**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**

**Implicit Manipulation in Public Discourse:**

**Quantitative and Qualitative approaches**

Dipartimento di Lingue, Letterature e Culture Straniere

Università Roma Tre, 27-28 April 2023

[**Teams link to follow the conference**](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/ap/t-59584e83/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fteams.microsoft.com%2Fl%2Fmeetup-join%2F19%253ameeting_MWUyZTA2ODEtMTM5Mi00MmM3LTg3MzMtYjI5NzIzZjU5YjZl%2540thread.v2%2F0%3Fcontext%3D%257b%2522Tid%2522%253a%2522ffb4df68-f464-458c-a546-00fb3af66f6a%2522%252c%2522Oid%2522%253a%25224f3257b8-299b-4fc6-8f95-87985d335133%2522%257d&data=05%7C01%7C%7Cfdb1f86ea04647edfb2c08db0e9a84c7%7Cffb4df68f464458ca54600fb3af66f6a%7C0%7C0%7C638119829030892547%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=AsBElP7tamlYvc6HuAtoKSOtg7%2BWLE1GPvEaOoUT6OQ%3D&reserved=0)

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**ORIENTATION FOR INVITED SPEAKERS**

The aim of this conference is to promote a discussion about the impact of linguistic implicit communication on human cognition, with particular reference to public discourse. The conference is organized as a conclusive event of the project IMPAQTS *Implicit Manipulation in Politics: Quantitatively Assessing the tendentiousness of Speeches* (funded by the Italian Government as the Project of Relevant National Interest 2017, n. 2017STJCE9 – https://impaqts.it).

In persuasive discourse, the boundary between communication and manipulation is not always easily traced. The aim of political and commercial propaganda is to mold peoples’ behaviors: this is often obtained through underencoded or implicit contents (Ducrot 1972; Sbisà 2007), whose cognitive processing is different from that of explicit contents. More specifically, linguistic implicit strategies have evolved as a part of human communication and of speakers’ widespread tendency to manipulate others (Mercier 2009, Sperber et al. 2010, Reboul 2011, Lombardi Vallauri 2019, 2021, building on Krebs & Dawkins 1984). The role of implicit strategies in manipulation has also been investigated within the theoretical frames of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and argumentation theory (van Dijk 1992, 1997, 2000, 2011; Chilton 2005; Danler 2005; Rocci 2005; Charaudeau 2005; Reisigl 2008).

An important part of the studies on linguistic implicitness have proposed taxonomies and methods aimed at classifying implicit persuasive strategies and at quantifying their impact in texts (Lombardi Vallauri & Masia, 2014; Lombardi Vallauri, 2016b; 2019; Müller, 2017; Garassino et al., 2019). The linguistic strategies normally considered in such taxonomies include: presuppositions (see a.o. Strawson ; Sellars 1954; Kiparsky & Kiparsky 1970; Karttunen 1971, 1973; Fillmore 1971; Levinson 1983; Fox & Thompson 1990; Stalnaker 2002, de Saussure 2012, Macagno 2022), different kinds of implicatures (see a.o. Grice 1975, Levinson 1983, Sperber & Wilson 1986, Sbisà 2007), vagueness (see Channell 1985, 1994; Cutting 2007; Brown & Levinson 1987; Overstreet & Yule 1997; Jucker et al. 2003; Cotterill 2007; Koester 2007; Lombardi Vallauri 2016a, 2019) and topicalizations (see Cresti 2000, Lombardi Vallauri 2009).

Another aspect relevant for our understanding of linguistic implicitness regards the collection of large amounts of authentic data. An important step in this direction has been made within the IMPAQTS project itself, which has allowed the collection of a large corpus of Italian political speeches thoroughly annotated per implicitly conveyed non *bona fide* true contents (Cominetti et al. in press).

In newly emerging lines of research, implicit strategies have also been experimentally investigated, with both behavioral and neurophysiological techniques. Notably, much work has been devoted to assessing the processing underpinnings of presupposed contents, with interesting findings on the differences between trigger types (Schwarz 2015; Masia et al. 2017, Domaneschi et al. 2018), which reveal that different presupposing constructions may induce as much different mental representations of discourse contents, which affect the likelihood with which receivers may challenge those contents in an interaction. Behavioral and neurophysiological experimentations on implicatures have shed light on extra mental resources involved in computing inferential meanings (Noveck & Posada 2003, Pouscoulous et al. 2007, Cory et al. 2014, Bašnáková et al. 2014), which marks them as involving different mental processes than those required to disentangle presupposed information. Other studies have also sought to test the effects of *plausible deniability* of implicit contents, namely the possibility that a speaker has to deny having conveyed certain content without bringing about contradictory communicative moves. Some of these works (Decock & Depraetere 2018, Mazzarella et al. 2018; Hall & Mazzarella, in press, Bonalumi 2020, among others) have shed light on the extent to which, when some content is conveyed as implicature, the speaker incurs minor reputational costs in subsequently denying it.

Preliminary findings on the processing of vagueness suggest that vague expressions are cognitively less costly than more precise equivalents, probably associated with a shallow processing modality (Lombardi Vallauri et al. in prep).

On the information structure level, earlier and recent works on the processing of Given vs. New and Topic vs. Focus components of utterances have highlighted the important role of expectation-based processing and, particularly, the sensitivity of our attentional system to more or less expected associations of information units to the activation state of some content, on the one hand (La Rocca et al. 2016), and to other levels of analysis, from syntax (Burmester et al. 2014), to parts of speech (Piciucco et al. 2022), and discourse structure (Cowles et al. 2007, Fetzer 2017), on the other hand.

Finally, educating people to recognize implicit strategies is a crucial resource towards the free and fruitful participation of citizens in democratic life (Bruno & Harris 1980, Sbisà 1999, Lombardi Vallauri 2019, Pietrandrea 2021). Pioneering experiments have been conducted on small population samples to train them to recognize implicit strategies (Bruno 1977; Harris 1977; Harris et al. 1979, 1981; Gaeth & Heath 1987; Papafragou & Musolino 2003; Guasti et al. 2005; Sbisà 2007; Brocca et al. 2020; Pietrandrea 2020). A dissemination action has been conducted within the IMPAQTS project and through two observatories created in the Italian and French-speaking environments, namely the Italian Osservatorio Permanente sulla Pubblicità e la Propaganda (OPPP!, Permanent Observatory on Advertising and Propaganda, http://oppp.it/), and the Italo-French Observatoire LINguistique du DIscours NUMérique (OLiNDiNUM, Linguistic Observatory on Digital Discourse, http://modes.huma-num.fr/), which publish educational contents on linguistic implicitness aimed at the general public.

Based on these premises, the conference intends to tackle the following topics:

* Persuasive and manipulative communication: boundaries and definitions;
* Pragmatic strategies of implicit communication;
* Taxonomies and methodologies for the analysis of linguistic implicitness;
* Quantitative methods: measuring the impact of linguistic implicitness in actual speeches and texts;
* The processing of linguistic implicit contents: experimental (behavioral and neurophysiological) approaches.
* Creation and analysis of data-bases of persuasive discourse;
* Analyses of actual examples of persuasive or manipulative implicit communication, and detection of previously not studied phenomena.
* Dissemination and education concerning the awareness about linguistic implicitness (cf. the OPPP! website: <https://oppp.it/>)

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