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Prosody and the Pragmatic Functions of Vocative in Spoken Italian Corpora

Vocatives are bare nouns that address the interlocutor. They are out of the argument structure but are recently considered syntactically integrated into the utterance. Vocatives function to *call on* or *strengthen social relationships*. The prosody of recalls (*Vocative chants*) has been studied in the Autosegmental model. They can appear isolated by prosody when starting the utterance or more integrated when at its end.

Assuming the Language into Act Theory and a corpus-based approach, the paper argues that Vocatives are Units of information and that their prosodic performance is predictive of their functions: a) isolated in a prosodic unit of a root type, they are speech acts (*Distal/Proximal calls, Greetings, Regret, Protest*) with differential prosody; b) focused in the first position of a Pattern of illocutionary units, serve at *sharing the attention* with the addressee; c) when out of focus, both in first and final position, are dialogical units of Allocutive *strengthening the empathic relation* and are not referential. Semantic correlations support their functional distinction.

Keywords: vocative, prosody, information functions, Allocutive, spoken Italian.

1. Introduction

What is commonly understood with the term vocative is not as simple as it might appear. However, there is general agreement that expressions that address the interlocutor – reader or addressee – used in isolation, without an apparent syntactic link with the rest of the sentence, are identified as vocatives.

However, as soon as the limits of this superficial description are overcome, if we try to identify the semantic domain of these expressions, their morphological and syntactic features, the levels and means of their isolation, and their interpretations and explanations diverge.

The literature on the subject has gradually expanded over the years, starting with Zwicky (1974). It has allowed the inclusion, although marginal, of the institute in the most recent major grammars, such as Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik (1985), Renzi, Salvi & Cardinaletti (1995), Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad & Finegan (1999), Abeillé, Goddard (2021) or in targeted research. However, the vocative is still considered in the literature as a puzzle (Coene, D’Hulst & Tasmowski, 2019). Sonnenhauser, Noel (2013), which can still be considered the most complete treatment of the subject, highlights the “intricate nature” of the vocative and the problems it poses for current linguistic analyses. The volume collects studies of many specialists in language typology, morphology, and syntax, and the cross-

linguistic variation of forms of address is observed. Empirically oriented papers focus on data from different languages, although most papers bring the vocative noun phrases back to formal syntactic frames. The universal prosodic marking of the ‘vocative chant’ is also considered (Göksel, Pöchtrager, 2013). Still, we want to report the editors’ reflections.

The main problem in discussing the ‘vocative’ is the separation of levels – form vs. function and the subsystems of prosody, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics – as well as the differing assumptions about the structures constituting the object of observation – morphology only, or syntactic structures such as NPs, clauses, sentences or utterances and the contribution of prosodic signaling. There is no consensus on their structure and no consensus on how to encompass vocative structure within a cross-linguistic approach (Sonnenhauser, Noel, 2013:17)

The conclusion is that the complexity of the vocative depends on its nature, which lies *between language system and performance*.

We can summarize some crosslinguistic features of the vocative. The lexical selection is limited to 2nd person pronouns (both direct and reverential), bare nouns comprehending proper names, appellatives, titles, and role nouns, possibly characterized by a morphologic case as in Latin, but also nominal phrases integrated by restrictive relative clauses developing forms of address.

The syntactic isolation of the vocative can be explained in different ways, but it is commonly assumed out of the argument structure of the predicate (Moro, 2003; D’Alessandro, van Oostendorp, 2016). It is marked by specific distribution, mainly at the beginning or end of the sentence in written texts or at the beginning or end of the utterance in speech. Moreover, the isolation is encapsulated by space and commas in writing or by silence and prosodic boundaries in speech.

As for the function of the vocative, there are significant interpretative differences; since Zwicky (1974), it has been observed that although the functions can be many, two main ones can be identified: the *call*, like a real appeal for getting the attention of the addressee, and the *address* to reactivate the addressee’s attention (Zwicky, 1974; Quirk et al., 1985; Mazzoleni, 1995; Corr, 2022). It’s worth noticing that there is a shared pre-theoretical assumption that vocatives “encode” a second person since every alleged vocative expression can be retraced to a “you,” which might underly its meaning (Bernstein, forthcoming; Micali, 2022). Accordingly, all vocatives are dealt with as deictic devices, as second-person pronouns are.

This set of features can be enriched by findings emerging from corpus-driven data on the American-English corpus reported by Biber et al. (1999), highlighting the importance of vocatives in defining and maintaining social cohesion that appears to be most significant in spoken conversations. Two distributions of vocatives result from the data:

- isolated or initial at the beginning of the utterance, primarily associated with a function of *Call*;
- final at the end of the utterance, primarily associated with *stressing the social cohesion* (with the highest frequency).

However, the association between distribution and functions is not predictive.

The prosodic performance of vocatives started to be faced only in the 2000s. Prosodic contours that are attributed to the recall of the addressee have been studied mainly within the framework of Auto-segmental theory and are reported under the name of *vocative chants* and *chanter calls* (Ladd, 2008; Frota, Prieto, 2015; Borràs-Comes, Sichel-Bazin & Prieto, 2015). It is worth noticing that the contribution of Göksel, Pöchtrager (2013), still a point of reference, proposed a difference between *calls* and what they consider *true vocatives* prosodically described.

Recently, in the chapter on Vocative in Corr (2022), remarks were also made on the different prosodic realizations of vocatives. At the beginning of the utterance, they correspond to a chunk marked by a prosodic boundary. In contrast, at the end of the utterance, they are more integrated into the prosodic contour, typically characterized by the falling movement of post-focal units.

D'Alessandro, van Oostendorp (2016), from a phonological point of view, and Corr (2022), at the syntactic structure level, face the problem of integrating the pragmatic functions of vocative within the grammar, trying to overcome the fracture “between system and performance” complained by Sonnenhauser, Noel. However, a general problem arises when formal grammar, which in principle does not treat the pragmatic aspect of language, must consider speech acts and their embodied dimensions expressed by prosody, as is the case with vocatives¹.

The literature does not clearly state a systematic relation between the various functions of vocatives and their prosodic properties. For instance, the sharp distinction between the *call* and the *address* – highest frequency, as reported in the Longman Grammar – relies on distributional properties and is not accompanied by any prosodic description.

This paper aims to make explicit the correlation between the vocative's functions and their prosodic performance through corpus-based analysis.

In § 2 we will sketch the main concepts of the Language into Act Theory (L-ActT), the framework adopted in this paper, which emphasizes the relation between prosody and pragmatics in speech corpora. In § 3 and 4, we will consider the language contexts of our Italian data set in which vocatives bear illocutionary functions. In § 3 we will look at vocatives filling one isolated prosodic unit (Comment unit) performing one speech act. In § 4 we will introduce the notion of Illocutionary pattern, a structure in which the vocative appears as a *call* within the *functional calling* pattern as a focused prosodic unit in the first position. In § 5 we will consider vocatives that cannot constitute independent speech acts but develop an information function of support (Allocutive). Regardless of their distribution within the utterance, they strengthen the empathic relation with the addressee and are consistently de-focused. Finally, in § 6 we will propose that the differential pragmatic values expressed by prosody correlate with semantic restrictions shown by vocatives, banning the referential and deictic reading in the Allocutive function.

¹ Rizzi (1997) considers the performative at the highest level of the sentence structure and is at the origin of this approach.

2. *The L-AcT framework and the relevance of prosody*

The research investigates the identification and definition of the vocative within L-AcT, a framework allowing the corpus-based study of prosody (Cresti, 2000; Moneglia, Raso, 2014; Cresti, Moneglia, 2018). Vocatives are analyzed in the LABLITA corpus of spoken Italian (Tuscan variety) not as lexical or propositional items but as information units developing a pragmatic function, which is considered in correlation with their necessary prosodic performance.

L-AcT proposes an organic frame, according to which the affect and the inherent pragmatic goal of the speaker are considered at the origin of speech and performed through a prosodic pattern. In the Austinian tradition (Austin, 1962), L-AcT takes a speaker-oriented perspective. The speaker's affective and pragmatic behavior toward the addressee determines the illocutionary act (Cresti, 2020). Prosody manifests the illocutionary information and behaves as an embodied interface with the locutionary act that consists of semantics and morpho-syntactic constituents, which find their place within the prosodic pattern. Therefore, the analysis of prosodic cues is at the core of the model.

Prosodic boundaries segment the speech flow into information units (Chafe, 1994) shaped by perceptively relevant prosodic contours ('t Hart, Collier & Cohen, 1990). Information units are framed in a prosodic pattern that performs the utterance.

The Comment is the information unit that expresses the illocutionary force and is necessary and sufficient to constitute the utterance. The other information unit types (Topic, Appendix, Parenthesis, and various units dedicated to managing the interaction with the addressee) depend on the Comment and cannot be pragmatically interpreted in isolation. The locutionary act fills the information units, whose syntactic and semantic selection depends on their functional goal.

In this frame, vocatives are supposed to develop two information functions with differential prosodic performance:

- Comment specifies the illocutionary activity, typically performing a *call* and other speech act types. In this case, from a syntactic point of view, vocatives can be considered independent nominal utterances. Comment units are realized through dedicated prosodic *root* units ('t Hart et al., 1990) presenting formal variants correlating with different illocutions they convey (Cresti, 2020; Cresti, Moneglia, 2023).
- Allocutive, developing dialogical support of the utterance, works as an *address* to reactivate the addressee's attention and specifically express the social relationship with the speaker. In this case, the utterance must have already established its independent illocution in the Comment. From a syntactic point of view, vocatives are nominal phrases linked to the Comment at the information structure level. Allocutives are always realized through a post-focal flat or falling prosodic unit without significant variations (Raso, 2014; Raso, Leite, 2010; Raso, Ferrari, 2020).

In the following paragraphs, corpus-based evidence will demonstrate these assumptions in detail.

3. Illocutionary types enacted by Vocative expressions

Deriving from corpus observation, Biber et al. (1999) already claimed that vocatives could correlate with many pragmatic uses: *call*, *alert*, *invocation*, *challenge*, *offense*, *appreciation*, *congratulation*, *welcome*, and *greetings*².

Our research on the LABLITA corpus confirms Biber's assumptions. It has allowed us to find many cases of utterances that are nominal expressions, clearly set off from any compositional structure, used in isolation, and fulfilled by typical vocative items. They can enact illocutions of different classes, specifically the directive, expressive, and ritual classes, according to the L-Act taxonomy (Cresti, 2020). As foreseen, each illocutionary type is performed by a dedicated root unit.

The most common examples of illocutionary uses filled by vocatives concern different types of recall, but they also extend to other directive and expressive types. Let's see some examples and their f0 tracks³ regarding *Call* illocutionary types, which, according to our classification, are a subtype of the directive class. They are pragmatically oriented at *opening the communication channel to get the addressee's appearance or involvement* and can be distinguished between *distal* and *proximal* calls.

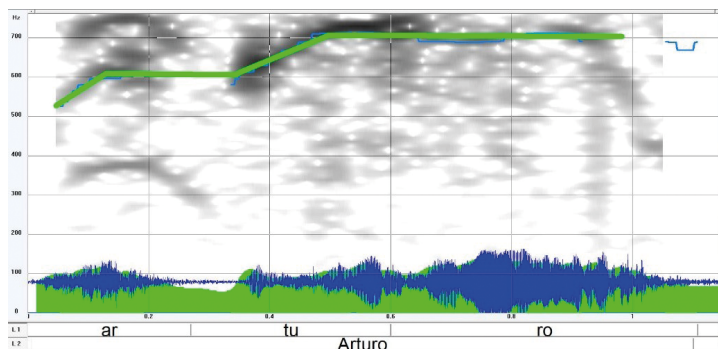
The *Distal call* regards an addressee not visible in the context that is requested to show up.

A child calls her dog, who ran away in a public garden.

*NIP: Arturo //COM

%ill: distal call [prvcv162-panc]

Figure 1



² See also Borràs-Comes et al. (2015).

³ Being derived from speech recorded in a natural environment, the f0 track may show errors (as in Fig. 3) or be partially not calculated. Here and below, the figures show the f0 track face to the first or second harmonic to verify the correctness of the contour, which is highlighted through its stylization. Layer 1 shows the alignment with syllables, and Layer 2 the segmentation into the prosodic units of the utterance, gathering the syllabic sequence. To the end of readability, the segmentation into prosodic units (if any) is traced onto the f0 track. F0 calculation and synthesis are achieved through Winpitch (Martin, 2011). The audio files of the full set of examples presented in the figures are available to the reader in .wav files from <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1zTM4UmS4mZSnZAAy6Ze8pt-1FB1cZyz3M?usp=sharing>.

A rising contour performs the unit to a high f0 level, followed by a prolonged hold on the last post-tonic vowel, characterized by high-intensity values.

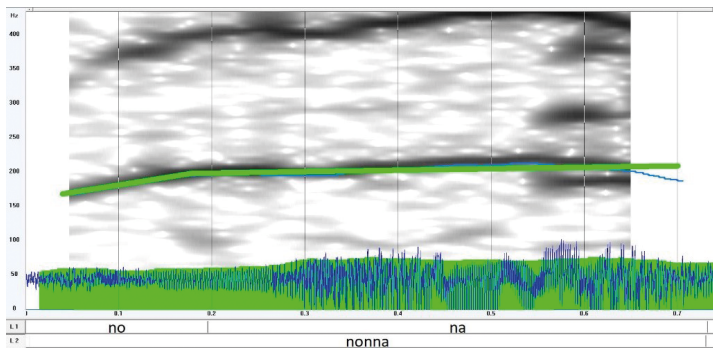
The *Proximal call* regards an addressee present in the near context but not involved in the exchange.

The child calls her grandmother, who was talking with another person.

*NIP: nonna // ^{COM}

%ill: proximal call (with an attitude of irritation) [prvcvl62-panc]

Figure 2



The *Proximal call* is performed by a rising contour similar to the *Distal call* but at a much lower f0 range, still marked by a lengthening on the last post-tonic vowel.

The alleged *Calls* are not limited to the previous ones but include the expressive and ritual acts presented below.

The *Protest* belongs to the expressive class, here characterized by the expression of a feeling of fear.

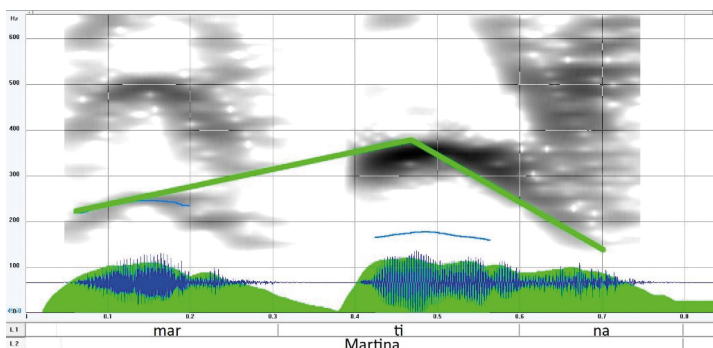
During a driving lesson, the novice risked a collision.

*MAX: Martina // ^{COM} ma che cazzo fai? ^{COM}

‘Martina! What the fuck are you doing?’

%ill: 1 protest (emotionally marked by fear); 2 refusal (emotionally marked by anger) [ifamdl10-guid]

Figure 3



The *Protest* is characterized by a rising-falling contour at a high f0 range and strong intensity. The necessary falling movement occurs on the tonic vowel.⁴

Regret also belongs to the expressive class, characterized by expressing the corresponding feeling.

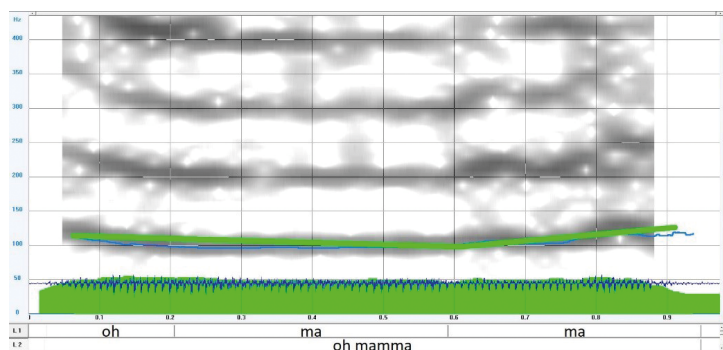
After a wrong Poker hand.

*MAX: oh mamma //^{COM}

‘oh mother’

%ill: regret [ifamcv14]

Figure 4



The *Regret* is performed by a platform contour at a low f0 range with a lengthening of the tonic syllable.

Greeting belongs to the ritual class, characterized by a friendly modality. When enacted as a parting greeting, it is preferably performed through a greeting formula and the addressee's name.

When going home after joint work.

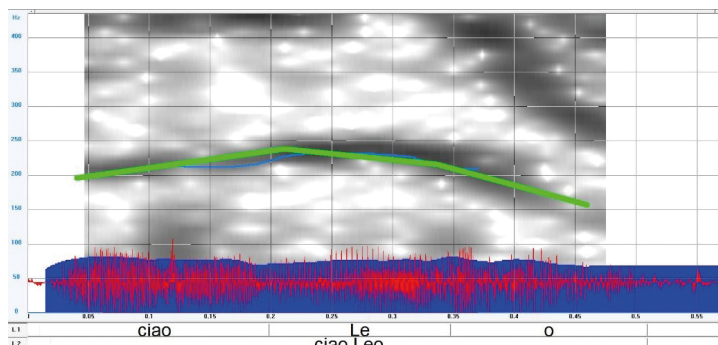
*OLV: cia' Leo //^{COM}

‘so long Leo’

%ill: greeting [prvcvl63-plum]

⁴ According to Ladd (1978), *Protest* or *Warning* is described as a “stepping down sequence of two-level tones.” Even if realized with a proper name, it is not necessarily associated with *calling* but “conveys the implication that an utterance is stereotyped or stylized” expressing a nuance of meaning. In L-AcT, *Protest* is considered a specific illocutionary act of the expressive class performed by the dedicated contour just described, which differs from those of *Calling*.

Figure 5



The *Greeting* is performed by a rising-falling contour at a mid-f₀ range with the falling movement on the vocative expression.

4. *Illocutionary patterns of Functional call*

Illocutionary patterns are utterances composed of a chain of at least two Comments, called Multiple Comments (CMM). In this case, the Comment unit does not stand alone. Illocutionary patterns are frequent in spontaneous speech and are conceived according to a *natural rhetoric model* of pragmatic units (*Reinforcement, List, Comparison, Alternative structures*, etc.). They are performed according to a prosodic and rhythmic pattern (Panunzi, Saccone, 2018).

Functional calling is a specific Illocutionary pattern composed of two CMMs: the first develops a directive *call* to share the attentional focus with the addressee, and the other is a kind of request whose force can vary.

The *Call* within this pattern is *proximal*. Still, the communicative channel is foreseen already open, and it is prosodically distinguished from *Proximal calls* in isolation. Let's look at examples of *Functional calling* in which the *Call* is followed by *Order* or *Reproach* illocutions. The f₀ track of the last example is in Fig. 6.

While dining.

*CLA: Giovanni /^{CMM} l'acqua // ^{CMM}

'Giovanni ! Water'

%ill: call + order [ifamcv17]

During a car driving lesson.

*MAR: babbo /^{CMM} falla finita di recitare // ^{CMM}

'Dad! Stop acting'

%ill: call + reproach [ifamd119]

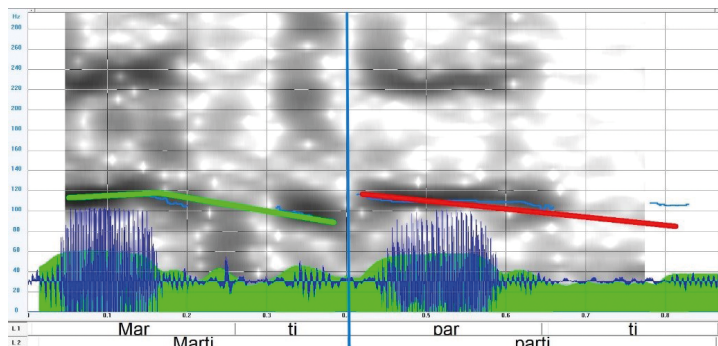
during a car driving lesson

*MAX: Marti /^{CMM} parti // ^{CMM}

'Marti! go'

%ill: call + instruction [ifamd119-234]

Figure 6



Both contours are characterized by a falling directive movement, where the *call* is shaped differently from the *Proximal call* in Fig. 2. The latter is performed in isolation and is rising. Below, the *Call* introduces an *Alert* illocution.

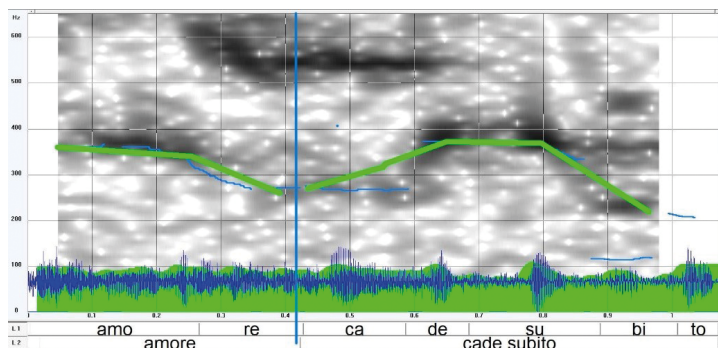
To a child playing with some breakable object.

*DAN: eh /^{PHA} amore /^{CMM} cade subito //^{CMM}

'hey, darling! it falls right away'

%ill: call + alert [ifamcv15]

Figure 7



Also, in this pattern, the first CMM of *Call* is shaped by a directive falling contour, while the second CMM, bearing a different directive illocutionary type, is performed by a rising-falling contour.⁵

It must be highlighted that vocative expressions within a *Functional call* can include second-person deictic pronouns. For instance, the deictic *Call* in the

⁵ All the vocatives developing a *Call* within illocutionary patterns are always at the beginning of the composed pattern. This distribution has been faced in generative frameworks, considering the vocative's connection with the major syntactic entity at the illocutionary level (D'Alessandro, van Oostendorp, 2016; Corr, 2022). According to L-Act, the vocative accomplishing a *Call* in a *Functional calling* pattern is structured within a pragmatic model composed of two illocutions. Therefore, the pattern structure cannot be headed by the illocutionary force conveyed through the vocative.

following examples introduces a directive illocution, respectively, a *Partial question* and an *Order*. It shows its typical falling movement in both cases, as in Fig. 8.

Among many friends leafing through an album of old photos

*ELA: e te /^{CMM} quanto tu c' a(vevi) ?^{CMM}

'and you! how old were you?'

%ill: call + partial question [ifamcv01]

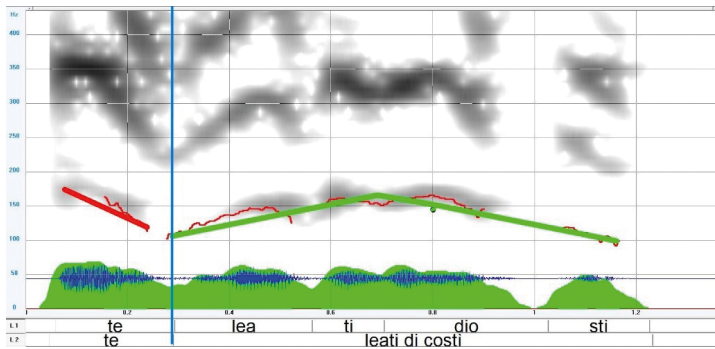
During a lively discussion at dinner

*MAX: te /^{CMM} le(v)ati di costì //^{CMM}

'you! get out of here!'

%ill: call + order [lab 05]

Figure 8



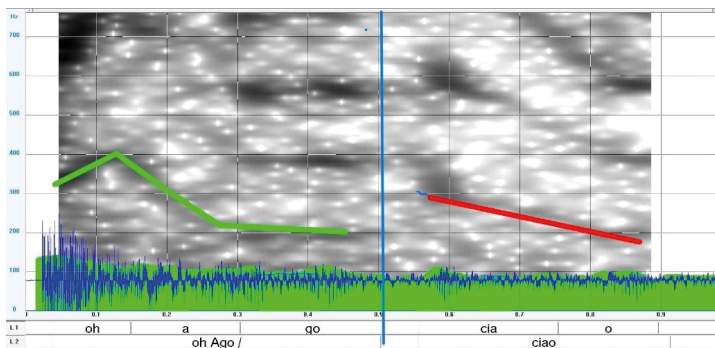
Also, greetings, preferably at the addressee's coming, are realized through an illocutionary pattern: the first CMM is still a *Call*, and the second is a proper greeting formula, both performed with a falling movement.

*SAB: oh Ago /^{CMM} ciao //^{CMM}

'oh Ago! Hi!'

%ill: call + greeting [ipubdl03]

Figure 9



We also found *Functional callings* that don't match the previous model since they are composed of a *Call* followed by a representative act. The latter is characterized by a disagreement attitude with the addressee instead of a directive illocution. Let's consider some examples. The f0 track of the last one is in Fig. 10.

*OTT: Assan /^{CMM} senti /^{CNT} no //^{CMM}

'Assan ! Look, no way'

%ill: call + assertion (disagreement attitude) [ipubcv01]

*OTT: < Mega > /^{CMM} non ci siamo capiti //^{CMM}

'Mega ! We did not understand each other'

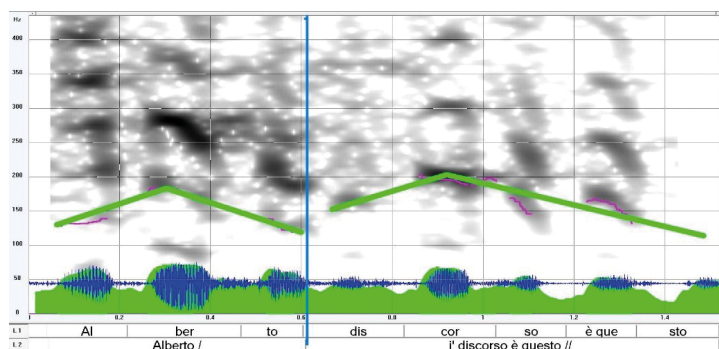
%ill: call + assertion (disagreement attitude) [ipubcv01-287]

*ABC: Alberto /^{CMM} i' discorso è questo //^{CMM}

'Alberto ! This is the point'

%ill: call + assertion (disagreement attitude) [ipubcv04]

Figure 10



When vocatives develop a Comment unit – both in isolation and within an illocutionary pattern – they are pragmatically interpretable. It may have theoretical relevance to note that, as assumed in the literature, the addressee is semantically included, and vocatives may encode a second-person pronoun. This assumption is supported by evidence that, specifically in *Functional calls*, the vocative expression can be replaced by a second-person pronoun, as seen in the example in Fig. 8.

However, it is worth noticing that the substitution will lead to odd utterances when applied to vocatives working as illocutionary acts in isolation. As we will see in the next paragraph, vocatives in the Allocutive function cannot be substituted by a deictic 'you'.

5. Allocutive

Within the L-AcT framework, various Dialogical information functions of prompting for attention (*Incipit*, *Expressive*, *Conative*, *Allocutive*) have been identified through corpus-based observation (Cresti, 2000; Frosali, 2008; Raso,

2014; Raso, Ferrari, 2020). However, only vocatives are specialized to implement the Allocutive function. The Allocutive identifies the addressee, seeking his attention, but its specific function is socially cohesive, and its end is establishing an empathic connection with him (Moneglia, Raso, 2014).

It is necessary to recall the functional distinction between an Allocutive and a Comment since the Allocutive cannot be pragmatically interpreted in isolation and functionally depends on the latter. Consequently, the distribution of the Allocutive with respect to the Comment is a fundamental feature for its identification together with its prosodic realization.

Italian corpus data show that most Allocutives are distributed after the Comment unit and are performed through a dedicated prosodic unit, which, however, is integrated into the declination line of the utterance. The prosodic contour can be described as a gently falling or flat unit with a weak intensity value. Its phonetic execution remains accurate, unlike, for example, that of the Comment Appendices (Cresti, 2021). This feature is necessary for the recognizability of the proper name or appellation of the addressee, which is required to carry out the function.

Let's consider some examples illustrating the final distribution, which appears to match the usage found to be the most frequent by Biber et al. (1999). In the following examples, the Allocutive is respectively filled by appellatives, family names, and proper names:

*LUC: lui disse /INT me la piglio io /COM+r nini //ALL-r
 'he said, I'm the one taking it, boy'
 %ill: reported speech [ifamcv22-286]

*VER: e' 'un lo so /COM mamma //ALL
 'eh, I don't know it, mom'
 %ill: conclusion [ifamd14-2]

*GAL: di solito si fa così /COM Mar(co) //ALL
 'it's usually done like this, Marco'
 %ill: reproach [ifamcv14]

*WAL: ammazzai due vipere /COM ieri /APC /Leo //ALL
 'I killed two vipers yesterday, Leo'
 %ill: narration [prvcv163-plum]

*LEO: la fascetta /TOP indo' la va /COM Marco ?ALL
 'the band, where should it go, Marco?'
 %ill: partial question [prvcv163-plum]

Figures 11 and 12 show the f0 tracks of the last two examples. The vocative is performed through a flat-falling contour. Fig. 11 shows an Allocutive presenting a prosodic contour at a lower f0 range than the Appendix, which usually concludes the utterance.

Figure 11

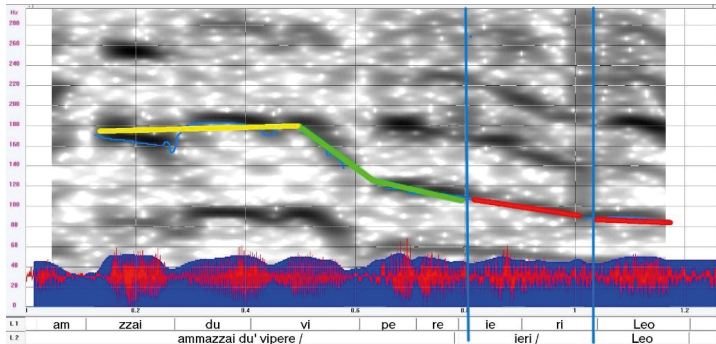
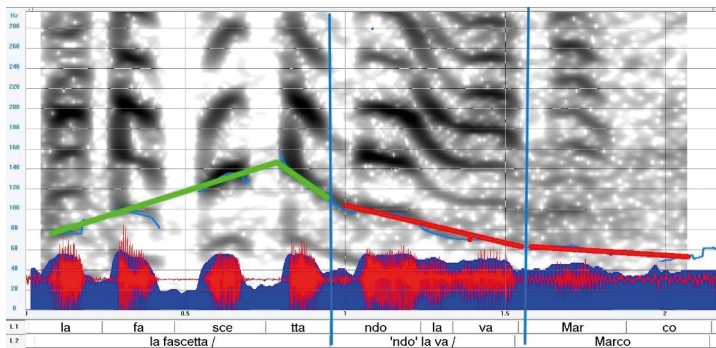


Figure 12



In the previous examples, the illocutions performed belong to the *assertive*, *expressive*, and *question* illocutionary types. Regardless of the illocutionary variation of the Comment, all Allocutives are realized by the flat-falling prosodic unit.

Concerning the rare instances of Allocutives with a distribution before the Comment, they, by preference, do not occur at the very start of the utterance. The following are some of the information patterns we found in corpora:

- after Topic, Incipit, and Conative

*IDA: guarda /^{CNT} Alessandro /^{ALL} credimi //^{COM}
 ‘look, Alessandro, believe me’
 %ill: directive [ifamd118]

- interspacing i-COM and COM and CMM and CMM

*ALE: lo sai /^{i-COM} Daddo /^{ALL} s’è rotto il video-registratore //^{COM}
 ‘you know, Daddo, the video recorder broke’
 %ill: complaining [ifamcv15]

- at the beginning of an utterance within a Reported episode

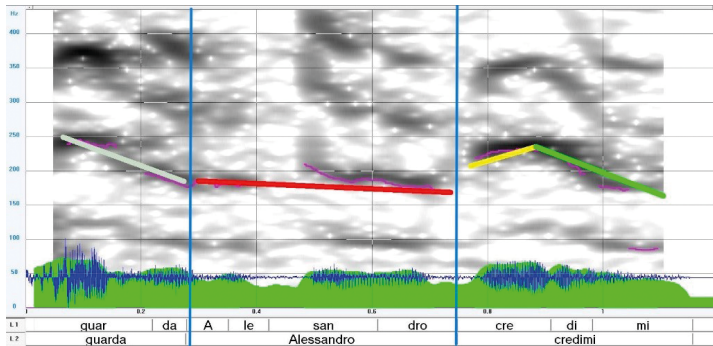
*IDA: allora dico /^{INT} [Antonio /^{ALL-r} guarda /^{CNT-r} Pretty woman /^{TOP-r} esiste in televisione //^{COM-r}]

‘then I say, Antonio, look, Pretty woman exists on television’

%ill: reported speech [ifamd120-54]

Fig. 13 shows the f₀ track of the first example. The prosodic contour of the Allocutive unit is still coherent with the features found in the final position (flat with low-intensity values) even though it cannot follow the declination line in this position.

Figure 13



In our corpus, only a few examples of the Allocutive occur at the absolute beginning of the utterance, as in the example in Fig. 14.

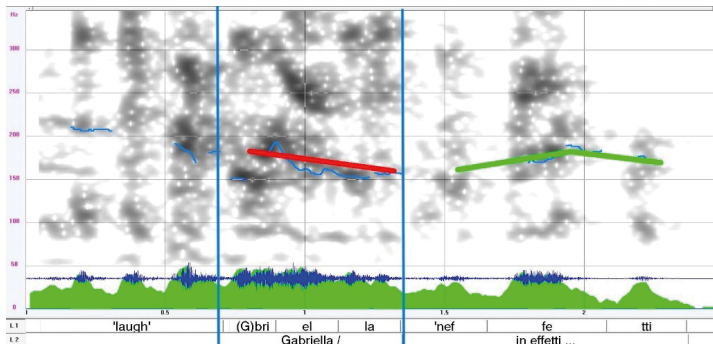
During a chat

*ELA: <laugh> Gabriella /^{ALL} in effetti...^{COM}

‘Gabriella, actually...’

% ill: expression of obviousness [ifammn03]

Figure 14



In this distribution, the Allocutive is characterized by a prosodic contour featuring a flat-falling movement.

Crucially, contrary to the *Functional calling* pattern, in which the vocative is also found in the first position, when the vocative develops the Allocutive function, it cannot be pragmatically interpreted in isolation as an act of calling because of its prosodic performance.

6. Syntax and Semantics of Allocutives

6.1 The Lexicon

Concerning the limited lexicon of Allocutives, only a restricted group of nouns are employed, and they are always characterized for making explicit the relationship between the speaker and the addressee.⁶

Frequent and cross-linguistically recurrent nouns are:

- Proper name (*addressee's label*)
- Titles (*addressee's social position*)
- Appellative (*affective speaker's labeling*)
- Role noun (*family position with respect to the speaker*)

Here, we can only quickly refer to the “inverse allocution”, which is widespread in the southern dialects and varieties of Italian (Corr, 2022b). In the inverse Allocutive relation, the alleged addressee is the speaker himself. Inverse Allocutive equally aims to stress the existing relationship with the addressee. The speaker's self-citation is preceded by the morpheme *a*, which can be interpreted as a benefactive dative. In this construction, lexical selection is even more restricted, limited to proper names or family relationships. See Fig. 15:

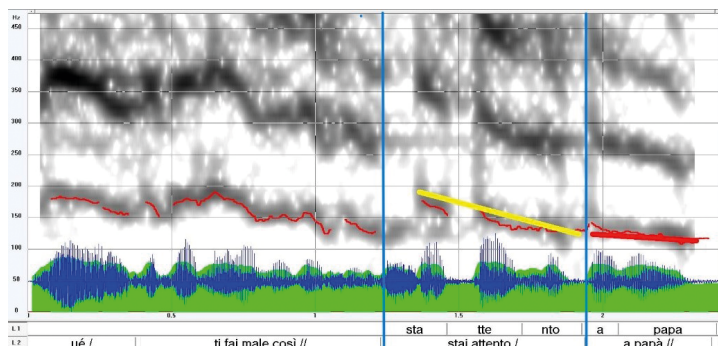
Father's calling his little son back.

*ABC: uè /^{CNT} ti fai male cossì //^{COM} stai attent /^{COM} a papà //^{ALL}

'hey, you get hurt like this. Be careful, (to) dad'

%ill: 1 admonishing; 2 alert

Figure 15



⁶ The lexical restriction is particularly evident if we compare the spoken usage to vocative in *dedications* or *invocations* in high register written texts.

Let's notice that the last prosodic unit, *a papà* (to dad), is performed coherently through a flat-falling contour like the other types of Allocutives.

6.2 Syntax and Semantics

For syntax, corpus data confirms what is foreseen in the literature: bare nouns fill vocatives and resist articles (Rohlf, 1966; Moro, 2003).⁷ This research does not confirm the assumption that vocatives “encode” a second person since every alleged vocative expression can be retraced to a “you”.

Let's recall that Italian corpus data show that vocatives filled by second-person pronouns are not found to develop Illocutionary types in isolation. If second-person pronouns substitute actual examples, the resulting utterances sound odd to competence judgment. The deictic reference to the addressed interlocutor is found only in vocatives within *Functional calling* patterns following their directive illocutionary force.

Considering specifically vocatives filling Allocutives, we stress that no deictics second person pronoun can develop this function. So, the Allocutive determines two restrictions: referential phrases determined by articles and deictic expressions are banned in this function.

Therefore, it is necessary to abandon a generic consideration of vocative as a grammar category that implies a deictic nature. Both distribution and prosodic performance determine different functions with specific semantic restrictions.

An apparent logical contradiction emerges when vocatives work as Allocutives: the addressee's attention is drawn to the speaker by the latter's proper name, title, or role noun. These expressions, which are commonly used to refer to the addressee, consistently convey the relationship with the latter, whereas surprisingly, deictic and definite descriptions, which are inherently referential, are excluded.

Regarding the deictic second-person pronouns, they are not adequate because they are semantically empty and can be filled only by referring to the context. Therefore, the relationship between the speaker and the addressee is missed. As regards nominal phrases with determinate articles, they are not semantically empty but are mandatorily referential. We hypothesize that referentiality is the specific obstacle to performing the Allocutive function. The very semantic nature of the Allocutive emerges. Proper names, titles, and role nouns are designators that may not have a referential reading. Allocutives only cite the addressee's designator (Kripke, 1971) to strengthen the empathic relation, and this information function has nothing to do with an act of referring to someone in the world.⁸ In other words, the semantic restriction on the Allocutive is because deixis and determined noun phrases necessarily have a referential interpretation.

⁷ There are well-known exceptions. French typically accepts vocatives filled by determined nominal constituents (*allez les enfants !*) (Bernstaint et al 2019; Bernstaint, forthcoming).

⁸ Crucially unlike Topic. Lambrecht (1996), on the contrary, claims that Allocutive can be equated to Topic since both are nominal detached units. See Cresti (forthcoming) for a discussion.

A further distributional property of the Allocutive function concerns the possibility of its iteration within an utterance. Indeed, the iteration of vocatives is not attested in corpora and results in odd competence judgment (unlike Topic or Appendix units). For instance, if a second Allocutive unit is added to actual examples, the resulting utterance is rejected by competence.

*GAL: di solito si fa così /^{COM} Marco /^{ALL} * papà //^{ALL}

‘it’s usually done like this, Marco / * dad’

%ill: reproach [ifamcv14]

*LUC: lui disse /^{INT} me la piglio io /^{COM-r} nini /^{ALL-r} * Giovanni //^{ALL-r}

‘he said, I’m the one taking it, boy / * John’

%ill: reported speech [ifamcv22]

*MAX: queste son belle /^{COM} mamma /^{ALL} * cara //^{ALL}

‘these are nice, mom / * darling’

%ill: appreciation [ifamcv01]

The rejection of vocative iteration has been observed also by Corr (2022). However, according to competence examples, the Author assumes there can be iterations, provided they are not contiguous. We observe that the restriction does not depend on the contiguity of the two vocative expressions but on their functional diversity: an illocutionary function of *Call* in the first CMM within a functional calling pattern and a second at the end of the second CMM with an Allocutive function. For instance, the real example below can be easily integrated with an Allocutive at the end of the pattern.

*ABC: Alberto /^{CMM} i’ discorso è questo /^{CMM} caro mio //^{ALL}

‘Alberto ! This is the point, my dear!’

%ill: call + assertion (disagreement attitude) [ipubcv04]

7. Conclusions

Assuming the L-AcT frame, vocatives are identified as units of information whose prosodic performance predicts their different pragmatic functions. Vocatives can develop Comment units with illocutionary force and Allocutive units supporting the utterance.

Comment units are performed by *root* prosodic units shaped by various contours correlating with specific illocutionary forces. On the contrary, Allocutive units are always performed by a prosodic unit characterized by a flat-falling contour.

Comment units can occur in isolation, giving rise to simple speech acts (*Distal/Proximal calls, Greetings, Regret, Protest*) or be patterned within a *Functional calling* structure. In the second case, vocatives serves as a *call* to share *the attentional horizon with the addressee*. When patterned, the vocative unit is focused in the first position.

Allocutive units are aimed at *strengthening the empathic relationship with the addressee*.

They cannot occur in isolation. By preference, they are placed at the end of the utterance after the Comment or rarely in the first position before the Comment. In both cases, they are performed by a flat or gently falling unit.

Accordingly, the vocative is not a single grammatical notion “in between system and performance” (Sonnenhauser, Noel, 2013), but it plays different pragmatic functions foreseen by competence and embodied by prosody.

The functional distinction among the usages of vocative sheds light on the semantic selection that applies in each case. When Vocatives develop an illocutionary type within the *Functional calling* pattern, they can be filled by a deictic pronoun and interpreted as referring to the second person, as is largely assumed to be a general property of vocatives in the literature.

Conversely, when vocatives develop the Allocutive function, their lexical selection is restricted to bare proper names, titles, appellatives, and role nouns. Deictics and referential phrases are banned in this function, and iteration is excluded. Our interpretation can explain this, considering that *strengthening the empathic relationship* is implemented by citing the addressee’s designator rather than through a referential activity.

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