

Discursive and Pragmatic Functions of *In Fact* and *Infatti*

Silvia Bruti
University of Pisa

0. Introduction

There is an area of non-equivalence between *in fact* and *infatti* in terms of their functions in English and Italian discourse and I would like to investigate to what extent this area develops. The literature concerning expressions like *in fact/infatti* points out that they represent a serious difficulty for non-native speakers, because correspondence across languages may be defective. A connective may be lacking in one language, or, when it exists, it often shares a different value. Since connectives mainly serve an interactional function, which varies according to the language and mirrors the behavioural rules of a community, non-native speakers and students should be made aware of their contrastive functions, in order to avoid pragmatic mistakes and awkwardness.

1. Connectives: the state-of-the-art

Expressions like *in fact/infatti* have been variously referred to as "attitudinal disjuncts" (Quirk and Greenbaum 1976), "discourse markers" (Schiffrin 1987; Fraser 1990; Redeker 1990), "pragmatic/metatextual/discursive connectives" (van Dijk 1979; Bazzanella 1985; 1986; 1990; Caron 1987), and in Italian "particelle conversazionali", "connettivi testuali" (Berretta 1984) or, more often, "segnali discorsivi" (Orletti 1994; Bazzanella 1995).

Quirk et al. (1976) identify "attitudinal disjuncts" as those unnecessary constituents of a clause which may express a reservation about a preceding portion of text or about what is to follow.

Schiffrin (1987), who has offered the most thorough review of markers so far, describes markers in a large corpus of conversational data and attempts to give them a functional meaning. She also develops a theoretical model to evaluate how/to what extent markers contribute to the coherence of discourse. In particular, she investigates how the same item has to be understood differently according to its role at different points in the conversation. The flexibility and the lack of constraints of her analysis do not always permit to make successful generalisations on the basis of a few context-dependent interpretations. The merit of this research lies however in the attempt to propose a taxonomy of discourse functions.

Fraser (1990) identifies three different types of markers: "basic pragmatic markers", "commentary markers" and "parallel markers". Discourse markers are one type of "commentary markers", whose main task is that of pointing out how the message relates to the preceding text. So their function is mainly to pinpoint a sequential relationship within discourse. Fraser's approach is aimed at establishing the nature of markers, and consequently how they should be defined as a linguistic category. He disagrees with Schiffrin's statement about markers' core meaning and suggests they have only a core pragmatic meaning, without any content meaning. Discourse markers are kept apart from other types of commentary markers, from vocatives, interjections, and expressions such as "y'know", "I mean", which he does not treat as markers.

Bazzanella (1985; 1986; 1990) prefers to use the term "connectives". She distinguishes "phatic connectives", which correspond to what other linguists call "discourse particles/markers", from "pragmatic connectives", which play a metatextual role. She shares Fraser's thesis concerning markers' lack of connectedness with the propositional content of an utterance. In her final classification (1995) she identifies three main functions: the interactional (those belonging to the speaker's line and those belonging to the addressee's line), the metatextual (organizing the text), and the cognitive function.

The taxonomies proposed either establish criteria for distinction on the basis of syntactic features, semantic properties or discursive functions, very often mixing up the parameters, or record the different uses a marker may have in discourse (Wierzbicka 1986).

2. Starting hypotheses

Besides the syntactic criteria (the tests of interrogation, negation and pronominal substitution; see Bazzanella 1995) which establish that markers do not belong to the number of the obligatory constituents of a clause, another prerequisite they must have is their unrelatedness with the propositional content (Fraser 1990: 389; Bazzanella 1995: 228). It is true that the propositional content does not change if we erase the connective¹, yet if a connective has been chosen among many options, its meaning should be somehow related to the content. Both *in fact* and *infatti* satisfy the above – mentioned syntactic criteria, but their semantic meaning seems to contribute to the definition of the illocutionary force of the utterance. If we admit that they have both a great influence on the illocutionary force of the utterance, and if we recognize that their semantic content is more or less correspondent, we are justified in expecting a similarity

1 The term "connective" appears more useful in that it stresses the general relational function that this category usually performs.

in their pragmatic functions. But in reality we acknowledge that similarity is very scanty indeed. What I actually found is the following pattern. Whereas *in fact* introduces an autonomous argumentative assertion, *infatti* signals acquiescence or compliance. So in English *in fact* is forward-oriented, in that it allows semantic and pragmatic progression of discourse and interaction, while *infatti* displays agreement with the co-speaker but points backwards. In other words, it does not allow text progress.

A suitable starting point for my argumentation is a comparison of the discursive functions of both connectives. Among many models, I have adopted Bazzanella's taxonomy of functions, which is displayed in the following figures.

INTERACTIONAL FUNCTION

1a	turn-taking device		1b	interrupting device
2	filler/correction indicator			
3a	call for attention	INFATTI →	3b	attention confirmed
4	phaticism/vocative			
5	modulation mechanism	← IN FACT		
6a	checking reception		6b	reception confirmed
7a	asking for agreement/ confirmation		7b	agreement/confirmation granted
8	giving the turn			

METATEXTUAL FUNCTION

IN FACT →	Topic management Text articulation	← INFATTI
IN FACT →	Focaliser	
IN FACT →	Reformulation: a) paraphrase b) correction c) exemplification (specification)	

In assigning functions to connectives we generally discriminate and choose the most relevant one, but there may be a coalescence of many in a single utterance. Bazzanella (1995), for instance, distinguishes the metatextual from the interactional function and to the former she ascribes all the indicators of reformulation, whereas to the latter the markers of modulation, e.g. cataphoric signals of precision. But in this respect I think that it is hardly possible to fix a boundary between the two functions, since both reformulation and modulation in terms of grades of precision serve the same goal of communicative effectiveness. Modulation is actually a hyponym of the more general act of reformulating.

Let's see some examples² and identify functional correspondences, if any.

- (1) A. Er creosote is not a thick liquid it's a very thin liquid. It looks sort of you expected it to be thick but **in fact** it's about as thin as water (C)
- (2) A. say well **in fact** what's happening is that the central bank is willing to re-discount loans that the commercial banks make and so they can they will **in fact** expand loans through the commercial banks through the rediscount procedure. So the banks don't have the resources to make more loans erm you know nobody's increasing (C)
- (3) A. so the the the criminal once he knows he's being watched he he knows that he's going to be caught sooner or later and he may **in fact** be deterred **in fact** he will be deterred because ...
B. Yeah but it's important to make sure that that erm you you that erm you know things are less easy for criminals that the fact ...(C)
- (4) A. and the one that they have is actually like a big plunger but it's kind of like this suction sticker thing here. Right. So like if you push this down in here it sticks. **In fact** this one sticks incredibly hard (laugh) (C)
- (5) A. It's already you've already wiped all the surfaces and (pause) washed up
B. I used to make cakes
A. So I keep hearing
B. (laughs) in a former life
A. **In fact** have I actually sampled one of your cakes?
- (6) C. Comunque anche cercagli le parole sul vocabolario e fargli vedere
A. ecco ecco
C. come si usa il vocabolario
A. (?) indispensabile
B. certo
C. **infatti**
A. **infatti** e - gli fa anche bene io gli ho detto a me mi va bene se porti tedesco. (LIP-FI)

2 The English examples are drawn from the Cobuild Spoken Corpus and the British National Corpus (only for a few examples). My Italian data include several sources: the PIXIE corpora on bookshop encounters, the LIP corpus of spoken Italian, TV programs and some extracts from everyday conversations I have personally collected. I have used the following abbreviations: C= Cobuild Spoken Corpus, BNC= British National Corpus, PIXI= The PIXI Corpora, LIP= Lessico di frequenza dell'italiano parlato; FI= Firenze, MI=Milano.

- (7) C. be no Sgarbi con ricomincio da due o da tre che sia non mi ricordo della Raffaella Carrà il sabato fa una lezione di arte e lui va lui va nei vari posti così italiani magari anche posti sconosciuti però che magari si lasciano un po' perdere e li presenta per esempio quan(do) è stato al tempietto di Bramante
 B. ma questo è un pericolo pubblico si sposta pure
 A. sì sì **infatti** (LIP-MI)
- (8) B. Andiamo avanti allora chi parla?
 F. eh Paolo da Milano
 B. buonasera Paolo
 F. buonasera saluti a tutti
 B. alzi la voce per cortesia grazie [...]
 F. senta volevo domandare questo eh non credete che nell'Inter (pausa) al di là dei giocatori che non si impegnano più di tanto perché molto probabilmente sono demotivati ma credo che Trapattoni oltre ad essere un buon allenatore gli altri anni faceva anche da dirigente nell'Inter cioè faceva eh
 B. sì sì
 F. legava tra i giocatori e la società oggi a me sembra che questa società non abbia collegamenti [...]
 B. qualcuno diceva ma Trapattoni lì si deve occupare un po' di tutto invece dicevano eh guarda il Milan il team manager eh il coso di qui e Ramaccioni e Braida adesso
 A. e **infatti** (LIP-MI TV program)
- (9) A. Ma cos'è questa storia dei taxi che cambiano colore?
 B. Sì **infatti**
 A. Lei ce l'avrà già bianco
 C. No ce l'ho sempre giallo
 B. Come la mia moto
 C. E **infatti** lavoro molto più dei miei colleghi (La Ruota della Fortuna 27/5/95)
- (10) C. perché telefoni col microfono?
 A. eh?
 C. perché stai telefonando col microfono?
 A. perché devo aiutare la mia mamma che deve registrare le telefonate
 C. ah
 A. sì **infatti** (f) ascolta
 C. dimmi
 A. (?) andiamo con una macchina sola? (LIP-FI, telephone conversation)

Numbers (1) to (4) are all instances of metatextual functions. (1) is a correction, (2) and (3) are reformulations, (4) is a modulation in terms of more precision (which in Bazzanella's taxonomy belongs to the interactional function, but I find

it practically equivalent with the metatextual reformulation); (5) signals topic management³ i.e. a topic shift. Numbers (6), (7) and (8) show how *infatti* signals agreement in responses; in (9) *infatti* is an attention-granting device, rather than a signal of agreement. As for *infatti* Bazzanella's model is not fine-grained enough to describe the scalar dimension of agreement. On the addressee scale she identifies the function "agreement/confirmation granted", but she does not specify the intensity of the agreement, which is essential for *infatti*, because it does not belong to the economy of her investigation. As we shall see, sometimes *infatti* is uttered by a speaker with a low degree of commitment, either when he wants to end the present topic, or when he employs it as a safe way to participate a conversation which he finds boring and dull. In (10) *infatti* underlines a topic closing. As can be seen, only example (5) of *in fact* finds a functional correspondence with *infatti* of (10), and the area of functional divergence is certainly wider. The only discursive function they seem to share is that of topic management.

3. *In fact/infatti* and the nature of the illocutionary force

A first hypothesis and a first step in the analysis has been that in each language the expression preferentially occurs in some type of speech acts. It is the context within which *in fact/infatti* occur that specify the global force of the utterance. According to our investigation *in fact* appears preferentially in assertives. Conversely, the overwhelming majority of instances of *infatti* occur in second-speaker responses, either alone or with other words ("e", "sì", "no"). These short answers are sequences of agreement with the speaker's thesis, ranging from unconditional agreement to implied disagreement, passing through the middle stage of partial agreement.

Let's first have a look at the English examples of assertives.

ASSERTIVES:

(1)-(4) quoted above

(11) A. Which foot have you got a verruca on? Just get another sock out. You must have millions.

B. I haven't got very many socks. I haven't got any socks **in fact**. (C)

(12) A. I only missed two preps. That is strange. **In fact** I only missed one prep (BNC)

(13) A. at the time, I can't remember much about it. **In fact** I can't remember anything about it ... (BNC)

3 For a description of the role of topic in the construction of conversational coherence and cooperativeness see Bublitz 1988.

- (14) A. and you (laugh) may as well do your own thing.
 B. So in the summer term in theory you could continue that part-time attendance then is that right?
 A. Yes I think *in fact* if you hadn't put in your erm appropriate amount you had to continue.
 B. Yes.
 A. The school had to take you on if you hadn't done as much as as many d (incomprehensible) half days as ... (C)

With the class of assertives variation of force especially applies to the illocutionary point and to sincerity conditions (Searle 1969; Searle and Vandervecken 1985). According to Bazzanella et al. (1990) illocutionary force may be modified, either by downgrading or upgrading its intensity, on four different dimensions: 1) propositional content, 2) expressed inner states, 3) modal roles of participants and 4) perlocutionary goals. Each category is then divided into finer sub-categories.

Most occurrences of *in fact* in assertives are corrections, or, in other words, upgradings of the propositional content or augmentations in terms of precision or determinacy. *In fact* undertakes here the cataphoric function of indicating the reformulation which is to follow in variable forms: paraphrase (repeating the same content/*signatum* with alternative lexis/*signans*), very rarely relevant with *in fact*, correction (entailing a total change) and specification, usually in numeric details. *In fact* fits an illocutionary act which displays the speaker's intention of making his contribution as clear as possible, and signals that cooperativeness is being pursued. The maxims of Quality and Quantity are carefully complied with, especially through correction of details, whereas the maxim of Manner is taken care of through paraphrase and exemplification.

Assertives generally expound the locutor's personal point of view on a certain state of affairs; this entails a modalization⁴ of discourse both at a global and local level (this is what Bazzanella et al. subsume under the label of "modal roles of participants"). Since argumentative discourse develops from the cognitive sphere of personal beliefs, epistemic modality is here particularly relevant. An epistemic modifier can contribute to the validity of a micro- or a macro-proposition. So *in fact* is included in the speaker's line of argumentation and belongs to the epistemic dimension.

4 For a similar notion of "modalization" see Merlini (1987). For a complete discussion on modality cf. Kiefer (1987). The three most important notions of modality Kiefer identifies are the following: 1) modality as an expression of possibility and necessity; 2) modality as the meaning of propositional attitudes, 3) modality as expression of the speaker's attitudes (which is the aspect in which we are interested in the discussion of "in fact").

There are, however, other indicators pertaining to the receiver's isotopic line, which do not interfere with the locutor's subscription of his thesis. The latter group expresses rather the high degree of inferability of a statement. My next aim is to ascertain to which class *in fact* actually belongs. In other words, as Merlini (1987) claims for other indicators, even when a speaker judges the degree of inferability of his own thesis he signals in the meantime his own commitment; he therefore performs two functions simultaneously. Yet, since both functions are acted out by the speaker and he strategically anticipates possible objections from the addressee by temporarily performing the opponent's role, it is difficult to establish incontrovertibly to which line the modifier belongs. In this concern Merlini proposes to consider this new line as referring to a third participant role as "a projection of the locutor's mind engaged in alternative courses of reasoning" and to subsume it under the epistemic evaluation. Still, there are cases where the patent value of obviousness corresponding to a high degree of inferability makes the thesis objective and self-evident. Lyons (1977; 1981) seems to refer to this borderline area when he distinguishes between "subjective" and "objective" epistemic modality. The former is prevalent and displays, as we have already pointed out, the speaker's epistemic responsibility, while in the latter the evidence of the truth of the utterance does not lie within the speaker's epistemic world but may be ascribed to the so-called shared knowledge, available both to the speaker and to the addressee. Lyons (1977; 1981) calls this operation "objectivized modality".

In (2) the speaker engages in a modification of his own speech: he first states a possibility with "can" but adds "will" followed by *in fact*. The modals intervene here in the process of definition of the speaker's epistemic certainty. With "can" he first suggests the possibility of future action, insinuating the actual ability of his referent to perform an action. Then, with "will", he expresses a higher degree of certainty, and a high degree of subjective commitment. The following element, *in fact*, signals the high inferability of the speaker's thesis. The presence of two elements belonging to different scales of epistemic evaluation re-establishes the balance between subjectiveness and objectiveness. In (3) as well we have a progression of predictions: "going to" (announcing inevitable future events), then "may" + *in fact*, and finally "will". The second prediction is less certain than the first and *in fact* reinforces the degree of inferability of "may". The second instance of *in fact* introduces the same propositional content but changes in terms of argumentation. With "will" the speaker moves towards certainty and responsibility, yet preserving inferability.

In examples (11) to (14) *in fact* announces a reformulation in terms of precision. Its meaning gives us the key to the interpretation: its textual function is that of pointing out consequential relationships and making it easier for the addressee to follow the reasoning; thus it is not so much an expression of the

speaker's belief as of his attitude towards the degree of inferability of his statements. The presence of *in fact* signals that the speaker judges his assertions easily inferable.

When instead the degree of inferability of the proposition is uncertain it would be reasonable to expect an intensification of the illocutionary force. But this is not the case, and the illocutionary force is never intensified. In the case of high inferability, the speaker decides to emphasize the self-evidence of his reasoning; in the other he claims no responsibility. The final result is a shift towards less personal commitment or a downgrading of subjective involvement. This does not mean that the assertive force in general is downgraded. Quite the contrary, it is very often intensified. *in fact* is aimed to express the locutor's certainty by way of underlying the high degree of inferability of his thesis. In this way, by emphasising its objective, easily perceivable quality, the speaker achieves the goal of making a subjective idea acceptable.

If we check what happens with other speech act types we find out that *in fact* again introduces the speaker's elucidation of his own previous statement (there are a few cases of modification of other people's contribution, obviously for politeness implications). The locutor clearly displays his intention to make his contribution clearer.

DIRECTIVES

- (15) A. What how did you manage then er going through this erm uncompromisingly dangerous j er on this er uncompromisingly da dangerous journey? How in fact did you manage to get round to laying foundations and?
 B. In our innocence we thought that we ought to go to an architect and we did who welcomed us with open arms and ...
 (C)
- (16) A. That I've never heard and I f I have great difficulty finding and I have to go to a big old dictionary (incomprehensible word)
 B. (incomprehensible word)
 A. Yeah that sort of thing what's a (incomprehensible word) i n fact how do you pronounce it (C)
- (5) quoted above

In (15) and (16) *in fact* contributes to define the degree of strength of the illocutionary force by operating on the propositional content. In both cases it serves the purpose of clarification, in the first dispelling the confusion the speaker himself generated (in uttering "uncompromisingly" and "compromisingly") and in the second the locutor interrupts himself in order to organise his ideas and give them a higher degree of precision with a second attempt. In (5) *in fact* announces a topic shifting and of highlights a dishomogeneity in the management of textual topics. The degree of precision is looked for to prevent

the addressee's possible objections. The ultimate degree of strength results thus from the calculation of the synergic modifications of all the different indicators.

With commissives, (17) to (19), *in fact* shares the same function and introduces a reshaping of the content in the direction of more precision. Especially with commissives, where a speaker undertakes a responsibility for the future, it is important to specify in detail the limit of the commitment.

COMMISSIVES

- (17) A. A very distressed state of mind
 B. That's very worrying isn't it?
 A. I just feel horrified and I I intend to do (pause) something about in **in fact** I intend to do a lot about it (C)
- (18) A. Why don't I give you the name of (incomprehensible word) all the programme controllers of local radio
 B. That would be very helpful
 A. Erm **in fact** I'll give you a back copy of (proper noun) Pimms which has got or no a back copy of Editors. I've got a mag I've got a er a book that just lists all the key (C)
- (19) A. the hostage exchange being pretty close. It's the speculation is it ain't far way. Well I'll tell you what's twenty-four hours away well less actually is the show music **in fact** in twenty-one hours I'll be back with you. And on the show tomorrow night we shall be meeting Seline Dionne a Canadian singer doing awfully well in Quebec [pause] and now ... (C)

Let us turn to Italian. As we anticipated above, *infatti* mainly occurs in second-speaker agreement responses. *Infatti* actually occurs in monologic and written discourse too. In these two formats it mainly operates as a conjunction which marks exemplification or demonstration of thematic connectedness. Sometimes even in dialogic spoken discourse *infatti* may underline this aspect of textual coherence; in general, in all these cases it has the same function of agreement we find in second-speaker agreement. The only difference is that it is here agreement with oneself. The range of functions it performs is more limited than that of *in fact*; yet, in agreement sequences *infatti* may occur with a remarkable epistemic extension: on the gradient of agreement it can express the maximum level of agreement, a partial level, or even ironic disapproval. Simple forms of agreement are in examples (6), (7), (8) above.

Sometimes the contribution of the addressee is so limited that the sequence where *infatti* occurs does not seem to promote any new information unit either to the interaction or the locutor's own discourse. As always when scalar dimension is at stake, there are numerous intermediate positions between the pole of unconditional agreement and that of absolute disagreement. I have observed that in partial agreement *infatti* can convey an uncommitted

subscription to the locutor's line of reasoning, which may be due to the addressee's desire to rapidly come to an end or to express a feigned solidarity for politeness purposes. In both cases, *infatti* is almost desemanticized, inclining clearly to a phatic response. In example (10) speaker A is answering listlessly to his friend's question. His "sì infatti" sounds final and leaves no room to objections or expansions, for it is followed by the focaliser "ascolta", which is forward-oriented.

(10) quoted above

(20) A. Poi ti vie li prendi, a te da sola eh in un colpo solo

B. Li prendo tutti

A. Si può fare un po' di sconto

B. Ecco bene questo è un buon discorso **infatti** perché se no

A. Mm sui libri sì sulle cassette no perché mi costano molto a a me

B. Eh ma **infatti** immagino sì sì Sempre sì sempre il solito discorso. (PIXI Bof F-18/b5)

In (20) the second occurrence of *infatti* uttered by B does not seem to signal a deep-felt agreement: there are actually several indicators of B's disappointment when she is told that tapes are excluded from the discount formula: the parenthetical verb "immagino" narrows the subscription to the truth of the proposition. Yet, being a subjective evaluation (Venier 1991: 118), it still leaves the matter unsettled. It is in uttering "sempre il solito discorso" that the speaker presents her conclusion through implicature. Without explicitly stating that, she means that the preceding explanation is the typical excuse bookshop assistants produce when asked for discounts. Irony usually corresponds to pretended empathy, with the intent of hurting the listener (Litman and May 1991: 147; see Merlini for "aggravation strategies").

We admitted the possibility of finding cases of implied disagreement on the basis of intuitive predictions and experience, but in our corpus we actually came across one single example:

(21) A. La gente pensa che un insegnante non faccia niente. Mi dicono ti cerchiamo ma non ci sei mai sei una girottolona (dialect for *girellona*). Sì infatti...

Here *infatti* occurs in the speaker's turn of speech, but the apparent agreement, which is actually disagreement, refers to an absent interlocutor's hypothesis. *infatti* is ironically uttered and its true meaning is retrievable through intonation and prosody, besides the contextual situation. The potential of irony enclosed in *infatti* counts on the interlocutors' shared knowledge: the speaker knew that her addressee was well aware that she is a scrupulous teacher. The reason for the low

number of occurrences of *infatti* with this meaning is probably the high degree of mutual knowledge between the co-speakers and the restricted situational setting, e.g. colloquial, familiar, peer group it requires.

4. Conclusions

On the whole we can advance a tentative conclusion, based on the results of our limited investigation. *in fact* is a typical connective in argumentation, preferentially used by the speaker when reshaping his previous assertion for precision's sake. Its modalizing function depends on its interaction with the other epistemic operators in the utterance, yet it frequently strengthens the credibility of a statement through its objective quality: the semantics of in-(actual)-facts enables the performance of this task. In argumentation it plays a very active, progressive role, not only for the speaker, but also for the interaction. By contrast *infatti* belongs to the addressee's line and mostly occurs in agreements. It can cover a wide extension of intensity of the illocutionary force, but most frequently it represents a low degree of commitment in agreement, and its semantic meaning tends to be obliterated. Although it does not prevent conversation from going on, it does not contribute to its progress either. From this analysis I think I have demonstrated that *in fact* has a remarkable progressive quality, whereas *infatti* is usually regressive. This confirms our initial thesis that correspondence between connectives across languages is often problematic: for *in fact* and *infatti* the area of functional equivalence tends to almost nothing and the only discursive function they have shown to share is that of topic management indicators.

Probably we would find much to add to this partial conclusion by extending the scope of our analysis, either enlarging the textual types investigated, or introducing other connectors in order to ascertain if there is at least functional correspondence across languages (even if performed by semantically unrelated items).

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