



From TAM to discourse

The role of information status in North-Western Italian *già* ‘already’

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This study investigates some discursive uses of the North-Western Italian adverb *già* ‘already’, which cumulates the Italian interjectional function with the interrogative use typical of the French cognate *déjà*. While as an interjection *già* acquires the metadiscursive functions of a proper discourse marker, the interrogative use shares formal and functional properties with modal particles. The analysis will show that, apart from their morphosyntactic differences, these uses are interconnected by their common functional interpretation as pragmatic markers of ‘given’ information (‘backchecking’ in the interrogative use and ‘confirmativity’ in interjections). A comparative assessment of Italian and French data contributes to clarifying what features modal particles and discourse markers have in common but also where they morphosyntactically diverge.

1. The discursive uses of Romance phasal adverbs

The development of discursive uses in French temporal-aspectual adverbs (*déjà* ‘already’, *encore* ‘still’) has been comprehensively elucidated by Hansen (2002, 2008), who also capitalized on the import of these data in distinguishing between propositional meanings of phasal adverbs in a temporal-aspectual dimension (van der Auwera 1998) and ‘context-level’ uses of the same forms in different discursive domains including their functions as pragmatic markers, connectives and focus particles. More recent works by Bazzanella et al. (2005, 2007) and Hansen and Strudsholm (2008) have proposed a wider comparative perspective in which other Romance languages have been taken into account, highlighting the extremely varied array of discursive uses that can be covered by Romance T(emporal)-A(spectual)-M(odal) markers and especially by the descendants of Latin *iam* ‘already’. As well as showing that these uses go well beyond those detected by Kroon and Risselada (2002) and Rosén (2009, 342, 348) for the Latin ancestor *iam*,

a detailed intra-Romance comparison turns out to be particularly intriguing if one considers that the discursive uses of ‘already’ are extremely diverse across the Romance area and, in some cases, the distribution of different uses seems to be mutually exclusive (Hansen and Strudsholm 2008), ultimately suggesting possible internal partitions within the extensive domain of discourse-pragmatic functions. Moreover, as emphasized by Bazzanella et al. (2005), a comparison based on a richer array of languages in which regional varieties are also taken into account might produce results that are not only more fine-grained but are also more interestingly problematic in distinguishing various discursive uses. In a similar vein, the principal aim of this article will be to pursue this comparison further by also taking into account the discursive functions of *già* ‘already’ in a regional variety of Italian (the one spoken in the North-West of Italy). Not only will this empirical enrichment provide a more varied picture than the one offered by the Romance languages investigated so far, but it will also contribute to the debate on the functional/formal distinctions between **Discourse Markers (DM)** and **Modal Particles (MP)** along similar lines as those followed in other chapters of this volume. It will be claimed that North-Western Italian *già* occurs in discursive functions in which it behaves as a MP, not differently from other Romance forms having this use (Hansen 1998, Coniglio 2008, Detges and Waltereit 2009). Conversely, the same form will also be described in other interactional uses in which it typically covers the function of a DM, the latter notion being defined not only in the extended sense admitted by Bazzanella (1995, 2006),¹ but also in the narrower delimitation squarely proposed by Diewald (2006, this volume) and Detges and Waltereit (2009). The intention of what follows is to emphasize the extent to which a Romance comparative perspective taking into account parametric variations among similar phenomena in sister languages including their regional varieties may be illuminating in disentangling the complex bundle of functional and formal features characterizing the boundary between DMs and MPs (in a similar comparative perspective see Lauwers et al. (2012) and Detges and Waltereit (2009) on Spanish and French cognate adverbs *bien* ‘well’).

In comparison with other chapters of this book, the analysis that follows will put particular emphasis on the role of information structure (‘given’/‘new’ information, shared knowledge) as a common feature on which the whole functional behaviour of the pragmatic markers² under scrutiny is based. Following Chafe

1. Bazzanella (2006, 2009) intends ‘discourse markers’ as a macro-category which also includes “modalizers, such as hedges and boosters”, thus considering modal particles as a subtype of ‘discourse markers’ (cf. especially Bazzanella 2006, 463, fn. 22).

2. Following Fraser (1996) I will use the label ‘pragmatic markers’ in referring to the general macrocategory including DMs as well as MPs.

(1987) and Lambrecht (1994), information structure will be intended here as a discursive dimension having to do with the degree of activation that the propositional content of an utterance acquires in the informational flow governing textual progression. In particular, the mechanism of backchecking, whose connection to MPs has already been underlined by Waltireit (2001), will be further elaborated within more general principles of information structure as a possible common ground among the various interactional uses of North-Western Italian *già* described here.

Section 1.1. sets the general comparative scene by providing selected examples of the major discursive uses of Romance ‘already’ that will be dealt with in more detail in the rest of this work. The following two sections constitute the bulk of the empirical analysis and will be reserved to describing the relevant regional uses of Italian *già*, whose distribution will be systematically analyzed by comparing them with standard Italian *già* and, when applicable, with French *déjà*. The two main functions of *già* as a MP and as a DM will be treated separately, in Section 2 and 3 respectively, and then compared in Section 4, where the role of information structure will be emphasized.

1.1 Discursive ‘already’ in Romance: Interrogative and interjection

In analyzing the complex array of functions covered by French temporal-aspectual adverbs Hansen (2002, 46; 2008, 171, 213) mentions a rather “marginal” use of the phasal adverb *déjà* ‘already’ in direct questions (1), a phenomenon which, among others, had already been signalled by Fonagy (1982, 68) and Välikangas (2004). As described by Hansen (2002, 46; 2008, 171, 213), *déjà* functions in (1) as a speech-act modifier signalling that “the host speech act is in some sense premature when compared to what might have been expected” (it “might be paraphrased as *I already have to ask you what your name is*”):

- (1) Quel est votre nom, *déjà*? (Hansen 2008, 213)
 ‘What’s your name, ALREADY?’

Further elaborating on phasal adverbs from a comparative perspective Hansen and Strudsholm (2008) include this interrogative use in a comprehensive semantic (and pragmatic) map in which the various functions of French *déjà* are compared to its Italian cognate adverb *già*. In this map (1) is described as belonging to what Hansen (2008, 213) defines (“for lack of a better term”) as an “interactional” extension directly deriving from the temporal-aspectual meaning of the phasal adverb ‘already’ (on the diachronic process see also Buchi 2007):

- (2) PHASAL > INTERROGATIVE

In comparing French and Italian Hansen and Strudsholm (2008) highlight the opposite distribution shown by these two languages in the pragmatic uses of *déjà/già*. While the interactional function in interrogative sentences is restricted to French *déjà*, its Italian cognate *già* has independently developed a different ‘interjectional’ function (Hansen and Strudsholm 2008), which Bazzanella (1995, 242) lists among Italian ‘discourse markers’ interpreting it as a signal of dialogic confirmation:

- (3) *Già* – confermai – ce l’abbiamo fatta (Bazzanella 1995, 242)
 ‘ALREADY – I confirmed – We managed’

In Hansen and Strudsholm’s (2008) semantic map this pragmatic evolution of Italian *già* is represented as a parallel extension which shares the ‘interactional’ nature of French *déjà* but is conceived as an independent path towards interjectional uses:

- (4) PHASAL > INTERJECTION

Further extensions of the comparative picture seem to confirm the tendency towards a mutually exclusive distribution between interjectional and interrogative uses (Bazzanella et al. 2005). In this respect, Spanish *ya* (5), which, apart from other temporal and non-temporal uses (Deloor 2011), is well attested as an interjectional “meta-discursive conversational marker” (Martín Zorraquino and Portolés 1999, 4191; cf. also Koike 1996, Delbecque and Maldonado 2011) but, like Portuguese and Sardinian (Bazzanella et al. 2005, 55, fn. 22), does not admit the French interrogative use, is relevant in confirming the tendency towards mutual exclusion between the two interactional uses under scrutiny:

- (5) A: Quiero que lo hagas ahora (Koike 1996, 271, fn. 6)
 B: *Ya*
 ‘A: I want you to do it now
 B: OK’

Table 1 sums up the main features of the comparison of French, Italian and Spanish by showing the different distribution of French as opposed to the other two languages:

Table 1. Romance descendants from Latin (DE)IAM: ‘interactional’ functions

	French	Spanish	Italian
INTERROGATIVE	+	-	-
INTERJECTION	-	+	+

But, the neat and chiastic distribution provided by Table 1 tends to blur if one also considers North-Western Italian varieties, which have therefore attracted closer inspection with the aim of verifying formal and functional correlations between the two interactional uses presented here. After describing in detail the relevant data, the impact of North-Western Italian on the general comparative picture depicted in Table 1 will be schematized in Table 2 (Section 4 below), where the theoretical consequences in the confrontation between MPs and DMs will also be discussed.

2. **Interrogative *già***

As already noticed by Välikangas (2004), speakers from the North-West of Italy, especially those from Piedmont, do not seem to conform to the distribution just shown in Table 1 as they admit *già* in an ‘interrogative’ use which is directly comparable to the one exemplified in (1) for French. The similarity, also observed by Bazzanella et al. (2005, 55, fn. 23), is confirmed by the following pair of examples from the web. (6) is another example of the French interrogative *déjà* presented in (1), while (7) represents the regional Italian use.³

- (6) Quel est *déjà* le nom de cet acteur qui se prénomme Robert et joue au côté de Marilyn Monroe dans *Rivière sans retour*? [from www. in a site commenting on the *mot sur le bout de la langue* ‘tip of the tongue’]
 ‘What is ALREADY the name of that actor whose first name is Robert, who acts with Marilyn Monroe in *River of No Return*?’ [the answer is: Robert Mitchum]
- (7) ciao *come si chiama già* la bassista di colore che suona con david bowie? mi ricordo che ho anche visitato il suo sito ma mi sono dimenticato ... [from www.]
 ‘hello what’s ALREADY the name of the black bassist who plays with david bowie? I can remember that I also visited her site but I forgot ...’

Both contexts in (6–7) refer to a ‘tip of the tongue’ situation, where the originally TAM marker ‘already’ does not indicate the anteriority of a state of affairs to a given reference time, as would be required by its temporal-aspectual nature. By using *déjà/già* the speaker is instead discursively qualifying the speech act (the question itself), in these cases signalling that the question might be considered as

3. The majority of the data analyzed here was specially collected for the purpose of the present research either by web-extractions or by taking manual records of authentic oral conversations in Piedmont. Artificial examples submitted to native speakers’ judgements have also been used, especially in Section 3 when dealing with interjectional *già*.

redundant and only due to a contingent extralinguistic fact (an accidental tip of the tongue).

Obviously, examples extracted from the web cannot be attributed to a definite regional area, and the geographical boundaries of this use of Italian *già* are still poorly studied and variously interpreted. Whereas the description given in Bazzanella et al. (2005, 55) seems to imply that an interrogative *già* should not in principle be considered as exclusively ‘regional’, possibly extending to Italian in general, Cerruti (2009, 113–114) lists it among the regional features typically characterizing North-Western varieties, as also suggested by Välíkangas (2004) and confirmed by Miola and Fedriani (in press). Interestingly, folk linguistics from the web seems to help us in suggesting a solution, as is shown by the following metalinguistic comment apparently produced by a speaker belonging to another regional area, who stigmatizes the overuse of *già* attributing it to the area of Turin, the biggest urban agglomeration in Piedmont:

- (8) si ma i torinesi che dicono “*già*” quando non c’entra un cazzo [from www.]
 ‘yes but those from Turin who say “*già*” when there is no reason whatsoever to do so’

Additional empirical research is needed to map more carefully the actual geographical extent of this phenomenon, a task which goes beyond the perspective adopted in this work. However, the metalinguistic comment in (8) shows that, despite the controversy on geographical distribution, the occurrence of interrogative *già* in Italian can still be considered as a ‘regional’ phenomenon which is particularly frequent in some areas (typically in the North-West and especially in ‘Piedmontese Italian’),⁴ while being (still?) unknown in other areas (e.g. the Central Italian varieties spoken in Tuscany, which will be used as comparing terms).⁵

4. Note that ‘Piedmontese Italian’ is the variety of Italian spoken in a regional area in the North-West of Italy (Piedmont), which should not be confused with the substantially different local Romance vernacular directly descended from Latin (‘Piedmontese dialect’). Using Maiden and Parry’s (1997, 2) terminology, the variety that will be described here might be labelled as an ‘Italian dialect’ (i.e. a local variety of ‘the standard Italian language’) whereas the Piedmontese dialect belongs to the list of the ‘dialects of Italy’.

5. A detailed assessment of the geographical boundaries of this phenomenon should also take into account the fact that the North-Western area, where interrogative *già* appears to be more entrenchedly rooted immediately borders areas where other particles occur as comparable interactional markers in direct wh-questions. This is the case of the varieties of regional Italian spoken in Liguria and Western Emilia, where *più* ‘more’ and *pure* ‘already’ occur with the same function as Piedmontese *già* (Miola and Fedriani, in press). This seems to support the hypothesis that also the French *déjà* should be considered as an areal feature (Välíkangas 2004) influenced the German MP *schon* along the Romance/Germanic borders (especially in French-speaking Switzerland).

Disregarding the details of the geographical distribution of these ‘interrogative’ uses, *déjà* and *già* will be interpreted in Section 2.1 as pragmatic markers having properties typically associated with MPs. In so doing, the morphosyntactic features of French *déjà* and regional Italian *già* will be analyzed along with their functional nature, whose connection to information structure will also be discussed.

2.1 *Già* as a MP: Formal and functional properties

In describing the interactional function of French interrogative *déjà* in (1) Hansen (2008, 213) elaborates on its role as a speech act modifier clearly suggesting an interpretation as a modalizer (“downtoner [...] of directive speech acts”), which corresponds to some characterizations of MPs as elements which “crucially refer to participants’ stance toward speech acts” (Waltereit 2001, Detges and Waltereit 2009, 54). Nonetheless, Hansen (2008, 213) also insists on the extra-sentential syntactic behaviour of French interrogative *déjà* by remarking that it “is always right-detached with respect to the host utterance”. In her analysis, this peripheral location is significant in confirming that *déjà* “scopes the speech act level” (Hansen 2008, 213), but, if one considers that one of the main defining features of MPs is traditionally recognized in their structural insertion within the clause (cf. Diewald 2006, 408, this volume, and previous literature on German *Abtönungspartikeln* quoted therein) periphericity might be considered as a counterargument to the interpretation of French interrogative *déjà* as a MP. It can be counter-objected that French *déjà* is not necessarily right-dislocated and can in fact be placed within the VP, as this example demonstrates:

- (9) *bonjour quel est déjà votre niveau initial* (V, IV, III?)
 ‘hello what’s ALREADY your starting level (5, 4, 3?)’

The same holds for regional Italian *già*, which can be placed between the verb and argumental NPs:

- (10) *come si chiamano già questi pantaloni?* [informal conversation, Turin⁶]
 ‘what’s ALREADY the name of these trousers?’
- (11) *ma quando devono cambiare, già, Windows*
 (Cerruti 2009, 113 [oral corpus of regional Italian])
 ‘but when should they change ALREADY Windows’

6. Apart from the examples extracted from the web or quoted from previous literature (Bazzanella et al. 2005, Cerruti 2009) the rest of Western-Italian data presented in what follows were collected from every-day conversations I personally heard in Turin in January-June 2011.

In commenting (11) Cerruti (2009, 113) mentions the intonational nature of *già* as a parenthetical element (signalled by the two commas in his transcription), which might suggest an extra-sentential position. Nonetheless, a parenthetical location contrasts with the possibility of inserting *già* within the complementizer of a cleft question, where an intonational (parenthetical) breakdown would be impossible:⁷

- (12) com'è *già* che si fa a calcolare la media? [informal conversation, Turin]
 'how do you calculate
 (lit. 'how is it ALREADY that you calculate') the average mark?'

These data show that, despite being a speech act modifier, *déjà/già* can be 'topologically integrated' within the structure of the clause (Gerdes and Kahane 2007), which strengthens the interpretation of the regional Italian *già* as a MP. This behaviour contrasts with the interjectional use of *già* mentioned above (3), which will be more thoroughly analyzed in Section 3. While interjections constitute prosodically independent utterances at the beginning of a turn and are therefore "discourse-structurally governed" (Detges and Waltereit 2009, 45), *déjà/già* as 'MPs' can be found within the syntactic structure of the clause with different degrees of topological integration that include the right periphery but also the morphosyntactic nucleus of a cleft sentence.⁸

Apart from their morphosyntactic properties, the interpretation of interrogative *déjà/già* as MPs is also strengthened by their interactional nature. As mentioned by Hansen (2008, 213) in commenting (1), "[t]ypically, *déjà* will be used in this way in contexts where the addressee has already stated his name at some earlier point during the same speech event". A comparable description, which appears to be an analytical reformulation of what has been defined as a backchecking context (Klein 1994, Waltereit 2001), might hold for the regional Italian use of interrogative *già* (Bazzanella et al. 2005, 55, fn. 23, Cerruti 2009, 113).

In the regional Italian example in (13) the backchecking interpretation is made explicit by reference to the popularity of a song ('It is very famous') that the speaker had repeatedly tried to tune without remembering it correctly. In requesting the addressee's help the speaker assumes shared encyclopaedic knowledge, which is linguistically signalled by means of the particle *già*:

7. The possibility of inserting *già* into the syntactic core of the clause is confirmed by Miola and Fedriani (in press), who nonetheless suggest that intra-syntactic location might be influenced by sociolinguistic factors, with younger speakers preferring a peripheral location of *già*.

8. A non-peripheral location can also be found in (i), where *già* precedes the right-dislocated topical pronoun *lui* 'he':

- (i) Diego, che numero ha *già*, lui? [informal conversation, Turin]
 'What's Diego's number? (lit. what number has already, he?)'

- (13) *e come fa già? che è famosissima* [informal conversation, Turin]
 ‘how does it go, ALREADY? It is very famous [the topic is a well-known melody]’

Backchecking strategies have been considered by Waltereit (2001) as a typical functional equivalent of what would be expressed by a MP in German and other Germanic languages. Significantly, in my regional Italian data a functional correlation with backchecking is confirmed by the frequent syntagmatic combination of *già* with a backchecking Imperfect, which is precisely the strategy that Waltereit (2001) considers as a Romance equivalent of Germanic MPs (cf. also Bazzanella et al. 2005, 55):

- (14) *come si chiamava già quel tizio?* [informal conversation, Turin]
 ‘what was [IMPERFECT] ALREADY the name of that guy?’

More generally, backchecking can be connected to the ‘non-initial’ status in the information flow that Diewald (2006, this volume) and Diewald et al. (2009, 197) consider as the basic function of MPs. The ‘presuppositional’ meaning inherently linked to backchecking is the functional core of interrogative *déjà/già*, which presuppose previous knowledge, thus qualifying the information requested in the interrogative speech act as already ‘given’. Obviously, enquiring on something which is not informationally ‘new’ is rather unusual (we normally ask for something we don’t know) but is contextually justified by the fact that the speaker has momentarily forgotten that piece of information. Even though not infrequent in everyday life, this is a pragmatically marked situation, which is iconically represented by the behaviour of French and North-Western Italian speakers, who morphosyntactically mark this type of question (*Erinnerungsfrage*, according to Franck 1980 and Välíkangas 2004) by means of a MP.⁹ Presupposition also justifies the combination of interrogative *già* with wh-interrogative sentences (Cerruti 2009, 113), which inherently trigger more presupposed elements than ‘yes/no’ questions, where an interrogative *già* is described as ungrammatical (Cerruti 2009, 113, Miola and Fedriani, in press).

Summing up the results reached so far it can be concluded that the interrogative use of *già* in North-Western Italian is characterized by the possibility of topological integration, a formal property which is coupled by a functional specialization

9. Miola and Fedriani (in press) provide a typological overview of the *Erinnerungsfragepartikeln* in the languages of Europe, where, apart from showing a generalized tendency to mark the special pragmatic nature of these questions, the authors also recognize various lexical sources of the particles used (‘inchoative’ particles as in French *déjà* and North-Western Italian *già*, ‘iterative’ particles as in English *again* or Belgian French *encore* and ‘cumulative’ particles as in Ligurian Italian *più* ‘more, cf. also fn. 5).

(backchecking) connected to information status. On the basis of these discriminatory features it has been argued that an interrogative *già* can be included among Romance MPs. In the next section the results on the role of information structure will be extended from interrogative *già* to its interjectional function, underlining the similarities between the two uses, which will both turn out to be linked, albeit in different ways, to the marking of ‘given’ information. But, despite functional comparability, the two uses radically differ in their syntactic and scopal properties, which will become particularly clear in contrasting the topological integration demonstrated above for the interrogative use with the ‘holophrastic’ nature of interjections, which makes them recalcitrant to any form of structural insertion within the clause.

3. Interjectional *già*

In introducing a comparison between the interrogative use of *già* as a MP described in Section 2 and the interjectional use that will be analyzed in detail below a preliminary proviso on the geographical distribution of the two phenomena is needed. While the interrogative use of *già* belongs to regional features and might be ungrammatical in some areas (see the discussion in Section 2 above), *già* used as an interjection has no special regional flavour, thus occurring in North-Western Italian as well as in other areas. However, regional differentiation can be detected if one considers the possibility of reinforcing an interjectional *già* with a preposed vowel. These vocalizations show a certain degree of variation, and, again, the North-Western area turns out to be particularly productive in this domain having its special form of vocalized *già* (*oh già*). A description in discursive terms is given in a specific section (3.3).

3.1 Confirmativity

When used as an interjection (Poggi 1995) Italian *già* belongs to the list of ‘pro-sentential’ particles (Bernini 1995, Ortu 2003) occupying the same paradigmatic slot that is more generally covered by the Italian affirmative particle *sì* ‘yes’:

- (15) S1: Vuoi uscire?
 S2: *Si/Già*
 ‘S1: Would you like to go out?
 S2: *Yes/Right*’

However, despite the fact that, as is the case in (15), *sì* and *già* may share the same distribution, the affirmative function of *già* has a special informational nature which makes it not freely interchangeable with *sì* ‘yes’. Those who have described this

interjectional use of *già* (Bazzanella 1995, 242, Bernini 1995, 220, Poggi 1995, 415, Hansen and Strudsholm 2008, 496–497) have all emphasized the role of information structure (‘given’/‘new’ information) in this interjection as opposed to the unmarked choice of *sì*. While the latter is the generalized form occurring in any affirmative context, *già* is a marked form, whose occurrence is limited to a more restricted set of contexts in which the relevant piece of information is not ‘new’, or, as Hansen and Strudsholm (2008, 497) put it, is conceived as “unsurprising”. In order to grasp the different informational import of *sì* and *già* consider that in a context such as (15) *già* could only replace *sì* if the requested information (‘Would you like to go out?’) is contextually represented as already activated within the informational background shared by the two speakers. The requirement imposed by this contextual scenario might be fulfilled if, for instance, speaker 2 stands close to the front door with his coat on and ready to go out. In this case, inferential reasoning (Bernini 1995, 221) is activated by external evidence (the coat on), which is directly perceivable to both discourse participants and therefore considered as ‘already given’. By referring to ‘given’ information *già* functions as a ‘confirmative’ marker, which confirms what is somehow already evident in the relevant context. While *sì* can be more generally defined as an ‘affirmative’ particle, *già* is more specifically a ‘confirmative particle’. As a consequence, *già* is particularly appropriate as a reply to a positively oriented question (Hansen and Strudsholm 2008, 496–497) used as a request of confirmation (*Vuoi uscire, vero?* ‘You want to go out, don’t you?’).

The interpretation in which the relevant information is contextually activated by ‘direct evidence’ is not the only context making the occurrence of the confirmative particle *già* appropriate. Generally speaking, what triggers confirmativity is the degree of activation, which implies that, apart from the case imagined above in which the relevant information is activated by direct evidence, common world knowledge that for any number of reasons discourse participants consider as mutually shared and therefore always retrievable can always allow the construal of a confirmative situation.¹⁰ For instance, if both speaker 1 and 2 know that speaker 2 regularly goes

10. Since the main focus here is on comparing these interjections with MPs, it might be relevant to recall that the role of ‘evidentiality’ including external evidence, inferences and reports of common world knowledge has also been suggested for MPs. Among the contextual factors triggering the use of German *Abtönungspartikeln* König (1991) explicitly refers to ‘evidential’ elements, as they can for instance be detected in the use of German *ja*. In the following pair of examples (from König 1997, 70, Walterit 2001, 1398) the occurrence of *ja* is linked to evidence derived either from external sensory data (i) or from commonly shared sources (‘As you know’):

- (i) Dein Mantel ist *ja* ganz schmutzig!
‘But your coat is all dirty!’
- (ii) Die Malerei war *ja* schon immer sein Hobby.
‘(As you know), painting has always been his hobby.’

out for a walk at noon and speaker 1 poses the question in (15) at 11.55 am, speaker 2 may freely interchange between *sì* and *già* as affirmative particles, thus recognizing the confirmative interpretation triggered by mutually shared information.

The crucial role played by confirmativity explains why *già* is not only an answering particle used to respond questions but it also occurs as a generalized reply to declarative statements (Bernini 1995, 221). Replacing the question in (15) with a declarative sentence would not prevent either *sì* or *già* being used as ‘replying’ particles:

- (16) S1: È simpatico
 S2: *Sì/Già*
 ‘S1: He is nice
 S2: *Yes/I know*’

When occurring in replies to declarative statements confirmation of ‘already’ given information is the only possible value, which neutralizes the differences between *già* and *sì*. Unlike the question in (15), the declarative statement in (16) does not request S2 to provide information, and therefore the reply *sì/già* can only be intended as a confirmation elliptically echoing what S1 has just said, either because S2 already knew the relevant propositional content or because some external evidence indicates that S1’s statement is correct.

Note that Italian *già*, unlike its unmarked counterpart *sì*, is primarily a phasal adverb meaning ‘already’, which, as interpreted by Hansen and Strudsholm (2008), ‘contextually’ acquires this interjectional function as a confirmative marker. The holophrastic context in (16) also admits a temporal-aspectual interpretation of ‘already’, but, significantly, the form used might be morphologically differentiated by integrating *già* with a prepositional element. Even though the prepositional form (*di già*) is not obligatory for a temporal-aspectual interpretation (in (17) a simple *già* might also be used), it should be stressed that the distribution of *già* and *di già* is not totally overlapping, since *di già* is restricted to a TAM reading and would not be admitted as a confirmative particle replacing a simple *già* in (15–16).

- (17) S1: Vorrei uscire
 S2: *Di già?*
 ‘S1: I would you like to go out?
 S2: *Already?*’

The prepositional form *di già* in (17) parallels the diachronic evolution of French *déjà* in which the form deriving from a prepositional precursor (Latin *de + iam*) has replaced Old French *ja*. While French *déjà* has ousted *ja*, Italian *già* and *di già* coexist in the current synchronic stage, even though the latter is a very marked form whose occurrence, apart from the holophrastic context in (17), is either

regional or obsolete. However, the specialization of current Italian *di già* as an interjectional form restricted to a temporal-aspectual interpretation with no confirmative function shows the tendency to produce formal differentiations (*già* vs. *di già*) which ultimately supports a functional partition between the grammatical domain represented by TAM marking (where both *già* and *di già* are possible) and ‘context-based’ uses as a confirmative interaction (which only admit *già*). The importance of formal differentiations in expressing functional distinctions will be elaborated further in the following section by analyzing those cases in which *già* is reinforced by a syntagmatic combination with other interjections, thus providing a formal differentiation of the interjectional uses of *già* with respect not only to the temporal-aspectual marker but also to the MP described in Section 2.

3.2 Syntagmatic combinations of *già* with other interjections

Apart from *sì*, *già* and an extremely varied array of lexical items (Poggi 1995), standard Italian also admits the possibility of using long as well as extra-long vowels (*ah*, *uh*, *eh*, *oh*, *aah*, *ooh*, etc.) as interjections. The exact list and distributions of these vocalic interjections is characterized by regional variation and submitted to restrictions of diverse nature (Poggi 1995), which will not be dealt with in detail in what follows, where, instead, I will focus on the empirical observation that some of these vocalizations also occur as preposed elements syntagmatically combined to the interjection *già* described above (*ah già* and *eh già* are commonly admitted).¹¹ These agglutinations appear to be syntagmatically constrained (vowels can only be preposed, postpositions being not grammatical: **già eh*) as well as paradigmatically restricted (only some vowels can be agglutinated). In this respect, geodialectal differences become relevant and will be described in this section, especially because they involve the regional variety under scrutiny (North-Western Italian), where the list of syntagmatic combinations includes *oh già* in addition to the agglutinated form admitted in other varieties (*ah già* and *eh già*) and described as standard forms in Poggi (1995). All in all, these agglutinated forms confirm the role of information structure as the major functional feature governing the selection of these interjections.

As described in Bernini (1995, 220–221), *eh già* and *ah già* substantially differ in several functional properties connected to their semantic and pragmatic properties, which are also significantly linked to information structure. As noticed by Poggi (1995, 419–420), when used alone as a single interjection, *ah* is a marker of

11. Agglutination of two interjections is in fact a more general phenomenon which also includes the possibility of duplicating the same interjection (*sì sì* as well as *già già* are well attested reduplication in Italian, cf. Välikangas 2000).

'new' information and this function is also transmitted to the agglutinative form *ah già*. Since *già* has the opposite value ('given' information), the potential clash between 'new' and 'given' is functionally balanced by producing a combined meaning which expresses 'sudden remembrance' of something that the speaker had accidentally forgotten and suddenly comes to his/her mind again. In this combination the 'surprise effect' is triggered by *ah* as a marker of new information,¹² while *già* maintains its stable connection to given information ('the speaker used to know that piece of information'). As a consequence of this combined meaning, *ah già* cannot as such occur as an affirmative particle in answering a question, as it is instead the case with an unvocalized *già* (see (15) above). By using *ah già* as a reply to a question (18), the request for information is not positively or negatively answered. The speaker is rather signalling that the propositional content of the question or what the propositional content might trigger as conversational implicatures was contingently forgotten. For instance S2 in (18) might indicate that, albeit planned, the idea of going out belonged to S2's previously acquired knowledge:

- (18) S1: Vuoi uscire?
 S2: *Ah già!*
 'S1: Would you like to go out?
 S2: *Oh. I forgot it!*

Consistently with this informational function, *ah già* is appropriate as a reply to a declarative statement, whose propositional content is confirmed by suddenly remembering it:

- (19) S1: Oggi è domenica e i negozi sono chiusi
 S2: *Ah già!*
 'S1: Today is Sunday and shops are closed
 S2: *Oh. I forgot it!*

As opposed to the function of 'sudden remembrance' characterizing *ah già*, the agglutination of *già* with a front mid vowel (*eh già*) produces a different informational function, which makes it possible as a proper answering particle:

- (20) S1: Vuoi uscire?
 S2: *Eh già!*
 'S1: Would you like to go out?
 S2: *Right!*

12. Via 'surprise' the function of these interjectional markers might be connected to mirativity, another highly controversial category (DeLancey 1997, Lazard 1999) which is also strictly related to information status (given vs new information). In particular, mirative markers signal the surprise produced by extraordinarily 'new' information in the speaker's unprepared mind.

As is apparent from the different English translations of *Eh già* ('Right!) and *Ah già!* ('Oh, I forgot it!') in (20) and (18) respectively, the former functions as an answering particle in confirming the propositional content of the question, while *Ah già!* in (18) simply qualifies the propositional content of the question (or its implicatures) as information which, even though already given, was accidentally forgotten. From this point of view, *eh già* is a substitutive form of a simple *già* described in Section 3.1 above, with which it shares the interjectional role as an answering particle expressing confirmativity.

Apparently, the only difference between the vocalized form in (20) and an unvocalized *già* in a comparable context (15) has to do with the degree of expectedness, which, like the other uses of an interjectional *già*, is ultimately connected to information status ('given information'). Native speakers tend to agree that the vocalized form *eh già* expresses a stronger degree of confirmativity in which the speaker more explicitly shows certainty in the relevant propositional content. Stronger certainty may be contextually exploited to express different degrees of expectedness from other discourse participants. In (20) the selection of *eh già* instead of *già* might signal that S2 is aware that that his/her desire to go out, albeit derivable from external evidence (e.g., the coat on) or based on shared knowledge, will possibly sound unexpected or controversial to S1. From an interactional perspective, such a contrast of expectations among discourse participants might be variedly exploited in negotiating reciprocal stances in dialogic interactions. For instance, by using the vocalized form S2 might recognize and prevent further S1's objections to something which, even though not uncontroversial, S2 considers as not under discussion. Whatever formal representation of this interactional dynamics one should eventually prefer, the basic assumption is that *ah già* and *eh già* both signal unexpectedness, but, at the same time, they require opposite orientations with respect to the discourse participants to whom unexpectedness is attributed. While *ah già* signals the speaker's sudden surprise at something that is unexpected because it was forgotten, by using *eh già* as an answering particle the speaker attributes potential surprise to the addressee, whose 'unprepared mind' is focussed in order to fulfil various interactional objectives. More research on authentic data from oral corpora would be needed to verify native speakers' intuitions on these subtle nuances, but, as will be argued in Section 3.3, the behaviour of North-Western speakers when using their local vocalized forms (*oh già*) fits well in the speaker/addressee dynamics suggested by the opposition between *ah già* and *eh già* as just described.

The bulk of the data presented here regarding the use of agglutinated forms of *già* confirms the role of information structure as the regulating notion governing the interactional use of these interjections. Taken all together, the three interjections scrutinized so far (*già* and its two vocalized variants *ah già* and *eh già*)

demonstrate the existence of a paradigmatic set of interjections used to signal a varied array of contextual nuances which, albeit diverse in their possible interactional uses, are all connected to the same discourse domain, and ultimately have to do with the degree of activation of discourse referents. In all of these markers the original TAM meaning of the adverb *già* ‘already’ still influences their discourse uses (what is discursively ‘given’ *already* belongs to shared knowledge among discourse participants). Either used as sheer confirmative particles (*già*, *eh già*) or additionally signalling ‘sudden remembrance’ (*ah già*), they all refer to previously acquired (‘already given’) knowledge.

3.3 From confirmativity to **conclusivity**: North-Western Italian *oh già*

With respect to the general picture characterizing the use of vocalized interjections in standard Italian, the data provided by North-Western varieties corroborate the paradigmatic system of pragmatic markers presented above by adding a form in which *già* is reinforced by a back mid vowel (*oh già*). Even though *oh* and *già* do exist as independent interjections in standard Italian, their syntagmatic combination seems to be peculiar to the regional variety spoken in the North-West. Apart from enriching the list of combinatorial possibilities between *già* and the set of vowels independently used as interjections, North-Western *oh già* also seems to fill a functional gap within the system of vocalized forms of *già* admitted in standard Italian. As suggested above, standard Italian *ah già* and *eh già* can be opposed by measuring the degree of activation of the information marked with these interjections in which two discourse participants, as distinct deictic poles, play different roles. While *ah già* marks the speaker’s unprepared mind, *eh già* focuses on the addressee’s expectations as they are imagined and prevented by the speaker. The same functional distinctions characterize the use of *ah già* and *eh già* in North-Western Italian, where, however, speakers have the additional possibility of avoiding the deictic bifurcation between *ah già* and *eh già* by using *oh già*, which, interestingly, seems to neutralize any confrontation between S1 and S2 by marking information whose degree of activation is presented as equally recognized by all discourse participants. *Oh già* can be described as a neuter confirmative interjection recognizing that the speaker and the addressee share the same degree of responsibility in accepting that the relevant piece of information belongs to given information and has therefore to be trusted.

A typical context in which *oh già* occurs in the North-West is represented by the dialogue in (21), where *oh già* closes a discourse segment by confirming what S1 has just said and presenting it as shared information equally expected by both discourse participants and therefore accepted as uncontroversial.

- (21) S1: Da quel dottore lì devi aspettare almeno due ore ogni volta
 S2: *Oh già!* [informal conversation, Turin]
 'S1: When you go to that doctor's, you have to wait at least two hours every time
 S2: Right!

Due to its 'neuter' character as a marker of confirmative agreement among discourse participants *oh già* can interestingly be exploited in conversational dynamics, where it is reinterpreted as a marker of conclusivity. A similar function has also been detected in Spanish *ya* 'already', whose interactional 'neutrality' as a discourse regulator has been pointed out by Delbecque and Maldonado (2011, 75). Not differently from Spanish *ya* (Martín Zorraquino and Portolés 1999, 4192), by using North-Western Italian *oh già* the confirmative meaning is discursively reinterpreted as a signal that the topic is satisfactorily settled, which might have two discursive consequences: either the conversation ends (this was actually the case in the specific context, which I personally witnessed) or a new topic can be initiated.¹³ In this function *oh già* typically allows a speaker to take the turn only to confirm the point made by the other speaker without maintaining it afterwards, which reinforces the conclusive nature of this marker. ✕

When distinguishing between **DMs** and **MPs** Diewald (2006, 406, this volume) insists on the fact the former "relate items of discourse to other items of linguistically expressed discourse", this observation being rephrased by Detges and Waltereit (2009, 44) with their characterization of DMs as elements denoting a "two-place relationship". Conclusivity can be very naturally interpreted along the lines suggested by Diewald (2006, this volume) and Detges and Waltereit (2009, 44) as a relationship between different discourse chunks (S1's argument and S2's confirmative conclusion). The interpretation of *oh già!* as a DM is also confirmed by its role in turn alternation, which is undoubtedly a prototypical function connected to DMs (Detges and Waltereit 2009, 44). Even though *per se* an interjection is not a DM, by structuring discourse organization *oh già* tends to be used as a "phatic" and "receptive" regulator, which makes it possible to interpret it as a DM *stricto sensu* (Diewald 2006, Detges and Waltereit 2009, 44). Nonetheless, it should be borne in mind that *oh già* is still a prosentential particle which crucially refers

13. By modulating the intonational contour of the utterance it is also possible to reverse the original confirmative meaning thus expressing irony and incredulity and possibly non-confirmativity. Apart from being well attested in the corresponding Spanish DM *ya* (Martín Zorraquino and Portolés 1999, 4191, Delbecque and Maldonado 2011, 75), this 'reversive' modulation, which is also common with other particles (the Italian affirmative interjection *si* 'yes' can also express incredulity and irony, if modulated with the appropriate intonational contour), simply confirms that confirmativity is the main function which can be contextually reversed by means of intonational modulation.

to the propositional content of S1's previous statement (Bernini 1995). The interjection is not solely shaping "the structure or form of discourse" (Detges and Waltereit 2009, 44) and cannot therefore be totally equated to a DM. The comparison between *oh già* and the metadiscursive use of *già* that will be analyzed in the next section will clarify this point by permitting us to measure the extent of the transition between what is still an interjection, albeit textually exploited as a discourse regulator, and what is a proper DM.

3.4 Where interjections become DMs: **metadiscursive già**

In the analysis conducted above confirmativity has been demonstrated as the overall function encompassing various interjectional uses of *già*, while in Section 3.3 it has been suggested how confirmativity can be textually reinterpreted as connected to discourse regulation in which it signals topic conclusivity. However, this is not the only possibility in extending the discursive scope of an interjection, especially if one considers those contexts in which the interjection is not an answering particle but a reply to a declarative statement. Quite naturally, these replies in which *già* marks dialogic confirmativity (see (16) and (19) above) may represent bridging contexts to metadiscursive uses in which what is confirmed is not the propositional context of previous statements, but the structure of the dialogic exchange in itself.

A displacement from semantic content to discourse structuring is exactly what happens with the Italian answering particle *si* when used as a phatic signal of back channelling (as is for instance the case when *si* replaces the more stereotyped Italian *pronto* 'hello' as the listener's initiating formula in answering a phone call). As pointed out by Bernini (1995, 180–181), the metadiscursive nature of these uses crosses the boundary between prosentential interjections, whose function is still connected to the propositional content of the preceding utterance, and 'discourse markers' (*segnali discorsivi* 'discourse signals' in Bernini's 1995 as well as in Bazzanella's 1995 terminology), where the link to the propositional content is missing (in answering a phone call there is no propositional content to be confirmed). In comparing *si* and *già* from this perspective it is interesting to observe that the latter has not developed so far as to cover the whole range of metadiscursive functions connected to the phatic uses of *si* (for instance, it may not be used by the listener in answering a phone call). Nonetheless, Bernini (1995, 212) interestingly pointed out a special context (also cited by Hansen and Strudsholm 2008, 496) in which *già* occurs as a proper DM, having lost any reference to the propositional content of preceding utterances and assuming a metadiscursive function. This is clearly the case in (22), where *già*, instead of confirming the propositional content of what has been just said, is rather used to confirm the adequacy of the speech act represented by the question posed by S2 (*Dove?* 'Where?').

- (22) S1: Ti scriverò
 S2: Dove?
 S1: Già. Dove?
 S1: I'll write to you
 S2: Where?
 S1: *You're right*. Where?

Despite the promise to write, S1 does not know S2's address and consequently recognizes that the conversational move made by S2 is metadiscursively adequate. Interestingly, *già* keeps its original confirmative value (S1 confirms that S2's question is correct), which, however, is shifted from informational content to metadiscursive modification. In the perspective adopted here, this behaviour may be instructive in demonstrating how the retention of the original discursive function as a marker of information structure also characterizes the evolution towards metadiscursive functions. What is common to all uses of *già* considered so far is their connection to information structure which constantly refers to given information.

In order to complete the comparison between *già* and *sì*, it can be observed that while in (16) above both interjections were proven as possible, *già* being the marked form of *sì* in contexts where contextually given information can be confirmed, in (22) *sì* would not be appropriate as a substitutive form of *già*. This confirms that when used as a metadiscursive marker *già* enters a new domain where the paradigmatic correlation with the unmarked interjection *sì* no longer applies. Conversely, the metadiscursive uses typical of *sì* as a phatic marker (as, for instance, at the outset of a phone call) cannot be expressed by *già*, which indicates the tendency of these two interjectional markers to separate their distributional behaviours once they cover metadiscursive functions.

The descriptive account on the interjectional use of *già* and its vocalized forms provided in the whole of Section 3 has displayed the rich array of discursive functions covered by this marker in Italian with a special focus on its North-Western variety. In particular, its role as a pro-sentential particle of confirmativity which tends to develop towards textual conclusivity and may also lose any connection to the propositional content of preceding utterances by developing purely metadiscursive uses has shown its gradual transition towards DMs. Having concluded the descriptive analysis, we are now in a position to propose a comparative assessment of the functional and formal properties of North-Western *già* as a MP described in Section 2. This will be undertaken in the next section, where North-Western Italian data will be comprehensively reappraised by also elucidating their interplay with the behaviour of the other Romance languages mentioned throughout this work.

4. North-Western Italian *già* between MPs and DMs

Table 2 sums up the main results of the discussion developed above by placing them into the same comparative model already presented in Table 1 (Section 1.1), from which the whole discussion was originated. As a consequence of the analysis presented in Sections 2–3 Hansen's (2008) structural labels ('interrogative' and 'interjection') have been replaced by more general functional characterizations ('MP' and 'DM', respectively) and a fourth column has been added to account for the behaviour of N(orth-)W(estern) regional Italian. Considering that the geographical distribution of the interrogative use of *già* in other varieties of Italian is still poorly investigated, which also affects a correct interpretation of the extent to which this phenomenon has extended to Italian in general (see the discussion in Section 2.1 above), the North-Western varieties, which appear to cover the area in which this phenomenon is majorly represented, are contrasted with other varieties where it does not occur. As announced in Section 2.1, Central Italian regional varieties such as those spoken in Tuscany will be taken here as representatives of this behaviour, without excluding the possibility that the same distribution might be found in other regions.

As is graphically apparent from Table 2, the main result of the comparative analysis conducted above is that in North-Western Italian, unlike the other Romance languages considered here, *già* cumulates the two functions under scrutiny (MP and DM) in one and the same form, thus also distinguishing itself from other Italian varieties, in which it is only used as a DM (prototypically represented by *già* as a metadiscursive interjection). The distribution of *già* in Central Italian only covers a subset of the functions admitted by the more extensive use of North-Western *già*. However, my aim in interpreting the data schematized in Table 2 is not simply to observe which language admits which function, but rather to point out the bifurcation between two main language types. On the one hand, some languages (actually the majority in our small sample: French, Spanish and Central Italian) show a 'privative' distribution, in which the occurrence of one of the two functions excludes the other. On the opposite side, one finds the case of North-Western Italian, in which a 'cumulative' distribution occurs. Now, the occurrence of contradictory findings (cognates that tend to bifurcate their uses in sister

Table 2. Romance descendants from Latin (de)iam: DMs vs. MPs

	French	Spanish	Central Italian	NW Italian
MP	+	-	-	+
DM	-	+	+	+

languages, while in some languages there is one form cumulating the two uses) suggests an internally composite explanation which should not only indicate what the two interactional uses presented above have in common, but also permit us to define their differential features.

Trying to explain first the cumulative distribution found in North-Western Italian, I think that the analyses presented above do indicate a common functional feature shared by MPs and DMs which can justify why they are expressed by the same marker. In my view, this unifying feature is to be found in the common reference to information structure. Despite more specific differences, what backchecking and the different forms of confirmativity analyzed above have in common is that they all refer to given information. From this point of view, backchecking can be considered as the interrogative counterpart of what appears as a confirmative marker in a declarative sentence (see also Cerruti 2009, 113). Even though in some cases confirmativity is variedly combined with other notions, as is the case with the ‘mirative’ surprise expressed by the interjection *ah già* (cf also fn. 12), confirmativity is still the primary functional feature encompassing the whole spectrum of uses covered by an interactional *già*. However, what counts more in my perspective is that ‘given information’ not only characterizes backchecking as well as the varied list of subfunctions expressed by interjectional *già*, but it also affects its metadiscursive use as a proper DM *stricto sensu*, where confirmativity refers to discourse structure instead of denoting a contextually given propositional content. This demonstrates that becoming a DM does not require losing the original link to information structure, which ultimately retains the function of ‘already’ as a TAM marker.

‘Information status’, also labelled as ‘knowledge status’, has often been recognized as a grammatical category paradigmatically marked by dedicated particles in some (mostly Asian) languages (DeLancey 1986, Choi 1995). According to Choi (1995, 168) ‘knowledge status’ denotes “the degree to which knowledge has been integrated in the speaker’s mind”, which implies a basic distinction to be drawn between ‘given’ and ‘new’ information. ‘Knowledge status’ admits different degrees of accessibility to the information “on the part of the speaker and the listener” (Choi 1995, 169), in which the amount of information that the speaker has just acquired from the present context should also be included. Given these definitions, backchecking and the various types of confirmativity discussed above seem to smoothly accommodate within the general notion of ‘information status’, a grammatical category that in some of the languages where it has been detected (DeLancey 1986, Choi 1995) is also paradigmatically connected to evidentiality and mirativity.

In my opinion, recognizing a unifying notion which might cover the different uses considered above provides compelling evidence in support of a close

relationship between the two pragmatic phenomena under scrutiny in this book, ultimately reinforcing the positions of those who, like Bazzanella (2006, 2009), tend to minimize the discrepancies between MPs and DMs by advocating a general solution in which the two categories belong to the same discursive tier. Nonetheless, we still need to explain why Table 2 also contains cases of privative distribution. In other words, it must be explained why Spanish, French and Central Italian keep MPs formally separate from DMs, thus appearing insensitive to the same functional principles governing North-Western Italian. In this respect, the discursive behaviour of interjections, which are holophrastically characterized by the absence of any syntactic constraints, is illuminating in demonstrating their formally different status from MPs, which, on the contrary, show syntactic restrictions. Following Diewald (2006) and Detges and Waltereit (2009), I think that, whatever functional similarity might be detected with DMs, these morphosyntactic restrictions of MPs and the scopal differences that derives from morphosyntax should not be underestimated. From this point of view DMs and MPs radically differ and it is therefore not surprising that the use of *già* as a DM (the metadiscursive *già* described in Section 3.4) derives from the interjectional use of *già*, whose non-sentential holophrasticity may acquire the extrasentential scope which is necessary to regulate and connect discourse chunks.

As a conclusion, the composite explanation extracted from Table 2 seems to suggest further elaboration connected to the main research thread proposed by our editors (*Modal particles and discourse markers: two sides of the same coin?*) By looking at North-Western Italian *già*, it might be answered that they are in fact two sides of the same coin, whose unifying feature is provided by information status. On the other hand, formal properties including morphosyntactic and scopal behaviour keep the two coins mutually exclusive. North-Western Italian data also contain specific features that might be indicative of a tendency to introduce formal differentiations among the various uses of *già*. Agglutinated vowels that can only be added to the interjection but not to interrogative *già* provide a formal differentiation between MPs and those uses of *già* that tend to develop in the functional direction of DMs.

As to the role of information status, one might additionally wonder whether this is a generalized feature whose unifying nature can be extended to other cases in which MPs and DMs show complex boundaries. Alternatively, it might be argued that the importance of information status in the case under scrutiny here is a mere epiphenomenal effect due to the original meaning of the TAM marker 'already', which intrinsically refers to 'given' information. This is an empirical issue that requires comparative data from other semantic and grammatical domains and cannot, therefore, be addressed now. However, before concluding I would like to add a final comparative point which complements the description of French *déjà* and its

North-Western Italian counterpart by showing that in a language where the overlap between MP and DM does not apply (French *déjà* as opposed to regional Italian *già* is only used as a MP and not as a DM, cf. Table 2), the role of information status is less stable and MPs tend to evolve towards more general illocutionary domains.

As summed up in Table 2, French and regional Italian share the same interrogative use. Nonetheless, upon closer inspection I have observed that the similarity between French and regional Italian only covers some of the relevant data. As its regional Italian counterpart, French *déjà* is ‘typically’ (Hansen 2008, 213) used as a backchecking strategy, but, while in regional Italian this is the only function of interrogative *già* as a MP, French interrogative *déjà* appears to be compatible with contexts in which the backchecking function does not apply. This is for instance the case in (23), where the speaker and the addressee have just got in touch for the first time on the net (the addressee has been enquiring about job opportunities). Lacking previous acquaintance, backchecking is not applicable. Even more explicitly the context in (24) clarifies that the addressee has not yet introduced himself (*tu commence[s] par te presenter* ‘you start by introducing yourself’) and therefore those addressed to him are ‘real informative questions and not backchecking questions referring to previously given information.

- (23) Quelques questions: quel est déjà ton diplôme et quel est ton but en voulant faire ces formations?
 Ta réponse pourrait m’aider à te donner des pistes
 Cordialement [from www]
 ‘Some questions; what’s ALREADY your degree and what’s your goal with this education?
 Your answer might help me to give you some hints
 Best’
- (24) Bonjour. Très bonne initiative mais je pense qu’il serait plus raisonnable que tu commence par te présenter et donner plus d’info déjà, sur ton cursus personnel au sein de ce nouveau parti. quel est déjà ton degré d’instruction? de quel écoles est tu issu? etc etc etc.
 ‘Hello. A very good initiative but I think that it would be more reasonable that you start by introducing yourself and giving already more information, on your career in this party, what’s ALREADY your level of education? what schools do you come from? etc. etc. etc.’

The interesting comparative point is that in similar contexts *già* would not be admitted even in those varieties of regional Italian where it does occur as a backchecking strategy, which shows that, if compared to its French cognate, regional Italian has a more restricted use of modal *già*.

Since backchecking is still the most ‘typical’ use of French interrogative *déjà* and this function is shared by the variety of regional Italian described above, it can be hypothesized with a decent degree of confidence that what we observe in (23–24) is an extension of the original backchecking function, eventually producing a French innovation which is not shared by neighbouring North-Western Italian varieties. Assuming that this French innovation is the result of pragmaticalization,¹⁴ I think that reference to information status might be considered as an intermediate phase, followed by a subsequent stage corresponding to the current French distribution in which *déjà* is not restricted to backchecking, being instead a more general ‘interrogative’ marker. Evolving from backchecking to interrogative implies that the connection with information status tends to be loosened as the pragmatic evolution proceeds and *déjà* becomes more and more connected to the speech act in itself, instead of exclusively marking the degree of novelty of the requested information. When used as a generalized speech act modifier, *déjà* can be consistently considered a politeness strategy, as also hypothesized by Hansen (2008, 213), who suggests how also backchecking might be re-interpreted in terms of politeness (“asking for the second time might be impolite and face-threatening”). Nonetheless, assuming a generalized interpretation via politeness cannot explain why regional Italian *già* does not extend to contexts such as (23–24). The behaviours of regional Italian and French demonstrate that we definitely need a unifying account (which might be connected to politeness) in order to explain the French extended distribution but we also need a modular interpretation that could justify the more restricted interpretation (backchecking only) in regional *già*. Due to its connections with information status, backchecking can be conceived as still being linked to the propositional content of the utterance (the degree of novelty of the propositional content)¹⁵ and appears therefore reasonable as an intermediate stage between content-level uses and fully-fledged context level uses (Hansen 2008), the latter being anchored to the illocutionary

14. Well aware that, as convincingly concluded by Diewald (2011, 376), the whole debate on the boundary between pragmaticalization and grammaticalization ultimately relies on where one draws the dividing line between grammar and pragmatics, the choice of the term ‘pragmaticalization’ has been consistently selected under the assumption that in its evolutionary process the French marker *déjà* extends the role of prototypical pragmatic functions related to illocution and speech-act specifications. The data analyzed here seem to indicate that, in order to grasp the different evolutionary stages represented by French *déjà* and regional Italian *già*, a dividing line should be drawn between ‘discourse grammar’, which refers to information flow, and more extended ‘pragmatic’ modulations of illocutionary force represented by the French use of *déjà* as a speech-act downtoner (see Squartini, in press).

15. See Bazzanella (2006, 463, fn. 22) for a distinction between two different types of modalizers, those connected to social interaction and politeness and those linked to the propositional content.

domain of the speech act and more extensively compatible with questions as illocutionary types in general.¹⁶ In a sense, backchecking and illocutionary modification of questions are both interactional dimensions which involve reference to the addressee's sphere and are therefore equally connected to intersubjectification (Traugott and Dasher 2002), but in fact they seem to represent different dimensions of intersubjectivity in the pragmatic dynamics between content and context.

5. Future research

A thorough description of the functional properties of North-Western *già* has shown to what extent DMs and MPs may derive their functional load from the same area of discourse grammar where information status and referents' activation degrees are regulated. Future research should concentrate on clarifying whether information status might be extended to other comparable pragmatic phenomena and how it is linked to principles suggested as general tenets encompassing the whole domain of MPs such as the notion of non-initial status in the information flow, which, according to Diewald (2006, this volume) and Diewald et al. (2009), characterizes MPs in general. However, it is the diachronic comparison between North-Western Italian and French suggested in the last section that especially demands more refined analyses on the pragmaticalization process of Romance 'already'. In developing this perspective Squartini (in press) pays particular attention to more thoroughly test the hypothesis of a gradual evolution from

16. As illocutionary modifiers, the Romance descendants of Latin *iam* tend to specialize in different illocutionary functions. As seen above, the use in direct questions is restricted to French *déjà* and North-Western Italian *già*, but French also admits a marginal use of *déjà* as a jussive marker in imperative sentences (i), which does not occur in standard and North-Western Italian. Instead, the jussive use is frequent in Spanish (ii) and Catalan (iii), where it covers various illocutionary acts including orders (ii) and permissions (iii):

- (i) Montre-moi *déjà* ce que tu sais faire! (Hansen Mosegaard 2008, 213)
'Just show me what you can do!'
- (ii) ¡Lárgate *ya*! (Bazzanella et al. 2005, 71)
'Go away, now'
- (iii) *Ja* pots entrar, *ja* (Torrent 2011, 89)
'Right, you can come in now'

Interestingly, this list of illocutionary specializations is complemented by the behaviour of Occitan, where *ja* occurs in declarative sentences as an emphatic marker of assertiveness (Pusch 2007, 97–98), a distribution that, even though under different syntactic restrictions, can also be found in Sardinian (Bazzanella et al. 2005, 62–67, Calaresu in press).

the domain of discourse grammar, in which information status (either backchecking or confirmativity) plays a crucial role, and illocutionary modification, in which pragmatic interaction comes to the foreground.

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