Modelling grammaticalization in spoken Italian: Evidence from *mica*

Malte Rosemeyer (FU Berlin)

Grammaticalization is frequently accompanied by formal change, such as phonetic reduction, clitization, word order fixation, and shifts in syntactic scope. However, it remains unclear whether such cases involve a single evolving construction or the emergence of two distinct constructions. This paper addresses this theoretical problem by proposing a two-stage model in which (i) semantic reanalysis arises in recurrent bridging contexts within an established construction, and (ii) this reanalysis enables the formation of a formally distinct construction that no longer depends on those contexts.

The model is tested on the Italian particle *mica*, based on 105 tokens from the spoken Italian KIPASTI corpus (Goria and Mauri, 2018). The study combines interactional analysis with quantitative methods. Latent Class Analysis (Rosemeyer, 2024) is used to develop a data-driven operationalization of two uses already described in previous studies (Visconti, 2009; Thaler, 2016; 2018). While the emphatic negation use is strongly associated with dispreference-marking features (e.g. adversative prefaces, question tags, prosodic lengthening), the pragmatic particle use shows no such association, indicating a shift from interactional to Common Ground-oriented functions. Consistent with the proposed model, use of the historically more recent preverbal *mica*X construction (as in *mica è un problema*) is significantly more likely in the pragmatic particle use than the old NegX*mica* construction (as in *non è mica un problema*). A Pearson's chi-squared test with Yates' continuity correction showed a significant association between LC and position, $\chi^2(1) = 23.08$, $p < .001$***.

Bridging contexts are operationalized as cases in which *mica* is used to reject a contextually available inference. The following example (1) illustrates such a bridging context. In (1), the speaker rejects the inference that a situation is highly dangerous, thereby signaling that a previously expressed concern (not wanting to walk in the city alone) is unwarranted. Such contexts link emphatic negation to inference management and thus provide a pathway to the pragmatic particle use.

(1) PKP094 *eh so non è mica il Bronx* (Toscana, 2020, KPC002)

To test this, a mixed-effects logistic regression model examines the effect of bridging contexts on constructional choice. The results show a clear asymmetry: bridging contexts significantly increase the probability of pragmatic particle use in the older postverbal NegX*mica* and X*mica* constructions, but have no effect in the newer preverbal *mica*X construction (Fig. 1, next page). This indicates that bridging contexts facilitate semantic reanalysis but are no longer required once the new construction is established.

These findings support an analysis in which preverbal *mica* constitutes a distinct construction that has emerged through grammaticalization, involving integration into a left-peripheral template for Common Ground management. At the methodological level, the paper demonstrates how spoken corpus data and quantitative modelling can be used to operationalize bridging contexts and to distinguish between constructional change and constructional emergence.

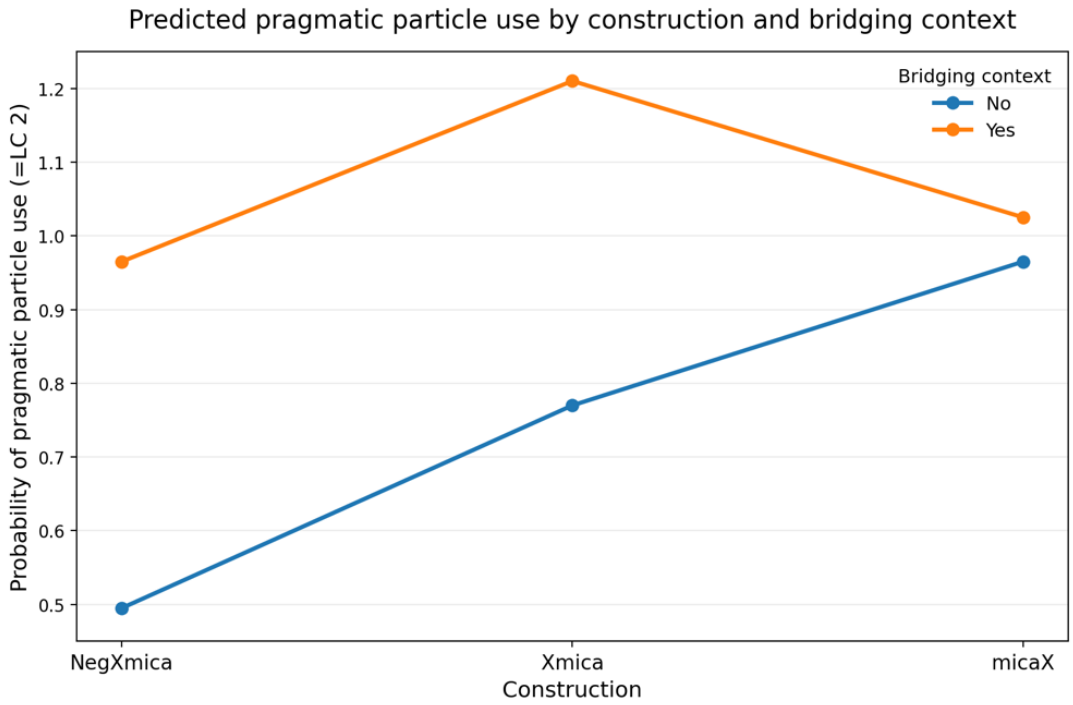

Figure 1. Predicted probability of pragmatic particle use (LC2) across constructions, by presence vs. absence of a bridging context.

References

Goria, Eugenio and Caterina Mauri (2018). The KIParla corpus: a new resource for the study of spoken Italian. *CLUB Working Papers in Linguistics*. Francesca Masini and Fabio Tamburini. Bologna, Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna. Volume 2**:** 96-116.

Rosemeyer, Malte (2024). Data-driven identification of situated meanings in corpus data using Latent Class Analysis. *Open Linguistics* 10(1): 20240029. doi:10.1515/opli-2024-0029

Thaler, Verena (2016). Italian *mica* and its use in discourse: An interactional account. *Journal of Pragmatics* 103: 49-69. doi:10.1016/j.pragma.2016.07.011

Thaler, Verena (2018). The diachronic evolution of Italian *mica*: Discourse strategies and language change. *Italian Journal of Linguistics* 30(1): 3-40. doi:10.26346/1120-2726-114

Visconti, Jacqueline (2009). From “textual” to “interpersonal”: On the diachrony of the Italian particle mica. *Journal of Pragmatics* 41(5): 937-950. doi:10.1016/j.pragma.2008.08.012