

Manipulative impact of implicit communication: A comparative analysis of French, Italian and German political speeches*

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Abstract

This paper presents the application of a quantitative model for measuring the impact of manipulative implicit linguistic strategies on a small comparable corpus of Italian, German and French political discourses. The aim is to show the cross-linguistic applicability of the model, originally developed and put to test on Italian. Furthermore, the analysis allows a quantitative and qualitative comparison of the three comparable corpora: some statistical correlations and tendencies in the frequency and type of linguistic implicit strategies are presented and put in relation not only with the language, but also with the political orientation of the speaker and with other parameters (context, subject, rhetorical style). Results show that the model can be applied to multiple languages and that inter- and intra-linguistic tendencies in the use of manipulative implicit linguistic strategies can be appreciated.

1 Introduction

This work presents a quantitative model for measuring the impact of implicit discursive strategies in real texts (cf. Lombardi Vallauri/Masia 2014; Lombardi Vallauri et al. 2020). Specifically, we present here an application of this model on an original corpus of Italian, French and German political speeches from the 2019 European election campaign. Such application intends to bring into focus some of the model's theoretical and applicative potentialities, namely its cross-linguistic adaptability, which makes it a remarkable support for general and applied pragmatic studies, and its role in providing quantitative data on the use of implicit strategies, allowing cross-textual comparisons and supporting qualitative analysis. For the present work, we specifically targeted a predominantly persuasive text genre, namely political propaganda, with a focus on implicit questionable contents, as their use can be considered a potentially manipulative.

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tive discursive strategy. Let us explain more in detail why this is so, by outlining theoretical and experimental work on the functioning of implicit strategies.

At least since Krebs/Dawkins' (1984) work on animal communication, it became evident that no clear-cut boundary between the concepts of "communication" and "manipulation" can be traced easily. Indeed, the authors show that all forms of animal communication are ultimately performed to produce a change in others' behavior (e. g., to keep others distant, to make them come closer, to make them go (or not) in a certain direction, to mate with them, etc). Thus, all animals (and humans are no exception) communicate with others to manipulate them – in a neutral (non-negatively connotated) way. In this sense, it is generally acknowledged that all forms and techniques of communication are ultimately intended to bring a change in the recipient's state of belief and subsequently, possibly, in their behavior. However, it is also generally acknowledged that some discursive strategies can be markedly manipulative. Indeed, as suggested by Reboul (2011: 10), there is reason to think that: "Implicit communication evolved to facilitate manipulation by allowing communicators to hide their (manipulative) intents".

The assumed enhanced manipulative potential of implicit information seems to have multifaceted cognitive grounds. As a matter of fact, information conveyed implicitly does not seem to undergo the same accurate and critical processing as explicit information. Over the last decades, research has provided empirical evidence supporting the idea that some implicitly encoded contents correlate with less accurate or shallow processing (cf. Loftus 1975; Erickson/Mattson 1981; Barton/Sanford 1993; Sanford/Sturt 2002; Sturt et al. 2004; Schwarz 2015; Lombardi Vallauri/Masia 2015; Masia et al. 2017). These studies suggest that semantic and pragmatic anomalies go significantly undetected when referring to implicitly conveyed contents (mostly presuppositions). In other words, questionable or even false information is often not recognized as such if conveyed implicitly. For example, Erickson/Mattson (1981) famously asked their participants: "How many animals of each kind did Moses take on the Ark?", following which most people would respond: "Two", not noticing (even if they knew it) that it is not Moses who brought animals on the Ark but rather Noah. This clearly shows that the question was processed by participants in an inaccurate, shallow way. More precisely, the part which is processed (more) inaccurately is the presupposed one (i. e., Moses took animals on the ark), triggered by the interrogative subordinate clause introduced by *how many*. Many studies show that when the same questionable information is conveyed more explicitly (e. g., through an assertion instead of a presupposition) the anomalies are detected significantly better.

From an evolutionary point of view, a plausible explanation for the different processing of explicit and implicit information is that together with manipulation abilities, so-called "sales-resistance" and "cognitive optimism" attitudes co-evolved as well (cf. Krebs/Dawkins 1984; Lombardi Vallauri et al. 2020). The concept of sales resistance refers to the fact that when we become aware of somebody's intention to persuade us, a critical reaction arises, due to which we tend to resist our interlocutor's argument by challenging and questioning their truthfulness and trustworthiness. Petty/Cacioppo (1979) showed that explicit information about the persuasive attempt made the latter less efficient and called this response "reactance". This cognitive attitude is combined with the fact that we tend to over-trust our own interpretation of facts and our judgment (*cognitive optimism*). Accordingly, as implicit contents are not overtly presented as coming from an external source, but rather are generally retrieved by recipients themselves,

the above-mentioned critical reaction is less likely to occur. Thus, generally, unstated, inexplicit pieces of information are processed with less attention and *epistemic vigilance* (Sperber et al. 2010) compared to overtly stated ones. Therefore, the more covert the manipulative attempt, the more likely to succeed it is.

All in all, the above-mentioned findings also reveal that strategies of implicit encoding can prove more effective than explicit ones in conveying questionable information and in leading the addressees to believe it. In other words, they can be an effective tool in predominantly persuasive and manipulative texts.

The present contribution presents a model for pragmatic text analysis aimed at quantifying the use of implicit strategies conveying questionable information within a text. The implicit strategies considered in the present work are: implicatures, vague expressions, presuppositions and topicalizations (see also 2.1). The manipulative potential of these communication devices has been addressed in numerous – mainly qualitative¹ – contributions in the fields of Discourse Studies, Critical Linguistics or Critical Discourse Analysis and Cognitive Pragmatics (*inter alia*, de Saussure 2005, 2013; Rigotti 2005; van Dijk 1998, 2006, 2010, 2016; Maillat/Oswald 2011; Lombardi Vallauri/Masia 2014). To our best knowledge, the present model is the sole which currently allows measuring the amount of (questionable) implicit information conveyed within a text.

The model presented here is meant to measure the extension and the impact of questionable, i. e., non *bona fide* true information conveyed implicitly within a text, considered as potentially ideologically loaded content. For self-evident or well-ascertained truths, indeed, there is generally no need to persuade anybody. Therefore, implicit encoding of already shared knowledge is considered to be not only a straightforward, i. e., a non-persuasive choice, but also an appropriate, i. e., economic one (cf. Lombardi Vallauri/Masia 2014). The notion of “*bona fide* true information” is an operative category we adopted and is highly context-dependent. In our account, this term refers to those contents which are neither objectively true, nor generally known or agreed upon (cf. *ibid.*).

The text types to which the model could be applied are limitless. In the present work, we illustrate an application of the model to the predominantly persuasive text type of political speeches, suggesting that this method could contribute to a technicization – among others – of the newly developing area called “Politolinguistics” (cf. Reisigl 2008; Klein 2014; Cedroni 2014).

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: in 2 we present the relevant implicit categories, the measuring model and its previous application in further detail; in 3 we present the corpus; in 4 a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data is provided; in 5 some conclusions and further perspectives are drawn.

¹ Several authors, notably in the field of CDA, in which significant attention has been paid to explore which communicative devices can play a role in manipulation processes, have pointed out the strong need for more rigorous and quantitative methods of text analysis (cf. Weiss/Wodak 2003; Pauwels 2011; Aslanidis 2017).

2 Method

2.1 Implicit encoding of content and implicit encoding of responsibility

Following the theoretical frame suggested in Lombardi Vallauri/Masia (2014; cf. also Lombardi Vallauri 2019; Lombardi Vallauri et al. 2020), in the present work the categories of implicitness are divided into those concealing some **content** (i. e., implicatures and vague expressions) and those concealing the **responsibility** of the speaker on an asserted content (presuppositions and topicalizations). In what follows, these categories are illustrated through Italian, French and German political discourse examples, taken from the corpus built and analyzed for the present work (see 3).

Among the categories concealing content, the term *implicature* refers to a logic-conversational inference, thanks to which the addressee is expected to retrieve some content which is *meant* by the speaker, yet not overtly stated on surface structure. The triggering of implicatures is typically described in relation to Grice's Maxims (cf. Grice 1975): an implicature may arise from the assumption that all speakers follow the Maxims or by their apparent violation. In (1) an example from a speech by Matteo Salvini is reported:²

- (1) Intanto ieri la commissione bilancio del Senato – a proposito della Lega che fa, dalle parole ai fatti – **e non avete letto mezza riga su nessun giornale e ci avrei giurato [...]** la commissione bilancio del Senato ha approvato un emendamento della Lega che permette di mettere telecamere negli asili nido, nelle scuole materne e nelle case di riposo, per proteggere bimbi, anziani e disabili
 ‘Meanwhile yesterday the Budget Committee of the Senate – speaking of Lega working and not just talking – **and (on this) you didn't read a line on any newspaper, and I could have sworn you wouldn't [...]** the Budget Committee of the Senate approved an amendment proposed by the Lega which allows cameras in nursery schools, kindergartens and in rest homes, in order to protect children, elderly and disabled people’.³

In (1), by saying that he was expecting the press not to comment on his work, the speaker apparently violates the Maxim of Relevance, in order to imply that the media are not impartial, but rather biased against his party. Implicatures are traditionally classified along a scale of conventionality (cf. Levinson 1983; Sbisà 2007; Zufferey/Moeschler/Reboul 2019). In this view, context-bound implicatures, such as the one in (1), are called *conversational* or *particularized*; implicatures that are activated in almost all contexts due to language general functioning rules are called *generalized* implicatures; and finally, implicatures that are linked to the conventional meaning of some linguistic expressions are called *conventional* implicatures. As will be illustrated in the following section, this difference is relevant in the model proposed here, as the two types of implicatures also receive different scores, indexing a different degree to which they leave some content unexpressed.

The second category of implicit encoding is represented by *vague expressions*. We consider as implicit strategies the fuzzy expressions through which some information is left underspecified

² All emphases here and in the following citations are by the authors of this paper.

³ All translations have been provided by the authors of this paper.

and is not retrievable from the context, although it is relevant to the ongoing discourse. In (2) an excerpt from Luigi Di Maio's speech is reported:

- (2) Ma alla base di tutto, io dico sempre, che c'è **chi sceglie di parlare sempre dello stesso tema, da un anno. Chi cerca anche altri temi, ma alla fine è monotematico e parla sempre della stessa questione.** E chi invece si occupa del paese.

'At the heart of everything, as I always say, there are **those who have been choosing to talk about the same topic for a year now, those who try to address other topics too but end up being monothematic, always dealing with the same issue.** And then there are those who actually take care of the country'.

In (2), the speaker vaguely accuses some opponents of having just dealt with one issue, without saying neither the addressee of the accusation nor the topic on which they are supposedly focusing on.

Among the categories concealing responsibility, we find the category of *presuppositions*. The term *presupposition* refers to information that the speaker presents as already known and shared by the audience (cf. Frege 1892; Strawson 1964; Stalnaker 1974, 2002; Sbisà 2007). Presuppositions can be triggered by numerous – both syntactic and lexical – linguistic devices (cf. Levinson 1983; Lombardi Vallauri 2009; Müller 2018). The utterance in (3) shows two presuppositions from a speech by Marine Le Pen. The first presupposition is triggered by a predicate conveying a change of state (*redresser* 'raise') and the second one by a relative clause (*le pouvoir qui leur a été enlevé* 'the power that has been taken away from them').

- (3) Comme en Espagne il y a quelques jours, avec nos amis de Vox, ou en Estonie avec nos amis de ECRE, partout les peuples d'Europe **redressent la tête** et fièrement se lèvent pour reprendre **le pouvoir qui leur a été enlevé.**

'Just like in Spain a few days ago, with our friends of Vox, or in Estonia with our friends of ECRE, everywhere the peoples of Europe **are raising their heads** and are boldly standing up to take back **the power that has been taken away from them**'.

In (3), by saying that the people of Europe are raising their heads, the speaker presupposes that up to that moment, they were living with their heads down, meaning that they were passively enduring the power abuse perpetrated by the EU. Similarly, by saying that they are taking back the power that they had been deprived of, the information that someone had taken their power from them is taken for granted.⁴

The last implicit strategy considered here is represented by *topicalizations* (cf. Cresti 2000; Lombardi Vallauri 2009, 2019; Lombardi Vallauri/Masia 2014). As in Cresti (2000) and Lombardi Vallauri (2009), we consider the *Focus* to be the portion of an utterance conveying its illocutionary force, and the **Topic** to be the rest of the utterance, conveying accessory and background information. Similar to presuppositions, from the pragmatic point of view, topicalizations often have the function of resuming already known or already introduced information, and they generally indicate to the addressee that they should not focus their attention on that portion

⁴ Technically, the utterance contains also another presupposition triggered by the change of state predicate *reprendre* ('take back'), which precedes the relative clause presupposition, but for illustrative purposes we chose to comment only once on different linguistic triggers.

of the text, as that piece of information is only a background one. Cf. an example of topicalization from a speech by Annalena Baerbock in (4):

- (4) Und daher müssen wir, wir, **die die liberalen Grundwerte dieses Europa verteidigen**, das in sozialen in den Mittelpunkt unserer Europapolitik stellen, liebe Freundinnen und Freunde.

‘And then it is up to us, us, **who defend the liberal values of this Europe**, to bring this in the social, in the core of our EU politics, dear friends’.

In (4), the speaker uttered the information that her party is the one defending liberal values in Europe as if that had already been introduced in the discourse and had been activated in everybody’s working memory, albeit this is not the case.

Summing up, as suggested by Lombardi Vallauri/Masia (2014), we consider that through implicatures and vague expressions speakers generally hint at – but leave unsaid – *contents* that (they assume) the addressee will be able to infer from the message expressed and from the context. Conversely, when presenting some information as presupposed or topicalized – thus, as already known and shared by the addressee – the sender does not conceal the content itself (which is, in fact, presented), but rather their *responsibility* for introducing that information in the discourse. As already mentioned, we assume that these types of implicit encoding can represent a manipulative communication strategy when conveying questionable and ideologically loaded information, whose persuasive chances would not benefit from a thorough elaboration on the part of the addressees.

2.2 Measurement methodology

As hinted at in the foregoing, we will assess the overall “weight” of implicit communication in the corpus of political speeches gathered for the analysis by quantifying its *extension* (in terms of the number of characters) and **impact** in each of the speeches examined. This methodology partly builds on an algorithm presented in Lombardi Vallauri/Masia (2014) and put to test in subsequent studies (see 2.3), in which each textual string containing an implicit encoding strategy (i. e., implicature, vagueness, presupposition and topicalization) is assigned an index of implicitness indicating the intensity of its under-encoding power, as in Table 1 below.

The criterion to calculate both the extension and impact of implicit communicative devices in the texts examined is the following: the number of characters (i. e., extension) of each string of text conveying non-*bona fide* true implicit meaning (whether by means of a presupposition, a topic, an implicature or a vague expression) has been divided by the total extension (always in number of characters) of the whole text containing it. The resulting value indicates which portion of the whole text is occupied by the implicit string. For example, if in a text of 10000 characters the subordinate clause “when they lied about working class people’s salaries” counts 45 characters, its extension will represent 0,45% of the extension of the text. This value is then multiplied for the intensity index assigned to the instantiated category (e. g., conversational implicature, presupposition, etc.) according to Table 1. The intensity index will indicate the “strength” of each implicit strategy in covering either the main content of the message or the speaker’s responsibility. Values obtained through this algorithm are then all summed in order to gauge how extended and impacting implicit communication is throughout a text: such a

figure provides the text’s global impact index. Also, partial sums can be provided to assess which types of strategies (of either content or responsibility implicitness, see 2.1) are more extended or impacting than others.

Implicit strategies	Implicitness of responsibility	Implicitness of content	Global ratings
<i>Topic</i>			
Topic	3.0	0.0	3.0
<i>Implicatures</i>			
Conventional implicatures	0.0	1.0	1.0
Generalized implicatures	0.0	2.0	2.0
Conversational implicatures	0.0	3.0	3.0
<i>Presuppositions</i>			
Presupposition	4.0	0.0	4.0
<i>Vagueness</i>			
Syntactic vagueness	0.0	3.0	3.0
Semantic vagueness	0.0	3.0	3.0

Table 1: Indexes of implicitness strategies (from Lombardi Vallauri/Masia 2014, modified by the authors)

As shown in Table 1, presuppositions display a higher rating than implicatures, vagueness and topics. This choice hinges on the fact that in presuppositions, as information is coded as if it were already in the background knowledge of the receiver, the speaker’s role as a source of some information remains concealed. Thereby the speaker can be attributed no full responsibility for the presupposed content **at any time** of the utterance production and processing (cf. Lombardi Vallauri/Masia 2014: 169). Conversely, for example, the content conveyed by means of implicature is supplied by the addressee but then recognized as stemming from the speaker. Thus, at the end of the process, the receiver can attribute to the speaker both the implied content and the intention to convey it. As a consequence, the impact of presupposed content on the text is larger than that of an implicated one.

As displayed in Table 1, topics have been assigned index 3, that is, slightly lower than that exhibited by presuppositions. The reason for this criterion is that, although still concealing the speaker’s responsibility for the truth of some content, topics bring about this discourse operation in a fairly less impacting way, because they generally hint at the presence of the relevant content in the foregoing context of discourse, instead of presupposing it altogether.

Within the implicatures set, the highest index has been assigned to conversational implicatures, because their derivation calls for appealing to contextual – and not strictly linguistic – cues. Therefore, they turn out to be more implicit than conventional ones, which rely on the presence of more explicit linguistic material. Since understanding a conventional implicature mainly implies knowing the semantic value and linguistic function of an expression (e. g. in *Jane is clever but mean*, the contrastive value of *but* can be derived in any context in which the conjunction is used), they turn out to be more overtly coded than conversational implicatures and are accordingly assigned a lower index. In between, we find generalized conversational implicatures, because their computation requires computing both linguistic and contextual cues, and so they display a somewhat hybrid behavior in the process of meaning representation in discourse.

The index assigned to vagueness (whether triggered by syntactic or semantic processes) is analogous to that of conversational implicatures because, similarly to them, also vague meanings require the receiver to contribute to the process of meaning reconstruction. Also, vague discourse strategies leave part of the speaker's intended meaning unexpressed, and therefore to be inferentially derived by the receiver.⁵

All in all, the methodology described above proved revealing of peculiar trends in both the extension and effects of implicit communicative strategies as well as of the influence they have on the full comprehension of an oral or written text.

2.3 Quantifying manipulative communication in texts: from nationwide projects to a cross-linguistic analysis

Within empirical approaches to pragmatics, both qualitative and quantitative studies on implicit communication have already been undertaken, with a view not only to tracing taxonomies of types of implicit contents in different contexts of language use, but also to assess how much information in a text can be left unexpressed and how this impinges on our overall comprehension of the text itself. The relevance of this research topic has been at the heart of some important projects which sought to put forth a methodology to better inquire implicit communication in a corpus-based perspective and assess how the outcome of this line of research can be fed into investigations on the reception side and, notably, on the way the brain deals with the processing of implicit language. Within the Italian context, a pioneering attempt is the one pursued by the IMPAQTs project (Cominetti et al. 2022), financed by the Italian Ministry of Research and Education (MIUR). The project has the purpose of collecting a corpus of Italian political speeches and analysing them for the above-mentioned categories (2.1), and also of inquiring about their brain processing through a series of electrophysiological experiments. An important scientific offshoot of this line of work involves drawing qualitative and quantitative considerations on what types of implicit strategies are more recurrent in each politician's speech and in which proportion they are found – which could allow drawing inferences on the different rhetorical styles of a speaker in terms of how implicit they are.

Furthermore, the Observatory of Political Propaganda and Advertising (OPPP!), in addition to the qualitative analysis, also applies the above-outlined quantitative method in order to measure the extension and the impact of questionable implicit information in political speeches and advertising texts, and was designed to work as a dissemination tool for Italian citizens.

In the subsequent section, we propose to apply the aforementioned methodology to carry out a cross-linguistic comparative analysis on a corpus of Italian, French and German political speeches selected from the 2019 European electoral campaign. The data that will be presented suggest that not only can this methodology be applied on a comparative interlinguistic basis, but that peculiar language-dependent trends can be detected.

Each text of the corpus has been analyzed according to the method presented in 2.2 by two annotators, whose annotations have finally been subsumed in a definitive one, if necessary,

⁵ For a more exhaustive explanation of index assignment criteria, cf. Lombardi Vallauri/Masia (2014) and Lombardi Vallauri et al. (2020).

after discussion of controversial points. Since the final version was the result of the co-operative agreement of both annotators, the inter-annotator agreement was not calculated. All the annotators have been working for years in the IMPAQTS and OPPP! projects and are therefore well-trained in the method. It should however be mentioned that all of them are native Italian speakers, currently based in Italy or Switzerland. So, it cannot be excluded that some subtle implicit information may have not been noticed, due to a maybe unavoidable cultural gap. This is especially true for conversational implicatures, whose implicit content often needs specific cultural clues to be retrieved.

3 Data Set

3.1 Corpus description

The data basis used to illustrate our model for the measurement of implicitness impact is a specialized and comparable corpus of spoken political discourse. More precisely, the corpus includes 35 speeches held by Italian, French and German politicians, collected from online sources, orthographically transcribed through an automatic transcription tool (the dictation tool provided by Google Drive), and then manually checked, for a total amount of approximately 11 hours, equivalent to ca. 90000 words. As already mentioned (1 and 2), the transcribed texts are manually annotated for the pragmatic categories of implicitness of content – implicatures and vagueness – and implicitness of responsibility – presuppositions and topicalizations –, exclusively signaling tendentious, that is non-*bona fide* true, encoding.

The speeches were delivered for the 2019 European Parliament political campaign, which took place from May 23rd to May 26th. The time span considered for the selection of the recordings consists of approximately 7 months, from November 2018 to the last election campaign day. Limiting the political and time frames allowed for the comparison of similar subjects, as Italian, French and German politicians, participating in transnational political coalitions, would often discuss not only national but also distinctively European issues, such as immigration, environment or the importance of the European Union itself.

In order to achieve a qualitative balance of the corpus, we collected our data following criteria hinging on both the speaker and the receiver involved in the communicative events analyzed (cf. Laudanna et al. 1995; Leech 2007). Indeed, we considered both the political role of the candidate within the coalition, and the approval rate of the voters, based on the national electoral results⁶. Accordingly, the leading figures of the four national parties winning the most seats in the European Parliament were considered, independently from their political colors (see Table 2 below). The dataset is then likely to mirror the persuasiveness of the national political campaign, and possible differences in the exploitation of manipulative strategies in the political spectrum could emerge from the analysis. As a final remark on the qualitative design of the corpus, please note that we did not include the gender of the speaker as a possible significant parameter of variation. Nevertheless, the number of politicians considered is almost gender-balanced.

⁶ Detailed results are available on the website of the European Parliament.

The corpus is also quantitatively balanced. The overall size of the corpus (11 hours and 38 minutes of recordings, equivalent to 93237 transcribed words) is equally divided between the three languages considered, namely, 31137 words for Italian, 30919 for French, and 31181 for German. For each of the 12 politicians, we collected three speeches⁷, whose length is variable, ranging from a minimum of 537 to a maximum of 4264 words. However, the number of words pronounced during the speeches analyzed for each politician is comparable (around 7000 words), as to avoid the bias of individual preference in the use of manipulative strategies. In Table 2, the metadata of the speakers, including language, name, gender, political affiliation (national party and European Parliament coalition⁸) and the number of words analyzed are shown.

LAN	POLITICIAN	NATIONAL PARTY	EU COALITION	WORDS
I	Matteo Salvini	Lega	ID	7'756
I	Nicola Zingaretti	Partito Democratico	S&D	7'368
I	Luigi Di Maio	Movimento 5 Stelle	NI	8'233
I	Giorgia Meloni	Fratelli d'Italia	ECR	7'780
F	Marine Le Pen	Rassemblement National	ID	8'075
F	Nathalie Loiseau	Renaissance	RE	6'566
F	Yannick Jadot	Europe Écologie	G/EFA	7'349
F	François-Xavier Bellamy	Union de la droite et du centre	EPP	8'929
D	Manfred Weber	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutsch.	EPP	7'261
D	Annalena Baerbock	Bündnis 90/Die Grünen	G/EFA	7'749
D	Katarina Barley	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutsch.	S&D	7'857
D	Joerg Meuthen	Alternative für Deutschland	ID	8'314
TOT				93'237

Table 2: Quantitative and qualitative balance of the corpus

3.2 Comparability criteria

To ensure the cross-linguistic comparability of the Italian, French and German sections of the corpus, we chose to create a specialistic corpus, ideally portraying a single type of communicative event. Indeed, every incident of language use is embedded in a particular setting, and has a specific communicative goal. Consistently, the description and interpretation of implicit meaning are intertwined with the context and the text in which the implicit linguistic strategies occur. Implicit expressions differ in the way they contribute to the context, and, in turn, different context conditions might activate peculiar inferences (cf. Sbisà 1999; and Ungerer 2006, among others).

⁷ With the only exception of Annalena Baerbock, for whom we only found two speeches matching the requested features available online.

⁸ The acronyms stand for Identity and Democracy (ID), Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D), Non-attached Members (NI), European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR), Renew Europe group (RE), Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance (G/EFA), and Group of the European People's Party (EPP).

Therefore, our approach aimed at collecting data with the minimum possible variation in terms of type of interaction, communicative goal, and context of utterance. Specifically, we selected public monological political speeches, initially addressed to a live audience or TV broadcast, but potentially reaching the web audience as well, as the recordings were uploaded online. Being delivered during a political campaign, their communicative goal is patently persuasive and can be directed both to supporters and opponents. We selected three types of communication settings: election rallies, public conventions (mostly in squares), and press conferences. Therefore, the intended audience can be more or less close to the speaker's background knowledge and beliefs, leading to the exploitation of dedicated manipulative strategies.

In conclusion, the criteria we considered relevant for the comparability of the sample collection are focused on the texts, not on the languages selected, which, on the contrary, constitute a random parameter.⁹ The reason is twofold. First, from a theoretical point of view, the considered implicit categories are presumably language-independent (cf. Lombardi Vallauri/Masia 2014)¹⁰, so this analysis can be potentially conducted for every language. Second, as we will clarify below in 4, the interlinguistic comparison we propose in this study is conducted considering every language independently, and the computation of the implicitness values is carried out by comparing the politicians' speeches.

4 Analysis

In this section we present the results of the pragmatic annotation per implicit strategies conducted on the multi-language corpus (3.1) according to the methodology presented in 2.2. We will illustrate two sets of data: in 4.1 the results of the quantitative analysis will be shown and discussed; these will be complemented with some qualitative observations in 4.2; 4.3 will provide a general discussion of the findings.

4.1 Quantitative analysis

After each text was annotated per non-*bona fide* true implicit strategies, we calculated the average *extension* of the phenomena for each politician on the basis of the three speeches by each. As mentioned (2.2), the extension of the implicit phenomena is calculated counting the characters of the strings that include non-*bona fide* true implicit encoding strategies and dividing the number by the number of characters of the entire speech. Such data are presented in the following table:¹¹

⁹ Among the countries participating in the European elections, we selected Italy, France and Germany, as we have an excellent knowledge of their language and a good knowledge of their political panorama.

¹⁰ Counterexamples to this assumption have been provided regarding the interpretation of the implicit categories, not to the very existence of the implicit categories per se. Cf., for example, Stateva et al. (2019) on the pragmatic enrichment of quantifiers as the English *some* and its linguistic counterparts in French, Slovenian and German.

¹¹ In all the tables, RESP stands for implicit encoding of responsibility, PPP stands for presupposition, TOP stands for topicalization, CONT stands for implicit encoding of content, IMPL stands for implicature, VAG stands for vagueness. The RESP values consist of the sum of PPP and TOP, the CONT values consist of the sum of IMPL and VAG. The TOTAL values are obtained as the sum of RESP and CONT values.

	POLITICIAN	TOTAL	RESP	PPP	TOP	CONT	IMPL	VAG
I	Nicola Zingaretti	0.563	0.222	0.160	0.061	0.341	0.230	0.111
I	Luigi Di Maio	0.513	0.116	0.093	0.023	0.397	0.288	0.109
I	Matteo Salvini	0.492	0.184	0.136	0.047	0.308	0.252	0.056
I	Giorgia Meloni	0.469	0.145	0.112	0.034	0.324	0.232	0.092
F	Marine Le Pen	0.373	0.226	0.178	0.049	0.147	0.128	0.019
F	Nathalie Loiseau	0.249	0.110	0.093	0.017	0.139	0.080	0.059
F	Yannick Jadot	0.236	0.144	0.125	0.019	0.092	0.078	0.015
F	François-Xavier Bellamy	0.229	0.152	0.138	0.014	0.077	0.058	0.019
G	Joerg Meuthen	0.312	0.085	0.065	0.020	0.227	0.145	0.082
G	Annalena Baerbock	0.239	0.059	0.046	0.013	0.180	0.100	0.080
G	Manfred Weber	0.181	0.060	0.049	0.011	0.122	0.077	0.045
G	Katarina Barley	0.108	0.034	0.029	0.005	0.074	0.043	0.031
	CORPUS AVERAGE	0.333	0.130	0.104	0.026	0.203	0.144	0.059

Table 3: Extension of the implicating strategies for each politician (average of 3 speeches)

Building on such “raw extension” data, the indexes presented in Table 1 were then applied in order to evaluate for each politician the average **impact** of the pragmatic phenomena:

	POLITICIAN	TOTAL	RESP	PPP	TOP	CONT	IMPL	VAG
I	Nicola Zingaretti	1.83	0.83	0.64	0.18	1.01	0.67	0.33
I	Luigi Di Maio	1.66	0.44	0.37	0.07	1.22	0.89	0.33
I	Matteo Salvini	1.62	0.69	0.55	0.14	0.92	0.75	0.17
I	Giorgia Meloni	1.51	0.55	0.45	0.10	0.96	0.69	0.28
F	Marine Le Pen	1.29	0.86	0.71	0.15	0.44	0.38	0.06
F	Nathalie Loiseau	0.84	0.42	0.37	0.05	0.42	0.24	0.18
F	Yannick Jadot	0.83	0.56	0.50	0.06	0.28	0.23	0.04
F	François-Xavier Bellamy	0.83	0.59	0.55	0.04	0.23	0.18	0.06
G	Joerg Meuthen	1.00	0.32	0.26	0.06	0.68	0.43	0.25
G	Annalena Baerbock	0.76	0.22	0.18	0.04	0.54	0.30	0.24
G	Manfred Weber	0.59	0.23	0.20	0.03	0.36	0.23	0.14
G	Katarina Barley	0.35	0.13	0.12	0.01	0.22	0.13	0.09
	CORPUS AVERAGE	1.10	0.49	0.41	0.08	0.61	0.43	0.18

Table 4: Impact of the implicating strategies for each politician (average of 3 speeches)

A first important observation emerges: both the (raw) extension data (Table 3) and the impact data (Table 4) show that the considered Italian politicians prove to convey more questionable implicit information than the French and the German ones: actually, even the least implicit Italian politician (Giorgia Meloni) appears to be more implicit than the most implicit French and German ones. This is confirmed by the average indexes calculated for each language sub-corpus, both for extension and impact of the implicit strategies:

LANGUAGE	TOTAL	RESP	PPP	TOP	CONT	IMPL	VAG
ITALIAN	0.51	0.17	0.13	0.04	0.35	0.26	0.09
FRENCH	0.27	0.16	0.13	0.02	0.11	0.09	0.03
GERMAN	0.21	0.06	0.05	0.01	0.15	0.09	0.06

Table 5: Average extension of implicit strategies for each language

LANGUAGE	TOTAL	RESP	PPP	TOP	CONT	IMPL	VAG
ITALIAN	1.67	0.62	0.50	0.12	1.05	0.77	0.28
FRENCH	0.95	0.61	0.53	0.07	0.34	0.26	0.08
GERMAN	0.67	0.23	0.19	0.04	0.44	0.27	0.17

Table 6: Average impact of implicit strategies for each language

A t-test for independent samples confirmed a statistically significant difference between the global implicitness indexes of Italian and French, both for extension¹² and impact¹³ and between Italian and German, again both for extension¹⁴ and impact,¹⁵ with Italian speakers being significantly more implicit than French and German ones. Such difference is particularly due to the significantly larger presence of content implicit strategies, i. e., implicatures and vagueness.¹⁶ As for responsibility implicit strategies, i. e., presuppositions and topicalizations, in our corpus Italian and French show a similar usage (Italian: Means = 0.167, French: Means = 0.158), while in German they are far less used (German: Means = 0.060).

¹² The difference in the total extension of implicitness between Italian (M = 0.510; SD = 0.115) and French (M = 0.272; SD = 0.093) was significant (degrees of freedom = 22; t(22) = 13.64).

¹³ The difference in the total impact of implicitness between Italian (M = 1.654; SD = 0.368) and French (M = 0.949; SD = 0.324) was significant (degrees of freedom = 22; t(22) = 10.01).

¹⁴ The difference in the total extension of implicitness between Italian (M = 0.510; SD = 0.115) and German (M = 0.207; SD = 0.097) was significant (degrees of freedom = 21; t(21) = 16.29).

¹⁵ The difference in the total impact of implicitness between Italian (M = 1.654; SD = 0.368) and German (M = 0.667; SD = 0.308) was significant (degrees of freedom = 21; t(21) = 16.61).

¹⁶ The difference in the use (extension) of implicit strategies of content between Italian (M = 0.343; SD = 0.090) and French (M = 0.114; SD = 0.051) is significant (degrees of freedom = 22; t(22) = 18.76). The difference in the use (extension) of implicit strategies of content between Italian (M = 0.343; SD = 0.090) and German (M = 0.147; SD = 0.075) is significant (degrees of freedom = 21; t(21) = 13.48).

Comparing the French and German sub-corpora, we notice that the difference in the use of implicit strategies, even if less marked if compared to Italian, is still significant for impact¹⁷ and extension.¹⁸

Looking inside each sub-corpus (Table 5), we notice that the Italian and German politicians tend to use more implicit strategies of content than implicit strategies of responsibility,¹⁹ while the French use more implicit strategies of responsibility than implicit strategies of content.²⁰ Not only does this tendency emerge from the average figures, but it is consistently validated by every single speaker, with the only exception of Nathalie Loiseau, who is the only French politician who shows a slightly larger usage of implicit strategies of content over implicit strategies of responsibility.

A remarkable cross-linguistic fact emerging from the data is that both in the French and in the German sub-corpora the Right-wing politicians (Marine Le Pen and Joerg Meuthen) show a tendency to use more implicit strategies than all the others. A t-test proved the difference significant for both the correlations (Le Pen vs. other French²¹ and Meuthen vs. other German²²) and for both the data-sets (extension and impact²³ of the implicit strategies). Of course, such tendency should be verified in a larger corpus to exclude the possibility that the wider use of implicit strategies is a personal stylistic feature of these two politicians, actually independent from their political orientation (on this, see also 4.2). Also, such a tendency is not observed in the Italian sub-corpus, where all the politicians have similar average scores, and actually the most implicit one is Zingaretti from Partito Democratico (S&D).

Another interesting cross-linguistic finding emerged comparing all the speakers belonging to an “anti-European” party to those belonging to “pro-European” parties. This tendency can be partly related to the one that sees Right-wing politicians as more implicit than the others, since a large part of the anti-European current consists of Right-wing parties. The “anti-EU” group, composed of Luigi Di Maio (M5S), Matteo Salvini (Lega), Giorgia Meloni (Fratelli d’Italia), Marine Le Pen (Rassemblement National), Joerg Meuthen (Alternative für Deutschland),

¹⁷ The difference in the total impact of implicitness between French (M = 0.949; SD = 0.324) and German (M = 0.667; SD = 0.308) was significant (degrees of freedom = 21; t(21) = 5.10).

¹⁸ The difference in the total extension of implicitness between French (M = 0.272; SD = 0.093) and German (M = 0.207; SD = 0.097) was significant (degrees of freedom = 21; t(21) = 3.94).

¹⁹ Italian: Content = 0.343, Responsibility = 0.167 (Ratio 2.05).
German: Content = 0.147, Responsibility = 0.060 (Ratio 2.47).

²⁰ French: Content = 0.114, Responsibility = 0.158 (Ratio 0.72).

²¹ The difference in the total extension of implicitness between Marine Le Pen (M = 0.373; SD = 0.014) and the other French politicians (M = 0.238; SD = 0.082) was significant (degrees of freedom = 10; t(10) = 4.07).

²² The difference in the total extension of implicitness between Joerg Meuthen (M = 0.311; SD = 0.107) and the other German politicians (M = 0.168; SD = 0.062) was significant (degrees of freedom = 9; t(9) = 4.22).

²³ The difference in the total impact of implicitness between Marine Le Pen (M = 1.295; SD = 0.047) and the other French politicians (M = 0.833; SD = 0.290) was significant (degrees of freedom = 10; t(10) = 3.99).
The difference in the total impact of implicitness between Joerg Meuthen (M = 0.998; SD = 0.349) and the other German politicians (M = 0.543; SD = 0.191) was significant (degrees of freedom = 9; t(9) = 4.20).

proved to be more implicit than the second group, composed by all the other speakers. A T-test suggested that the difference is statistically significant²⁴ and worth further analysis.

No other statistically significant correlations were retrieved. Women result to be less implicit than men (average global extension index 0.290 vs. 0.361), but such difference is not statistically significant. Also in this respect, a larger corpus may help clarify whether gender plays a role in the tendency to implicitness.

4.2 Qualitative considerations

As shown in 4.1, the statistically significant correlations laid out above allow to suggest that three main factors impact the global implicitness score and/or the preferred kind of implicit strategies: the nationality/language of the speaker, their political orientation and their belonging to a pro or anti-European party. In addition to these quantitative results, our data show that four other factors may have an influence on the use of implicit strategies conveying non-*bona fide* true contents, despite not being statistically significant in our sample: 1) the political role of the speaker; 2) the context, in relation to the three different communication settings considered: election rallies, public conventions and press conferences; 3) the subjects which the speaker includes in the speech; 4) the personal rhetorical style, with particular reference to irony.

4.2.1 Role-dependent variation in the use of presuppositions

A tendency of the opposition politicians to be more implicit than their establishment counterparts has been observed. Our data show that in each of the three language groups, the most implicit speaker (Zingaretti, Le Pen, Meuthen) belongs to an opposition party. This finding could be due to the fact that government parties usually have a less urgent need to persuade the audience by resorting to manipulative implicit strategies because they are already in power, at least on a national level.

Furthermore, the role of the speaker is also linked to the kind of implicitly conveyed contents: for example, in both Italian and German speeches given by majority politicians, we observe a quite extensive use of presuppositions conveying the speaker's party past achievements and self-praising contents, which is not observed in their respective opposition parties. Here are some examples of how different presupposition triggers (Levinson 1983) are likely to function as an effective tool to boost politicians' credibility taking (allegedly) successful past achievements for granted:

Factive predicate "to be glad" (Salvini, Lega):

- (5) **E son contento**, con la mia azione di governo, di **aver dato una risposta nei fatti e non con le parole**.

'And **I am glad**, with my government action, to **have given an answer by means of deeds and not words**.'

[Non *bona fide* true presupposed content: Salvini has given an answer by means of deeds and not words]

²⁴ The difference in the total extension of implicitness between anti-EU politicians (including: Le Pen, Meuthen, di Maio, Salvini, Meloni; M = 0.433; SD = 0.116) and pro-EU politicians (including: Zingaretti, Loiseau, Bellamy, Jadot, Weber, Barley, Baerbock; M = 0.258; SD = 0.159) was significant (degrees of freedom = 33; t(33) = 10.56).

Subordinate clause + defining relative clause (Di Maio, 5 Star Movement):

- (6) **Quando stavamo progettando i provvedimenti che poi sono stati approvati e che oggi stanno portando i risultati [...]**

‘When we were planning those measures that were then approved and that are bearing fruit [...]

[Non *bona fide* true presupposed content: Government measures planned by 5 Star Movement are bearing fruit]

Definite descriptions (Weber, CSU):

- (7) wenn wir die Menschen für Europa gewinnen wollen, dann müssen über wir **unsere Erfolge** reden

‘if we want to bring people close to Europe, then we should talk about **our successes**’

[Non *bona fide* true presupposed content: CSU has achieved successes]

Continuation of state predicate (Weber, CSU):

- (8) [...] Da ist auch eine Zusicherung von uns, [...] nämlich dass wir **weiter einen humanitären Einsatz in der Flüchtlingspolitik praktizieren**

‘And here’s also a promise from us [...], that we will **keep on adopting a humanitarian approach** to the migration policy’

[Non *bona fide* true presupposed content: The German government has been adopting a humanitarian approach to the migration policy so far]

The reason why presuppositions seem to be the preferred implicit strategies to convey self-praising contents – a tendency already observed by Garassino/Masia/Brocca (2019)²⁵ – may lie in the fact that such contents usually refer to something actually already happened in the past (approved decrees or achieved government actions); these contents, however, are usually loaded with some positively connotated component (the ‘approach to migration’ becomes a ‘humanitarian approach to migration’, ‘measures’ become ‘measures that are bearing fruit’, ‘government actions’ become ‘successes’ and so on). Therefore, manipulation lies in the exploitation of the legitimate and primary function of presuppositions to recall already known and shared information (cf. Stalnaker 2002) – thus lightening the cognitive load (cf. Lombardi Vallauri 2021) – to avoid responsibility for having surreptitiously introduced non-*bona fide* true contents as true.²⁶

4.2.2 Context

The second aspect possibly impacting on the use of implicit strategies is context. As mentioned in 3.2, to ensure comparability, our corpus was collected in order to have minimal variation in terms of type of interaction, communicative goal, and context of utterance, and therefore all the speeches pertain to the same wider kind of communicative event, that we can define under the

²⁵ In their work, the authors analyze political discourse on Twitter also taking into account communicative functions such as attack, speaker-centered-praise, praise to others, opinion/stance and information.

²⁶ However, this phenomenon is not observed in the speeches by Loiseau (who in our corpus represents the French establishment), which clearly indicates that these should be seen as tendencies rather than direct correlations, and that other variables (such as personal rhetorical style) come into play as well.

umbrella term “election campaign event”. However, we observe a tendency to be less implicit in more formal and/or institutional settings and more implicit in informal settings. Specifically, it would seem that the more convivial or less institutional setting encourages a larger use of implicit strategies to convey manipulative contents.

A clear example is provided by Katarina Barley’s speeches: two out of her three speeches were held during traditional election campaign events (respectively an election rally and a public convention), while the other one was held in a slightly more informal context (the traditional German “Political Ash Wednesday”), with supporters sitting at a table drinking beer. Compared with the other two, in the latter Barley resorts to a far higher number of conversational implicatures, especially conveying attacks, and, overall, this speech resulted to be the speaker’s most implicit one. Here is an excerpt from the last-mentioned speech:

- (9) Und dann sehe ich noch vor mir dieses Foto, vom Heimatministerium. Könnt ihr euch erinnern? Da kamen sie auf die Bühne: **ein Mann, noch ein Mann, noch ein Mann, noch ein Mann, noch ein Mann, noch ein Mann, noch ein Mann, noch ein Mann.** | **Und dann Horst Seehofer.**

‘And then I see this picture of the Federal Ministry of the Interior. Can you remember? They came on the stage: **a man, another man, another man, another man, another man, another man, another man, another man.** | **And then Horst Seehofer.**’

In (9) we can clearly see traits of informal style (e. g. the use of a question directly addressing the public, the informal address form *ihr* and deictics) and two conversational implicatures²⁷ both violating the Maxim of Quantity, conveying bitter attacks towards the CDU/CSU. More specifically, the speaker first implicitly criticizes the lack of gender equality within the Union parties and then undermines Seehofer’s credibility. Such bitter and personal attacks were less frequent in the two other speeches, revealing that the speaker might have felt less restrained from attacking opponents in a convivial atmosphere than in more formal contexts.

The same holds for Zingaretti, who turns out to be particularly implicit during his rally, a typically more partisan and less controlled situation, as compared to the other two more formal communication settings (respectively a party election meeting and a press conference). By the same token, Loiseau and Meloni resulted to be less implicit in more institutional contexts (Loiseau’s speech was held during a TV-broadcasted event in the presence of a mediating journalist, Meloni’s during the Italian General Confederation of Commerce, Tourism and Services conference) as compared to their other two speeches, held during elections rallies.

In Di Maio this tendency is even observed within the same communication setting. His speeches were held respectively during a typical election rally and during two quite different press conferences: the first one was a more informal meeting, specifically devoted to launching the party’s political program for the European elections, while the second one was a more formal gathering, held in an institutional government setting. Consistently with our hypothesis, the

²⁷ The tendency to resort mostly to conversational implicatures to convey attacks was already revealed by Garassino/Masia/Brocca (2019) and might be explained with the fact that, unlike self-praising past achievements conveyed through presuppositions (see above), attacks are usually entirely evaluative, not factual and therefore face-threatening contents, and therefore it may be more convenient on the part of the speaker to make leave their addressees the task of inferring them.

more informal of the two press conferences was the one where Di Maio more frequently resorted to implicit strategies, with scores that do not drastically differ from the ones of the rally.

4.2.3 Subjects of the speech

Also, the subjects which the speaker decides to include in the speech can possibly have a role in its global implicitness. In particular, in our corpus, we notice that the politicians who make many references to EU history and achievements (also in terms of figures), especially in the first section of their speech, generally result in being less implicit than those who do not. This could be due to the fact that when talking about history one is generally more inclined to refer to actual and verifiable facts rather than to less objective non-*bona fide* true opinions, which – according to our hypothesis – may need to be conveyed through an implicit linguistic packaging. Furthermore, our data suggest that the tendency to dwell on historical facts and on one’s personal experience related to the EU seems to be related to national discursive practices. Among the German speakers, this tendency is particularly strong in speeches held by Weber and Barley, both belonging to traditional political parties (CSU and SPD, respectively) and who resulted to be the least implicit; conversely, the phenomenon is less observed in speeches held by Baerbock and Meuthen, representatives of more recently founded parties (Bündnis 90/die Grünen and AfD respectively) and who scored higher in implicitness. On the contrary, in the Italian and French sub-corpora, this connection seems to be cross-party, but going in opposite directions: all the French politicians speak extensively about historical facts and figures, maybe not by chance scoring quite low in implicitness; conversely, none of the Italians does, which could be related to their resulting the most implicit ones (cfr. 4.1).

4.2.4 Personal rhetorical style

Lastly, we also observe a possible influence of individual ironic rhetorical style on the use of implicit strategies. Most of the analyzed speakers occasionally resort to irony by means of conversational implicatures violating the Maxim of Quality (cf. Grice 1975). Nevertheless, among them, only Meuthen can be said to have an actual ironic style (cf. Musolff 2017; Tsakona/Popa 2011; Săftoiu/Popescu 2014), which emerges from a very high number of conversational implicatures²⁸ aimed at mocking and attacking political opponents and others’ beliefs. These implicit ironic contents are so significant in his speeches that they were even found in the opening greetings, which are normally (but not always, cf. Duranti 2008) very formulaic and therefore are not usually affected by individual style. Here is an example:

(10) Meine sehr geehrten Damen und Herren, **selbstverständlich auch hochverehrte Andersgeschlechtliche** [...]

‘Ladies and Gentlemen, **of course highly esteemed other-gender people too** [...]

Here the speaker is ironically implicating that some gender issues, especially the ones regarding gender-inclusive language, are actually ridiculous.

To sum up, on the one hand, our qualitative analysis reveals the possible influence of some variables such as the role of the politician, different communicative settings, textual function

²⁸ See footnote 13.

and personal style on the quantity and/or the quality of implicit strategies used by speakers, showing tendencies for which possible explanations were provided; on the other hand, it sheds light on possible cultural differences emerging from pragma-linguistic behavior. It is our belief that both these observations, albeit not generalizable yet, deserve further analysis on a larger corpus.

4.3 General discussion

Overall, the analysis confirms prior theorizations on the manipulative potential of linguistic implicit strategies and, crucially for the specific purpose of this contribution, demonstrates the fruitfulness of cross-linguistic investigations.

One first general result emerging from our analysis is that linguistic implicit vs. explicit encoding seems to be linked to the type of content conveyed. This is especially traceable in anti-establishment politicians (possibly in addition to their opposition role) making (in our corpus) more extensive use of implicit linguistic strategies than establishment ones, as revealed by the quantitative analysis (4.1). This may be due to the fact that most of the contents conveyed by “anti-speakers” are quite face-threatening (for the speaker and/or the receiver) in that they try to “change” the *status-quo*. Therefore, it may be more convenient for these speakers to smuggle such contents through an implicit linguistic packaging than with an assertive one, confirming our initial hypothesis (see 2) and previous theoretical work on the persuasive potential of implicit communication (see 1). The qualitative analysis (4.2) further corroborated this content-dependency in that in our corpus particularly face-threatening contents (such as personal attacks) are more frequently conveyed in a fully implicit way (through implicitness of content, e. g. implicatures, see example 9), while less face-threatening ones (such as self-praise) are usually conveyed through implicitness of responsibility, where the linguistic content is only partly implicit (see example 8). This not only validates the theoretical distinction between implicitness of content and of responsibility (see 2.1), but also confirms some previous work (cf. Garassino/Masia/Brocca 2019) where similar associations were found, and certainly calls for future work on the correlation between specific implicit strategies and the communicative function they serve.

Furthermore, overall, our analysis also seems to show that genre-, register-related and situational features have an impact on the quality and/or quantity of manipulative implicit strategies used. If one sees genres and registers as deeply contextually and situationally rooted entities, i. e. emerging from specific exigences within a speech community (cf. Swales 1993), this point acquires particular cross-linguistic and -cultural relevance. In this sense, statistically significant differences between speakers of different languages found in our corpus (e. g. Italian speakers being significantly more implicit than their French and German counterparts or the French using more responsibility-implicitating strategies) may be not (only) related to language-specific features, but rather to political discourse practices entrenched at the individual and conventionalized at the societal level (cf. Vergaro 2018). Practices involving implicit strategies emerging from the qualitative analysis such as resorting to informal language, attacking the counterpart (see example 9), recalling past events (see example 6) and even idiosyncratic traits (such as the use of irony by conversational implicature by Meuthen, see example 10) seem to point to these claims. This also calls for research involving cultures

other than the Western one, where such analyses may reveal different political discursive practices.

This finding also confirms some research carried out on genres in political communication (cf. Cap/Okulska 2013) and some more recent work on the impact of genre-related features on the use of manipulative implicit linguistic strategies (cf. Coppola et al., forthcoming). More purely language-specific tendencies were not under close investigation in this work, but are certainly worth exploring in future research, especially in the light of some recent work on manipulative implicit strategies in typologically different languages (cf. Coppola/Lombardi Vallauri (in press) on the use of presupposing compounds in German vs. Italian and French).

Taken together, our findings strengthen empirically our assumptions and previous theoretical work on manipulative implicit strategies. Our analysis also confirms the validity of our model, showing the benefit of combining quantitative analysis (through the measuring model and statistical analysis) with qualitative analysis. In particular, the measuring model proved a useful tool that can be further fine-tuned (e. g. adjusting the indexes) and that can be used not only in academic research, but also as a pedagogical instrument within a broader awareness-raising education action on manipulative implicit communication in persuasive discourse.

5 Conclusion

We have presented a model to measure the extension and the impact of implicitly conveyed questionable information in persuasive texts. Following the method outlined in Lombardi Vallauri/Masia 2014, we have chosen to analyze linguistic strategies used to conceal content – implicatures and vague expressions – or the responsibility of the speaker – presuppositions and topicalizations –. We have limited our measuring to the extension and impact of non-*bona fide* true information, that is, potentially ideologically loaded content (different from self-evident or shared knowledge), which must be assessed based on the socio-political context of the text.

We have shown the application of the model on a corpus of speeches delivered for the European Parliament political campaign held in 2019, conducting a qualitative and quantitative comparison of the political propaganda in three European nations: Italy, France, and Germany. The quantitative analysis allowed us to highlight statistically significant differences and similarities in the use of implicit encoding both intra- and cross-linguistically. The results revealed that, overall, Italian politicians exploited implicit encoding strategies more extensively than French and German ones. As for the comparison between French and German politicians, it emerged that in the former data set discursive strategies have a higher “impact” than in the latter: in other words, in the French sub-corpus, a significantly higher number of implicit strategies of responsibility was retrieved, while the use of implicit strategies of content was found to be similar. Also, cross-cultural tendencies were retrieved concerning the political spectrum. Right-wing and “anti-European” parties tended to make larger use of implicit encoding strategies.

A qualitative analysis of non-statistically significant tendencies has revealed that the political role of the speaker, content and context of discourse may further influence the use of implicit strategies. In our data, the speaker’s office seems to influence the quality of triggered implicit contents, as opposition politicians tend to make larger use of presuppositions. Then, we ob-

served that informal communication settings can trigger larger use of implicit strategies, as compared to formal situations. Finally, the exploitation of implicit encoding can be higher when subjective standpoints are expressed; consistently, when objective facts are recalled (e. g., historical facts), the implicit rate decreases.

In future studies, both the quantitative and qualitative results may be corroborated or disproved by the investigation of larger and differently designed corpora. In particular, a gender-balanced corpus may allow sociological investigation into the exploitation of implicit strategies by male and female politicians. Moreover, a wider variety of communicative settings, as opposed to the unifying approach adopted here, may foster a different understanding of the implicit strategies' exploitation in persuasive texts.

Lastly, but crucially, the recruitment and training of annotators with different mother tongues and based in different countries is also an important aspect to consider, in order to eliminate the language and cultural biases which may reduce the accuracy in the detection of the implicit contents. All in all, a cross-linguistic qualitative and quantitative approach to detect manipulative political discourse may be fruitful in raising awareness of the manipulative potential in political propaganda, promoting transparent discursive practices, improving the quality of participation in a democratic society and reducing inequality in power relations. Citizens can learn to critically evaluate political speeches refining their ability to recognize and correctly interpret implicit communication in persuasive – thus potentially manipulative – discourse contexts. Indeed, we have argued that linguistic implicit strategies generally exploited in persuasive texts can be identified and measured, providing the necessary tools.

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