding may support the idea that if a change is ongoing, especially in relation to variables of which speakers are more socially aware, older speakers, as they age, may change their speech, to some extent, in the direction of change.

A more fine grained picture derives from considering how age-groups use different strategies. This implies considering data on how speakers use approximation vs exemplification vs addition (Figures 4.75 and 4.76) or metadiscourse relativisation vs hypothetical strategies (Figures 4.77 and 4.78).

If approximation confirms to have remained stable, exemplification seems to be used less frequently by younger speakers in C2010, if confronted with their peers in C1976; by contrast the addition strategy seems to be more frequent in C2010, especially among young adults and younger speakers.

Instead, the use of metadiscourse relativisation seems more stable across age cohorts, if confronted with approximation and deixis (cf. Figures 4.77 and 4.78).

On a general level, from the data analysis emerges that the use of VMs is characterized in terms of discourse styles that can be associ-

ated with age of speakers. For instance approximation is used more by younger speakers and adults, less by young adults, while a deictic reference increases with age. Older speakers in general show a significantly lower frequency of use of VMs, if compared with all other age cohorts.

The use of VMs is also characterised in terms of generational change as there is a general reduction of these forms in the community of C2010 and this is particularly marked for strategies associated with deictic reference.

Figure 4.75 - Approximation strategies (C1976), p/1000

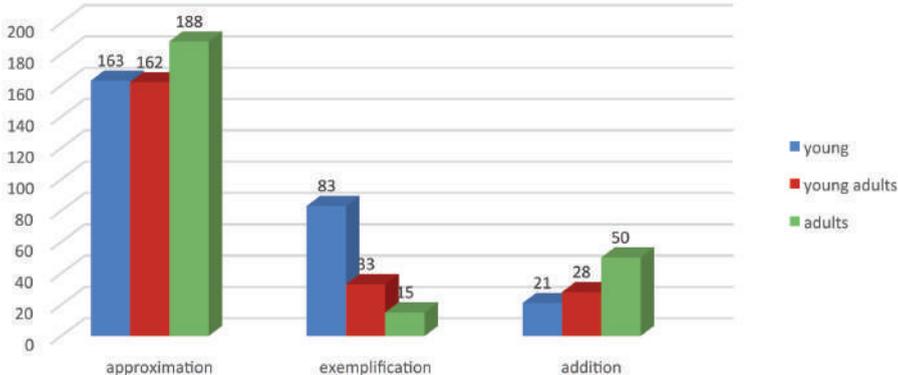


Figure 4.76 - Approximation strategies (C 2010), p/1000

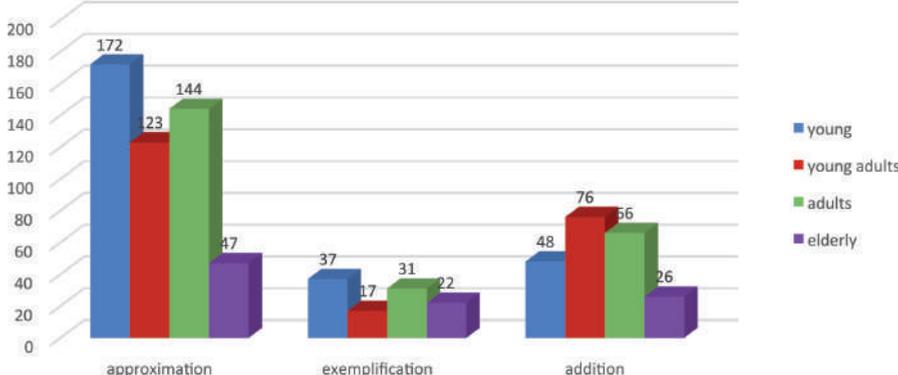


Figure 4.77 - Metadiscourse strategies (C1976), p/1000

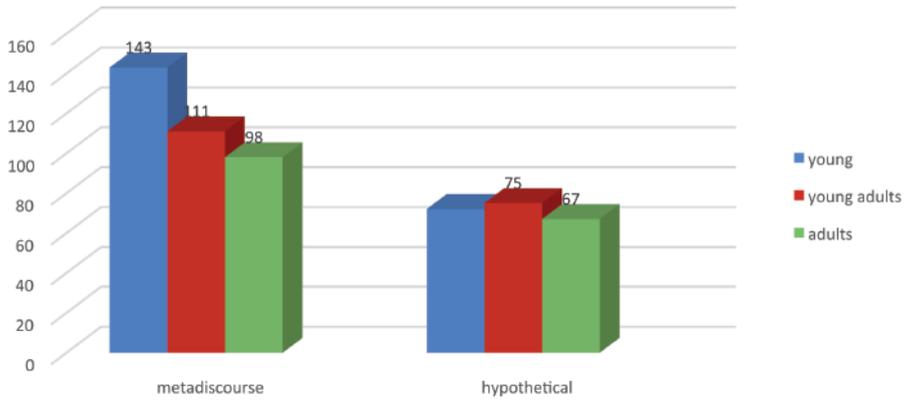
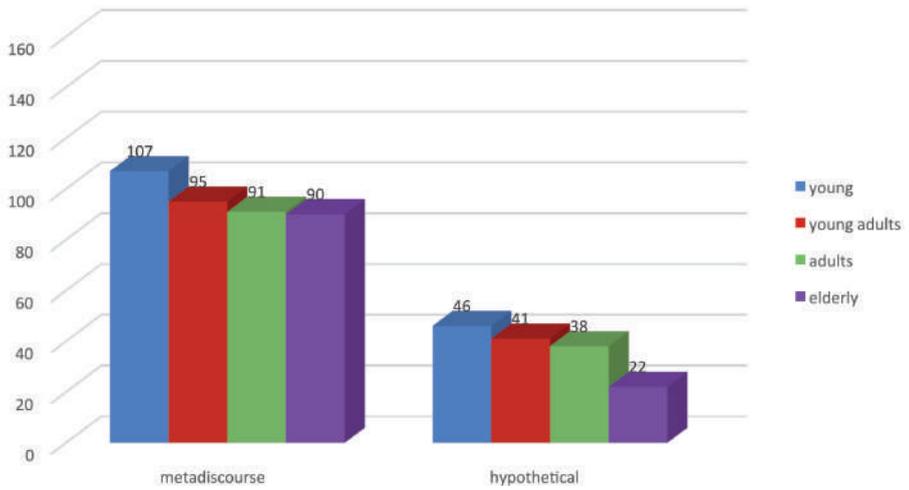


Figure 4.78 - Metadiscourse strategies (C 2010), p/1000



## 5. Case studies

### 5.1. Vagueness markers from discourse and pragmatic markers

As it emerged from the discussion in Chapter 4, speakers can employ the same forms to perform different functions. For instance, it has been discussed how general nouns often also operate within general extenders or how forms like *diciamo* ‘let us say’, which index the enunciation level, can also operate with an exemplification function.

This polyfunctionality becomes particularly evident for forms which have a higher degree of pragmaticalization and which operate as discourse and/or pragmatic markers. As mentioned in Chapter 1, it is relevant to stress that no discourse or pragmatic markers are inherently VMs, but they can serve this function in specific contexts; however, their pervasive nature in natural data represents a precious cue for understanding how language works and how intended meaning is recognized (Bazzanella, 2006: 449).

Both discourse and pragmatic markers, whose functional behaviour and formal properties have been the subject of extensive studies<sup>1</sup>, show some common properties. These units do not affect the truth conditions of an utterance, but they contribute to its ‘pragmatic’ meaning. Their meaning is compositional and refers to something outside the utterance which can be an element of the host utterance, a contextual element, a situational factor (Bazzanella, 2006: 449).

The ‘non-syntactic’ nature of these functional units has two consequences. In the first place, from a semasiological point of view, their nature can explain the formal heterogeneity of the members of this open class,

1. Cf. for instance Van Olmen & Šinkūniene (2021), Ranger (2018), Pons Bordería & Loureda Lamas (2018), Fedriani & Sansò (2017), Ghezzi & Molinelli (2014), among more recent overviews.

which gathers forms with non-predefined morphological and syntactic features that developed through recategorization processes. For VMs in particular, these include adverbs (e.g. *cioè* ‘that is’), noun phrases (e.g. *tipo* ‘type’), verb phrases (e.g. *diciamo* ‘let us say’), prepositional phrases (e.g. *per esempio* ‘for example’), performative expressions (e.g. *dico* ‘I say’), whole clauses (e.g. *l’esempio tipico è* ‘the typical example is’), etc. (Berretta, 1984).

Secondly, their non-syntactic nature makes it possible to eliminate them from the utterance without changing its overall meaning. Similarly, different forms can paradigmatically occur in the same context, if they fulfil the same functions – even if their semantic meaning is different. In (1) both *come dire* ‘how to say’ and *tipo* ‘type’ index a difficulty in the choice of an expression (*modello imperante*), which is therefore codified as less than prototypical for that specific categorization.

- (1) però allora era **come dire tipo** un modello imperante (Vailate, 18.3.2018)  
‘It was, **how to say (it), like** a prevailing model’

Moving from these premises on the nature of discourse and pragmatic markers, it is possible to say that VMs, which are derived from discourse and pragmatic markers, may represent for speakers a flexible and efficient array of forms which may acquire different functional status, depending on their context of occurrence.

Cases in point are (a) approximating markers, such as *non so* ‘I do not know’, which function as exemplification markers, but can also be used as signals of word-finding problems, and (b) metadiscourse markers, such as *per dire* ‘to say’ and *cioè* ‘that is’, or epistemic markers, such as *magari* ‘maybe’, which can also function as exemplification markers. This has to do with the fact that most pragmatized units have a core meaning which triggers conversational implicatures, often derived through metaphorical or metonymic extension, and which makes the functions of such units highly dependent on the context of occurrence (cf. also Fischer, 2006; Mihatsch, 2010a; Waltereit, 2006, among others).

Interestingly, when discourse and pragmatic markers are used as VMs, the same form can embody different conceptual strategies at once. In other words, the same forms can be used to approximate the propositional content of an utterance, as is the case of the exemplification marker *magari* in (2), or to relativise the uttering process, as is the case of the epistemic use of *magari* in (3). Moreover, forms which enact different strategies may cluster together within the same utterance, often in the same speech act, as is the case of (4).

In such contexts, clearly identifying the main function is often a matter of subjective interpretation, and, as such, becomes a questionable process from a methodological point of view. This is evident if one compares the uses and the functions of *magari* in (2) and (3) vs its uses in (4) and (5).

- (2) MART nel senso che praticame:nte↑ ehm: quando: si decidono i tassi↓ °h non è↑ che si decidono dei tassi che stanno al di sotto↓ **magari** (.) di due punti↓ (.) del tasso di usura↓ in modo che↑ comunque↑ dai↑ (-) eh guadagni tanti soldi↓ (.) già così↓ no. (15\_25\_s\_d\_03241004)  
 ‘In the sense that, practically speaking, when the rates are decided, it is not the case that you decide rates that are below the usury rate, **maybe** of two points, so that, in any case, come on, you earn a lot of money, already like that, don’t you’
- (3) CAT io dico- (.) penso che↑ (.) eh sì↓ c’è chi: si sente come me↑ perfettamente a suo agio al telefono↑ °h eh: chi **magari**↑ (.) preferisca↑ ehm: guardarsi in faccia↓ (46\_65\_s\_d\_03011010)  
 ‘I say-, I think that, eh yes, there are those who feel like me, perfectly comfortable on the phone, (and) **maybe** (those) who prefer to look at each other’
- (4) CAT **nel senso che**↓ io quando↑ **non so**↑ **tipo**↓ voglio sentire una mia amica↑ (.) **magari** le dico↑ ci se- le le mando un un sms↑ ci sei stasera a casa↑ ti chiamo↑ h° **cose così**↓ **insomma**↓ (46\_65\_s\_d\_03011010)  
 ‘In the sense that, I when, **I don’t know, like**, I want to hear from a friend of mine, **maybe** I tell her, are you-, I send her a sms, are you at home tonight, I call you, **things like that, in short**’
- (5) BART ha una certa mentalità↓ cioè↓ fargliela cambiare è molto difficile↓ (-) **cioè**↓ **come: noi magari**↑ abbiamo: (-) **non so**↑ da farci delle autocritiche↑ non accettiamo↓ (.) **magari**↑ sono già: piccole↓ (15\_25\_d\_g\_1980\_fuga3)  
 ‘(My father) has a certain mentality, I mean, making him change (that) it is very difficult, **I mean, like us, maybe** we have, **I don’t know**, to be self-critical, we don’t accept, **maybe** (these criticism) are already small’

Beginning with these peculiarities, some scholars, who have investigated the phenomenon in relation to English, suggest that this characteristic clustering may be a by-product of a redundant priming-effect of one feature which leads to the use of another with the same or similar functions (cf. Aijmer, 2004; Overstreet, 2005). This perspective implies that since VMs are often employed when categorization or word-finding is in some respect difficult, some of their uses, and their clustering, would grant the speaker more time for online processing.

Others show that co-occurrences create new meanings and functions which together are different from the meanings and functions of these

features in isolation.<sup>2</sup> This second perspective hints to the fact that the isolated use of a single feature, versus a cluster of features, would indicate a lower degree of (inter)subjectification and a higher degree of epistemic commitment by the speaker.

Moving from these premises on the nature of discourse and pragmatic markers, we focus here on a series of forms used as VMs. As the data discussed in Chapter 4 have shown, the strategies employed by speakers persist over time; by contrast, the forms co-opted to encode them are susceptible to renewal, in the short run and long after the end of the critical period, as it happened for instance for deictic strategies (cf. also Bazzanella, 2006).

In the corpora under analysis here, these peculiarities are first analysed in relation to some exemplification and metadiscourse markers, which seem to have undergone a more marked reconfiguration in the two points of reference in time (§ 5.1.1 and § 5.1.2, respectively). The functional units strategically employed to express an exemplification or a metadiscourse relativization represent interesting examples for observing the dynamics of change, its gradient and gradual nature; and for interpreting the motivations that speakers may have for abandoning old forms or introducing new ones.

Secondly, the processes at work in the dynamics of use of different forms will be analysed in § 5.2 through three case studies which consider more common forms used by speakers as representatives of the three classes of strategies identified. The first case study focuses on *un po'* 'a bit' as an instance of approximation (cf. § 5.2.1), the second on the deictic use of *così* 'like this' (cf. § 5.2.2), the third on the use of *cioè* 'that is' as a metadiscourse relativisation (cf. § 5.2.3).

These case studies have been chosen because they are particularly significant both in relation to understanding how age variation, associated with the use of VMs, and pragmatic change interact with each other, and how they can be correlated with social indexicality associated with age. The first two case studies have an onomasiologic approach as they include the analysis of different classes of discourse and pragmatic markers used with an exemplification and metadiscourse functions, respectively. For each function different types of markers are considered in order to identify specific patterns of age-variation or changes in speakers preferences with time. The other three case studies have a semasiological approach, as they take into consideration specific forms (i.e. *un po'* 'a bit', *cioè* 'that is to

2. See also Adolphs (2007) on modality clusters and politeness in English or Stubbe & Holmes (1995) on the clustering of *you know* with other discourse features.

say’, and *così* ‘so’), describe the functions they have developed, and correlate them with age-based social stratification and with changes of preferences of speakers in time. VMs operate at a high level of social awareness and can acquire levels of third-order indexicality which may play a role in their rapid rise or decline.

### 5.1.1. *Exemplification markers*

Exemplification is a universal strategy, employed in various contexts, through which speakers build and communicate their thought or develop it (Manzotti, 1998: 107). The strategy implies the generalization of particular cases, the example(s), to conceptually represent a wider category; it also entails an inference of ‘non-prototypicality’ and discrepancy between the linguistic choice of the speaker to represent a concept and the concept itself (cf. also § 1.5 and § 4.2.2).

It is evident how exemplification and categorisation are extremely interconnected and very telling as to how people create and communicate conceptual categories (Barotto 2021: 1). In the discussion of data in § 4.2.2, it emerged clearly how exemplification can be achieved in different ways also using non-dedicated strategies (e.g. *magari* ‘maybe’). As such it is a widespread device used by speakers whenever they need to build and communicate a new form of thought (Barotto, 2021: 5).

Exemplification markers, like the prototypical *per esempio* ‘for example’, have been traditionally described as specific types of discourse markers, i.e. as reformulation markers together with paraphrase and correction markers as *cioè* ‘that is’ (Bazzanella, 1995). As discussed in § 1.5 and § 4.2.2, the same forms can also operate as hedging strategies in specific contexts, as their function is to open up a “paradigm and show that other neighbouring expressions would be equally possible” (Mihatsch, 2010a: 108). Therefore, marking a linguistic element as an example can allow speakers to convey approximation and eventually a hedging of the whole speech act by indexing a discrepancy between the conventional meaning of the expression and its meaning in a concrete utterance (Mihatsch, 2010a: 107).

The pragmatic function of exemplification markers stresses the fact that the elements that follow are selected from a larger set of alternatives.

- (6) SIL ascolta↓ (-) allora↓ **la storia tipo gatto nero**↑ (.) **eccetera eccetera**↓  
 (26\_45\_s\_u\_10141005)  
 ‘Listen, then the story **like the black cat etcetera etcetera**’

In (6) the speaker's arbitrary choice seems justified, because the external realization *gatto nero* is only partly consistent with the concepts the speaker has in mind and wishes to communicate (cf. Andersen, 2001). This would also explain co-occurrence with the general extender *eccetera* in the same example. Metapragmatically, the hearer is instructed to construct an *ad hoc* concept, using information that is stored in the encyclopaedic entry for *gatto nero* (perhaps something in the direction of bad omens as 'elements which people should be afraid of'), for which *gatto nero* would be an eligible candidate, since our general knowledge of the expression includes the information that it could be a sign of bad luck.

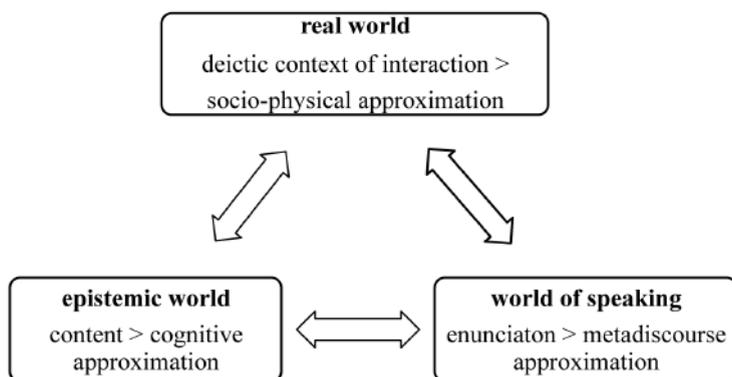
Proceeding from these observations on the processes at work in exemplification, it is evident that forms that metadiscoursively underline the exemplary value of a lexical choice, as well as its degree of preference, can be strategically employed by speakers in exemplifications (cf. Mihatsch, 2010a: 51). This is exemplified in (7)-(9). In (7) *cioè* 'that is' introduces examples of things you do with a mobile phone, while the use of *magari* 'maybe' in (8) introduces an example of an excessively late hour at which the working day ends. This is prototypically represented in the question in (9), in which the presenter invites the caller to 'explain' his thought through examples.

- (7) MEN °h eh al telefono ci sta↓(.) **cioé**↓ messaggi↑ telefono↑ così↓  
(46-65\_s\_u\_03011001)  
'(she) is on the telephone (a lot), **I mean**, messages, phone, so'
- (8) MAS e a volte gli tocca mangiare pure il panino alla sera↑ perchè finiscono **magari** alle dieci (.) in ufficio↑ (.) (26\_45\_s\_u\_10181004)  
'And sometimes he even has to eat a sandwich in the evening, because they finish **maybe** at ten o'clock in the office'
- (9) PREAND **cioè**↑ **per esempio**↓ quale potrebbe essere. (15\_25\_d\_u\_1980\_fuga1)  
'**That is, for example**, what would that be?'

As with more prototypical exemplification markers such as *per esempio* 'for example' or *tipo* 'type', the use of *cioè* in (7) also indicates the exemplary value of the following examples (*messaggi, telefono* through which the speaker describes how her daughter uses a mobile phone); however, unlike more prototypical exemplification strategies described so far, it does so by strategically focusing on the metalinguistic level instead of the conceptual level. Exemplification, in this case, arises as a conversational implicature which operates between the non-literal linguistic resemblance and the conceptual discrepancy between the intended concept and the codified concepts.

A possible explanation to this overlapping is given by Sweetser (1990) in terms of the cognitive strategies employed. Sweetser, analysing semantic change, underlines how polysemy patterns that are based on metaphorical connections between semantic fields are quite common in Indo-European languages. What seems particularly relevant here are common patterns of polysemy based on metaphorical relations (cf. Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1 - Polysemies based on metaphorical relations



These polysemies seem particularly relevant for explaining and connecting the apparently diverse formal means used for expressing tentative categorization, as with *tipo* 'type' (a taxonomic noun) and *diciamo* 'let us say' (a verb). As discussed in § 1.5, different types of metaphoric and metonymic extensions can be at work. If speakers can approximate a number and/or a quantity in the real world (e.g. *un po' di persone* 'some people' / *dieci venti persone* 'ten twenty people'), with the same expression they can also approximate on a conceptual level (e.g. *c'era un po'/ tipo una comunità* 'there was a bit/kind of a community'), or else may move to another level and metadiscursively approximate a term, thus also implicating a conceptual approximation (*c'era diciamo una comunità* 'there was let us say a community').

The analysis of the repertoire of forms and their structural embedding in different generations of speakers, as well as in different communities over time, thus offers an insight into the favoured mechanisms employed by different groups of speakers, and the motivations behind rapid changes in the preferred patterns for specific forms or contexts of use.

Let us now turn to the data analysis. For exemplification strategies, the comparison in apparent time in C1976 (Figures 5.2 - 5.4) shows that speakers belonging to different age cohorts are characterized by different distributions of types and frequencies of more pragmaticalized forms. For younger speakers, the most commonly employed forms are *non so* ‘I don’t know’ and *cioè* ‘that is’, for young adults *non so* and *per esempio* ‘for example’, and for adults *non so* and *cioè*.

Figure 5.2 - Exemplification strategies. Forms in young speakers (C1976), p/10000

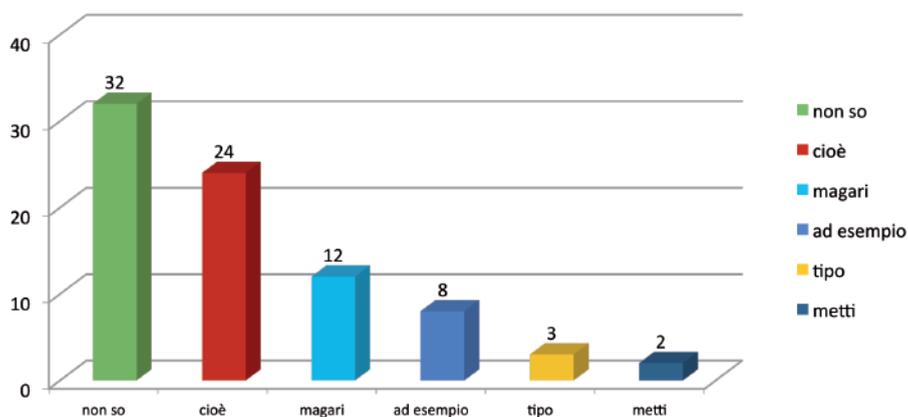


Figure 5.3 - Exemplification strategies. Forms in young adult speakers (C1976), p/10000

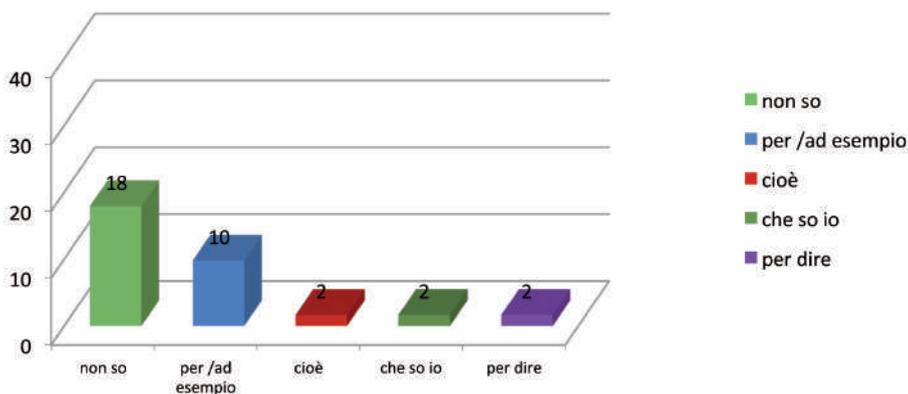
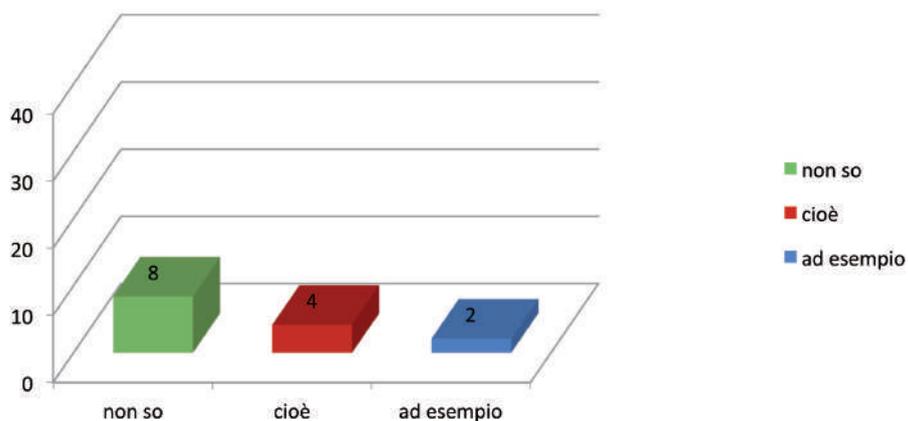


Figure 5.4 - Exemplification strategies. Forms in adult speakers (C1976), p/10000



Apparent-time data in C2010 (Figures 5.5 - 5.8) show a similar picture, with each generation characterized by a different clustering of forms. The most common forms include *tipo* ‘type’ and *magari* ‘maybe’ for younger speakers, *per esempio* ‘for example’ and *magari* for young adults, *magari*, *per esempio*, and *cioè* ‘that is’ for adults, and *per esempio* ‘for example’ and *non so* ‘I don’t know’ for elderly speakers.

Figure 5.5 - Exemplification strategies. Forms in younger speakers (C2010), p/10000

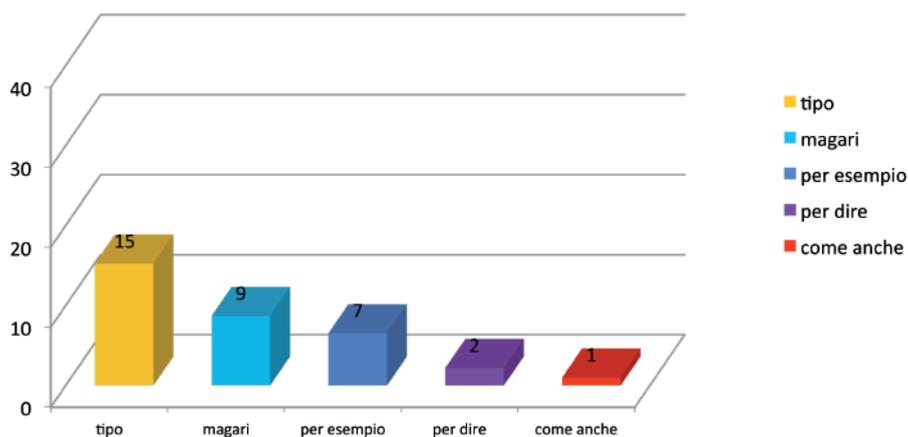


Figure 5.6 - Exemplification strategies. Forms in young adult speakers (C2010), p/10000

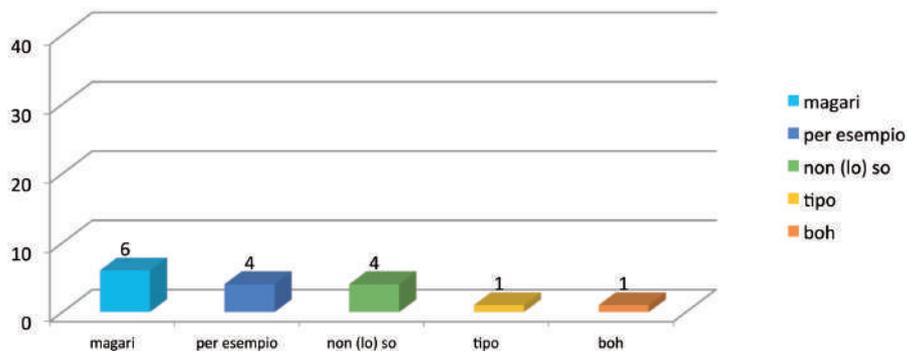


Figure 5.7 - Exemplification strategies. Forms in adults speakers (C2010), p/10000

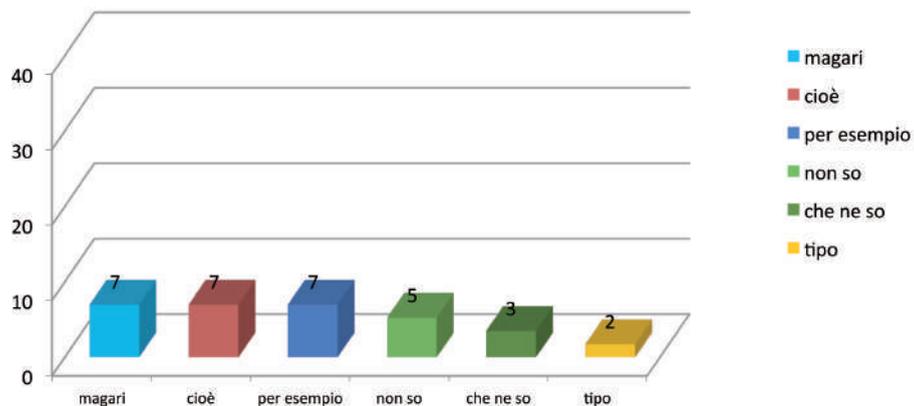
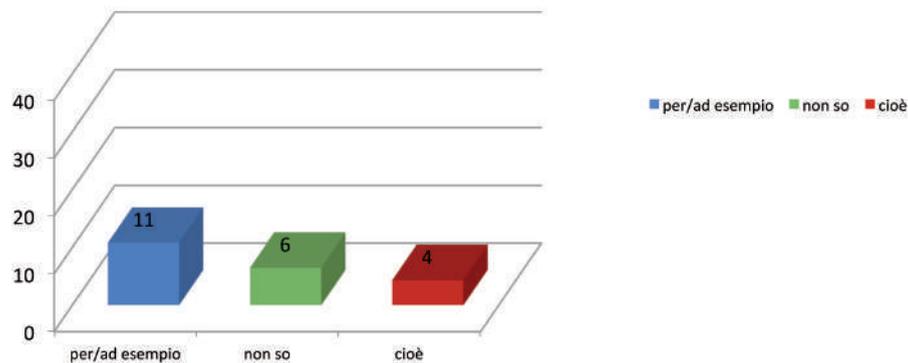


Figure 5.8 - Exemplification strategies. Forms in elderly speakers (C2010), p/10000



The comparison between the two communities of speakers over time shows that on one hand the introduction of innovations (e.g. the use of *magari*) by the younger generation in C1976 is maintained also in the community in 2010 not only by adults, but also by the younger age-cohorts. Instead the same form is absent in older speakers whose behaviour is rather conservative as they have maintained their repertoire of exemplification markers of their earlier years (i.e. *non so*, *cioè*, *ad esempio*). Furthermore, the younger generation in C2010, like the younger generation in C1976, is at the fare front of change as it has innovated the whole repertoire of forms used as exemplification markers (with the only exception of *magari*) and has introduced a new incipient form (*tipo* ‘type’), whose frequency exceeds that of all others.

Considering the structural embedding of these forms also reveals some interesting patterns. Younger speakers (Figure 5.9) not only use the highest number of different markers, but they employ these markers more creatively in the widest variety of contexts (in the left periphery of phrases, subacts, and acts). Young adults (Figure 5.10) and adults (Figure 5.11) instead, not only share a less varied repertoire of forms, but these forms also appear more consistently in the same contexts, as they seem to specialize in specific structural contexts.

The data in C2010 show a different picture, although speakers still employ different forms with characteristic generational styles. Younger speakers (Figure 5.12) have a repertoire characterized by a form (*tipo*) which is more frequent and more versatile than others, since it is used in the largest number of contexts with the most variable scope, i.e. before phrases, but also in the left periphery of acts and subacts. Young adults

Figure 5.9 - Exemplification strategies. Structural embedding in younger speakers (C1976), p/10000

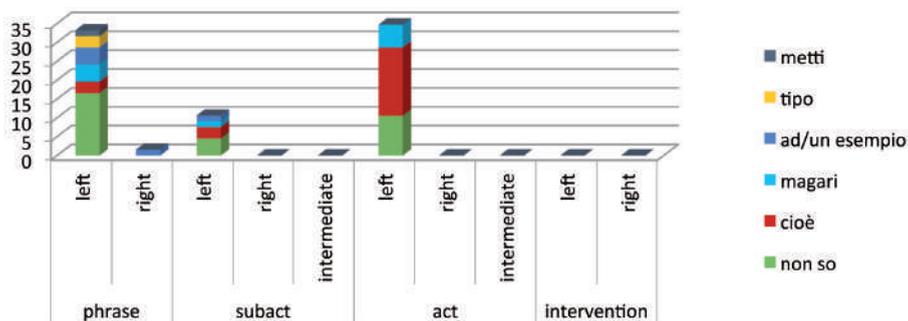


Figure 5.10 - Exemplification strategies. Structural embedding in young adult speakers (C1976), p/10000

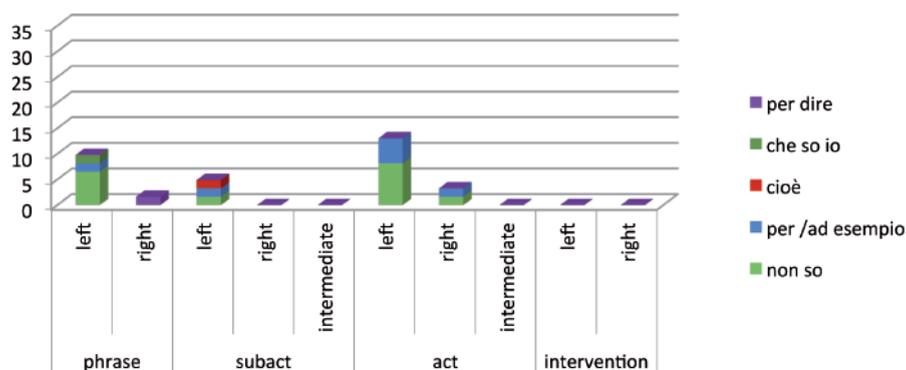
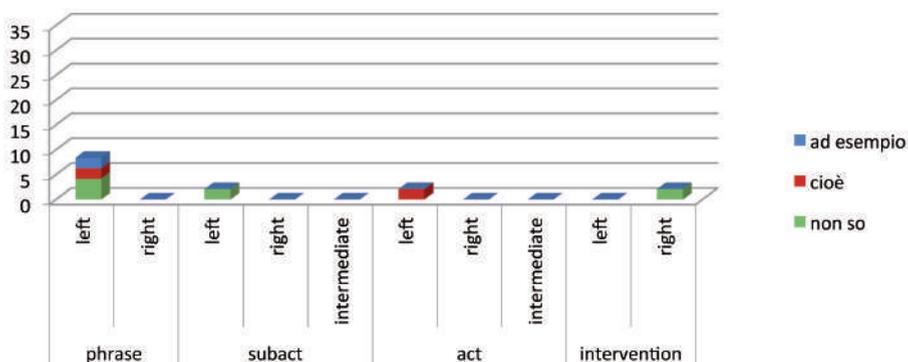


Figure 5.11 - Exemplification strategies. Structural embedding in adult speakers (C1976), p/10000



(Figure 5.13) have a wider variety of forms than younger speakers, but the forms they use seem to be more interchangeable before phrases, they are not before acts or subacts. Adult speakers (Figure 5.14) also have a rich repertoire of forms, but their characterising structural contexts of occurrence are different, a case in point being the different distribution of *tipo*; finally, elderly speakers (Figure 5.15) are characterized by a reduced repertoire of forms which also appear in a reduced number of characterising structural contexts.

Finally, the real-time comparison between the two communities shows how younger speakers in C2010 use exemplification markers less

Figure 5.12 - Exemplification strategies. Structural embedding in younger speakers (C2010), p/10000

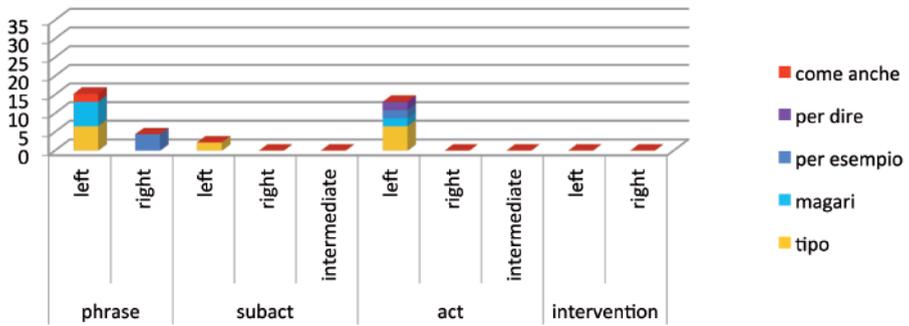


Figure 5.13 - Exemplification strategies. Structural embedding in young adult speakers (C2010), p/10000

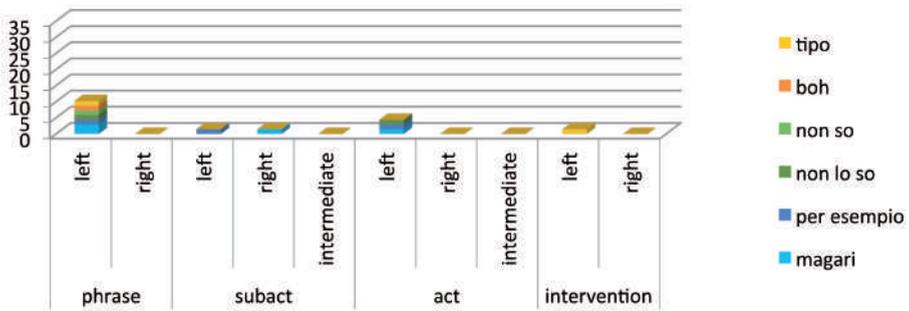


Figure 5.14 - Exemplification strategies. Structural embedding in adult speakers (C2010), p/10000

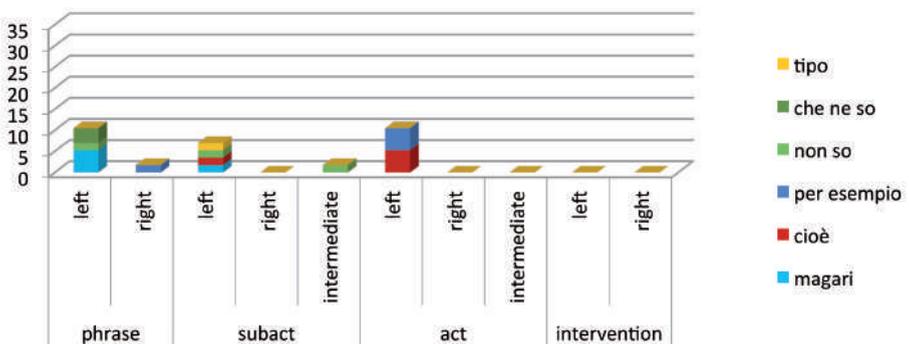
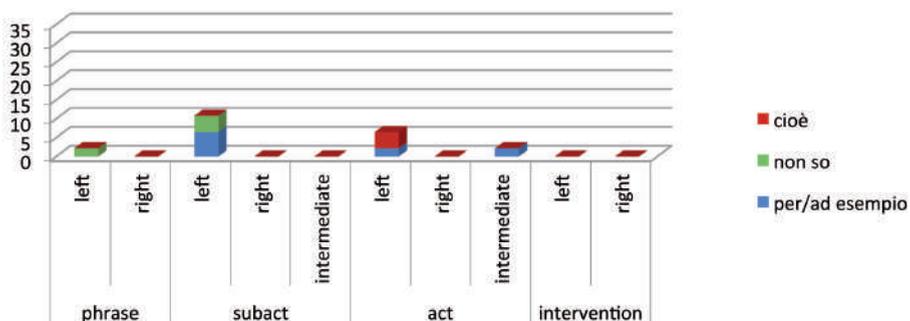


Figure 5.15 - Exemplification strategies. Structural embedding in elderly speakers (C2010), p/10000



frequently and have changed the type of conceptual categories used to codify them. As a matter of fact they have dropped the use of *cioè* (which belongs to the metadiscourse strategy) in favour of the approximation value of the taxonomic noun *tipo*. Adult speakers, on the other hand, also have incorporated into their repertoire the young speakers' innovation *tipo*.

### Summary

Exemplification strategies are universally employed by speakers to generalize particular cases and to conceptually represent a wider category. Speakers are characterized intergenerationally by the selection of different forms and by the variability of their distribution, each new generation selects specific forms which tend to be used more frequently. This characterization pertains not only to frequency of forms but also to contexts of structural embedding, since younger speakers seem to employ forms more creatively in the widest variety of contexts and with more variable scopes, while older speakers tend to narrow their repertoire of forms, reduce their frequency, and structural contexts of use.

The real-time comparison shows that young speakers in C2010 have innovated their repertoire of exemplification markers and have introduced the new form *tipo*. In general, there is a decrease in frequency of use of exemplification markers, especially in younger generations.

### 5.1.2. *Metadiscourse markers*

Metadiscourse markers are used by speakers to approximate a conceptual category, to signal a less-than-prototypical choice of a lexeme, and through these uses to hedge speech acts. The focus on the metadiscourse level, i.e. the relativization of the uttering process, is strategically used to call into question the validity of the entire statement, which is thus semantically approximated or pragmatically hedged.

The forms can operate locally, through a metalinguistic indication that signals a non-identical resemblance between the chosen expression and a potential, perhaps more appropriate, alternative (e.g. *diciamo* in 10). The same forms can also have wider scope over speech acts/interventions, where they signal that the whole act is to be interpreted less than literally (thus resulting in a semantic approximation, as in (11), or pragmatic hedging, as in (12)).

- (10) PREMA eh↓ perché e:h appunto↓ DOMANDA↓ (.) se:↑ (.) a tutti questi **diciamo**↑ (.) **canali** (.) tecnici↓ tecnologici↓ affidi (.) prevalentemente mi sembra di capire↑ la comunicazione↓ quella: veloce. (46\_65\_s\_u\_03011001)  
'Because, precisely. (I have a) question. If to all these, **let's say**, technical, technological channels you entrust, mainly, I seem to understand, communication, the fast one'
- (11) LAU eh le le: cola il naso↑ starnuta tutto il giorno↑ eh: delle infiammazioni agli occhi↑ non respira↑(.) **insomma**↓ sta male. (26\_45\_d\_d\_05067820)  
'She has a runny nose, sneezes all day, (has) inflammation of the eyes, can't breathe, **in short**, she is sick'
- (12) MAR (-) va bene↓ (senti)↓ (.) (ma) **niente**↓ (.) è che ti volevo dire proprio↑ (.) è che ti volevo dire proprio↑ (.) questo fatto↓ come è: facile↓ no↑ andare andare fuori di testa↓ per tanta per tanta gente. (15\_25\_d\_u\_02068012)  
'Fine. Listen. But **nothing**. It's that I wanted to tell you just, it's that I wanted to tell you just this fact: how it is easy, isn't it, to go off the deep end for so many people'

As already mentioned in § 1.6.2 and 5.1.1 for exemplification markers, metadiscourse markers derive their function from a metadiscourse relativization of a unit of discourse (e.g. a word, a phrase, an act, an intervention) and they operate as metapragmatic indicators of a non-identical resemblance between the linguistic coding of a concept and the corresponding concept the speaker has in mind. In the case of the metadiscourse level, speakers strategically highlight different properties of the process of codification as these markers index the level of signifier and focus on formal linguistic properties of the modified unit rather than on its conceptual – logical and encyclopaedic – properties. This is for instance the case of the

word *canali* in (10), of which the speaker is unsure; of the list of examples that the speaker approximatively summarizes with *sta male* in (11); and of the introduction of a new turn through the hedging formula *niente* in (12).

As Carston (1996: 320) suggests, the function of metadiscourse markers can be considered as primarily subjective and can be said to be “echoic”. In other words, the material in the scope of the operator, or some of it at least, is echoically used, i.e. it reports what someone else has said or thought and expresses an attitude to it. When this happens in an utterance “there is a range of properties in addition to semantic or conceptual content that might be the target of the echo: linguistic factors such as phonetic, grammatical or lexical properties, aspects of dialect, register or style, and paralinguistic features such as tone of voice, pitch or other gestures, audible or visible”.

This conversational implicature is particularly evident when markers operate locally over phrases. In such contexts the crucial element is the fact that concepts have a lexical entry which “contains information about the natural-language lexical item used to express it” and “information about its syntactic category membership and co-occurrence possibilities, phonological structure, and so on” (Sperber & Wilson, 1995: 90). Although not explicitly pointed out in this quotation, information about style, register, and the sociolinguistic properties of expressions is also stored in the lexical entries of concepts.

The markers may thus signal that the expression selected may not be the most appropriate or efficient, and also that it does not fit readily into the linguistic repertoire of the speaker, i.e. that the speaker feels a minor discomfort in using it. This is for instance the case of *diciamo così* in (13), of *chiamiamola pure* in (14), *come dire* and *se mi permetti il termine* in (15), *come possiamo dire* and *cioè* in (16), *diciamo* in (17), and *insomma* in (18).

- (13) PREBART e:cco↓ dovrebbe CERIMONIARE un po' meno↓ [**diciamo così**].  
(15\_25\_d\_d\_04248001)  
'Now, he should cerimonize a little less, **let us say so**'
- (14) PREBA (.) nel senso che (.) in questa (.) NORMALITÀ↑ **chiamiamola pure normalità**↓ fatta di morti↓ di uccisioni↓ di di di di di battaglie↑ armate politiche↑ di fatti di cronaca↑ (26-45\_d\_u\_01297903)  
'In the sense that in this normality, **let's call it normality**, made up of deaths, of killings, of battles, of political armies, of news events'
- (15) ORN la gente è assolutamente un po':↑ (.) °**h eh mhm come dire**↓ quasi↑ (.) **se mi permetti il termine**↑ ANESTETIZZATA da tutta questa situazione.  
(46\_65\_s\_d\_06101004)  
'People are absolutely a bit, mhm, **how to say**, almost, **if you allow me the term**, anesthetized by this whole situation'

- (16) SIL c'è <<acc> **come possiamo dire**> cioè↓ tutta così↓ quella carica del diciottenne↓ no↑ (46\_65\_d\_d\_01087807)  
 'There is, **how can we say, I mean**, all so, that charge of the 18-year-old, right'
- (17) EDO (-) queste due persone↑ (-) lo confermo↑ sono due elementi (.) di SPICCO↑ uno↑ (.) **diciamo**↑ quello più grosso↓ l'altro↑ °h alla statale↑ (xxx) della- dell'area dell'autonomia qui di milano. (15\_25\_d\_u\_05147714)  
 'These two people, I confirm it, are two prominent elements, one, **let's say**, the larger one, the other, at the state (university), of the- of the autonomy area here in Milan'
- (18) GIA voi mi date delle notizie↑ benissimo↓ (.) cioè↓ non sto lì **insomma**↓ a smenarmela↓ è giusto non è giusto↓ non me ne frega niente se è giusto o non è giusto↓ (26-45\_d\_u\_01297903)  
 'You give me news, good. I mean, I don't stand there, **in short**, to ask me fucking questions, I don't give a damn whether it's right or not'

On the basis of this interpretation, there is a non-identical resemblance between the expressions the speakers choose and any potential alternative expression that is literal (and non-metaphorical), more suitable for the context of interaction or fully internalized in their vocabulary (cf. also Andersen, 2001).

The impact of such uses is paradigmatically exemplified by the marker *cosiddetto* 'so called'. Through the use of the marker the speakers are echoing what someone else has said, or might say. This use enables them to distance themselves from the expression chosen and to mark it off as not entirely internalized in their vocabulary. Consequently, this allows the speakers to express their attitude towards the chosen expression through a reduced "lexical commitment" (Stubbs, 1986). It is as if the speakers were saying that they do not guarantee the relevance and efficiency of the mode of expression, and that there may be alternative expressions that fit their communicative intentions just as well. Cognitive, social, and stylistic explanations may be equally relevant.

This does not mean that speakers who use metadiscourse strategies need actually 'wonder' whether the chosen expression is the right one. Speakers may be absolutely certain that the expression chosen is the most appropriate one, but nevertheless choose to qualify it through such strategies. The reason for this might be the speakers' deliberate wish to indicate non-incorporation of the term in the vocabulary, thereby avoiding sounding too confident in their language, avoiding undue assertiveness, or warning the hearer about potential stylistic inadequacy (cf. examples 13-18 above).

Hence it appears possible to use such strategies for the benefit of the interlocutor, and for interactional, rather than subjective, purposes. In other words, an interactional (side-)effect of such uses may be to increase politeness and/or solidarity between speakers, suggesting that ‘this is the way other people talk, and not really how you and I do’. This is explicitly coded in (19).

- (19) LUI io penso che: se i genitori danno più fiducia ai loro figli↑ anche i figli↓ (.) fanno meno↑ (-) cioè↓ (.) **CHIAMIAMOLE: come dicono loro↓ cavolate↓** (.) ma non sono cavolate↑ (-) cioè↓ se se io ho più fiducia in mio padre↑ e crede in me↑ (.) io non non gli non gli arriverò mai a casa: eh: cioè:↓ va be’↓ non è giusto. (15\_25\_d\_d\_1980\_fuga\_01)  
 ‘I think that if parents give more trust to their children, also the children will do less- I mean, **let’s call them as they say, nonsense**. But they are not nonsense, I mean, if I have more confidence in my father and he believes in me, I won’t ever get to him-, I mean, it’s not right’

Similar strategies can be used to refer to lexemes/phrases or to higher level units as subacts, acts or interventions. In such contexts they may have scope over the propositional content or the strength of the illocution (cf. the use of the same markers with a wider scope in 20-22).

- (20) GIA ecco↓ **ciòè↓** a questo punto no. (26-45\_d\_u\_01297903)  
 ‘Now, **I mean**, at this point, no’
- (21) EDO (-) ma↓ (.) ho visto due persone↓ (.) le quali↑ uno è un↑ **diciamo↑** uno tra gli elementi più in vista dell’autonomia↑ (15\_25\_d\_u\_05147714)  
 ‘Well, I saw two people, one of whom is one, **let’s say**, of the most prominent elements of the autonomy (movement)’
- (22) GOF (.) eh certo↓ (.) e questo: c’era una vecchia pubblicità che diceva↑ figli si nasce↓ genitori no↑(--) e quello: la- dice tutto↓ **insomma↑** secondo me. (46\_65\_s\_u\_08111007)  
 ‘Sure. And this, there was an old advertisement that said: children are born, parents are not, and that says it all, **in short**, in my opinion’

The analysis of VMs that speakers derive from more pragmaticalized markers to imply a metadiscourse relativization offers a similar picture to that given for exemplification markers (cf. § 5.1.1). The repertoire of forms and their structural embedding in different generations of speakers, as in different communities in time, is revealing in relation to both (a) the preferred cognitive mechanisms in groups of speakers and (b) the motivations behind changes in the repertoire of forms or contexts of use.

The comparison in apparent time, in C1976 (Figures 5.16-5.18), shows that speakers belonging to different age cohorts are characterized by different distributions of types and frequencies of forms. For younger speakers the most common form is represented by *cioè*, for young adults *cioè*, *insomma*, and *diciamo*, and for adults *insomma* and *diciamo*.

Apparent-time data in the 2010 corpus (Figures 5.19-5.22) show a similar picture, with each generation characterized by a different clustering of forms. The most common forms include *insomma* and *diciamo* for younger and young adult speakers, *insomma* and *come dire* for adults, and *insomma* for elderly speakers.

Figure 5.16 - Metadiscourse strategies. Forms in young speakers (C1976), p/10000

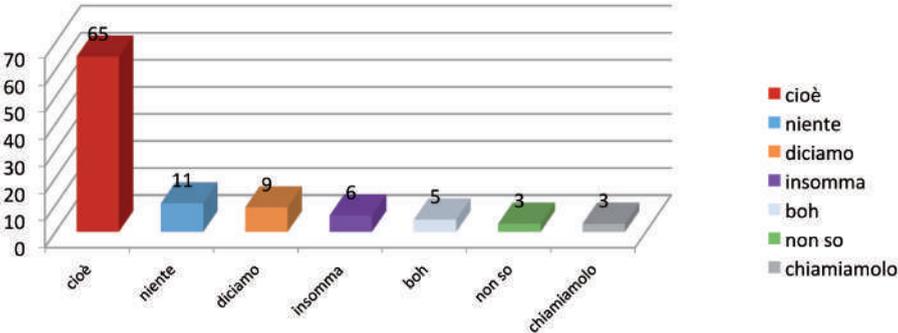


Figure 5.17 - Metadiscourse strategies. Forms in young adult speakers (C1976), p/10000

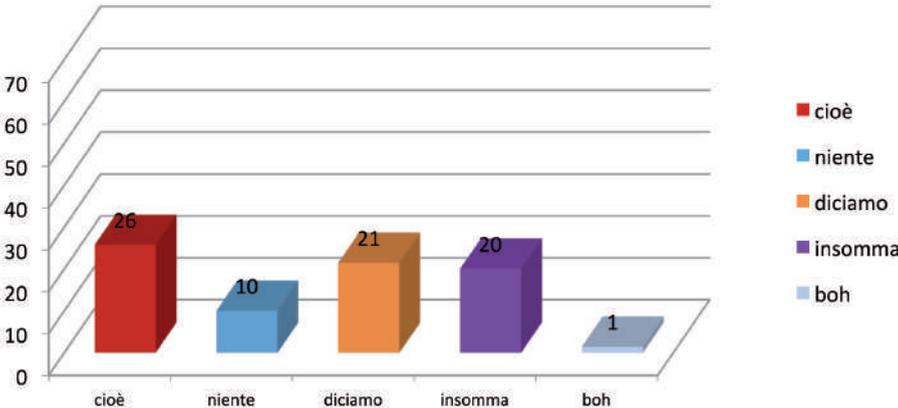


Figure 5.18 - Metadiscourse strategies. Forms in adult speakers (C1976), p/10000

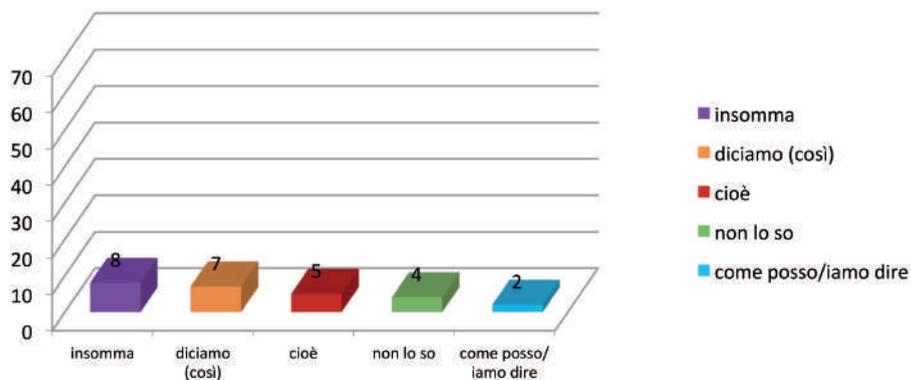


Figure 5.19 - Metadiscourse strategies. Forms in younger speakers (C2010), p/10000

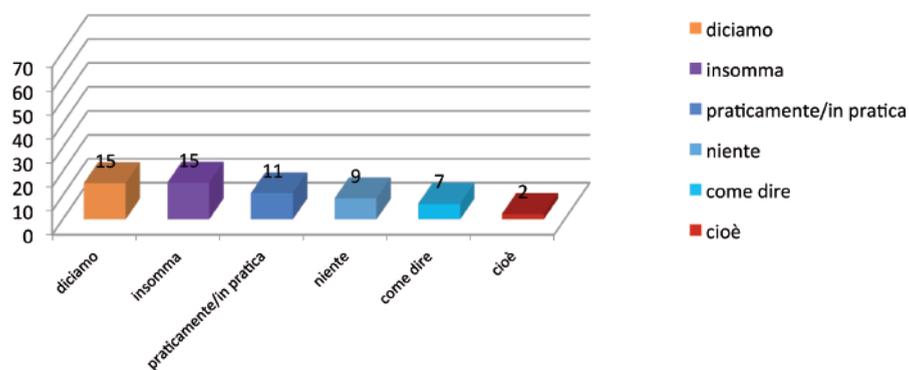


Figure 5.20 - Metadiscourse strategies. Forms in young adult speakers (C2010), p/10000

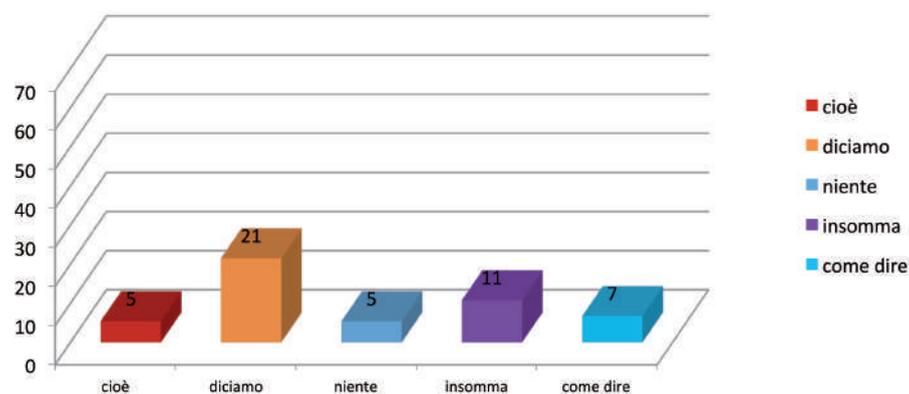


Figure 5.21 - Metadiscourse strategies. Forms in adult speakers (C2010), p/10000

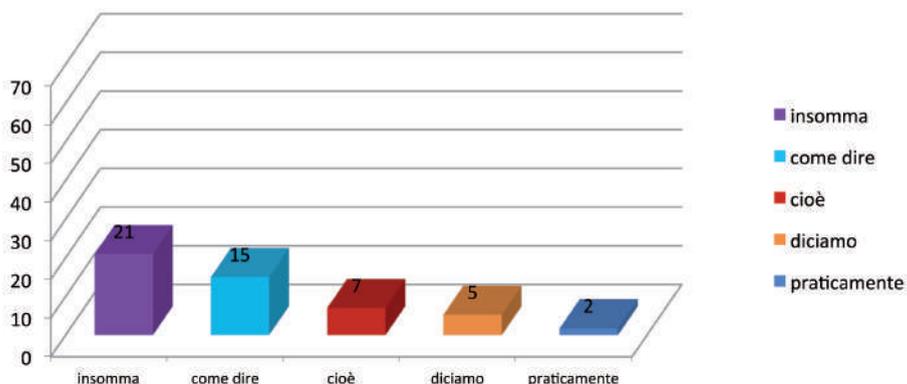
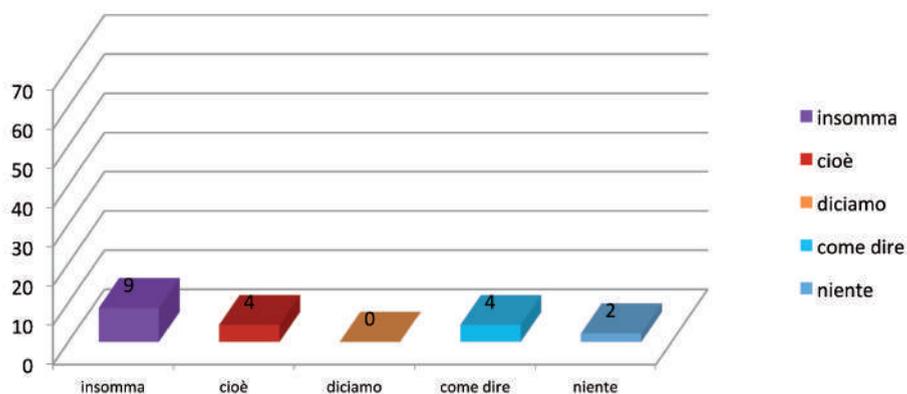


Figure 5.22 - Metadiscourse strategies. Forms in elderly speakers (2010 corpus), p/10000



The analysis of structural embedding of forms in C1976 shows that it is possible to identify specific generational styles in terms of preferred forms and of their structural contexts of embedding. In particular, younger speakers (Figure 5.23) most frequently employ markers with a metadiscourse function. From the repertoire of forms at their disposal, they select a form, *ciòè*, which is generalised to the widest variety of structural contexts and scopes; other forms are less frequent and more specialized. For instance, *diciamo* modifies local phrases or subacts, typically in the form *diciamo che*, which is still syntactically integrated; *non so* appears only before phrases; *niente* tends to function as a turn-managing device in the left periphery of acts or interventions. Young adults show less frequent uses of the strategy but in a more varied number of contexts (Figure 5.24), while adults show a reduced frequency of both use of the strategy and contexts (Figure 5.25).

Figure 5.23 - Metadiscourse strategies. Structural embedding in younger speakers (C1976), p/10000

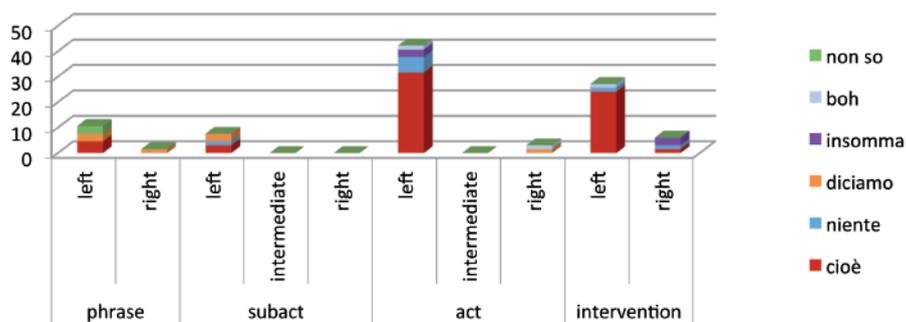


Figure 5.24 - Metadiscourse strategies. Structural embedding in young adult speakers (C1976), p/10000

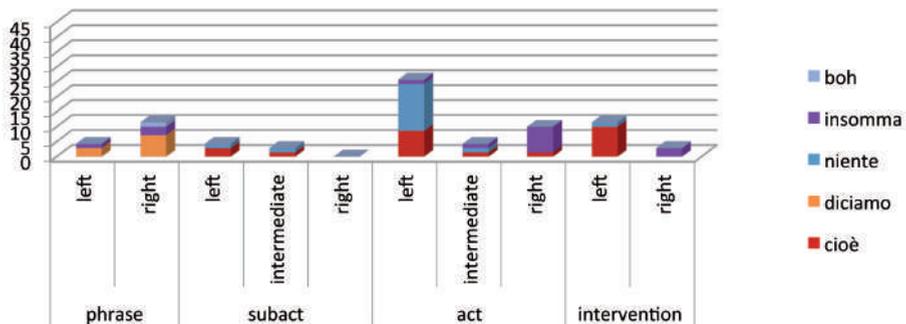
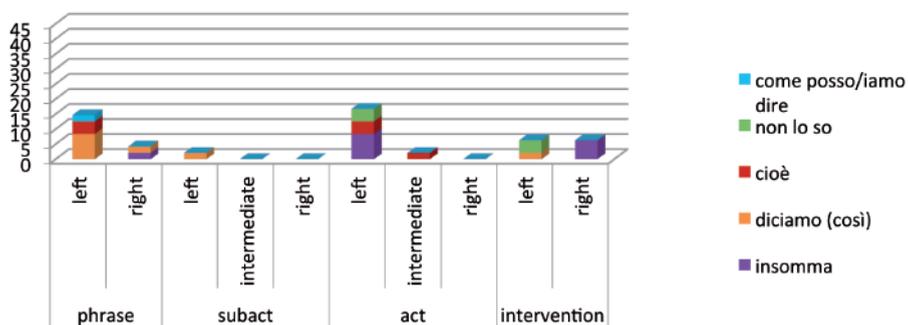


Figure 5.25 - Metadiscourse strategies. Structural embedding in adult speakers (C1976), p/10000



As for the distribution of the repertoire of forms in the 2010 corpus, groups of speakers cluster on the basis of age in relation to preferences for particular forms. Younger speakers (Figure 5.26) have a rich repertoire of forms and the highest number of structural contexts of use. A common form, *diciamo*, is frequent in specific contexts, in particular before or after a phrase; *insomma* most frequently appears in the right periphery of acts or interventions, but appearances in the left periphery of acts, or with local scope after a phrase, do also occur. *Niente* and *praticamente* mostly seem to be employed in the left periphery of acts (especially *praticamente*) or interventions.

Both young adults and adults have a less rich repertoire of more frequent forms (Figures 5.27-5.28), but they use them in a wider variety of contexts and show more versatility in the use of forms with a local scope; however, they seem to prefer some specialized markers: *niente* in young adults is found only in the left periphery of interventions, while *insomma* is used to mark the close of an intervention in adult speakers.

Elderly speakers (Figure 5.29) once more have a reduced repertoire of forms; one form, *insomma*, tends to be used in a variety of contexts, but only in the right periphery and with a variable scope (after local constituents, acts, interventions, or subacts).

The real-time comparison between the two communities shows a change in preferences in relation to discourse style in the younger generations. In particular in C1976 *cioè* predominates over other strategies. Its use may have been favoured by the original semantic and pragmatic value of the marker (i.e. reformulation marker). The comparison in real time of the two central age groups shows that even though the repertoire of forms has remained similar, their occurrences in structural contexts has changed. This is again particularly evident for the marker *cioè*: although in the two

Figure 5.26 - Metadiscourse strategies. Structural embedding in younger speakers (C2010), p/10000

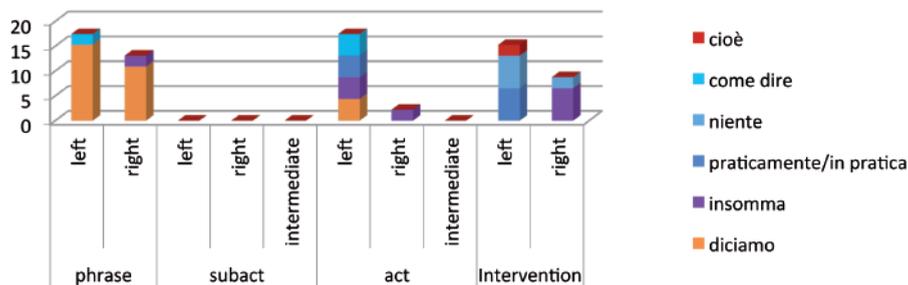


Figure 5.27 - Metadiscourse strategies. Structural embedding in young adult speakers (C2010), p/10000

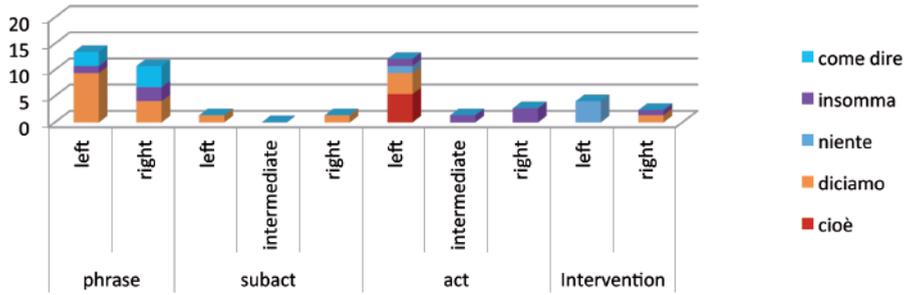


Figure 5.28 - Metadiscourse strategies. Structural embedding in adult speakers (C2010), p/10000

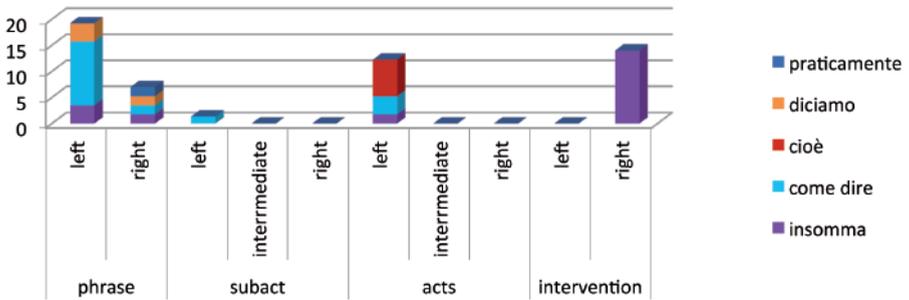
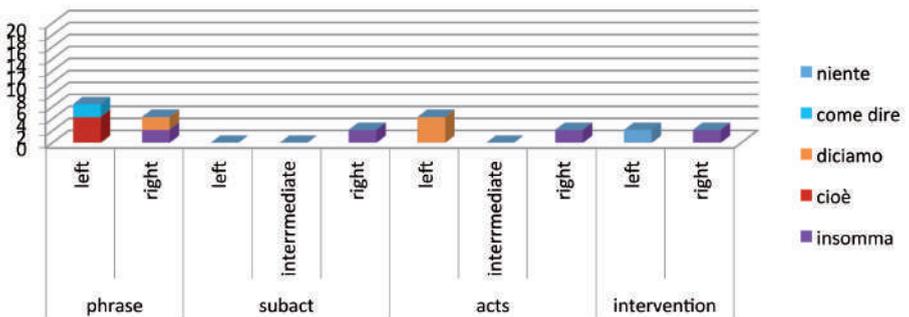


Figure 5.29 - Metadiscourse strategies. Structural embedding in elderly speakers (C2010), p/10000



corpora both age groups have similar absolute numbers of occurrences of the marker, adult speakers in 2010 have a richer repertoire of forms, whose frequencies are more evenly distributed in a variety of contexts. The same age group in 2010 has only partially maintained its use of *cioè*, especially in the most characterising structural contexts typical of their teenage years, that is in the left periphery of acts (see also § 5.2.3).

### *Summary*

Metadiscourse strategies subjectively relativize the speaker's relation to the formal characteristics of the proposition. They therefore have an echoic function. Different generations of speakers are characterized by the selection of different forms and by the variability of their distribution, with each new generation selecting different forms for more frequent use. This characterization pertains not only to the frequency of forms but also to contexts of their structural embedding, since younger speakers in C1976 select one form (*cioè*) which is used creatively in the widest variety of contexts, while younger speakers in 2010 have a richer repertoire of forms, which are used more evenly in a wider variety of contexts. On the contrary, older speakers tend to narrow their repertoire of forms and to reduce their frequency of occurrence, and contexts of use.

Real-time comparison shows that younger speakers have changed their preference of use in the repertoire of forms, since they have substantially reduced the use of *cioè* in favour of a more varied selection of forms, each of which is more specialised in specific contexts.

### 5.1.3. *Discussion*

The analysis of the evolution of exemplification and metadiscourse markers by groups of speakers shows interesting patterns in terms of both intergenerational variation and changes in speakers' preferences.

As for the former, different generations are characterized by specific conversational styles which include both a variable distribution of frequencies of available forms and their distinctive use in specific structural contexts. This pattern would be in line with an interpretation of age-grading as intended in Labov (1994). However, the forms selected do not drastically diverge in different age cohorts, but may be used more or less frequently within an age-group of speakers (e.g. older speakers) and in specific structural contexts.

Younger speakers seem to be characterised by a distinctive discourse style, as they select, in the repertoire of existing structures, one form which they creatively overextend in a variety of contexts and scopes, and which, therefore, they employ frequently (e.g. the use of *cioè* as a meta-discourse marker by younger speakers in 1976 and of the exemplification marker *tipo* in 2010). Yet younger speakers do not use classes of strategies more frequently than the other age cohorts; rather, they employ the available forms differently. It is probably this different style of use which makes them more noticeable on a linguistic and social levels. Due to their particular style, interlocutors may more easily perceive the overextended form and favour in some speakers belonging to other age cohorts processes of pragmatic priming (cf. also Cheshire, 2012). However, as life progresses, these characterising traits of youth language are partially abandoned.

As for changes in speakers' preferences in time, the forms are subject to change, and this change corresponds to a social stratification which is age-based. Forms that characterize the youth language tend to be abandoned over time by the age cohort that first began the overextension process, but also by other age cohorts, and by the community as a whole. An example of this change is the progressive reduction in frequency of the metadiscourse marker *cioè* which will be discussed in detail in § 5.2.3.

## 5.2. Forms and trajectories

Let us now turn to consider in detail, through a semasiological approach, the trajectory of three different forms (*un po'* 'a bit', *così* 'like this', and *cioè* 'that is') in the two communities of speakers in 1976 and in 2010.

All the three forms were chosen as the focus of a case study as they are somehow representative, and more prototypical, for the enactment of a class of strategies, i.e. approximation of content (the signified) (*un po'*) in § 5.2.1, metadiscourse relativisation of the uttering process (the signifier) (*cioè*) in § 5.2.3, and a deictic reference to the context of interaction (*così*) in § 5.2.2.

Both *un po'* and *così* have already been considered in detail in § 1.5.1 and § 1.5.3, respectively, in relation to the common properties of sources of VMs and to the processes of meaning extensions at work in their uses in different contexts. Therefore, the analysis of their functions and frequencies in the two corpora will move from the premises set in § 1.5.1 and § 1.5.3, respectively.

Instead, as regards *cioè*, as it emerged in the data discussed in § 4.3 and in § 5.1.2 its trajectory of change through the two communities is

particularly telling in relation to linguistic and social processes at work in socio-pragmatic change and its analysis proves extremely rewarding for the objectives of this study.

### 5.2.1. Un po'

As mentioned in § 1.5.1, the use of *un po'* 'a bit' as VM implies a less than prototypical categorization. This use derives from the routinization of its literal meaning which refers to something physically small or partial. Its use as a VM derives from an interaction between the form and its context of use. Through processes of metaphorical and metonymical extensions, *un po'* can be used to approximate a number or a quantity as in (23), to approximate a categorization as in (24), and to hedge a speech act as in (25)<sup>3</sup>.

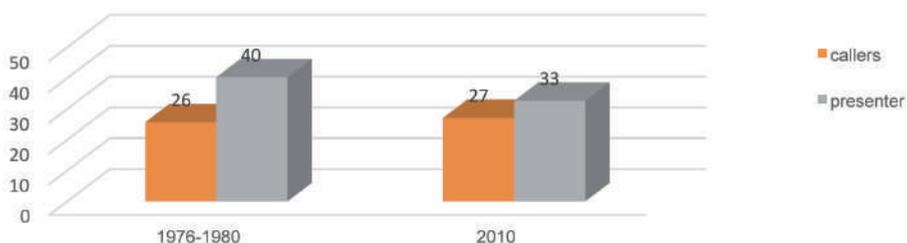
- (23) °h eh: ti dirò↓ che ho seguito↑ una: un'assemblea:↑ ho (.) stamattina alle dieci↓ che ci- dove c'erano un: (.) un (.) **un po' di studenti↑ un po' di professori↑** (15\_25\_s\_d\_11151003)  
 'I'm telling you, I attended a meeting, I, this morning at ten, where there were **some** students, **some** professors'
- (24) cerchi un vestito da cupido↓ (.) **un po': oversize↑(.) un po' baggie↓ (.) un po': hip hop.** (15\_25\_s\_d\_02031001p)  
 'You are looking for a Cupid costume, **a bit oversize, a bit baggie, a bit hip hop**'
- (25) ho notato comunque una certa: come dire:↓ sterzata (.) **un po' civettuola↓** (15\_25\_s\_d\_10131001m)  
 'Anyway, I noticed a sort of, how can I say that, **kind of a skittish** shift'

Moving from these three main functions identified in § 1.5.1, let us now turn to consider the distribution of *un po'* and of its uses in different generations of speakers and within the two points of reference in time under analysis here.

The quantitative data on the overall distribution of the form *un po'* (and variants *un pochettino* and *un pochino*) in callers and presenters show no significant variation in its frequency in the two corpora (cf. Figure 5.30). This is especially true for the callers, although the presenter in the late Seventies tended to use the form more frequently.

3. The examples have already been discussed in more detail in § 1.5.1 to which we refer here for the data analysis.

Figure 5.30 - Overall frequency of *un po'*, p/10000



An analysis of the meanings of *un po'* gives us a more detailed picture (cf. Figures 5.31 and 5.32).

In both C1976 and C2010 *un po'* is used more frequently to hedge speech acts by both presenters and callers. However, in presenters this use has globally decreased with time. The frequency and functions of the VM by the callers are instead evenly distributed in the two corpora.

Figure 5.31 - Different meanings of *un po'* in C1976, p/10000

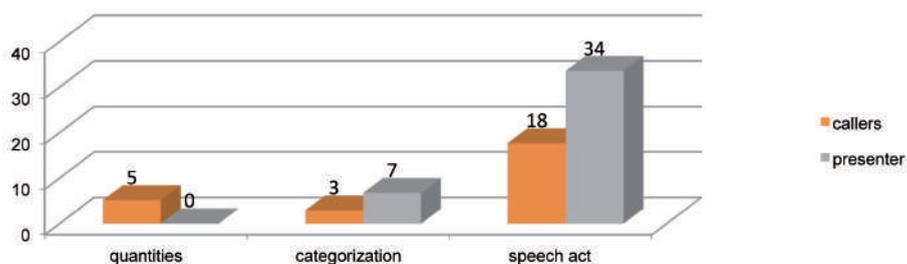
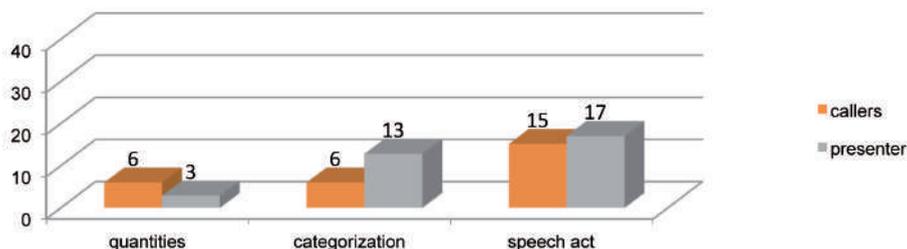
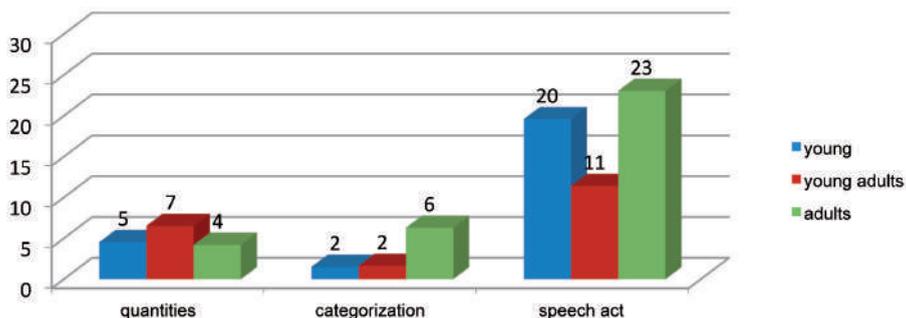


Figure 5.32 - Different meanings of *un po'* in C2010, p/10000



If we look at the callers' use of the VM according to their age (cf. Figure 5.33), we notice that in 1976 all speakers, regardless of their age, prefer to use *un po'* to hedge speech acts. Adults use *un po'* more frequently, regardless of its meaning.

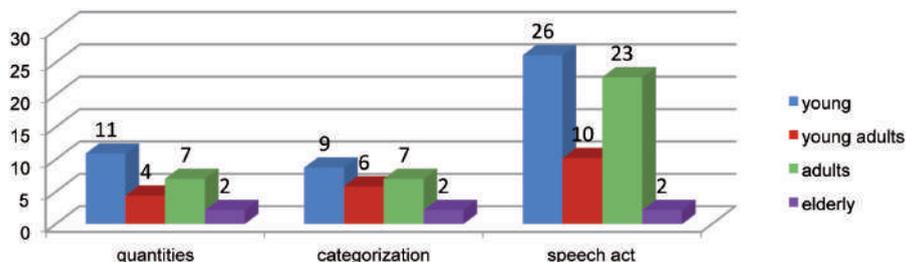
Figure 5.33 - Age-based stratification of *un po'* in C1976, *p/10000*



The analysis of the 2010 corpus shows a similar picture (cf. Figure 5.34). *Un po'* tends to be used by most age cohorts with a politeness value to hedge speech acts. Its frequency is higher among younger speakers and adults. Elderly speakers show the lowest frequency of use of the VMs in all the three values considered here.

Some general comments should be made on the analysis of *un po'* summarily described above. Through the idea of smallness It. *un po'* develops a qualificatory meaning not only at the level of the proposition (semantic value), but also at the level of illocution (pragmatic value) on the basis of metaphorical and metonymic extensions.

Figure 5.34 - Age-based stratification of *un po'* in C2010, *p/10000*



Speakers, regardless of age and point of reference in time, mostly use *un po'* to hedge speech acts. As for synchronic stratification of frequencies and values of *un po'*, it seems that young speakers and adults are the age-cohort that use *un po'* the most in both corpora. Older speakers use *un po'* the least. The diachronic comparison of the two communities shows that the semantic and pragmatic values of the marker are rather stable.

### 5.2.2. Così

As highlighted in § 1.5.3 the manner adverb *così* is often used as VM. As mentioned in the case of *un po'*, its use as VM derives from the routinization of the corresponding deictic, being rooted in the routinization of implicatures which arise from the interaction between *così* and its context of use (see § 1.5.3 for a detailed analysis of the development of implicatures and functions of *così*).

In general, its deictic value is strategically employed to imply a vague reference as the interlocutor is left to infer which quality (or qualities) of the presented element is relevant and/or salient in the context of the interaction (deictic value) or in the surrounding co-text (anaphoric value) for the correct interpretation of the element itself. This is the case of (26), where co-text is needed to infer the quality of the *sciopero* 'strike' the speaker is referring to.

From these original meanings, new meanings arise through processes of meaning extensions by which the interlocutors are invited to infer the salient nuance, not much from the co-text or the context of interaction, but from the abstract domains of knowledge and categorization. In such cases the presence of *così* signals procedurally the need to activate shared knowledge in order to infer the intended quality of referents or of categorizations. In (27) for instance, a vague value is instantiated by the presence of *e così* which implies a reference to shared knowledge to infer the qualities of "being a right-oriented person" relevant in the context of the interaction.

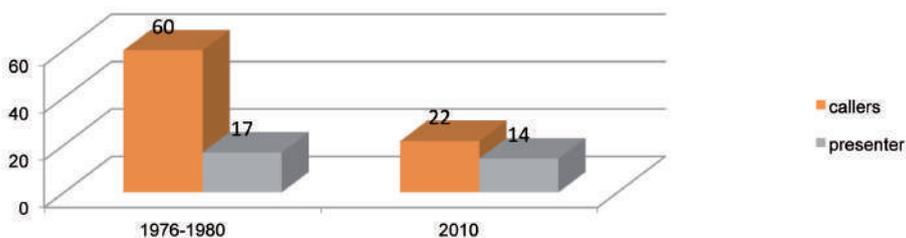
Finally, when the same inference is applied to a whole speech act, moving from the level of the proposition to the level of the illocution, an implicature of politeness arises as the interlocutor is asked to infer which quality of the speech act the speaker intended to refer to. In (28), where the caller is commenting upon a particular style of teenagers, which she judges as 'snob', his potential criticism is hedged through the use of *così* that, together with *un po'*, precedes the actual and potentially face-threatening adjective *snob*.

- (26) (.) cioè↓ si cambia linea totalm- ma gli scioperi↑ **così**↓ di solidarietà↓ capisco il problema↓ (.)ma non servono↑ a niente↓(46\_65\_d\_u\_01297901)  
 ‘I mean to say, we should totally change the course of actions, but strikes, **like-this**, of solidarity are useless’
- (27) voi mi crederete un sovversivo↑ perché assolutamente (.) non la penso come voi↓ anzi la penso in tutt’altro modo↓ cioè sono: mi reputo di destra↑ (-) **e: così**↓ (15\_25\_d\_u\_01087803)  
 ‘You may think I am a subversive because I am absolutely not with you on this, rather I have a completely different opinion, I mean I am right oriented **and so on**’
- (28) **così** un po’ snob↑ (.) anche↓ (15\_25\_s\_u\_11121101m)  
 ‘**like-this**, a bit snob, also’

Let us now move to analyse the distribution of *così* and of its values in the two corpora.

The quantitative data on the overall distribution of the form by callers and presenters show a decrease of frequency of use by callers in 2010 corpus, but no significant variation in the language of presenters (cf. Figure 5.35).

Figure 5.35 - Overall frequency of *così*, p/10000



An analysis of meanings of *così* shows a similar trend both in C1976 and in C2010 (cf. Figures 5.36 and 5.37).

In C1976, callers use *così* with similar frequencies in the three meanings identified. A different picture is represented in C2010 where *così* shows a generalized drop of frequency for all uses.

Figure 5.36 - Different meanings of *così* in C1976, p/10000

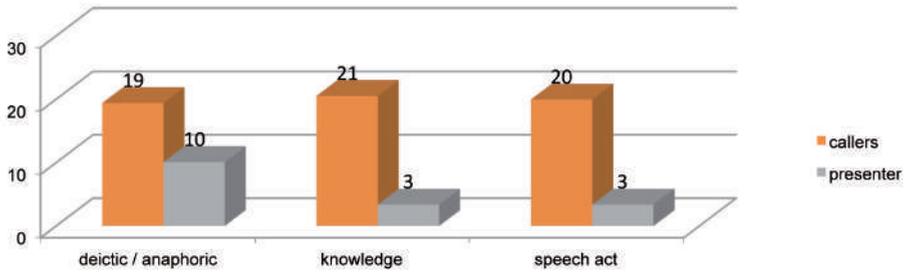
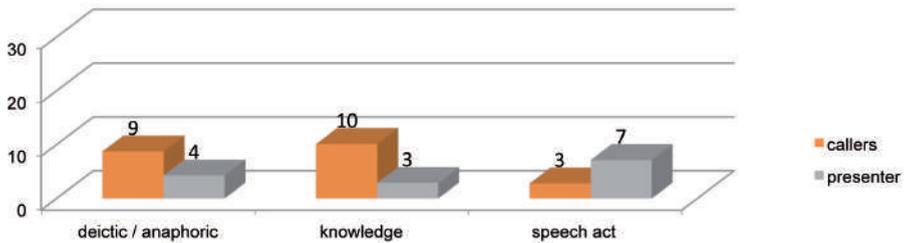
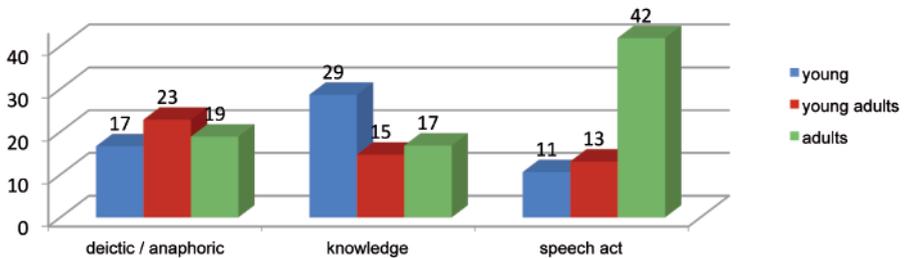


Figure 5.37 - Different meanings of *così* in C2010, p/10000



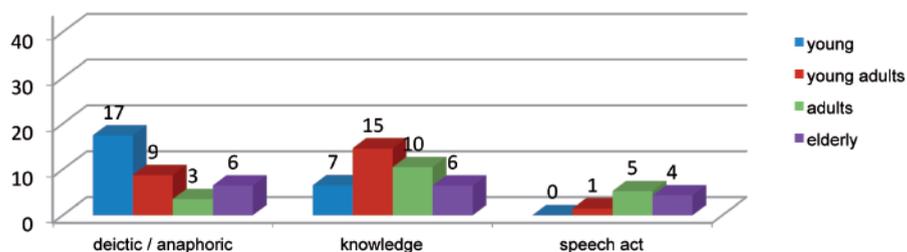
If we look in detail to the callers' use of the VM according to their age, we notice that in 1976 (cf. Figure 5.38) young speakers prefer to use *così* to activate shared knowledge, while adults to hedge speech acts.

Figure 5.38 - Age-based stratification of *così* in C1976, p/10000



In 2010 (cf. Figure 5.39) *così* is more commonly used by young speakers with a deictic or anaphoric value, young adults and adult prefer to use it to activate shared knowledge, elder speakers show more diversified uses with all the three meanings.

Figure 5.39 - Age-based stratification of *così* in C2010,  $p/10000$



To summarize this case study, it is possible to say that through manner deixis *così* develops a qualificatory meaning not only at the level of the proposition (semantic value), but also at the level of illocution (pragmatic value). This value is used by speakers for politeness reason to hedge an assertion which is perceived as too strong. Speakers use *così* with an age-graded stratification, but its frequency has generally decreased with time and this trend is particularly evident for politeness values.

### 5.2.3. Cioè

The trajectory of *cioè* ‘I mean, in other words, that is, or better’ within the two communities of speakers is extremely interesting in terms of both generational styles and changes of speakers’ preferences with time.

The use of *cioè* as a discourse marker has been the focus of a number of studies (Bazzanella, 1995; Manzotti, 1999; Dal Negro & Fiorentini, 2014; Ghezzi, 2018). In general it is described as the ‘prototypical’ reformulation marker (Bazzanella, 1995: 248-249; cf. examples 29 and 30).

- (29) Partirò tra quattro giorni, **cioè** venerdì.  
 ‘I am going to leave in four days, **that-is** on Friday’
- (30) Non c’è male, **cioè**, per esser sinceri, non mi piace affatto.  
 ‘Not bad, **I mean**, to be honest, I don’t like it at all’

As a matter of fact, precisely from its prototypical value of reformulation marker, derive some of its uses as VM (cf. § 4.3). By strategically exploiting its function as reformulation marker that points to the enunciation level, speakers can use *cioè* as VM with an exemplification or metadiscourse function (cf. § 5.1.1 and § 5.1.2). However, it often happens, especially in C1976, that speakers use it as an extremely versatile and polyfunctional marker, as example (31) highlights.

- (31) LUI il fatto è che anche se scappi di casa: (.) **cioè**: ci sono **cioè** io che ho: ad esempio quindic'anni ci sono i problemi di: non so dov- la casa di di come campare (.) di dove trovare i soldi per andare avanti (.) e poi c'è sempre il fatto del **cioè** delle dei genitori che che chiamano la pula e **cioè** ti rimandano a casa come niente (15\_25\_d\_d\_1980).

'The thing is that even if you run away from home, **that-is**, there are **that-is** me that I am for example fifteen there are problems, I don't know, your house, how you get by, where you find money to get by. And then there is always the thing, **that-is**, of your parents that call the cops and **that-is** they easily send you back home'

As mentioned in Ghezzi (2018: 203-212), *cioè* is commonly used to introduce a change in the uttering perspective, because of a retro-interpretation of a preceding discourse movement, which also includes both discourse memory and shared knowledge (Rossari, 1994: 9). In the two copora it is possibile to identify different uses of *cioè* not all of which can be traced back to its use as VM. These uses cluster around five different functions, exemplified below in (a)-(e).

(a) Paraphrastic reformulation (PR), induced by the same speaker (self-reformulation) or by a different speaker (hetero-reformulation). In these contexts, *cioè* underlines a semantic equivalence between the two utterances.

- (32) SAL è gente che anche voi dovete mandar fuori dalle vostre file↓ **cioè** cercare di eliminare. (15\_25\_d\_u\_1980)

'Those are people you should expel from your ranks, **that-is** you should try to get rid of'

In (32), a first formulation ('you should expel from your ranks') is rephrased for the sake of clarity ('that-is you should try to get rid of'). As regards the structural embedding of *cioè* in these contexts, since the second reformulation is an appendage to the first one, it can be considered to be subordinated to it. That is, in cases of paraphrastic reformulation, *cioè* precedes a subordinate subact, which, together with the directive act it is appended to ('those are people you should expel from your ranks'), builds a reformulation move.

(b) Non-paraphrastic (NPR), self- or hetero- reformulation (whose limits can even reach denial). *Cioè* procedurally signals a change in the point of view, which it indexes.

- (33) UGO Io appartengo a quella generazione che non ha mai avuto il posto fisso↓ **cioè** io ho quarant'anni laureato col master. (24\_45\_s\_u\_03241009)  
 'I belong to the generation that has never had a permanent job, **that-is** I am forty years with a bachelor and master degree'

The use of *cioè* in non-paraphrastic reformulations implies a polyphony of voices or points of views. In (33) the speaker is actually juxtaposing two different points of view, as he is implying 'I never had a permanent job, but as a matter of fact, and seen from another perspective, I am fully entitled to have one'. The presence of *cioè* here underlines a retro-interpretation of the initial point of view, in relation to which the speaker may distance himself to various degrees (Pons Bordería, 2014a: 110).

In the paraphrastic type, the marker allows a predication of identity. Two 'points of view' are presented as equivalent (expel = get rid of). In the non-paraphrastic type, instead, the two points of view are not considered equivalent, as the one introduced by *cioè* can be understood as a reconsideration of the first, according to the speech situation perspective.

This process gives rise to a more or less pronounced distance-taking in relation to the point of view expressed at first, from which derive the vague uses of *cioè*. Different degrees of distance are possible from recapitulation, re-examination, distance, up to renunciation (cf. Rossari, 1994: 22).

When *cioè* performs this function, it typically introduces a directive subact, if both points of view are explicit, or an act, if the first point of view is left implicit. However, especially in hetero-reformulations the marker moves from monologic to dialogic values, and can also fill the initial slot of an intervention, as exemplified in (34).

- (34) PREMIO (3.0) ma per esempio. e su quando concretamente. cioè cos'è successo concretamente che ti ha fatto venire il bisogno la voglia di scappare di casa. (15\_25\_d\_d\_1980\_FUGA)  
 LUI (--) **cioè?**  
 'PREMIO But for instance, and on what in particular, I mean, what happened in concrete (terms) that made you want to run away from home'  
 LUI **what do you mean?'**

(c) Planning device (PL). The corrective value of *cioè* can be used strategically to signal formulative and planning-related problems, as exemplified in (35).

- (35) ti dico la verità. mi faccio colpa- **cioè** è colpa mia. (46\_65\_s\_u\_09225\_MA)  
 'I tell you the truth, I make fault, **that-is** it is my fault'

This use of *cioè* is typical after false starts or hesitation phenomena. This function, more frequently fills the medial position in acts or subacts.

(d) Modal values (boosting or hedging). In some contexts within the corpora, *cioè* also acquires modal values that increase or decrease the illocutionary force of a speech act. Both the boosting and the hedging values are exemplified in (36) and (37), respectively.

(d.1) Modal (boosting, MB)

- (36) il sindaco della Louisiana non esiste. **cioè**. (15\_25\_s\_d\_051911m)  
'the mayor of Louisiana does not exist. **that-is**'

The boosting value of *cioè* is acquired through an inference, drawing on the prototypical paraphrastic value of the marker. The speakers let the interlocutor infer that they may have much to say about, and disagree with, concerning a previous statement. *Cioè* functions as an efficient interaction-managing strategy by means of which the speakers call their interlocutors to draw an inference about the state of affairs, which the speakers left unexpressed on purpose.

This use of *cioè* is based on syntactic vagueness, or "clausal ellipsis", as it ideally introduces "unfinished ends of sentences for which the speaker knows that the hearer could finish the utterance with more informative noun phrases" Cutting (2007a: 225).

(d.2) Modal (hedging, MH)

- (37) SEL io: **cioè**: non che sia sbagliato (.) questo. però bisogna prendere una decisione. (15\_25\_s\_u\_07234)  
'I, **that-is**, I don't think it is wrong, this idea, but we have to make a decision'

Hedging values draw on the inference that a paraphrasis is always an approximation (more or less precise) of a statement. Here *cioè* metalinguistically signals a less-than-literal resemblance between a chosen expression or speech act and a potentially more precise alternative with the same reference. In other words its use implies a relativisation of the propositional content of the utterance. *Cioè* signals an interpretive resemblance in form rather than in content.

It is precisely this value which is at the origin of both hedging and hesitation/planning uses. The common denominator between the two lies

in the fact that the conversational implicature arising is that the speaker, through the use of *cioè*, may suggest that a particular reformulation of a speech act or word may not be the most appropriate one to use (e.g. for social or stylistic reasons). In other words, in both cases *cioè* restricts the meaning of the modified unit to a specific scope, which relaxes the illocutionary force of the speech act, the category boundaries, or the linguistic connotation of the chosen expression. Evidently, the relation between these two types of use must be construed as a continuum rather than as discrete and clearly identifiable functions.

In the two corpora, hedging and boosting values seem to have a complementary distribution in terms of structural embedding, as the first more frequently occur in the left periphery of acts and the latter in the right periphery. Yet, as the quantitative data will show, positions are not fixed as *cioè* can appear with similar values also in the left periphery of acts, subacts or whole interventions.

(e) Presentative values (PV). *Cioè* can also have demarcative values, as it can be used to take the floor, as exemplified in (38).

(38) TU **cioè**. io premetto che (.) voi mi crederete un sovversivo. (15\_25\_d\_u\_19128)  
'**that-is**, I will start by saying that you may think me a subversive'

In such contexts the marker typically occurs in the left periphery and acquires a dialogic value, as it introduces whole interventions.

Moving from the functions just outlined above, let us now turn to consider the correlation between the structural embedding of *cioè* and its functions within different age-groups of speakers.

The comparison of the frequencies of *cioè* in apparent time, i.e. in the two cross-sections of speakers in C1976 and C2010, respectively, proves rewarding (cf. Table 5.1).

The use of *cioè* in C1976 is characterized by age-grading, with a peak in frequency in the youngest age-cohort and a decrease of frequency with age. Instead, a completely different picture can be drawn for the C2010, where *cioè* is not characterized by age-grading and where the youngest age-cohort has the second lowest frequency of use of *cioè*, while adults have the highest frequency (cf. Figure 5.40). If we assume that the adult speakers (46-65 years) in 2010 are the generation which used *cioè* in 1976, we can hypothesise that they have kept using it, albeit to a lesser degree, whereas the younger generation do not use it with a frequency similar to that of their peers in 1976.

Table 5.1 - Data on frequencies and functions of *Cioè* in C1976 and C2010, p/10000

1976-80	PR		NPR		HM		BM		PL		PV		Total	
	AF <sup>4</sup>	RF	AF	RF	AF	RF	AF	RF	AF	RF	AF	RF	AF	RF
15-25	10	15	47	71	29	44	29	44	23	35	16	24	154	232
26-45	8	13	29	47	14	23	10	16	13	21	10	16	84	137
46-65	2	4	10	21	8	17	1	2	6	13	2	4	29	61
66-90	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>152</b>
2010	PR		NPR		HM		BM		PL		PV		Total	
	AF	RF	AF	RF	AF	RF	AF	RF	AF	RF	AF	RF	AF	RF
15-25	0	0	7	15	0	0	2	4	5	11	1	2	15	33
26-45	0	0	10	15	4	6	1	1	2	3	0	0	17	25
46-65	3	5	14	24	6	10	6	10	2	3	1	2	32	56
66-90	4	9	8	17	2	4	0	0	2	4	0	2	16	34
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>29</b>

PR = Paraphrastic Reformulation, NPR = Non Paraphrastic Reformulation, HM = Hedging - Modal Hedging, BM = Boosting - Modal, PL = Planning, PV = Presentative Value

The comparison of data in real time shows that the distributional frequencies of *cioè* in both corpora are rather different as *cioè* has generally decreased in frequency from 1976 to 2010, thus highlighting a variation in the preferences of younger speakers for the use of the marker.

The study of data on the correlations between the pragmatic functions performed by *cioè* and the age of speakers gives a clearer picture.

In C1976 (cf. Figure 5.41), *cioè* is more frequently used as a reformulation marker with non-paraphrastic value, but other functions are also attested and evenly distributed, the only exception being the reformulating paraphrastic value, which has the lower frequency in all age cohorts. It is worth noting that the youngest speakers use *cioè* in its modal functions a great deal more than the adults.

4. For both corpora, the counts of actual occurrences (AF = absolute frequency) and of their relative frequency (RF, p/10000) are given in the table.

Figure 5.40 - Frequency of *ciòè* in C1976 and in C2010, p/10000

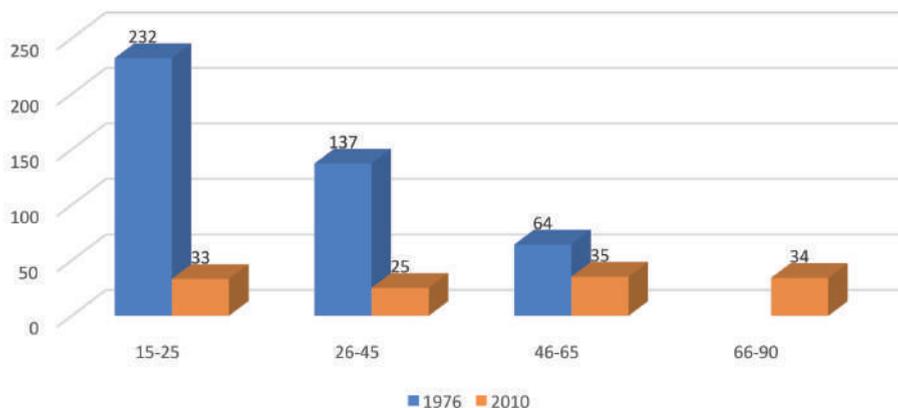
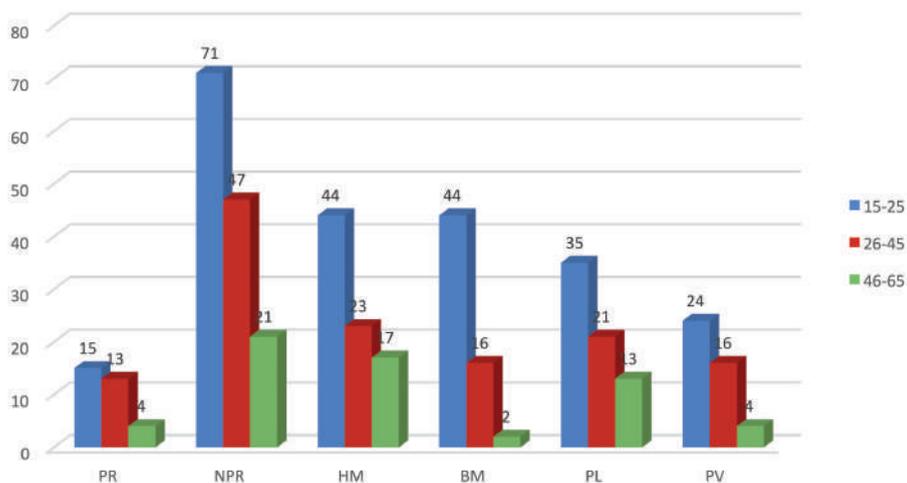


Figure 5.41 - Pragmatic functions of *ciòè* and age of speakers in C1976, p/10000

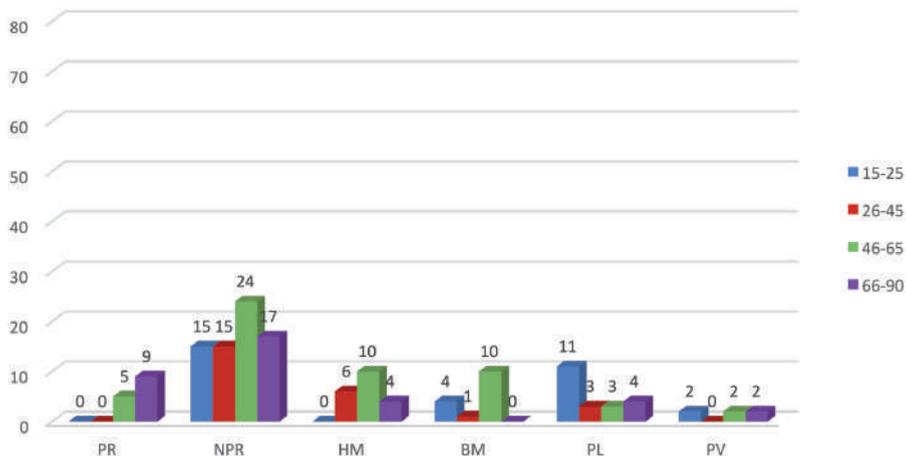


Different cohorts of speakers differ in their use of *ciòè* not only in terms of frequency, but also in relation to the pragmatic values of *ciòè*. The youngest speakers use the marker more regardless of function. The 46-65 age-band use the marker least.

A different picture can be drawn for the 2010 corpus (cf. Figure 5.42), as the frequency of all pragmatic functions has dropped in all age cohorts, if compared with the frequency of *ciòè* with the same functions in 1976.

However, it is noteworthy that the non-paraphrastic reformulating value is still the most frequent value acquired by *cioè* in all age-cohorts, that some pragmatic functions of *cioè* are not attested for young speakers (the paraphrastic reformulation and the hedging value), that adults represent the age-cohort with higher frequency of use of *cioè* with a non-paraphrastic reformulation value, with hedging and boosting values.

Figure 5.42 - Pragmatic functions of *cioè* and age of speakers in C2010



In C2010 younger speakers have dropped their rates of use of *cioè*. The way they use the marker is rather different from that of their peers in 1976. Only the non-paraphrastic reformulation and the planning values seem to have a significant number of occurrences. Although adults have lowered their frequency of use of *cioè*, they have maintained the use of the marker in its most frequent functions characteristic of younger speakers in 1976 (i.e. in non-paraphrastic reformulations).

The analysis of the quantitative correlations between the position the marker occupies and the type of discourse unit in which it occurs offers interesting insights into the functional choices made by speakers within different age-cohorts.

Among the pragmatic values of *cioè*, interesting cases include the non-paraphrastic reformulation values and the boosting values. The distribution of these two functions is interesting for different reasons. The first represents the more frequent, and more prototypical, function performed by *cioè*. The second is the function whose frequency is more divergent in speakers of 1976 and 2010.

As for the non-paraphrastic reformulation value, speakers in the two corpora are consistent in their use of *cioè*, which always appears in the left periphery of acts or subacts (Figures 5.43 and 5.44). This is true for the two points of reference in time and regardless of speaker's age. However, in 2010 *cioè* is used with similar frequencies both before acts and before

Figure 5.43 - Structural embedding of non-paraphrastic reformulations and age of speakers in C1976, p/10000

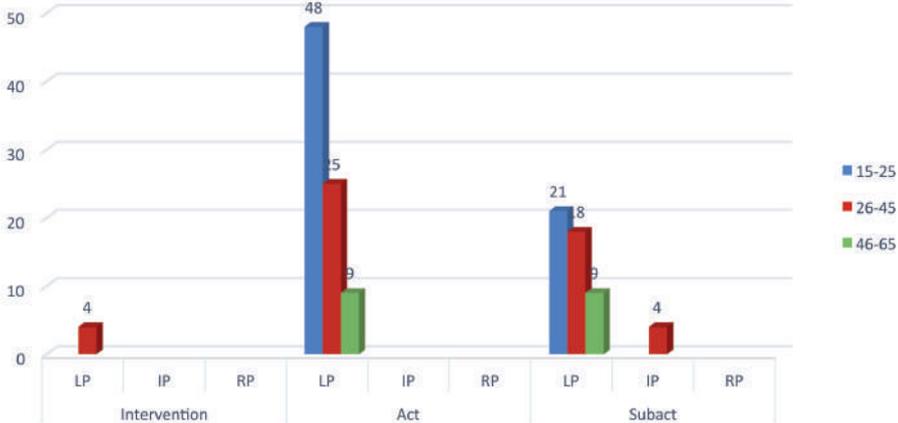
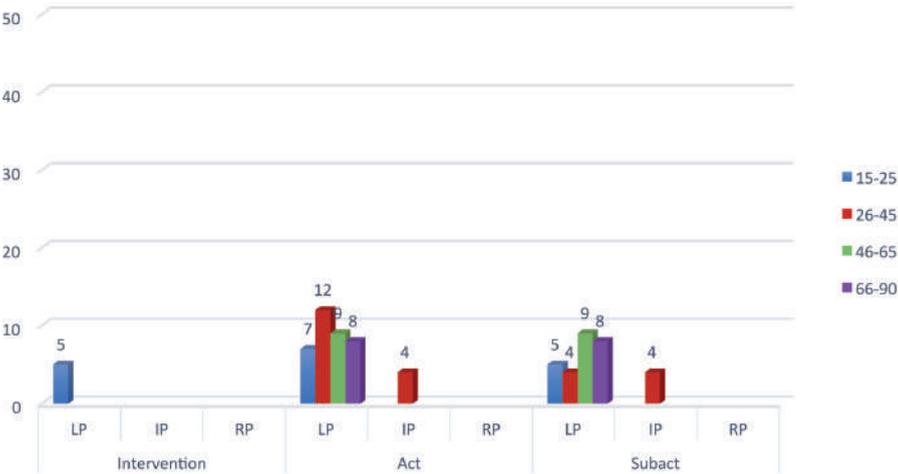


Figure 5.44 - Structural embedding of non-paraphrastic reformulations and age of speakers in C2010, p/10000

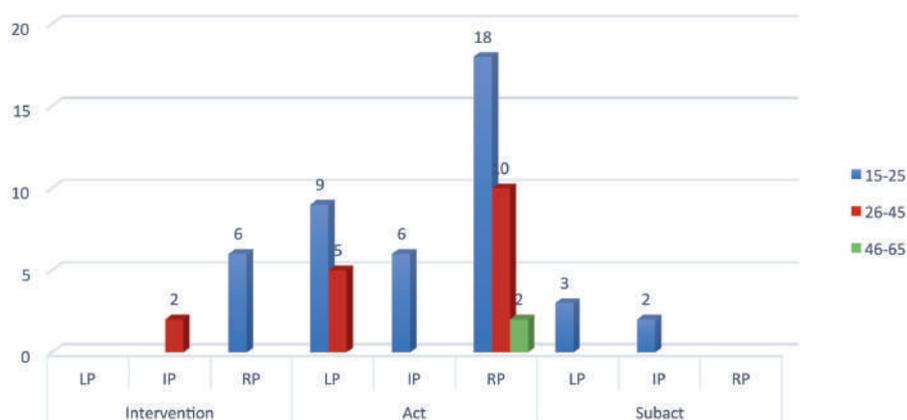


subacts, while speakers in C1976 had a preference for its use in subacts. In 2010 young speakers also use it in the left periphery of whole interventions, mostly as a hetero non-paraphrastic reformulation.

Data therefore show that the structural embedding of *cioè* in this function has remained stable in the two communities, although its frequency has dropped in 2010.

The analysis of structural embedding of boosting values shows a different and rather interesting picture (Figures 5.45 and 5.46).

Figure 5.45 - Structural embedding of boosting values and age of speakers in C1976, *p/10000*

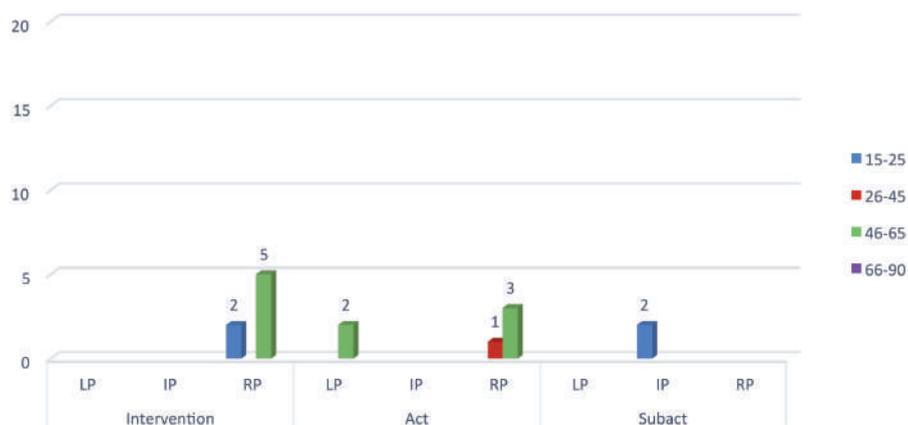


The structural embedding of the boosting use of *cioè* in C1976 (Figure 5.45) shows that it is possible to identify generational styles in terms of structural contexts of embedding. In particular, younger speakers use *cioè* in the widest variety of structural contexts, while other age cohorts use the marker only in the contexts which are more prototypical also for young speakers (i.e. in the left and right periphery of acts).

As for the distribution of *cioè* in 2010 (Figure 5.46), data show that adult speakers have generally maintained the use of the marker, although with a lower frequency, in the most common contexts typical of their teenage years (i.e. in the right periphery of interventions, in the left and right periphery of acts).

The changes just described in the use of *cioè* within the two communities of speakers under analysis here cannot be explained without taking into consideration the indexical values acquired by the form during the

Figure 5.46 - Structural embedding of boosting values and age of speakers in C2010, p/10000



second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a matter of fact, especially in the late 70s, *cioè* progressively became a very frequent catchword among younger speakers to the extent that those years are known as *gli anni del cioè* ‘the age of *cioè*’ (Goldoni 1977:10, Dal Negro & Fiorentini 2014:96).

As mentioned in § 2.3, pragmatic change is dependent on indexicality, as social meanings and linguistic choices are connected in different ways. The use of words or expressions, or more generally of discourse styles, are always experienced in connection with other types of style as ways of dressing, grooming, or social activities. So that words are in themselves evocative and contribute themselves to creating a social identity, eventually even in the absence of other cues (Silverstein 2003, on the notion of indexicality, metapragmatics and enregistrement).

These connections between linguistic forms and indexical meanings also emerge in conversation in the form of metapragmatics (Silverstein, 1993; Agha, 2006), which include all the ways in which an utterance is linked with a specific context. In this sense, forms can be metapragmatically linked with social identities explicitly. For instance, in the case of *cioè* it is possible to reconstruct a series of these metapragmatic links as in the late Seventies and early Eighties the form is considered ‘emblematic’, in Silverstein’s (2003) words, since it is associated with a stereotyped discourse style characteristic of teenagers.

Some examples include metadiscourses within the community on the use of *cioè* as in the extract below from a book by Luca Goldoni written in 1977 with the emblematic title *Cioè*.

*Quando parlo con un ragazzo al primo 'cioè' mi concentro e dico stiamo attenti, adesso puntualizza meglio. Al secondo 'cioè' strizzo gli occhi e mi sforzo per non perdere neppure una sfumatura. Al terzo 'cioè' la mia tensione è allo spasimo. Poi mi lascio andare come un naufrago e non seguo più le capriole del discorso. Certo, certo, ripeto stancamente.*

*Una volta tentai di spiegare a mio figlio: se, prima di parlare, ti concentrassi un attimo sul pensiero da esprimere, eviteresti almeno dieci 'cioè'. Ma mi sono accorto che era un suggerimento patetico, ridicolo come quelli classici di una volta: ricordati che tuo padre mangiava la polenta e ne aveva di grazia. Contro 'cioè' non c'è nulla da fare, è una specie di lubrificante che permette qualsiasi discorso, qualsiasi cambiamento d'umore, qualsiasi contraddizione. L'altro giorno un amico di mio figlio cui avevo chiesto dove andava in vacanza quest'estate ha risposto cominciando con 'cioè'. Una ragazza cui avevo chiesto se le era piaciuto *Cadaveri eccellenti* mi ha detto: "sì, cioè no". (Goldoni, 1977: 8-9)*

'When I talk to a teenager, the moment I hear the first *cioè*, I concentrate and I tell myself 'be careful, now he is going to clarify better'. At the second *cioè* I squint and I try not to miss a nuance of meaning. At the third *cioè* I am in agony. Then I decide to let myself drown and not to follow the somersaults of speech. Sure, sure, I say wearily.

Once I tried to explain to my son: if you concentrated a moment on the thought you want to express before speaking, you would avoid at least ten *cioè*. But I realized it was a pathetic suggestion, ridiculous as those of the old times gone by: remember that your father ate polenta and was very gracious. Against *cioè* there is nothing you can do, it is a sort of lubricant that allows any speech, any changes in mood, any contradiction. The other day a friend of my son, whom I had asked where he was going on holiday this summer, answered beginning with *cioè*. A girl whom I had asked if she liked *Cadaveri eccellenti* told me: 'yes, *cioè* no.'

Moreover, *cioè* is often used in stylizations, as comedians rely on second-order indexical forms for the construction of humorous personae which, in turn, have a role in enregistering linguistic forms in multiple ways. For *cioè* this was done by Carlo Verdone, a famous Italian comedian, who in 1982 in his movie *Un sacco Bello* (cf. Figure 5.47) interprets the character of Ruggero, a university student, living in the commune of Children of eternal love in Tuscany, as he says, in direct contact with nature.

In the movie, Ruggero imbues his sentences with *cioè* (cf. Figure 5.48).

Figure 5.47 - The poster for the film *Un sacco bello* (1982)



Figure 5.48 - The character of Ruggero in the movie *Un sacco bello*



It is interesting what Verdone says in a series of interviews<sup>5</sup> about the origin of his character and the stereotypes associated with a particular way of speaking:

*Un giorno ci sintonizzamo su Radio Subasio, a un certo punto c'era lo speaker radiofonico che faceva da tramite tra un padre e un figlio, una scena magnifica. Il padre diceva*

*“Marco, torna a casa che la mamma non sta bene. Marco!”*

*Risposta di Marco “No papà io ormai ho fatto un certo tipo di scelta”*

*“Marco dai ti prego, la mamma ieri è stata poco bene”*

*“No, ti prego, papà, dai non insistere”*

*“Vieni via da quella comunità, non mi piace per niente”.*

*[...] Ruggero è quello che, cioè, parla così, eccetera, era uno studente che faceva casino alle occupazioni studentesche, un figlio dei fiori. Nel caso del tono di voce di Ruggero mi sono ispirato al tecnico del suono del mio film, probabilmente uno di Lotta Continua, mi ricordo una volta che mi disse “Hai sentito l'ultima dei Pink Floyd Wish you were here? Si sente davvero l'acido!”*

*[Ruggero] Era un personaggio che identificava molto bene tutto un periodo, perché quel tipo di voce la sentivo spesso nelle assemblee universitarie. Quella era una tipica voce che sentivi sempre nell'aula sesta, durante i moti studenteschi all'università. Gli scontri tra Potere operaio, Lotta continua, Movimento studentesco. Quindi io frequentavo l'università e sentivo sempre 'ste assemblee e 'ste occupazioni, dove tutti quanti, tutti, molti avevano questo tipo di voce “Mi sta bene, però il potere, cazzo, dobbiamo armare il popolo! Cioè, capito in che senso, no?” Quindi era gente non preparata, però questo tono di voce era per loro come un'arma per dire “Sono intellettuale, capito?” Era diventato un po' un cliché 'sta voce. Cioè, 'sto cioè, 'sto tono di voce era una voce che secondo me identificava un'ignoranza di base però quella tonalità dava una sorta di sdoganamento culturale.*

*‘One day we tuned in to Radio Subasio, at one point there was the radio announcer who was acting as an intermediary between a father and son, a magnificent scene. The father said:*

*“Marco, come home, mummy is not well. Marco!”*

*Marco's reply “No daddy I have made a certain kind of choice now”*

*“Marco come on please, mummy wasn't well yesterday”*

*“No, please daddy, come on don't insist”*

*“Come away from that community, I don't like it at all”.*

*[...] Ruggero is the one who, I mean, he talks like this, etcetera, the one that was a kind of student who was messing around during the university occupation, a kind of flower child. Having that tone of voice at the time was more or less like saying “I am an intellectual”. In Ruggero's case I was inspired by the sound technician of my film, probably one of Lotta Continua, I remember once he said to*

5. These interviews are freely visible on Youtube. See for instance the interview to the *Accademia dei Lincei*, on 25.11.2022 or to Alanews, on 18.06.2022.

me “Have you heard the latest Pink Floyd song *Wish you were here?* You can really feel the acid!”

[Ruggero] was a character that identified a whole period very well, because I often heard that kind of voice in university assemblies. That was a typical voice you always heard in the sixth lecture hall, during the student uprisings at university. The clashes between *Potere Operaio*, *Lotta Continua*, *Student Movement*. So I used to go to university and I would always hear these assemblies and these occupations, where everyone, everyone, many people, had this kind of voice: “I’m OK with it, but power, fuck, we have to arm the people! I mean, you understand in what sense, right?” So they were untrained people, but this tone of voice was like a weapon for them to say “I’m intellectual, understand?” It had become a bit of a cliché, this voice. I mean, *cioè*, that *cioè*, that tone of voice was a voice that in my opinion identified a basic ignorance, but that tone gave a kind of cultural clearance’.

The explanations of Carlo Verdone on the stereotypes associated with Ruggero’s voice offer a glimpse on the indexicalities that at the time associated particular discourse styles, which included a frequent use of *cioè* and a specific tone of voice, among other things, with a group of people, i.e. young students protesting in universities. Verdone’s character, at the time, was likely to be taken as young because aspects of the way he talked evoked and created one or more cultural schemas of young people: as he mentions “intellectuals, or supposedly so, messing around during universities protest, flower children”. Within the repertoire of the forms he used, *cioè* may already have been enregistered as index of the schema relating to the young age of speakers for some listeners. For others, Verdone’s performances may have had a role in enregistering it. For most, what probably happened, was a mixture of these two processes.

Finally, in October 1980, a famous teen magazine for teen girls was founded with the emblematic name of *Cioè* (<http://www.cioe.it/>). Below in Figure 5.49 are some covers of the magazine through the years. The name of the magazine suggests that *cioè* had already acquired a second order indexicality at the time, which somehow enabled members of the community to associate the use of the word to a certain class of speakers and, as such, had already been enregistered within the community as in-group marker of teenagers, especially girls.

*Cioè*, today, is still frequent in the spoken language, although it is no longer associated with youth speak and is rather considered a ‘totem-word of the 1977 students’ movement’ (Bartezzaghi, 2010: 23).

Beeching (2016: 4) underlines how the association of discourse and pragmatic markers “with naturalness and friendliness” leads to their propensity to project a friendly sociability, thus making them easily avail-

Figure 5.49 - Covers of the magazine *Cioè*



able to implement social indexicality. This notion is particularly useful to explain the trajectory of *cioè* from 1976 to 2010 and to explain its uses among the different age cohorts in the data just analysed.

The rapid evolution that characterizes *cioè* shows patterns for intergenerational variation and changes in speakers' preferences. This is true for the frequency of the form and for its pragmatic functions.

As for the variation in use with age, different generations have specific conversational styles.

Younger speakers in 1976 have a socially connotated use of *cioè*, as it is used with a frequency that exceeds all other age-cohorts in the same years, with the higher degree of polyfunctionality. As far as changes in speakers' preferences, in 2010 all age-cohorts, adults included, use *cioè* less frequently. Therefore, the polyfunctionality of the form was abandoned over time by the age cohort that first began the overextension process, but also by other age cohorts, and by the community as a whole.

The indexicalities developed by *cioè* can be correlated to its use in the communities and to its development through the years. The second-order indexicality of *cioè*, associated with informality, solidarity, and in-group identity, probably had a role in accelerating the spread of the marker through young speakers. This implied that when *cioè* developed this meaning more and more speakers, (more or less) young, who wanted to identify with youth speak, more frequently adopted *cioè* in their speech and extended its use also to non-prototypical structural contexts up to the point that it was used as a highly desemantized marker, extremely common and versatile, which speakers often used as a mere filler word.

Its use, with time, acquired a social third-order indexicality as it became more and more associated with the particular speech style of teenagers. In the community, stereotypes arose linking the use of *cioè* to young

speakers and older speakers stigmatized its use, while metadiscourse and prescriptive comments were made about the use of *cioè* by young speakers (cf. Goldoni's book *Cioè* 1977, Verdone's interviews and stereotypes he relied on to create his characters).

The analysis of structural contexts of *cioè* confirms this hypothesis, as the marker became more frequent, it was also used in a wider variety of structural contexts and with a higher number of pragmatic functions. It is possible to assume that the appearance of variables with a high social meaning comes frequently in structural contexts that are more prominent, and therefore less prototypical and more marked for that form. For *cioè* this is the case of the right periphery of interventions in modal boosting values. These contexts are also highly salient on a social level and represent, therefore, the perfect *loci* for speakers who want to identify strongly with a community.

Young speakers of 1976-1980, as they grew into adults, have dropped their frequency rates of use of *cioè* in the direction of an ongoing change, but at the same time they have maintained *cioè* in more prototypical contexts (i.e. with non-paraphrastic reformulations).

If these changes were rapid and decisive in terms of frequencies and expansion (and reduction) of the functional domain of *cioè*, similar changes were also at work in the constellation of indexicalities attached to the form, which included both second-level and third-level indexicalities, as mentioned earlier. Therefore, if the social meaning of *cioè* as in-group identity marker had initially a role in accelerating its spread among young speakers, later stigmatization probably promoted its progressive abandonment in new generations. In other words, *cioè* has become stigmatized, precisely because it was used by young speakers in the way they used it and these stigmatizations may have had a role in its progressive abandonment by new incoming generations. Social salience has promoted propagation, but also abandonment in the long run.

### 5.3. Discussion

The polyfunctionality of more pragmaticalized VMs considered in this Chapter shows that not only speakers frequently change forms to perform specific functions (e.g. exemplification markers, metadiscourse markers), but also that generational styles are influenced by these frequent changes.

These patterns of evolution may have to do precisely with the status of discourse and pragmatic markers, and with their role as discourse-pragmatic variables (cf. Chapter 2). Variables operating at the discourse-

pragmatic level, of which speakers are more linguistically and socially aware, seem to be subject to change in the direction of an ongoing change in the linguistic community, even in older age cohorts, and even long after the end of the so-called ‘critical period’, as the diachrony of *cioè* has shown. This is probably one of the reasons why discourse-pragmatic variables are less stable, move through the community, and are more available to speakers to take on social meaning by virtue of their temporariness (cf. also Bazzanella, 2006). Speakers do not have equal access in terms of perception towards different levels of language, so that features belonging to the discourse-pragmatic level can be more easily perceived as more or less fashionable or outdated (Niedzielski & Preston, 2003). This is also probably why discourse pragmatic variables more often develop into ‘catchphrases’ which become the object of metadiscourse comments by the linguistic community (e.g. *cioè*).

Moreover, the structural properties of discourse and pragmatic markers, their syntactic freedom and variable positions favour their poly-functionality depending on contexts of use. These properties may therefore explain why discourse and pragmatic markers continually give rise to new implicatures and, eventually, to new forms that speakers co-opt to perform a specific function (cf. Hansen, 2020; Fedriani & Molinelli, as well as Ghezzi & Molinelli, 2020 on the cyclical nature of pragmatic change).

As regards, VMs in particular, the interplay between the deictic context of interaction, favouring the use of deictic strategies, the level of enunciation, favouring metadiscourse strategies, and the level of content, favouring approximation strategies, may facilitate the development of new conversational implicatures that give rise to new function-form configurations. All levels are at the speakers’ disposal in the form of classes of strategies from which they can draw forms to enact specific functions, also on a social level (as the case study on *cioè* has shown).

Generations of speakers select one form or another within those belonging to the same class of strategies (e.g. metadiscourse markers), or totally change their repertoire of forms belonging to that strategy (e.g. exemplification markers). Age cohorts by contrast can be consistent through the years in the use of some forms (e.g. *un po’*) or (more or less) drastically change them (e.g. *così*, *cioè*, but also *tipo* as exemplification marker). Age cohorts, may also change their frequencies of use of classes of strategies, as in the case of exemplification markers has shown, or their preferences for whole classes of strategies, as the trajectories of *tipo* and *cioè* have shown. The analysis of *cioè* shows that this form, which is part of the metadiscourse strategies, was selected by young speakers in 1976 as ‘emblematic’ for their generation, this translated into an high

frequency of use of the form which became highly polyfunctional, and was used in a high variety of contexts and positions. However, the form was later progressively abandoned by young speakers of new generations. The young speakers in 2010 have introduced the new VM *tipo*, which belongs to another class of strategies, i.e. the exemplification strategies, which seems to behave in that particular generation as *cioè* in the Seventies, as it is becoming highly frequent, polyfunctional and syntactically 'flexible', although it has not developed a third-order indexicality.

## 6. *Concluding remarks*

The aim of this study was to consider how speakers belonging to different age-cohorts use VMs in their communication. VMs were considered as specific discourse-pragmatic strategies associated with the use of intentional vagueness. A first question for this research was to consider the nature of these strategies within the Italian language. Secondly, another relevant topic was to analyse how and if they contribute to discourse styles of speakers; consequently, if it was possible to identify correlations between variation in discourse styles and (a) ages of speakers or (b) communities of speakers separated by thirty years (1976 and 2010). A third question related to if and how variation, connected with age in speakers' styles, can be correlated to pragmatic change in the time span considered. A last question was whether an approach in terms of discourse style can help explain the frequent emergence of new VMs in the speech of young people, and whether it is possible to identify general principles involved in the process.

Through a qualitative and quantitative comparison of data in apparent- and real-time, conducted through an onomasiologic approach, the study has focused on the description of functional properties of VMs moving from the analysis of listeners' phone-ins to an Italian talk radio programme in order to correlate them to (a) variation in the use of classes of vagueness markers by different age cohorts of speakers and (b) patterns of change in the two communities of speakers identified (1976 *vs* 2010). What has emerged from the analysis contributes to answering the questions posed and to the understanding of how VMs are used in discourse by speakers belonging to different age cohorts.

As for the first question, Italian VMs include multifarious linguistic means that speakers employ to be (intentionally) vague in conversation. As such, VMs are a formally heterogeneous class of macro- and micro-strate-

gies that speakers use to protect their linguistic action from various interactional risks. Speakers use VMs strategically to cooperate with their interlocutors, to negotiate and co-construct meaning, and eventually to make their contributions accepted. This group of features proves to be truly pragmatic in essence in that their use can be explained only taking into consideration the full complexity of functioning of language in context, including the social context. VMs are polyfunctional means that ‘stretch’ language across continua as they are used to approximate content, but they also operate as intensity markers to strengthen or weaken speech acts, to boost or hedge the speakers’ stances, to resolve conflicts in potentially face-threatening acts, where they are used as mitigators to strategically evade truth. Therefore, they are invaluable tools which can be employed with a variety of reasons connected, among others, with a difficult categorization, a strategic reference to shared knowledge, or with taking time for online planning. In this sense it is possible to say that vagueness is a highly ‘economical’ strategy in interaction, as being vague, in specific interactional contexts, is a means for being interactionally ‘safe’. Vagueness is not parasitic on language use, rather it represents an essential and widespread property of language in which VMs play a relevant role.

The pragmatic functions of VMs are encoded through a potentially open list of forms belonging to different linguistic categories which include syntactic structures, intonations, moods (*saranno le tre* ‘it might be three o’clock’ vs *sono* ‘it is three o’clock’) and other morphological means, but also lexical elements as single words (*circa* ‘around’) or phrases (*un sacco di* ‘a lot of’), discourse and pragmatic markers (*cioè* ‘I mean’). This study focused on lexical and discourse-pragmatic means.

Uses of Italian VMs cluster around three groups of strategies, namely approximation, which indexes the level of the signified; metadiscourse relativisation, which focuses on the level of the signifier; and reference to deixis, which indexes cotext and context. The first group of strategies includes elements that imply a less than prototypical resemblance between the codified and the intended concept, resulting in an approximation of the speakers’ thought. The second group includes forms that strategically exploit a supposed approximation of linguistic choices to imply a less than literal resemblance between the codified and the intended concept. Through indexical reference to the interactional context or co-text, the third group of forms implies that verbal information is not enough and that interlocutors should activate co-text or shared knowledge to infer referents, or qualities of referents, intended by the speakers. General nouns, which imply a totally vague reference, operate at the intersection of the other three groups.

To try and explain this multilevel heterogeneity, the semantic properties of lexical sources of VMs have been considered. Indeed, their polyfunctionality can be explained through recurrent processes of co-optation, more or less entrenched in the language, by which, via metaphorical and metonymic extensions, forms develop functions associated with the expression of vagueness. These processes seem to be connected by a basic semantic ‘qualificatory’ nature of lexical sources which unites the function-form relationships of different pragmaticalization patterns. VMs recruited from an underlying function of qualification derive from words or grammatical structures expressing smallness (e.g. *un po’*), approximation (e.g. taxonomic nouns, such as *tipo*, *specie*, *sorta*, comparison, *come*), quality deixis (e.g. *così*), demurral, tentativeness or correction (e.g. *non so*, *forse*, *magari*, *insomma*), adversativeness (e.g. *comunque*), and addition (e.g. *poi*, *anche*).

These peculiarities are helpful in explaining the behaviour of VMs and their status of discourse-pragmatic variables. As a matter of fact, many VMs co-exist with their lexical sources within the linguistic system and are frequently ‘recycled’ by speakers as new items are easily introduced, and ‘old-fashioned’ forms substituted and abandoned by speakers (e.g. the trajectory of *cioè* and *tipo* in § 5.1 as well as that of *anche* in § 4.2.3). This behaviour contributes to creating recognizable discourse styles which are indexed on a social level, eventually acquiring third-order indexicalities, as the trajectory of *cioè* as shown (§ 5.2.3). On social level, VMs are double-edged since within the community they are overtly stigmatized as characteristic of informal registers, but covertly they are used by individual speakers to meta-pragmatically signal informality, solidarity, and in-group identity. These constellations of socially indexed meanings can promote or hinder the propagation of specific forms as well as their abandonment.

As regards the second question, i.e. the correlation between discourse styles and age of speakers, the data analysis has concentrated on how speakers of different ages use the various classes of forms, how they stylize them in their language, how and if these uses can be correlated with their age and/or with their community of belonging (in 1976 or in 2010). In analysis, qualitative approaches have been integrated with quantitative analysis of the functions, structural contexts of use, and frequencies of VMs. The two communities in 1976 and 2010 have then been confronted in apparent- and real-time.

Results show that indeed it is possible to identify differences in styles of use of VMs in terms of both synchronic variation and pragmatic change. As for the first, the use of approximation peaks among younger speakers and adults, while deictic reference increases with age. As for the

second, the data show a general reduction of VMs in 2010 and, particularly, of strategies associated with deictic reference.

Another relevant aspect that emerges from the apparent-time data, especially in relation to exemplification and metadiscourse markers *tipo* and *cioè* (cf. § 5.1), is that the youngest age cohorts do not use VMs more frequently overall. Instead, they tend to overextend one form, *cioè* in 1976 and *tipo* in 2010, whose uses are stretched to a number of different functions and structural contexts; this characteristic style may be the reason why speakers belonging to other age cohorts think that young speakers make excessive use of ‘catchphrases’. It is probably this discourse style which makes young speakers more ‘noticeable’ on a linguistic and social levels, as their interlocutors may more easily perceive their overextended and extremely polyfunctional forms, and favour processes of pragmatic priming and developments of social indexicalities. Yet, along the life span these traits are partially abandoned.

Specularly, older speakers, at least in 2010, do use VMs less frequently and seem to be less worried of being perceived as too explicit in their conversations. Yet, they show, considering the overall less frequent use of VMs, a rather high frequency of general extenders and seem more attentive to creating common ground with their interlocutors, as they frequently resort to reference to a shared knowledge. These data need, however, further corroboration as the behaviour of elderly speakers was not confronted with a similar age cohort in 1976.

As for question three, i.e. the correlation between age-graded variation and pragmatic change, the analysis of data in real-time has proven rewarding for the description of discourse-pragmatic change across the life-span. The comparison of the two communities shows that speakers in 2010 tend to employ less frequently VMs and that this trend is particularly marked for deictic strategies. These same data also apply to specific age cohorts, as each new generation chooses to employ a deictic reference less frequently. The decrease of frequency of deictic strategies is particularly interesting for different reasons.

The first has to do with the status of discourse-pragmatic variables. Indeed, the decrease of deictic reference also characterises older speakers in 2010, whom one would expect to represent the most conservative age cohort. Therefore, their linguistic behaviour seems to confirm that discourse-pragmatic variables, of which speakers are more linguistically and socially aware, are subject to change in the direction of an ongoing change in the linguistic community, even in older age cohorts. In other words speakers, have a high degree of control over discourse-pragmatic variables, even long after the end of the critical period, and throughout

their lives continue to change their language choosing to conform, to various degrees, to an ongoing change.

The second reason regards the relationship between age-graded variation and life-span change. For those forms of which speakers are more 'aware' and over which they have a higher degree of control, as is the case of deictic strategies and, more generally, of discourse-pragmatic variables, if a change is ongoing, and speakers less frequently decide to use a reference to deixis, older speakers, as they age, also change their speech, to some extent, in the direction of the change. Consequently, if age-grading is characterised by cyclical age-appropriate frequencies, the life-span change component does not necessarily imply cyclicity. Nevertheless, the apparent-time comparison, which is rooted in the identification of age-graded variation, confirms to be a 'precondition' for change and, therefore, to be powerful in locating the presence of a 'potential' change.

Finally, as regards the last question, i.e. the role of discourse style in the frequent emergence of new VMs, the case studies of more pragmaticalized forms have given a thorough picture of patterns and processes involved in the use of VMs. If age cohorts can be characterized in terms of conversational styles, these styles can be recognized not much by the difference in the repertoire of forms, which however is cyclically renewed for some functions (e.g. exemplification), rather by the way in which speakers employ forms with different frequencies (e.g. less frequently by older speakers), and with different structural embedding.

Younger speakers can be identified as the most 'creative' age-cohort with a peculiar style, as they tend to select one form, within the repertoire at their disposal, which is overextended in a wide variety of structural contexts, as the use of *cioè* in 1976 has clearly shown and as the use of *tipo* in 2010 also suggests. Thus, forms selected are 'stretched' into new functions and contexts of use as they increase in frequency and in polyfunctionality. Young speakers do not show a significant increase of frequency of VMs, overall, yet within the community it's their speech which is perceived as full of catchphrases. It is therefore not much the overall frequency of VMs, but rather the peculiar use of VMs by young speakers, their discourse style, which makes their speech more 'perceived' by the wider community. Therefore, the functional status of forms used is subject to change, and this change correlates with an age-based social stratification. As the development of *cioè* has shown, forms characteristic of youth language are abandoned with age by the same generation that first introduced and generalized them, but also by incoming young generations, and by the community as a whole.

These cyclical developments in discourse styles, and the motivations behind them, can be fruitfully connected with the social indexicalities associated with forms. Pragmatic change is inextricably connected with indexicality and the trajectory of *cioè* is exemplar in showing the relevance of social indexicality for pragmatic change. If indexicalities attached to forms, in terms for instance of in-group membership, can favour at first the diffusion of forms within one age cohort or within people who want to identify with that age cohort, later it is these same indexicalities that in the wider community favour the progressive (partial) abandonment of the same forms in rising younger generations. If at first stereotypes on young speech have a role in favouring the adoption of the form by speakers who want to identify with that cohort, at later stages, when the form has become a mere ‘filler’ word and verbal tic, highly polysemous and bleached, extremely polyfunctional and structurally versatile, it is highly stigmatised by the whole community. Incoming new generations of young speakers incorporate it less frequently in their repertoire precisely for the way in which earlier generations used it, and for the stereotypes attached to its use. This creates a pragmatic ‘drag’ chain, as *cioè* is no longer used with its original function by incoming new generations, and leaves a gap which is filled by an innovation through a new function-form configuration, as the use of *tipo* by young speakers in 2010 seems to suggest. Interestingly, what emerges from these data is that the overextension process is instead maintained as a characteristic trait of young speech discourse style. Young speakers of 1976, as they grow into adults, maintain *cioè* especially in more prototypical structural contexts, but reduce its overall frequency, while at the same time they incorporate into their language to various degrees the new incipient variant *tipo*, which today has the potential of characterizing young people’s speech.

The analysis of structural contexts of use of these markers has proven central for the explanation of trajectories of forms. As mentioned, as forms become more frequent, they are also used in a wider variety of structural contexts with a more variable scope. The appearance of forms with a high social meaning, as *cioè*, comes frequently in structural contexts that are more prominent, less prototypical, and more marked for that form. For *cioè* this is the case of the left and right periphery of interventions. These contexts are also highly salient on a social level and represent the perfect *loci* for speakers who want to identify strongly with a community. Conversely, new and incoming variants first appear in less prominent contexts (e.g. before phrases or acts), precisely because of their low interactional salience.

Finally, as regards the three classes of strategies of VMs analysed, they are employed at the interplay of (a) the deictic context and co-text of interaction, through which speakers refer to shared knowledge and the universe of discourse, (b) the level of enunciation, through which they metadiscursively relativize their speech, and (c) the level of content, through which speakers approximate semantic content and hedge speech acts. This interplay may facilitate the development of new conversational implicatures that give easily rise to new function-forms configurations. All levels are at the speakers' disposal in the forms of classes of strategies from which they can draw forms and 'stretch' their uses to enact functions, also on a social level.

The use of VMs therefore proves to be socially situated and the speakers' stances are influenced by social factors, as this study on age of speakers has attempted to show.



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# Vagueness Markers in Italian

Moving from a broad socio-pragmatic perspective, this study analyses how speakers of different ages use a class of items and constructions that codify intentional vagueness in Italian.

Items as *un po'* 'a bit', *tipo* 'kind', *diciamo* 'let us say', *così* 'so', *e cose del genere* 'and things like that', or *cosa* 'thing' constitute a class of linguistically heterogeneous means that often function in conversation as vagueness markers, i.e. elements by which speakers signal that their knowledge or communication are somehow only tentative, approximate, and vague. Their use does not depend on language systemic factors, but is the result of a, more or less conscious, choice of speakers to enhance conversation for different reasons, which include facilitating the flow of conversation, signifying a vague categorization, and, eventually, being polite.

Operating at the pragmatic level, vagueness markers represent elements that are readily available to speakers' choices and contribute to characterise individual and generational discourse styles. Through a corpus-based analysis of listeners' phone-ins to a radio station based in Milan, this study investigates how vagueness markers are used by speakers of different ages in 1976 and in 2010, and how Italian discourse styles have evolved in the last forty years.

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