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A PRELIMINARY NOTE ON THE EXPRESSIVE USES OF AFFIRMATIVE AND NEGATIVE PARTICLES IN ITALIAN AND ENGLISH

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This work examines the properties of affirmative and negative particles, such as *yes* and *no*, when used to express emotions like regret, surprise, disapproval, and others. In the cases discussed here, *yes* and *no* do not negate or affirm the truth of the previous statement but instead convey the speaker's emotional response to a certain content. They therefore belong to the category of *expressive language*, which transmits emotional meanings. This article compares Italian and English and argues that both languages in these cases use similar structures to express the speaker's reactions, with specific intonation and gestures enhancing their expressive effect. This discussion will also demonstrate that pragmatic considerations can be integrated into a model of language to generate relevant expressive interpretations, framing language as a multimodal system.

Keywords: *Syntax, pragmatics, expressive language, comparative linguistics, multimodality, negative particles, affirmative particles.*

Introduction

In this work, I examine the properties of affirmative and negative particles, like *yes* and *no*, when used to express emotions such as regret, surprise, disapproval, and others. These usages fall under the category of *expressive language*, which refers to language that conveys emotional meanings. The investigation of this topic has usually been pursued under the label of *pragmatics*. I will show in this article that in order to understand the phenomena described in what follows, we must take into account the complex interplay between syntactic structures, phonology and gestuality.[1]

The coexistence of literal and emotional meanings is a fascinating aspect of

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human language and provides a key insight into human cognition. Unlike other special language constructs, such as idioms or proverbs, expressive language is not simply a lexical property associated with entire phrases or sentences. Usually, expressive language differs from "normal" language because of how it is delivered, both acoustically and through body language. Consider for instance the following example: an idiom like "*to break the ice"* – which means "to start a conversation and make the interlocutor more comfortable" – is learned by the speaker as a fixed unit stored in her lexicon. In contrast, expressive language might not differ lexically from normal language but is typically marked phonologically and gesturally. For instance, the question *"What are you doing?"* could be a straightforward request for information or an expression of disapproval. In the first case, it is associated with the usual questioning contour of English, but in the second, the intonational pattern is very different, and the facial expression usually shows disapproval, featuring, for instance, furrowed brows.[2]

In this article, I will compare Italian and English and argue that both languages, at a certain level of abstraction, use similar structures for expressing emotional reactions, with specific intonation and gestures enhancing their expressive quality.

This work's significance lies in the fact that it tells something more about expressive language, which constitutes a fundamental component of human communication. Several studies, including those related to the expression of surprise and disapproval, such as Giorgi and Dal Farra (2019), Giorgi and Petrocchi (2024, 2025), demonstrate that there is a high degree of consistency among speakers and even across different languages, especially regarding the alignment of syntactic and lexical cues with intonation and gestures. The fact that expressive language shows such remarkable consistency across speakers and languages suggests that it cannot be seen simply as a phenomenon shaped only by cultural factors; rather, there must be something deeper involved, related to the very nature of language itself.[3]

In what follows I will often refer to the *context*. By context I mean here the *hic and nunc* – the here and now – of the speaker. This is a very simple definition of context, but it proved useful in my previous investigation, beginning with Giorgi (2010), and I continue to adopt it here.

This article is structured as follows: In the next section, I will briefly review the well-known properties of negative and affirmative particles, along with a brief overview of the existing literature. In section 3, I will present the data and the key properties associated with them. In section 4, I will suggest some generalizations and briefly argue in favor of Holmberg's (2016) proposal. Finally, in section 5, I will outline the research questions that could be explored in future studies.

Affirmative and negative particles

According to the grammatical tradition, dictionaries like Treccani for Italian – https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/ – and the Oxford English Dictionary for English – https://www.oed.com/ – classify these lexical items as "adverbs." I will not discuss whether this classification is appropriate and will instead follow the generative convention that labels these items as *particles*, specifically "affirmative and negative particles" or "response particles". The syntax and semantics of affirmative and negative particles, like *yes* and *no* in English, have been examined by many scholars across different languages, mainly focusing on the strategies adopted by languages for answering polar questions.[4] The main observation is that the strategies used by languages for this purpose vary widely. Sadock & Zwicky (1985) identify three primary strategies: a "yes-no" system, like the one used in English, an "agree-disagree" system, like that of Japanese, and an "echo system", as in Welsh, where parts of the question—usually the verb – are repeated in the answer. However, more detailed research, such as the cross-linguistic investigation by Enfield et al. (2019), which analyzed data collected from informal everyday dialogues in 14 languages, has shown that most systems are generally mixed and that the differences among the various strategies are related to pragmatic factors. This is an important conclusion, as it highlights the importance of context in determining the type of answer, even when it consists of a simple affirmative or negative statement.

A much investigated topic since the beginning of the formal study of affirmative and negative particles concerns how different languages handle responses to negative questions. Languages often have specific forms for responding to negative questions, which differ from those used in other cases. This issue has been explored both theoretically and experimentally – see, among others, Pope (1976), Farkas and Bruce (2010), Brasoveanu (2013), Holmberg (2013, 2016), Krifka (2013, 2017), Roelofsen & Farkas (2015), Enflied et al. (2019). For Italian specifically, see Poletto and Zanuttini (2013), Bianchi & Cruschina (2016), Servidio et al. (2018), and Dal Farra et al. (2025).[5]

Italian maintains its two-form system even in negative contexts, but other languages do not. For example, some Germanic languages use a three-form system, like German, where *j*a and *nein* are used normally, and *doch* appears as an answer to a negative question. Even if I will not further pursue this topic here, I want to emphasize that the use and mode of employment of affirmative and negative particles are complex phenomena, where sensitivity to the previous context plays a very important role.

Let us briefly consider now the evolution of this system in Italian and English.

Diachronically, the Italian word *sì* (yes), according to the Treccani vocabulary, is derived from Latin *sic* (so), which is a shortened form of the affirmative locution *sic est* (lit: so is 'it is so'), while *no* (no) is derived from Latin *non*. Ernout and Meillet (1959) explain that *non*, in turn, is a complex element stemming from *ne* (not) plus *oinom* (Latin *unus*, one). In providing answers, Latin, as discussed in Potočnik (2023) who analyzed a vast corpus of the Latin language, mostly relied on an echo system. The Italian lexical items *sì* and *no* therefore, are innovations with respect to the Latin pattern.

Among the Germanic languages, Modern English is considered a two-term system, even though in earlier stages it was not like that. Shakespearean English, as pointed out by Crystal & Crystal (2002), exhibited a more complex system, in that it had lexical items specialized for positive and negative answers to positive questions – *yea* and *nay* – and items for positive-negative answers to negative questions – *yes* and *no*.[6]

In this work, I will show that even present-day English uses a variety of affirmative and negative particles to convey emotional values, extending beyond just *yes* and *no*. I will also compare these strategies with their Italian counterparts.

Note that, besides specific particles, languages often use characteristic intonation and gestures to accompany expressive language, and although I will not consider this issue in detail, I will briefly discuss the most relevant features and their significance in sections 3 and 4.

From a theoretical perspective, scholars follow two main approaches to account for the distribution of response particles. Let's consider the following dialogue:[7]

(1) Speaker A: Did John arrive?
Speaker B: Yes / No

Krifka (2013) proposed that response particles are anaphoric items, in that they refer to something already present in the previous discourse:

> "Response particles like *yes* and *no* are anaphoric elements that pick up propositional discourse referents that are introduced by preceding sentences" (Krifka, 2013, p. 18).

Namely, according to Krifka, in the example above, *yes* and *no* are anaphoric to *John's arrival* – the discourse referent – negating or affirming its occurrence. In his view, therefore, response particles resemble pronouns when they pick up a

referent in the previous discourse.

On the other hand, Holmberg (2016) proposes that response particles are actually sentences where the affirmed, or negated, part is elliptical, i.e., present in the abstract representation but elided and not pronounced.

> "Answers to yes–no questions, even when they consist of just one word, are derived by ellipsis from full sentential expressions" (Holmberg, 2016, p. 1).

For example, the answers in (1) are derived by ellipsis of the bracketed clause, as shown in the representation in (2). The unpronounced clause is essentially identical to the clause proposed by speaker A in the question.[8]

(2) Yes [~~John arrived~~]

In section 4, I will argue that the analysis of expressive usages shows that the ellipsis approach can explain the phenomena in question in a simpler way than the anaphoric one. However, some additional considerations will also lead to a revision of Holmberg's proposal, as it is not entirely adequate to fully capture the variety of data illustrated.

Expressive usages: the data

In this section, I provide a brief description of the relevant data in both Italian and English. Subsequently, in section 4, I will address some generalizations intended to accommodate these observations.

Italian expressive particles: *Sì* and *no* in Italian, as their counterparts in English, are affirmative and negative particles used to answer polar questions:[9]

(3) Speaker A: È partito Gianni?
Did Gianni leave?
(4) Speaker B: Sì (, è partito)
Yes (he left)
(5) Speaker B: No (, non è partito)
No (he did not leave)

Yes and *no* are also used to confirm or deny a proposition *p* introduced by the interlocutor:

(6) Speaker A: Gianni è partito
Gianni left
(7) Speaker B: Sì (, è vero)
Yes (it is true)
(8) Speaker B: No (, non è vero)
No (it is not true)

Languages, however, can use affirmative and negative particles also to express emotional reactions to contextual stimuli, as I am going to investigate in this work.

Note that expressive language is usually not grammaticalized, meaning that traditional grammars and dictionaries often don't dedicate much space to describing the features of linguistic expressions used to convey emotions. Also, the categories used to label these expressions, such as *interjection* or *adverb*, often fail to effectively distinguish them from other categories. Additionally, due to the lack of an official standardization, judgments can often vary among speakers and be heavily influenced by regional and dialectal factors. The data below, however, are generally uncontroversial among Italian speakers, just as their counterparts are among English speakers – although some expressions might be used less frequently by certain speakers compared to others. Another key point is that this is definitely not the only way to express emotional meaning, as both Italian and English have other verbal and non-verbal means to achieve the same effect. Finally, this list of expressive usages is certainly not exhaustive; there could be many other instances, especially when considering regional and dialectal variants.

Consider the following examples, where Speaker A provides the context in the first line and Speaker B answers with the second line:

(9) Speaker A: Gianni ha perso il treno
Gianni missed the train
Speaker B: oh no! **regret**
*Speaker B is sorry Gianni missed the train/ *he didn't miss the train*

Speaker B's response does not contradict Speaker A's assertion, in that *oh no* does *not* mean that Speaker B believes that Gianni did not miss the train, but rather it conveys an emotional value. Through this reply, in fact, Speaker B expresses his/her feelings about the previous statement, in this case, regret. Note that in this example, a primary interjection appears – *oh* – preceding the negative particle; see the next section for a brief discussion.[10]

Consider now the following case:

(10) Speakers A: Gianni ha vinto la gara
Gianni won the race
Speaker B: Nooo! (*no* with long vowel) **surprise**
*Speaker did not expect him to win the race/ *he didn't win*

In this example, Speaker B's reply shows her surprise at the statement that Gianni won the race. What is implied here is that Speaker B did not expect this outcome and saw the possibility of Gianni winning the race as quite unlikely. Once again, Speaker B's reply does *not* mean that Speaker A's statement is false. As will be better discussed in the next section, there are several cues indicating that the reply should not be interpreted as a disconfirmation of Speaker A's assertion. In this case, the vowel in *no* is very long and there are characteristic manual and non-manual gestures accompanying the negative particle, as we will discuss in the next section.

Let's look now at sentences expressing disapproval:

(11) Speaker A: Gianni è arrivato tardi
Gianni was late
Speaker B: No no (, così non va bene) **disapproval**
no no (, that's not good)
*Speaker B disapproves of Gianni's arriving late/*it is not true that…*

(12) Speaker A: Gianni è arrivato tardi
Gianni was late
Speaker B: E no! (Di nuovo?) **strong disapproval**
and no (again?)
*Speaker is indignant/*it is not true that…*

These sentences express varying degrees of disapproval. The stronger the disapproval, the more emphatic the pronunciation and gestures (head shake). Furthermore, we can see two additional means for marking this emotional value, i.e., repetition of the negative particle, in ex. (11), and the presence of the coordinating particle *e* (and) in example (12). Even in this case, Speaker B's reply does not negate Speaker A's affirmation but conveys instead an emotional value.

Let's analyze now some expressive usages of the affirmative particle. First,

consider that the use of negative particles appears to be more common and widespread compared to affirmative ones. This may be because there is a possible link between negative emotions and negative particles, as will be argued in section 4, and negative feelings are typically expressed in a more marked and emphatic way:

(13) Speaker A: Ho deciso di (non) partire
I decided (not) to leave
Speaker B: Ma sì! (but yes) **approval**
*Speaker approves / *it is true that you decided (not) to leave*

In this situation, Speaker A is conveying her decision to do or not do something. Speaker B's answer does not mean that it is true that Speaker A decided to leave, but rather, it indicates approval, meaning that Speaker B approves of Speaker A's decision. In this case, *sì* is preceded by the adversative particle *ma* (but), although its presence is not mandatory for all speakers, and there are characteristic intonation and gestures, as in the negative cases illustrated above.

Let's consider now an example of disbelief:[11]

(14) Speaker A: Gianni ha comprato una Lamborghini
Gianni bought a Lamborghini
Speaker B: Səə (*yes, V lower, central, nasalized, long*)
disbelief
*Speaker B doesn't believe it/ *It is true that …*

Again, this answer doesn't mean that Speaker B affirms Gianni bought a Lamborghini; instead, it clearly shows the speaker's strong disbelief. Notably, besides characteristic intonation and gestures, the lexical item has slightly changed. The vowel, in fact, is quite different from that of the standard particle and is used exclusively to express this specific nuance. I will suggest that this change in phonological realization is significant in signaling the particular value to be assigned to the affirmative particle in this case.

English expressive particles: In this section, I present some comparable data from American English regarding surprise, regret, and disbelief. The data reported here have been checked both with native speakers and on the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA).[12]

Consider the following dialogue, similar to that discussed in the previous

section for Italian:

(15) Speaker A: John missed the train
Speaker B: Oh no! **regret**
*Speaker B is sorry John missed the train/ *he didn't miss the train.*

As in Italian, this expression of regret features the negative particle preceded by the primary interjection *oh*. Like in Italian, it might be possible to omit the interjection while keeping the same expressive value, but *no* cannot be omitted. Characteristic intonation and gestures accompany this locution. There are several examples of this expressive use of the negative particle in the spoken corpus of COCA. Consider, for instance, the following one, where actress Meryl Streep is answering an interviewer on CBS in 2012:

(16) Meryl Streep: When they called my name I had this feeling
I could hear half of
America going: **Oh no.** Come on. Why her? Again?

Meryl Streep is commenting on the fact that she has won another award for her acting and, somewhat self-deprecatingly, is attributing a feeling of regret to the people. The negative particle does not negate anything that occurred in the preceding context, as in the case of the preceding example (15).

Consider now the expression of surprise:

(17) Speaker A: John won the competition
Speaker B: No way! **surprise**
*Speaker did not expect him to win the competition/ *he didn't win.*

In this case, *no way* does not mean the speaker believes he did not win, but rather that he is genuinely surprised to learn that it happened. In order to get this interpretation, this negative expression must be accompanied by a specific intonation, such as, for example, both the vowels "o" and the diphthong in *way* being long, along with characteristic gestures. Furthermore, even if in this case the response is a locution, it still resembles the Italian case in (10), in that it is a negative expression, and, as I will discuss in section 4, the gesture accompanying it seems very similar, at least based on this initial analysis.

In the COCA corpus of spoken language, there are several instances that can be interpreted this way. For example, in the following dialogue from a 2013 episode of the TV show "Today Show," Mel-B – one of the Spice Girls – comments with actress Natalie Morales, about an episode where President Bill Clinton impersonated Bono:

(18) Natalie Morales: He did his impersonation of Bono.
Mel-B: **No way**!
Natalie Morales: Pretty good too!

Mel-B's comment doesn't mean she thinks the story is false, but that she's very surprised it happened.

Consider now the following expression of disbelief:

(19) Speaker A: John bought a Lamborghini
Speaker B: Yeah yeah **disbelief**
*Speaker B doesn't believe it/ *It is true that …*

This case parallels the one given for Italian in example (14). Speaker B is not claiming that it is true that John bought a Lamborghini; rather, he is expressing disbelief. Note that in this situation, my informants say that the affirmative particle *yeah* cannot be replaced with *yes* because *yes* would not carry the same emotional nuance. It's also observable that the particle is repeated, which is common in these expressive uses, and it must be delivered with characteristic intonation and gesture. Interestingly, even in the Italian case, as mentioned earlier, the lexical item itself differs from the other cases.

In the COCA spoken corpus, it is possible to find some occurrences which can be interpreted in the same way. Consider, for instance, the following example (The Daily Bell, 2012):

(20) Oh yeah, right: we attacked ourselves. **Yeah yeah**, sure....
get a life, bub.

The speaker is saying that he does not believe Americans attacked themselves, not that it is true that Americans did. Also, note that in the first part of the sentence, the locution *Oh yeah* carries the same meaning.

Concluding this brief section on English, it appears that Italian and English are quite similar. In English, the distribution of affirmative and negative particles, in

fact, mirrors the Italian pattern: negative particles express surprise and regret, while positive ones indicate disbelief; the expression of regret is often preceded by the primary interjection *oh;* the expressive usage is marked in both languages by special intonation and gestures. Finally, the disbelief affirmative particle is realized differently compared to the non-expressive one: in English, there is a specific lexical item, while in Italian, a phonetically modified version of the normal one is used. In the next section, I will propose that these similarities are not due to casual coincidence but stem from the same underlying representation of the utterances.

Towards an explanation

In this section, I will present some generalizations from comparing the Italian and English cases and argue in favor of a theoretical perspective that supports the theory proposed by Holmberg (2016), i.e., the ellipsis analysis of affirmative and negative particles.

Let me clarify, however, that what I am discussing here is only preliminary work; my observations about the phonetic/phonological realization and the gestural component in these cases are very sketchy and reflect my initial impressions of the data. In future research, a detailed experimental plan will be developed, involving interviews with a substantial number of informants. The realizations of these particles will be recorded, and the phonological properties can be analyzed using specialized software like Praat, while the gestural component will be annotated using ELAN.[13] I believe that, in any case, even if the considerations proposed here are not rigorously checked, they might be useful to understand what could be relevant for future work.

Similarities between Italian in English

As already noted, all the particles illustrated in the previous section share the common trait of not assigning an affirmative or negative value to the proposition *p;* instead, they express an emotional reaction from the speaker to a statement made by the interlocutor. In other words, in these cases, the particles communicate the speaker's *emotional respons*e to a proposition *p* rather than an assessment of the truth or falsity of *p*'s content. The emotions conveyed include regret, surprise, various levels of disapproval, approval, and disbelief.

The key questions a linguist must answer regarding these phenomena are: How do we know that the replies shown in section 3 express an emotional reaction by Speaker B and not disagreement – in the case of negative particles – or agreement – in the case of positive particles – with Speaker A's assertions? Which theoretical model is more promising for explaining these phenomena? I will now

examine the different cases one by one, building on the observations from the previous section.

Multimodality of language

Regarding the first question, several cues contribute to suggesting that the interpretation must be an emotional one. Let's consider the regret cases in Italian and English. As already pointed out in section 3, in both languages, the negative particle comes after the interjection *oh*. However, its presence is not mandatory, and the negative particle can still express the same emotional meaning without it. Therefore, we cannot rely on this feature alone to distinguish between a normal case and an emotional one.

A more reliable cue seems to be the phonological realization of *no*, in particular its intonation: in an expressive context, it shows a long vowel with a falling pitch. Normally, when Speaker B wants to indicate that Speaker A's assertion is false, these features do not occur, neither in Italian nor in English.

There is a third important category of properties related to expressive language, namely gestures.[14] Gestures accompany all our language production to varying degrees: some people tend to use more gestures, while others use fewer. However, as seen in previous research, emotional contexts often trigger gestural behavior, with people tending to gesture more when their utterance is linked to an emotional state.[15]

The cases considered here all involve the expression of an emotion, and indeed in all of them, it is possible to observe characteristic gestures. In the case of regrets, a particularly common gesture in both languages appears to be a slight toss of the head, aligned with *no*.

Let’s now consider the expression of surprise. In Italian, the vowel of *nooo* is extra-long and accompanied by an egressive aspiration. In English, in this case, we observe a special locution, realized with distinctive phonetic features, such as a long realization of the diphthong in the word *way*. Therefore, it appears that in both languages, vowel length is significant, even though, in the case of English, disbelief is conveyed through a phrase rather than a single particle. Furthermore, in both languages, the typical gestures marking surprise appear – see Giorgi & Dal Farra (2019), Petrocchi (2022), and Giorgi & Petrocchi (2024) – such as the non-manual gestures ‘raised eyebrows’ and ‘head forward’.

Disapproval was not assessed in English because it seems to have many possible realizations. In Italian, the negative particle *no* is marked either by repetition or by the presence of the conjunction *e* (and) preceding it.[16] The phonological realization is quite emphatic and often accompanied by a head shake.

In contrast, in the approval case, shown in example (13), the positive particle *sì* is (not obligatorily) preceded by *ma* (but) and is associated with an emphatic pronunciation of the affirmative particle and by a head nod to mark agreement.

Finally, disbelief is marked by a positive particle in both languages, even if, as remarked above, in both cases, it has undergone some phonological changes. As far as gestures are concerned, in this case the affirmative particle is often accompanied in both languages by a head nod.

An important theoretical question is whether the combination of phonetic/phonological realization and gestural cues can effectively differentiate between the 'normal' reading and the emotional one. In other words, how do we immediately know that Speaker B expresses regret, surprise, etc.? In fact, no one would mistake, for instance, the regret answer *oh no!* in Italian and English for an assertion about the falseness of *p*.

As mentioned earlier, the syntactic form of the answer, the distinctive intonation, and gestures can all help distinguish between common and expressive uses. It may seem like a lot, but some caution is needed because none of these alone might be enough. Let's look at each one in turn.

Even if, in some cases, unlike in non-emotional contexts, the particle can be preceded by an interjection or a conjunction, this is not always mandatory, as noted earlier; therefore, the syntactic form of the answer is not a definitive cue. Additionally, regarding gestures, as I mentioned before, their amount varies greatly from speaker to speaker, and we can easily imagine the dialogues in section 3 succeeding when conducted over the phone, where Speaker A cannot see Speaker B – even though there might be some challenges at times. Thus, gestures alone cannot be relied on as disambiguating cues. Finally, various studies on the relationship between phonetic and phonological cues and emotions have shown that the predictive power of these cues is less than 100%. For example, pitch accent – even when combined with other features like vowel length – does not serve as a completely reliable indicator of the specific emotion involved.

However, the problem is easily solved if we consider all these properties – i.e., syntax, phonetic/phonological realization, and gestures – simultaneously. One or the other *must* be present; otherwise, the default interpretation would be non-emotional. In some cases, they can all occur together, while in others, only one or two can be realized. This consideration strongly supports the idea that language is *multimodal* – as argued by Giorgi & Petrocchi (2025) and the authors mentioned there – in that it integrates both vocal and visual channels, using phonology, manual and non-manual gestures, and body positioning in space.

Towards a syntactic representation

Let's now explore a possible theoretical explanation for the observations in Section 3. How can the emotional value of the structures discussed here be represented in syntax? As mentioned earlier, the distribution of positive and negative particles is the same in both languages. For now, I'll set aside disbelief cases and focus on other emotions. The correspondence between Italian and English does not seem coincidental; it feels natural that regret, surprise, and disapproval are expressed using negative particles. However, as noted earlier, the negative particle does not negate the propositional content *p*; therefore, there must be some other element that carries a negative value in the utterances.

As argued in Giorgi (2018, 2023), regret and disapproval involve a negative evaluation by the speaker on the propositional content. Capitalizing on the theoretical proposal by Cinque (1999), I propose that the syntactic representation of these structures includes an evaluative projection, which, according to Cinque is the one hosting adverbs such as *fortunatamente* (luckily) in sentences as the following:[17]

(21) Fortunatamente Maria è partita
Luckily Maria left

I propose, therefore, that the following representation of the examples expressing regret is as follows:

(22) …. [No [$_{\text{EVAL-P}}$ EVAL° …. [~~John missed the train~~]

Following Cinque (1999), EVAL° functions as an evaluative head that scopes over the elided propositional content. The negative item preceding it assigns a negative value to EVAL, which consequently expresses a negative emotion. The phonetic or phonological form of *no* indicates the specific emotion involved—such as regret in this case or disapproval in Italian examples (11)-(12). In example (12), which shows approval, the evaluation is positive because the evaluative projection is within the scope of *sì* (yes).

In the case of surprise, as argued in Giorgi and Dal Farra (2019) and Giorgi and Petrocchi (2024), the expectations of Speaker B are *not* met. That is, in the example given above, both in Italian and English, Speaker B did *not* expect John to win the competition. I will not go into detail here; the representation proposed by the authors is very similar to the one given in (22), where the head hosting the (silent) expectations of the speaker is empty and receives a negative value, being in

the scope of a negative particle.

Finally, in the case of disbelief, the fact that the lexical item, though affirmative, is lexically different from the normal affirmative particle shows that it has a specific value. I propose that this is a *dubitative* particle, having scope on the proposition. The representation is therefore the following (details omitted):

(23) …. [$_{\text{DUB-P}}$ yeah …. [~~John bought a Lamborghini~~]

Yeah and *səə* convey the dubitative value, represented here as a dedicated syntactic projection.

This representation is an oversimplification of more complex phenomena, but it serves the purpose of conveying the idea that in all these cases, there is an extra layer on the left of the proposition itself, which plays a crucial role in the expressive interpretation of the structure. This extra layer is *not* part of *p* itself but is added freely by speaker B as a reaction to the context.

A couple of further considerations

In section 4, I presented an account based on ellipsis, i.e., on Holmberg's (2016) proposal. In this section, I will briefly examine the possible alternative, i.e., Krifka's (2013) account. I will not delve into the technical details related to the exact implementation of Holmberg's and Krifka's ideas but will instead focus on the plausibility of their theories concerning the empirical domain under analysis here.

It seems to me that when applied to the domain of expressive negative and positive particles, Krifka's (2013) account faces some challenges. Recall that Krifka (2013) suggests that these particles are anaphoric elements referring to something already present in the discourse. In question-answering contexts or when responding positively or negatively to an assertion, the referent for the anaphor may indeed be considered *given* in the context, that is, already mentioned. However, in the case of expressive meanings, the evaluation or expectations are not *given* because they are part of Speaker B's idiosyncratic experience, and for this reason, they are directly supplied by her and not retrievable from the preceding discourse.

Finally, let me say a few words on a topic that is especially important in relation to expressive language, namely, self-talk.[18] Note that although expressive negative and positive particles are most common in dialogues, it is not unusual for a speaker to use these particles even when there is no audience, as a form of self-talk. For example, if I spill my coffee on my clean shirt, I might say *oh no!* – an

expression of regret – just to myself, as a way of commenting on what just happened. Similarly, if I realize I have won the lottery, I might be surprised and say *nooo* in Italian, or *no way!* in English. If I see that my flight has been canceled, I might express strong disapproval or anger by uttering *e no!* (and no) and so on. Situations like these are quite common and part of our everyday experience. Neither Krifka's (2013) proposal nor Holmberg's (2016) can immediately account for this fact, in the sense that they both should allow for a more abstract notion of context, including the inner experience of the speaker. It is not clear to me how Krifka's proposal could be extended to account for this issue– given that even the emotional representation might be problematic, as pointed out above – whereas on the basis of Holmberg's approach, the following representation can be provided:

(1)…. [No [$_{\text{EVAL-P}}$ EVAL° …. [~~I SPILLED MY COFFEE~~]

I suggest that to represent *oh no!* in self-talk, we need to hypothesize an abstract structure indicating the cause of the feeling – written in capital letters to distinguish it from the actual language – in the scope of an evaluative node. *I SPILLED MY COFFEE* remains unpronounced, reflecting the speaker's experience that triggers her reaction. However, the structure retains the same characteristics as the one proposed for lexical ones, so it seems that even here, the proposal resorting to ellipsis offers an advantage.

Conclusion

In this article, I addressed an issue related to expressive language and demonstrated that in this case, it is possible to account for it without resorting to a separate module identified as *pragmatics.* Instead, pragmatic considerations can be inte*grated* into the system—specifically, the sensorimotor apparatus that generates the phonological form along with gestures, and the conceptual one – yielding the *expressive* interpretation. This system takes as input the syntactic representation, which includes an extra layer encoding the relevant information.

As a future line of research, as pointed out above, the material presented here must be checked in a more rigorous way, setting up the appropriate experiments for assessing the phonological and the gestural realization, both in Italian and English.

Notes

[1] *Pragmatics* usually identifies that branch of linguistics which studies how the context interacts with grammar, in particular how implied meanings and intentions can be understood, beyond the literal interpretation of the utterance.

[2] On the expression of surprise and disapproval, see Giorgi (2018), Giorgi & Dal Farra (2019), Petrocchi (2022) and Giorgi & Petrocchi (2024, 2025). As emerged from these studies, besides being characterized by peculiar intonation and gesture, expressive language also features *alignment*, namely, syntactic, prosodical and gestural cues "go together", in that they are simultaneously activated at the beginning of the sentence.

[3] Experimental studies on Spanish (Furlan 2019), Neapolitan – a Southern Italian dialect – (Marchetiello 2022), and Italian (Giorgi & Dal Farra 2019) show that there is a high degree of uniformity in how surprise and disapproval are expressed, even when compared to Far-Eastern languages like Vietnamese, Japanese and Korean, as studied in Petrocchi (2022) and Giorgi & Petrocchi (2024).

[4] Scholars often label affirmative and negative particles as *response particles*. I prefer to avoid this term since these lexical items have many uses, like the ones I am about to discuss here, which do not involve answering questions.

[5] Poletto & Zanuttini (2013) examined the distribution of Italian *sì* and *no* as well, focusing specifically on the structures *sì che* (literally: yes that) and *no che* (literally: no that). This work will not address this particular context.

[6] For a discussion of the diachronic evolution of the English system in Old English see Wallage & van der Wurf (2013). For an analysis of affirmative lexical items in Early Modern English, see Culpeper (2023). I will not pursue diachronic issues further here.

[7] For the sake of simplicity, I am not considering here other possible answers, included the one using the auxiliary:

(i) Yes, he did / no, he didn't

This case might be relevant in a comparison between Italian and English, especially regarding the syntactic representation associated with these structures. However, I will leave this and related issues for future study.

[8] Note that in this case *yes* is a lexical realization for *aff(irmative)*, as *no* is a lexical realization for *neg(ative)*. Hence, a more abstract representation of *yes* and *no* according to the ellipsis proposal would be the following:

(i) AFF [~~John arrived~~]

(ii)NEG [~~John arrived~~]

[9] In Italian the same items are used to answer negative questions, even if in that case the answer is ambiguous with respect to these phenomena, therefore, Italian in considered a two-form language. For a discussion of answers to negative questions we refer the reader to the literature mentioned in section 2.

[10] For a recent discussion of interjections in Italian See Munaro (2019).

[11] Another possible way of expressing disbelief, given the above context, is the following: (i) Sì, ciao! (*yes, bye!*), (ii) Sì, ti saluto! (*yes, I say bye to you!*).

These expressions are widespread in Central and Southern Italy as ways for expressing disbelief, even if they are not always shared by Northern Italian speakers.

[12] The COCA – https://www.english-corpora.org/coca – is a corpus that includes over one billion words collected from 1990 to 2016. It is especially useful for this research because it covers various genres, including a large corpus of spoken language. This makes it very helpful in identifying possible occurrences of affirmative and negative particles in expressive language. I am also very grateful to my informants for their time and patience. This part of the research should be considered a preliminary step toward a more thorough and rigorous data collection. However, it is important to compare Italian and American English even on the basis of a small set of data, because there are some striking similarities between the two languages, which certainly deserve further attention and may reveal more general properties of human language. Further research is indeed necessary, both for data collection and their theoretical interpretation. Here the data collected in COCA have not been studied quantitatively.

[13] Praat is an open-source software widely used for speech analysis and synthesis in phonetics. See also the presentation by its author in Boersma (2001). ELAN is an open-source computer software to manually or semi-automatically annotate audio and video recording, most used for annotating gestures. See Sloetjes (2017).

[14] There is a large literature on gesture accompanying language. The gestures considered here are called non-lexical co-speech gestures, namely gestures which do not add a lexical contribution, but accompany the linguistic production as a sort of 'comment', see Kendon (2004). For a theoretical perspective see Schlenker (2020). For more details on the topic, see Cienki (2004) and Gutzmann & Turgay (2025).

[15] Concerning the link between emotion and gestuality, Giorgi and Petrocchi (in prep.) show that the amount of gestures produced in an utterance conveying emotional content is higher than in other utterances, in a statistically significant way. Note however, that gestures, besides varying quantitatively from person to person, can also vary, even if to a lesser degree, qualitatively. Still, Giorgi and Petrocchi (in prep.) show that there is a fair amount of uniformity among people.

[16] In this work, I am not going to consider the syntactic representation of conjunctions, such as *ma* (but) and *e* (and) when preceding the particle. For an

analysis of similar cases in surprise and disapproval expressions, see Giorgi (2018, 2023).

[17] For a discussion of the derivation of the other positions where adverbs can appear, I refer the reader to the analyses provided in Cinque (1999).

[18] On self-talk see Holmberg (2010) and Wiltschko (2025).

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Conflict of Interests
The author declares no ethical issues or conflict of interests in this research.

Ethical standards
The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

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ՀԱՍՏԱՏԱԿԱՆ ԵՎ ԺԽՏԱԿԱՆ ՄԱՍՆԻԿՆԵՐԻ ԱՐՏԱՀԱՅՏՉԱԿԱՆ ԳՈՐԾԱԾՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԸ ԻՏԱԼԵՐԵՆՈՒՄ ԵՎ ԱՆԳԼԵՐԵՆՈՒՄ

Ալեսանդրա Ջիորջի

Հոդվածում ուսումնասիրվում են հաստատական և ժխտական մասնիկների առանձնահատկությունները՝ ափսոսանքի, զարմանքի, չհավանության և այլ զգացմունքների արտահայտման տեսանկյունից: Քննարկվող դեպքերում *այո*-ն և *ոչ*-ը չեն հաստատում կամ ժխտում նախորդ ասույթի ճշմարտացիությունը, այլ փոխանցում են խոսողի էմոցիոնալ արձագանքը որոշակի բովանդակությանը: Այսպիսով՝ դրանք պատկանում են արտահայտչական լեզվի շարքին, որն իր մեջ կրում է զգացմունքային նշանակություններ: Ներկայացվող հոդվածում նաև համեմատվում են իտալերենը և անգլերենը և նշվում է, որ խոսողի արձագանքը արտահայտելու համար երկու լեզուներում էլ գործածվում են նմանատիպ կառուցվածքներ, ընդ որում դրանց արտահայտչականությունն առավել ազդեցիկ է դառնում շնորհիվ հնչերանգային ու ժեստային միջոցների: Հետազոտությունը նաև ցույց է տալիս, որ գործաբա-

նական դիտարկումները հնարավոր է ներառել լեզվի մոդելի մեջ՝ համապատասխան արտահայտչական մեկնաբանություններ ստեղծելու նպատակով: Կարևորվում է նաև լեզվի դիտարկումը որպես բազմաեղանակային համակարգ:

Բանալի բառեր՝ *շարահյուսություն, գործաբանություն, արտահայտչական լեզու, համեմատական լեզվաբանություն, բազմեղանակայնություն:*