Discourse markers and turn-planning at the pragmatics-prosody interface: the case of *allora* in spoken Italian

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Abstract

It has been shown that the prosodic contour with which discourse markers (DMs) are realized can convey different semantic-pragmatic meanings (Schiffrin, 1987) and interactional functions (Prieto & Roseano, 2021; Raso & Vieira, 2016). Within the Conversation Analysis framework, it has been demonstrated that DMs "collaborate" with prosody also beyond the sentence, at the level of the turn-taking and the overall organization of the interaction (Couper-Kuhlen, 2015; Local, 2003). Despite the general agreement on the pivotal role of prosody, more experimental studies would be needed to understand how and which prosodic features are relevant for the interpretation of DMs. In this work, we demonstrate experimentally how speakers exploit DMs and variations in their pitch range in order to organize their turns in conversation both on the discursive-pragmatic and syntactic levels. Our database consists of dialogues between Italian monolingual speakers from the online corpus CLIPS. We extracted all the occurrences (95 in total) of the DM *allora* 'then' occurring in turn-initial position and followed by a silent pause. With these characteristics, the meaning of *allora* is completely bleached, and the DM is used to take the floor. First, the *allora*-prefaced turns are coded for the conversational move they realize (Carletta et al., 1996). Then, various measures (Speech Rate, Pitch Span, Pitch Height and Pitch on the first stressed syllable) are taken (using Praat: Boersma & Weenink, 2021) on the DM and on the following intonational phrase (IP), in order to investigate the discursive relationship between the DM and the rest of the turn. Each measure is then fit as the dependent variable into a Linear Mixed Model (LMM), having length of the utterance, conversational move realized by the turn and intonational phrase (DM/following IP) as independent variables and "speaker" and "sentence" as random factors. The results of the LMMs show that, whereas the length of the utterance and the conversational move did not have an effect on the dependent variables, all the prosodic measures where significantly affected by the DM/following IP distinction. The turn-initial *allora* displays a higher articulation rate and a narrower range of pitch values with respect to the rest of the sentence. The DM is normally uttered at a lower level of pitch and an upward reset is visible at the onset of the following IP, as exemplified below:
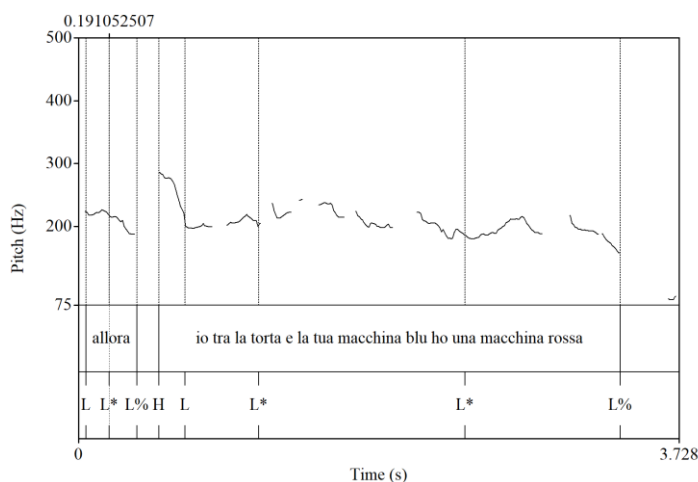
Figure 1: f0 contour of the *allora*-prefaced turn: *allora io tra la torta e la tua macchina blu ho una macchina rossa*, 'then between your cake and your blue car I have a red car'

As shown in Figure 1, the isolated, low *allora* is produced outside the general declination trend and it is peripheric with respect to the rest of the turn. From a syntactic point of view, this is in line with the tradition of studies ascribing elements like DMs to Speech Act Layer (Speas & Tenny, 2003) in the left periphery of the clause, above Rizzi's (1997) ForceP (Cardinaletti 2015; Del Gobbo, Munaro & Poletto 2015, a.o.): our data suggest that the DM is produced as a unit outside the propositional content of the utterance.In this view, DMs function as syntactic and discursive junctures: they are at the same time outside the main illocution, and inside the speaker's turn planification. Following Krivokapic (2012) we argue that the DM and the following IP are in fact two distinct units in the turn's planning. This corroborates the idea of various levels of programming within the same utterance, and it demonstrates that turn-initial position already provides crucial information to the interlocutor about the utterance set-up. Furthermore, our data provide additional evidence of the fact that speakers produce higher or lower turn onset to convey not only syntactic dependencies – as it has been shown for the recursive side of the utterance within the Autosegmantal-Metrical phonology tradition (Féry & Truckenbrodt, 2005) – but also discursive-pragmatic relations between intonation units (Couper-Kuhlen, 2015).

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