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**In search for polarity contrast marking in Italian:  
a contribution from Map Task data.**

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**Abstract**

In the current paper, we examine polarity contrast marking in Italian in contexts where a contrast in polarity (polarity maintenance or switch) is the main information to be conveyed. We analyze and compare two kinds of data: elicited speech from Map Task dialogues and read speech focusing on clausal replies echoing (part of) the prompt. We tackle the questions how frequently do speakers of Italian use echo replies when confirming or correcting the polarity of a negatively biased question; what are the syntactic and prosodic properties of Italian echo replies in these contexts, and how often speakers produce *verum focus* when no other option is available for marking a contrast in polarity. The results confirm that the marking of polarity contrast, and in particular, prosodic encoding through *verum focus*, is possible although not a preferred option in Italian. Polarity contrast can also be left unspecified. This result supports earlier findings about the instability of polarity marking in Italian. In addition to this, the results indicate that *verum focus* readings can also emerge as a result of morpho-syntactic manipulations, such as the use of clitic right dislocation. In this case, the prosodic highlighting of the verb can be seen as an effect of a syntactic operation.

**1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

Despite extensive use of both prosody and constituent position to encode information structure - as is the case for focus and topic marking of nominal constituents (Avesani & Vayra 2005; Bocci & Avesani 2006; Bonvino 2005; Crocco 2013; Scarano 2003) - Italian does not seem to be well-suited for focusing prosodically on polarity as an isolated functional element, as is the case for “*verum focus*” constructions in languages such as German (Gutzmann 2012; Dimroth et al. 2014), in which the speaker can mark a polarity contrast by pitch accenting the finite verbal form<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, Italian lacks a particle such as German *schon* and an auxiliary such as English *do* that can be used for encoding polarity contrasts; and although constructions with a similar function are available, such as the *sì che / no che* construction in sentences such as *sì che ho fame* ‘I am indeed hungry’ (Poletto & Zanuttini 2013), they are only exploited to a minimal extent by Italian speakers, when compared with speakers of Germanic languages (for a corpus-based study see Garassino & Jacob this volume). This difference has been observed in comparative studies based on different tasks and discourse types, such as relating contrasting events in narratives (Dimroth et al. 2010; Benazzo et al. 2012), or comparing contrasting scenes in dialogue tasks (Turco 2014). Differences also arise in second language acquisition. On the one hand, Italian learners of German take time to place particles in the post-finite

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<sup>1</sup> We wish to thank Christine Dimroth, Davide Garassino, Daniel Jacob and the anonymous reviewers for their suggestions and their stimulating comments.

<sup>2</sup> Following Höhle (1992), Krifka (2007) refers to such a focus as *verum focus*. However, it is worth noticing that the notion is controversial (see Gutzmann 2012, Repp 2013, Hartmann this volume).

verb position and are not able to stress them prosodically until they reach advanced competence levels (Andorno & Turco 2015); on the other hand, the interplay between negation, post-verbal particles and finite verb forms, that are core factors in the acquisition of finiteness in German L2, only play a marginal role in Italian L2 (Bernini 2003, 2005; Andorno 2000).

In the current paper, we extend the search for polarity contrast marking in Italian to contexts where a contrast in polarity is the main information to be conveyed. This paper focuses on verbal echo-replies, i.e. clausal replies in which (part) of the predicate of the prompt is repeated, such as:

(1) A: *I do not have to turn left then?*

B: *Yes you do have to turn left / No, you do not have to turn left*

In the current work, we tackle the following questions:

(RQ1) How frequently do speakers of Italian use echo replies when confirming or correcting the polarity of a negatively biased question?

(RQ2) What are the syntactic and prosodic properties of Italian echo replies in these contexts?

(RQ3) How often speakers produce *verum focus* when no other option is available for marking a contrast in polarity?

Notice that echo replies are particularly suited to investigate polarity contrast when the presence of a verbal predicate provides the environment to observe *verum focus*.

The analysis presented in this study relies on two kinds of data: (1) elicited speech from Map Task dialogues; we examined contexts in which speaker B replies to a negatively biased sentence produced by the confederate speaker A, and (2) read speech elicited with a reading task; in this task the speakers are presented with a prompt consisting in a negatively or positively biased question, and are required to produce sentences with a fixed morpho-syntactic structure. The two sets of data provide pragmatically similar contexts, in that in both cases the speaker's task is to contrast the assumption proposed by the interlocutor's utterances, either by maintaining or by switching the polarity of the relevant proposition. Crucially, however, the two datasets differ with respect to the freedom in linguistic encoding offered to the speaker. This difference between the two datasets allowed us, on the one hand, to investigate speaker preferences in the linguistic encoding of information structure in particular pragmatic contexts (Corpus 1) and, on the other, to look more closely at prosodic encoding when this is the only viable strategy left for marking polarity contrast (Corpus 2).

Our findings show that Italian speakers do not have grammaticalized patterns to mark a contrast in polarity, although they can resort to marked syntactic structures or ordinary focus marking devices to meet such a goal when it is relevant for the ongoing conversation.

This paper is structured as follows: in Section 2 we outline the background of the current research; in Section 2.1 we present the relevant terminology regarding focus, contrast and polarity; in 2.2 we sum up available research on the expression of polarity contrast in a comparative perspective. In section 2.3

we examine the prosodic (2.3.1) and lexico-syntactic (2.3.2) markers of polarity contrast in Italian. Section 3 presents corpora, methods and research questions of the current study (3.1) and the results obtained by analyzing the corpora from a syntactic and prosodic point of view (3.2). Finally, in section 4, we discuss our findings and draw some conclusions from this research.

## 2. Background

### 2.1. Polarity, focus, and contrast: terminological distinctions

In the current paper, we focus on dialogic contexts in which speakers are engaged in mutually establishing the truth of a proposition. Example (2), from the Map Task section of our corpus, will provide an useful example of this situation. Map Tasks are dialogical games in which the two interlocutors play different roles, namely the role of *Instruction Giver* (henceforth: GIV) and *Instruction Follower* (FOL) (Carletta et al. 1996). In the Map Task dialogues examined for this work, FOL is a confederate speaker who produces negative biased statements or questions as frequently as possible. These biased utterances create contexts in which the switch or maintenance of the polarity of the proposition at play is the only relevant information. We examine the GIV's replies to the biased utterances produced by FOL, as in GIV2<sup>3</sup> below.

- (2) GIV1: devi prendere una diagonale eh: a destra -, verso l'estremità eh: del foglio -,  
FOL1: okay -, *quindi # non devo superare # l'albergo.*  
GIV2: ## sì. devi superare l'albergo -, a questo punto. devi lasciare l'albergo sulla destra -, arrivare # sopra l'albergo.

GIV1: you have to take a diagonal path, eh: on the right -, towards the edge eh of the sheet -,  
FOL1: okay -, *then # I don't need to pass # the hotel.*  
GIV2: ## yes. You must pass the hotel -, at this point. You must leave the hotel to your right -, get # above the hotel.

Further details concerning the pragmatic properties of the contexts analyzed will be given in Section 3.1. For the time being, in order to clarify our terminological choices, suffice it to say that these contexts share the following properties:

(a) *Contrastive focus*. In the relevant contexts, practices of Common Ground (CG) management can encourage speakers to use a contrastive focus in the sentence packaging. The notions of contrast and focus intertwine and sometimes overlap (Repp 2010). We adopt Krifka's (2007) functional definition of focus as a device for CG management that "indicates the presence of alternatives that are relevant for the interpretation of linguistic expressions" and we distinguish between informational and contrastive focus. A *contrastive focus* "presupposes that the CG content contains a proposition with which the current utterance can

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<sup>3</sup> As will be the case in the analysis section of the paper (Section 3), the following conventions apply to the example: the part of the reply which constitutes the target of the analysis is underlined; the relevant part of the question / assertion the reply replies, is in italics.

be contrasted, or that such a proposition can be accommodated” (Krifka 2007). As a consequence, with a contrastive focus the alternatives at play form a closed set defined by the information that is already available in the CG.

In Krifka’s terms, a *contrastive* focus does not need to be *corrective*, but can also *confirm* a proposition. Based on the type of presupposition involved and on the conversational contribution to the CG made by the relevant proposition, different pragmatic uses of contrastive focus can be disentangled. A contrastive focus has a correcting function when the integration of the current proposition in the CG entails the cancellation of an alternative proposition already available in the CG, as is the case in the contribution of speaker B, rebutting A’s contribution in (3i). When the proposition put forward by the interlocutor is the same as the one previously uttered by the speaker, contrastive focus has a *confirming* function, as in the contribution of speaker B in (3ii) (the relevant alternatives to be contrasted are marked with brackets; the contrastive focus is marked in bold).

- (3) A: [John] wants coffee  
 B: i. No, [**Mary**] wants coffee  
 ii. Yes, [**John**] wants coffee

With an additive particle, however, a contrastive focus adds a new proposition to the CG together with its already available alternatives.

- (4) A: [John] wants coffee  
 B: [**Mary**] wants coffee, too

A similar function can also be found when contrastive focus highlights “parallel” expressions or propositions (cf. Krifka & Musan 2012:12), as in the following case, where two sets of alternatives are contrasted by speaker A and speaker B for the proposition “X stole Y” and they are both added to the CG.

- (5) A: [Mary] stole the [cookies]  
 B: And [**Peter**] stole the [**cake**]!

As shown in examples (4) and (5) for additive and parallel contrasts, the current proposition is added to the CG together with its alternative. However, in additive contrast current and alternative proposition concern the same predicate, whereas in parallel contrast they concern similar though not identical predicates. The contribution of the current assertion to the CG needs to be carefully encoded by speakers, in order to avoid any possible ambiguity regarding whether the sentence is to be considered as additive or parallel.

Table 1. Different pragmatic functions for a contrastive focus.

Contrastive focus: relevant alternatives to the	Corrective contrast: the current proposition cancels an alternative proposition already asserted as part of the CG
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	Confirming contrast: the current proposition is confirmed to be part of the CG
	Additive contrast: the current proposition is to be added to the CG, as well as the previously asserted alternative proposition concerning the same predicate about a different topic / frame
	Parallel contrast: the current proposition is to be added to the CG, as well as the previously asserted alternative proposition concerning a similar predicate about a different topic / frame
	...

A difference between a wider notion of contrastive focus and a more specific notion of corrective focus is also made in studies concerning the prosodic marking of information structure, as it is shown in examples (6) and (7) (adapted from Bianchi & Bocci 2012:2-3). A sentence (here: *Si era messa un Armani*, “She wore an Armani dress”) involves a *contrast* whenever it focuses on an element (“an Armani dress”) contrasted with an alternative which is introduced in the following part of the utterance (“a cheap dress from H&M”).

- (6) A: Maria era molto elegante l'altra sera a teatro.  
‘Maria was really elegant the other evening at the theatre.’
- B: Certo. Si era messa [**un ArMA**ni], non [uno straccetto di H&M]  
‘I bet. She wore an Armani (dress) not a cheap dress from H&M.’

Note that the alternative proposition (“She wore a cheap dress from H&M”) is *negated* in (6), but is not *corrected*, as it has never been asserted to be part of the CG, and therefore does not need to be *removed* from it.

Instead, the same sentence “She wore an Armani dress” involves a *correction* when it causes the cancellation of a previously asserted proposition, as in (7).

- (7) A: L'altra sera a teatro, Maria si era messa [uno straccetto di H&M].  
‘Yesterday evening at the theatre, Maria wore a cheap dress from H&M.’
- B: No, si era messa [**un ArMA**ni].  
‘No, she wore an Armani (dress).’

(b) *Polarity contrast*. In contexts like (2), the speaker (GIV) *confirms* or *corrects* a proposition explicitly proposed as part of the CG by the previous utterance of the interlocutor (FOL), cf. the turns FOL1 and GIV2 in example (2). In doing so, the speaker’s reply can explicitly focus on polarity (positive vs. negative polarity), or, from the point of view of the contrastive relation, maintenance vs. switch of polarity with respect to the proposition proposed by the interlocutor. Following Krifka’s definition of ‘contrast’, we define ‘polarity contrast’ as a contrast occurring in the domain of polarity and subsume linguistic expressions

of polarity-switch and polarity-maintenance under “polarity contrast markers”. We therefore define a linguistic expression as a “polarity contrast marker” if the sentence containing it entails a contrast in polarity with some other proposition included in the CG, either *switching* or *maintaining* the polarity value of the alternative proposition (see Table 2)<sup>4</sup>.

Table 2. Possible values for polarity contrast markers.

Polarity contrast marker: a linguistic expression marking a contrast in polarity with respect to an alternative proposition (otherwise) carrying the same content and occurring in the preceding context.	Polarity-switch marker: linguistic expression marking that polarity has been changed with respect to the alternative proposition
	Polarity-maintenance marker: linguistic expression marking that polarity has been maintained with respect to the alternative proposition

## 2.2. Polarity contrast marking from a comparative perspective

Recently, a few comparative and experimental studies have asked how speakers of different languages organize information structure and use cohesive devices in discourse when a contrast in the polarity domain arises. The studies which we sum up below, analyze polarity contrast on the basis of Dimroth’s (2002) notion of *contrastiveness*, as a “paradigmatic relationship between an information unit of a given utterance with respect to the same information unit in a previous utterance”. These studies examine different kinds of discourse tasks potentially involving a contrast in polarity.

In the *Finite Story* (Dimroth et al. 2010), a monological narrative task, speakers have to retell a video showing a sequence of events concerning different people performing / not performing similar actions during a fire episode, as in the following excerpt:

- |     |           |   |
|-----|-----------|---|
| (8) | scene 22. | Arrival of fire engine with rescue net.     |
|     | scene 24. | Mr. Green does not jump into the rescue net |
|     | scene 25. | Mr. Red does not jump into the rescue net   |
|     | scene 26. | Mr. Blue jumps into the rescue net          |

According to the terminology proposed in Table 1, Finite Story plots include sequences where the speaker can mark an additive contrast in which polarity is maintained (as in (8), scenes 24 to 25), or a parallel contrast in which a switch in polarity is involved (as in (8), scenes 25 to 26), in order to increase the cohesion between subsequent utterances in the retelling. Results show language-specific preferences in the use of cohesive devices (Dimroth et al. 2010; Benazzo & Andorno 2010; Benazzo et al. 2012). In parallel contrasts, speakers of Germanic languages (Dutch, German) often use polarity-switch markers, either particles

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that Turco et al. (2015) adopt the label of ‘polarity-contrast markers’ only for linguistic expressions that “marks a switch on the polarity component” against the same propositional content.



(Dutch: *meneer Blauw springt wel uit het raam*) or *verum focus* (German: *deswegen IST er dann wohl auch gesprungen*), while speakers of Romance languages (Italian, French) use topic-switch markers (Italian: *il sig. Blu invece decise di buttarsi*, “Mr. Blue instead decided to jump”). In additive contrasts, speakers of Romance languages use predicate-maintenance markers (Italian: *lo stesso succede per il sig. Rossi*, “the same happened to Mr. Red”) or additive particles with scope over nominal constituents (Italian: *anche lui rifiuta*, “he also refuses”), thus not focusing on the polarity. In contrast, speakers of Germanic languages often use additive particles following the finite verb (German: *jetzt hat er AUCH den Mut gefunden*). The particles in these structures can be considered as polarity-maintenance markers, signaling that an assertion with the same truth-value about a different topic is added to the CG (cf. Dimroth et al. 2010:3342). On the whole, when different cohesive strategies are available, speakers of Romance languages tend to avoid the use of polarity contrast markers, unlike speakers of Germanic languages.

In the *Polarity-switch Dialogues* (Turco 2014, Turco et al. 2012, Turco et al. 2014), participants compared their own picture to the description of a different picture produced by a confederate speaker, as in the following example:

- (9) Confederate speaker [picture of a boy with a candy in his hands]:  
 “In my picture, the boy is not eating the candy”  
 Speaker [picture of a boy with a candy in his mouth]: “...”

The study found the following language-specific preferences. Speakers of Germanic languages use polarity-switch markers, either particles (Dutch: *wel*) or *verum focus* (German). Speakers of French and Italian instead often recur to switch markers with scope on a constituent working as frame setter (French: *Dans mon image par contre* “in my picture instead”). Féry & Krifka (2008) related these frame setter switch markers to topichood, as both frame setters and topics restrict the range of application of the ensuing predication. Moreover, in Romance languages, occurrences of an accent on verbs in non-final position - possibly interpreted as a *verum focus* - were only observed in about 35% of the utterances (cf. section 2.3.1).

As a whole, the results of these studies suggest that speakers of Romance languages - Italian among them – adopt less specific strategies to mark polarity contrasts, such as switch markers operating on the topical portion of the sentence.

Both the Finite Story and the Polarity-switch Dialogues potentially offer additive and parallel contrastive contexts in Krifka’s terms, but not confirming and correcting contrasts. In both tasks, the two pieces of information in contrast are not mutually exclusive: indeed, both are included in the CG. In the Finite Story there are different characters performing divergent actions, and in the Polarity-switch Dialogues pictures representing different situations are used. In conclusion, polarity contrast markers in these contexts do not confirm or correct previous information, but rather add new (contrastive) information. Moreover, both tasks allow for the choice of different information units in order to mark contrastive relations. Apart from the polarity, either the topic or the frame setting component can be marked as being in contrast with a previous unit of the same type. Therefore, in discarding polarity as a locus to mark the contrast, Romance speakers opt for different solutions in the information packaging or may even

leave the contrast relation unmarked.

The contexts analyzed in the current research offer an advancement with respect to these possibilities. As will be explained in more detail in Section 3.1, the speakers are referring to the exact same piece of information and, therefore, the two alternative propositions are mutually exclusive. Either the information proposed by the interlocutor is confirmed by the speaker to be part of the CG, or it is corrected and has to be removed from the CG. We can expect such a context to encourage the use of polarity-switch markers even in Italian speakers, provided that this kind of markers is available in Italian (cf. Section 3.2).

### 2.3. Polarity contrast markers in Italian

#### 2.3.1. Prosodic encoding

As seen above, together with the use of affirmative particles such as *doch* and *wel*, *verum focus* is a primary means of highlighting polarity operators in Germanic languages (Gutzmann 2012; Dimroth et al. 2014). In these languages, it is possible to emphasize the polarity of a sentence by pitch-accenting a finite verb, an auxiliary, or even a complementizer. In Italian, in contrast, the use of prosodic means to highlight polarity seems to be strongly limited. For instance, there is no evidence at present that Italian speakers mark polarity by prosody in spontaneous interactions (Dimroth et al. 2010), although they can be encouraged to produce *verum focus* if the interlocutor draws particular attention to the polarity of the utterance (Turco 2014). Turco's data on polarity marking in *Picture-difference Tasks* (cf. section 2.2) provide evidence that, under specific experimental conditions, speakers of Roman Italian produce utterances with the main prominence on a verb in more than half of the relevant contexts, and *verum focus* (i.e. main prominence on a finite verb) in about 35% of the cases (Turco 2014:150-151). The study shows that finite verbs are preferred over non-finite forms as the place for the main prominence, although this is not the case when the finite form is an auxiliary. In complex verbal forms such as *ha mangiato* 'has eaten', speakers place the prominence preferably on the past participle, i.e. on the rightmost lexical element of the phrase, and *verum focus* is infrequent. Turco (2014) and Turco et al. (2015) interpret this preference, along the lines of Selkirk (1996), as resulting from phonological constraints disfavoring the accentuation of non-phrase-final functional monosyllables. Finally, similarly to what has been observed in cases of narrow or contrastive focus in several Italian varieties (Bocci 2013; D'Imperio 2002; Grice et al. 2005), *verum focus* in Roman Italian triggers a prosodic rearrangement of the post-focal prominences, which is described by the author as post-nuclear downstep.

In conclusion, there is evidence that Italian speakers can produce *verum focus* under certain conditions, a result which is complementary to the findings by Dimroth et al. (2010) about natural interactions. These studies indicate that *verum focus* is one of the possible options in this language to highlight polarity, although it is not a primary resource.

#### 2.3.2. Lexical and syntactic encoding

As mentioned in the preceding section, Italian speakers focalize the verb in a

Picture-difference Task in more than half of the relevant contexts. In the rest of the cases, however, prosodic structure is completely neutral. In these cases, Italian speakers can rely on lexical or syntactic means to encode polarity maintenance or switch. As with prosody, the use of these means is not systematic, and empirical studies have pointed out that polarity contrast can be simply left unspecified.

Studies by Bernini (1995) and Poletto & Zanuttini (2012) have explored the structural and pragmatic properties of cleft constructions such as *sì che vieni* ‘you do come’ as a fronted polarity marker, such as (10):

- (10) Se ho visto cosa c’è lì dentro?  
 if have.prs.1sg see.pst.prt what there be.prs.3sg there in  
 Sì che l’ho visto<sup>5</sup>  
 Yes that it have.prs.1sg see.pst.prt  
 ‘[you ask] if I saw what there was inside? Yes, I did see it’

These structures, however, have not been attested in empirical studies such as the one by Brunetti (2009), and they do not occur in the Polarity-switch Dialogues analyzed by Turco (2014). Italian speakers can also highlight polarity through sentence initial adverbs such as *invece* ‘instead’ or intensifiers such as *proprio* or *davvero* ‘really, certainly’<sup>6</sup>. However, empirical investigations again show that intensifiers rarely appear as polarity markers in spontaneous speech (Dimroth et al. 2010). Adverbs such as *invece* ‘instead’ (see ex. 11) are more frequent, but they are not specialized as polarity markers; rather, they occur in sentence-initial position (as in 11.a) or in a parenthetical phrase between the topic and the VP (11.b):

- (11) a. I vigili del fuoco dicono al signor Verdi di buttarsi, ma lui non vuole.  
 [...] Invece il signor Blu si butta  
 ‘The firemen say to mister Green to jump, but he doesn’t want to do it.  
 [...] Instead mister Blue jumps’  
 b. Il signor Verdi non voleva assolutamente buttarsi. [...] Il signor Blu invece decise di buttarsi.  
 ‘Mister Green absolutely did not want to jump. [...] Mister Blue, instead, decided to jump’

A further strategy to highlight polarity is the use of syntactic structures that are generally employed for topic marking, such as clitic right dislocation. In a typical declarative right dislocation, an object constituent is resumed by a coreferent clitic pronoun and is therefore marked as a given topic in the periphery of the sentence<sup>7</sup>. As a consequence of the pronominal doubling, the

<sup>5</sup>Example taken from the Italian newspaper *Corriere della sera*.  
[http://corrieredelmezzogiorno.corriere.it/bari/cronaca/15\\_luglio\\_25/fuoco-li-ha-mangiati-vivi-ceb22af6-3294-11e5-b678-cba043437fc9.shtml](http://corrieredelmezzogiorno.corriere.it/bari/cronaca/15_luglio_25/fuoco-li-ha-mangiati-vivi-ceb22af6-3294-11e5-b678-cba043437fc9.shtml) [accessed 02.06.2017]

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of the polarity markers in Italian see Garassino & Jacob this volume.

<sup>7</sup> Right dislocation can also involve constituents other than objects. For an overview see e.g. to

object phrase is separated from the preceding material by a prosodic boundary; moreover, the main prosodic prominence of the utterance occurs before the dislocated object (cf. Benincà 1988; Bernini 2009; Crocco 2013). In certain cases, this syntactic-prosodic construction seems to be used primarily as a means to focalize the verb while at the same time highlighting the polarity of the utterance, rather than as a means to topicalize a given constituent. In the following question-answer pair (12), for instance, speaker B replies to his interlocutor by highlighting the polarity of the utterance through a clitic right dislocation<sup>8</sup>:

- (12) A: Ma hai visto il film?<sup>9</sup>  
 but have.prs.2sg see.pst.prt the movie  
 ‘but have you seen the movie?’
- B: L’ ho visto il film, ovvio  
 it have.prs.1sg see.pst.prt the movie obviously  
 ‘I did see [it] the movie, obviously’

Clitic right dislocation can also occur in yes-no questions, such as (13)<sup>10</sup>. Interestingly, in these cases the right dislocated phrase, which is always resumed by a clitic, can be either discourse given or new. Furthermore, both the verb and the object can be pitch accented (Crocco 2013). Yes-no questions containing a right dislocation have been analyzed by Crocco (2013) as a means to express a confirmation request. In addition, polarity questions with a right dislocation seem to put special emphasis on the alternative answers available to the interlocutor. In this sense, they are one of the linguistic resources that Italian speakers can use to highlight polarity in yes-no questions. See for instance (12):

- (13) GIV: tu ce l’ hai un dado?  
 you there it have a dice?  
 ‘Do you have [it] a dice?’

Note that in (13) the right-dislocated NP *dado* ‘dice’ is discourse-new and non-specific, as indicated by the indefinite article *un* ‘a’. In such a context, right-dislocation cannot be straightforwardly considered a means to mark the object constituent as a given topic<sup>11</sup>.

In any event, right dislocation is not the only option available to the speaker to put emphasis on polarity. Example (14.B) illustrates that left dislocation can be

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Benincà (1988) and Cecchetto (1999).

<sup>8</sup> Despite the absence of a comma marking the disjuncture between verb and object, this example is clearly a case of clitic right dislocation because of the presence of a resumptive pronominal clitic. The example is taken from a discussion forum on the internet and is written in a rather colloquial style. The absence of a comma after the past participle, therefore, could be due to informality. Moreover, the presence of a resumptive clitic is *per se* sufficient to identify this sentence as a case of right dislocation: in fact, clause internal clitic doubling (cf. Anagnostopoulou 2006) is not permitted in standard Italian, at least in declarative clauses (cf. Crocco 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Source: <http://www.pluschan.com/index.php?/topic/4140-brave-ribelle-di-brenda-chapman-e-mark-andrews/page-3>

<sup>10</sup> This example is taken from the Map Task corpus analyzed by Crocco (2013).

<sup>11</sup> While clitic right dislocations are a means to mark a specific constituent as a given topic, there is evidence that this is not always the case for interrogatives (Crocco 2013).

used in a similar way to mark a polarity contrast:

- (14) A: impar-a                    l'    italiano altrimenti    tac-i.....  
         learn-imp.prs.2sg the    Italian otherwise    shut up-imp.prs.2sg  
         'Learn Italian or shut up'
- B: Ue' ciccio, guard-a                    che l'    italiano lo    conosc-o<sup>12</sup>  
         hey dude, look-imp.prs.2sg that the Italian it    know-prs.1sg  
         'Hey dude, look, I do know [it] Italian'

Overall, research indicates that Italian, similarly to other Romance languages, can mark polarity contrast in several ways. Crucially, however, the means deployed to highlight polarity are not specialized and appear to variable extent in different contexts. In this paper we compare Map Task interactions and a sample of read speech in order to gather further evidence on the different linguistic means exploited by speakers to switch or maintain the polarity of an utterance in natural vs. morpho-syntactically constrained contexts.

### 3. The study

#### 3.1. Corpora, methods and research questions

Our dataset comes from two subcorpora. Corpus 1 was collected for the study of particles *sì / no* in Italian (Andorno & Rosi 2015); it consists of elicited dialogues based on the Map Task (Anderson et al. 1991), an interactive game between two participants who are given two similar maps. As mentioned above (section 2.1) one of the speakers, the *Instruction follower* FOL, has to draw a path on his map, following the instructions given by the other speaker (the *Instruction Giver* GIV). At the outset, only the GIV has the relevant path information on his map. GIV and FOL cannot look at each other's map. They each make use of information based on their own maps, on which, however, also the depicted objects are only partly similar (see Appendix). Therefore, expectations can arise about the information that can be put in the CG, but speakers often need to check whether their expectations are actually confirmed. The Map Task dialogues were performed by 9 female university students, native speakers of northern varieties of Italian, acting as the GIV. The FOL role was performed by a female confederate speaker<sup>13</sup>. For the current purposes, we analyzed the GIV's replies to polar questions and assertions performed by the FOL.

The following examples illustrate the context in which the relevant replies are found. In ex. (15), the proposition 'curves do not zigzag', proposed for check in turn FOL2, was already suggested as part of the CG in turn GIV1 (*sono due curve piuttosto larghe*, 'they are rather wide bends'). Through her assertion in turn 2, the FOL shows an expectation, based on contextual evidence, that a negative proposition is true and asks for a confirmation that it can be added to the CG<sup>14</sup>:

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<sup>12</sup> Source: <http://it.hobby.viaggi.narkive.com/RzxwWPVX/tragedia-in-myamair>

<sup>13</sup> Further details concerning the participants and the data are offered in Andorno & Rosi (2015).

<sup>14</sup> According to the Map Task annotation scheme, these conversational moves can be considered

- (15) FOL1: ma # sono ravvicinate -, queste curve? sono strette?  
 GIV1: m: n:o -, non sono strette. sono due curve  
 piuttosto larghe. ←NEG contextual evidence  
 FOL2: okay. okay -, quindi <non> [/] <non devo farle> [/]  
 insomma non sono zigzag.  
 GIV2: no no no no.  
 FOL1: are they tight, these curves? are they narrow?  
 GIV1: no, they are not narrow. They are rather wide  
 bends ←NEG contextual evidence  
 FOL2: okay. okay, then I do not have to take them [/] they do not zigzag  
 then.  
 GIV2: no no no no.

In ex. (16), the accuracy of the proposition ‘colle delle rondini is on your map’ as part of the CG is expected by the FOL, see turn FOL1 (*verso il colle delle rondini*, ‘toward colle delle rondini’). In GIV2 this is challenged by the GIV’s hesitation (*no n:*) and therefore checked in turn FOL2. Through the question in turn FOL2, the FOL asks whether the positive proposition she had supposed to be part of the CG needs to be canceled, as recent contextual evidence suggests<sup>15</sup>.

- (16) GIV1: devi fare metà giro intorno al colibrì -, e poi proseguire dritto.  
 FOL1: verso: <il colle> [/] il colle delle rondini. ←POS epistemic bias  
 GIV2: n:o. n: ←NEG contextual evidence  
 FOL2: *non hai il colle delle rondini?*  
 GIV3: eh: n:on ci sono colli delle rondini sulla mappa.  
 GIV1: you must turn half way around the ‘colibrì’ and then go straight  
 on.  
 FOL1: toward ‘colle delle rondini’. ←POS epistemic bias  
 GIV2: no n: ←NEG contextual evidence  
 FOL2: *don’t you have ‘colle delle rondini’?*  
 GIV3: eh: there are no ‘colli delle rondini’ on the map.

Note that in all contexts considered the FOL has no primary access to the information at play, as the check concerns information included in the GIV’s map. That is to say, the FOL’s check concerns *B-events*, “things which B [the recipient] knows but A [the speaker] does not” (Labov 1972:254) or, more precisely, “some matter which the recipient has rights to know more than the

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‘confident checks’ (Carletta et al. 1996, Grice & Savino 2004).

<sup>15</sup> Negative questions in our data always have inner negation, in Ladd (1981) terms. These conversational moves are called *tentative checks*, in Grice & Savino (2004). For an in-depth description of different dialogic contexts in the data, see Andorno & Rosi (2015). The complex semantic and pragmatic value of negative polar questions has recently been described through several different approaches: Romero (2006), Reese (2007), Repp (2013), Krifka (2015).

speaker” (Heritage 2002:1428). As a consequence, once the GIV has confirmed or corrected the proposition proposed in the FOL’s turn, this is definitely accepted or discarded as part of the CG.

For the purposes of the current study, we considered only those among the FOL’s prompts that are clearly biased, i.e. prompts which show her positive or negative expectation about the truth value of the proposition at play. These are the contexts in which the GIV’s reply can possibly include a confirmation or a correction of the polarity value expected by the FOL. It turned out that the FOL’s positive questions did not always show a clear bias<sup>16</sup>: the FOL often used positive questions to ask for further information about which she has no previous expectations. In this case the GIV’s replies cannot be interpreted as a confirmation or a correction, as they can simply state a value for a proposition which neither speaker had considered to be part of the CG before. Instead, as shown in examples (15) and (16) above, the negative form of the prompt provides a signal of the FOL’s epistemic bias concerning the truth-value to be assigned to the proposition at play (Ladd 1981, Büring & Gunlogson 2000, Krifka 2012). In order to avoid including replies lacking a clear polarity-maintenance/switch value in the corpus, we restricted the analysis of Corpus 1 to replies to negative prompts. In total, we collected 330 replies to negative questions and assertions.

Corpus 2 was collected during an experiment which was part of a larger study on the syntax-prosody interface in Italian (Badan & Crocco 2018). The data were elicited using a reading task in which the speakers were required to silently read a series of short situational prompts followed by a sentence to be read aloud. The prompts were designed to induce the desired reading of the target sentence, which is provided to the speaker in a given morpho-syntactic form. Examples of the prompts used to collect this dataset are provided below:

- (17) A: Ah, quindi i tuoi non hanno vissuto a Parigi?  
A: ‘Oh, so your parents didn’t live in Paris?’  
  
B: Sì sì. Hanno vissuto a Parigi.  
B: ‘Yes, they did [live in Paris].’
- (18) A: Le tue figlie hanno studiato a Milano?  
A: ‘Did your daughters study in Milan?’  
  
B: No. Non hanno studiato a Milano.  
B: ‘No, they didn’t [study in Milan].’

The much more constrained form of the prompt/reply pair and the context provided allowed us to include replies to both positive and negative questions. On the other hand, prompts in Corpus 2 are always (positive or negative) questions, and replies always express a switch in polarity. We decided to focus on polarity-switching replies since *verum focus* is observed in this type of utterance in studies we used for a comparison (especially Turco 2014, Turco et al. 2015, cf. Section 2.2 and 2.3.1). Corpus 2 consists of 40 utterances read by 4 speakers (1 male and 3 female) from the city of Este, in the province of Padua

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<sup>16</sup> In fact, the lack of bias follows from the unmarked value of positive polarity when compared with negative (Reese 2007, Krifka 2017).

(Veneto), age ranging from 30 to 40 with university-level education. The speakers were recorded in a quiet room using a Røde HS1-P headset microphone plugged into a portable Marantz PMD 620 recorder. All target sentences presented an unmarked word order, without intensifiers or sentence-initial adverbs. The verb is always composed of a bisyllabic auxiliary form (*hanno* ‘have’) followed by a past participle and by a locative PP.

The data considered in Corpus 1 and Corpus 2 are summed up in Table 3:

	Form of the reply	Prompts considered	Replies considered
<b>Corpus 1</b>	Free	Negative assertions and questions	Positive polarity + switch Negative polarity + maintenance
<b>Corpus 2</b>	Constrained	Negative and positive questions	Positive polarity + switch Negative polarity + switch

Table 3. Pragmatic conditions of data considered for Corpus 1 and Corpus 2.

Our first goal was to provide a background description of the format of polarity switching and polarity-maintaining replies, and their relative frequency in non-constrained conditions. We focused on the form and frequency of echo replies, i.e. replies adopting (part of) the predicate of the prompt, where a polarity contrast is expected to arise. This analysis is based on Corpus 1 and is described in Sections 3.2.1 (RQ1) and 3.2.2 (RQ2). Our second goal was to deepen the analysis of echo replies from a prosodic perspective. To this end we selected from Corpus 1 echo replies including a verbal nucleus and considered all sentences of Corpus 2, which have the form of VP echo replies. The more constrained conditions of Corpus 2 allowed us to observe what speakers do with echo-replies, when morpho-syntactic and lexical choices cannot be manipulated and *verum focus* is the only viable option to mark a polarity contrast (the other option being to leave the contrast unmarked). This analysis is described in Sections 3.2.3 (RQ2) and 3.2.4 (RQ3).

With respect to the form of prosodic patterns, the analysis of the two corpora allowed us to compare,

- free (Corpus 1) and constrained (Corpus 2) echo replies carrying the same polarity (positive) and discourse function (polarity-switch);
- echo replies carrying the same function (polarity-switch) but a different polarity (positive in Corpus 1 and Corpus 2; negative in Corpus 2);
- echo replies carrying the same polarity (negative) but a different function (polarity-maintenance in Corpus 1; polarity-switch in Corpus 2).

The prosodic analysis aimed at identifying the position of the main prominence of the utterance, in order to determine the scope (broad or narrow) of the prosodic focus. The analysis was carried out using Praat (Boersma & Weeninck 2016) for visual inspection and listening. Following Ladd (2008) we consider every utterance in which the rightmost metrical head is pitch accented as an instance of broad focus, and every utterance in which the main prominence occurs on an element different from the rightmost head, as an instance of narrow focus. Furthermore, we assume that perceptual prominence reflects prosodic



prominence. Finally, we consider as *verum focus* instances of narrow focus in which main sentential prominence is assigned to the finite verb. Note that, in this work, we will not provide a detailed analysis of the types and properties of the pitch accents occurring in the utterances. This limitation of the analysis is mainly due to (a) the diverse regional affiliations of the speakers, who speak Italian according to regional phonologies partly different from one another (cf. Gili Fivela et al. 2015); and (b) the syntactic diversity and variability of the samples. In fact, while syntax in Corpus 2 is strongly constrained, the speakers included in Corpus 1 can speak spontaneously. Therefore, the interaction between syntax and prosody (see a.o. Frascarelli 2000, Selkirk 2011) is not controlled and cannot be always reconstructed. Given the small size of the sample, the data on *verum focus* presented in this paper should be considered explorative.

### 3.2. Results

#### 3.2.1. Frequency of clausal and echo replies (Corpus 1)

In all, we collected 330 replies to negative checks in the Map Task corpus: 227 of them are polarity-maintaining replies and 103 are polarity-switching replies. The replies can have various formats. For instance, a reply can start with an anaphoric polarity particle (*yes / no*, as ex. a, b in Table 4) or other particles (ex. c). The clausal part of the reply, when available, can add further information and precisions (ex. b, d) or explicitly reformulate (part of) the information checked, in the form of an echo reply (ex. a).

(Replying to the check:) <i>Sopra non hai gli abeti?</i> ‘you don’t have the firs above?’		
	Particle	Clause
a	No ‘No	non ho gli abeti I don’t have the firs’
b	Sì ‘Yes	però gli abeti non sono proprio sopra sopra but the firs are not really above’
c	Esatto ‘Exactly’	
d		Ho le automobili ‘I have the cars’

Table 4. Examples of formats of the replies found in Corpus 1.

Figure 1 shows the frequency of different types of reply found in Corpus 1. In general, replies including an information or an echo clause (as type a, b or d above) are more frequent than non-clausal replies, in which only a particle is present. In polarity-maintenance replies, clauses occur in 50 to 60% of the cases, while in polarity-switch replies they represent about the 90% of the occurrences. Among the clausal replies, echoes (type a above) are not so frequent within the polarity-maintenance replies (10 to 20%), but they are the most frequent type of polarity-switch reply (50 to 60%). In fact, the strong increase of clauses in polarity-switch replies is due to echo replies. In addition, echoes are slightly more frequent in replies to assertions than in replies to questions.

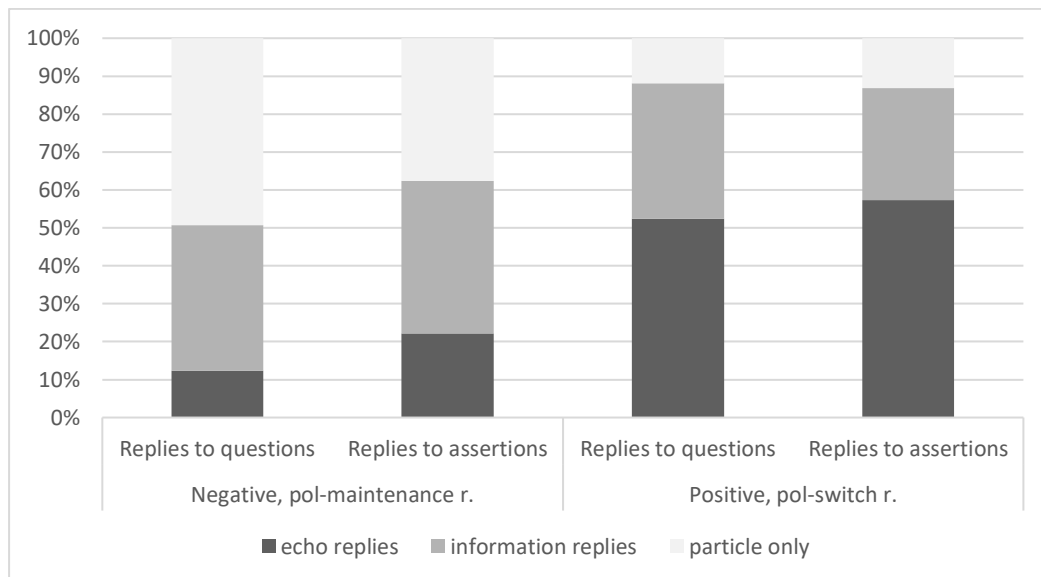


Figure 1. Corpus 1, percentage of clausal replies in polarity-maintenance and polarity-switch replies (total = 330 replies).

The results reported in Figure 1 show that the use of clausal replies, instead of particles alone, and of echo replies, instead of replies adding new information, is favored in cases of polarity-switch over polarity-maintenance and, slightly, in replies to assertions over replies to questions. On the one hand, when the speaker needs to signal that a switch in polarity has occurred, he uses echo replies more frequently than when the polarity is maintained. On the other hand, the stronger the commitment made by the interlocutor concerning the proposition at play (assertions vs. questions), the more frequent is the use of echo replies. Echo replies, in explicitly reformulating the propositional content at issue, are indeed an ideal locus to mark a polarity contrast. In the following sections, we will therefore describe the syntactic (Section 3.2.2) and prosodic (Section 3.2.3) format of the echo replies of Corpus 1, in order to find out whether polarity contrasts are marked through syntactic or prosodic means.

### 3.2.2. Corpus 1: Syntactic format of echo replies

The subset of echo replies includes 102 utterances with different syntactic formats<sup>17</sup>. The replies can be realized as a NP/PP alone (17/102) or followed by a polarity particle (9/102), or as full VP clauses (76/102). In what follow we comment on examples of the different syntactic formats found in Corpus 1.

a) NP/PP alone (17 cases).

- (19) [pol. switch] FOL: quindi *la linea # non è dritta*. GIV: beh sì. # abbastanza dritta.  
FOL: so the line is not straight. GIV: well yes. Pretty straight. [i07]

<sup>17</sup> From ex. (19) onward the different experimental subjects (GIVs) are identified with a number (i01, i02...). The confederate Follower is always indicated as FOL.

- (20) [pol. maint.] FOL: *ma non devo fare un giro intero.* GIV: no -, non un giro intero.  
 FOL: but mh I do not have to go all the way round. GIV:  
 no -, not all the way round. [i01]

In format a), the clause is reduced to the relevant predicative part of the proposition at play. Note that, as polarity-maintenance replies in Corpus 1 always carry a negative polarity, the NP/PP is preceded by the negator *non*, while polarity-switch replies do not carry any polarity marker.

b) NP/PP followed by a polarity particle (9 cases).

- (21) [pol. switch] FOL: *ma neppure le barche hai?* GIV: sì le barche sì.  
 FOL: you do not even have boats? GIV: (lit.) yes -, boats  
 yes [i07]
- (22) [pol. maint.] FOL: *cioè non hai niente lì # in: basso.* GIV: in basso a sinistra no.  
 FOL: you mean you have nothing at the bottom. GIV: at  
 the bottom on the left no. [i04]

In format b), polarity is overtly marked by the particles following the NP/PP. This construction can be considered a way to manage polarity contrasts, as it can only be used when the proposition to which the polarity contrast applies is already part of the CG.

c) sentences including a VP (76/102). VP replies are by far the most frequent format (75%) of echo replies. However, when we consider the ratio of VP echoes out of the total amount of replies in the corpus, we observe a great difference in frequency between polarity-maintenance (32/76) and polarity-switch (44/76): VP echoes correspond to 14% (32/227) of polarity-maintenance replies, but they represent 43% of polarity-switch replies (44/103). That is to say, the need to mark a switch in polarity strongly favors the use of an echo reply with a verbal nucleus.

VP replies can have different sentence structures. For instance, the VP can be partly reduced, with dependent constituents (e.g. object) expressed by a clitic pronoun (16 cases).

- (23) FOL: *ma # non devo toccare la scritta.* GIV: sì. la tocco.  
 FOL: but I must not touch the writing. GIV: yes. I touch it

When the VP is fully expressed, it generally follows an unmarked (S)VO order (55 cases).

- (24) FOL: *senza toccare le scritte della discoteca.* GIV: no: tocchi la scritta  
 FOL: without touching the writings of the disco. GIV: no: you touch the  
 writing [i06]

In 5 cases, VP echo replies show a marked word order. The object is left-dislocated in (25) and right-dislocated in (26); in (27) the unmarked order for the presentative *c'è* NP (*there is* NP) is reversed; in (28) a polarity particle *sì* is inserted between the left dislocated object and the verb.

- (25) FOL: *ma le barche non le supero.* GIV: &tz -, le barche le superi!  
 FOL: but the boats I do not pass them. GIV: (lit.) /tz/ -, the boats you pass them! [i08]
- (26) FOL: *tu non ce l'hai l'ambulante?* GIV: &eh sì ce l'ho l'ambulante  
 FOL: don't you have the pedlar? GIV: (lit.) yes I have it the pedlar [i09]
- (27) FOL: *ma non hai nemmeno # ancora più a destra. la pasticceria "il babà".* GIV: sì. la pasticceria "il babà" c'è.  
 FOL: but you do not even have # on the right. the pastry "il babà". GIV: (lit.) yes. the pastry shop "il babà" I have it. [i09]
- (28) FOL: *ma non hai nemmeno due barche?* GIV: le barche -, sì -, ce le ho.  
 FOL: you do not even have two boats? GIV: the boats -, yes -, I have them [i03]

As a final remark, we signal the lexical strategy observed in VP echo replies by two speakers, who occasionally emphasize the positive / negative value of the polarity with emphatic adverbs (*assolutamente* 'absolutely', *effettivamente*, 'indeed'; see (29-30)) or negative adverbs, determinants or pronouns reinforcing the negator *non* (*mai* 'never', *nessuno* 'nobody', 'none', *niente* 'nothing'; see (31-33)).

- (29) FOL: *non hai nessuna figura a:lla sinistra del colibrì?* GIV: no. non ho assolutamente nessuna figura.  
 FOL: don't you have any figure to the right of the hummingbird? GIV: no. I have absolutely no figure [i08]
- (30) FOL: *ma # non devo fare <un> -, [/] <un giro> [//] una curva +...* GIV: sì. effettivamente devi fare una curva -  
 FOL: I don't have to turn ? GIV: yes. you have to turn indeed [i09]
- (31) FOL: *però non lo tocco.* GIV: non lo tocchi mai.  
 FOL: but I do not touch it. GIV: you never touch it [i09]
- (32) FOL: *non ci sono più curve: +...* GIV: non ci sono più curve né niente -, completamente dritto  
 FOL: there are no more bends: ... GIV: there are no more bends or other things, completely straight [i08]
- (33) FOL: *non hai <una stra> [//] una figura con una strada.* GIV: no. non ho nessuna strada.  
 FOL: don't you have a figure with a street. GIV: no. I don't have any street [i08]

In conclusion, we did not observe a unique and specific format to mark polarity contrasts in echo replies, but rather different possible formats of both reduced and full clauses. In addition, our data indicate that the need to mark a switch in polarity favors the use of an echo reply with a verbal nucleus.

In the following sections (3.2.3 and 3.2.4) we present the prosodic analysis of the echo replies with a verbal nucleus: these replies represent the possible contexts in which *verum focus* appear.

### 3.2.3. Prosodic analysis of echo replies: Corpus 1

As mentioned above, in Corpus 1 we found 76 echo replies. All echo replies follow negative prompts. The number includes both polarity-maintenance and polarity-switch replies as well as replies to both assertions and questions.

As a whole, *verum focus* emerges from these data as a possible strategy to highlight polarity, although not a particularly frequent one. Overall, the 22 cases of *verum focus* were identified. They represent 29% of the echo replies (22/76), but only 10% of the clausal replies as a whole (22/224) and 7% of all replies (22/330). Within echo replies, narrow focus on the verb does not significantly differ in frequency neither between polarity-maintenance and polarity-switch replies, nor between replies to assertions and to questions. The small amount of examples available in our corpus does not permit further observations. In Table 5 we present the results for the prosodic analysis of Corpus 1 concerning the position of the main prominence and the scope of the prosodic focus. As mentioned in Section 3.1, we considered every utterance with the main prominence on the rightmost metrical head as an instance of broad focus, every utterance in which the main prominence is on a non-final element as instances of narrow focus and, all utterances with main prominence on the finite verb as instances of *verum focus*. In Table 6 we present the results concerning narrow focus in more detail.

Type of reply		Type of focus						tot
		Broad		Narrow		Other <sup>18</sup>		
Pol. maintenance reply	to assertions	9	37%	9	37%	6	25%	24
	to questions	5	62%	2	25%	1	13%	8
	tot	14	44%	11	34%	7	22%	32
Pol. switch reply	to assertions	14	50%	13	46%	1	4%	28
	to questions	4	25%	6	37%	6	37%	16
	tot	18	41%	19	43%	7	16%	44
tot		32	42%	30	39%	14	18%	76

Table 5 without %

Type of reply		Type of focus			
		Broad	Narrow	Other	Tot
Pol. maintenance reply	to assertions	9	9	6	24

<sup>18</sup> The data in column “other” refer to ambiguous cases that could not be reliably analyzed.

	to questions	5	2	1	8
	tot	14	11	7	32
Pol. switch reply	to assertions	14	13	1	28
	to questions	4	6	6	16
	tot	18	19	7	44
tot		32	30	14	76

Table 5. Types of focus in the clausal echo replies of Corpus 1.

Type of reply		Narrow focus							
		On other constituents		On the verb				tot	
				finite		non-finite			
Pol. maintenance reply	to assertions	2	6,7%	7	23,3%	-	-	9	30%
	to questions	-	-	2	6,7%	-	-	2	6,7%
	tot	2	<b>6,7%</b>	9	<b>30%</b>	-	-	11	<b>36,7%</b>
Pol. switch reply	to assertions	2	6,7%	9	30%	2	6,7%	13	43,3%
	to questions	2	6,7%	4	13,3%	-	-	6	20%
	tot	4	<b>13,3%</b>	15	<b>50%</b>	-	-	19	<b>63,3%</b>
tot		6	<b>20%</b>	24	<b>80%</b>			30	<b>100%</b>

Type of reply		Narrow focus			
		On other constituents	On the verb		tot
			finite	non-finite	
Pol. maintenance reply	to assertions	2	7	-	9
	to questions	-	2	-	2
	tot	2	9	-	11
		2	9	2	13

Pol. switch reply	to assertions				
	to questions	2	4	-	6
	tot	4	15	-	19
tot		6	24		30

Table 6. Types of narrow focus in the clausal echo replies of Corpus 1.

A closer look shows that 43% (19 cases) of polarity-switch replies and 34% (11 cases) of polarity-maintenance replies are narrow focus utterances (cf. Table 5). In most of these cases, narrow focus is on the verb: in particular, the main prominence is on the verb in 24 cases, i.e. in 34% (15 cases) of the polarity-switch replies and in 28% (9 cases) of polarity-maintenance replies. Out of these 24 cases, 22 are occurrences of narrow focus on the finite verb, i.e. *verum focus*, while in the remaining 2 cases the main prominence is on a non-finite form.

As the following examples show, *verum focus* can be realized by highlighting different types of verbal elements (the item carrying the main prominence is boldfaced).

(34) Finite lexical forms

FOL: ma non devo toccare la scritta. GIV: sì qua la **tocca** un pochino.

FOL: but I don't have to touch the writing. GIV: (lit.) yes, here it touches it a bit [i01]

(35) Forms of *avere* 'have possession'<sup>19</sup>

FOL: tu non ce l'hai l'ambulante? GIV: eh sì ce l'**ho** l'ambulante

FOL: you don't have the pedlar? GIV: (lit.) oh yes I have it the pedlar [i09]

(36) The copula

FOL: quindi non sono tanto importanti questi abeti. GIV: sì, **sono** importanti

FOL: so these pines are not that important. GIV: yes, they are important [i09]

(37) Modal verbs

FOL: però non devo superarle. GIV: sì. **devi** superarle

FOL: but I don't have to go over them. GIV: yes, you have to go over them [i09]

The pitch tracks of examples (36) and (37) are shown in Figures 2 and 3.

<sup>19</sup> In this case *verum focus* emerges as an effect of a clitic right-dislocation of the NP (*l'ambulante* 'the pedlar') resumed by a clitic object pronoun (cf. ex. 12 and 13).





(add table 7)

Table 7. Broad and narrow focus in Corpus 2 (all echo replies with a verbal nucleus).

Table 7a

Type of focus		Polarity-switch replies		Tot
		Positive	Negative	
Broad		11	0	11
Narrow	Past participle	9	5	14
	Aux	5	10	15
Tot		25	15	40

Table 7b

Type of focus		Polarity-switch replies				Tot	
		Positive		Negative			
Broad		11	27,5%	0	0	11	27,5%
Narrow	Past part.	9	20,50%	5	11,40%	14	31,80%
	Aux	5	11,40%	10	22,80%	15	34%
Tot		25	62,50%	15	37,50%	40	100%

The verb is focused in 29 out of the 40 utterances. In particular, all 15 negative replies have a narrow focus on the verb: in 10 cases the focus is on the auxiliary *hanno* ‘have’, i.e. *verum focus* while in 5 cases main prominence is located on the past participle. In contrast, in positive replies narrow focus on the verb occurs in 14 out of 25 cases, and the auxiliary is focused in only 5 out of the 14 cases. The contrast in polarity, therefore, is not marked at all in 11 cases of positive replies, that are realized as broad focus utterances. In this corpus no cases of narrow focus on elements different from the verb were found.

Figures 4-7 provide examples of utterances with *verum focus* (fig. 4 and 5), with narrow focus on the past participle (fig. 6), and with broad focus (fig. 7).

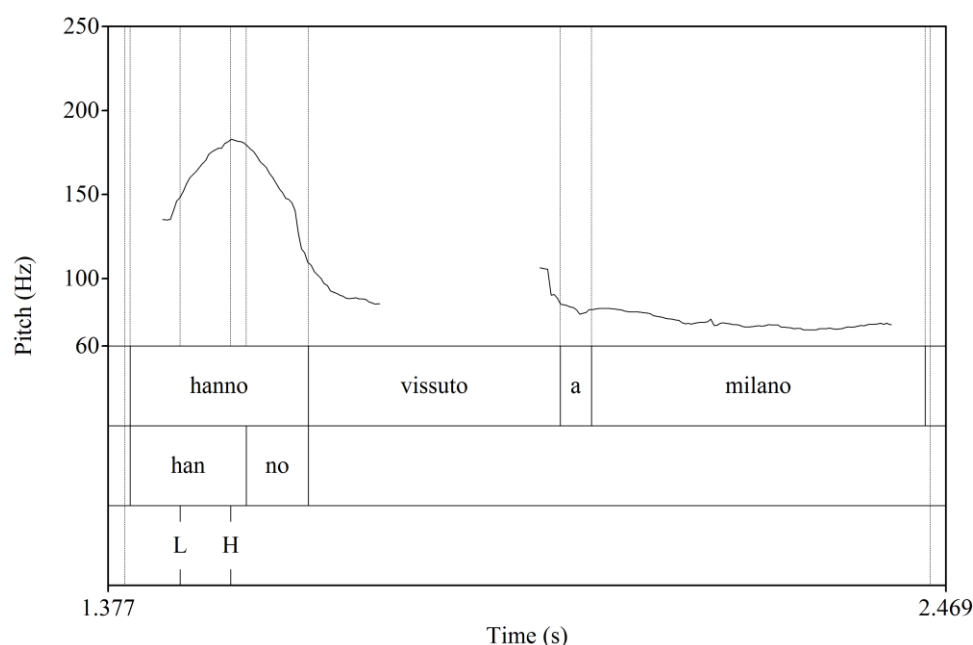


Figure 4. Positive reply *hanno vissuto a Milano* produced by a male speaker (in reply to prompt: “Quindi i tuoi non hanno vissuto a Milano?” ‘So your parents didn’t live in Milano’). Narrow prosodic focus on the auxiliary *hanno* ‘have’ (*verum focus*).

The data from Corpus 2 show a discrepancy between positive and negative replies in the realization of polarity contrast. Despite the fact that polarity is the only relevant information in the sentence, and that prosodic marking is the only option left to the speaker to mark the switch, speakers leave the contrast often unmarked in positive replies and produce narrow focus on the verb, and more specifically on the auxiliary, more in negative than in positive replies. An interesting example of the low acceptability of *verum focus* in positive replies was provided spontaneously by speaker AX (female), ex. (38). This speaker first produced a positive reply with narrow focus on the auxiliary and then corrected herself by producing another rendition of the sentence this time with focus on the past participle, i.e. on the head of the VP<sup>20</sup>:

- (38) “**Hanno** vissuto a Milano” (no, è sbagliato) “hanno **vissuto** a Milano”  
 “they **have** lived in Milan” (no, this is wrong) “they have **lived** in Milan”

<sup>20</sup> Note that this speaker, just like the others, produced *verum focus* in negative replies.

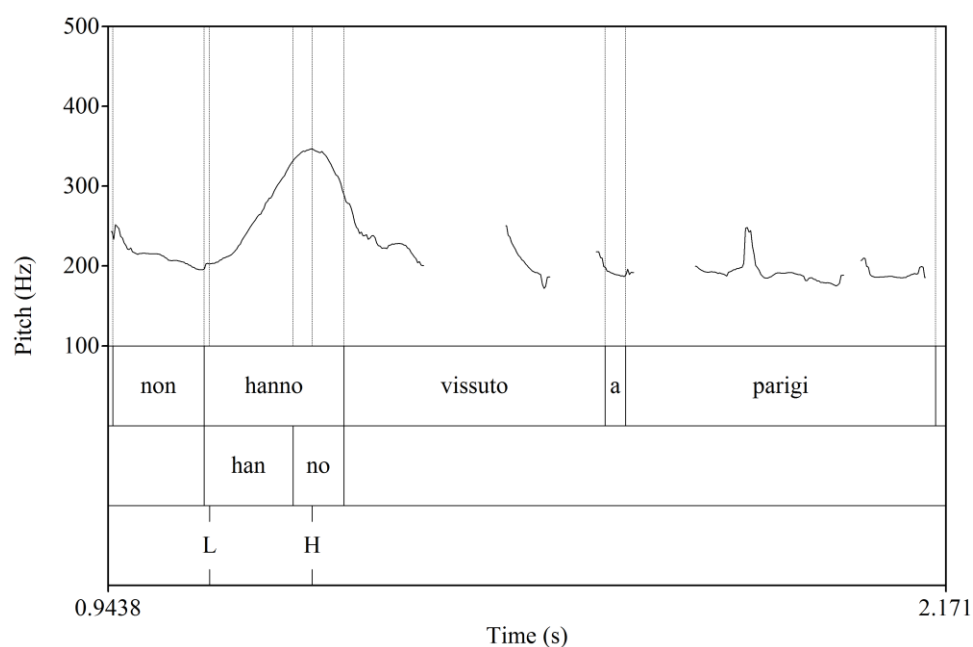


Figure 5: Negative reply *Non hanno vissuto a Milano* produced by a female speaker (in reply to prompt: “*Quindi i tuoi hanno vissuto a Milano?*”, ‘So your parents lived in Milano?’). Narrow prosodic focus on the auxiliary *hanno* ‘have’ (*verum focus*).

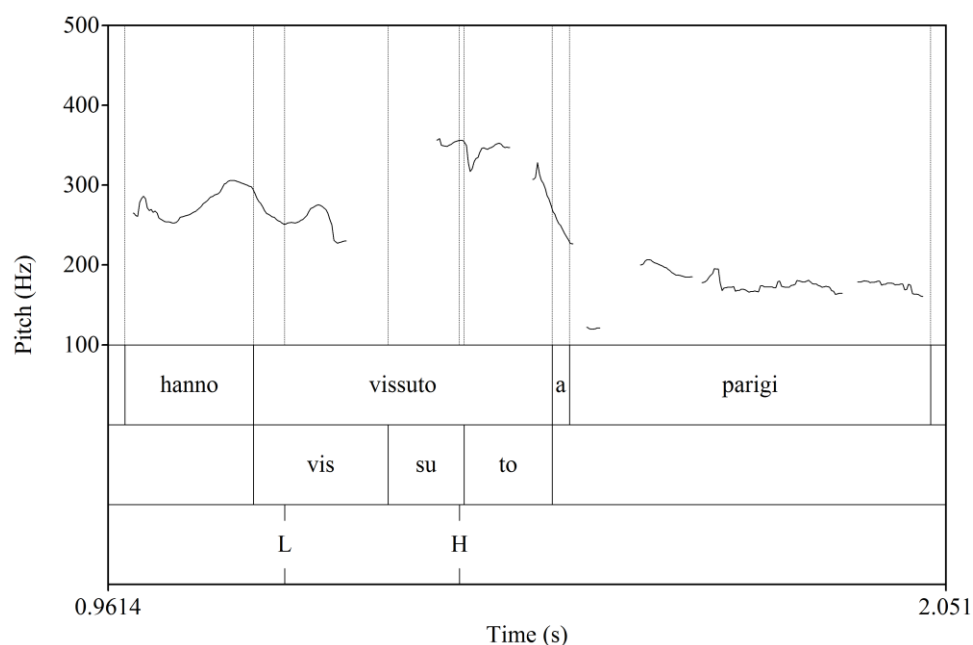


Figure 6: Positive reply *hanno vissuto a Milano* produced by a female speaker (in reply to prompt: “*Quindi i tuoi non hanno vissuto a Milano?*”, ‘So your parents didn’t live in Milano?’). Narrow prosodic focus on the past participle *vissuto* ‘lived’.

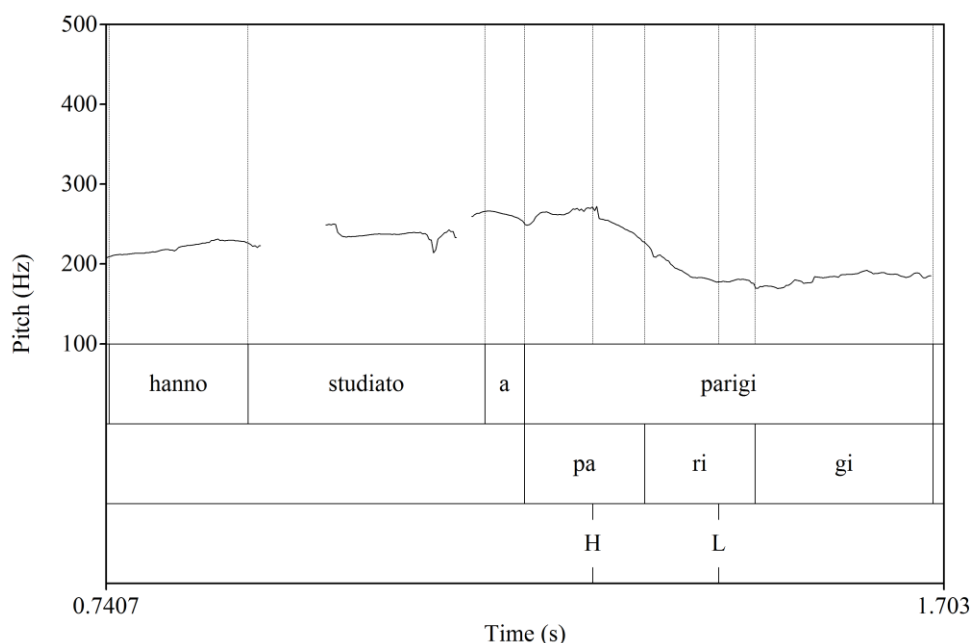


Figure 7: Positive reply *hanno studiato a Parigi* produced by a female speaker (in reply to prompt: “*Quindi le tue figlie non hanno studiato a Parigi?*”, ‘So your daughters did not study in Paris’). Broad focus.

#### 4. Discussion and final remarks

Our analysis confirms that the marking of polarity contrast, and in particular, prosodic encoding through *verum focus*, is possible although not a preferred option in Italian. When speakers are free to organize their speech, as in the Map Task data from Corpus 1, replies including a polarity contrast show *verum focus* marking in a minority of the cases. When only echo replies are considered, in which a *verum focus* is more likely to occur, the proportion increases to 1/3 of the cases. This is the same proportion observed in Polarity-switch Dialogues by Turco (2014). Remember that replies in Turco’s dialogues were echo replies as well, but, in Krifka’s terms, they realized a parallel contrast rather than a switch, and in that case the contrast was often marked on a different information unit (topics or frame setters). Parallel contrasts among sentences produced by the same speaker in a narrative - as shown in the Finite Story data (Dimroth et al. 2010) - proved to be an even less favorable context for the marking of polarity contrast in Italian, and this tendency was even stronger for additive contrast (cf. section 2.2 for further details on both studies).

In the more constrained context of correcting replies of Corpus 2, instead, narrow focus on the non-finite verb and *verum focus* emerge rather frequently, in more than a half of the cases, showing that, although prosodic marking of polarity-switch can be unsystematic in Italian, it is included among the possibilities at play.

The comparison of our data with results from previous research suggests that pragmatic, morpho-syntactic and prosodic factors need to be taken into account

for a proper characterization of the marking of polarity contrast in Italian, and of *verum focus* in particular.

The Map Task data from Corpus 1 show that, when a speaker wants to cancel a proposition proposed to the CG by the interlocutor - a corrective contrast -, he makes use of an echo reply much more than in cases when he wants to confirm it (more than 40% of the polarity-switch replies are echoes, against 15% of the polarity-maintenance replies). Lexical markers emphasizing polarity (*assolutamente, proprio*) and marked word orders (left and right dislocation, leaving the verb at the right boundary of the prosodic phrase) are occasionally found, and *verum focus* is found in about 1/3 of the echo replies. In most cases, however, utterances do not exhibit any specific lexical or morpho-syntactic means for marking a contrast in polarity. The use of an echo seems *per se* the main signal of a corrective reply, while confirming replies have a wider range of realization formats.

When the results from the Map Task are further compared with results from the two other tasks used in similar studies (the Finite Story of Dimroth et al., 2010, and the Polarity-switch Dialogues of Turco, 2014), the following pragmatic factors seem to play a role. At the level of information structure and cohesion management, the availability of an alternative information unit to mark shift or maintenance (e.g. topic or frame setters) disfavors the marking of contrast on the polarity, as it is shown by additive and parallel sentences of *Finite Story* narratives and by parallel replies in Polarity-switch Dialogues. A shift (as in correcting and parallel contrast) rather than a maintenance (as in additive and confirming contrast) of polarity favors the marking of polarity contrasts. This is shown both by the comparison of correcting *vs.* confirming replies in the Map Tasks in Corpus 1, and by the parallel *vs.* additive sentences in the *Finite Story* narratives. When considering the communicative acts involved and the speakers' interplay, polarity contrast marking and particularly *verum focus* seems to be highly disfavored in monologic narrative (additive and parallel sentences in the Finite Story narratives). On the contrary, *verum focus* appears in dialogues, when the speaker has to contrast his own proposition with a proposition that has been previously added to the CG by an interlocutor (replies in Polarity-switch Dialogues and in Map Tasks). The speaker's and the interlocutor's propositions do not need to be mutually exclusive, as is proved by the parallel contrasts used in the Polarity-switch Dialogues. Map Task data suggest that *verum focus* appears both in confirming and in correcting replies, although it is favored in corrections.

It is worth underlining two further pragmatic properties shared by replies in our Map Task data. The replies concern information that only the speaker has the right to confirm or correct (B-events, according to Labov 1972; Heritage 2002). Therefore, the prompts to which the speakers reply are rather meant to check (in either interrogative or declarative form) the interlocutors' previous assumptions. Corrective replies in our Map Tasks are thus counter-presuppositional (Gussenhoven 1983, Krifka 2017), as they cancel previous assumptions tentatively put forward by the interlocutor. Data from Poletto and Zanuttini

(2013) suggest that even more explicit polarity-switch devices (*sì/no che*, polarity extraposition constructions) occur in Italian when correcting replies act as counter-assertive, rather than counter-presuppositional assertions (Gussenhoven 1983, Krifka 2017). In these cases, speakers engage in a fight concerning one and the same proposition, whereby both pretend to have direct and primary access to its truth (*AB-events*).

From a prosodic point of view, the data presented in this paper confirm the findings of Turco (2014), indicating that *verum focus* in Italian is an instance of a general strategy of narrowing the focus to some locally relevant information, rather than a specialized prosodic device. This result emerges from the analysis of Corpus 1 summed up above, which indicates that *verum focus* is only one of the possible strategies available to the speaker to highlight polarity in an unconstrained interaction, a fact further confirmed by the analysis of Corpus 2. In fact, the analysis of Corpus 2 shows that, even when prosodic marking is the only option left to the speaker to highlight polarity, *verum focus* does not appear systematically. In these circumstances, Italian speakers may realize a narrow focus on the verb by placing the main prominence on the non-finite rather than the finite form, or they may rely exclusively on the presence of an affirmative/negative particle at the beginning of the sentence, while leaving the contrast on the polarity unmarked. This result supports earlier findings about the instability of polarity marking in Italian. Polarity is not necessarily marked in Italian and *verum focus*, even under the most favorable conditions, is optional. In addition to this, the analysis of Corpus 1 indicates that *verum focus* readings can also emerge as a result of morpho-syntactic manipulations, such as the use of clitic right dislocation. In this case, the prosodic highlighting of the verb can be seen as an effect of a syntactic operation.

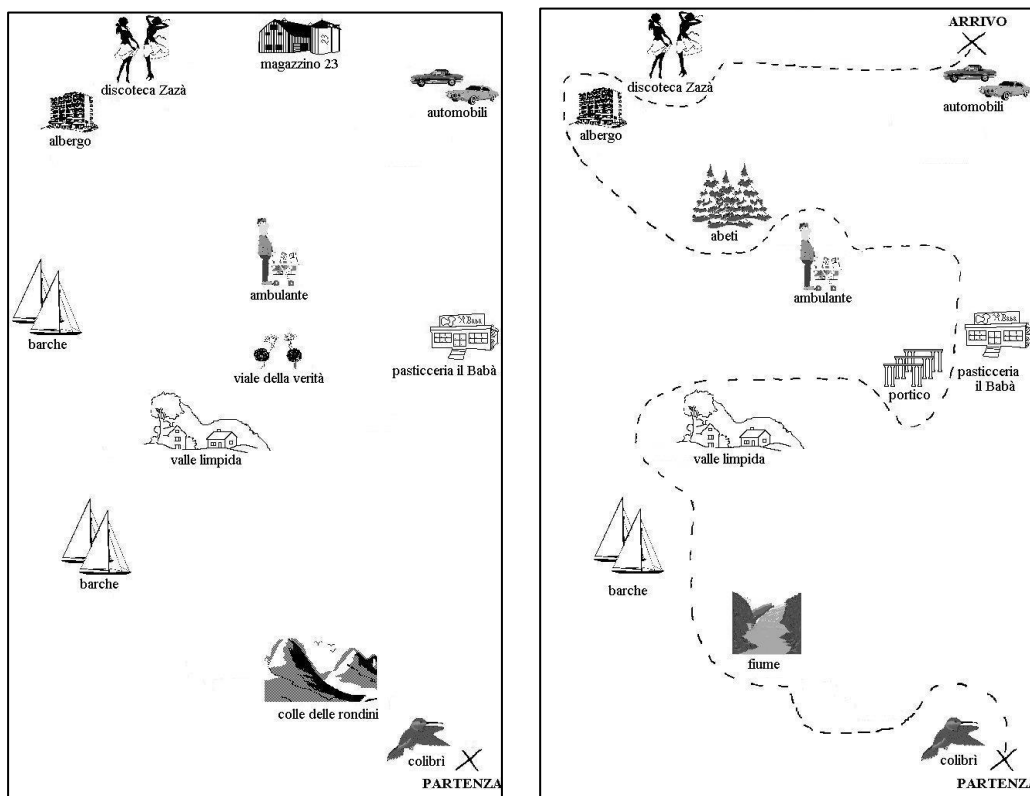
In any event, although prosodic marking of polarity is rather unsystematic in Italian, *verum focus* emerges relatively frequently in Corpus 2. As noticed by Turco (2014) along the lines of Selkirk (1996), monosyllabic and non-phrase final function words do not form prosodic constituents. In this framework, focusing an auxiliary, especially a monosyllabic one, is a strongly marked choice which violates a structural constraint (cf. above, section 2.3.1). Nevertheless, there is empirical evidence that this option is not completely ruled out in Italian despite its markedness, as proved by the fact that *verum focus* has been reported by Turco (2014) as a possible, though infrequent option. A possible reason for which *verum focus* is comparatively frequent in Corpus 2 may be the type of auxiliary used in the target sentences. All auxiliaries in Corpus 2 are bisyllabic free forms (*hanno*, ‘they have’), and therefore qualify as prosodic words (cf. Selkirk 1996, Elordieta 2002). The different prosodic status of monosyllabic and bisyllabic auxiliaries could have favored *verum focus* in the examined contests, since focusing on a bisyllabic function word could represent a less marked choice than focusing on a monosyllabic one.

Finally, a further result which emerges from the analysis of Corpus 2 concerns the discrepancy between positive and negative correcting replies. In this corpus, *verum focus* appears sporadically in positive replies (5/25), whereas it occurs

more frequently in negative replies (10/15)<sup>21</sup>. Therefore, the question arises as to why narrow focus on the auxiliary seems more acceptable in negative as opposed to positive replies. Let us first point out that these results could be due to the characteristics and the size of the examined sample. With the necessary caution, it can be tentatively hypothesized that *verum focus* in negative correcting replies is favored by the fact that the focused constituent is longer than in positive replies, since it includes a further function word adjacent to the bisyllabic auxiliary, i.e. the negation. Under this hypothesis, which needs to be tested under appropriate conditions in future research, *verum focus* in negative utterances would not be favored by the negation *per se*, but rather by the phonetic length of the focused constituent.

## Appendix

Follower's and giver's map for the Map Tasks data in Corpus 1.



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<sup>21</sup> Note that *verum focus* in negative replies of Corpus 1 is less frequently marked: negative replies in this case are confirming replies, and disfavours the use of *verum focus*.

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