



## The interplay between illocutionary force and information management: On the discourse-pragmatic functions of Italian *un po'* 'a bit' and European Portuguese *lá* 'there'

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This paper investigates the polyfunctionality of two Romance adverbial elements: Italian *un po'* 'a bit' and European Portuguese *lá* 'there'. Both adverbs display various uses: some of them have a bearing on the propositional level of the sentence, while others have a bearing on the management of the information conveyed by the utterance, or on the performance of speech acts. By describing the different contexts of use of the adverbs, their meaning variation is examined, and a functional categorization is laid out. Subsequently, relying on the layered model of grammatical categories proposed by Functional Discourse Grammar, the distinction between uses that relate to illocutionary force modification and uses that relate to information management is reassessed, and the interplay between these functional domains is discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

This paper investigates the discourse-pragmatic functions of two Romance adverbial elements: Italian *un po'* 'a bit' and European Portuguese *lá* 'there'. These elements are characterized by a similar polyfunctionality, as they can express both values related to the semantics of sentences (content-level uses) and values related to the pragmatics of speech acts (context-level uses). Quite interestingly, although the content-level uses of these elements are connected to different semantic domains (quantification in the case of *un po'* and spatial deixis in the case of *lá*), some of their context-level uses show a comparable distribution and functional similarities. Therefore, a comparison of the context-level uses of *un po'* and *lá* can provide empirical evidence for a joint discussion of their functions, as well as a common core for a theoretical treatment of the grammatical categories that they relate to.

Relying on newly extracted corpus data (from LIP and KIParla for Italian; from CRPC-Oral for European Portuguese) as well as on previous description of these elements (on *un po'*, see Favaro, 2021; on *lá*, see Martins, 2012; Marques & Duarte, 2017; Lejeune & Mendes, *forthc.*), this paper deals in particular with context-level uses of *un po'* and *lá* that have a bearing on the illocutionary force of the utterance and closely related uses, approaching them from a fresh perspective. Informed by notions of speech act theory and interactional linguistics, a description of relevant examples will be given as regards the illocutionary contexts in which the adverbs appear (directive and assertive speech acts) and the discourse-pragmatic functions that they express (illocutionary force modification, speech act specification, focus marking and approximation). At the same time, building on notions developed in the framework of Functional Discourse Grammar (Hengeveld & Mackenzie, 2008), a new analysis of the context-level uses of *un po'* and *lá* is presented. On the one hand, by exploring the interplay between different functions, the discussion will argue for a distinction between those mostly related to the illocutionary domain (illocutionary force modification) and those mostly related to the communicated content (information management). On the other hand, by comparing the functions of the context-level uses of *un po'* and *lá* with similar elements in a cross-linguistic perspective, these elements will be analyzed as modal particles, that is syntactically integrated elements that fine-tune speech acts (Remberger, 2021, Vismans, 1994; Waltereit, 2001).

This paper is structured as follows: after this introduction, Section 2 introduces the main theoretical notions that will be used for the analysis. Subsequently, Section 3 and Section 4 represent the empirical bulk of the paper, dealing respectively with the description of selected corpus examples of *un po'* and *lá*. In Section 5 the empirical data are reappraised to better discuss the interplay between different discourse-pragmatic functions and the grammatical status of the context-level uses of *un po'* and *lá*. Finally, Section 6 presents my conclusions.

## 2. Preliminary notions: context-level uses, illocutionary force, and information management

### 2.1 Content-level and context-level uses of linguistic expressions

Discourse-pragmatic elements are known for their polyfunctionality (Cuenca & Degand, 2022; Fischer, 2014).<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, this can be attributed to the fact that they can simultaneously operate in different functional domains of discourse (Schiffrin, 1987). On the other hand, the polyfunctionality of many discourse-pragmatic elements may reflect the fact that they have homophonous counterparts that operate at the propositional level (Sweetser, 1990, pp. 76–86). A profitable approach to frame these issues revolves around the distinction between content- vs. context-level uses of linguistic expressions, as formulated by Hansen (2008, pp. 14–17, 2012, pp. 592–594).

The first label refers to any use of a linguistic expression in which the meaning of that expression bears saliently either on a state-of-affairs/proposition referred to in its host clause or on the relation between that state-of-affairs/proposition and other states-of-affairs/propositions. The second label, instead, refers to any use of a linguistic expression in which that expression primarily expresses the speaker's comment either on the relation between a described state-of-affairs/proposition and the discourse itself, or on the relation between a described state-of-affairs/proposition and the wider speech situation (including contextual features, the subjective attitudes and mental states of the interlocutors, the interactional common ground). Some linguistic elements display a type of polyfunctionality that crosses this divide: if this is the case, they show a coexistence of content-level and context-level uses. The uses pertaining to the first group operate at the propositional level, while those pertaining to the second group operate at the discourse-pragmatic level.

Both elements under scrutiny in this paper show a coexistence of content-level and context-level uses. Example (1) features two occurrences of the Italian adverbial expression *un po'* 'a bit'. The first one represents a use of *un po'* as a speech-act modifier operating at the discourse-pragmatic level (context-level use), while the second one represents the prototypical use of this expression as an adverbial degree modifier operating at the propositional level (content-level use).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I use *discourse-pragmatic elements* as an umbrella label for linguistic elements that can express different functions in discourse (rhetorical functions, turn management, and so on). Other labels found in the literature are *discourse markers*, *pragmatic markers*, *discourse particles* and many more. According to the theoretical approach adopted, each of these labels has also been used to identify specific subclasses of elements.

<sup>2</sup> In the translation of the examples, when no exact equivalent of *un po'* and *l * is available, the presence of the adverb is signaled by the gloss PTC 'particle'.

## (1) [LIP corpus – Naples A1]

- E: Anna **metti** **un po'** là per favore  
 Anna put:IMPV.2SG a bit there please
- B: qua Vincenzo  
 here Vincenzo
- E: dove sta la borsa Franco mettiti  
 where stay:3SG ART bag Franco put:IMPV.2SG:REFL  
**un po'** più vicino a me va  
 a bit more close to me go:3SG
- E: 'Anna **put it PTC** there please'
- B: 'here Vincenzo'
- E: 'where is the bag, Franco move **a bit** closer to me, come on'

In a similar fashion, example (2) features several occurrences of the European Portuguese adverb *lá* 'there'. The first occurrence represents the prototypical use of *lá* as a deictic locative operating at the propositional level (content-level use), while the four occurrences of *lá* in the last chunk of conversation represent the use of *lá* as a speech-act modifier operating at the discourse-pragmatic level (context-level use).

## (2) [CRPC-Oral – pfamd106]

- RUI: e então / na noite de fados estavam **lá** / familiares /  
 and so in:ART night of fados be:IMPF.3PL there relatives  
 nossos //  
 our
- SAA: pois //  
 yeah
- RUI: cinco ou seis pessoas // tudo vazio //  
 five or six people all empty
- [...]
- RUI: tocaram / mesmo assim // e depois / quiseram / cobrar //  
 play:PST.3PL even like\_this and then want:PST.3PL charge:INF  
 e a gente hhh /**lá** fez / **lá** discutiu / **lá**  
 and ART people hhh there do:PST.3SG there discuss:PST.3SG there  
**argumentou** / e **lá** **conseguimos** / fazer com que eles  
 argue:PST.3SG and there obtain:PST.3SG do:INF with that they  
 pedissem só metade do pagamento / que deviam /  
 ask:SUBJ.PST.3PL only half of:ART payment that must:IMPF.3PL  
 receber //  
 receive

- RUI: ‘and so / at the fado night / our relatives / were **there**’  
 SAA: ‘yeah //’  
 RUI: ‘five or six people / [it was] completely empty //’  
 [...]
   
 RUI: ‘they played / nonetheless // and then / they wanted / to charge us  
 // and we mh / **did** PTC / we **discussed** PTC / we **argued** PTC / we  
**managed** PTC / that they asked only half of the payment / they had / to receive’

## 2.2 Illocutionary force and information management

In this paper, the discourse-pragmatic functions expressed by the context-level uses of *un po’* and *lá* will be analyzed as related to two functional domains, namely illocution and information management. The first domain relates to the performance of speech acts, while the second domain relates to the strategies adopted by the speaker to present and highlight the information conveyed by the speech act.<sup>3</sup> To better outline these domains as well as to frame the functional similarities between *un po’* and *lá*, I will refer to the concepts of *illocution* and *communicated content* as elaborated by Functional Discourse Grammar (FDG), a typologically based theory of language structure (Hengeveld & Mackenzie, 2008). FDG relies on the idea that grammatical categories are organized in layers, connected to each other by scope relations: “in Functional Discourse Grammar scope relations are defined in terms of different pragmatic and semantic layers. Pragmatic layers together constitute the interpersonal level in this model, while semantic layers together constitute the representational level” (Hengeveld, 2017, p. 15).<sup>4</sup>

The layers that constitute the interpersonal level are the most relevant here. This level of analysis deals with all the formal aspects of a linguistic unit that reflect its role in the interaction between speaker and addressee. The highest layer is the move, which represents an entire segment of discourse. The move consists of one or more (sequentially ordered) discourse acts, which are the basic units of communication. Each act in turn consists of an illocution, which specifies the communicative intention of the speaker, the speech participants, and the communicated content, which represents the message transmitted in an utterance. Finally, within the communicated content, one or more subacts of reference and ascription are executed by the speaker, by means of which they refer to entities and ascribe properties to these entities.

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<sup>3</sup> The notions of *illocution* and *illocutionary force* have been widely used in linguistics since Austin (1962). On the contrary, *information management* is not a widespread label, but shows up here and there in the scientific literature (see for instance Kleinknecht & Souza, 2017, and Squartini, 2017, who uses the label *information managing*).

<sup>4</sup> As noted by Hansen herself (2008, p. 16), the distinction between content-level and context-level uses of adverbial elements largely corresponds to the distinction drawn by FDG between adverbials that operate at the representational level and those that operate at the interpersonal level (see also Dik *et. al.*, 1990; Hengeveld, 1989; Ramat & Ricca, 1998, p. 192). From this perspective, the two approaches used in this paper are largely compatible with each other.

Moreover, the basic content of each layer may be further specified by operators and modifiers: operators capture specification by grammatical means, while modifiers capture specification by lexical means (see Hengeveld, 2017, pp. 14–18).

The attention given by FDG to the distinction between the illocution and the communicated content represents a key element in the present paper. The notion of illocution refers to the grammatical domain where communicative intentions are coded onto conventionalized linguistic expressions: “The basic illocution of a sentence can be defined as the conversational use conventionally associated with the formal properties of that sentence which together constitute a sentence type” (Hengeveld, 2004, pp. 1190–1191). Basic illocutions are represented by categories such as declarative, interrogative, and imperative, while the notion of illocutionary force is used to distinguish among specific types of speech acts, such as statements, requests, orders, warnings, permissions (see Levinson, 2017; Searle, 1969). Grammatical operators associated to this layer express illocutionary modification:

Basic illocutions may be further modified by markers of what I here call illocutionary modification. Like basic illocution, illocutionary modification should be interpreted in terms of the conversational use of sentences. But unlike basic illocution, markers of illocutionary modification do not identify sentences as speech acts of certain types, but rather mark much more general communicative strategies on the part of the speaker: they reinforce or mitigate the force of the speech act. (Hengeveld, 2004, p. 1192)

In this respect, the notion of illocutionary modification refers to the various grammatical means that modify the illocutionary force of a speech act and further differentiate between communicative intentions (to wit, the marking of specific illocutionary forces such as making statements and requests, giving orders, warnings and permissions).

Conversely, the communicated content captures the information that the speaker wants to bring across and the different strategies for molding it:

Whereas the Illocution indicates the conventionalized conversational use of a Discourse Act, and the Participants represent the essential Speaker-Addressee dyad, the Communicated Content contains the totality of what the Speaker wishes to evoke in his/her communication with the Addressee. In actional terms it corresponds to what Searle (1969) calls the ‘representational act’ and corresponds to the choices the Speaker makes in order to evoke a picture of the external world s/he wants to talk about. (Hengeveld & Mackenzie, 2008, p. 87)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> It is important to highlight that FDG also distinguishes between the communicated content and the propositional content. The first one must be understood as the message that is being communicated in an utterance, and represents a pragmatic layer at the interpersonal level (it can thus be considered context-level). The second one, instead, must be understood as a mental construct entertained by the speaker about a series of states of affairs, and represents a

Overall, the communicated content is concerned with information management, as it deals with the way in which the speaker presents information and organizes the information flow.<sup>6</sup> The pragmatic relations that determine the information structure of an utterance (focus, topic and contrast) are expressed at this layer (Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008, pp. 89–99). Further interpersonal strategies expressed at this layer deal with the marking of the source of information (Hengeveld & Hattner, 2015), the marking of the speaker’s reaction and attitude towards the information flow (Hengeveld & Olbertz, 2012), and the degree of straightforwardness of the message (Hengeveld & Keizer, 2011). In the next sections, different features related to the domains of illocutionary force and information management will be used to describe the functions expressed by context-level uses of Italian *un po’* and European Portuguese *lá*.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. Context-level uses of Italian *un po’* ‘a bit’

Example (1) above illustrated the difference between content-level and context-level uses of *un po’*, and specifically between its use as an adverbial degree modifier and as an illocutionary operator in a directive speech act.<sup>8</sup> When used as an adverbial modifier, the adverb has scope over verbal phrases (3a), adjectives (3b) or adverbs, and expresses a quantificational measure (a degree) related to the propositional content of the relevant phrase:

- (3) (a) mi fa stare **un po’** in ansia  
to.me make:3SG stay:INF a bit in anxiety  
‘it makes me feel **a bit** anxious’
- (b) mi sento **un po’** stanco  
REFL feel:1SG a bit tired  
‘I feel **a little** tired’

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semantic layer at the representational level (it can thus be considered content-level). Nevertheless, the two layers are closely connected since the communicated content is “the unit within which the mapping to the Representational Level takes place” (Hengeveld & Mackenzie, 2008, p. 87).

<sup>6</sup> As already mentioned, the label *information management* does not represent a well-established concept in linguistics, nor is it part of the terminology used by FDG. Here, I use this label as an overarching term for the different functions expressed by modifiers and operators at the layer of the communicated content.

<sup>7</sup> The distinction between illocution and communicated content is made evident by the fact that they are targeted by different modifiers. For instance, taking examples from the class of English *-ly* adverbs, Keizer, Schweiger & ten Wolde (2022, p. 517) show how the illocution and the communicated content are targeted by different adverbs that express a range of speaker-oriented functions, such as indicating the speaker’s manner of carrying out the illocution (e.g. *frankly*, *honestly*), expressing the speaker’s subjective attitude towards the communicated content (e.g. *unfortunately*, *surprisingly*), emphasizing it (e.g. *absolutely*, *totally*), or indicating that the communicated content has been obtained from another source (e.g. *allegedly*, *supposedly*).

<sup>8</sup> Another content-level use of *un po’* is represented by its use as a quantifier in pseudo-partitive constructions (*un po’ di arance* ‘some oranges’). Detailed discussion on the content-level uses of *un po’* and related development paths can be found in Favaro (2021, pp. 133–137).

- (c) l' ho fatto **un po'** velocemente  
 it have:1SG done a bit quickly  
 'I did it **a bit** quickly'

Conversely, context-level uses of *un po'* have scope over illocutions or communicated contents. They do not target the propositional content of the sentence, but rather modify the illocutionary features of the speech act in which they appear, or the way the information is presented by the speaker. Context-level uses of *un po'* appear in two distinct illocutionary contexts: directive and assertive speech acts.<sup>9</sup>

### 3.1 Directive speech acts

The use of *un po'* as an illocutionary operator is particularly clear in directive speech acts in the form of imperative sentences, where the adverb occurs in the postverbal position. Examples of *un po'* in directive speech acts can be grouped in three subsets according to the function expressed and the type of conversational context. In a first subset of examples, *un po'* operates as a mitigating particle: it downtones the illocutionary force of the speech act, specifying directives as soft requests or invitations. In example (4), in the context of an oral exam at school, *un po'* downtones the force of the professor's directive (*raccontami un po'* 'tell me PTC'). Obviously, the professor is not asking the student to give a partial answer to the question, they rather perform the speech act so that it does not sound too overbearing.

(4) [LIP corpus – Rome C9]

- A: volevo chiedere sempre a Manuela che cosa dunque eh dunque  
 want:IMPF.1SG ask:INF always to Manuela what thing then uh then  
 Calvino si è occupato quindi del problema della fiaba  
 Calvino REFL be:3SG dealt then of:ART problem of:ART fairytale  
 eccetera volevo sapere ha fatto eh ha  
 and\_so\_on want:IMPF.1SG know:INF have:1SG done uh have:1SG  
 prodotto un' opera interessante sulla fiaba eh non un testo  
 produced a work interesting on:ART fairytale uh NEG a text  
 critic no una  
 critical NEG a
- B: una raccolta  
 a collection
- A: una raccolta di fiabe intitolate  
 a collection of fairytales titled

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<sup>9</sup> All examples below are taken from two corpora of spoken Italian: the LIP corpus (De Mauro *et al.* 1993) and the KIParla corpus (Mauri *et al.* 2019). I extracted 350 random occurrences of *un po'* from each corpus which have been used as a dataset for my study.



- B: Fiabe italiane  
 fairytales Italian
- A: Fiabe italiane ah che praticamente ecco **raccontami** **un po'**  
 fairytales italian uh that practically so tell:IMPV.2SG:REFL a bit  
 di cosa cosa sono  
 of what what be:3PL
- A: 'I wanted to ask again to Manuela what are well uh well Calvino worked then on the issue of the folktale and so on I wanted to know he made uh he produced an interesting work on folktales and uh not a critical work no a'
- B: 'a collection'
- A: 'a collection of folktales called'
- B: 'Italian folktales'
- A: 'Italian folktales right that basically well **tell me PTC** what what they are'

In a second subset of examples, *un po'* brings about a different conversational effect: it enriches requests with an incitement flavor or a reinforcing overtone. In example (5), the speaker is complaining about the quality of a photo he received from a friend (it is crooked and the screen in the picture has dust on it): imagining an exchange of words with him, he utters a marked directive (*togli un po' quel dito di polvere* 'take off PTC that inch of dust'). In this case, along with a specific flavor of casualness, the utterance sounds like a stressed request.<sup>10</sup>

- (5) [KIParla corpus – BOA3021]  
 però nel senso almeno fai la foto allo schermo da  
 but on:ART sense a\_least do:IMPV.2SG ART photo on:ART screen from  
 davanti // non metà // non in diagonale // non con il flash  
 in\_front NEG half NEG in diagonal NEG with ART flash  
**togli un po'** quel dito di polvere  
 take\_off:IMPV.2SG a bit that finger of dust  
 'but I mean at least take the picture of the screen from the front // not the half // not  
 crooked // not with the flash **take off PTC** that inch of dust'

The last subset includes expressions like *senti un po'* 'listen a bit', *guarda un po'* 'look a bit' or *pensa un po'* 'think a bit', which are composed of high-frequency imperatives marked by *un po'* (see **Table 1** below). They represent routinized directives which often display a non-compositional meaning: rather than expressing a directive speech act, they are used as attention-getters, to

<sup>10</sup> In general, the presence of *un po'* in directives contributes to marking speech acts where little effort is required from the addressee to perform the action (see the overview in Section 3.3). The difference between the mitigation and the reinforcement value seems to be more a consequence of contextual features than of actual illocutionary features. In particular, it is the conversational context (background of the conversation, role of the interlocutors) that determines whether the directive marked by *un po'* expresses one or the other value. Intonation and suprasegmental features also play a relevant role.

highlight specific points in the interaction or to segment discourse chunks, as in example (6). In other words, they have reached a discourse-marker status (see Waltereit, 2002, on *guarda* ‘look’; see also Oliveira, 2023).

VERB	OCCURRENCES	VERB	OCCURRENCES
guardare ‘look’	12	raccontare ‘tell’	1
vedere ‘see’	9	provare ‘try’	1
pensare ‘think’	6	scusare ‘apologize’	1
dire ‘say’	6	figurarsi ‘imagine’	1
sentire ‘hear’	5	chiamare ‘call’	1
fare ‘do’	2	chiudere ‘close’	1
andare ‘go’	2	mettere ‘put’	1
togliere ‘take off’	1	indovinare ‘guess’	1

**Table 1:** Imperatives with *un po’* in the dataset used for this study.

- (6) [KIParla corpus – TOD2003]  
 io tra l’ altro ho anche paura dei cani il mio fidanzato  
 I between ART other have:1SG also fear of:ART dogs ART mio partner  
 vorrebbe un canelupo cecoslovacco **pensa** **un po’** //  
 want:COND.3SG a wolf\_dog czechoslovak think:IMPV.2SG a bit  
 costa il lupo cecoslovacco //  
 cost:3SG ART wolf Czechoslovak  
 ‘by the way I’m even afraid of dogs my boyfriend would like to have a Czechoslovakian  
 wolf dog **can you imagine that** // a Czechoslovakian wolf is expensive //

In many cases, the contribution of *un po’* to this kind of imperatives is more complex. In fact, it does not only contribute to identifying the conventionalized sequence as a discourse marker, but it also specifies the speaker’s attitude towards the information evoked. Specifically, in imperatives like (6) *un po’* also gives a mirative flavor to the utterance (on mirativity, see Delancey, 1997; Hengeveld & Olbertz, 2012). When *un po’* conveys a mirative reading, it has always scope over a directive (*ma pensa un po’* ‘but guess what/imagine that!’, *guarda un po’ chi arriva!* ‘look who’s coming!’), so that the mirative value seems to develop as a sort of by-product of the context-level use of *un po’* in this kind of directives.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> In fact, all these conventionalized sequences expressing surprise feature an imperative through which the speaker asks the addressee to direct their attention to something that is surprising and therefore deserves to be noticed.

Finally, *un po'* can occur in hortative speech acts, which can be considered as closely related to directives (see König & Siemund, 2007, p. 313). In this kind of speech acts, *un po'* combines with first person plural subjunctives. The most typical case is *vediamo un po'* 'let's see', which represents a routinized expression used as a discourse marker.

- (7) [KIParla corpus – BOA1015]  
 mh okay // che cosa possono dire adesso in italiano che prima  
 hm okay what thing can:3PL know:INF now in italian that before  
 non potevano dire // okay **vediamo un po'**  
 NEG can:IMPF.3PL say:INF okay see:SUBJ.1PL a bit  
 'hm okay // what else can they now say in Italian that they couldn't say before //  
 okay **let's have PTC a look'**

### 3.2 Assertive speech acts

Context-level uses of *un po'* also appear in another illocutionary context, namely assertions. This context of use shows greater continuity with the use of *un po'* as an adverbial degree modifier. However, in that case *un po'* has scope over gradable expressions (adjectives, adverbs, verbal phrases), while when it is used as an operator on assertive speech acts it has scope over the illocution. In example (8) below, *un po'* operates on a non-gradable predicate, so that the value of degree modifier seems to be excluded. Thus, the particle does not express a degree in relation to (parts of) the propositional content of the sentence, but rather modifies the degree of assertivity of the utterance, that is, the illocutionary force expressed by the speech act. This construction is typically used when speakers assert something, but they are not completely sure about (or confident with) what they are saying, or when they want to limit the conversational impact of their utterance. This way, the presence of *un po'* specifies the assertion as a suggestion, giving the utterance a non-assertive tone:

- (8) [KIParla corpus - BOD2014]  
 leo lo vedo molto bene in 'sto periodo // **ho visto un po'** che  
 leo him see:1SG very well in this period have:1SG seen a bit that  
 ha una tipa che fanno parecchie cose // beh come sempre // solito  
 have:3SG a girl that do:3PL several things well as always usual  
 solito leo // un uomo di successo //  
 usual leo a man of success  
 'leo I see him in good shape at the moment // **I saw PTC** that he has a girl they do lot  
 of stuff // well as usually // same same leo // a man of success //

In example (8), different contextual factors suggest that the speaker might show a weak commitment towards the performance of the speech act: the reported information (the fact that Leo is dating someone) could not have been verified, or the speaker does not feel entirely entitled

to share it with the addressee. This being the situation, the speaker uses *un po'* to lower the degree of assertivity of their speech act.<sup>12</sup>

Other examples of *un po'* in assertive speech acts seem to perform a different function. In particular, it is not always easy to assess to what extent this particle operates on the illocutionary features of the speech act or on the message conveyed by it. To better elaborate on this point, it might be useful to recall the notion of communicated content as elaborated by FDG. As outlined above, the communicated content represents the grammatical layer responsible for information management, that is, the relevant layer for strategies that allow the speaker to structure the information conveyed by their speech act, and to express subjective attitudes towards it. Several examples of *un po'* in assertive speech acts express functions related to this domain:

- (9) [KIParla corpus – BOA1001]  
 periodo di inserimento eccetera // mh // eh mh // questa è la  
 period of settling-in and\_so\_on hm uh hm this be:3SG ART  
 fase esplorativa in cui le cose che raccoglie **sono un po' vanno**  
 phase exploratory in which ART things that collect:3SG be:3PL a bit go:3PL  
**un po'** in più direzioni //  
 a bit in more directions  
 'settling-in period and so on // hm // eh hm // this is the exploratory phase where the  
 things that she collects **are PTC they go PTC** in several directions //'

In example (9), the two occurrences of *un po'* have scope over verbal phrases (*sono un po'* 'they are PTC', *vanno un po'* 'they go PTC') but do not modify the illocutionary force of the speech act. Rather, the use of *un po'* in this example reminds the function of linguistic elements that express non-straightforwardness, that is "grammatical and lexical strategies that are available to speakers to convey that the message they intend to communicate is not straightforwardly covered by the basic elements contained in their utterance" (Hengeveld & Keizer, 2011, p. 1962). Specifically, *un po'* can be considered a marker of approximation. By using approximation markers, the speaker makes it clear that the selected entity (a lexeme or a whole communicated content) is not a prototypical member of the class to which they belong, or that they are not fully able or willing to provide the exact amount of information needed for felicitous communication.<sup>13</sup> Consider the following example:

<sup>12</sup> Assertions represent a class of speech acts with specific preparatory and sincerity conditions. Among them, there is the fact that the speaker has evidence for the truth of their own proposition and believes it (Searle, 1969, p. 66). In example (8), the presence of *un po'* in the assertion explicitly signals the discrepancy between these general conditions and what constitutes the actual common ground shared by the interlocutors in this context. This way, by marking a low degree of assertivity on the speech act, *un po'* contributes to accommodating the illocutionary features of the assertion to the relevant conversational setting (see also Waltereit, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> The opposite strategy is exactness (see Hengeveld & Keizer, 2011). Both approximation and exactness should be understood as pragmatic strategies: "Although in many cases there is an undeniable link between the linguistic

- (10) [KIParla corpus – BOD2015]  
 no scherzo però secondo me quella è **un po' l' età** in  
 NEG joke:1SG but according me that be:3SG a bit ART age in  
 cui ti rendi conto / mh di cosa vuoi fare  
 which REFL realize:2SG account hm of what want:3SG do:INF  
 davvero // nel senso mh // come spiegare **abbandoni un po' l'**  
 really in:ART sense hm how explain:INF leave:2SG a bit ART  
**infanzia**  
 childhood  
 'no I'm joking but in my view that's **PTC the age** when you realize // hm what you  
 really want to do // I mean hm // how to explain **you leave PTC your childhood**'

In example (10), several contextual clues point to a scarce degree of speaker's confidence with regard to the message being conveyed, namely two pause-fillers (*mh*) and a reformulation marker (*nel senso*); moreover, the process of reformulation itself is indexed explicitly by a question that the speaker perhaps asks themselves in passing (*come spiegare*). All these clues point to difficulties in online processing, and this explains the presence of *un po'* marking approximation on a referential subact (*l'età*) and on a whole communicated content (*abbandoni l'infanzia*).<sup>14</sup> Finally, in example (11) the function expressed by *un po'* is different again:

- (11) [KIParla corpus - BOD2001]  
 eh **la cosa è un po' quella** che vivi in una bolla però  
 uh ART thing be:3SG a bit that that live:2SG in a bubble but  
 poi effettivamente sì certoosci un po' il luogo però forse  
 then actually yeah of course know:2SG a bit ART place but maybe  
 non loosci proprio in tutti i pro e i contro  
 NEG it know:2SG really in all ART pros and ART cons  
 'well, **the thing is PTC that**, that you live in in a bubble but then actually yeah sure  
 you know a bit the place but maybe you don't know it exactly with all pros and cons'

In this case, rather than approximating the communicated content, *un po'* contributes to structuring the information evoked. More precisely, *un po'* seems to operate as a focus marker (here, in a pseudo-cleft syntactic structure: *la cosa è un po' quella* 'the thing is PTC that'), separating the focused part of the utterance (*quella*) from the backgrounded one (*la cosa è*). From an FDG

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coding of straightforwardness and such representational matters as predication and denotation, straightforwardness will first and foremost be seen as pertaining to the Interpersonal Level, i.e. as modifying or specifying the actions performed by the Speaker in his/her interaction with an Addressee" (Hengeveld & Keizer, 2011, p. 1964).

<sup>14</sup> See Hengeveld & Mackenzie (2008, pp. 107–124) and Hengeveld & Keizer (2011, pp. 1964–1975) for detailed discussion on the subcomponents of the communicated content, that is the ascriptive subact and the referential subact. See Franken (1997) and Allwood et al. (2014) for further discussion of concepts such as *approximation*, *uncertainty* and *vagueness* in pragmatics.

perspective, this is not surprising since pragmatic functions such as focus and topic are expressed exactly at the layer of the communicated content, and some overlap between functions is to be expected (Hengeveld & Keizer, 2011, p. 1974).

### 3.3 Common features of the context-level uses of *un po'*

Overall, there is a strong link between the adverbial semantics of *un po'* and its use as an illocutionary operator and as a marker of approximation. More precisely, the notion of small degree/quantity expressed by the content-level uses of *un po'* is reflected by its context-level uses. In directive speech acts, *un po'* is decisive in specifying them as requests. In this respect, the core meaning contribution of *un po'*, which is directly derived from its adverbial semantics, is to mark speech acts where little effort from the addressee is required to perform the action. In addition to this, other contextual features that vary according to the conversational setting (urgency, unexpectedness, casualness, and so on) contribute to further differentiating between soft and stressed requests, sudden proposals, and incitements. In assertive speech acts, *un po'* is decisive in reducing the degree of commitment of the speaker towards their own speech act. In this respect, the function of *un po'* is to mark a speech act characterized by low assertivity (if the low commitment targets the illocutionary force of the speech act) or by an approximated transmission of information (if it targets the communicated content conveyed by the speech act).

This evidence shows that the same element can express different functions at different grammatical layers (illocution and communicated content). In the case of *un po'*, it is important to highlight that both layers can be targeted by the adverb, regardless of the illocutionary context of occurrence. In directive speech acts, the adverb marks requests (illocutionary modification) but can also add a mirative flavor to the utterance (information management). In assertive speech acts, the adverb can mark low assertivity (illocutionary modification), but in many cases can be analyzed as a marker of approximation and focus structure (information management). This way, the functional distribution of *un po'* shows the interplay between these two grammatical layers.

## 4. Context-level uses of European Portuguese *lá* 'there'

I turn now to European Portuguese *lá* 'there'. Example (2) above illustrated the difference between content-level and context-level uses of *lá*, and specifically between its use as a deictic locative and its use as an illocutionary operator in assertive speech acts. When used as a deictic locative adverb, *lá* indicates spatial distance from the speaker ('there'), in opposition with the adverb *cá*, which indicates spatial proximity ('here').

- (12) (a) eu vou lá no inverno  
           I go:1SG there in:ART winter  
           'I'm going there in winter'

- (b) eu estive cá este verão  
 I stay:PST.1SG here this summer  
 ‘I was here in summer’

Besides this use, *lá* displays several context-level uses which express a broad range of discourse-pragmatic functions. In contrast to Italian *un po’*, several research works have addressed the context-level uses of European Portuguese *lá*, notably Martins (2012), Marques & Duarte (2015, 2017), Duarte & Marques (2018) and Lejeune & Mendes (forthc.).<sup>15</sup> Adopting a speech-act theoretic approach, this study presents the context-level uses of *lá* on the basis of the illocutionary context in which they appear: directive and assertive speech acts. In a similar way to the discussion concerning *un po’*, I will show that some of them have a bearing on illocutions, while others operate on communicated contents.<sup>16</sup>

#### 4.1 Directive speech acts

Like *un po’*, the use of *lá* as an illocutionary operator is well represented by its use in directive speech acts in the form of imperative sentences. The adverb is postponed to the verb. Imperatives with *lá* can express stressed requests, suggestions, exhortations and warnings.<sup>17</sup> Overall, they represent different kinds of marked directives, and *lá* contributes to explicitly highlighting the fact that the imperative should not be understood as a plain order. Consider the following example:

- (13) [CRPC-Oral – pfammn13]  
 VAN: ah por exemplo gosto imenso da internet // acho isto  
 uh for examples like:1SG really of:ART internet think:1SG this  
 muito giro // é uma coisa muito gira  
 very nice be:3SG a thing very nice

<sup>15</sup> Martins (2012) describes the use of *lá* as a metalinguistic negation and other emphatic values. Marques & Duarte (2015, 2017) give an overview of the discourse-pragmatic functions of *lá*, while Duarte & Marques (2018) discuss the role of *lá* in a few conventionalized constructions. Lejeune & Mendes (forthc.), by adopting a contrastive approach, discuss the French functional equivalents of some context-level uses of *lá*. Some studies are also available on the discourse-pragmatic functions of *lá* in Brazilian Portuguese: see for instance Martelotta and Rêgo (1996, pp. 237–250) and Oliveira (2018).

<sup>16</sup> All examples below are taken from CRPC-Oral, the spoken subpart of the Reference Corpus of Contemporary Portuguese (CRPC) of the Centre of Linguistics of the University of Lisbon (CLUL). I extracted 700 random occurrences of *lá* which have been used as a dataset for my analysis. This study does not aim at giving an exhaustive coverage of the context-level uses of *lá*, but rather focuses on those that were more relevant for the comparison with *un po’*. Further uses (for instance the use of *lá* as a metalinguistic negation) – even if well attested in the corpus data – were excluded from the present analysis.

<sup>17</sup> As in the case of *un po’*, intonation and suprasegmental features may also play a decisive role in specifying the actual illocutionary force of the speech act.

NUN: **discorre**      **lá**      sobre a internet  
 tell:IMPV.2SG there about a internet

VAN: ‘uh for instance I really like Internet // I think it’s really nice // it’s a really nice thing’

NUN: ‘**talk PTC** about internet’

In example (13), the presence of the adverb modifies the illocutionary force of the speech act, which sounds softened, and contributes to specify the directive as an exhortation. This seems to be related to the deictic value of *lá*, which can be contextually exploited by speakers to express distancing from their own speech act: thus, it can be reanalyzed as a form that signals a decreased illocutionary force and a cooperative attitude towards the interlocutor. This way, directives with *lá* often appear in codified interactional patterns such as interviews, teacher-student talks and similar (see Marques & Duarte, 2017, pp. 30–32).

More in general, *lá* marks directives where some component of the speaker’s point of view with respect to the uttered proposition is made visible or salient, and is thus responsible for activating inferences that would not be explicitly available without it. As Martins (2012, p. 221) puts it: “The presence of non-argumental *lá* in an imperative sentence adds imperative force in a polite and cooperative manner, thus signaling the speaker’s attitude towards the preadjacent proposition”. This way, imperatives with *lá* represent directives that do not come out of the blue but are related to a specific conversational background: the adverb explicitly signals that the speech act must be interpreted against these contextual conditions. Consider the following example:

(14) [CRPC-Oral – pnatco02]

eu digo “eu tenho psicologia mas a minha mãe não quer  
 I say:1SG I have:1SG psychology but ART my mum NEG want:3SG  
 que eu vá para psicologia diz que eu vou ficar no  
 that I go:SUBJ.1SG for psychology say:3SG that I go:1SG stay:INF in:ART  
 desemprego” e ele dizia-me assim “olha vamos  
 unemployment and he say:IMPF.3SG like\_this look:IMPV.2SG go:SUBJ.1PL  
 fazer uma coisa tu vai para psicologia que se tu estiveres  
 do:INF a thing you go:3SG for psychology that if you stay:SUBJ.FUT.2SG  
 desempregada vens viver cá para casa [...]” e a minha  
 unemployed come:2SG live:INF here for house and ART my  
 mãe estava lá e disse assim “olha tu  
 mum stay:IMPF.3SG there and say:PST.3SG like\_this look:IMPV.2SG tu



vê lá não te esqueças daquilo que lhe estás  
 see:IMPV.2SG there NEG REFL forget:SUBJ.2SG of:that that to.her stay:2SG  
 a dizer” [...] e cheguei a casa fui pegar nos papéis  
 at say:INF and get:PST.1SG at house be:PST.1SG take:INF in-ART papers  
 comecei a escrever quando chegou para pôr a cruz cheguei  
 start:PST.1SG to write:INF when get:PST.3SG for put:INF ART cross get:PST.1SG  
 ao pé da minha mãe e disse assim “ó mãe então”? e  
 to:ART foot of:ART my mum and say:PST.1SG like\_this oh mum so and  
 ela diz “põe lá a psicologia que é o que  
 she say:PST.3SG put:IMPV.2SG there ART psychology that be:3SG ART that  
 tu queres”  
 you want:2SG

‘I say “I would choose psychology but my mother doesn’t want me to go into psychology, she says I’ll be unemployed” and he said to me “Look, let’s do something: you’ll go into psychology and if you’re unemployed you’ll come and live here at my place [...]” and my mother was there and she said “look, **be PTC careful** not to forget what you’re telling her” [...] and I got home and picked up the papers and started writing, and when I had to put the cross I went up to my mother and said “mom, then?” and she said “**put PTC** psychology, that’s what you want”

In example (14) a girl tells of a conversation that she had with her mother and a friend of her mother. The topic concerns the choice of university studies: she would like to study psychology, but her mother is concerned about the difficulties of finding a job after that degree. The reported conversation features two imperatives with *lá*. The first one (*vê lá* ‘make sure/be careful; lit. ‘see there’) sounds like a challenge or warning, while the second one is an exhortation or encouragement (*põe lá a psicologia* ‘put PTC psychology’). Interestingly, in this example the contextual conditions that allow the correct interpretation of the directives are made explicit right after them (*não te esqueças daquilo que lhe estás a dizer* after the warning; *que é o que tu queres* after the exhortation). This supports the idea that imperatives with *lá* represent a marked class of directives, whereby the adverb relates the speech act to a specific conversational background (which may or may not be made explicit by the speaker).

In the dataset used for this study I identified imperative forms of fourteen verbs modified by *lá*, for a total of 51 occurrences (see **Table 2** below). Similarly to what has been noticed about *un po’*, some of these forms appear to be much more frequent than others: they represent highly conventionalized sequences that express specific communicative routines (*desculpe lá*) or operate as discourse markers (*diz lá, olha lá*), as in example (15) below.

VERB	OCCURRENCES	VERB	OCCURRENCES
dizer ‘say’	11	discorrer ‘talk’	1
desculpar ‘apologize’	10	ouvir ‘listen’	1
ver ‘see’	7	deixar ‘leave’	1
olhar ‘look’	5	assinar ‘sign’	1
explicar ‘explain’	4	especificar ‘specify’	1
esperar ‘wait’	4	pôr ‘put’	1
contar ‘tell’	3	tomar ‘take’	1

**Table 2:** Imperatives with *lá* in the dataset used for this study.

(15) [CRPC-Oral – pfamcv01]

AUG: vai cá uma crise muito grande  
go:3SG here a crisis very big

FBA: ai é **olha** **lá** estás  
oh be:3SG look:IMPV.2SG there stay:2SG  
em crise não é?  
in crisis NEG be:3SG

AUG: ‘there is a big crisis coming’

FBA: ‘really, **look PTC**, you’re in crisis, aren’t you?’

Finally, just as in the case of *un po’*, the adverb *lá* can contribute to marking a specific type of illocutionary force, namely hortatives:

(16) [CRPC-Oral – pmedin03]

BAP: tu estás com sessenta não é? [...]  
you stay:2SG with sixty NEG be:3SG

PBF: cinquenta e nove  
fifty and nine  
**vamos lá frisar** esta coisa  
go:SUBJ.1PL there point\_out:INF this thing

BAP: ‘you are sixty, aren’t you?’

PBF: ‘fifty-nine, **let’s point PTC this out**’

## 4.2 Assertive speech acts

Context-level uses of *lá* also appear in another illocutionary context, namely assertions, which are commonly expressed by declarative sentences. While in imperative sentences the adverb appears in the postverbal position, it occupies the preverbal position in declarative sentences, a fact that possibly points to separate development paths.<sup>18</sup> At a general level, the presence of preverbal *lá* marks the declarative sentence as a specific type of assertion, one that presupposes some kind of predictability in the performance of the speech act and some degree of expectedness about the proposition conveyed by it (see Duarte, 2009, p. 191). This can be interpreted as a modification of the illocutionary features of the speech act. This way, the utterance must not be understood as a plain assertion, but rather as an assertion that conveys additional subjective and inferential values: “Declarative sentences with emphatic *lá* denote the speaker’s attitude towards the preadjacent proposition either by reinforcing the assertive force or by adding a comment on top of the mere assertion of the proposition” (Martins, 2012, p. 222).<sup>19</sup>

The speaker’s comment signaled by the presence of *lá* allows for different conversational effects (at times very elusive), and its interpretation heavily relies on contextual factors. This way, assertions with preverbal *lá* can express a wide range of subjective attitudes, such as annoyance, disappointment, relief or inevitability with respect to the proposition conveyed by the speech act. Consider the two following examples:

(17) [CRPC-Oral – pfamcv08]

e portanto não se consegue // que eles se sintam bem  
 and therefore NEG REFL manage:3SG that they REFL feel:SUBJ.3PL well  
 dentro da aula // às vezes / **lá vão atrás dos colegas**  
 inside of:ART class at:ART times there go:3PL behind of:ART classmates  
 e tal // outras vezes também acontece isso / mesmo / quando  
 and such other times also happen:3SG this same when  
 conseguem arranjar um grupo // e o grupo nestas idades é  
 manage:3PL find:INF a group and ART group in:these ages be:3SG  
 muito / importante //  
 very / important  
 ‘and so it’s not possible // for them to feel comfortable in class // sometimes / **they go PTC after their classmates** and so on // other times this also happens / even / when they manage to get a group // and the group at these ages is very / important //

<sup>18</sup> Martins (2012) dedicates some space to the diachronic development of non-locatives uses of *lá*, but more research is needed on these issues.

<sup>19</sup> Assertions with preverbal *lá* activate the inference that the proposition conveyed by the assertion should be considered as already present in the common ground shared by the interlocutors (or it is presented as such by the speaker). Thus, the uttering of the assertion sounds in a way obvious, but it is justified by the fact that it marks the speaker’s intention of adding their own subjective view on it. This way, assertions with *lá* represent a pragmatically marked type of assertions.

- (18) [CRPC-Oral – pfamdl25]  
 os tipos / os operários / todos portugueses / decidiram não trabalhar  
 ART guys ART workers all portuguese decide:PST.3PL NEG work:INF  
 naquele dia / enquanto não fossem / aceites/ **lá as**  
 in:that day as\_long\_as NEG be:SUBJ.PST.3PL accepted there ART  
**reivindicações** que eles queriam / que era os aumentos de  
 demands that they want:IMPF.3PL that be:IMPF.3SG ART increases of  
 salários e tal // os italianos andaram todos aflitos / porque  
 salaries / and such ART Italians go:IMPF.3PL all upset because  
 era uma obra enorme // só parar um dia / é um  
 be:IMPF.3SG a construction huge only stop:INF a day be:3SG a  
 prejuízo doido // e **lá andaram / nas conversações //**  
 loss insane and there go:IMPF.3PL in:ART negotiations  
 ‘the guys / the workers / all Portuguese / decided not to work that day / until / PTC  
 the demands they wanted / which were wage increases and so on / were accepted  
 // the Italians were all upset / because it was a huge construction site // just  
 stopping for one day / is a big loss // and **they have been PTC / negotiating //**’

In example (17), a professor is talking about the well-being of school pupils and mentions conflict among them; in example (18), someone talks about a strike where separate groups of workers have different opinions on how to proceed. In both examples, the assertion with *lá* stands out within the discourse flow: *lá vão atrás dos colegas* ‘they go PTC after their classmates’ in (17); *lá andaram nas conversações* ‘they have been PTC negotiating’ in (18). In particular, the presence of *lá* signals a subjective evaluation on the part of the speaker towards the proposition conveyed by the speech act: in (17), it adds a sense of inevitability; in (18), it conveys some kind of disappointment at the fact that the negotiations have lasted longer than expected.<sup>20</sup>

As in the case of directives, some assertions with *lá* have reached the status of routinized expressions (for instance: *lá está*, lit. ‘there it is’; *já lá vai*, lit. ‘there it goes already’). These conventionalized sequences can express broader discursive functions (confirmation, justification) in argumentative patterns. In example (19) below, the fact that the presence of *lá* enriches the utterance with an overtone of inevitability is exploited by the speaker for argumentative purposes. In this case, *lá está* operates as a discourse-marking element that scopes over a whole discourse chunk. The speaker affirms that she likes Provence and, shortly after, that she likes Southern French people: the second utterance is preceded by *lá está*, and thus acquires the function of a justification of what has been said before. Thus, the fact that she likes southern French people is presented as a prior argument that inevitably leads to the fact that she likes Provence.

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<sup>20</sup> Example (18) also features another occurrence of *lá* (*lá as reivindicações*) that I will discuss later.

## (19) [CRPC-Oral – pfamd120]

ISL: gosto imenso daquela zona toda do sul de França //  
 like:1SG really of-that area all of:ART south of France  
 Provença //  
 Provence

HLR: é lindo //  
 be:3SG beautiful

ISL: eh / gosto imenso / Provença // Aix // aquela zona toda ali //  
 uh like:1SG really Provence Aix that area all there

HLR: hhh  
 mmm

ISL: gosto / acho que é e gosto de lá está / gosto  
 like:1SG think:1SG that be:3SG and like:1SG of there stay: 3SG like:1SG  
 muito / dos franceses do sul //  
 much of:ART French of:ART south

ISL: 'I really like that whole area of southern France // Provence'

HLR: 'it's beautiful'

ISL: 'uh, I really like Provence, Aix, that whole area over there'

HLR: 'mmm'

ISL: 'I like / I think that it's and I like **I mean PTC** / I really like southern French people'

Going back to example (18), another occurrence of *lá* should be noticed (*lá as reivindicações* 'the demands there'): in this case, *lá* has scope over a noun phrase (NP). Functionally, although the adverb partially keeps its locative meaning, the distancing value should be understood as a way of expressing a subjective stance rather than a spatial reference. Consider the following example, where the adverb also has syntactic scope over a NP:

## (20) [CRPC-Oral – ppubd107]

eu nunca fui fazer compras // quem fazia as compras  
 I never be:PST.1SG do:INF shopping REL do:IMPF.3SG ART shopping  
 era / lá a senhora / a dona da casa / e um dos  
 be:IMPF.3SG there ART lady ART owner of:ART house and a of:ART  
 filhos //  
 sons

'I never went shopping // the one who did the shopping was / **PTC the lady** who owned the house / and one of her sons //

In example (20), the presence of *lá* marks the fact that the NP *a senhora* only approximately matches the referent that the speaker would like to evoke: when used with this function, *lá* can be interpreted as a marker of approximation.<sup>21</sup> This function probably develops when the distancing value of locative *lá* is transferred from the representational to the interpersonal level: this way, the presence of *lá* can express the distancing enacted by the speaker with respect to their own assertion.<sup>22</sup> Depending on the target, the approximation value can target parts of the communicated content as in (20) above, or the whole of it as in (21):

(21) [CRPC-Oral – ppubdl07]

os patrões / eh / que eu tinha / não eram assim /  
 ART employers uh that I have:PST.1SG NEG be:IMPF.3PL like\_this  
 muito famosos também // porque / tinham um filho que era  
 much popular also because have:PST.3PL a son who be:IMPF.3SG  
 assim meio / não se portava lá muito bem com os  
 like\_this half / NEG REFL behave:IMPF.3SG there very well with ART  
**empregados**  
 employees  
 ‘and the bosses / uh / that I had / weren’t / very good either // because / they had a  
 son who was like half / **he didn’t behave PTC very well with the employees**’

### 4.3 Common features of the context-level uses of *lá*

Overall, the distinction between locative and non-locative uses of *lá* should be understood as a continuum of content-level and context-level uses, which in some cases leaves space for underdetermination between the two interpretations (see Marques & Duarte, 2015, pp. 119–121). Looking at the discourse-pragmatic functions of *lá* examined so far, the connection with the prototypical locative value can be explained in (at least) two ways.

On the one hand, the deictic value of the adverb, which can express both spatial and textual deixis (Marques & Duarte, 2017, pp. 21–23), must be considered. In particular, the deictic potential of *lá* can be exploited to point to propositions which do not explicitly appear in the text, but are rather implicitly active in the common ground shared by the interlocutors. Thus, the adverb does not refer to textual chunks, but rather to contextual inferences, and it can be locally

<sup>21</sup> The approximation value seems to be a relevant feature in other context-level uses of *lá* as well, such as its use as a general extender and as a negation (see Marques & Duarte, 2017, pp. 28–30; see also Lejeune & Mendes, *forthc.*, pp. 46–47). The deictic locative *aí* in Brazilian Portuguese can also express approximation (Hengeveld & Keizer, 2011, p. 1971; Waltereit, 2006, pp. 105–107).

<sup>22</sup> As it is concerned with the way information is presented by the speaker, the approximation value relates to the functional domain of information management. Nevertheless, in many cases it is not easy to assess whether *lá* expresses approximation on the communicated or rather a low degree of assertivity on the speech act (which represents modification of the illocutionary force). This issue has already been pointed out as regards the context-level uses of *un po’*: I will further discuss it in section 5.

reanalyzed as a marker of interactional salience. This process seems to be particularly relevant for the illocutionary uses of *lá*, as soon as the deictic potential of the adverb is transferred to the interpersonal level and paired with the subjective attitude of the speaker. Directive and assertive speech acts with *lá* are thus marked as non-initial speech acts, as the presence of *lá* signals that the speech act must be interpreted with reference to some element of the common ground or a codified interactional frame. This way, the presence of *lá* contributes to specifying how the speech act should be interpreted in the relevant interactional context.

On the other hand, the distancing value related to locative use of the adverb (‘there’) must be considered. In particular, the expression of spatial distance can be paired with a subjective perspective so that *lá* marks “some sort of distancing between the enunciator and the situation described (‘nothing to do with me’)” (Lejeune & Mendes forthc., p. 43; see also Marques & Duarte, 2017, pp. 28–30). In particular, the speaker can use *lá* to mark distance towards their own speech act or distance towards the communicated content of their own utterance: this can lead to the marking of approximation on parts of the communicated content, or the expression of a low degree of confidence with respect to the whole message conveyed.<sup>23</sup>

Importantly, as already mentioned, the functional variation of *lá* is partly reflected by formal distinctions. As a marker of illocutionary modification, the adverb occurs in the postverbal position in directive speech acts (imperative sentences), while it occurs in the preverbal position in assertive speech acts (declarative sentences). As a marker of approximation, it shows more flexibility, as it can occur both immediately before and after the phrase over which it has scope, as well as in other positions of the sentence. In particular, when it takes scope over the whole utterance, it mainly occurs after the finite verb form, thus showing a formal difference from the illocutionary use of *lá* in assertive speech acts. This way, the fact that the various context-level uses of *lá* show formal differences between them reflects the fact that they express different functions at different grammatical layers.

## 5. Discussion of the findings

### 5.1 A comparison of the discourse-pragmatic functions of *un po’* and *lá*

Having described some of the context-level uses of *un po’* and *lá*, I will now highlight a few similarities and differences between them, and resume thereby the discussion on specific theoretical points. As it became clear through the description of the examples, the comparison between the two adverbs is not based on an exact equivalence of their meanings, but rather on their grammatical status and broader functional issues. These can be summarized in three main points.

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<sup>23</sup> The distancing value seems to be also relevant for the development of negative constructions with *lá* (expressions such as *sei lá* ‘I don’t know’, *quero lá saber* ‘I don’t care’), which are outside the scope of this paper (see Martins, 2012).

First, both adverbs are polyfunctional: in particular, they show a coexistence of content-level and context-level uses. The first group is represented by uses of *un po'* and *lá* that modify the propositional content of a sentence, while the second group is represented by uses of *un po'* and *lá* that target the pragmatic features of the utterance. Considering content-level uses, *un po'* operates as an adverbial degree modifier and as a quantifier in partitive constructions, while *lá* operates as a deictic locative adverb. Considering context-level uses, both adverbs can perform a wide range of functions: from discourse marking to illocutionary modification and several information-managing functions. This kind of polyfunctionality has been observed cross-linguistically for many adverbial elements, and has been discussed by several studies about semantic change and the semantics/pragmatics divide (see Ariel 2008; Hansen, 2008; Traugott & Dasher, 2002). Moreover, looking at the frequencies of content-level vs. context-level uses of the two adverbs in the dataset used for this study (see **Table 3** below), it can be noticed that the first group largely outnumber the second one: in this perspective, this distinction should also be understood as a distinction between prototypical vs. non-prototypical uses.

	<i>un po'</i>	<i>lá</i>
content-level uses	560	481
context-level uses	140	219
TOTAL	700	700

**Table 3:** Frequencies in the dataset used for this study.

Second, some of the context-level uses of *un po'* and *lá* show a comparable speech-act distribution, namely they appear in similar illocutionary contexts. In this study, I presented the most important contexts of occurrence that are common to both adverbs: directive, hortative, and assertive speech acts.<sup>24</sup> This way, the illocutionary context can provide a baseline both for the classification of the context-level uses of these adverbs and for their functional description. Moreover, in hortatives and directives, *un po'* and *lá* appear in a set of constructions that perform equivalent discursive functions: particularly noteworthy are a few highly conventionalized verb-particle sequences (*vediamo un po'/vamos lá ver* 'let's see PTC'; *guarda un po'/olha lá* 'look PTC'; *dimmi un po'/diz lá* 'tell me PTC') that are used in the same interactional patterns.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> According to Martins (2012, pp. 224–226), an illocutionary *lá* also appears in rhetorical questions, which however are functionally close to assertions.

<sup>25</sup> In these examples *un po'* and *lá* could be considered exact translational equivalents.



Finally, the context-level uses of both adverbs are related to the same functional domains: illocutionary modification and information management. The first domain accounts for the actual illocutionary uses (those expressing modification of the illocutionary force and speech-act specification in an interpersonal perspective), while the second domain accounts for the uses that relate to the speaker's handling of the information flow (those expressing approximation, focus marking, mirativity, and metalinguistic negation). This fact represents the most striking functional similarity between the context-level uses of *un po'* and *lá*, and leads to relevant theoretical issues. On the one hand, this data can be used to discuss the respective features of these functional domains and the interplay between them. On the other hand, the theoretical discussion can lead to a better definition of the grammatical status of the context-level uses of *un po'* and *lá*.

## 5.2 The interplay between illocutionary force and information management

In Section 2, I referred to the framework of Functional Discourse Grammar to discuss the notions of illocutionary force and information management, linking them respectively to the grammatical layers of the illocution and the communicated content. The distinction between these two layers is treated in FDG as a distinction pertaining to the interpersonal level, which deals with the interaction between the speaker and the addressee (Hengeveld & Mackenzie, 2008, pp. 46–48). Linguistic expressions operating at this level have no designating force: they relate to the attitude of the speaker towards the information that they are transmitting rather than to the propositional content of the sentences in which they occur. In **Table 4**, the functions related to four different grammatical categories at the interpersonal level (mood, negation, evidentiality, mirativity) are shown.

Interpersonal level			
	DISCOURSE ACT	ILLOCUTION	COMMUNICATED CONTENT
MOOD	irony, mitigation, reinforcement	basic illocution, illocutionary modification	approximation
NEGATION	rejection	negative basic illocution	metalinguistic negation, denial
EVIDENTIALITY			reportative
MIRATIVITY			mirative

**Table 4:** Grammatical categories at the interpersonal level in FDG.  
(adapted from Hengeveld, 2017, p. 17 and Hengeveld & Olbertz, 2018, p. 325).

As regards this study, illocutionary modification and approximation (and to a lesser extent, mirative and metalinguistic negation) are the functions that played a major role in the analysis of *un po'* and *lá*. The first element can express illocutionary modification at the layer of the illocution, as well as approximation and mirativity at the layer of the communicated content. The second element can express illocutionary modification at the layer of the illocution, as well as approximation and metalinguistic negation at the layer of the communicated content.

Moreover, the description of the examples also showed that while some context-level uses of these adverbs clearly relate to a single grammatical layer, others are fuzzy with respect to the functions expressed and, consequently, the relevant grammatical layer. In directive speech acts, due to their distinctive illocutionary features, context-level uses of *un po'* and *lá* are mostly connected to illocutionary force modification. In assertive speech acts a greater interplay between the two layers can be observed.<sup>26</sup> In particular, several examples of *un po'* and *lá* in assertive speech acts are ambiguous as to whether they express approximation at the layer of the communicated content or low degree of assertivity at the layer of the illocution. This is not surprising, as Hengeveld & Keizer (2011) point out:

It would be worthwhile to see to what extent these distinctions are relevant at other layers of the Interpersonal Level (the Illocution or the Discourse Act) as well. However, since the same expressions are often used to mark non-straightforwardness at the different layers, it is not always easy to determine to which level these expressions apply. For the same reason, it turns out to be difficult to distinguish between approximation/exactness on the one hand and mitigation/reinforcement on the other. (Hengeveld & Keizer, 2011, p. 1975)<sup>27</sup>

Overall, the interplay between illocutionary force and information management reflects the contiguity of the illocutionary and the locutionary features that together constitute a speech act. It is therefore reasonable to expect that, according to the specificities of the context of occurrence, the same operator can target one layer or the other. Moreover, the expression of the speaker's subjective attitude plays a role both in the marking of the illocutionary force and in the managing of the information flow. From this perspective, in the absence of clear formal features that distinguish the use of the same element at different layers, some degree of scope and functional vagueness can be assumed.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See Hengeveld & Mackenzie (2008, pp. 74–75) for the distinction between propositional and behavioral illocutions, that is those that have to do with the exchange of information (interrogative and declarative) and those that have to do with influencing behavior (like imperative and hortative).

<sup>27</sup> See also the concept of *referential vagueness* in Caffi (2007, p. 58): “In other words, speakers can use referential vagueness to reduce both their commitment to the precision of denotation, hence of their reference act, and their epistemic endorsement of the truth of the proposition.”

<sup>28</sup> This is well known from studies on reanalysis and semantic change (see for instance De Smet, 2009). Despite this underlying complexity, it is perhaps important to point out that *context-level use* represents an informative and inclusive label for descriptive purposes, which encompasses the different layers at the interpersonal level.

### 5.3 *un po'* and *lá* as Romance modal particles

One last issue to be considered concerns the grammatical status of the context-level uses of *un po'* and *lá*, and the question of whether they can be assigned to a specific grammatical category or word class. In the FDG line of research, only a few works have specifically addressed the cross-linguistic distribution and the specific features of grammatical operators at the layers of the illocution and the communicated content, and more work is needed on this topic (see however Fang & Hengeveld, 2022; Hengeveld & Keizer, 2011; Vismans, 1994). Moreover, the distinction between the illocution and the communicated content is not always comparable with the categories adopted by other frameworks. Nevertheless, a few similarities with other approaches can be highlighted. In particular, the functions expressed by the context-level uses of *un po'* and *lá* closely resemble the functions of modal particles in German, Dutch and other languages (see among others Abraham, 1991; Artiagoitia, Elordieta & Monforte, 2022; Waltereit, 2001). Modal particles are syntactically integrated elements that have scope over sentences. Functionally, they fine-tune speech acts by specifying the illocutionary force. Modal particles mark a relationship between a speech act and some element in the common ground, usually a belief ('a proposition') attributed to the addressee. This way, they contribute to accommodating a speech act to the relevant interactional context (Detges, 2015, p. 131).

From this perspective, the functions of *un po'* and *lá* in directive speech acts can be considered in all respects modal-particle uses of these adverbs: they specify the illocutionary force of the speech act, and relate it to specific common ground structures and interactional patterns. Moreover, since they always occur in a fixed position of the sentence, close to the main verb, they are syntactically integrated elements. Similarly, the particle-verb construction with *lá* in assertive speech acts also represents a modal-particle use of this element, which marks a specific class of assertions.<sup>29</sup> Given this, the illocutionary uses of *un po'* and *lá* can be included in the inventory of Romance modal particles (see Remberger, 2021; Squartini, 2014, 2017; Waltereit, 2001, 2006). By contrast, the uses of *un po'* and *lá* that express approximation should be probably better kept apart, as they are related to more general hedging strategies that have scope on the communicated content (see Kaltenböck, Mihatsch & Schneider, 2010).

## 6. Conclusion

This paper investigated specific uses of two Romance adverbial elements, Italian *un po'* 'a bit' and European Portuguese *lá* 'there', and discussed their discourse-pragmatic functions. The description initially traced a distinction between content-level and context-level uses of the two adverbs. Subsequently, it related the context-level uses to two different functional domains, namely illocutionary force and information management, that both adverbs likewise express.

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<sup>29</sup> This is consistent with earlier descriptions of specific uses of *lá* as a modal particle in Portuguese (Franco, 1989; Meisnitzer, 2012, pp. 343–345).

This distinction was reassessed by referring to the layered model of grammatical categories proposed by Functional Discourse Grammar: two layers in particular, the illocution and the communicated content (both part of the interpersonal level) have been shown to be relevant for the analysis of the discourse-pragmatic functions of *un po'* and *lá*. Moreover, the reference to FDG made it possible to frame the different functions within a broader model of grammatical categories, a fact that is often neglected in the description of discourse-pragmatic elements. At the same time, the functional distribution of *un po'* and *lá* confirmed the proximity of these grammatical layers.

Taken as a whole, the sum of the empirical descriptions presented in this paper contributes to a better understanding of the subtle boundaries between different functional domains. It demonstrated that, as regards the functions of *un po'* and *lá*, a tripartite distinction should be posited, in which the communicated content also plays its independent role along the representational level (content-level uses) and the illocution. In fact, despite being both interpersonal (context-level uses), the communicated content and the illocution can be kept separated, for the former refers to information management, while illocution directly interfaces to the pragmatics of speech acts.

Future research will investigate the diachronic development of the context-level uses of *un po'* and *lá* and will describe in more detail specific uses that involve other categories such as mirativity and polarity. Furthermore, cross-linguistic comparison with other elements that express both illocutionary modification and approximation will allow for a better understanding of the interplay between these functional domains.

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## Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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