Negotiating Implicit Meaning on the Internet: A Case Study

Francesca Ferrucci

Department of European, American and Intercultural Studies

University of Rome "La Sapienza", Italy

E-mail: f.ferrucci@uniroma1.it

Abstract

Negotiating the meaning of words and sentences is a fundamental part of verbal interactions. This essay aims to examine a particular type of negotiation, that relating to the content of presuppositions, which are placed, together with the implicatures, in the phenomena of implicit communication. The research made use of automatic tools for querying empirical data: a database of lexical presupposition triggers for the Italian language, including approximately 20,000 entries (simple lexemes and multiword expressions) and the corpus of Computer Mediated Communication *Web2Corpus_it*, specifically in its public chat sections, which contains about 300,000 tokens. Quantitative data are provided in relation to the pragmatic function of negotiation, its initiation stage, and the types of presupposition triggers involved. In the context of the media characteristics of chats, which must be considered to discuss the results, the items of *implicit meaning negotiation* provide corpus-based evidence of the conditions under which presuppositions are available to the receiver's monitoring of the meaning and consequent possible reaction.

Keywords: Negotiation, Implicit meaning, Presupposition, Computer-mediated communication, Experimental methodologies

1. Negotiating Presuppositions

Negotiating the meaning of words and sentences is a fundamental part of verbal interactions, as a consequence of the intrinsic semantic ambiguity of natural languages: this activity is mentioned in the *Common European Framework of Reference for languages* (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001) and it is examined in depth in its *Companion Volume* (Council of Europe, 2020), together with the cooperative principle in conversational discourse (Grice, 1975). Negotiation includes strategies such as asking for clarification, rephrasing, and

confirming and is defined as a process that speakers go through to reach a clear understanding of each other; it is accounted to be a key concept to describe communication events (an overall discussion is provided by Lewicki, Saunders, & Minton, 1999).

This essay aims to examine a particular type of negotiation, that relating to the content of presuppositions. As is known, the presupposition can be placed, together with the implicatures, in the phenomena of implicit communication: what is conveyed through this medium, even if it is recognized by the addressor and the receiver as part of the message, has a different role with respect to the rest, being in a sort of deeper level of meaning.

Starting from Frege's first formulation (Frege, 1892), specialized studies in this field developed mostly in the second post-war period and identified different types of presupposition triggers, i.e. linguistic entries and structures that are associated with this phenomenon: for example, at the lexical level, the change-of-state lexemes (e.g. *unfreeze*, *heal*) which presuppose a starting condition; at the syntax level, certain types of questions (e.g. *When does the plane leave?*, which presupposes that the plane will leave). Despite the interest encountered, many works on this topic have been challenged by the need to clearly specify the distinctive features of the object of analysis. Scientific literature seems to suffer from a dichotomy between theoretical elaboration and empirical analysis: on the one hand, in fact, the first is based above all on potential linguistic uses (invented statements or dialogues in which logical-semantic values and pragmatic acceptability are analyzed); on the other hand, the second uses very small corpora on which different types of presuppositions are identified manually (without automatic tools), with the aim of examining individual texts. Different areas of study have contributed to the analysis of implicit meaning, from Generative Grammar to Linguistics, from Philosophy to Didactics of Modern Languages. Theoretical and descriptive background for these phenomena is provided by Frege (1892), Strawson (1952), Sellars (1954), Austin (1962), Stalnaker (1973, 2002), Grice (1975, 1989), Wilson (1975), Gazdar (1979), Levinson (1983), Sbisà (2007), Lombardi Vallauri (2009), Allott (2010). Relevant contributions refer to specific issues and types of presupposition triggers (Kiparsky & Kiparsky, 1971; Karttunen, 1971, 1973; Sebba, 1987; Heim, 1988; Konig, 1991; Levin, 1993; Pi, 1995; Kripke, 2009; Abusch, 2002, 2010; Bauerle, Reyle, & Zimmermann, 2010; Abrusán, 2016; Mazzarella, Reinecke, Noveck, & Mercier 2018). Triggers identification and quantification is applied to the interpretation of power exhibitions and attempts to influence the audience (mostly in political, journalistic or advertising texts) in a rich scientific literature in different languages (examples are, among others, Zare, Abbaspour, & Rajaee, 2012; Lombardi Vallauri & Masia, 2014; Drai & de Saussure, 2016 and Youssef & Albarakati, 2021). Much debate has also centered on the addressor's commitment to truth when conveying the information with specific linguistic structures or pragmatic choices and on the epistemic status of the implicit content; in particular, presuppositions have been associated to a "concealment of responsibility" (Frege, 1892; Strawson, 1964; Grice, 1975, Givón, 1982; Masia, 2017). Regarding the receiver's side, some essays in cognitive psycholinguistics have explored how implicit contents are comprehended and neurologically processed (Langford & Holmes, 1979, Masia, Canal, Ricci, Lombardi Vallauri, & Bambini, 2017). On a different ground, evidence of how implicit contents are identified or challenged

could be collected using conversational corpora, either of spoken or written interactions: a pilot study on this type of linguistic resources, based on computer-mediated communication, is presented by Ferrucci (2014). Under a methodological perspective, recent papers have further justified the need for and the feasibility of an experimental investigation of perlocutionary effects of implicit meaning (de Oliveira & Oswald 2023).

The intention here is not to deal with these issues of a general nature, which should be explored in a much more extensive way; however, it is worth highlighting how much the study of negotiation, as occurs in real dialogues, can contribute to positively overcoming the aforementioned dichotomy. Specifically, understanding when and how speakers feel the need to open a negotiation around an implicit meaning, on the basis of a documented use, can remove the reasoning from the subjective impressions, however acute, of the scholar; it can provide valuable indications on the meaning itself and its form of expression, as well as on the verbal interaction in which it is inserted.

2. The Database of Lexical Presupposition Triggers for the Italian Language and the Method of Analysis

The research made use of an automatic tool for querying the empirical data, which made it possible to examine a much larger corpus than those usually used to study presuppositions with a manual analysis of the text. It is a database of lexical presupposition triggers for the Italian language, including approximately 20,000 entries (simple lexemes and multiword expressions). It was thus possible to take into consideration, within the overall corpus of Computer Mediated Communication *Web2Corpus_it*, the public chats section, which contains about 300,000 tokens, proceeding with Automatic Text Analysis through the TaLTaC software ("Trattamento Automatico Lessicale e Testuale per l'Analisi del Contenuto", *Automatic Lexical and Textual Processing for the Analysis of the Content*) (Bolasco, 2013).

The database was elaborated at the Tuscia University of Viterbo (Ferrucci, 2014). The database contains numerous polysemous entries, the actual value of which has been verified through the assessment of the sentences and paragraphs where the presupposition trigger occurs. The database, therefore, represented the starting point of the corpus querying: often, in fact, a lexical trigger is accompanied, in the previous or following text, by other triggers, also of syntactic nature.

The corpus *Web2Corpus_it* includes various genres of computer-mediated communication (Chiari & Canzonetti, 2014). We have chosen to study the public chats in detail because their textuality appears particularly suited to the purpose, due to the marked dialogical nature deriving from the synchronism of the interaction and the tendential symmetry of the participants. Furthermore, the absence of specific topics, decided beforehand, on which to focus the conversation, makes it possible to investigate dialogues in many thematic areas.

The definition of presupposition that we take as a reference is the one proposed by Sbisà (2007), which appears to be among the most advanced in overcoming ambiguities with contiguous concepts such as logical consequence, inferences or propositional attitudes: "We will consider presuppositions not simply as utterances, the truth of which is (in fact) taken for

granted by those who accept as appropriate the production of a certain utterance containing a presuppositional trigger, but as utterances whose truth *must* be taken for granted in order to accept the production of that certain utterance as appropriate" (Sbisà, 2007, author's translation).

Starting from this definition, we identified the episodes where chat participants challenge the presupposition, asking questions for clarifications or denying its truth or acceptability: they have been annotated as items of *implicit meaning negotiation*, excluding those relating to the explicit semantic value of the trigger. This filter limited the set of examined interactions but avoided overlapping with those cases that, while referring to presupposition triggers, go beyond the specific phenomenon of textual implicitness: for example, in the case of the change-of-state verb *to recover* (from an illness), only the possible negotiations relating to the presupposed disease (even in metaphorical uses) were considered, disregarding those relating to more or less effective healing, which do not belong to the implicit dimension of the utterance.

The items of *implicit meaning negotiation* identified were then divided according to the function they perform in the dialogue: a first value was one of play, when it is mainly used to joke or tease each other; a second value was of conflict, when it occurs within (or together with) verbal aggression, even with mutual insults and accusations; a third dialectical value was when it clarifies a misunderstanding or deepens an issue, where apparently different feelings are in place (up to heated criticism) but keeping the object of the dispute as the centre of attention. Each item was also analyzed based on the initiation stage or opening phase (Lewicki, 1999): a question, a denial, a manifestation of doubt or discomfort with respect to the assumption, from which a variable sequence of conversation rounds arises.

3. Results

The following sections describe the interactions based on the first parameter of function: joking, conflict, dialectics.

3.1 Negotiating to Joke

The function of play is the one most frequently encountered. Some of these cases seem to be dictated by interpersonal interests: mischief and winking, or simple attention between people mostly of different sexes, are the main components. In the following examples, the author's translation is presented between the square brackets.

(1) J0ker: emy se ti interessa anche io e tazzina abbiamo fatto pace [emy, if you're interested, "tazzina" and I also made peace]

EmY: avevate litigato? o.O [did you have a fight?]

[…]

Tazzina: no, non abbiamo litigato [no, we didn't fight]

J0ker: si*____*è[yes]

EmY: decidetevi -.- [make up your minds]

[…]

so`Rakkia: era un tentativo di ingelosirti! EmY svegliaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa [it was an attempt to make you jealous! EmY wake up]

[…]

J0ker: si abbiamo litigato!!deciso [yes, we did have a fight!]

[…]

EmY: ingelosire me? o.O MA J0ker lo sa che non lo filo di pezza |010 [make me jealous? BUT J0ker knows I'm not at all interested in him]

(2) schianto: ....Ti ho già detto che...[Did I already tell you that…]

schianto: ...mi sei mancata? […I missed you?]

[…]

SquiLiBraTa: anche tu..[I missed you too]

[…]

SquiLiBraTa: Tanto..[A lot]

[…]

schianto: Tantio Tanto? [Really a lot?]

SquiLiBraTa: Da impazzire! [It was driving me crazy!]

[…]

schianto: Però... [But…]

SquiLiBraTa: cosa..[What?]

schianto: non Sei Impazzita... [You didn't go crazy]

[…]

SquiLiBraTa: stavo impazzendo...[I was going crazy…]

SquiLiBraTa: poi..[then]

[…]

SquiLiBraTa: ti ho letto.. [I read your message]

FraGoLiNa: schianto lei e nata pazza [schianto, she was born crazy]

[…]

AmoreMio: ènata in un manicomio [she was born in a mental institution]

In the first example, *J0ker* states that he and another female chat participant (whose nickname is *Tazzina*) made peace; their friend *Emy* asks if they had previously argued. While *Tazzina* denies it, *J0ker* confirms it; all the participants mischievously joke about each other's jealousy.

In the second example, two different people challenge the assumption of the state of mental health (prior to the change of state expressed by the multiword expression *going crazy*). The game, which becomes collective, demonstrates a very important component of the Chat textualities, the absence of a purpose that strongly motivates it: a goal is found along the way. In this disconnected way of moving forward, the value of individual words or sentences is a spark that is gladly used to kick off the exchange, or even just for talking to oneself.

(3)linfrattone.28(2:28 PM):

CONFERMO [I CONFIRM]

[…]

linfrattone.28(2:28 PM):

NON SOI COSA MA CONFERMO [I DON'T KNOW WHAT, BUT I CONFIRM]

[…]

linfrattone.28(2:29 PM):

EH SI SA MAI..... [EH YOU NEVER KNOW]

[…]

linfrattone.28(2:29 PM):

QUI HANNO IL GUSTO DELL'ORRIDO [HERE THEY HAVE THE TASTE FOR THE HORRID]

In the third example, the chat participant confirms something, stating that he does not even know what he is actually confirming. The presupposition is challenged by the same person who produced it.

The playful character may also be present where the conversation is serious, imposing a thematic variety even when a well-defined topic has been taking place. In example (4) the chat participants are talking about sleeping pills. There is first a dialectical development, in which the trigger *arrivarci* (*to realize something*) arouses the reaction of *palestrato* and then *tripola*'s reconfirmation of (*I realised that you had understood the opposite*). But then, at the end, *tripola* herself takes on a joking tone: the use of the trigger *diventare rincoglionita* (*to lose your marbles*) is, from the point of view of the addressor, unmarked, since it effectively expresses a knowledge that is supposedly shared by the receiver; unexpectedly, it is *tripola* who overturns the perspective of the conversation, stating that she already has (lost her marbles).

(4)tripola: qualche medicina x non dormire [some medicine to stay awake]

[…]

palestrato: roipnol

[…]

tripola: le roipnol sn x dormire [roipnol makes you sleep]

[…]

palestrato: tu nn volevi dormire? [didn't you want to sleep?]

[…]

tripola: ooooooooooooooh

[…]

tripola: ci sei arrivato pale [pale, you've finally got it]

[…]

palestrato: tripola io avevo capito [tripola, I had already understood]

[…]

tripola: ho capito [I thought]

[…]

tripola: che avevi capito il contrario [that you'd understood the opposite]

[…]

palestrato: ma ti sconsiglio di prendere il sonnifero [but I advise you not to take a sleeping pill]

[…]

palestrato: dopo un anno [after one year]

[…]

palestrato: crei dipendenza [you develop an addiction]

[…]

palestrato: diventi rincoglionita [you lose your marbles]

[…]

tripola: non ce proble ma [no problem]

tripola: hahaha

tripola: lo sono gia' [I've already lost them!]

Instead, in other cases, it is the user of the presupposition trigger who acts as the director of the conversation, because his/her intervention seems aimed at provoking the interlocutor's reaction, always within a collective game, highlighted by the emoticons. In the fifth example, *pugliese* deliberately calls a pleasurable action a "sacrifice"; in the sixth one, *Lunella* invites *joyce* not to laugh too much to avoid losing the dentures.

(5) pugliese_M: ke eri un uniko pezzo l'hanno detto anke loro....ma ke gran pezzo ahahah [that you were very beautiful, they said it too .... really very beautiful]

[…]

ba-ba-bambolina: pugliè qll nn posso confermarlo io [pugliese, I cannot confirm that]

[…]

pugliese_M: brava sempre modesta al punto giusto....be dai mi sacrifiko io nel confermarlo ahahah [well, as always you're being modest… I'll sacrifice myself and confirm it, hahaha]

[…]

ba-ba-bambolina: pugliè ahahah ke sacrificio [pugliese, hahaha what a sacrifice]

[…]

pugliese_M: eeee duro sii ahahahah [yes, a tough sacrifice]

(6) Lunella: joyce non ridere, ti salta la dentiera [joyce don't laugh, you might lose your dentures]

[…]

Joyce_: ma io non porto la dentiera |010 [but I don't wear dentures]

Joyce_: porto le protesi |010 [I wear prostheses]

3.2 Negotiation in Arguing

In a context of strong conflict, presuppositional triggers are, in most cases, used by the addressor to convey a content that he/she already knows is not shared with the audience (as it is offensive), therefore with a deliberately informative function; however, he/she wants to give it a different status with respect to the explicit component of the statement.

(7) des`esseintes: smettila co' 'sta commedia [please stop this performance].

[…]

priscilla83: non capisco...+o) [I don't understand]

[…]

des`esseintes: sì è una ridicola farsa. [yes, it is a ridiculous farce]

[…]

Lion82: nemmeno io [me neither]

[…]

Lion82: ma per cosa? [but why?]

platonico: BASTA CON LA COMMEDIA LAION [PLEASE STOP THIS PERFORMANCE, LION]

[…]

Lion82: dov'è il problema [what's the problem?]

[…]

des`esseintes: Lion, ti spiego. Il tuo IP e quello di priscilla è lo stesso. [Lion, Let me explain. Your IP and priscilla's are the same one]

Using the presuppositional trigger *smetterla* with the complement *'sta commedia* (meaning *to stop your performance*), the interpretation of the behavior of others as a performance is taken for granted, removing it from the possible negotiation to which the explicit part of the assertion is more exposed. Those to whom the criticism is addressed remain dumbfounded and ask for explanations: the negotiation is then started by an incomprehension, which is then followed by the confirmation of the accusation and the dispute on the topic.

Similar profiles are found, in correspondence with other tokens of *to quit* (or synonyms) even if, unlike in (7), the main strategy for initiating the negotiation is defensive denial.

While in the previous group, characterized by the playful function, the defined descriptions, associated with the presupposition of existence, mostly had a mischievous value (e.g. *your beloved*, later denied by the declaration of not being engaged), here they are associated with insults, as in (8).

(8) animeplexiglas: donna luna tu non sai scrivere ragazzina [donna luna you can't write little girl]

[…]

DonnaLuna`: animeplexiglas insegnami...[animeplexiglas please teach me…]

[…]

DonnaLuna`: visto che sei capace. [since you are capable]

animeplexiglas: donnaluna nn è compito mio alleviare il ritardo mentale della gente [donnaluna, it is not my job to alleviate people's mental retardation]

[…]

[due`facce][: in effetti ha un gran bel da fare ad alleviare il suo [in fact, he's very busy alleviating his own mental retardation]

[…]

animeplexiglas: che stanza vuota [what an empty room]

[…]

DonnaLuna`: animeplexiglas appunto, vattene. [animeplexiglas, indeed, go away]

[…]

[due`facce][: io avrei voluto dirgli "come la tua testa", ma ripensandoci non era il caso sparare sulla croce rossa [I wanted to tell him "like your head", but thinking back, it isn't appropriate to shoot at the red cross...]

In (8) various presuppositional triggers (i.e. *alleviare il ritardo mentale della gente*, meaning *to alleviate people's mental retardation*) and implicatures overlap (which allow us to understand, for example in the fourth round referred to, that according to the user *animeplexiglas* the intellectual deficit belongs to *DonnaLuna*). It is worthwhile noticing that the confutation of the presupposition is conveyed by an inference (starting from the counter-attack of the fifth round). The implicit meaning seems to play a special role in interactions dominated by aggression, making it possible to skip logical passages that, if they were to be expressed with a strict and explicit argumentation, would make the interventions less pragmatically effective. The interactions of this group are also characterized, on a typographic level, by the use of capital letters, exemplified in (7), to express impatience or anger.

3.3 Negotiating to Investigate

(9) india: nn occorre lo psichiatra x capire quanta gente vien qua x avere unruolo di protagonismo [you don't need a psychiatrist to understand how many people come here to play a leading role]

[…]

Chiara-: no..[no]

[…]

india: kiara io nn mi riferisco a te ma in generale [kiara, I'm not referring to you, I'm talking in general]

[…]

Chiara-: mai pensato tu lo facessi... [I never thought you were…]

[…]

Chiara-: o si...[or were you?]

Chiara-: ?

[…]

india: no kiara [no, kiara]

[…]

Chiara-: mi riferico al bipolare io.. [I'm referring to the bipolar person…]

[…]

india: kiara parla kiaro [kiara, please speak clearly]

[…]

Chiara-: io .... entro al pom... poi esco.. la chat nn è lamia vita.. n c resto 24 ore al giorno.. nn sono una protagonista di nulla...[I enter the chat in the afternoon…then I leave…the chat is not my life, I don't stay here 24 hours a day…I'm not playing any leading role]

[…]

india: ma xke ti sei sentita messa in cUSA [but why did you feel challenged]

[…]

Chiara-: io nn mi sono sentita messa in causa [I didn't feel challenged]

[…]

Chiara-: ho solo precisato che io n lo sono [I just wanted to specify that I'm not trying to play a leading role]

[…]

india: ok kiara [ok]

In these cases, the negotiation is part of a comment on general issues or on social conditions, on the habits of daily life or on particular contingent events. Even if a certain hatred is sometimes present, as in (9), the will to debate and the need to achieve a synthesis prevail. In this group we find various presupposition triggers such as *togliere il disturbo* (meaning *take your leave*), which show discomfort but are recomposed with the intervention of the other participants. With similar profiles there are tokens of *calmarsi*, *placare gli animi* (meaning *to calm things down*), *spiegare* (*to explain*), *imparare* (*to learn*), *documentarsi* (*to gather information*).

One aspect that characterizes conversations in public chats, as in other genres of computer-mediated communication, is the anonymity of the participants, who intervene behind the mask of nicknames (only partially attenuated by the possibility of seeing each other in videos or pictures). In the corpus, the nicknames, many of which are imaginative and creative and some vulgar, are one of the starting points of the discussion, as they catalyze the curiosity of the users and have a non-negligible role in determining the lighthearted tone of this virtual place. At the same time, however, they shape it as a sort of space for an escape: as the user *india* points out in (9), there are those who enter the virtual rooms to let off steam

and behave as they would never have the courage to do in front of another audience; to attribute qualities to oneself that could not be sustained in other contexts; or, more simply, to confess habits that would otherwise be more difficult to talk about.

(10) pasquale: e poi che fine ha fatto il fidanzatino [so, what happened to the boyfriend]

[…]

stregadellest: e ki se lo ricorda [I don't remember]

[…]

stregadellest: manco me piaceva [I didn't even like him]

[…]

pasquale: magari gli mettevi pure le corna [maybe you used to cheat on him]

[…]

pasquale: ahahahahah hahaha

[…]

stregadellest: a ò io gli e lo dicevo ke non mi piaceva [I told him I didn't like him]

pasquale: e scusa perch é non lo lasciavi direttamente [sorry, so why didn't you just break up]

[…]

stregadellest: ma si era fidanzati tanto x dire [but we were not really engaged]

[…]

pasquale: del tipo scusa ti vuoi fidanzare con me.... [like "so, what do you think about getting engaged?]

pasquale: ...ehm...si [hmm, "yes, ok"]

[…]

pasquale: va bene allora ci vediamo domani ["ok, so, see you tomorrow"]

stregadellest: ecco......[yes, that's it]

3.4 Quantitative Data

In total, 9002 tokens of possible presupposition triggers were automatically detected by the TaLTaC software. This number refers to the corpus without automatic server notifications that account for the entry and exit of each participant in the chat. Among them, only a part (corresponding to 1869 tokens) is associated with the effective presence of a presupposition (as it is used in the reference meaning for which it was entered in the database). Then, among this narrower set of tokens, 149 items of *implicit meaning negotiation* were found: that is, the

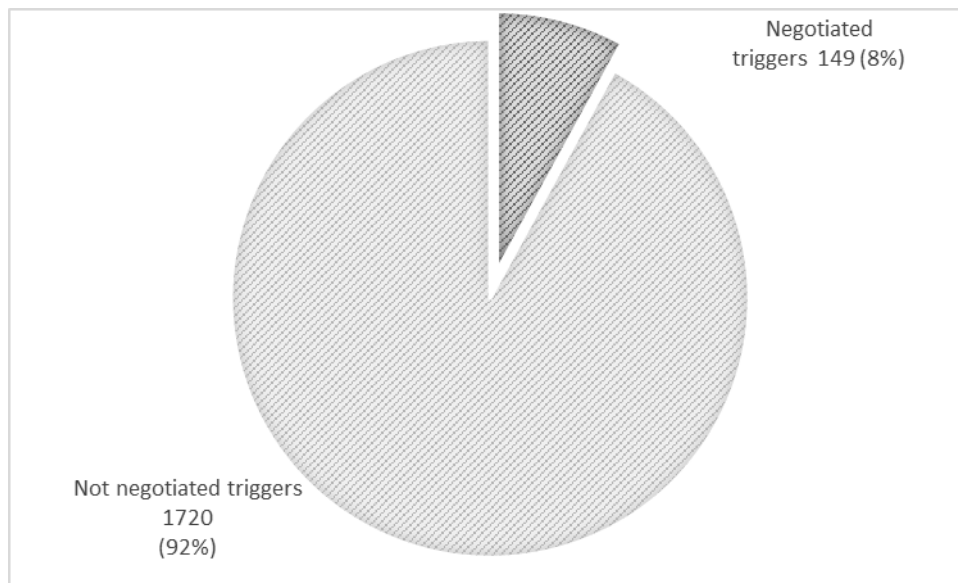8% of tokens were somehow challenged by the receiver(s).

Figure 1. Percentage of *implicit meaning negotiation*

The general trend, as anticipated, is the prevalence of joking, according to the percentages shown in Figure 2 (where, as in Figures 3 and 4, the percentages are calculated assuming the total of 149 items as the reference set).
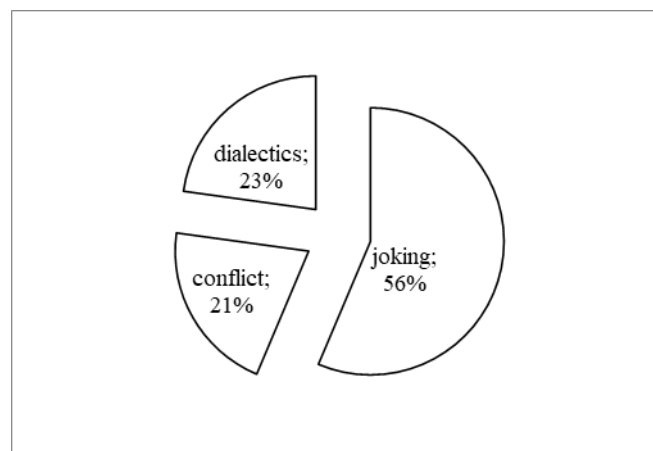

Figure 2. Why users negotiate implicit meaning

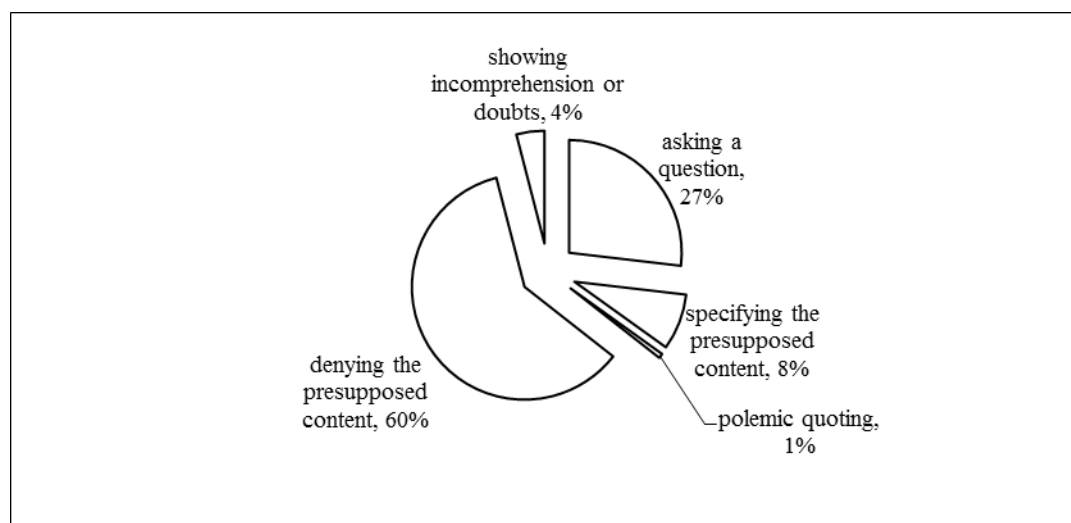Regarding the initiation stage of negotiation, the percentages found are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. The initiation stage of negotiation

Denial is the main strategy with which anyone who reads a presupposition trigger opens a negotiation (60%): in many cases it is joking, as in the last part of (4); sometimes, when the context is one of strong conflict, it is accompanied by a counterattack, as in (8). It makes use of various rhetorical figures, including ironic confirmation, as in (5) or in (11), where participants comment on the arrival of the user named *fool*.

(11) harthaknuth: finalmente c'è fool [*fool* has finally arrived]

    […]

    DonnaDaEvitare: si finalmente [yes, finally!]

    DonnaDaEvitare: proprio ce mancava [we really missed him]

    […]

    harthaknuth: sotto sotto è un brav'uomo [deep down, he is a good man]

A similar tendency to that in (11) is the only case of polemic quoting: a participant mentions several times by copying and pasting a vulgar comment made by another person about a girl, conveyed by a presupposition trigger, implying that he does not consider it respectful, until the author is forced to justify himself.

On the other hand, in 8% of items of *implicit meaning negotiation* the receiver specifies the presupposition, without challenging it globally but nevertheless modifying it: for example, in (10) *stregadellest* limits the concept of betrothal as a reaction to the trigger *lasciare* (meaning *to leave* and referring to someone you are in love with).

Overall, the denials, specifications and polemic quotes, representing almost 70% of the negotiation items, suggest that Internet users immediately understand the presupposition triggers and decide to challenge or limit them. It is significant that these are the prevailing cases in conflict negotiations, where they exceed 90%: in fact, here the assumption is both informative and well defined, because otherwise it would not be functional to the aggressive purpose. In dialectical and playful interactions, they are around 60% and 65%, respectively.

Conversely, when the presupposition is not immediately understood or contextualized, but, in any case, perceived as problematic, questions arise, as in (1), or manifestations of incomprehension, as in (7).

Figure 4 shows the presuppositional triggers, divided by type, which are negotiated.
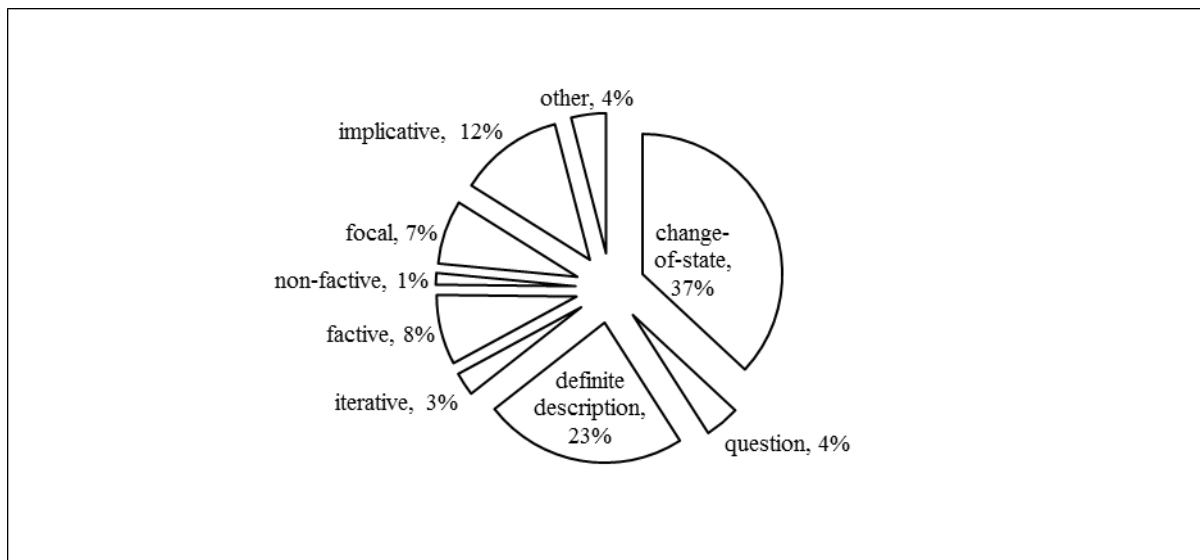

Figure 4. Negotiated presupposition triggers (by type)

In most cases the negotiated triggers are change-of-state lexemes, as in (1) (*fare pace*, *ingelosire*, meaning *to make peace*, *to make jealous*), (2) *impazzire* (*to go crazy*), (4) *diventare* (*to become*), (6) *saltare* (*to lose*), (7) *smetterla* (*to stop*) and (8) *alleviare* (*to alleviate*), or definite descriptions with consequent presupposition of existence, as in the same (8) (*people's mental retardation*). An example of implicative is found in (5) *sacrificarsi* (*to sacrifice yourself*); of factive in (4) *arrivarci*, *capire* (*to realize, to understand*). In decreasing order, we then find the focals, such as *finalmente* (*finally*) in (11); the questions, as in (9) (*why did you feel challenged?*); the iteratives, as in (3) (*to confirm*).

The category "other" includes lexemes with a status as presuppositional trigger that is particularly problematic: they have been entered into the database at an experimental level. According to the present study, they have been shown to be perceived as presuppositions, but with a different value from the assumed one in traditional logical-semantic analyses.

An example is given by the adjective and pronoun *tutto* (meaning *all, everything*).

(12) maito40: ciao a tutti e tutte4 [hello everyone, males and females]

[…]

maito40: ma soprattutto a tutte [but above all females]

maito40: c'è qualche tutta? [are there any "all females?"]

[…]

maito40: cercasi tutta urgentemente [an "all female" is urgently needed]

[…]

SoStanca: si maito40 clikka mokela lei è tutta tutta|001)))))))))))))))) [yes, *maito40*, please click on mokela, she is "all female"]

[…]

SenzaCore: io me sento mezza mezza invece [I, on the other hand, I feel a bit fifty-fifty]

[…]

SenzaCore: sara' perchè domani lavoro boh [maybe it's because I'm working tomorrow]

Unlike from the analysis made by the logicians, according to which the universal quantification does not necessarily imply the existence of individuals who fall into the concerned domain, in (12) the use of *all* appears to be associated with the assumption that there is at least one female participant in the chat (verified with the question): therefore, this confirms what was already noted by Strawson (1952: 222-230) regarding the activation of a presupposition of existence.

In (13), on the other hand, where the universal quantifier occurs for the first time in the abbreviated form *tt*, another different use emerges (presupposition of a populous set):

(13) NienteN|ck: ma ieri parlavi in quel modo incomprensibile |013 [but yesterday you were speaking in that incomprehensible way]

[…]

NienteN|ck: che era piemontese? [was it Piedmontese dialect?]

[…]

zula: ma se me capivano tt [but everyone managed to understand me]

[…]

NienteN|ck: ma che tutti che eravamo in 4 [what do you mean "everyone" when there were only 4 of us]

[…]

zula: a si vero [yes, you are right]

[…]

NienteN|ck: eh [in fact]

These last examples reinforce the methodological requirement to make the empirical analysis proceed in parallel with the theoretical-descriptive moment, as highlighted at the beginning (par. 1).

4. Discussion

In the corpus examined, the use of presuppositional triggers appears to be associated with pragmatic conditions and textual factors.

On the one hand, there is strong syntactic fragmentation, which is also due to the synchronous mode of written interaction. It does not seem to have equals in the context of computer-mediated communication: to write a long or articulated sentence, several

interventions are often used and are spaced out on the screen. This is accompanied by semantic and thematic discontinuity: on many occasions users express difficulty in following the thread, in keeping up with a chaotic and frenetic flow in which they continually risk being out of time, because, when the writing of a round is completed, it may already be outdated in the progress of the conversation. For example, in (8) *teach me*, *since you are capable*, they are separated into two non-consecutive rounds, making it more difficult for the reader to reconstruct the syntactic hierarchies; in (4) *palestrato's* observations are rather distant, in the succession of the rounds, from those made by *tripola*, hence the difficulty in understanding each other; in (3) the user claims he is confirming something, but he doesn't know what, having lost the memory of the antecedent.

On the other hand, the interaction tends to be distant from the external context and tends to anchor itself more to the virtual place. The nicknames creatively redefine the setting of the communication, which is filled with references to the participants, to the previous contexts and to the playful scripts invented within the parallel "world" of the session. This assigns an even more stringent role to verbal material: self-expression is entrusted more to what one says and how one says it in the contingency of the dialogue than to the narration of real experiences. For example, in one session, two girls, taking a cue from another user who boasts about being an expert aircraft pilot, imagine themselves on an airplane flight; one of the two asks to be "shot down" with a machine gun, followed by the imitation of the shot and the destruction that occurs. In another session, one participant imagines grabbing another, whose nickname resembles the name of a well-known brand of biscuits, and "disintegrating" him by immersing him in milk; the "biscuit" indulges her by showing terror and trying (in vain) to escape, before being "eaten".

Both of these characters form an environment where the argumentative or narrative development struggles to gain a far-reaching scope and where expressive synthesis is preferred. The absence or lesser incidence of complex clauses may contribute to a lower number of presuppositions, at least for the syntactic triggers such as adverbial subordinate propositions (Lombardi Vallauri 2009). In parallel, it can be hypothesized that the role of individual words and the negotiation developed around the lexical meanings, their implicit value and their potential polysemy increases compared to other medias.

From the point of view of the addressor, presuppositions may economize semantic development. In most cases (92%, Figure 1, par. 3.4), which have not been described in the previous paragraphs because they lack negotiation, the presupposition has been seen to have a prevalent anaphoric value, or in any case reproposes some knowledge already shared with the other users, as part of the common encyclopedic background. Therefore, it does not seem to pose problems of interpretation, instead configuring itself as a cohesive factor of the text. This factor is particularly important in the context of such a decomposed dialogue: the chat participants can use the presuppositional triggers to reconnect, within their round of conversation, with the other rounds that must be implicitly recalled to reconstruct the framework of semantic and thematic relevance. The focal *anche* (English *also* or *too*) is an example of this.

In the other cases (8%, Figure 1, par. 3.4), there is a prevalent informative function of the presupposition triggers: they are not limited to recalling knowledge that has already been shared between the addressor and the receiver, but they convey new knowledge, which is (at least partially) demanding for the receiver. This study therefore confirms the description of presupposing, when it has an informative function, as a strategy of concealment of responsibility (Frege 1982, Strawson 1964), rather than concealment of contents, which has instead been suggested for implicatures (Grice 1975; Lombardi Vallauri 2009 and de Oliveira, & Oswald 2023 provide a general overview of the issue). When responsibility is concealed, implicitness does not affect the message or any parts of it, but the person on whom its authorship falls: in fact, in the items examined, the semantic content seems to be well recognized and, for this reason, in different ways, challenged. The issue of responsibility clearly arises when negotiation has a conflictual nature (par. 3.2).

From the point of view of the receiver, the same percentage (8%) could testify that implicitness, and in particular the presupposition, does not discourage users from negotiating the meanings for different purposes. In the corpus examined, negotiation appears above all as a way to positively reverse the syntactic and semantic discontinuity of the text, in order to transform it into an opportunity to surprise (disregarding the sender's predictions) or for joking (par. 3.1). The quantitative data in Figure 2 (par. 3.4) show that, for the most part, the presupposed content is questioned for the pleasure of creating confusion, shuffling the cards, continuing the game of conversation rounds. The negotiation is shown here not only in its physiological value, that of solving the problems of understanding inherent to the intrinsic characteristics of languages; but also as a resource that feeds and enlivens interaction, understood as a value in itself, not subordinated to the tackling of a particular topic.

The percentage of 8% is not negligible; we also hypothesized that when chat participants choose the strategies of denial, specification and polemic quote, representing almost 70% of the initiation stages, they have probably fully understood the presupposition triggers before deciding to challenge or limit them (Figure 3, par. 3.4).

Figures 1, 2 and 3 suggest that, at least under some conditions, presupposed contents are available to the receiver's monitoring of the implicit meaning and consequent reaction. According to these findings, the overall description of the effects of presupposition on Audience and Conversational Dynamics could be enriched: even if, in general, the audience is less likely to critically evaluate the message and more likely to accept its dubious parts (de Oliveira, & Oswald, 2023), the effect seems to be partially counterbalanced by other factors. On the other hand, even if, in an overall perspective, the continuity of the exchange is likely to be preserved and challenging moves are decreased (de Oliveira, & Oswald, 2023), the case study limits this assumption.

The research also contributes to evaluate possible different effects of the various types of presupposition triggers: in fact, Figure 4 (par. 3.4) shows that questions, together with other groups, are much less negotiated compared to change-of-state lexemes or definite descriptions. These data need to be further verified and explored, also in comparison with scientific literature that distinguishes between soft/hard triggers or argues against such

distinction (Abusch, 2002, 2010, Abrusán, 2016): at the current status, they strengthen the second hypothesis, identifying the highest negotiation quote for triggers that are otherwise classified in different groups (namely, definite descriptions are considered "hard" triggers, while change-of-state verbs are considered "soft" ones). Therefore, negotiation could be unselective with respect to the type of triggers involved and depend instead on other pragmatic factors related to the context of communication and the specific linguistic interaction (Abrusán, 2016).

One of the most relevant achievements of the case study is under a methodological perspective. Studying implicit meaning through its negotiation is demonstrated to have an important potential; in fact, it makes it possible to empirically investigate the receiver's behavior and therefore collect corpus-based evidence of perlocutionary effects of presuppositions, implicatures and other phenomena. The proposed focus on *implicit meaning negotiation*, which is replicable for all corpora including linguistic interactions (either spoken or written), is a fruitful experimental approach, in particular if related to the effects on Audience and on Conversational Dynamics (de Oliveira, & Oswald, 2023). It can also clarify the theoretical-descriptive nature of the implicit meaning and its linguistic triggers, although more robust data are necessary to this purpose.

Acknowledgements

References

Abrusán, M. (2016). Presupposition cancellation: explaining the 'soft–hard' trigger distinction. *Natural Language Semantics*, *2*, 165-202. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11050-016-9122-7

Abusch, D. (2002). Lexical alternatives as a source of pragmatic presuppositions. In B. Jackson (Ed.), *Proceedings of SALT 12* (pp. 1-19). Ithaca, NY: CLC Publications.

Abusch, D. (2010). Presupposition triggering from alternatives. *Journal of Semantics*, *1*, 37-80. https://doi.org/10.1093/jos/ffp009

Allott, N. (2010). *Key Terms in Pragmatics*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Bauerle, R., Reyle, U., & Zimmermann, T. E. (Eds.) (2010). *Presuppositions and Discourse: Essays Offered to Hans Kamp*. Bingley: Emerald.

Bolasco, S. (2013). *L'analisi automatica dei testi. Fare ricerca con il text mining*. Roma: Carocci.

Chiari, I., & Canzonetti, A. (2014), Le forme della comunicazione mediata dal computer: generi, tipi e standard di annotazione. In E. Garavelli, & E. Suomela-Härmä (Eds.), *Dal manoscritto al web: canali e modalità di trasmissione dell'italiano. Tecniche, materiali e usi nella storia della lingua* (pp. 595-606). Firenze: Franco Cesati Editore.

Council of Europe. (2001). *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment* (CEFR). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Council of Europe. (2020). Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment – Companion volume, Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing. Retrieved from www.coe.int/lang-cefr

de Oliveira, F. D., & Oswald, S. (2023). On the Rhetorical Effectiveness of Implicit Meaning - A Pragmatic Approach. *Languages*, 6. https://doi.org/10.3390/languages8010006

Drai, N., & de Saussure, L. (2016). Quand l'implicite devient explicite: d'un accident expérimental à une étude pilote. *Syntaxe & Sémantique*, *1*, 115-133. https://doi.org/10.3917/ss.017.0115

Ferrucci, F. (2014). Semantic Classes and Functions of Lexical Presupposition Triggers: An Experimental Investigation of Chatters' Use. *International Journal of Linguistics*, *2*, 177-187. https://doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v6i2.5264

Frege, G. (1892). Über Sinn und Bedeutung. *Zeitschrift fur Philosophie und psilosophische Kritik*, 25-50.

Gazdar, G. (1979). *Pragmatics: Implicature, presupposition, and logical form.* New York, NY: New York Academic Press.

Givón, T. (1982). Evidentiality and Epistemic Space. *Studies in Language*, *6*, 23-49. https://doi.org/10.1075/sl.6.1.03giv

Grice, P. (1975). Logic and Conversation. In P. Cole, & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and Semantics, III: Speech Acts* (pp. 41-58). New York, NY: New York Academic Press.

Grice, P. (1989). *Studies in the Way of Words.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Heim, I. (1988). On the projection problem for presuppositions. In M. Barlow, D. P. Flickinger, & M. T. Wescoat (Eds.), *Proceedings of the Second West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistic*s (pp. 114-125). Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Karttunen, L. (1971). *The logic of English predicate complement constructions.* Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Linguistics Club.

Karttunen, L. (1973). Presuppositions of Compound Sentences, *Linguistic Inquiry*, *2*, 169-193.

Kiparsky, P., & Kiparsky, C. (1971). Fact. In D. D. Steinberg, & L. A. Jakobovits (Eds.), *Semantics. An interdisciplinary reader in Philosophy, Linguistics and Psychology* (pp. 345-369). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Konig, E. (1991). *The meaning of focus particles: a Comparative Perspective.* London-New York (NY): Routledge.

Kripke, S. (2009). Presupposition and Anaphora: Remarks on the Formulation of the

Projection Problem. *Linguistic Inquiry*, *3*, 367-386. Retrieved from https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/270090

Langford, J., & Holmes, V. M. (1979). Syntactic presupposition in sentence comprehension. *Cognition, 7*, 363-383. https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0277(79)90022-2

Levin, B. (1993). *English verb classes and alternations.* Chicago, Illinois: Chicago University Press.

Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lewicki, R. J., Saunders, D. M., & Minton, J. W. (1999). *Essentials of Negotiation*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.

Lombardi Vallauri, E. (2009). *La struttura informativa.* Roma: Carocci.

Lombardi Vallauri, E., & Masia, V. (2014). Implicitness impact: Measuring texts. *Journal of Pragmatics, 1,* 161-184, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2013.09.010

Masia, V. (2017). On the Evidential Status of Presupposition and Assertion. *International Journal of Linguistics, 4,* 134-153.

Masia, V., Canal, P., Ricci, I., Lombardi Vallauri, E., & Bambini, V. (2017). Presupposition of new information as a pragmatic garden path: Evidence from Event-Related Brain Potentials. *Journal of Neurolinguistics, 42*, 31-48. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneuroling.2016.11.005

Mazzarella, D., Reinecke R., Noveck I., & Mercier H. (2018). Saying, presupposing and implicating: How pragmatics modulates commitment. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *133,* 15-27, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2018.05.009.

Pi, T. (1995). The structure of English Iteratives. In P. Koskinen (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 1995 Annual Conference of the Canadian Linguistic Association* (pp. 435-445). Toronto: Linguistic Graduate Course Union, Dept. of Linguistics, University of Toronto.

Sbisà, M. (2007). *Detto non detto. Le forme della comunicazione implicita.* Roma-Bari: Laterza.

Sebba, M. (1987). *The Syntax of serial verbs.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins B.V.

Sellars, W. (1954). Presupposing. *Philosophical Review*, *2*, 197-215.

Stalnaker, R. (2002). Common ground. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, *5*, 701-721. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1020867916902

Stalnaker, R. C. (1973). Presuppositions. *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, *2*, 447-457. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00262951

Strawson, P. F. (1952). *Introduction to Logical Theory.* London: Methuen.

Strawson, P. F. (1964). Identifying reference and truth-values. *Theoria, 2,* 96-118.

Wilson, D. (1975). *Presupposition and Non-truth-conditional Semantics.* New York, NY:

New York Academic Press.

Youssef, S., & Albarakati M. (2021). Presupposition Use in Arabic Political Discourse: The Case of King Salman Speech on Terrorism. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, *1*, 22-31.

Zare, J., Abbaspour, E., & Rajaee, N.M. (2012). Presupposition Trigger – A Comparative Analysis of Broadcast News Discourse. *International Journal of Linguistics*, *4*, 734-743. https://doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v4i3.2002

Copyrights