Contrast marking variation in Romance and Germanic languages

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Contrast marking variation in Romance and Germanic languages. Crosslinguistic and intralinguistic comparison through task-elicited speech

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Abstract

In research on information structure and discourse cohesion, contrast has been defined in different ways, depending on the pragmatic/semantic relation established between the propositions involved in the contrast, on the text types and on other discourse conditions. As a whole, despite – or possibly because of – its vagueness, contrast has proved to be a useful heuristic tool for characterizing discourse cohesion phenomena. This paper focusses on results from our research concerning cohesion phenomena in elicited discourse in Romance (Italian, French) and Germanic (German, Dutch) languages and aims to offer a more precise characterization of contrast against several variation parameters. We take into consideration earlier work on three tasks (*Finite Story*, *Polarity-Switch Dialogues*, *Map Task*) and add a new one (*Spot the Difference*). The comparison between the results allows us to disentangle the following variables: information units involved in the contrast relation; discourse conditions (monologue vs. dialogue); speakers' access to information (shared vs. non-shared); effect of contrast on information in the common ground (alternative maintained vs. rejected). The aim is to achieve a more fine-grained definition of contrast relations, which allows us to identify and characterize the divergent behaviour of Romance and Germanic languages, and to relate intra- and cross-linguistic differences revealed by speakers' preferences in speech with structural specificities of the two language groups.

1. Introduction

Our joint research aims at investigating the management of discourse cohesion in a crosslinguistic and acquisitional perspective. Over the last decade, we have studied how cohesion is achieved in different languages and learner varieties and have tried to find out whether language-specific lexical and grammatical resources had an impact on the consistency and the type of cohesion marking. To this end, we adopted a function-to-form approach: we observed how speakers of different languages and language varieties used linguistic means to express informationally similar contexts. Contrast is one of the functional categories we used to characterize these contexts.

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In this paper we reconsider the results of three recent empirical studies (see Sections 3.1-3.3 for details) and the preliminary results from an ongoing study (Section 3.4), all investigating oral productions in Germanic and Romance languages in light of the notion of contrast, in order to achieve a better understanding of the notion itself and how it is relevant in characterizing crosslinguistic differences in discourse construction. More specifically, this comparative overview aims at drawing a coherent picture arising from these individual results, in terms of:

- how different languages exploit linguistic means to mark one and the same contrast (crosslinguistic perspective);

- how different parameters involved in the characterization of contrast have an impact on the way contrast is marked in one and the same language (intralinguistic perspective).

As we will see, speakers of Romance and Germanic languages show different preferences for marking contrast in discourse, in terms of frequency of use of linguistic devices and/or the information unit selected to this end. Moreover, there is variation in the consistency of contrast marking under differing discourse conditions. Cross-linguistic differences of this type are not usually predicted by formal approaches to contrast in discourse, and the relevance of factors such as dialogue type (monologue vs. dialogue), shared vs. non-shared access to information, type of contrast (alternative maintained vs. rejected), and their interplay are rarely taken into account. These factors related to discourse conditions can instead play a role in the way discourse relations are linguistically encoded in different languages (cf. Fetzer 2018; Fetzer & Speyer 2012).

This paper is organised as follows: in Section 2 we discuss the notion of contrast, explain how it is considered in our investigation and point out the parameters of variation relevant to explain the results in a comparative – both inter- and intralinguistic – perspective; in Section 3 we present the different tasks used in the studies and discuss the results that are relevant for contrast marking; in Section 4 we draw some conclusions concerning inter- and intralinguistic differences when observed under the notion of contrast and its variation.

2.   The notion of contrast and parameters for its variation

At its very core, contrastiveness has often been defined in terms of information flow throughout discourse, as the relation between an information proposed in an utterance and an alternative information available («given» or «inferable») in the common ground, defined as "presumed background information shared by participants in a conversation" (Stalnaker 2002: 701). Dimroth (2002: 895) defines contrastiveness as "the relationship between an information unit of a given utterance with respect to the same information unit in a previous utterance". Krifka reserves the notion of *contrastive focus* to cases in which "the Common Ground content contains a proposition with which the current utterance can be constructed, or that such proposition can be accommodated" (Krifka 2007: 33). Many authors further characterize contrast relations with the idea of 'opposition' (Molnar 2002) or 'discontinuation' in discourse (Fetzer 2018).

Starting from this very general characterization, many aspects are still the object of a lively debate: how defined, salient or explicit the (set of) alternatives have to be; how the relation between contrast marking and focus or topic marking can be described (see Cruschina 2021; Molnar 2002; Repp 2010). Many scholars nowadays agree that contrast should not be considered a binary property but rather a continuum of hierarchically ordered phenomena (Cruschina 2021; Molnar 2002), or "a cover term for phenomena that share a family resemblance but still show important differences" (Repp 2010: 1333). In this perspective, the corrective relation exemplified by the replies in (1) and (2), often considered paradigmatic cases of contrast, is considered as only one specific case of contrast, characterized by the rejection of the explicit alternative mentioned by a different speaker in the previous discourse:

(1) A- Jane drinks coffee, I guess

   B- No, *she does not drink coffee*

(2) A- John drinks coffee, I guess

   B- No, *he drinks tea*

However, the rejection of alternatives is not considered a necessary component of a contrastive relation. In the following examples a contrastive relation between two alternative propositions is

established, as the second proposition is made relevant against the information provided by an alternative available in the common ground, but the assertion of the second proposition does not reject the alternative one:

(3) A- John drinks coffee

B- Yeah, but *he does not drink tea*

(4) A- Jane drinks coffee, while *John drinks tea*

The explicit mention of the alternatives in discourse is not necessary either, as long as they are recoverable in the common ground. In Examples (5) and (6), a contrast relation is expressed by *instead* and *rather*, respectively, against an alternative provided by contextual conditions, either nonverbal communication or other relevant information arising from the context:

(5) [To a friend pointing to a teapot at a buffet]

- Do you mind if I take a coffee *instead*?

(6) [While looking at a recently married friend's photos in London]

- I'd *rather* choose Paris for my honeymoon.

In other words, preceding discourse is only one of the possible sources for the alternative information to become part of the common ground.

The studies we present are based on data elicited with communicative tasks which all favour the expression of contrastive relations in the broader sense discussed above, but differ from each other with respect to some of the parameters characterizing contrast as a discourse relation. The parameters concerned are:

1) the semantic nature of the information unit which is affected by the contrastive relation: two alternative pieces of information can differ in polarity (as in (1) and (3)) or with respect to their referential content (e.g. reference to an entity (as in (2), (3) and (4)), to a time span, to a location or other).

2) the identity of the speaker providing the two pieces of information to be contrasted: one single speaker can provide in her own discourse two contrasting pieces of information (as in (4)

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above), or she can provide information contrasting with what another speaker has said before (as in (1), (2) and (3));

3) the frame of reference the speaker(s) refer(s) to when providing information: two speakers can provide information referring to different frames of reference (e.g. when comparing two different pictures), or to the same one (e.g. when one speaker guesses what is in the other speaker's picture);

4) the communicative goal of the speaker's contrastive utterance: the alternative information can be retained (as in (3) and (4)) or rejected (as in (1) and (2));

The following table shows how these parameters are set across the different tasks considered; the subsequent sections will further develop them in detail.

Table 1. Setting of the parameters characterizing contrast in the task considered

Task	Information units involved in the contrast	Speaker providing the alternative information	Frame of reference providing the alternative information	Effect of the contrast on the alternative information
Finite Story (Andorno & Turco 2015; Benazzo & Andorno 2010; Benazzo *et al.* 2012; Dimroth *et al.* 2010): German, Dutch, Italian, French	polarity, entities, time spans	same	same	retained
Polarity-switch dialogues (Turco *et al.* 2013; Turco 2014; Turco *et al.* 2014; Turco, *et al.* 2015): German, Dutch, Italian, French	polarity	different	different	retained
MapTask (Andorno & Crocco 2018): Italian	polarity	different	same	rejected
Spot the difference (work in progress by Andorno, Benazzo, Dimroth): German, Italian, French	entities, locations	different	different	retained

It is worth noticing that the characterization of different types of contrast described in the table is not based on what speakers actually said when performing the tasks, but rather on the flow of information suggested by the task. As the task proceeds and the discourse unfolds, a

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contrastive relation between subsequent pieces of information is made salient by the task structure; however, speakers can choose to *mark* this contrast in their discursive contribution or not. We consider a relation between two propositions as *marked* for contrast whenever an utterance presents or contains some linguistic device that forces or induces reference to an alternative proposition in the common ground (either explicitly uttered in discourse or not) for its interpretation.

In this study, the configuration of the parameters characterizing a contrastive relation (provided in Table 1) is therefore the independent variable against which we describe the speakers' linguistic choices in terms of *contrast marking* as the dependent variable.

3. Contrastive relations in different tasks

3.1 *The Finite Story*: contrast on entity or polarity?

Our first investigation (Dimroth et al. 2010) was based on narratives elicited in four languages (Italian, French, German and Dutch) through a video retelling task. The stimulus, the 'Finite Story' videoclip,[1] consisted of 30 short sequences showing the misadventures of three characters (Mr. Blue, Mr. Green and Mr. Red) during a house fire. The participants were asked to retell what happened in the video immediately after watching each video sequence. The contents of the video sequences were designed to involve change and contrast in different combinations of information units (parameter 1 in Table 1): polarity, entities, time spans. For instance, Mr. Green went to sleep and so did Mr. Red (change in entities); Mr. Green slept but Mr. Blue did not (change in polarity + entities); the firefighter on duty missed a phone call a first time but answered the phone when Mr. Blue called him a second time (change in polarity + time spans); and so on. All these situations are part of the narrative of the same speaker (parameter 2), refer to the same frame of reference (the story of the videoclip; parameter 3) and are retained as part of the speaker's narration

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[1] Cfr. https://www.iris-database.org/iris/app/home/search?query=Finite+Story.

(parameter 4): the purpose of signaling the contrastive relation between the different situations is in this case not corrective, but cohesive.

For the purposes of the present study, we focus on contexts which potentially elicit a contrast involving two entities and their (lack of) performance of a specific action, namely contexts where polarity and entities differ in the two alternative situations. One of such contexts is represented by the sequences in which the firemen invite each of the three characters to jump out of the window to save themselves from the fire. In the first two sequences, providing the 'alternative' pieces of information in the common ground, Mr. Green is invited to jump out of the window, but he refuses; and the same happens with Mr. Red, who also refuses. In the third sequence, the target of the contrastive relation, Mr. Blue accepts to jump. We analyzed the corresponding discourse stretches to determine (a) if speakers marked the contrast between this last situation and the previous ones; and (b) which information unit was selected to mark the contrast. It is, in principle, possible to mark the contrast in the domain of entities (*Mr. Blue, <u>unlike Mr. Green</u>, jumps out of the window*), in the domain of polarity (*Mr. Blue <u>does</u> jump out of the window*), or in both domains (or in neither of them, thus leaving the contrast unmarked).

The results showed a similar proportion of marked utterances across languages (FR: 52%; IT: 50%; DU: 60%; GE: 37%).[2] What varies between them is the information unit selected to set up a contrast: speakers of Romance languages (Italian and French) mainly mark the contrast in the domain of entities, by using linguistic devices highlighting the entity involved in the contrast (such as pseudo-cleft in Italian, as in (7), or contrastive pronouns in French, as in (8)), whereas speakers of Germanic languages (German and Dutch) prefer to highlight a contrast in the domain of polarity, either with a pitch accent on the finite verb (as in German (9)), a construction known as *polarity focus* (Gussenhoven 1983) or *verum focus* (Höhle 1992), or with particles (as in both German (9) and Dutch (10)).[3]

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[2] The speakers of the four languages did not significantly differ in the amount of marked utterances ($x^2(3)$ = 5.28, p > .1). It is, however, likely that the number of marked utterances in German was actually underestimated, see note 6.

[3] From now on, all the examples mentioned come from data elicited with the tasks under discussion.

(7) IT: Il sig.Blu *è l'unico a*   buttarsi

            Mr.Blue   is the only one who jumps

(8) FR: M.Bleu *lui* il saute

            Mr.Blue him he jumps

(9) GE: H.Blau *IST wohl*   gesprungen

            Mr.Blue is   PART   jumped

(10) DU: M.Blauw   springt *WÉL*

            Mr.Blue   jumps   PART

The proportion of the relations marked across each language is reported in Figure 1, which

takes only marked utterances into account.
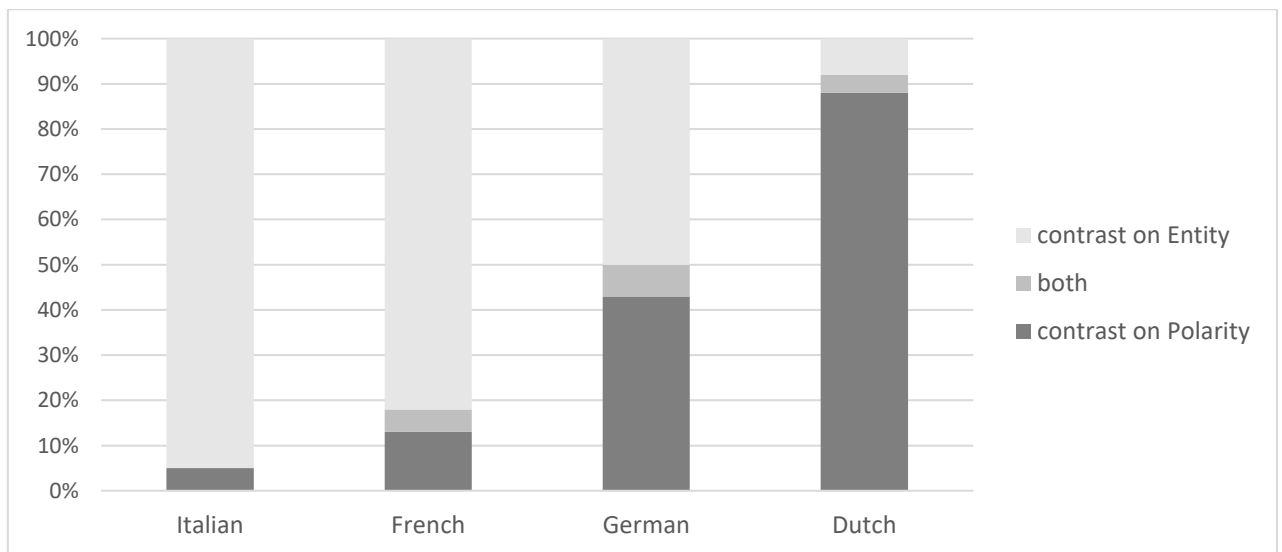
Figure 1. Entity/Polarity contrast marking in the Finite Story

Although the role of intonation, especially in German, was probably underestimated, as we

took a very conservative approach in counting the relevant items,[4] a clear difference is found

between Romance and Germanic speakers' preferential choices in the information unit selected

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[4] We excluded all cases in which the finite verb was stressed and yet in final position, because it was not clear whether the pitch accent on the finite verb was only due to the final position.

for contrast marking. Relevant differences in the repertoire of the languages considered can explain these differences. Germanic languages present a rich repertoire of assertion related particles (and flexible prosodic patterns) allowing the speaker to create an anaphoric link in the assertion domain (polarity change). Even if Romance languages present some particles which can be used for emphatic and contrastive purposes as well (FR: *bien*; IT: *sì, no*; cfr. Hansen 1998; Poletto & Zanuttini 2013), their use is much more restricted. On the other hand, Romance languages present a greater flexibility in word order and morphological resources, such as French strong and weak pronouns, which ease the expression of contrast on referential expressions. Although it is not impossible to mark both kinds of contrast in each of the four languages (for example, with intonation), when speakers have the choice between different information units, their default? preferences seem to be driven by the (grammatical or lexical) means that are most accessible in their language. We will come back to this point in the conclusion.

3.2 *Polarity Switch Dialogues*: polarity contrast

Building on the results of the Finite Story, some follow-up studies (Turco *et al.* 2013; Turco 2014; Turco *et al.* 2014; Turco *et al.* 2015) compared what speakers of different languages did when there was no choice about the information unit that could be selected to contrast information. The domain of polarity was chosen to this end, as contrast in this domain can be expressed through intonation, an option which is in principle equally available to all languages. The aim was to investigate whether in this case speakers of Romance and Germanic languages marked contrast with the same frequency. A comparably rigid protocol was used, the 'Polarity switch dialogue', a picture-comparison task in which two speakers were invited to compare two pictures, each showing the same character performing, or not performing, a particular action (e.g., a girl tearing a banknote or holding a banknote without tearing it). One of the participants was a confederate speaker, i.e. a trained research assistant playing the role of an ordinary participant, who provided a negative description such as *In my picture, the girl is not tearing the banknote*. The other speaker (the subject under investigation) was asked to reply by comparing her own picture to this

description, saying something like *In my picture, the girl is tearing the banknote*.[5] Thus, the confederate speaker's sentence provided the alternative proposition against which the target speaker's reply could set up a contrast. Concerning the parameters identified in Table 1 to characterize contrastive relations, unlike for the Finite Story, the contrast could in this task only be set in the domain of polarity (parameter 1); the speaker had to set up a contrast against information provided to the common ground by a different speaker (parameter 2), and the alternative propositions, consisting in this case of two different descriptions, referred to two different frames of reference (the two pictures; parameter 3); similar to the Finite Story, both situations were retained in the common ground (parameter 4).

Once again, we found differences among speakers of Germanic and Romance languages. Figure 2 reports the results for Italian, German and Dutch (Turco 2014).
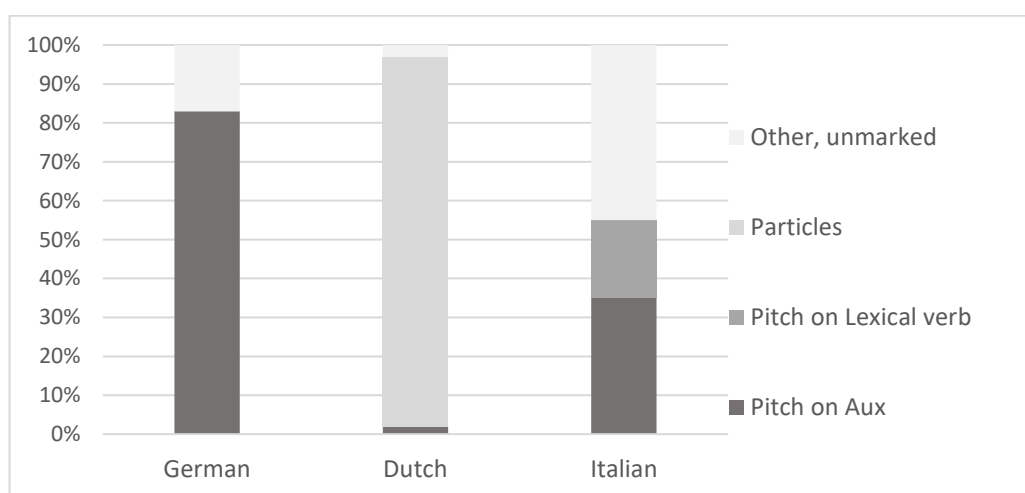

Figure 2. Polarity contrast marking in the Polarity-Switch Dialogues

Both German and Dutch speakers marked the contrast very frequently, either with a pitch accent on the finite verb ('verum focus'), in German (*auf meinem Bild HAT der Junge den Reifen zerstrochen*, 'in my picture the boy DID punch the tyre'), or with a particle, in both German and

Dutch (GE: *das Kind hat SCHON geweint*, 'the child did indeed cry'; DU: *de meneer leest het boek WEL*, 'the man does read the book indeed'). Dutch speakers clearly preferred the affirmative particle *wel* in these cases (Sudhoff 2012): namely, verum focus has been suggested to be restricted to counter-presuppositional rejections in Dutch (Gussenhoven 1983).

Italian speakers confirmed their reluctance to mark polarity contrasts, even when no alternative information units were available to establish cohesion: they did not use polarity particles, although an emphatic use of *sì / no* were in principle available (Poletto & Zanuttini 2013), and produced a pitch accent on the verb in only half of the cases. This can be partly due to Italian speakers' reluctance to place a pitch accent on functional verbs (in this case, auxiliaries: *la ragazza HA strappato la banconota*, 'The girl HAS torn up the banknote'), as in one third of the marked cases, the pitch accent fell on the main verb (*la ragazza ha strapPAto la banconota*). In the end, speakers of Italian left the contrast unmarked in half of the cases, unlike speakers of Germanic languages. In a different study based on the same stimulus (Turco *et al.* 2013), a similar proportion in prosodic polarity marking was found for French: only half of the French speakers marked a contrast in polarity by a specific pitch accent. Note that what was lacking in utterances produced by speakers of Romance languages was not the information that a different polarity held for the current proposition and an alternative available in the previous discourse; instead, cohesive devices were lacking underlying this semantic relation between the two propositions (for a more detailed discussion of polarity contrast marking in Italian and French, see references in the current and subsequent sections).

It is worth noting that speakers of Romance languages occasionally marked the contrast on a different information unit, namely by underlying the change in the frame of reference, either with an adverb (e.g. IT: *Nella mia immagine invece*… 'in my picture instead…') or through an emphatic prosodic realization in the topic component, where the frame of reference was mentioned (*Nella MIA immagine…* 'In MY picture'). We will come back to this in Section 3.4.

3.3 A modified version of the *Map task*: a different case of polarity contrast

In order to further investigate the boundaries for contrast marking in the domain of polarity in Romance languages, we focused on Italian speakers (Andorno & Crocco 2018) in a condition differing from both the Finite Story and the Polarity Switch dialogue with respect to the effect of the contrast on the alternative proposition: in this case, the assertion of the contrasting information is meant to reject information already available in the common ground. This possibly lead to speakers being less reluctant to mark a polarity contrast.

We used a modified version of the 'Map Task' stimulus. A confederate speaker (the 'follower' in the Map Task conventions) had to collect information about route direction from the other speaker (the 'giver'), on the basis of the two slightly different maps they were given. The follower had to integrate unavailable information from the giver and to check available information: she was instructed to do so in the form of polar questions and assertions, such as *So, I do not have to go past the boats*. We were interested in the replies performed by the giver and the way she possibly marked rejection or confirmation of the follower's utterance (*oh, you do (not) have to go past the boats*). As in the Polarity Switch Dialogues, polarity was the only information unit that could be contrasted in the contexts under investigation (parameter 1), and the alternative propositions were brought to the common ground by two different speakers (parameter 2); but, unlike the Polarity Switch Dialogue, both speakers were concerned with the same frame of reference (the giver's map) and as a consequence the contrast involved the rejection of the alternative proposition (parameter 4).[6]

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[6] Concerning parameter (4), it is to be noted that the 'follower' participant in the Map Task does not state assertions about knowledge she controls, but rather checks information against the 'giver' participant; as a result, confirmations and rejections by the giver do not cancel information already established in the common ground, but rather information provisionally proposed by the follower in order to be checked.
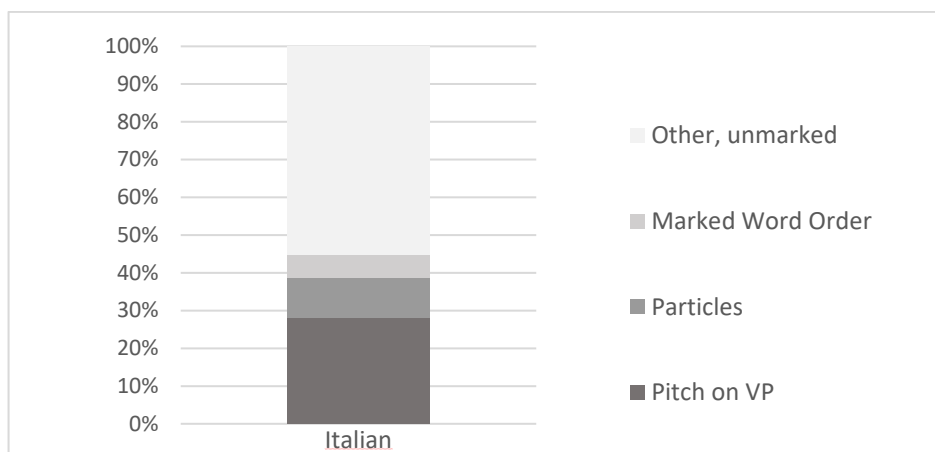
Figure 3. Polarity contrast marking in the Map Task

The results reported in Figure 3 conform partly to what was observed in the Polarity-Switch Dialogues: Italian speakers marked the contrast in less than half of the cases; a pitch accent on the verb – either the functional or the main verb – was the preferred option, observed in around two thirds of the marked cases. Moreover, thanks to the less constrained nature of the task, a wider set of utterance types and two further options for highlighting the polarity contrast became available. The first option was represented by utterances consisting of the topic followed by a polarity particle, constituting the rhematic component and contrasting with the utterance proposed in the common ground:

(11) - Quindi non tocco le barche   'so I do not touch the boats'

    - Sì,   *le barche   sì*   'yes, you do'

      Yes   the boats   yes

The second option is the use of object dislocation; this structure allows for the verb to appear at the end of the sentence, or in the final part of its tone unit, thus carrying the pitch accent:

(12)   - Ma le barche non devo superarle   ('but the boats, I do not have to pass them')

    - Sì, *le barche   le   superi*   ('yes, you do have to pass them')

      Yes the boats   them pass.2P

  It seems then that, even with the more pressing communicative need of rejecting or confirming of information in the common ground, Italian speakers are not as eager to highlight a

contrast on polarity as speakers of Germanic languages are. When they do, as already seen in the Finite Story, Italian speakers exploit word order, that is positional mobility, in order to shape the sentence's information structure: moving the object out of its canonical, postverbal position allows speakers to reserve the final, focal position to the verb alone. This structure could serve to highlight that the change of verb polarity is the only relevant information of the utterance, thus the functional equivalent of a verum focus in German.

3.4. *Spot the difference*: contrast on entities and/or locations

The results of the Map Task suggested to further investigate the role of marked word order in contrast marking through less constrained tasks and in a crosslinguistic perspective, to better see whether a coherent picture can be drawn between the findings for both the Romance and the Germanic languages investigated. Our current object of investigation concerns data from a picture comparison task, 'Spot the Difference', which, as the Finite Story, allows speakers to organize their discourse more freely, and to set up contrast relations within multiple information units.

The task involves two participants, who have to compare two pictures they are given in order to identify their differences; each participant can see only his own card.
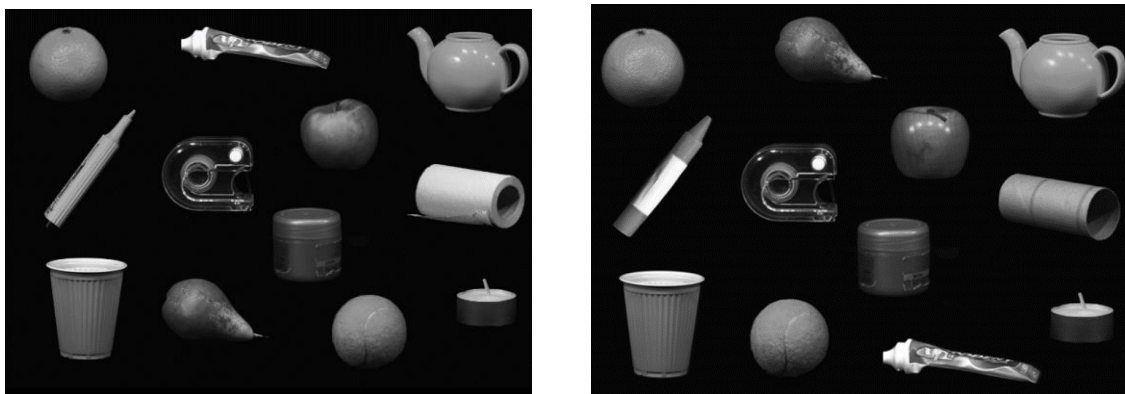

Figure 4. Spot the difference pictures[7]

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[7] The originally stimulus pictures were printed in color.

The pictures differ from each other (see Fig. 4) either for the entities they contain (for example a toilet roll with or without paper) or for their location (for example the position of the pear, of the toothpaste, etc.). In order to identify such differences, speakers have to contrast the characteristics of their own picture against the common ground provided by their partners' descriptions. For instance, after a speaker has described the pear lying at the bottom of the picture (*and then a pear, at the bottom*), her partner can contrast this information with the one provided by her picture, either stating that the same entity is at a different place (*mine's at the top*, a contrast in the domain of location) or that a different entity is at the same location (*I've got a tennis ball there*). With respect to the parameters taken into account for our comparison, this task allows speakers to choose to mark the contrast on different information units, as it is the case with the Finite Story (parameter 1), but polarity is not involved; similarly to the Finite Story, the alternative propositions are both retained in the common ground (parameter 4), but unlike the Finite Story two different speakers provide the alternative propositions (parameter 2), and they do so in reference to two different frames of reference, that is the two pictures they compare (parameter 3).

For the time being, data from German, French and Italian have been collected. So far, on the basis of the analysis of 10 dialogues for each language, we have found interesting differences between German on one side and French/Italian on the other, concerning the way information units are organized in the sentence, and particularly in the topic domain. For both kinds of contrast relations (on the entity or its location), German speakers reserve the final, focal part of the utterance to the information unit which changed with respect to the alternative utterance. The topic domain, which carries just one information unit because of the German V2 rule, is reserved for the maintained information, corresponding to the location, when the contrast is established? between entities (as in 13a), or to the entity when the contrast is established? between locations (as in 13b):

(13) GE: a. Da   ist bei mir ein Tennisball   contrasting entities

               There is by me   a tennis-ball

     b. Die Birne ist bei mir oben   contrasting locations

        The pear   is by me at-the-top

French and Italian speakers also place the changing information unit at the end of the utterance, but they make a different use of the topic domain. Namely, the topic position is not only used for the maintained information (eventually thanks to the use of dislocations: FR *la poire elle est en haut*, IT *la pera ce l'ho in alto*), but also to set up the relevant contrast through the speaker's reference to herself or to her own picture, by use of contrastive pronouns or possessives (FR: *moi*, IT: *io, la mia*):

  (14) FR: a. Moi en bas   j'ai   une balle de tennis   contrasting entities

         Me at bottom   I have a tennis ball

        b. Moi la poire elle est en haut   contrasting locations

         Me the pear she is   at top

  (15) IT: a. Io in basso   ho   una pallina da tennis   contrasting entities

         I   at bottom have.1SG   a tennis ball

        b. Io la pera   ce l'ho   in alto   contrasting locations

         I   the pear it have.1SG at top

Note that reference to self is also attested in German utterances (*bei mir* in Examples (13a) and (13b)), but it is part of the comment, and does not result in any kind of marked word order.

On the basis of these preliminary results, it seems then that speakers of Romance languages highlight a contrast much more frequently than speakers of Germanic languages, when the information unit involved corresponds to the domain of entities and locations, rather than to the domain of polarity: this result is in line with preferences already observed in the Finite Story (cf. 3.1) and fits as well with results observed for the Polarity Switch Dialogues (cf. 3.2).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper we have reconsidered the results of previous and on-going research under the notion of contrast, from both an intra- and crosslinguistic perspective. By taking into account the

parameters of variation identified in Table 1, the Germanic and Romance languages investigated seem to constitute two different groups with respect to the way they express contrastive relations, both in terms of the preferred information units selected to mark a contrast (parameter 1) and the sensitivity to the degree of contrastiveness involved by parameters 2-4 (same/different speaker providing the alternative information, same/different frame of reference, rejection/retention of the alternative information).

From an intralinguistic perspective, variation along a continuum outlined by the parameters 2-4 is visible in the results on Italian in the domain of polarity (cf. Section 3.2 and 3.3). Because of the limited repertoire of particles and the constraints concerning pitch accents on auxiliaries and other function verbs, Italian speakers preferentially do not mark polarity contrasts without communicative pressure. They refrain from using such contrasts for general cohesive purposes, especially when the alternative proposition is retained (parameter 4), and when other information units for cohesion marking are at play (parameter 1, Finite Story results). Italian speakers can, however, mark contrast on polarity when no other information units are available for contrast marking (Polarity-switch Dialogues results) and when the contrastive relation carries major pragmatic functions, such as the rejection or retention of their interlocutor's assertions (Map Task results). It would be interesting to verify whether the same gradience is also attested in French: to confirm the results from the Polarity-Switch dialogues, which seem to support the picture sketched for Romance languages, we plan to analyze French data collected with the Map Task protocol.

When comparing these results with what happens in Germanic languages (German and Dutch), we do not see the same variation in marking a contrast on polarity. A rich repertoire of particles and the peculiar syntactic and prosodic sentence structure, with the prominent position of the finite verb and the possibility to have it highlighted by a pitch accent, are all factors easing the way for speakers of German and Dutch to mark polarity contrast no matter the relation involved: German and Dutch speakers systematically highlight a contrast between alternative

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propositions in dialogues (Polarity-Switch Dialogues), but they also do it in monologues, for cohesive purposes, even when alternative options are at play.

These crosslinguistic differences are reversely mirrored when the information units in a contrastive relation differ with respect to the first parameter, according to the first parameter of variation we identified. When the contrast does not involve polarity but rather referential entities and locations, a richer repertoire of contrastive pronouns and the relative flexibility of word order (especially in the topic domain) allow speakers of Romance languages to exploit the topic position for contrastive purposes: the frame of reference for which a proposition holds, in contrast with an alternative proposition in the common ground, can be explicitly referred to in the topic domain, providing the setting for contrast highlighting (Spot the Difference results). Moreover, the topic position can also be used to remove non-contrastive elements from the final position, and thus as a suppletive device to highlight a contrast in the domain of polarity (Map Task results). Speakers of Germanic languages, on the other hand, are less ready to highlight a contrast in these referential domains. The more restricted set of contrastive pronouns and the V2 position rule prevent them from using the topic position in the same way.

To conclude, divergent results on the management of contrastive relations in Romance and Germanic languages can be integrated in a coherent picture when the relevant parameters characterizing contrast are taken into account: speakers' choices are not only motivated by the criss-crossed constraints on morphosyntax, prosody and lexical resources available in these two language groups, but also differently influenced by the degrees of contrastiveness of the relations to be expressed.

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