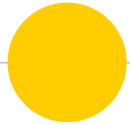


Implicit communication in Twitter.



Analysis of the pragmatic functions of politicians' use of implicatures and presuppositions

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Argumentation & Language

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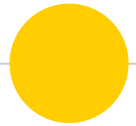
Twitter as a unique “watchtower”

- ❖ Twitter has modified the **relationship** between politicians and the public
- ❖ It allowed more **direct** interactions between politicians and his followers
- ❖ **Limited** number of characters
- ❖ Messages often run on the encoding of **implicit** meanings, due to space limitations, or...persuasive purposes...



Persuasion in political speech

- ❖ Persuasion is one of the **most pervasive** traits of political communication (Lombardi Vallauri & Masia 2014 and 2016)
- ❖ It is often pursued through the encoding of *implicit meanings* (e.g. presuppositions and implicatures, metaphors, vague expressions, cf. Sbisà 2007; Lombardi Vallauri 2016)



Corpus

A self-made corpus of Tweets

- ❖ 10 Italian + 6 English politicians
- ❖ 100 tweets per politician (tot. **1600 tweets**),
- ❖ January, 1st - March, 30th 2015 (UK General Elections)
- ❖ Tweets retrieved using an *R* script (package *Twitter*)
- ❖ Tweets made of links or pictures only, as well as Retweets, were excluded from the corpus.



Parameters of analysis

- ◎ Source (16 politicians)
- ◎ Communicative strategy
- ◎ Pragmatic Function

English Politicians



Italian Politicians



RENZI
PARTITO
DEMOCRATICO



GRILLO
M5S



DI VITA
M5S



GASPARRI
FORZA ITALIA



BRUNETTA
FORZA ITALIA

BOLDRINI
SINISTRA, ECO...



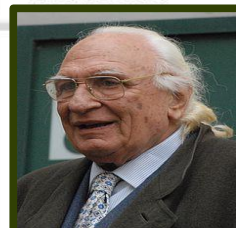
VENDOLA
SINISTRA, ECO...



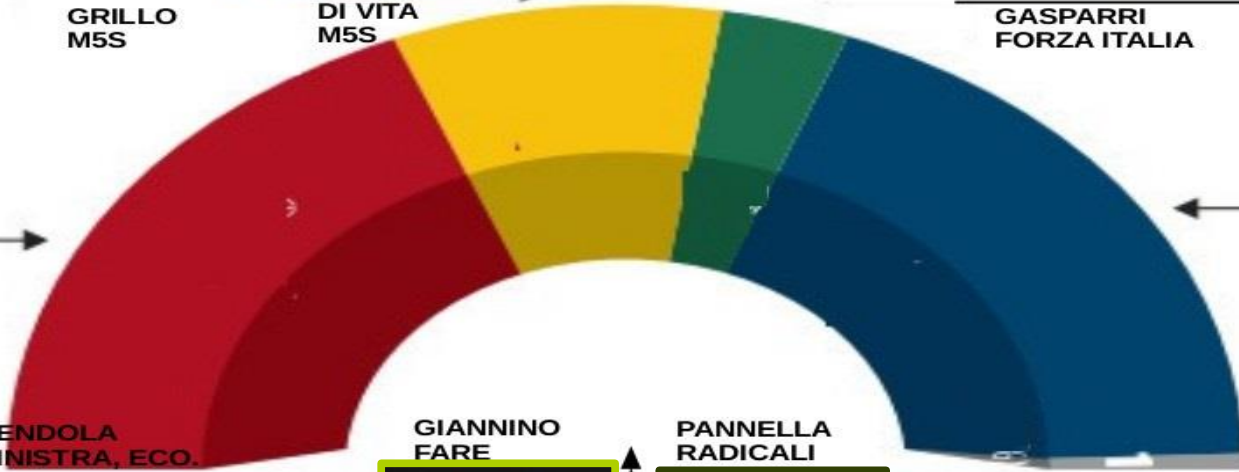
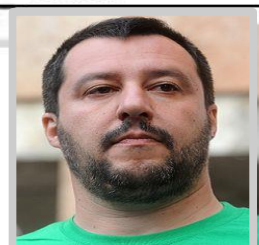
GIANNINO
FARE



PANNELLA
RADICALI



SALVINI
LEGA





Communicative strategy

- ❖ **ABSENCE OF IMPLICIT STRATEGIES (ABS):** messages with no presuppositional or implicatural strategy in which the relevant proposition is conveyed in a mainly assertive manner.
- ❖ **IMPLICATURES (IMPL):** contextual inferences originating from the violation of conversational maxims (Grice 1975).
- ❖ **PRESUPPOSITIONS (PPP):** content taken for granted as *common ground* among the participants in the conversation (Stalnaker 2002: 701).



Implicatures and Presuppositions

WHAT THEY SHARE...

They use “implicitness (of content or responsibility) as a means to reduce [or delay] the addressee’s tendency to critical reaction” (Lombardi Vallauri & Masia 2014: 166)

THE DIFFERENCES...

“While implicatures “contain” (but conceal) the content to be held as true, presuppositions contain but conceal the very act of proposing it as true” (Lombardi Vallauri & Masia 2014: 162)



Presuppositions

(3) **Clegg:** Some people may not have been heeding *my warnings about the need to tighten our belts*

(PPP = Clegg has addressed warnings about the need to tighten one's belts)

(4) **Renzi:** “Porteremo a casa le riforme. Gli italiani con referendum avranno ultima parola. E vedremo se sceglieranno noi o *chi non vuole cambiare mai*” [We will carry out the reforms. Italians with the referendum will have the last word. We'll see if they choose us or *those who never want to change*]

(PPP = there is someone who does not want to change)



Implicatures

(5) **Clegg:** I'm voting for a stronger economy and a fairer society

(IMPL = Clegg's party will build a stronger economy and a fairer society as compared to a former condition of the Country)

(6) **Salvini:** Prossimo presidente non dev'essere complice della bandiera di questa UE

[The future President must not be an accomplice of this EU]

(IMPL = The current President of the Italian Republic is an accomplice of the EU)

Pragmatic Functions

(boyd et al. 2010; Graham et al. 2013; Brocca & Garassino 2015; Garassino et al. submitted):

The “type of content” encoded by the message.

- ❖ **INFORMATIVE**: any (politically) neutral content aimed at conveying factual information.
- ❖ **ATTACK**: any critical remark directed to the political opponent.
- ❖ **OPINION**: speaker’s taking an ideological perspective on some issue.
- ❖ **PRAISE (Speaker-centered or Reader-centered)**: any remark targeted at boasting one’s own policy or political group.



Pragmatic functions: Corpus examples

INF: information

- (7) **Cameron:** I've told the House of Commons that the ISIL terrorist, Reyaad Khan, who was plotting attacks on the UK, was killed by an RAF aircraft.
- (8) **Giannino:** #De Luca a #Minniti: manda “agenti corpi speciali” per liberare Salerno da “extracomunitari che la occupano militarmente”.
[De #Luca to #Minniti: he sends special forces to free Salerno from non-European citizens who occupy the city by force of arms]



Pragmatic functions

ATT: Attack

- (11) **Farage:** Miliband has NOTHING to say on immigration... except that Labour gets it wrong. #BattleForNumber10
- (12) **Salvini:** #Alfano dice che dovrei vergognarmi. Lui invece dovrebbe dimettersi!
[#Alfano says I should be ashamed. Instead, he should resign!]



Pragmatic functions

OPI: Opinion

(9) **Johnson:** Backdoor Nige would let Miliband migrate into Downing Street. #voteukipgetmiliband #leadersdebate

(10) **Giannino:** Dicono commercio mondiale raddoppia crescita in 2015 su 2014, ma intanto #BalticDryIndex è ai minimi da 29 ANNI...
[They say global market is going to double its growth in 2015 but in the meantime #BalticDryIndex is at its lowest since 29 years]



Pragmatic functions

SPR: Speaker-centered Praise

- (13) **Clegg:** I am today launching @LibDems manifesto with opportunity at its heart, with new commitment to protect education funding for every child.
- (14) **Renzi:** Centomila posti di lavoro in più in un mese. Bene. Ma siamo solo all'inizio. Riporteremo l'Italia a crescere» #lavoltabuona
[One hundred thousand new jobs in one month. And we are just at the beginning. We will bring back growth in Italy#therighttime]

Pragmatic functions

RPR: Reader-Centered praise

(15) **Miliband:** @kezdugdale: you gave your heart and soul to leading Scottish Labour. Thank You. You deserve to get your life back. Enjoy.

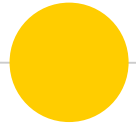
(16) **Grillo:** #Forza Virginia! Sei una roccia! Io e tutto il Movimento 5 Stelle ti siamo vicini!

[Come on Virginia! You are a rock! The Five Star Movement and I are close to you!]



Aim(s) of the research

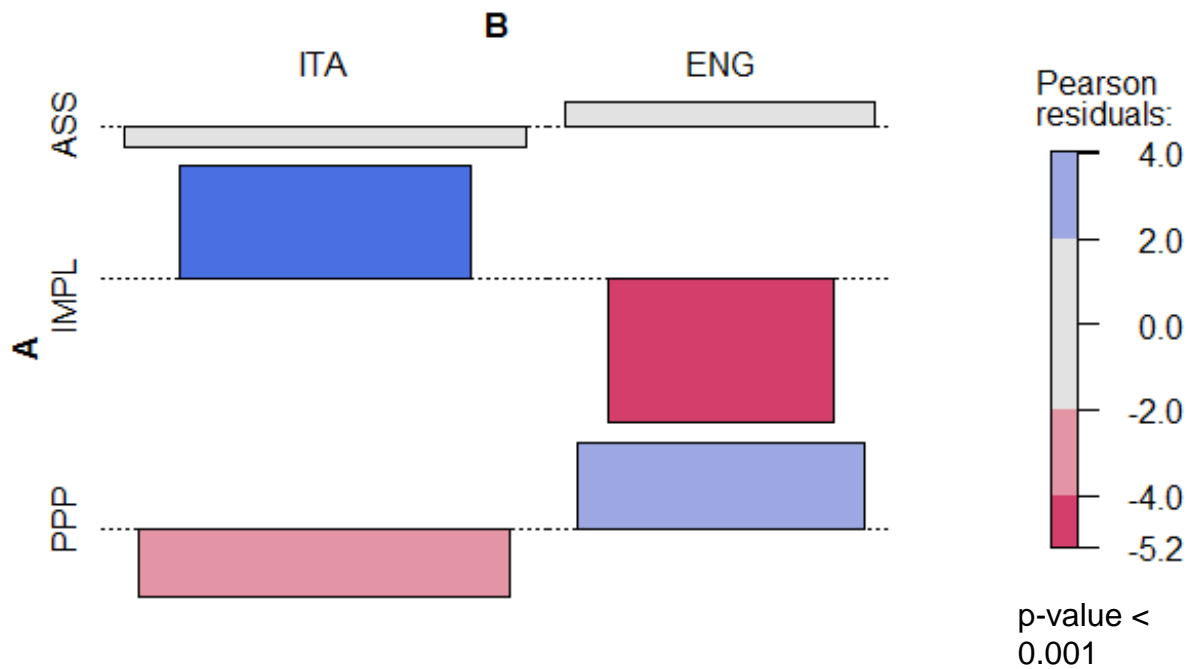
1. Which **pragmatic functions** are more tightly associated with implicitness in political communication on Twitter?
2. Are there significant **correlations** between pragmatic functions, the use of implicit strategies and given political groups?
3. Are certain uses of presuppositions and implicatures **characteristic** of the English or the Italian political scene?



ANALYSIS

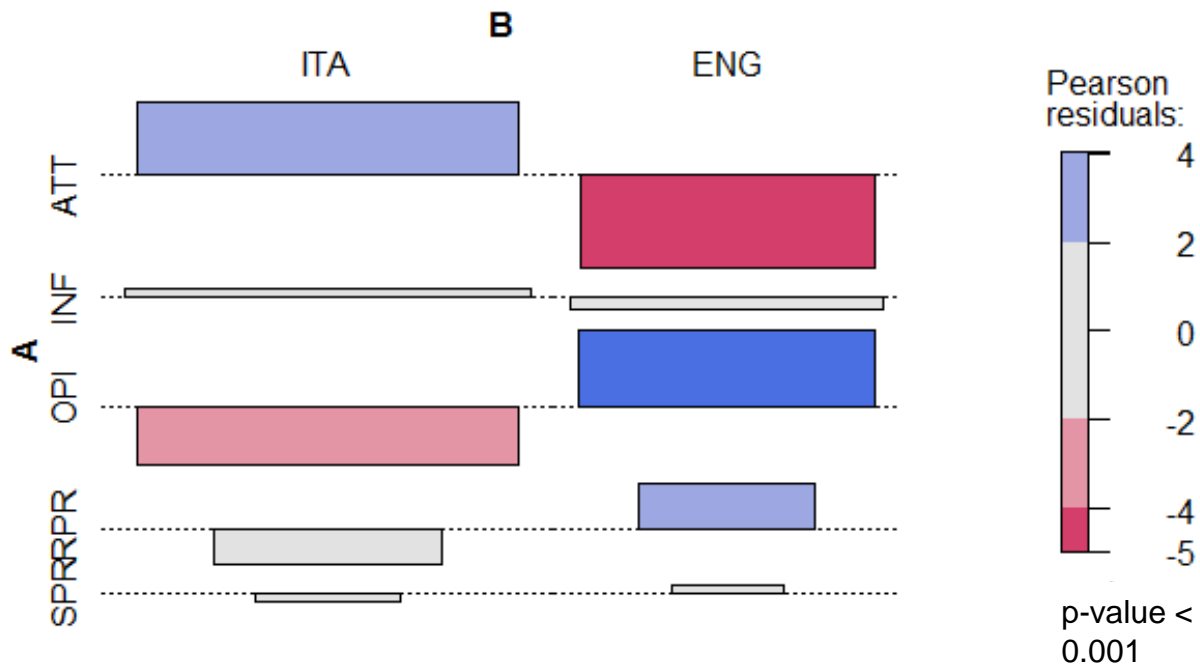


An Overview: Politicians & Implicit strategies





An Overview: Politicians & Pragmatic functions

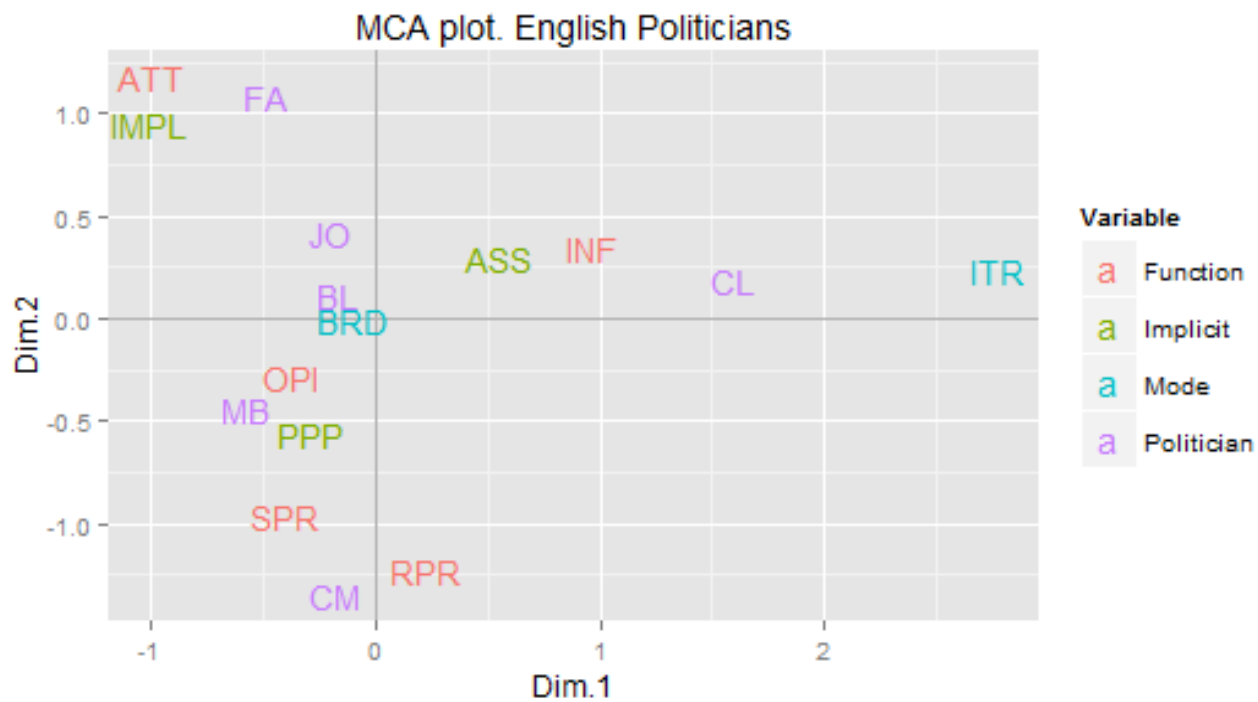




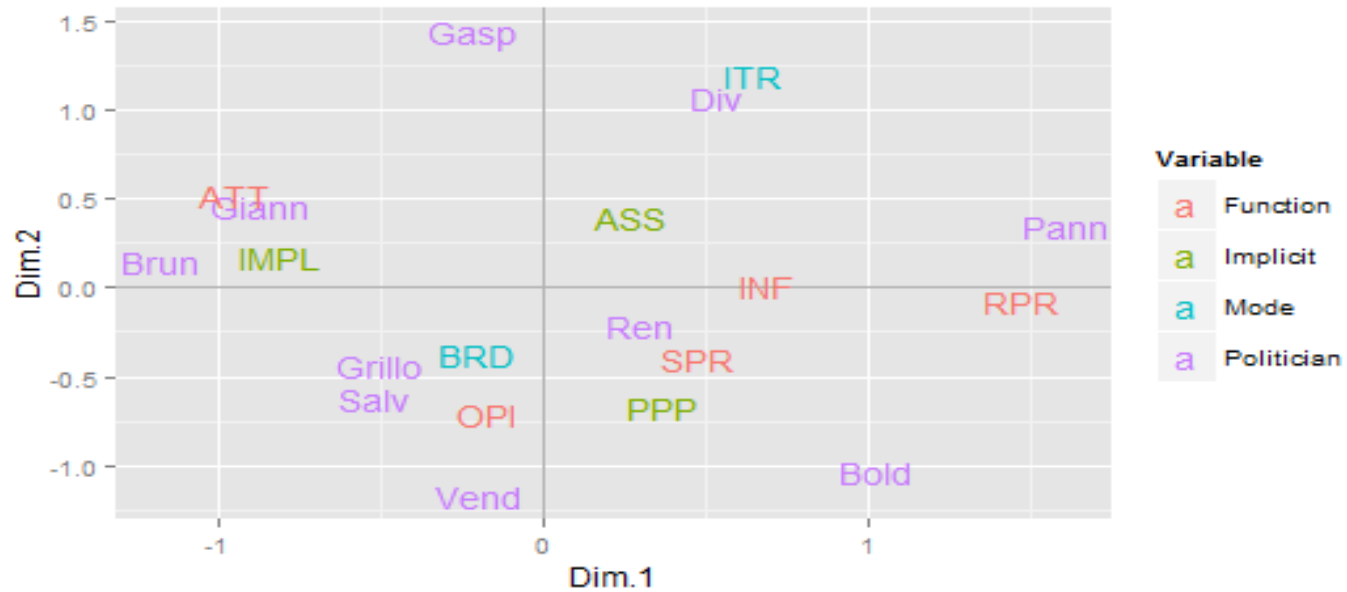
Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA; cf. Glynn 2014; R package *FactoMineR*)

A multivariate statistical technique

- ❖ Multidimensional data sets are reduced to two-dimensions (Dim1 and Dim2), thus allowing for **bidimensional representation**.
- ❖ The **closer** two variables are located on the graph, the **stronger** they are likely to be associated.



MCA Plot. Italian Politicians





The relation between Implicit and Function

Significant associations:

- Attack/Implicature
- Information/Absence of implicit strategies
- Presupposition/Opinion
- Presupposition/Speaker-Centered Praise



The relation between Implicit and Function

ATTACK / IMPLICATURE

- An attack is usually expected to feature the **illocutionary aim of an utterance**.
- Relative to presupposition, *implicature* is information to which **the speaker commits the most** (Saussure & Oswald 2009: 231).
- For this reason, Attack can be **face-threatening** (Goffman 1986) for both the sender and the receiver.
- The sender wants to stimulate the receiver's vigilance and awareness on a critique directed to the political opponent, yet **preserving his reputation** in the interaction.



Attack / Implicature

- (18) **Blair**: You have to give a real solution; not one which is populist but false
(IMPL = the ruling party finds solutions which are populist and false)
- (19) **Grillo**: A.A.A. Cercasi assessore al bilancio, ragioniere, ed un addetto alla calcolatrice. Anche prima esperienza. Pagamento in onestà.
[A.A.A. Budget councilor and accountant wanted, along with calculator service personnel, also first working experience accepted. Payment in honesty.]
(IMPL = The present budget councilor is not particularly efficient)



The relation between Implicit and Function

INFORMATIVE / ABSENCE OF IMPLICIT STRATEGIES:

- Informative types of contents usually have a merely **phatic** function.
- They are usually **weakly tendentious** and pursue no persuasive aims.

(20) **Blair**: Across the world mobile has been adopted, then adapted. It will be the world's first universal tech product.



The relation between Implicit and Function

PRESUPPOSITION / OPINION, PRESUPPOSITION / SPEAKER-CENTERED PRAISE

- Similarly to Attack, Opinion and Praise are **more challengeable** types of content
- Presupposition is a **less challengeable** discursive strategy (Givón 1982).
- The speaker might be willing to encode these two types of contents as presupposition with a view to **abating their potential addressability** in the interaction.



Presupposition / Opinion, Speaker-centered Praise

(21) **Blair:** *Our tolerance* is part of what makes Britain Britain. So conform to it, or don't come here.

(PPP = We are tolerant)

(22) **Renzi:** Centomila posti di lavoro in più in un mese. Bene. Ma siamo solo all'inizio. *Riporteremo l'Italia a crescere*» #lavoltabuona

[One hundred thousand new jobs in one month. Good., but we are just at the beginning. We will bring back growth in Italy #therighttime]

(PPP = Italy had grown in the past, but is not growing at the moment)



Concluding remarks: Open questions

1. The analysis showed that it is possible to detect **associations** between certain strategies of implicit or non-implicit communication and the use politicians make of certain types of contents.
2. Although data show that some strategies are more characteristic of the English vs. the Italian political spectrum, it would be interesting to assess whether the same methodology may also allow to **differentiate between Left or Right parties** or **given exponents** of political groups with respect to others.
3. More can certainly be said on (a) comparisons with French, German or Spanish data, and (b) the **rationale** behind the observed correlations, especially in the light of a more **refined taxonomy** of pragmatic functions.



**Thank you for
your attention!**



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