

# **Topic vs. Allocutive in the Language into Act Theory. Corpus-based research on spoken Italian**

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## **Abstract**

The paper presents the corpus-based comparison between the Topic and the Allocutive information units within the Language into Act Theory framework. The Topic is defined as the field of application for the illocutionary force of the Comment and is necessarily performed through a prefix prosodic unit preceding the Comment. The Topic's functional, morpho-syntactic, frequency, prosodic characteristics, and semantic restrictions are detailed. Then, vocatives are introduced, highlighting their broad use that can extend from directive illocutionary types (calling) to forms of dialogic support (Allocutive). Allocutive can be defined as a device of social/empathic cohesion and attention reactivation, which is clearly distinguished because of flat and defocused prosody preferentially occurring after the Comment. The Allocutive's detailed functional, frequency, lexical, and prosodic description follows. Allocutive's semantic constraints are usually limited to bare nouns and proper names, but corpus observation shows that deictic expressions and, more generally, any referential descriptions are not attested in corpus and are competence rejected. Based on this observation, a comparison is made between Topic and Allocutive. The paper argues that no interpretation ambiguity can occur between an information structure composed of a Topic-Comment or an Allocutive-Comment pattern, even if an identical sequence of words fills them. It depends on the respective prosodic performances and their semantic values. While the Topic is characterized by an identifiable reference, needed for an adequate field of application for the illocutionary force, the Allocutive makes its nominal fillings lose a referential interpretation in favor of a designatory reading required by its cohesive function.

**Keywords:** Topic; Allocutive; prosody; reference; designation.

## 1. Introduction

Figures 1 and 1a represent a possible case of ambiguity in interpreting two utterances with the same lexical sequence and word order: (1) is a real corpus example, and (1a) is a competence example of a mother tongue speaker in a laboratory performance.

(1) LIA: *Virgilio* / <sup>TOP</sup> *ha un tumore al cervello* // <sup>COM</sup>

‘Virgil<sub>i</sub>, (0<sub>i</sub>) has a brain tumor’<sup>1</sup>

%ill: conclusion [ifamcv01-573]

(1a) \*ABC: *sai* / <sup>CNT</sup> *Virgilio<sub>z</sub>* / <sup>ALL</sup> *ha un tumore al cervello (Mario<sub>i</sub>)* // <sup>COM</sup>

‘you know, Virgil<sub>z</sub>, (0<sub>i</sub>) has a brain tumor (Mario<sub>i</sub>)’

%ill: conclusion [lab. example]

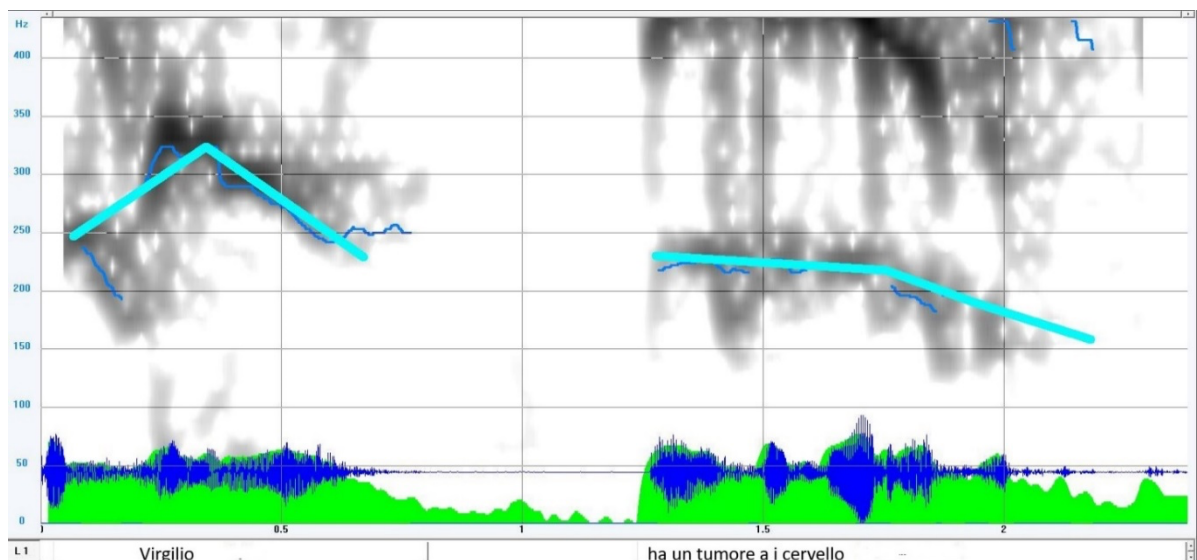
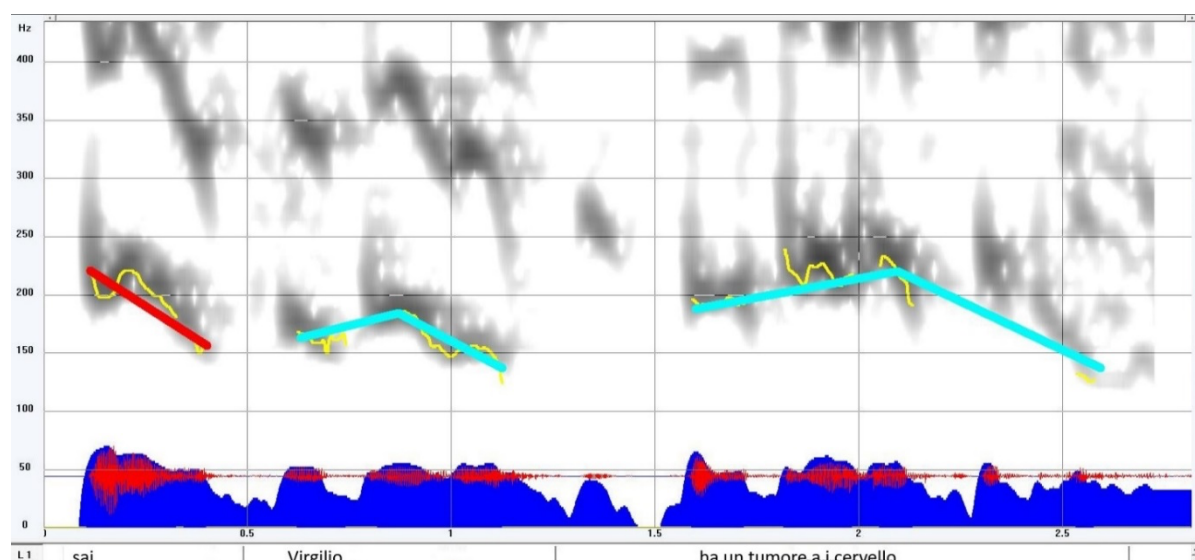


Figure 1: F0 tracks of example (1).

<sup>1</sup> The Italian examples and their English translation are not codified according to the Leipzig Glossing Rules. What is relevant in this paper is the tagging of the information structure and illocution characterization of utterances based on the prosodic performance. These features are not foreseen in the LGR and conversely are testified by Figures that report f0 tracks calculated with Winpitch. Given that noisy signals are frequent in spontaneous speech, we present the f0 face to the first or second harmonic.



**Figure 1a:** F0 tracks of example (1a).

The utterances correspond to two information patterns: (1) to a Topic-Comment and (1a) to an Allocutive-Comment structure. (1) is performed through a prosodic pattern composed of a focused prefix unit and a root unit, while (1a) is performed through a defocused unit and a root unit, as evidenced by the f0 tracks.<sup>2</sup> They are perceptively relevant to native speakers that distinguish them and consequently interpret the proper name, Virgilio, respectively, with a referential value in Topic or a designatory value in Allocutive as a peculiar type of vocative (see 5.3).

The paper will argue on the interpretation of vocative expressions, known in the literature as “the puzzle of vocatives” (Coene et al. 2019). As shown in the previous examples, we propose that according to the Language into Act Theory - that is, our reference framework - the difference between (1) and (1a) depends on their information structure, respectively composed of a Topic or an Allocutive information unit before the Comment unit. For a different explanation, let’s remember the proposal of Lambrecht (1996) who considers both Topic and “vocatives” at the

<sup>2</sup> Prosody is evaluated as f0 contours composed of a simple movement (rising, falling, holding) or several movements in sequence. In this paper, the f0 contours are aligned to the information units. The contour is identified on the f0 track, evaluating its perceptual relevance. After each movement is perceptually identified, it is manually annotated on the f0 track as it is shown by the Figures. The perceptual relevance of every single movement is confirmed by observing whether the annotation fits the glissando threshold provided by Winpitch. Glissando is the rate of f0 change above which a melodic change is supposed to be perceived. The glissando threshold determines the perceptual boundary between a static pitch and a melodic variation. The threshold was established using a semitone scale (Rossi 1971; 1978; Hart 1976; Martin 2018).

beginning of the sentence - but also anti-Topic and “vocatives” at the end of the sentence - as all cases of NPs detached from the proposition. They would be distinguished for an unspecified and essentially irrelevant pragmatic value. Not considering the specific prosodic realization of Topic and Allocutive, it is impossible to appreciate their different frequencies, their specific morphosyntactic fillings, and semantic restrictions, and finally, the common iteration of the Topic face to the incongruity of that of Allocutive, all data derived from corpus observations (see Table 1).

The paper is composed of five parts. The Introduction (1) presents a possible case of ambiguity which justifies the comparison between the Topic information unit and that of Allocutive. The first part (2) briefly illustrates the Language into Act Theory. The second part (3) presents the definition of the information function of the Topic (3.1), the prosodic and distributive characters, the morpho-syntactic exemplification of referential (3.2) and modal Topics (3.3), and the frequency and iteration of the unit (3.4). The third part (4) presents three paragraphs on the semantic restrictions of Topic (4.1), the comparison between Topic and subject (4.2-4.3), and the semantic restrictions on modal Topics (4.4). The fourth part (5) deals with the broad usage of vocative expressions, with three paragraphs on the state of the art on Vocatives (5.1) and the fundamental distinction between their illocutionary and dialogical functions (Conative, Allocutive), with particular attention to the latter (5.2-5.3). The fifth part (6) regards the semantic restrictions on Allocutive. It consists of three paragraphs on the possible ambiguity of interpretation with Topic (6.1), its referential and modal constraints (6.2), and finally, the designatory reading of Allocutive (6.3). The paper ends with a short conclusion (7) and table 1 that outlines the main features of the Topic and Allocutive units.

## **2. Premises of Language into Act Theory**

The Language into Act Theory (L-ActT) is a speaker-oriented approach to studying spoken language based on the affective speaker’s behavior toward the addressee. Its theoretical reference is the Human Birth Theory (HBT) by Massimo Fagioli (Fagioli 1972; Polese et al. 2022).

Affect is considered at the origin of every speech act (according to Austin 1962) and is characterized by the emergence of the pulsion intended as an exclusively

human property (Fagioli 2019).<sup>3</sup> Affect must be distinguished from all emotional states, which are mere physiological reactions of the subject to generic stimulus lacking intentionality toward the partner (Damasio 2000; Scherer & Schorr 2001). Affect is still a reaction to an external input, but it is significant from a human point of view. It is driven by a content of thought that is positively (interest) or negatively (hate) marked concerning the addressee. It is conveyed to the addressee as a speech act with a specific conventional illocution (Cresti, forthcoming).

Prosody is the means to manifest and perform speech acts. In the ontogeny, prosody expresses the newborn's affective communication before he realizes language. Prosody presides over the linguistic formation in the child's development.

According to L-Act, the accomplishment of speech can correspond to two basic pragmatic entities. Primarily utterance (90%) according to IPIC data (Panunzi & Gregori 2012; Cresti et al. 2022b),<sup>4</sup> which is directly supported by an affect and a pragmatic program toward the addressee, and secondarily stanza, which is a sequence of weak speech acts added outside a program by following the flow of the speaker's thought (Chafe 1994) rather than a strong interaction exchange with the addressee (Cresti 2000, 2010; Panunzi & Saccone 2018). Utterances and stanzas are considered the reference units for the speech analysis concerning which frequency of phenomena can be analyzed and measured (Ize'el et al. 2020).

Prosody performs reference units by delimiting their boundaries within the speech flow with highly perceptible prosodic cues (terminal breaks). Prosody also regulates the information structure internal to the utterance through non-terminal prosodic breaks, the types of information units depending on their different functions (information pattern). It shapes the prosodic units (root, prefix, suffix, parenthetical) through perceptively relevant prosodic contours ('t Hart et al. 1990). Prosodic units are dedicated to implementing different information functions (Comment, Topic,

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<sup>3</sup> *Pulsion* is a technical term within the HBT. Pulsion is species-specific to human beings and is opposed to instinct, which is specific to other animal species.

<sup>4</sup> DB-IPIC is an online resource that allows one to browse and perform complex searches on spoken corpora annotated following the L-Act principles. It is designed to host corpora with prosodic segmentation and information structure. The resource is composed of an XML database, and a web interface for corpus querying. DB-IPIC currently contains an Italian corpus of 74 texts (124,735 total words) chosen from the Informal section of Italian C-ORAL-ROM (Moneglia & Cresti 2005, Cresti 2000, Cresti & Moneglia 2018a), and three small comparable corpora (mini-corpora) of Italian (IT), Spanish (ES) and Brazilian Portuguese (BP). These last two are derived from C-Or-DiAL and from C-ORAL-BRASIL (Raso & Mello 2012).

Appendix, Parenthesis). There is a one-by-one correspondence between the information pattern and the prosodic pattern manifesting it (Moneglia & Cresti 2006).

The core of the information pattern is the Comment unit, which is specifically devoted to accomplishing the pragmatic action founding the utterance (illocution) and is necessary and sufficient to achieve the latter. The Comment is performed through a prosodic unit of the root type, which records many formal variants conveying specific illocutionary types. A rich taxonomy of corpus-based illocutionary types has been developed deriving from empirical and experimental investigations that make their correlation with formal prosodic variants (Firenzuoli 2003; Rocha 2016; Cresti 2017; Cresti 2020; Cresti & Moneglia 2023).

The information pattern of an utterance can be composed of many information units beyond the necessary Comment, and within this frame, the Topic is identified and defined (Moneglia & Raso 2014). Topic is the most relevant information unit beyond the Comment. It is usually assumed that the information structure is bipartite depending on the relation between the Topic and the Comment.

Much corpus-based research has been dedicated to the study of Topic in the framework of L-AcT (Firenzuoli & Signorini 2003; Signorini 2005; Malvessi-Mittman 2012; Cavalcante 2015; Cresti & Moneglia 2022; Cresti 2023). They are based on the systematic transcription, text/sound alignment per utterance, and analysis of broadly spoken corpora (French, Italian, Brazilian Portuguese, Spanish, and American English) and spoken Chinese is underway (Cresti et al. 2022a; Luo 2025).

### **3. Topic**

#### **3.1. *The Topic***

In L-AcT, the Comment is considered the necessary core of the Information Pattern, and its definition is based on an affective and pragmatic nature. This assumption changes the definition and interpretation of what is generally shared in the literature about the information structure that is based on a logic trajectory: the Topic is considered the semantic start of the utterance – or the sentence – linking it to the context and is followed by the new information conveyed by the Focus (Krifka & Musan 2012). Thus, in some sense, it is from the Topic that the Focus would be conceived.

Conversely, the pragmatic perspective of L-AcT foresees that the speaker starts to speak following his affect (pulsion) toward the addressee and depending on this internal input, he intentionally moves to behave pragmatically to accomplish a Comment. The other information units, which are all optional comprising Topic, are performed on the spot by the speaker, considering their opportunity concerning the addressee and the situation. Still, the affective and pragmatic intention regarding the Comment must already exist; otherwise, no linguistic production can be implemented. The function and distribution of each information unit, indeed, is defined in relation to the Comment and, in some cases, strictly depend on the illocution and semantics of the latter.

This is especially true in the Topic since its function is to provide the field of application of the Comment's illocution, thus being directly selected by the force qualities (see paragraph 4). The speaker's intention to accomplish a Comment with a specific force is a precondition for the Topic. L-AcT's perspective overturns the common assumption that the Topic would constitute the contextual condition of the Comment – or Focus –, because so doing the speaker's affective input giving rise to speech activity and pragmatic interaction with the addressee is ignored. Depending on its specific information function, Topic cannot be part of the Comment information and must also be realized by a dedicated prosodic unit (prefix).

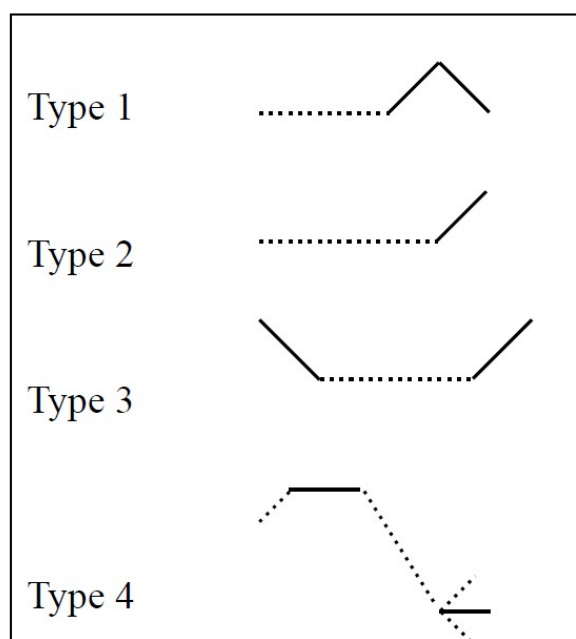
The Topic is classified among the set of Textual information units participating in the semantic filling of the utterance. To the task, the Topic must be implemented with an adequate reference for the Comment illocution. It must constitute a sure and stable “semantic scene” characterized by qualities allowing its representation and identification in isolation by the addressee. This condition implies some semantic restrictions (see paragraph 4).

Before proceeding with the exposition of the Topic's semantic constraints, it is necessary to consider the aspect of its prosodic realization, which in literature is often not considered for its functional definition.<sup>5</sup> Conversely, according to the L-AcT's mandatory request for the performance by prosody of each information unit, it must be noticed that the Topic is performed through a dedicated prosodic unit of the prefix

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<sup>5</sup> Within a perspective of morphosyntax-prosody mapping a Prosodic Hierarchy is proposed. It corresponds to a prefix-stem-suffix structure (Selkirk 2011; Scheer 2011), therefore the prosodic performance of the Topic could be in a generic way referred to the investigation on what is called prefix within these frameworks. Still, the breadth of the phenomena covered by the informative function of the Topic goes beyond morpho-syntactic predetermination and criteria of its description and identification diverge from those for prefix.

type, recording four canonical variants according to research on corpus data and laboratory experiments (Cavalcante 2015; Barbosa & Raso 2018). Let's see Figure 2:



**Figure 2.** The four canonical variants of the prefix unit (Cavalcante 2015).

Figure 2 represents the four types of contours of the prefix prosodic unit, marked at its end by a non-terminal prosodic break. Prefix units necessarily occur before the Comment unit which in turn is performed by an independent prosodic unit of the root type, the prosodic characteristics of which we cannot discuss here (Cresti 2020; Cresti & Moneglia 2023). The continuous lines represent the shape of the f0 nuclear contour occurring on the necessary tonic syllables, while the dot lines correspond to optional transition parts that may be composed of a free number of syllables. In Italian, the most widely used type of the prefix contour is the first, as can be seen from the f0 tracks shown in the example figures.<sup>6</sup>

Given the pragmatic perspective developed in L-AcT, the performance of a Topic also implies a speaker's choice toward the addressee manifested through the necessary means of prosody. The function of the Topic is not achieved out of the prosodic performance by one of these prefix variants. The assignment of the Topic function to

<sup>6</sup> At the state of the art, only occasional semantic correlations have been found for the types of prefix units. However, different languages demonstrate clear preferences for one type rather than another, which could therefore depend on factors of accentual structure. Martin (2018) leans towards a right-hand dependence dictated by the overall prosodic structure of the utterance.



a linguistic expression does not depend on features like givenness, animacy, definiteness, presupposition, relevance, aboutness, or communicative dynamism, as assumed in a large part of the literature (Reinhardt 1981; Givon 1983; Chafe 1994; Lambrecht 1994; Krifka & Musan 2012; Cimmino & Saccone in this volume). The Topic-Comment relation is pragmatic and not semantic. The motivation for the speaker to produce a Topic information unit consists of making a reference available to the addressee to facilitate and ensure the latter's interpretation of the illocutionary action he is about to accomplish through the Comment (Cimmino 2016; Cresti & Moneglia 2018). It is the affective intention toward the addressee that gives origin to speech and affect is embodied by prosody. Prosody, indeed, leads the speaker's production signalling the information function of each unit. Thus, Topic can be objectively recovered a posteriori for its formal features of prosodic performance and distribution before the Comment. However, this does not mean that the definition of the Topic is entrusted only to its prosodic identification but through its functional adequacy as field of application of the illocutionary force of the Comment. Prosody is the necessary means for the content to achieve its functional value toward the addressee.

It can be verified that, in effect, the fillings of the Topic are often given, definite, animate, and so on (Mello & Silva 2022).<sup>7</sup> Still, no one of these features can be considered necessary, as it is testified by both literature and corpus data. Specifically, Topic is not restricted to given contents that can be new from the point of view of their occurrence in the common ground, as in (6), or are modal adverbial and adjectival phrases, as in examples from (11) to (14). The speaker's evaluation feature of these expressions is evident, and it is new by default since it cannot be deduced from the common ground.

On the contrary, corpus investigation demonstrates that the semantic content of whatever unit realized through a prefix unit occurring before the Comment show the systematic correspondence and consistency with an overall function of reference for the illocutionary force. The prosodic prefix performance ensures the accomplishment of the Topic function while the semantic filling may vary, although it presents some semantic constraints due to the specificity of the function (see 4).

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<sup>7</sup> This probabilistic approach shows that there are about five times more chances that an NP animate, definite, and given, when performed in Topic, is also the "subject", i.e., the assignor of agreement of the verb in Comment (see paragraph 4.2).

The Topic is not a necessary information unit, as the Comment is. Still, if the speaker conceives it for the addressee, this information unit is placed before the Comment to fulfil its function. The distribution of the Topic before the Comment is necessary, even if the contiguity is not requested, since the Topic and Comment can be interspaced, for instance, in (12), by a parenthetical insertion.

Given that the information pattern is centred on the illocutionary accomplishment of Comment, the idea of a so-called function of the anti-Topic or post-posed Topic doesn't make much sense (Lambrecht 1996). What follows the Comment, Appendix in L-Act, cannot represent the field for applying the illocutionary force. The Topic is "affectively" given to the addressee before the Comment to facilitate and ensure its pragmatic interpretation. Following the Comment, Appendixes have a backward direction, developing an overall illocutionary mitigation and agreement attitude offered to the addressee (Cresti 2021, Cresti 2023). The Appendix is an adjunct functioning as a non-relevant completion of the utterance content already implemented. Corpus data show that the Appendix is manifested by typical fillings, which are unable to perform the function of field of application of force as Topic does. They are mostly empty repetitions, closing formulas, and secondary complements of the Comment's content and are realized through a low, flat, and almost devoid-of-intensity prosodic unit (suffix).

### 3.2. Referential Topic

According to Italian IPIC data (Panunzi & Gregori 2012), Topic fillings can cover many morpho-syntactic expressions belonging to both referential and modal domains (Moneglia & Cresti 2022), provided they can represent an adequate field of application for illocution.

These are some quantitative data of Topic fillings: noun phrases (55,2%), verbal phrases and subordinate clauses (37%), adverbial clauses (9,2%), prepositional phrases (12,5%), adjectival phrases (0,5%) (Cresti & Moneglia 2018; Moneglia & Cresti 2022; Cresti 2023).

Let's see examples of Topic's referential types filled by definite and quantified phrases, circumstantial clauses, and adjectival phrases:

(2) \*VAL: *il marito* / <sup>TOP</sup> *conta poco* // <sup>COM</sup>

'the husband, (he) matters little'

%Ill: assertion of evidence [ifamcv18]

(3) \*CIC: *un po' di gruzzolo* / <sup>TOP</sup> *lo hai fatto* / <sup>COM</sup> *no ?* <sup>PHA</sup>

‘a little nest egg, did you do it, didn’t you?’

%ill: request for confirmation [ifamcv14]

(4) \*ANN: *a Firenze* / <sup>TOP</sup> *c’hanno tutte queste idee...* <sup>COM</sup>

‘in Florence, they have all these ideas...’

%ill: expression of obviousness [ifamcv26]

(5) \*FRA: *fin quando non li apri* / <sup>TOP</sup> *i sapori rimangono buoni* // <sup>COM</sup>

‘until you open them, the flavors remain good’

%ill: constatation [ifamcv06]

(6) \*NIC: *blu* / <sup>TOP</sup> *non c’è* // <sup>COM</sup>

‘(colored in) blue, there is nothing’

%ill: surprise/contrast [ifamcv09]

Among the various referential Topic fillings, we must underline that proper names are good candidates for this function. See example (1) and (7), which records a feminine proper name preceded by a definite article:<sup>8</sup>

(7) \*ZIA: *la Ginetta* / <sup>TOP</sup> *aveva diciotto mesi* / <sup>COM</sup> *quando mi sposai* // <sup>APC</sup>

‘(the) Ginetta, (she) was eighteen months old, when I got married’

%ill: narration [ifamn01]

A specific filling of Topic is constituted by deictic expressions (personal pronouns, adjectives, time and space adverbs) representing nearly 10% of Topics (IPIC data):

(8) \*LIA: *questo* / <sup>TOP</sup> *è i’ San Gottardo* // <sup>COM</sup>

‘this, (it) is the Saint Gotthard’

%ill: assertion of evidence [ifamcv01]

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<sup>8</sup> The process of derivation of the Italian definite article from the Latin demonstrative pronoun *ille* started to distinguish a single and known object. Then the use was extended for generally identifying noun phrases. In many Italian regional varieties, it can precede feminine proper names.

(9) \**ALD*: *te* / <sup>TOP</sup> *tu curi più il lavoro...* <sup>COM</sup>

‘(as for) you, you take care of work more...’

%ill: expression of obviousness [ifamn14]

(10) \**NIC*: *anzi* / <sup>INP</sup> *per ora* / <sup>TOP</sup> *fallo tu* // <sup>COM</sup>

‘on the contrary, for the moment, it is up to you’

%ill: order [ifamcv09]

In paragraph 6.2, we’ll see that the deictic expressions, as in examples (8), (9), and (10), and feminine proper names preceded by a definite article, as in (7), represent a negative test bench for Allocutive since the previous expressions are not attested, and competence is rejected with this function.

### 3.3. Modal Topic

Expressions of modal value, such as adjectival and adverbial phrases and hypothetical subordinate clauses preceding the Comment and adequately performed through a prefix unit, have been considered suitable for performing the Topic function. However, their recognition as expressions, satisfying the requirement of being a reference identifiable by the addressee, could create perplexity. Within the pragmatic framework of L-AcT, modal Topics are interpreted as a window to the speaker’s attitude about his own illocutionary activity (Moneglia & Cresti 2022). Modal Topics constitute independent semantic scenes, making explicit for the addressee the speaker’s point of view on the illocutionary activity he intends to enact. So doing, they function in any case as an identifiable reference for the addressee, even if not external, but concerning the speaker himself, and can legitimately perform the information function of the Topic.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Within the important body of work by Ferrari and his team – known as the Basel Model – on Italian written texts (Ferrari 2014) it is proposed a distinction between the function of Topic and that of Frame. The latter often coincide for semantic and syntactic features with modal Topics. According to Basel Model, the Topic represents the aboutness of a predication and may participate to the foreground information of the same nucleus. Conversely, the Frame is detached from the nucleus and is part of the background information together with parenthetical inserts. In the case of background units occurring at the beginning of utterance, their definition is based on semantic and in some sense “perceptual” features because they have a broad scope, their content opens up to the previous context, creates connections and remains active in the subsequent context. In speech, no such distinction arises at the

It's worth noticing that in IPIC data, out of 2,500 utterances with a Topic, about 200 are in effect modal. Let's see some examples of adverbial phrases and subordinate hypothetical clauses:

(11) \*DAN: *praticamente* / <sup>TOP</sup> *aveva parlato Cofferati* // <sup>COM</sup>

‘practically, Cofferati had spoken’

%ill: report [ifamcv23]

(12) \*SIL: *perché secondo me* / <sup>TOP</sup> *comunque* / <sup>PAR</sup> *lui era proprio così* // <sup>COM</sup>

‘because in my opinion, anyway, he was just like that’

%ill: conclusion [ifamcv12]

(13) \*ALE: *bene o male* / <sup>TOP</sup> *facevamo il quarto* // <sup>COM</sup>

‘one way or the other, we were doing the fourth’

%ill: evaluation [ifamcv14]

(14) \*LUC: *se ero ancora da operare* / <sup>TOP</sup> *magari un'sarebbe andato* // <sup>COM</sup>

‘if I were going to undergo a surgery operation, he might not have gone’

%ill: (counterfactual) hypothesis [ifamcv22]

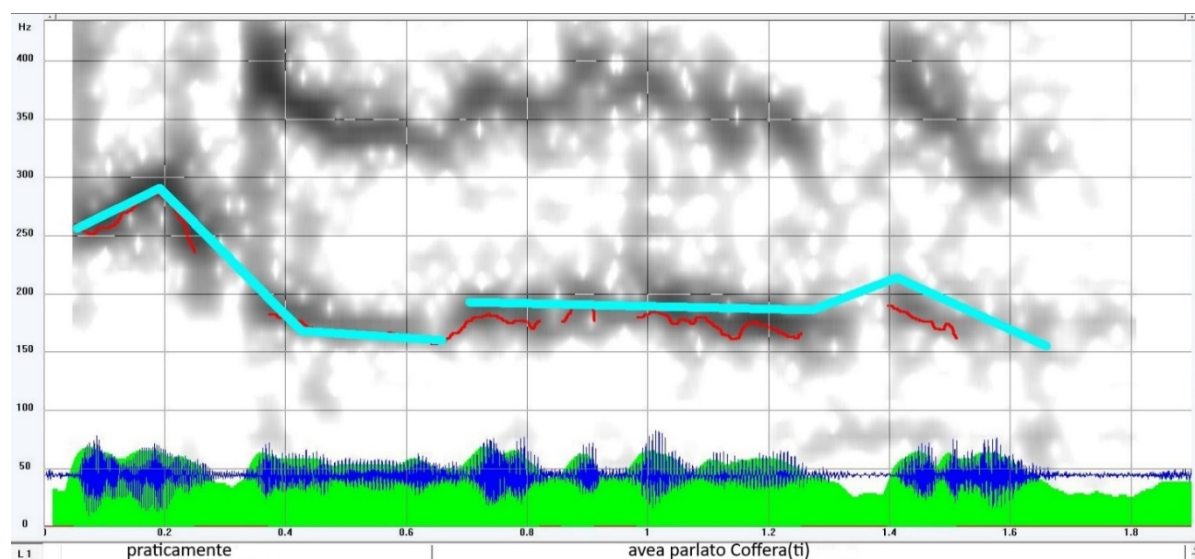


Figure 3: F0 tracks of (11).

utterance level, because a Topic cannot be part of the same nucleus within the Comment but must be detached from it. So, the distinction with Frame vanishes. In particular, the distinction between foreground and background aspects is not pertinent to the definition of the Topic information function as the field of application of the illocutionary force of the Comment.

Even if Topic allows such a large variety of morpho-syntactic fillings, its function imposes semantic restrictions. For instance, no adverbial phrases of manner have been found with the Topic function. Given that they develop a compositional relation of verb modification, they lack the semantic condition to represent an independent domain of reference for the addressee.<sup>10</sup> Only adverbials with a modal meaning and a sentence scope represent an independent scene expressing the speaker's point of view and being adequate to function as a Topic.<sup>11</sup>

Let's see some competence examples. (15) is an acceptable instance whose manner adverb (*lentamente*) constitutes a modification of the verb participating in the sentence configuration within a Comment unit.

(15) \*ABC: (*lei*) *ha mangiato lentamente la sua colazione* // <sup>COM</sup>

'she slowly ate her breakfast'

%ill: narration [competence ex.]

Conversely, in (15a), the adverb should perform a Topic function, but an utterance like this is not attested, and we assume that it is not "allowed" because of its semantic inadequacy. Of course, its foreseen prosodic performance must be considered to appreciate its absence in data.

(15a) \**lentamente* / <sup>TOP</sup> *ha mangiato la sua colazione* // <sup>COM</sup>

'slowly, she ate her breakfast'<sup>12</sup>

Still, keeping the linear word order, manner adverbs can develop a Comment function. In (15b) and (15c), it is specifically the adverb that conveys the illocution

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<sup>10</sup> The concept of manner, *maniera* in Italian, covers a wide domain of phenomena which, depending on the research perspective, vary from adverbs to verbal phrases of manner to tools for carrying out an action. Among them, the characterizations of the manner inherent in the verbal seeds can also be considered (Corona & Pietrandrea 2022). The exclusion from the Topic function observed in the corpus is limited to adverbs and adverbial phrases of manner.

<sup>11</sup> The class of manner adverbs are mostly covered by lexemes morphologically composed of the Latin suffix *-mente*, like *lentamente*, *allegramente*, *gentilmente*. Still, there are also adverbs composed in the same way, like *praticamente*, whose primary meaning is modal, and are consequently good candidate for the Topic function (De Cesare 2022).

<sup>12</sup> (15a) is an example that was not found in corpus, and which is rejected by competence. All the examples of this type are introduced by an only asterisk and not by an asterisk and three letters which by L-Act convention signal the speaker.

of answer and one of contrast. At the same time, the verbal phrase is conceived as a unit of the Appendix that is performed through a dedicated suffix prosodic unit. The content of the APC works as an echo repetition of the possible question (*how did he eat his breakfast?*) preceding (15b) or preceding (15c), as a contrastive expression of respect (*this time, he ate his breakfast quickly*).<sup>13</sup>

(15b) \*ABC: *lentamente* / <sup>COM</sup> *ha mangiato la sua colazione* // <sup>APC</sup>

‘slowly, she ate her breakfast’

%ill: answer [competence ex.]

(15c) \*ABC: *LENTAMENTE* / <sup>COM</sup> *ha mangiato la sua colazione* // <sup>APC</sup>

‘SLOWLY, she ate her breakfast’

%ill: contrast [competence ex.]

### 3.4. Iteration and Frequency of Topic

The frequency of the Topic reaches nearly 20% of utterances (IPIC, Panunzi & Gregori 2012). This frequency is also obtained considering that Topics can be iterated within an utterance, mostly in complex textual sequences, reaching a consistent percentage (approx. 10% of utterances with Topic). (16) shows a sequence of two referential Topics, a subordinate clause, and a noun phrase, interspaced by a Parenthesis unit:

(16) \*EST: *pagando il pacchetto clienti* / <sup>TOP</sup> *ovviamente* / <sup>PAR</sup> *estetica Silvana* / <sup>TOP</sup> *è una ditta che è aperta dal sessantadue* // <sup>COM</sup>

‘paying the customer package, obviously, Silvana aesthetics, (it) is a company that has been open since 1962’

%ill: arguing [ifamdl15]

A sequence of a modal adverbial and a referential Topic is also possible, as in (17).

---

<sup>13</sup> According to the illocutionary classification of L-Act, *contrast* is a speech act which cannot be enacted by an information function of Topic, developing only the field of application of the Comment illocution within the utterance. Contrast is an illocutionary type of the Expressive class belonging to the subclass of belief (Cresti 2017, 2020).

(17) \*SAB: *sicché* / <sup>DCT</sup> *niente* / <sup>INP</sup> *praticamente* / <sup>TOP</sup> *a fine marzo* / <sup>TOP</sup> *noi ci s' aveva già i biglietti* // <sup>COM</sup>

‘so, nothing, practically, at the end of March, we already had the tickets’

%ill: narration [ifamdl09]

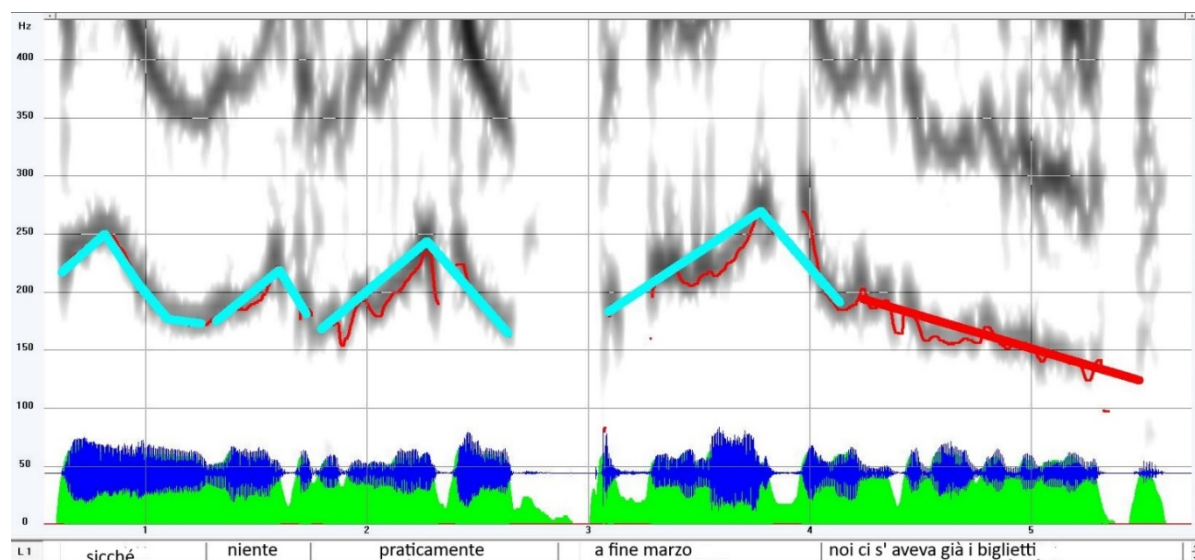


Figure 4: f0 tracks of (17).

The iteration of Topic and its significant percentage represent another feature of distinction from Allocutive, whose iteration is semantically incongruent (see 5.3).

## 4. Semantic constraints of Topic

### 4.1 Semantic constraints on the Topic function

As we anticipated, semantic constraints exist for the Topic's fillings. Referential expressions in Topic are submitted to the requirement to give rise to an identifiable reference for the addressee; thus, pure anaphoric pronouns,<sup>14</sup> negative pronouns, and indefinite phrases have not been found in the corpus and are assumed not to be adequate to fulfill the Topic function. Indeed, they are not sustainable, even from a

<sup>14</sup> There should be no confusion between the Italian purely anaphoric pronouns as *esso*, which cannot be interpreted through an *hic et nunc* reference, and deictic pronouns like *io*, *tu*, or *questo*. The latter indeed make up about 10% of the lexical fillings in the Topic and conversely the first has never been attested in this function and is competence rejected.



competence perspective. For instance, let's look at the fictitious examples (18), (19), and (20).

(18) \**esso* / <sup>TOP</sup> *è stato risolto recentemente* // <sup>COM</sup>  
 'it, was solved recently'

(19) \**una signora* / <sup>TOP</sup> *si è risentita e offesa* // <sup>COM</sup>  
 'a lady, (she) was resentful and offended'

(20) \**nessuno* / <sup>TOP</sup> *gli voleva bene* // <sup>COM</sup>  
 'nobody, (he) loved him'

The exclusion of interpretation of the previous pronouns and indefinite phrases from a Topic function is not evident if their prosodic performance is not considered. They could be interpreted as subjects, but they are not.<sup>15</sup>

To better evaluate this difference, one must consider that a noun phrase can develop a Topic function within the Topic-Comment information pattern of the utterance, and in that case, it must be necessarily performed and isolated in a prefix unit. Otherwise, keeping the same word order, the noun phrase can be integrated within the compositional structure of a sentence, of which it constitutes the subject. Overall, the sentence develops a Comment function performed by a root unit.

We did laboratory experiments asking speakers to perform *esso*, *una signora*, and *nessuno* in the fictitious instances (18), (19), and (20) through a prefix prosodic unit to realize a Topic. The resulting performances are uncertain, recording pauses between the expected expressions in Topic and the rest of the utterance. They give rise to a separated sequence of two chunks, whose interpretation is judged odd. Otherwise, speakers have prosodically integrated these expressions within the same prosodic unit of Comment together with the predicate, constituting an acceptable unitary entity, substantially a sentence.

For comparison, let us see (18a), (19a), and (20a), in which the nominal expressions are prosodically performed within the root unit of Comment and work as sentence subjects. These examples are acceptable on a competence basis, although such instances are rarely found in spoken corpora. Actually, only (20a) is a positive corpus datum.

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<sup>15</sup> Mello & Silva (2022).

(18a) \*ABC: *esso (il problema) è stato risolto recentemente* // <sup>COM</sup>

‘it (the problem) was solved recently’

%ill: explanation [competence ex.]

(19a) \*ABC: *una signora si è risentita e offesa* // <sup>COM</sup>

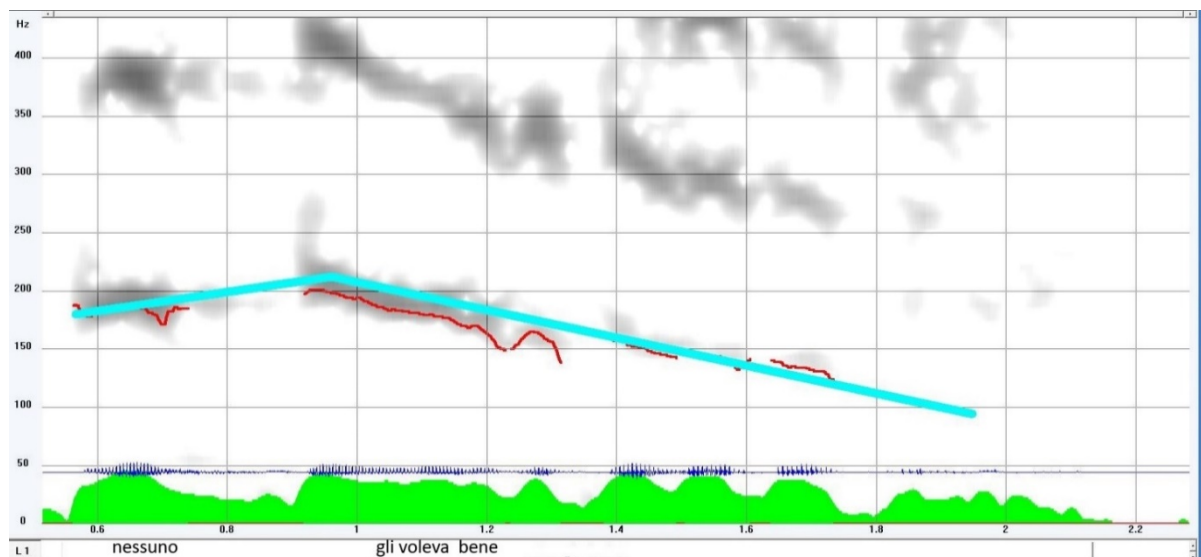
‘one lady became resentful and offended’

%ill: report [competence ex.]

(20a) \*ANG: *nessuno gli voleva bene* // <sup>COM</sup>

‘nobody loved him’

%ill: narration [ifammn20]



**Figure 5:** F0 tracks of (20a)

The f0 tracks of (20a) clearly show the prosodic integration of the negative pronoun *nessuno* within the Comment, thus developing a subject role in the sentence structure.

#### 4.2. Topic and subject

The syntactic definition of subject can be synthesized as that of assignor of agreement to the verb in the sentence and from a semantic point of view themes, agents, experiencers or beneficiaries can assume this role. Still, the distinction between Topic and subject remains open since also some Topics can be filled by contents sharing

these semantic properties. Accordingly, a Topic could play the semantic and syntactic role of subject and subject the information function of Topic.<sup>16</sup>

In the L-AcT frame, the two notions are independent the one from the other (Cresti 2005). The oddness of the fictitious utterances in (18), (19), and (20), indeed, can be directly connected to the identifiability requirement stated in the definition of the information function of Topic, while this condition does not regard the subject. The Topic constitutes a semantic scene conceived by the speaker to put the field for illocution in place for the addressee, and it must be identifiable by itself. Conversely, the subject doesn't constitute a semantic scene independently conceived and is not performed through a dedicated prefix unit since it doesn't develop an information function alone. The subject is compositionally integrated with a predicate within a syntactic sentence whose propositional content tends to the truth.

The Topic-Comment pattern implies a pragmatic relation at the information level, and the scenes fulfilling the respective functions are independent and develop: the Topic – the field of application for the illocution, and the Comment – the accomplishment of the illocution. The semantic content of each scene is conceived and governed by its own perspective depending on the information function. A dedicated prosodic unit, a prefix for Topic, and a root for Comment perform each unit.

It is a corpus finding that a large part of the Topic scene doesn't correspond to an individual but to space, time, deictic, or adverbial references.<sup>17</sup> Anyway, if there is an individual in Topic coreferential with the assignor of agreement in the predicate of Comment, within L-AcT it is assumed that the assignment is not direct but is given by an anaphoric relationship between the individual in the first scene of the Topic and a zero pronoun in the second scene of the Comment, as in (1) (*Virgilio<sub>i</sub> / <sup>TOP</sup> (0<sub>i</sub>) ha un tumore al cervello // <sup>COM</sup>*).<sup>18</sup>

The relationship between the subject and the predicate in the propositional entity doesn't regard the information level, which is ruled depending on Comment (illocutionary act), but syntax and semantics, which concern the locutionary act (Austin 1962). The subject-predicate relationship at the locutionary level composes only one scene that must be self-sufficient and governed by a unified perspective. In

<sup>16</sup> We mention in this regard a classic reference in the literature, such as Li & Thompson (1976).

<sup>17</sup> It must be remembered that more than 40% of utterances are not accomplished by assertive illocutions and therefore neither they are composed of a subject-predicate syntactic structure, nor their semantic content is committed to the truth.

<sup>18</sup> According to a shared assumption in generative linguistics (Graffi 1994).

this case, if the subject is co-referent with the verbal person of the predicate, it directly assigns the agreement. In real speech, propositions with subjects lexically implemented are not frequent, especially in the Romance languages. Concerning pragmatic performance, sentences with a lexical subject mainly develop a Comment function preferentially accomplishing neutral assertive illocutions, as in (20a) (*nessuno gli voleva bene* // <sup>COM</sup>). Of course, the Comment is performed through only the root unit, as seen in Figure 5.

#### 4.3. Comparison between the Topic and the subject in the corpus

The different types of relationships occurring within the two couples of Topic-Comment and subject-predicate become evident in crucial language structures, such as nominal predicates, especially with equative values.

Let's compare the corpus instances (21), (22), and (23), where the nominal expressions are performed as the Topic within a Topic-Comment pattern, with the fictitious counterparts (21a), (22a), and (23a), where the same expressions are performed as subjects of nominal predicates in a sentence, developing an only information unit of Comment. While the first series has a plain interpretation, the second leads to peculiar interpretative results or nonsense.

In the first series, the prefix performance of Topic signals that the speaker makes the expression available to the addressee as a granted reference for the Comment.

Let's see (21):

(21) \*MIC: *Marlon Brando* // <sup>COM</sup> \*MIC: *Marlon Brando* / <sup>TOP</sup> è *Marlon Brando* // <sup>COM</sup>

'Marlon Brando<sub>i</sub>, (0<sub>i</sub>) is Marlon Brando'

%ill: assertion of evidence [Ifamdl01-546]

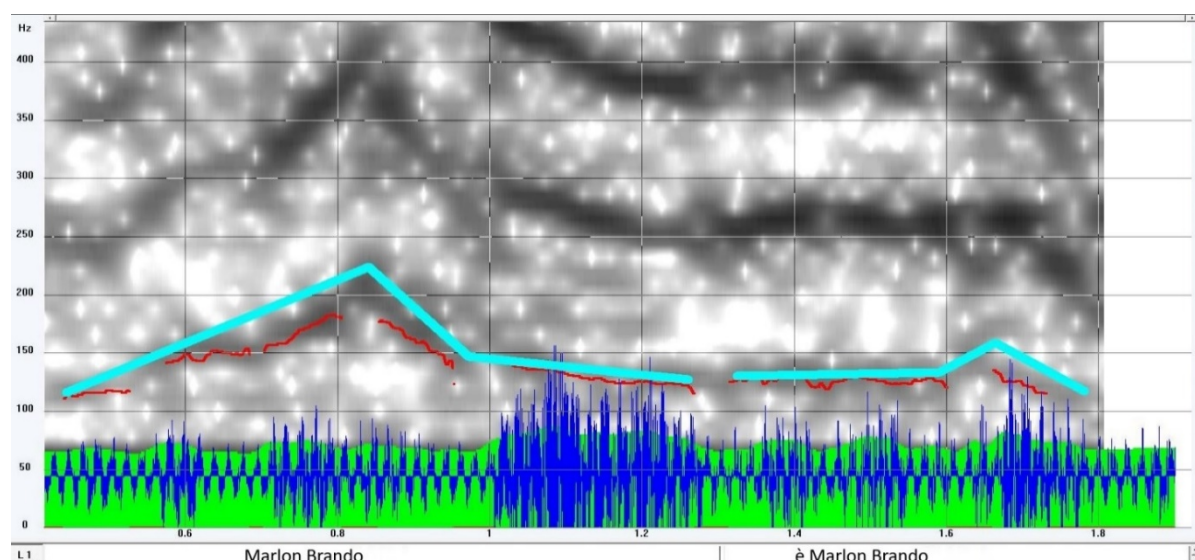


Figure 6: f0 tracks of (21).

We have reported the context of the examples since the Comment in the previous utterance ensures that the Topic's scene is identified. The interpretation of (21) concerns Marlon Brando, presented as an identifiable individual, already introduced in the context and repeated in the Topic's scene. Then, the proper name *Marlon Brando* can be interpreted in the Comment's scene as the typical characteristics of Brando's personality instead of the already assumed individual. This semantic "enrichment" is made possible by the illocutionary value of the Comment, which is an assertion of evidence belonging to the strong assertive sub-class, implying the speaker's evaluation (Cresti 2020; Cresti & Moneglia, forthcoming). In conclusion, the same proper name *Marlon Brando* is used two times in the utterance but each time it participates to an independent information function: Topic and Comment. Each scene has its own reference, and the relationship between them is provided and mediated by the assertion of evidence. There is no tautology.

Let's take now (22):

(22) \*ANT: *quando uno recita* / <sup>TOP</sup> *deve dare un po' di se stesso al personaggio* // <sup>COM</sup>

'when somebody plays, he must give something of himself to the character'

%ill: explanation

\*MIC: *eh* / TMT *cioè* / <sup>PHA</sup> *se stesso* / <sup>TOP</sup> *non deve esistere nel... (cinema)* // <sup>COM</sup>

'himself<sub>i</sub>, (0<sub>i</sub>) ought not to exist in the ... (movie)'

%ill: arguing [Ifamdl01]

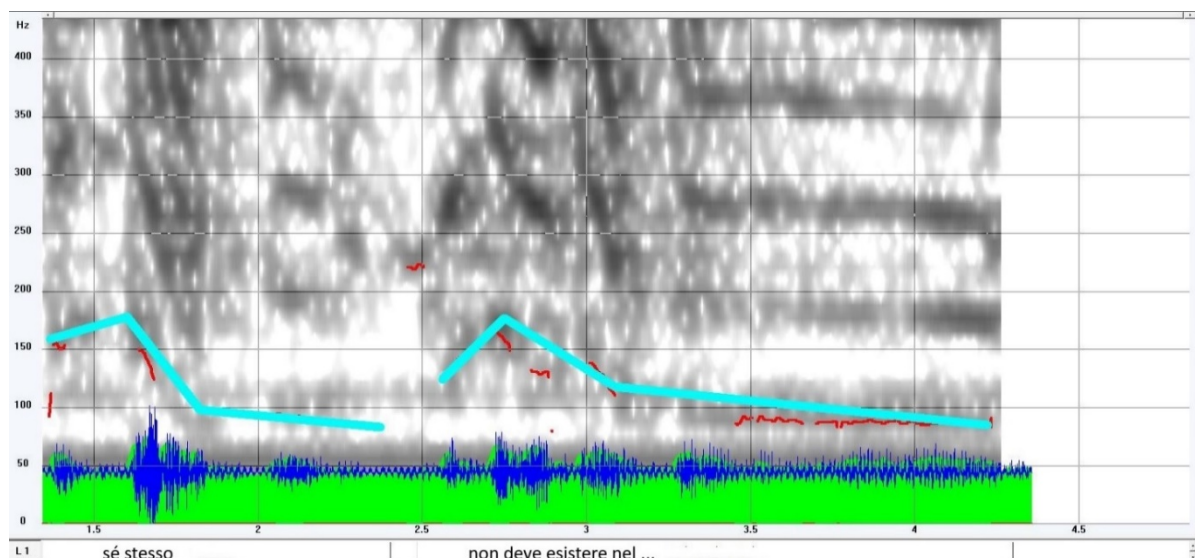


Figure 7: F0 tracks of (22).

The interpretation of (22) introduces in the Topic's scene the reference to the set of properties that identify the “personal identity” (*se stesso*) that is taken from the previous turn. The Comment argues that the “personal identity” should not influence an actor when he is playing. The relationship between the two scenes is meaningful.

Let's see also (23):

(23) \*LUI: *(queste) possono essere utilizzate solo come uscite // <sup>COM</sup> l'accesso / <sup>TOP</sup> è il cubo // <sup>COM</sup>*

‘(these) can be employed only as exit. The admittance, (0,) is the cube.’

%ill: conclusion; explanation [Ifamcv16]

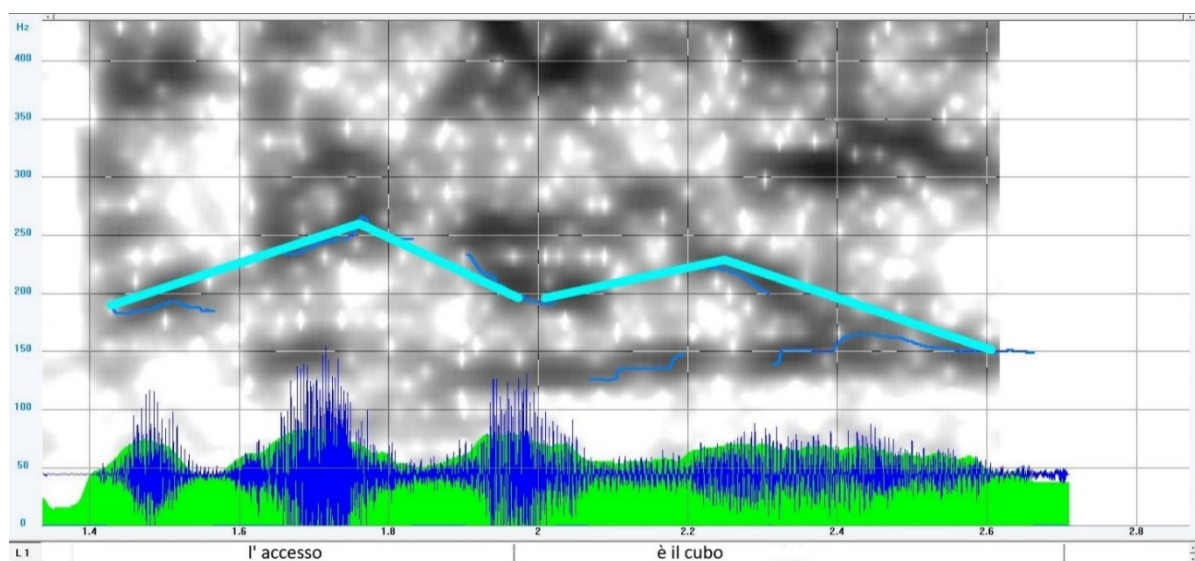


Figure 8: F0 tracks of (23).

In (23), the Topic-Comment structure is compulsory to get the actual interpretation. In the Topic scene, the admittance is identified through the opposition with the term *exits* in the previous utterance. In turn, the Comment accomplishes an assertion whose content is a predicate of identification. The semantic result is not a linear equative relationship between two individuals within the same scene but the pragmatic relationship (explanation) between two individuals participating in two distinct scenes. The core scene is the “representation as a cube” in the Comment, and the premise is the reference to an independently identified individual, “the admittance” in the Topic. Thus, the addressee can identify the entrance into the world relying on the admittance because of the explanation in the Comment. The addressee doesn’t have another possible interpretation.

Considering the second series, the nominal expressions previously used to fill the Topic are integrated into fictitious utterances as the subject of a sentence:

(21a) \**Marlon Brando è Marlon Brando* // <sup>COM</sup>

‘Marlon Brando is Marlon Brando.’

(22a) \**Se stesso non deve esistere nel ... (cinema)* // <sup>COM</sup>

‘Himself ought not to exist in the ... (movie)’

(23a) \**L’ accesso è il cubo* // <sup>COM</sup>

‘The admittance is the cube.’

Crucially, in (21a), (22a), and (23a), the interpretation and even the acceptability changes.

In (21a), two identical proper names refer to the same person and participate in an equative predicate. One scene is composed of two individuals, and no referential distinction between them is possible since they are functionally unified within the Comment by the same assertive illocution. Thus, the interpretation of the sentence can only be a tautology.

In (22a), *se stesso* remains an unreferenced reflexive pronoun that cannot even grammatically develop a subject role, and the resulting interpretation of the sentence is nonsense.

Then, the interpretation of (23a) is ambiguous, giving origin to a case of not-decidability about the actual entrance between the admittance and the cube. It

depends on the fact that two equally definite noun phrases participate in an equivalence predicate forming one scene. In this case, the possibility of an independent reference of one between the two individuals is also missing. Lacking an external reference does not ensure a clear choice of what the entrance is.

Therefore, to make interpretable non-semantically saturated contents, such as negative pronouns, pure anaphora, and indefinite sentences, as in (18a), (19a), and (20a), the subject can “profit” from the semantic content of the predicate within the same scene thus giving a context to these kinds of expressions and saturating their meaning. Conversely, these same expressions cannot serve as Topic, as we can appreciate in (18), (19), and (20), because they are not semantically sufficient to constitute a scene that must be per se identifiable.

Still, the subjects of sentences recording attributive and equative predicates must submit to semantic restrictions relating to the properties of the nominal part in the predicate, as in (21a), (22a), and (23a). Conversely, if the same nominal expressions – that are semantically adequate – develop the information function of Topic, as in (21), (22), and (23), they are freed from the constraints of the sentence compositionality. There is no direct equative relationship between two individuals within a scene but a functional relationship between two individuals participating in scenes, each provided with its own reference and mediated by illocution.

#### **4.4 Semantic Restrictions on Modal Topic**

It must be highlighted that there are semantic restrictions on modal Topics specifically depending on the illocutionary type of the Comment (Moneglia & Cresti 2022).<sup>19</sup> For instance, restrictions concern the fact that the point of view of the modal Topic is that of the speaker or that of the addressee, depending on specific illocutionary types such as *evidentiality assertion* and *request for confirmation*, according to the L-AcT tagset (Cresti 2017).

An assertion of evidence is an assertive act based on a modal premise in the Topic that places the speaker’s point of view as a guarantee of the act. In this regard, they offer the addressee a positive evaluation in the Comment (Cresti 2020). Let’s see (24).

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<sup>19</sup> The following constraints on modal Topic have not been reported in literature since they can be appreciated only on corpus-based research which also considers the prosodic alignment and functional and illocutionary identification of utterances.



(24) \*ABC: *a mio parere / <sup>TOP</sup>faresi bene a partire // <sup>COM</sup>*

‘in my opinion, you would do well to leave’

%ill: evidentiality assertion [competence ex.]

Still, the point of view, but this time referred to the addressee, cannot be assumed as the Topic’s premise of an evidentiality assertion, as results evident in (24a).

(24a) ??\* *a tuo parere / <sup>TOP</sup>faresi bene a partire // <sup>COM</sup>*

‘?? in your opinion, you would do well to leave’<sup>20</sup>

A request for confirmation is a directive act aimed at the addressee’s linguistic behavior. It starts with the speaker’s positive hypothesis about something in the Topic, which can also be extended to comprehend the addressee’s opinion (Cresti & Moneglia 2023). In (25), the Comment makes a request for agreement to the addressee that is inappropriate if it regards the addressee’s program.

(25) \*ABC: *a tuo parere / <sup>TOP</sup>farei (faresi) bene a partire? <sup>COM</sup>*

‘In your opinion, would I (you) do well to leave?’

%ill: request for confirmation [competence ex.]

Still, this positive hypothesis excludes the speaker’s opinion, which cannot, in any case, be asked for confirmation by the addressee (25a).

(25a) \* *a mio parere / <sup>TOP</sup>farei (faresi) bene a partire? <sup>COM</sup>*

‘in my opinion, would I (you) do well to leave?’

Of course, the semantic constraints on modal Topics can be extended to many other cases depending on specific illocutionary types that we cannot cover in this article.

However, there are also semantic constraints on modal Topics since deontic modality that implies a mandatory condition for the addressee is not an adequate filling for the Topic function. We want to notice the exclusion of deontic adverbials. As a matter of fact, no adverbial phrases introducing deontic modality as, for instance,

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<sup>20</sup> Different illocutions permit the use of an utterance like *In your opinion you would do well to leave*. Provided that it accomplishes an expressive illocution that report the addressee’s thinking in the whole, by criticizing it.

*per forza* ('absolutely'), *magari* ('even' in its deontic sense), *obbligatoriamente* ('compulsory'), *bisognerebbe* ('must'), have been, indeed, found in corpus with Topic function and result odd to competence judgment.

These adverbs cannot develop a modal Topic since they represent physical, legal, or religious rules that exist *per se* in the world, and are considered mandatory conditions, external to the speaker, and valid for the speaker and the addressee. Thus, they cannot be given as a modal Topic representing the personal speaker's point of view.

We must proceed in a comparison between two utterances: the first, the real (11), with a Topic-Comment information pattern whose Topic is a modal epistemic, and the second, the fictitious example (11a), with a deontic adverbial filling the Topic, which has no application:

(11) \*DAN: *praticamente* / <sup>TOP</sup> *aveva parlato Cofferati* // <sup>COM</sup>

'practically, Cofferati had spoken'

%ill: report [ifamcv23]

(11a) \**obbligatoriamente* / <sup>TOP</sup> *aveva parlato Cofferati* // <sup>COM</sup>

'compulsorily, Cofferati had spoken'

As in all the other fictitious examples, the hypothetical prosodic realization of (11a) according to a prefix unit must be considered. However, the example shows how giving the addressee an obligation as the textual premise of a report doesn't make much sense.

The utterance could have been accepted if it had been formulated with a referential Topic in a Topic-Comment pattern, as in: "since he had been compulsorily requested /TOP Cofferati had spoken // COM." In so doing, the obligation would have been presented in the Topic as an external real condition.

Of course, if the prosodic performance corresponds to a root type and, as in (11b), the deontic adverb can fulfill a Comment accomplishing a strong expressive force, followed by a repeated verbal phrase in the Appendix, the utterance should be accepted.

(11b) \*DAN: *obbligatoriamente* / <sup>COM</sup> *aveva parlato Cofferati* // <sup>APC</sup>

'mandatorily, Cofferati had spoken'

%ill: expression of agreement [competence ex.]

## 5. Allocutives

### 5.1 The state of the art on vocatives

What is called Allocutive within L-AcT is usually dealt with in the literature under the term *vocative*.<sup>21</sup> Still, grammars, at least in the Romance tradition, had given little space to this subject that was traced mostly under other phenomena such as allocutive pronouns (Serianni 1985; Micali 2022)<sup>22</sup> or in research on textual aspects concerning the addressee of a letter, salutations, greetings, and forms of dedication and citation (Abeillé & Godard 2021).<sup>23</sup> It is generically assumed that bare nouns without determiners and absolute generic noun phrases (*whoever you are*) are set off from the rest of the utterance to mark the addressee. They constitute an isolated prosodic unit in speech and are separated or encapsulated phrases by commas in writing. However, there is general agreement that proper names, nouns of family roles (*mom, dad*), names of professional roles (*professor, doctor, boss, man*), appellative adjectives (*dear, honey, rogue*), and respectful adjectives (*her majesty; his holiness*) are the most common candidates to be vocatives.

Among the scarce references for Italian, we would like to mention the chapter by Mazzoleni (1995) specifically dedicated to vocatives. The Author gives a detailed description of Italian usages, emphasizing the possibility of introducers of vocatives since they can be preceded by vocal supports (*o lei, o coso, a bella*).<sup>24</sup> The internal structure of the noun phrase is detailed: it can include affective adjectives (*caro, bravo*), nouns preceded by the third person demonstrative pronoun (*quel giovane*), nouns integrated by personal adjective and pronouns (*sua eccellenza, lor signori*), nouns crucially followed by the first possessive pronoun (*figlio mio, amica mia*), vocative pronoun modified by a relative clause (*tu che mi ascolti*). Proper names, nicknames, titles, terms of kinship, and social relationships are the most frequent fillings of vocatives.

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<sup>21</sup> See the introduction to vocative by Sonnenhauser & Noel (2013).

<sup>22</sup> This definition is commonly shared (Micali 2022). For example, in Italian the 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular *tu* is considered the natural allocutive pronoun and reverential pronouns are the 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural *voi* and third person singular feminine *lei*.

<sup>23</sup> The meaning of the term vocative is given as ‘marking someone addressed’ (Merriam Webster).

<sup>24</sup> Conversely, Serianni (1985) considers the vocatives not introduced as the real vocatives calling them *absolute*.

The most interesting question concerns the definition of vocative's function. Mazzoleni generally considers that vocative is an appeal to the addressee, identifying and addressing him. According to a shared definition, he assumes that vocatives behave as a deictic device and refer to the addressee as a 2<sup>nd</sup> person. Moreover, he distinguishes between two functions of vocatives: a call as a real appeal that makes someone become an interlocutor participating in the exchange and an address to an interlocutor already inserted in the communicative situation to reactivate his attention.<sup>25</sup> Mazzoleni also underlines that the first function, the call, is used in isolation, waiting for an answer or some reaction from the referred person. In contrast, in the second function, the address is inserted into the utterance with a substantially free distribution. There are constraints in the choice of the lexical expression filling the vocative depending on the two functions.

Regarding the function of vocatives, we can also refer to English grammars, even if marginally dealing with the phenomenon. For instance, in Quirk et al. (1985), the distinction between the two functions of the vocative is confirmed: a call drawing the attention of the person addressed, pulling them out of others in hearing, and an address, expressing instead the speaker's relationship or attitude to the addressee.

On corpus data of American and British English, Biber and colleagues (1999) highlight the importance of vocatives in defining and maintaining social relationships between participants in conversations. Two distributions are signaled: initial at the beginning and final at the end of the utterance. The final distribution, which records the highest frequency, stresses the social relationship with the addressee, while the initial distribution is mainly dedicated to prompting attention.

## 5.2 The L-Act perspective: illocutionary and dialogical functions of vocatives

In agreement with the literature but also because of observations on the corpus, we assume that vocatives develop two distinct functions that can be sketched as:

- A call to make someone a participant in the communicative exchange,
- An address to reactivate the addressee's attention and maintain social relationships.

However, within the L-Act framework, the two functions must be distinguished because "*calling to make someone a participant in the communication*" implies the accomplishment of an illocutionary force, and "*maintaining the social relationships while*

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<sup>25</sup> This basic functional distinction retraces to Zwicky (1974).

*getting the addressee's attention*" regards only a kind of information support. They work at different levels of the information structure of the utterance since a necessary Comment unit accomplishes the illocution, and optional dialogical units may implement the information support. The two functions are respectively performed through dedicated prosodic units.

In the literature, scarce attention is reserved to the prosodic performance of vocatives except for signaling their isolation from the rest of the utterance, and specifically, no correlation with the prosodic contours of different functions is noticed.<sup>26</sup> Conversely, the attention to the prosodic performance, as a compulsory request of L-AcT, leads to finding systematic correlations between prosodic contours and different functions.

For illocutionary functions, making someone to participate in the communication requires the speaker to open the closed communication channel or share a new attentional focus with the latter. These features define the directive illocutionary types of *distal* and *proximal calls* (Cresti 2017). Suppose someone is far away or not visible, and the speaker wants to make him appear and get in touch. In that case, the vocative expressions accomplish a directive act of distal call, performing the addressee's proper name or appellative very loudly, and the addressee is, in effect, dealt with as a 2<sup>nd</sup> person. As with all directive acts, the distal call is aimed at the addressee's behavior, who, in this case, is pushed to appear. The distal call is typically realized in isolation since it waits for the addressee's reaction.

The prosodic performance of the distal call corresponds to a rising contour to a high level and a hold on the post-tonic vowel, which is prolonged and characterized by high-intensity values. In (26), a child calls her dog, who ran away in a public garden.

(26) \*NIP: *Arturo* // <sup>COM</sup>

'Arturo'

%ill: distal call [prvcvl62-panc]

The call is connotated by an attitude of insistence and maybe of concern.

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<sup>26</sup> The most important contributions in the Auto-segmental model for the prosodic description of vocatives refer to what is defined "vocative chants" (Ladd 2008; Frota & Prieto 2015). However, no clear identification of the Allocutive function among vocative usages is provided.

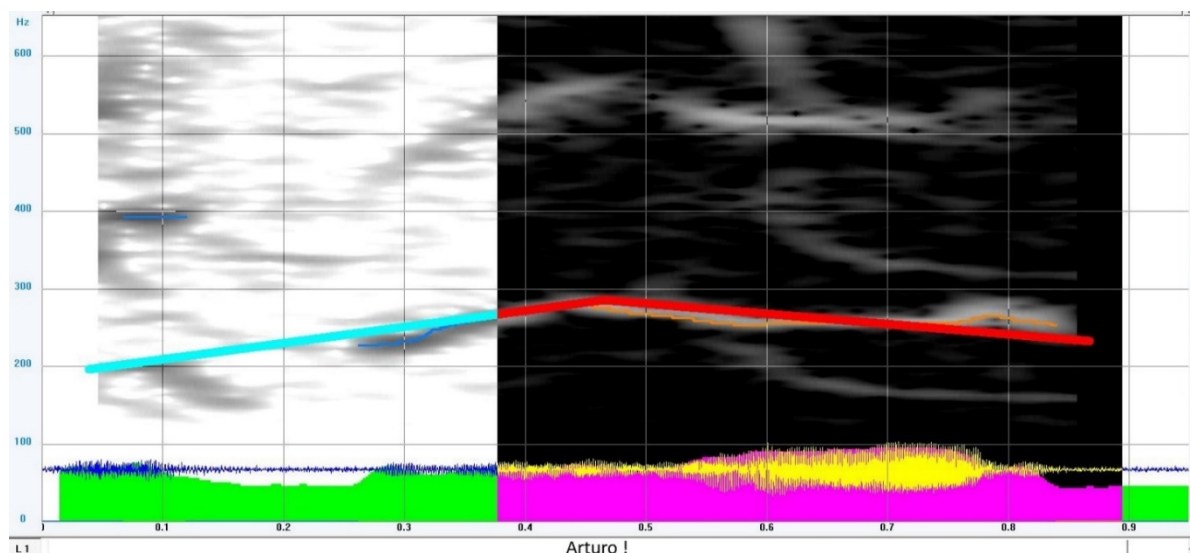


Figure 9: F0 tracks of (26).

However, finding a spontaneous example of a distal call in the corpus is not easy. In contrast, the proximal call is more common and regards an addressee in the context but not involved in the dialogue exchange. The act aims to share the focus of attention and is realized in isolation. It is performed by a rising contour with a lower range of f0 than that of a distal call.

Let's see (27). Three workers are repairing a roof; even though they are close together, the situation is dangerous, and one calls a companion to get his attention.

(27) \*WAL: *Leo* // <sup>COM</sup>

'Leo'

%ill: proximal call [prvcv163-plum]

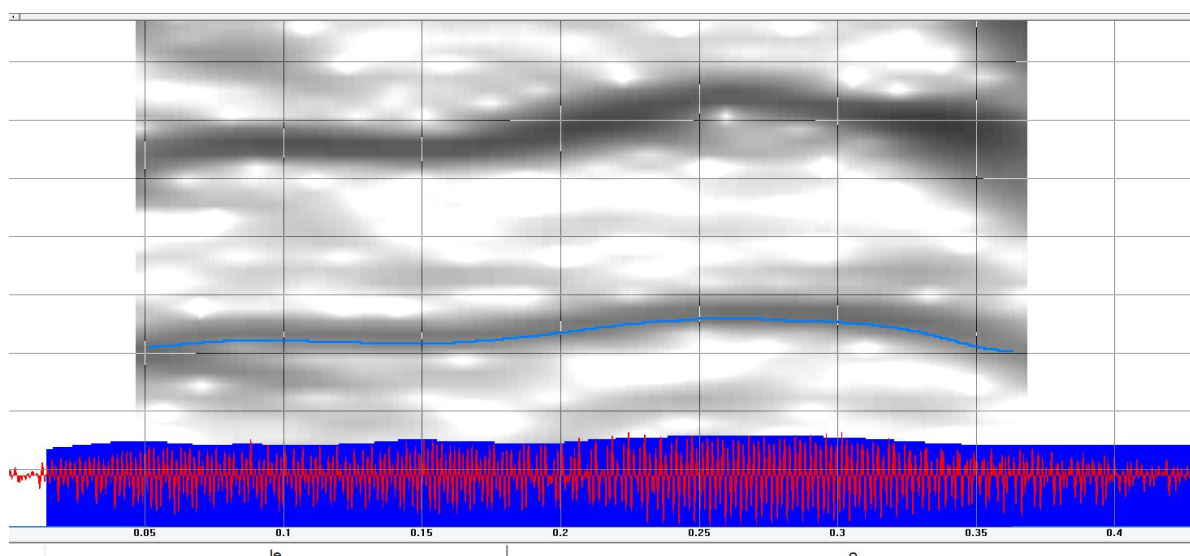


Figure 10: F0 tracks of (27).

However, the most common way to accomplish a call is to perform it together with another directive act within an *illocutionary pattern* named *functional calling* (Cresti 2000; Panunzi & Saccone 2018). This Illocutionary pattern is composed of a first Comment of proximal call (CMM) followed by a second Comment (CMM) implementing a kind of request (order, challenging question, reproach,...) to the addressee.

The pattern of the functional calling is directed to the addressee who is near and is alerted through his name or appellative to behave in a specific way: intervening, answering, or excusing. Let's see (28), (29), and (30):

(28) \*CLA: *Giovanni* / <sup>CMM</sup> *l'acqua* // <sup>CMM</sup>

'John, water'

%ill: proximal call + order [ifamcv 17]

(29) \*MAR: *sì* / <sup>INP</sup> *babbo* / <sup>CMM</sup> *falla finita di recitare* // <sup>CMM</sup>

'yes, dad, stop acting'

%ill: proximal call + protest [ifamdel19]

(30) \*ELA: *e te* / <sup>CMM</sup> *quanto tu c' avevi ?* <sup>CMM</sup>

'and you, how old were you?'

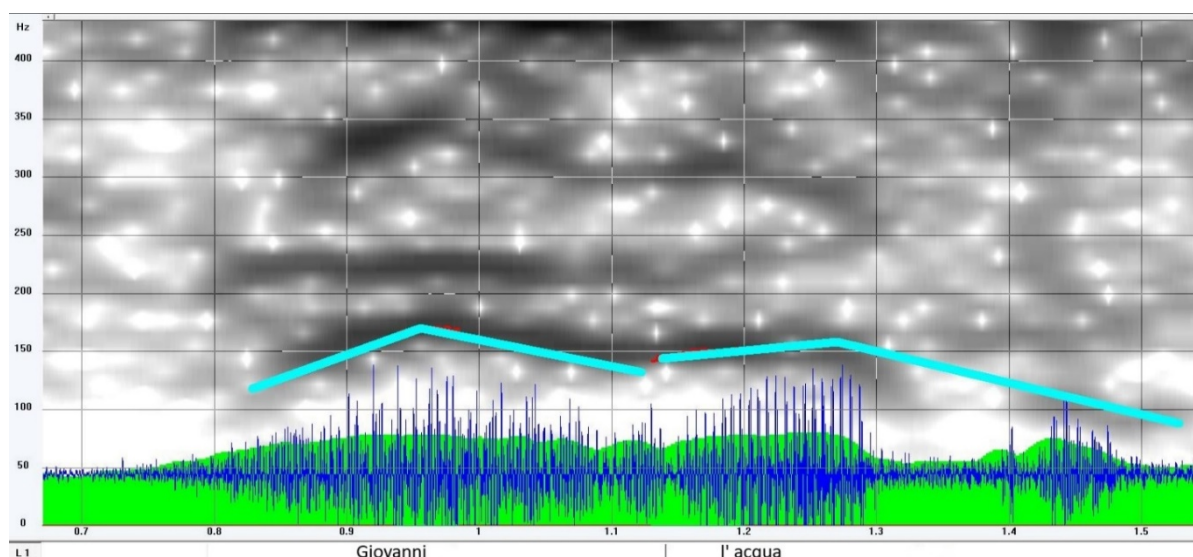
%ill: proximal call + wh-question [ifamcv01]

Let's notice that the addressee is referred to as a 2<sup>nd</sup> person, and even the deictic personal pronoun (*you*) can fill the proximal call as in (30).

The prosodic performance of the functional calling corresponds to a first raising contour that is not very high and short, which lowers a little and appears cut, remaining still interpretable in isolation. It is immediately followed by a second prosodic contour of the adequate form to convey the second directive force.

We can also consider many other illocutionary types that use bare nouns – comparable to vocatives – to perform specific acts such as invocation, introducing people, acts of expressive class for offense, challenge, or respect, and kinds of welcome and greetings (Biber et al. 1999, Borrás et al. 2015).

All are preferably accomplished in isolation and through specific prosodic contours. However, the article cannot address their prosodic performances and lexical constraints.



**Figure11:** F0 tracks of (28).

### 5.3. Allocutive

The general communication objective of getting the addressee's attention is implemented in speech as optional support to the utterance by Dialogical information units. In this case, the utterance conveys an illocutionary force through its necessary Comment unit since the channel is supposed to be already open, and the attentional focus is shared when these Dialogical units are played.

However, the communication objective of getting the addressee's attention can be achieved through different Dialogical unit types, i.e., Conative and Allocutive (Raso 2014; Raso & Leite 2010; Raso & Ferrari 2020).<sup>27</sup> Both Dialogical units are performed through dedicated prosodic units that can be generically described as *defocused* if compared with the root unit, which performs the Comment, which is always focused. The two functions have been identified in corpus observation (Cresti 2000; Frosali 2008; Raso & Leite 2013; Raso & Ferrari 2020) and are defined within the L-Act standard tag set according to Moneglia & Raso (2014) as follows:

- Conative pushes the addressee to participate adequately in the exchange, inducing them to perform, stop, or avoid a communicative action already underway.
- Allocutive identifies the addressee, looking for his attention but simultaneously establishing a personal connection with him.

<sup>27</sup> Devices realizing optional communicative support, within L-Act treated as Dialogical units, are mostly considered in literature Discourse Markers (Schiffrin 1987; Bazzanella 1995).



We cannot devote a satisfactory description of the Conative unit to this article; we only want to provide some useful features for a better distinction concerning the Allocutive unit.

Let's see typical examples of Conative (31) and (32):

(31) \*LAK: *a me tu me ne dai una* / <sup>COM</sup> *vai* // <sup>CNT</sup>

‘to me you give me one, go’

%ill: request [ifamcv14]

(32) \*ART: *questo lo fa Lorenzo* / <sup>COM</sup> *guarda* // <sup>CNT</sup>

‘this is up to Lorenzo, look’

%ill: constatement [ifamdl04]

In Italian, the Conative function is mainly associated with verbal forms, adverbs, connectives, and formulaic expressions (depending on regional varieties). It's worth noticing that *figées* verbal forms such as *wait*, *look*, and *hear*, when performing conative functions, lose their denotative meaning, getting a generic value of “pushing” to activate the addressee. In comparison, vocative expressions are rarely attested in the Conative function, while they systematically fill the Allocutive function.

However, the concept of attention-seeking shared by Conative and Allocutive must be restricted to define the latter's usage better. Let's then move on to some fundamental features of Allocutives: first, the function of social and empathic cohesion (Biber et al. 1999; Moneglia & Raso 2014; Raso & Ferrari 2020).

Let's see typical examples of Allocutives which show poor correspondence with a pushing attitude in favor of contacting the addressee:

(33) \*GAL: *di solito si fa così* / <sup>COM</sup> *Marco* // <sup>ALL</sup>

‘It's usually done like this, Marco’

%ill: reproach [ifamcv14]

(34) \*MAX: *queste son belle* / <sup>COM</sup> *mamma* // <sup>ALL</sup>

‘these are beautiful, mom’

%ill: appreciation [ifamcv01]

(35) \*LUC: *lui disse /<sup>INT</sup> me la piglio io /<sup>COM-r</sup> nini //<sup>ALL-r</sup>*

‘he said: I’m the one getting it, boy’

%ill: reported speech [ifamcv22]

(36) \*LEO: *la fascetta /<sup>TOP</sup> indo’ la va /<sup>COM</sup> Marco ?<sup>ALL</sup>*

‘the band, where does it go, Marco ?’

%ill: partial question [prvcv163-plum]

(37) \*WAL: *ammazzai due vipere /<sup>COM</sup> ieri /<sup>APC</sup> Leo //<sup>ALL</sup>*

‘I killed two vipers yesterday, Leo’

%ill: narration [prvcv163-plum]

The prosodic realization of Allocutive corresponds to a smooth, falling, and flat contour whose post-tonic syllable may be hypo articulated. The intensity is low, and the duration is medium. The complex of these characteristics causes its poor perceptual prominence.

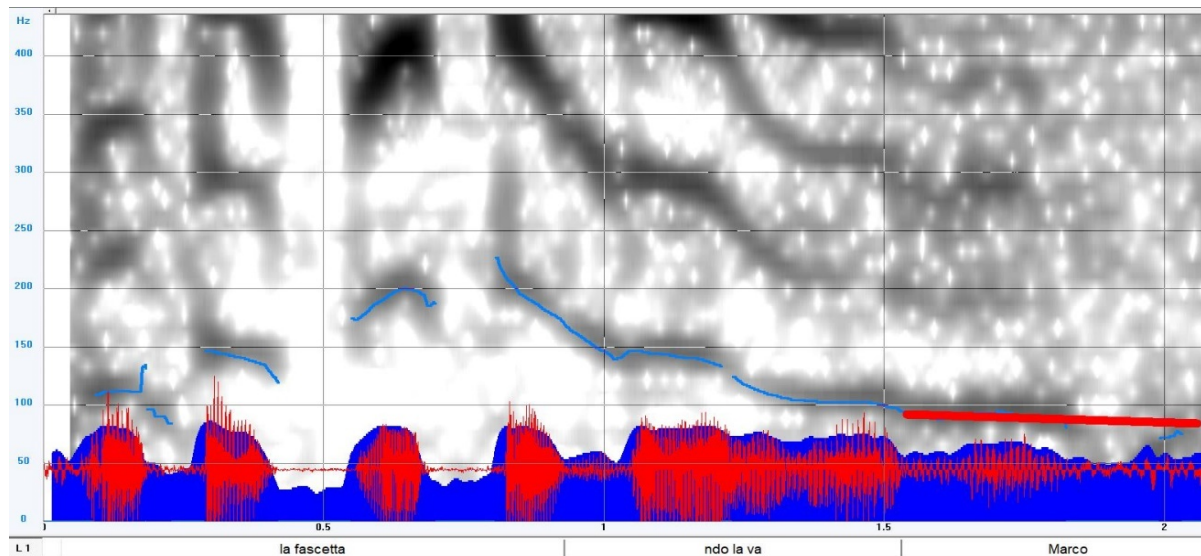


Figure 12: F0 tracks of (36).

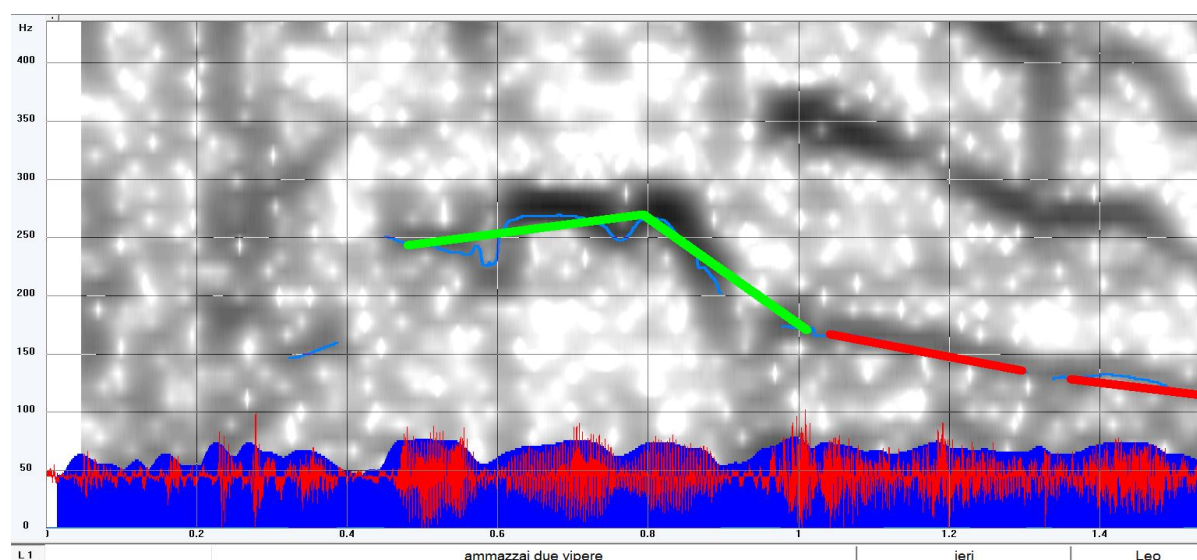


Figure 13: F0 tracks of (37).

The final distribution, too, confirms the weakness of the appeal of Allocutive. Agreeing with Raso, we verified that Allocutives mainly occur after the Comment. However, it is possible to find instances before the Comment in Italian, preferably if it is not at the absolute beginning of the utterance (see 5.1).

The frequency of Allocutive reaches approximately 1% of Italian utterances, which is in line with the values of the other Dialogical units.

It must be noticed that no case of Allocutive's iteration has been found, while Topic's iteration represents nearly 10% of occurrences (see paragraph 6.3).

In conclusion, prosody confirms being a distinctive feature that allows us to find a systematic correlation between the different functions of vocatives regarding illocutionary forces (Comment), realized through dedicated prosodic units of the root types, and information functions of support, as Allocutive, realized through a falling/flat and defocused prosodic unit.

## 6. Semantic constraints on Allocutive

### 6.1 Possible ambiguity between Topic and Allocutive

Corpus data show that Allocutives in Italian rarely occur before the Comment; anyway, they are by preference, not at the absolute beginning of the utterance. The distributive cases are the following:

a) after Topic, Incipit, and Conative

(38) \*VAL: *eh* / <sup>TMT</sup> *allora* / <sup>INP</sup> *Michela* / <sup>ALL</sup> *ti racconto il viaggio di nozze* // <sup>COM</sup>

‘eh, then, Michela, I’ll tell you about the honeymoon travel’

%ill: narration [ifammn08]

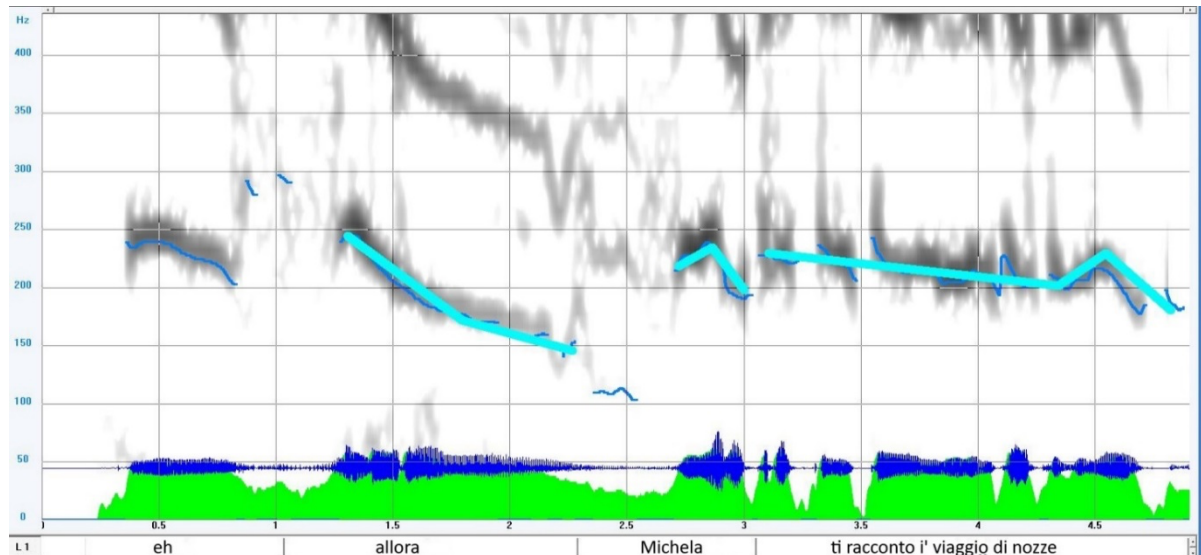


Figure 14: F0 tracks of (38).

b) interspacing an interrupted Comment, between i-COM and COM

(39) \*MAX: *te* / <sup>TOP</sup> *ci sei stata* / <sup>i-COM</sup> *Emanuela* / <sup>ALL</sup> *a Lecce?* <sup>COM</sup>

‘you, have you been there, Emanuela, in Lecce?’

%ill: request for confirmation [ifamcv17]

(40) \*ALE: *lo sai* / <sup>i-COM</sup> *piccolo* / <sup>ALL</sup> *s’è rotto il video-registratore?* <sup>COM</sup>

‘did you know, baby, the video recorder broke?’

%ill: complaining [ifamcv15]

c) at the beginning of a Reported utterance

(41) \*IDA: *allora dico* / <sup>INT</sup> [*Antonio* / <sup>ALL<sub>r</sub></sup> *guarda* / <sup>CNT<sub>r</sub></sup> *pretty woman* / <sup>TOP<sub>r</sub></sup> *esiste in televisione* // <sup>COM<sub>r</sub></sup>]

‘then I say: Antonio, look, pretty woman, exists only on television’

%ill: reported speech [Ifamdl20]

As the F0 tracks show in Figure 14, when Allocutive occurs before the Comment, its prosodic unit is slightly different from the one distributed after the Comment. Its intensity value is higher than that at the end of the utterance but still records an unfocused contour.

The distribution of Allocutives before the Comment might create ambiguity between the interpretation of Topic and Allocutive, as assumed in literature (Lambrecht 1996). We need to go back to example (1) and the competence example (1a), where the same wording corresponds to a different information structure recording at the beginning of the utterance with an Allocutive in the place of the Topic.

(1) \*LIA: *Virgilio* / <sup>TOP</sup> *ha un tumore al cervello* // <sup>COM</sup>

‘Virgil<sub>i</sub>, (0<sub>i</sub>) has a brain tumor’

%ill: conclusion [ifamcv01-573]

(1a) \*ABC: *sai* / <sup>CNT</sup> *Virgilio* / <sup>ALL</sup> *ha un tumore al cervello (Mario)* // <sup>COM</sup>

‘you know, Virgilio<sub>z</sub>, (0<sub>i</sub>) has a brain tumor (Mario<sub>i</sub>)’

%ill: conclusion [lab. example]

The F0 tracks in Figure (1a) and (1b) show that the two information functions are distinguished for their respective prosodic realizations: the Topic shows a prefix prominence, while the Allocutive is defocused, and does not give rise to a perceptually relevant unit. Thus, although the distinction is subtle, it is ensured by perceptual data.

However, even though native speakers know that they are different, their interpretations are not clear. What does it mean that Topic and Allocutive are correctly interpreted according to two distinct functions? What are the “puzzling” semantics conveyed by Allocutives?<sup>28</sup>

## 6.2 The Referential Constraint on Allocutive <sup>29</sup>

Although the wording in examples (1) and (1a) is the same, we must remember that the lexical filling of Topic is broad, implying even modal adverbials, while that of

<sup>28</sup> See in literature what has been called the puzzle of Vocatives (Coene et al. 2019) but also the many facets of explanation in Sonnenhauser & Noel (2013) show the intriguing nature of this phenomenon.

<sup>29</sup> The term *constraint* doesn’t depend on a normative attitude but, in addition to the fact that these uses are not attested, they are also not allowed by the competence, of course always on the condition that their adequate prosodic performance is taken into consideration.

Allocutive is quite reduced. Corpus data show that the set of expressions considered in the literature within overall vocative functions is further reduced in the Allocutive function. For instance, no noun phrases and pronouns followed by a relative clause (*you who listen to me*) or reverential nouns preceded by possessive adjectives (*his excellence*) are attested to develop this function. Only a restricted class of bare nouns – not preceded by determinate articles and quantifiers – can work.

For instance, in many Italian varieties, when a feminine proper name develops a Topic function, it can be preceded by a determinate article, but it is “banned from the Allocutive function. Let’s see the real example (5) and an artificial one (5a) where the same name in the Allocutive function can be used only if the definite article is rejected.

- (5) \*ZIA: *la Ginetta* / <sup>TOP</sup> *aveva diciotto mesi* / <sup>COM</sup> *quando mi sposai* // <sup>APC</sup>  
 ‘the Ginetta<sub>i</sub>, (0<sub>i</sub>) was eighteen months old, when I got married’  
 %ill: narration [ifamn01-170]

- (5a) \*ABC: *senti* / <sup>CNT</sup> (\**la*) *Ginetta* / <sup>ALL</sup> *aveva diciotto mesi* (*la Carla*) / <sup>COM</sup> *quando mi sposai* // <sup>APC</sup>  
 ‘(you know,) (\*the) Ginetta<sub>z</sub>, (0<sub>i</sub>) was eighteen months old (the Carla<sub>i</sub>), when I got married’

It is well known that definite articles are banned from vocatives in Romance languages (Rohlf 1966; Moro 2003). However, some exceptions are attested, as in the well-known case of French, and the explication of their usage is controversial (Coene et al. 2019; Bernstein et al. 2019; Bernstein forthcoming). In this regard, we want to take up again the distinction between vocatives used as fillers of illocutionary acts of call and those used as fillers with cohesive functions. Italian corpus data show that when developing an Allocutive function, nouns and proper names are always employed without definite articles. This makes it emerge that in the Allocutive function, vocatives are used out of a referential usage as a kind of literal citation or metalinguistic value, as suggested by Serianni (1985).

Following this trace, we also notice that no deictic expressions have been found in the corpora in the Allocutive function, and competence judgments reject these expressions. This contradicts the fact that vocatives are commonly and generally defined as deictic devices in literature (Mazzoleni 1995; Lambrecht 1996; Sonnenhauser & Noel 2013; Bernstein et al. 2019).

The deictic restriction can be verified in the comparison between the actual instance (9), where a deictic pronoun (*you*) develops a Topic function, and the artificial one (9a), in which the same deictic expression has been postponed testing its interpretability as Allocutive.

(9) \*ALD: *te* / <sup>TOP</sup> *tu curi più i' lavoro...* <sup>COM</sup>  
 'you, you take care of your work more...'  
 %ill: expression of obviousness [Ifammn14]

(9a) \**tu curi più i' lavoro* / <sup>COM</sup> *te* // <sup>ALL</sup>  
 \*'you take care of your work more..., you'

Even if the necessary variation in prosodic performance is not taken into account, the only possible interpretation of the postponed occurrence of *te* in (9a) would be as an irrelevant adjunct that develops an Appendix function, but indeed not a form of empathetic cohesiveness with the addressee.

For instance, in the real example (42), the occurrence of a deictic pronoun of the 2<sup>nd</sup> person develops an Appendix function realized through a suffix unit. It is clearly distinguished from the appellative *nini*, a vocative with the Allocutive function preceding it. This expression is appropriately realized through a defocused unit but is longer and higher than the suffix unit realizing the Appendix.

(42)\*MAR: *icché tu fai* / <sup>COM</sup> *nini* / <sup>ALL</sup> *te?* <sup>APC</sup>  
 'what are you doing, boy, you?'  
 %ill: wh-question [ifamcv22-168]

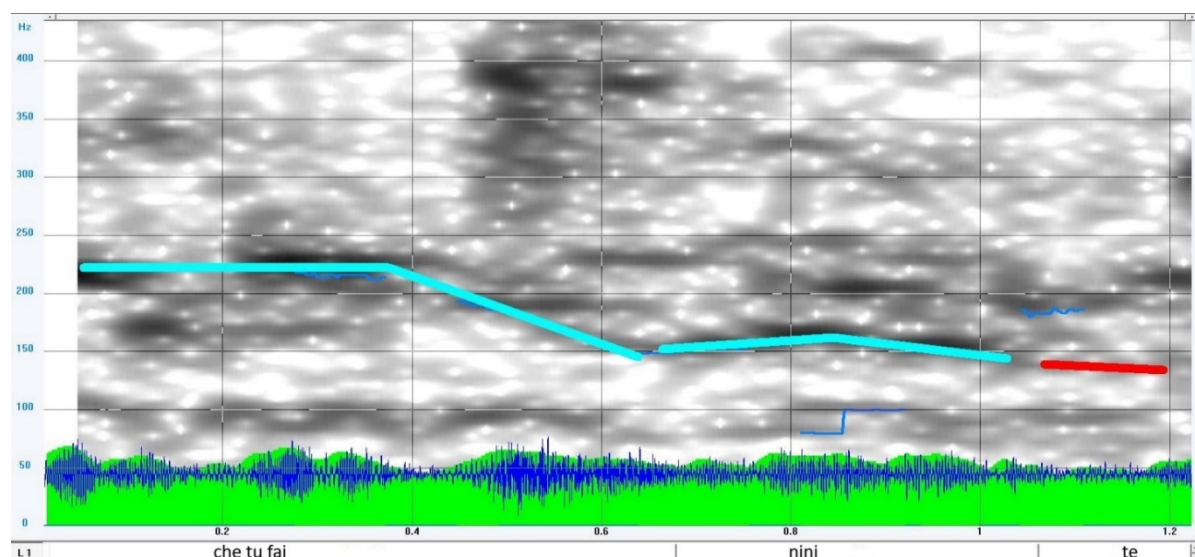


Figure 14: F0 tracks of (41).

The constraint on deictics is relevant since it shows that the content of an Allocutive function of social and empathic cohesion cannot be searched for in the world by referring to the *hic et nunc* situation, which is the proper characteristic of deixis. The constraint is impressive compared with the 10% of deictic Topic's filling, enacting a clear referential function.

The use of possessive adjectives with a noun goes in the same direction since, in the Allocutive function, only the first-person pronoun is allowed and must follow the noun; otherwise, the cohesive function fails.<sup>30</sup>

(43) \*ANT: *paranoia totale* / <sup>COM</sup>*figlio mio* // <sup>ALL</sup>

‘total paranoia, son of mine’

%ill: negative evaluation [ifamdl01-838]

Other possessive pronouns are competence-banned. Let's compare the real example (43) with the artificial (43a), showing the inappropriateness of other personal pronouns:

(43a) \**paranoia totale* / <sup>COM</sup>*figlio tuo (suo)* // <sup>ALL</sup>

\*‘total paranoia, your son / his son’

<sup>30</sup> The order with the adjective before the noun is possible only with *figée* expression as *mia cara*.



It means that the possessive pronoun must signal only the relationship that the noun (*son*) expresses with the speaker (see 6. 3). In this regard, the exclusion of 2<sup>nd</sup>-person possessive adjectives appears particularly relevant because it highlights how the Allocutive cannot be considered a reference to the addressee as a 2<sup>nd</sup> person. Of course, we can imagine other phrases developing the Allocutive function, such as *amica mia* (my friend) and *tesoro mio* (my treasure), provided they maintain the same relationship with the speaker.

Conversely, nominal phrases with all kinds of possessive pronouns, preceding or following the noun, are typical fillings of Topic and serve to develop identifiable references, even if external to the relationship with the speaker. Let's see (44) and (45):

(44) \*ANT: *il nostro testimone di Geova* / <sup>TOP</sup> *non ci ha fatto studiare Manzoni* // <sup>COM</sup>

‘our Jehovah’s Witness<sub>i</sub>, (0<sub>i</sub>) didn’t let us study Manzoni’

%ill: sarcasm [ifamcv23-66]

(45) \*JAK: *a casa tua* / <sup>TOP</sup> *c’è il tavolo così* // <sup>COM</sup>

‘at your house, there is a table like this’

%ill: constataion [ifamcv14-17]

In addition to the fact that a whole series of examples are not attested in the corpus, the competence constraints regarding definite articles, deictics, and 2<sup>nd</sup> person-possessive pronouns reveal that the Allocutive function excludes the referential identification of the addressee. An apparent logical contradiction appears: the addressee’s attention should be developed by the speaker with the latter’s proper name, title, or role noun, but any reference to him in the world is excluded.

### 6.3 The function of designation by Allocutive

We distinguish between using vocatives as Comments to express mainly illocutionary forces of call, that refer to the addressee as a 2<sup>nd</sup> person, and the aim of social and empathic cohesion toward the addressee as developed by the Allocutive. The L-AcT corpus-based functional distinction – corroborated by evidence of prosodic performance – allows us to overcome the semantic collapse proposed in the literature,

which, in an undifferentiated manner, considers the uses of vocatives as deictic devices.

Our investigation instead shows how the illocutionary uses of the vocative can be considered forms of direct reference to the addressee, while the function of the Allocutive deviates from this possibility by introducing a nominal expression as a *designation* of the addressee (Kripke 1980). The term designation denotes a word or group of words by which a person or thing is regularly known. The Allocutive's designation can be defined as the addressee's labeling made by the speaker through a proper name, an appellative, or a role noun, excluding any referential interpretation. The designatory interpretation of the Allocutive allows us to complete the distinction between this set of expressions with the function of Topic and that of Allocutive, which, beyond the same wording, have respectively a referential meaning compared to an exclusively designatory one.

However, it must be remembered that the addressee's designation made through the Allocutive performs only an auxiliary support function for an illocution already active in the Comment. In this regard, a schematic description of an act of deixis can help us make the difference between the auxiliary function of support of an Allocutive and an illocutionary act of deixis. The speaker, through deixis, makes the addressee fulfill an empty expression with content obtained by ostension in the context. Deixis is usually filled by a 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronoun (*tu*), a demonstrative pronoun (*questo*), a space adverb (*qui*), and a time adverb (*ieri*), getting their reference as a function of the situation. It implies the speaker's prompt to direct the addressee's attention to a specific part of the context that can be referred to as a shared denotation (prominence). This means that deictic expressions change their denotation from situation to situation.

Thus, it becomes clear why deictics cannot perform the Allocutive function. Given that deictics must be necessarily interpreted through their contextual reference, an addressee cannot be "baptized" by ostension without the speaker assigning him a "title" to serve as a designator. More generally, not only deictics but all types of phrases with a referential value, such as determinate and quantified nominal phrases, are inadequate to fulfill this function. Moreover, the cohesive support of the Allocutive is based precisely on the designation also shared by the addressee.

Thus, Allocutives cannot be considered as referred to the addressee intended as a 2<sup>nd</sup> person. Allocutive are not deictic devices but an addressee's designation through

which the speaker signals his closeness, and it is only indirectly that the Allocutive also “friendly” reactivates the addressee’s attention.

This explains why Allocutives can be filled only by a restricted lexicon revealing the relationship between the speaker and the addressee. They are conceived within a perspective of social and empathic cohesion, which is the first and specific function of Allocutives.

The typical lexical classes developing the designatory function are the following:

- Proper names signaling the speaker’s knowledge of the addressee,
- Appellatives signaling the affective and evaluative speaker’s consideration of the addressee,
- Role noun signaling the family or professional speaker’s position with respect to the addressee.

The designation made by the Allocutive is, in a certain sense, redundant because the speaker makes explicit bonds of kinship, friendship, and emotional relationships with the addressee that are well-known by the latter. Still, it is making them explicit that gives them cohesive value. The communication strategy is somehow the opposite of that implemented with the Topic, often characterized by implicit presuppositional aspects (Lombardi Vallauri 2019).

A referential device cannot accomplish the specific way Allocutive reactivates attention on the utterance; it is only done through an addressee’s designation. Thus, we can also figure out why no case of Allocutive’s iteration has been found in the corpus, while Topic’s iteration represents nearly 10% of occurrences.

The Allocutive function, acting as a rigid designator, cannot be repeated with a content variation, while the Topic content can be integrated and detailed (see paragraph 3.4). Let’s see the fictitious examples (33a) and (34a) where a double Allocutive should introduce a different labeling of the addressee, thus obtaining an effect of estrangement rather than empathic cohesion:

(33a) *\*di solito si fa così /<sup>COM</sup> Marco /<sup>ALL</sup> dottore //<sup>ALL</sup>*

‘It’s usually done like this, Marco, doctor’

%ill: reproach

(34a) *\*queste son belle /<sup>COM</sup> mamma /<sup>ALL</sup> amica mia //<sup>ALL</sup>*

‘these are beautiful, mom, my friend’

%ill: appreciation

Topic and Allocutive impose conditions on the semantic interpretation of their nominal filling so that the same expression, for instance, a proper name in (1) and (1a) is interpreted respectively as referential or designatory, depending on whether it is performed as a Topic or as an Allocutive.

(1) \*LIA: *Virgilio* / <sup>TOP</sup> *ha un tumore al cervello* // <sup>COM</sup>

‘Virgil<sub>i</sub>, (O<sub>i</sub>) has a brain tumor’

%ill: conclusion [ifamcv01-573]

(1a) \*ABC: *sai* / <sup>CNT</sup> *Virgilio* / <sup>ALL</sup> *ha un tumore al cervello (Mario)* // <sup>COM</sup>

‘you know, Virgil<sub>z</sub>, (O<sub>i</sub>) has a brain tumor (Mario<sub>i</sub>)’

%ill: conclusion [lab. example]

Given that native speakers come to distinguish perceptually the two utterances in connection to their respective prosodic performances, they also succeed in assigning them – although without a clear awareness of their difference – the referential interpretation of Topic and the designatory interpretation of Allocutive according to the communicative intention of the speaker. In other words, the Allocutive’s function changes the semantic value of the expressions filling it: a bare noun loses its referential possibility and maintains only a designatory value. It may thus appear less surprising that a bare nominal expression – deprived of its referential value and reduced to a designative value alone – could function as a cohesive social device and, in some sense, as a Discourse Marker.

## 7. Conclusions

Topic functions as the field of application of the illocutionary force and Allocutive as dialogical support aiming at social and empathic cohesion. However, the comparison between the two information units needs a premise on the fact that the set of expressions generically called vocative is not exclusively dedicated to the cohesive function. Vocatives can also accomplish directive illocutionary types, such as calling, which, like all directive acts, justifies the reference to the addressee as a 2<sup>nd</sup> person and considering vocatives as deictic devices, as generally assumed in the literature. Still, this is not the case with Allocutives, which are not deictic since they only designate the addressee. Crucially, prosody allows us to distinguish the illocutionary

functions of vocatives, performed through dedicated root units, and the labeling function of Allocutive, performed through a defocused falling/flat unit.

Given their occasional sharing of distribution (before the Comment) and lexical filling (bare nouns), an ambiguity of interpretation could arise between Topic and Allocutive. However, the prosodic performance of Topic (prefix unit) and Allocutive (defocused flat unit) allows their perceptive distinction, which also implies a change in the interpretation of their nominal fillings: referential for the Topic vs. designatory for the Allocutive.

The comparison between the function of the Topic and that of Allocutive makes the semantic characteristics of the Topic more clearly emerge. Although semantic restrictions are imposed on the Topic (pure anaphoric pronouns, negative pronouns, indefinite phrases, manner adverbs, deontic adverbials), its semantics include deictics and extend to a broad domain as long as providing an identifiable reference for the addressee. Conversely, the function of Allocutive limits the lexical fillings to bare nouns expressing the relationships between the speaker and the addressee. Specifically, it excludes the deictics since it labels the addressee out of any reference, maintaining only a designatory value.

The following table summarizes the comparison between the most relevant features of the Topic and the Allocutive information units.

	TOPIC	ALLOCUTIVE
<b>Type</b>	Textual Semantic and syntactic participation in the utterance	Dialogical Support and maintenance of the exchange with the addressee
<b>Function</b>	Field of application for the illocution of the Comment	Social/empathic cohesion and attention reactivation
<b>Prosody</b>	Prefix unit with prominence	Falling/flat unit without prominence
<b>Distribution</b>	Before the Comment	After the Comment (by preference)
<b>Morpho-syntax</b>	Phrases (referential, modal)	Nouns (proper names, appellatives, role nouns)
<b>Semantics</b>	Referential (+ deictic)	Designatory (-deictic)
<b>Iteration</b>	Possible	Banned
<b>Frequency</b>	20%	Less than 1%

**Table 1:** Definitory features of Topic and Allocutive information units.

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Corpus LABLITA: <http://corpus.lablita.it/>

Merriam Webster: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>

Winpitch: <https://www.winpitch.com>

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