The illocutionary basis of Information Structure
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The identification of reference units in a spoken corpus through syntactic and semantic devices which are employed in the analysis of writing is problematic (Blanche-Benveniste 1997; Miller & Weinert 1998; Abeillé 2003; Izre’el 2005). In accordance with a specific pragmatic tradition (Austin 1962; Quirk et al. 1985; Biber et al. 1999), research on spoken Romance corpora (Cresti & Moneglia 2005; Raso & Mello 2012) has led to the identification of the pragmatically defined utterance as the unit of reference for speech.

In the framework of Language into Act Theory (L-AcT, Cresti 2000; Moneglia & Raso 2014), prosody provides the means (through terminal breaks) of formally identifying the utterances within the flow of speech and segmenting it into information units (through non-terminal breaks) (Danieli et al., 2004; Moneglia et al. 2010).

Following the above criteria, LABLITA identified all the utterances of an Italian reference corpus and aligned them with their acoustic sources (WinPitch, Martin 2004). Using this large empirical dataset, the team developed the IPIC database (available online) where the Information Structure (IS) of a large sampling of this corpus is annotated (21,000 utterances, Panunzi & Gregori 2011; Panunzi & Mittmann 2014).

According to L-AcT, the Comment information unit accomplishes the illocution of the utterance and is the center of the IS. An utterance can be composed of a single Comment, which is necessary and sufficient for its performance, or a Comment together with additional, optional units which have different communication functions.

The identification of the Comment unit led to research on the actual variation of illocutionary values in spontaneous speech, producing a repertory of about 90 speech act types (Cresti 2005; Cresti forthcoming). The repertory is not a taxonomy grounded on logic criteria (Searle 1979; Sbisà & Turner 2013); it is based, rather, on pragmatic features in accordance with the usage based tradition (Kawaguchi et al., 2006; Cresti 2006).

It emerges from this that the illocutionary value accomplished by the Comment in spontaneous speech is non-assertive for at least 45% of utterances. This very general quantitative datum is of note because of its theoretical relevance to the conception of IS. In fact, it conflicts with the idea that IS corresponds to a Topic-Focus relation, meaning a proposition with a truth value (Krifka 2007; Krifka & Musan 2012). No truth value can be assigned to utterances whose Comment is, for instance, directive.

Given that the Comment accomplishes whatever illocution type, the Topic is defined as the field of application of illocutionary force, while the Topic and the Comment are related by a pragmatic aboutness function (Cresti 2012). Defined as such, the function is very far from a semantic relation between a Predicate-like Focus (or Comment) and a Subject-like Topic. More specifically, according to L-AcT the utterance doesn’t correspond to a syntactic and semantic proposition but rather to a combination of information units which are functionally conceived (Cresti 2014).

This talk will present the illocutionary repertory and some instances taken from Romance and English spontaneous corpora supporting the above theoretical framework.

References
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Cresti, E. forthcoming, *On the illocution*, in “CHIMERA. Romance corpora and linguistics studies”, n 2


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