The rise and fall of illocutionary negation: the semantic reanalysis of Venetan *miga*

Giuseppe Magistro
Ghent University

Italo-Romance dialects dispose of the particle *miga* to reinforce the expression of negation (Zanuttini 1997) together with preverbal *no*, which is used alone to convey standard negation. Frana/Rawlins (2019) described the Italian particle *mica* in terms of a FALSUM operator, which denies information belonging to the Common Ground (henceforth CG) by signaling the speakers' certainty that a proposition should be downgraded from the CG (*cf.* Repp 2013). In this light, *mica* is an illocutionary negation operator that denies already mentioned or inferable information, hence its ungrammaticality in out-of-the-blue contexts. This is also the case for Venetian and Paduan dialects (1). More surprisingly, more western dialects spoken in the region can use the cognate variant *mia* as standard negation, i.e. also in new contexts (2).

(1) A: *Parcossa ti pianzi?* (Venetian)
'Why are you crying?'
B: **Giani no ga miga preparà i bigoli*
'Gianni hasn't prepared the bigoli (a type of pasta)'

(2) A: *Parché pianzito?* (Gazzolese)
B: *Giani no ga mia parecià i bigoli*

Such variation is possible because the dialect of Gazzolo is at a more advanced stage in a diachronic pattern known as Jespersen's cycle, which is the renewal of the expression of negation through cycles of semantic and syntactic reanalysis (see Breitbarth et al. 2020 for an overview). In our research, we aim to sketch a formal approach to the semantic reanalysis process, together with its pragmatic import. As reviewed in Breitbarth et al., *miga* started its life as a minimizer, since in its original meaning it used to mean 'crumb', denoting the smallest degree on a pragmatic scale. Intuitively, when *miga* is used in a scale-reversing context like negation (Fauconnier 1978), it would imply that a certain predicate does not apply even to the lowest degree, hence it does not apply at all (paraphrased roughly as '*not even a crumb*'). Formally, this can be captured in Chierchia's (2013) model, where minimizers evoke different scalar degrees in forms of alternatives, which are ranked by likelihood and exhaustified by an E(ven) operator. In the application with negation, the likelihood scale is reversed, and it would open up the scalar implicature that even the most likely proposition does not hold.

(3) $E = \lambda p: \forall q \in ALT$ [p is less likely than q]

(4) $\neg[\![miga]\!][\![p]\!] = \lambda p: \forall q \in ALT$ [p is more likely than q] & $\neg p \mathrel{+\!\!>} \neg q$

At this earlier stage, *miga* would be used as negative reinforcer under Gricean reasoning: if one speaker wants to assert $\neg q$, then $\neg E(p)$ would be more informative and exhaustify any possibility of *q* being true. Departing from this stage, we apply Eckardt's (2009) principle *Avoid Pragmatic Overload (APO)*: when hearers find it difficult to retrieve a pragmatic scale that is contextually triggered, they would avoid such pragmatic overload and map a new meaning onto the lexical item. Hence, we argue that Venetian *miga* lost its original scalar meaning, but conventionalized its previous implicature ($\neg q$). It must be noted, however, that the former minimizer did not get analysed simply as standard negation, which is still expressed by the simple preverbal *no*: under Horn's division of pragmatic labour, the more marked competing form *no…miga* must be interpreted in terms of pragmatic markedness, as well. As a consequence, the original implicature is distinguished and encoded in form of illocutionary

negation, FALSUM. Such passage is documented in historical corpora of Old Italian by Hansen/Visconti (2012), where the increasing frequency of *mica* to reject old information is found in dialogues. More formally, for describing the Venetian *miga*, we keep Frana/Rawlins' adoption of the meta-conversational definition of FALSUM, originally proposed in Repp (2013).

(5) $[\![\text{miga}]\!] = [\![\text{FALSUM}]\!]^x = \lambda p_{<s,t>}\, \lambda w.\, \forall w' \in \text{Epi}_x(w)\, [\forall w'' \in \text{Conv}_x(w')\, [p \notin CG]]$[1]

Apart from its felicity conditions with activated information, there are other reasons for describing *miga* as an operator that does not operate directly at the internal level of proposition. Similarly to what Frana/Rawlins remarked for Italian *mica*, Venetian *miga* must scope over deontic obligative modals, yielding only an unnecessity interpretation (NEG > MUST), whereas standard negation can retain both the prohibitive (MUST > NEG) and the unnecessity meaning. Second*,* in biased polar questions, *miga* only evokes a negative expectation, contrary to *no* in questions, where both positive and negative expectations are available. We add a further point that has found similar empirical evidence in the previous literature on such speech act operators: the scope of negation and gapping (*cf.* Han/Romero 2004, Repp 2006). The standard negator *no* in biased polar questions with disjunct constituents (6) can have two different LFs, either with an alternative reading with internal negation or as yes/no question with negation surfacing externally. When *miga* is added, the only available LF contains negation in a higher position (7), as prescribed for the illocutionary operator FALSUM.

(6) *El no ga magnà i bigoli o la pizza?* (Venetian)

LF_1: $\neg p \vee \neg q$? 'What didn't he eat? The bigoli or the pizza?' (Alternative)

LF_2: $\neg(p \vee q)$? 'Did(n't)[2] he eat the bigoli or the pizza?' (yes/no question)

(7) *El no ga miga magnà i bigoli o la pizza?* (Venetian)

LF: $\neg(p \vee q)$? 'Did he eat the bigoli or the pizza?' (yes/no question)

On moving to the more advanced variety, the one spoken in Gazzolo, all these restrictions do not hold anymore and *mia* operates as a sentential negation. It can scope over or under modal, retain both types of expectation in biased polar questions and both LF-readings in disjunction. We believe that such a final stage is reached when the scope of *miga* is extended to less explicitly mentioned propositions, i.e. when it would deny information not directly activated previously in the CG (as documented by Hansen and Visconti for the French minimizer *pas*). By resorting to the APO principle again, instead of accommodating a difficult presupposition, hearers would understand the implicature ($\neg q$) and get rid of any pragmatic enrichment. *Mia* would then correspond to the standard negation, which would also explain the reason why its former licensor *no* became optional in this variety.

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[1] $\text{Epi}_x(w)$ is the set of worlds representing speaker x's knowledge, $\text{Conv}_x(w')$ is the set of worlds representing the conversational goals (in a Gricean sense). Hence, the denotation can be paraphrased as 'according to speaker x's knowledge, in all conversational worlds, the proposition *p* must not be part of the Common Ground'. [2] According to the speakers' expectation in the biased polar question.

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