

Markers of attribution in English and Italian opinion articles: A comparative corpus-based study

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Abstract

The range and frequency of lexico-grammatical markers of attribution or reporting in English and Italian are examined here in two parallel corpora of opinion articles. It is found that the majority of reporting markers are verbs, nouns and adjectives in both corpora, and these markers are divided into six attitude groups, including, inter alia, neutral reporting, subjective reporting, reporting and creating argument. Discrepancies in the resources used in both languages are noted, such as the much greater variety of markers of argumentative reporting in English and the higher frequency of these markers, and it is suggested that the commentators in the English articles under consideration write in a way that encourages debate. The lack of argumentative types, and their low frequency, coupled with the high frequency of verbs which report evidence of an objective status quo in the Italian corpus, are interpreted as signs of a style of writing in the Italian opinion articles which is authoritative and seeks consensus rather than debate.

1 Introduction

This paper investigates markers of attribution in English and Italian as they are represented in two corpora of opinion articles from quality newspapers in both languages.¹ Attribution, understood here as the transferral of responsibility for what is being said to a third party, is often an evaluative process, particularly in argumentative texts. As Aston (1977: 496) puts it, “the reporting of an assertion in argumentative discourse entails an evaluation of it, whether this is done explicitly or not.” This paper compares the amount and variety of attributive resources used in English and Italian articles of opinion, and, faced with a wider range and higher frequency of resources that I term *argumentative* in English, it raises questions about the expression of argumentative attitudes in Italian opinion articles.

2 Approaches to Attribution: A lexicographical or semantic view?

As soon as one tries to analyse text from the point of view of averral² and attribution, one must decide whether to adopt a lexico-grammatical or a semantic approach. The main advantage of the former is that it is more circumscribable: the lexico-grammatical structures encoding attribution can be identified to a fairly detailed degree, at least when the reporting signal is separated from the attributed message, so that – at least initially – an automatic search for data can be done in a corpus. This is how this investigation started, through the identification of elements in English and Italian which introduce attributions. A close examination of the findings in context revealed occasions when some of these markers did not perform the task I expected them to, and were being used in an indeterminate way. This led me to the identification of a ‘grey area’ which I call *middle ground* between averral and attribution, where a lexico-grammatical view would classify them as attributed, due to the presence of an attribution marker, but a semantic view would declare that the source of the assertion was unclear. A semantic view of attribution, or reporting (Thompson 1994, 1996), is recommended by Martin (1992: 16) since reporting represents one of the “semantic diffusions” that “permeate the grammar”. In other words, attribution can take place under so many lexico-grammatical forms that any attempt to pin these forms down is bound to be limited, particularly if one includes occurrences of grammatical metaphor (Halliday 1994, Ch. 10). However, in a corpus-based study, like this one, the semantic approach is methodologically problematic, and it has been discarded for the present study.

3 Methodology and presentation of the data

This section describes the methods used to identify the lexico-grammatical markers of attribution in the English corpus, and the frequencies of these markers. Being a corpus-based study, all the data was available in computerized form, and it was examined through the software *WordSmith Tools* (Scott 1999). Since the corpora are relatively small, it was also possible to read through them manually.

3.1 Lexico-grammatical markers of attribution in the English corpus (EC)

The first step taken was to look for attributive uses of the English markers of attribution identified by Thompson (1994): the prepositions *for*, *to*, and *as*, the attributive adjunct *according to*, and variants of the lexical phrases *in the words of* and *in the eyes of*, *as far as X is concerned*, and *from his/her/their point of view* or *viewpoint*. Each of these items was sought via the concordancer, and

examined in context. Subsequently, a composite list of possible reporting verbs, compiled from Hunston (1993), Tadros (1993), and Thompson (1996) was drawn up and then run through the concordancer. The findings were cross-checked by a second search which examined all the verbs preceding *that*-clauses. This meant that some verbs, nouns, or adjectives which were not on the composite list were found because they prefaced a *that*-clause. The only constructions examined with these verbs, nouns, and adjectives were *that*-clauses reporting propositions.

The overall frequency of attribution markers in the English corpus, expressed per thousand words (ptw), are illustrated in Table 1:

Table 1: Lexico-grammatical markers of attribution in the English corpus (EC) and their frequency per thousand words (ptw)

Lexico-grammatical markers of attribution (EC)	Frequency of occurrence (ptw)
<i>According to</i>	0.268
As + proper noun/Pronoun + reporting verb	0.191
<i>For</i> + proper noun/pronoun	0.057
Variations on <i>As far as x is concerned/From the US viewpoint, in my view</i> types	0.048
Variations on <i>in the eyes of</i> type	0.019
Reporting verbs	4.918
Reporting nouns	1.492
Reporting adjectives	0.641
Total frequency of markers of attribution (EC) ptw	7.634

It can be seen from the table that verbs, nouns and adjectives carry the majority of the attributions in the English corpus, accounting for 94.2 per cent of the occurrences of attribution.

3.2 Lexico-grammatical markers of attribution in the Italian corpus (IC)

Studies of averral and attribution are not yet very common in Italian, so there were fewer works to refer to when identifying the data. I looked for the attribu-

tion markers mentioned in the most comprehensive (non corpus-based) modern Italian reference grammar, Renzi et al. (1995: 431–436), and in Stati's study of the lexis of argumentation (1998). These resources included the prepositions *per* ('for') and *secondo* ('according to') followed either by a proper noun or a common noun, the prepositional groups *agli occhi di* ('in the eyes of'), *a parere di* ('in the opinion of'), *a detta di* ('according to') (although of these, only *agli occhi* occurs) and *nell'ottica di* ('in the perspective of'), followed by a proper noun or indefinite pronoun such as *qualcuno* or *chi* ('someone' or 'some people' or 'those who'). Examples of two of these attribution markers in the Italian corpus follow:

(1) Centomila, forse duecentomila uomini sarebbero necessari sul terreno, **secondo** le valutazioni degli esperti militari.

(*One hundred thousand, perhaps two hundred thousand men, are needed as land forces, according to the estimates of military experts.*)

(2) **Agli occhi della Russia** gran parte dei Balcani diverrebbe in tal modo un protettorato atlantico.

(*In Russia's eyes, the majority of the Balkans would thus become an Atlantic protectorate.*)

Like French, Italian has the option of a grammatical structure that quotes hearsay, the quotative conditional, as in *Il presidente sarebbe malato*. This structure leaves the source of the proposition unclear, and it can also indicate a lack of certainty about the truth of the proposition. This particular use of the conditional can only be recognized in context, so all the occurrences of conditionals in the Italian corpus were examined within a few lines of the surrounding text, and those with this function were sifted out. There were not very many occurrences (0.059 ptw), as Table 2 shows.

Italian also uses impersonal structures such as *si dice che* ('it is said that'), *si sa che* ('it is known that') which attribute a proposition to a general public through verbal groups and impersonal constructions with an indefinite plural subject, as in *mi hanno promesso che* ('they promised me that'). Impersonal structures such as these were therefore included in the list of resources.

Lastly, four groups of verbs and their derived nouns introducing reported propositions were taken from Mortara Garavelli (1995: 432). These include: verbs of saying (*dire* 'to say', *affermare* 'to assert'), commanding verbs (*comandare* 'to order'), verbs of perception (*sentire* 'to feel' or 'hear'), epistemic verbs (*apprendere* 'to learn') and mental process verbs (*pensare* 'to think'). All these markers were looked for in the corpus, and all the *che*-clauses (the equivalent to *that*-clauses) were checked for other reporting markers not included in the lists.

The attribution markers in the Italian corpus are represented with frequency figures per thousand words in Table 2:

Table 2: Lexico-grammatical markers of attribution in the Italian corpus (IC) and their frequency ptw

Lexico-grammatical markers of attribution (IC)	Frequency of occurrence (ptw)
<i>Come</i> ('how') + proper noun/Pronoun + reporting verb	0.439
<i>Secondo</i> ('according to') + proper noun or pronoun	0.380
Impersonal constructions: <i>si dice, si sa</i> , ('it is said' / 'known') etc.	0.361
<i>Per</i> ('for') + proper noun or pronoun	0.273
Prepositional groups: <i>Agli occhi di, a mio parere</i> , ('in X's eyes', 'in my opinion')	0.068
Quotative conditionals	0.059
Reporting verbs	3.242
Reporting nouns	1.014
Reporting adjectives	0.644
Total frequency of markers of attribution (IC) ptw	6.480

From Table 2 it can be seen that the majority of the reporting signals are to be found among the verbs in the Italian corpus too, and that together with the reporting nouns and adjectives, they account for 74.8 per cent of all the attribution signals.

Overall, attribution is considerably more frequent in the English corpus than in the Italian (1.037 ptw EC versus 0.709 IC), while the Italian corpus makes a slightly more frequent use of its lexical attribution resources (0.105 ptw IC versus 0.060 EC).

4 The classification of the verbs, nouns and adjectives in both corpora (BC) according to reporting attitude

The writer's attitude to a reported proposition can be more or less overtly pronounced, and, as Hunston (1993), Caldas-Coulthard (1994) and Thompson (1994, 1996, 2001) have shown, this property is often encoded in the reporting marker, frequently in the form of a verb. Having identified all the nouns, adjectives and verbs that preface *that*-clauses, and seen that these three word classes introduce most of reported clauses in both corpora, I discarded the lexical phrases and classified the reporting verbs, nouns and adjectives into six *reporting attitude* groups. This decision was also prompted by the fact that since the corpora are relatively small, significant numbers could only be reached by grouping mini-elements (individual verbs, nouns or adjectives) into macro-elements (the expression of an attitude). The aim of this classification was to investigate whether the same kinds of resources were used in the two corpora, and if not, where the differences lay, and, most importantly, what this meant in terms of the writer attitude towards the propositions being reported. It is worth noting that the generic term *attitude* is being kept here, in preference to more specific terms such as *illocution marker* or *speech act marker* or *validity marker* from studies on metadiscourse (see Vande Kopple 1985: 84).

A major factor in the categorization process was that each reporting signal was examined in context, although in the presentation of the findings in tables this cannot be seen. This is important, because the function of a marker (like the verbs *imply* and *repeat* in this corpus) can vary according to context. There are also classifications of verbs which differ from classifications in previous studies. For example, the verbs *repeat* or *add* are classified by Thompson (1994: 47–48) as verbs “which show how the message fits in with the rest of the language event”. In this study, as examples (5) and (6) show, they are used within the context of a disagreement, and they convey an argumentative attitude. They have thus been classified under *creating or reporting argumentation*. Ample context is provided in these examples, since, as Hunston 1993 points out, this is necessary in order to understand the prosody of the verb in the context of the argument. (The background to example (5) is the bombing of the Serbian TV station by Nato troops, which killed between 15 and 20 civilians.)

(3) A) Mr Cook and Ms Short ask us to accept that, because Western journalists are on the side of right and Serbs on the side of wrong, the premeditated killing of the latter is a “just act”. B) The massacre stopped broadcasts for just six hours, and risked the life of every Western reporter in Yugoslavia. C) I cannot see the proportionality, let alone the morality, in this. D) Targeting civilians

remains wrong, and it is no good ministers **repeating** that the Kosovans were civilians too. E) It is an odd “just” war that seeks an equivalence of mayhem in others’ conflicts.

(4) It is legitimate for all the armchair infantry generals to insist on a ground war (Mr Blair **repeats** in his article that while this is not a ‘plan’ all options are continually reviewed), though they should accept that, ground troops or not, bombing was always a necessary preliminary, just as it was in the Gulf.

Example (3) demonstrates an argument in action, as it were, where the side of the argument with which the writer does not agree is represented by *Mr Cook* and *Ms Short* who *ask us to accept* that all Serbs are *on the side of wrong*. The negative attitude of the writer towards the bombing of any civilians is made clear in sentence C (*I cannot see the proportionality, let alone the morality*); it is reiterated in the first clause of D – *targeting civilians remains wrong*, and it continues through the expression *it is no good* in the second clause. The use of the verb *repeat* conveys the idea that the ministers insist on their point of view, as though engaged in an argument, rather than just saying it more than once.

The verb *ripetere*, which can be a translation of *repeat*, is used on one occasion to mean ‘to say again’ (without any argumentative intent) before a reported proposition, while on two occasions it is used to report an assertion with which the writer clearly does not agree, as in example (5). In this example, the whole phrase *continui a ripetere* seems to carry the same nuance of writer annoyance and disagreement that *keep + V-ing* can have:

(5) E davvero non si capisce perché Prodi **continui a ripetere** che “la vera tragedia di questa guerra è l’assenza dell’ Europa.”

(*And it really is not clear why Prodi keeps repeating that “the real tragedy of this war is Europe’s absence.”*)

From this example of *repeat*, it can be seen that a verb can occur in two different attitude groups, because it can be used with more than one function.

Although reference was made for the final choice of criteria to established classification studies of this type, like Chafe (1986), Hunston (1993), Thompson (1994) and Francis et al. (1996, 1998) for English, and Mortara Garavelli (1995) and Stati (1998) for Italian, I started out by studying the markers themselves and trying to discover which attitude groups emerged from the data. The final classification resulted in the six groups illustrated in Table 3:

Table 3: Six reporting attitude groups and the frequency of their markers (ptw)

Group	Reporting attitude groups and the word classes involved	English	Italian
1	Reporting or saying (V), public statement of position (N, Adj)	1.793	0.624
2	Subjective interpreting (V), communicating impressions (N, Adj)	2.084	1.794
3	Recognizing evidence of the status quo (V, N, Adj)	1.065	1.009
4	Creating or reporting argument (V, N)	1.224	0.498
5	Knowing and reflecting on beliefs (V, N, Adj)	0.355	0.663
6	Attitudes, feelings and reactions (V, N, Adj)	0.537	0.312
Total frequency of an attitude reporting marker ptw		7.051	4.900

All the groups will now be presented in terms of figures, and the most interesting findings from groups 3, 4, and 5 will be discussed. A few examples are given with each group to illustrate the different types in context.

4.1 Group 1: Reporting or saying (Verbs), public statement of position (Nouns, Adjectives)

The first group of verbs, nouns and adjectives represents a predominantly neutral style of reporting propositions, with verbs such as *say*, *dire* ('say'), *observe*, *comunicare* ('communicate'), and some related nouns such as *observation*, *stand*, *stipulation*. In this group the English corpus contains a far wider range of markers than the Italian (37 types versus 16 in Italian) and these markers are also used more frequently (0.104 ptw versus 0.068 ptw in Italian). Worthy of note is the lack of Italian nouns in this category (the only one used is *affermazione* 'assertion') and the lack of adjectives in both languages.

Two examples of verbs in the group follow:

(6) A student's letter to a Paris newspaper last weekend observed that Nato has created something without precedent in human history: a war in which only civilians are killed.

(7) Qualcuno ha osservato che le guerre di questo tempo non sono più paragonabili all' ultima mondiale che fu una guerra per la vita e per la morte...
(Someone **has remarked that** the wars of this epoch cannot be compared with the last world war which was a war for life and death...)

4.2 Group 2: Subjective Interpreting (Verbs), communicating impressions and opinions (Nouns, Adjectives)

The second group, named *subjective interpreting*, represents the largest group overall in terms of breadth of resources and frequency of use in both corpora: 62 types and 2.084 tokens ptw in the English, and 58 types and 1.794 tokens ptw in the Italian.

This group differs from the first group (neutral reporting/saying) in that a mental act of interpreting is required of the speaker reporting the proposition. For example, saying that a third person *believes* or *thinks* something requires either knowledge of their mind or an act of imagination on the part of the speaker. Grouping these verbs under the heading *subjective interpreting* brings the reporting subject's act of interpretation and attitude to the fore, rather than the content of the reported proposition. Verbs of subjective interpreting are illustrated in (8) and (9):

(8) Few now **doubt that** the Rambouillet talks were a set-up...

(9)...come molti **è convinto** che gli occidentali stiano conducendo una sorta di guerra parallela...
(like many others, **he is convinced that** the Westerners are conducting a sort of parallel war)

Within this group, a number of abstract nouns in each corpus describe ways of interpreting the different facets of a proposition. Types like *corollary*, *explanation*, *finding*, *reflection*, and *condizione* ('condition'), *conseguenza* ('consequence'), *possibilità* ('possibility', 'chance'), *prova* ('proof') are included. The Italian corpus, which contains 18 types, includes some evaluatively coloured noun groups, through which a strong subjective opinion is conveyed, as in *aspetto paradossale* ('paradoxical aspect') *fortuna* ('the lucky thing is..'), *guaio* ('the problem', 'trouble is...'). Some of these markers are exemplified in (10) and (11):

(10) Officials constantly trotted out **the thesis that** the Muslims were thought to be "bombing themselves".

(11) **Il guaio è che** un Kosovo indipendente potrebbe tornare a infiammare l'intera regione.
(**The trouble is that** an independent Kosovo could set the whole region alight.)

4.3 Group 3: Recognizing evidence of the status quo (Verbs, Nouns, Adjectives)

The markers in this group indicate minimal mental elaboration of a judgement on the part of the speaker, and the proposition seems to speak for itself through strong or clear evidence. A typical sequence with these markers is *V-link + adj + that*, or the use of verbs like *show*, or *demonstrate*. This group is illustrated and discussed in section 5.2.

4.4 Group 4: Creating or reporting argument

The markers in group 4, examples of which are verbs like *claim*, or *sostenere* ('claim', 'maintain') are meta-argumentative (see Bondi 2001), in that they present propositions in a way that indicates that a difference of opinion is being pointed out or provoked by the writer. Attributing an opinion to another is an important part of the management of interaction in text, and creating the appearance of a debate or argument is one of the features of opinion articles. The English corpus contains a greater variety of markers of this type (27 types as opposed to 11 in Italian), and they are used considerably more frequently than in the Italian corpus (1.68 ptw EC; 0.44 IC). A comparison of these markers is made in section 5.1.

4.5 Group 5: Knowing (Verbs) and reflection on beliefs (Nouns, Verbs, Adjectives)

The markers of knowing and reflection on beliefs constitute a small but important group in both languages. They indicate the process of coming to know something (as in *realize* or *prendere atto* ('take note of')), or of remembering or recalling something, or else the state of knowing something (*know*, 'sapere'). Both corpora contain a fairly small number of types (six in English and nine in Italian), and the Italian markers are used twice as often as the English ones: 0.353 ptw in English, 0.663 ptw in Italian. This group is discussed later in section 5.1.

4.6 Group 6: Attitudes, feelings and reactions

The last reporting attitude group gathers together markers of emotions, feelings or reactions, as both mental and verbal processes. The English corpus displays a broader variety of markers, and a higher frequency of their use overall: 25 types in English vs. 11 in Italian, and 0.535 ptw in English vs. 0.312 in Italian. Some examples of the markers from each corpus are illustrated in (12) and (13):

(12) **È confortante che** l'Europa, con la sola e non nuova esenzione britannica, parli con una voce sola.

*(It's **comforting that** Europe, with the only, and not new exception of Britain, is speaking in one voice.)*

(13) Ma da ieri sera c'è **un concreto timore che** l'unità della Nato si incrina prima che Milosevic crolli.

*(But since last night there has been **real fear that** Nato's unity may crack before Milosevic crumbles.)*

5 Overall comparison of the verbal, nominal and adjectival types

There is a clear quantitative preference in the English corpus to report more than the Italian, using the verbs, nouns and adjectives as markers. The figures summarised in Table 4:

Table 4: Reporting verbs, nouns and adjectives: types and tokens (BC)

	English	Italian
Number of types	180	123
Overall frequency tokens ptw	7.051	4.900

However, while this difference in frequency is curious, perhaps the most interesting aspect of the difference is the type of reporting which tends to occur in the corpora. The above sections have mentioned the wider variety of resources used in the English corpus generally, but now some significant differences will be highlighted. Firstly, since the corpus contains opinion articles, and their ultimate aim is presumably to persuade the reader of a particular reading of events, the markers which stimulate most thought are those which set up an argument, as opposed to presenting a reading of events that is more fixed, and allows for little interpretation. Judging from the resources examined here, the English corpus is characterized by a more argumentative attitude towards reported propositions, while the Italian corpus displays less of a tendency to interpret. Group 4, *Creating or Reporting Argument*, demonstrating the largest difference in type and token, will now be discussed.

5.1 Discussion: group 4. Verbs and Nouns creating or reporting argument

There are 27 different types of this category found in the English corpus, and 11 in the Italian. The frequency shows an even greater difference, with the English resources at 1.68 ptw compared to only 0.44 ptw in the Italian. No adjectives are found in this group in either language, and a greater variety of verbs can be found in English, namely:

Accept, acknowledge, admit, agree, argue, assert, claim, concede, concur, convince someone, declare, dispute, insist, note, point out

Compared to:

Accettare ('accept'), *riconoscere* ('recognize', 'acknowledge'), *ammettere* ('admit'), *affermare* ('state', 'affirm'), *calcolare* ('calculate'), *sostenere* ('maintain', 'hold'), *convincere* ('convince'), *dichiarare* ('declare')

(The underlined verbs have no equivalents in the other corpus.)

Two aspects of group 4 are worth noting in particular. The first is the almost total lack of meta-argumentative nouns (or nouns indicating an argumentative role) in Italian in this category – only *concessione* ('concession') occurs, once, whereas in the English corpus, nouns like *assumption*, or *argument* typically encapsulate previously set out arguments or cataphorically label a *that*-clause (Tadros 1985; Francis 1986). Examples (14) and (15) illustrate how meta-argumentative nouns are used in the English corpus.

(14) The **ultimate reason** why a moral shadow has fallen over Nato's conduct of this war is that its actions have reflected **the assumption that** the lives of its soldiers and airmen are more valuable than the lives of Yugoslavs.

(15) Yet **the argument that** Nato had to do something, when it is quite apparent that what Nato has actually done has made things worse, is obviously false.

In example (14), the writer covers him/herself from criticism by making the *actions* of Nato reflect an *assumption that*.... This nominalization keeps the writer at a certain distance from the rather racist accusation that Nato member countries think the lives of their soldiers and airmen have greater worth than those of other nations. In example (15), the writer is criticising an argument about Nato, which is attributed to no-one. Again, there is a distance between the writer and the situation s/he is criticising. There is an argument between the

problem and the writer, as it were, rather than a direct opponent with whom to argue. The implication of this is that through the technique of nominalization there is greater argumentative space for the writer. The fact that the Italian corpus lacks these nouns closes that space considerably.

The second point to be made here regards the fact that in English there is considerable use made of the verb and noun *claim*. Before *that*-clauses, they are used 0.60 times per thousand words. There is no equivalent noun used in the Italian corpus, and the verb *sostenere*, which can be used in similar circumstances, occurs at a rate of 0.20 ptw. Another important verb used in the English corpus is *argue* with its corresponding noun *argument*. There is no equivalent of this in the Italian corpus, which again indicates a lack of the possibility to indicate immediately that something said is contentious. Examples from the English corpus of the verb and noun *claim*, and of the verb *argue* are given in (16) to (19):

(16) Not a soul among the Nato press corps attempted to question the extraordinary **claims** of military success against the Yugoslav Third Army in Kosovo – claims which now turn out to have been a pack of lies.

(17) But by victory he means ground assault, as the critics of the “bombing alone” strategy **have always claimed** it would.

(18) Left supporters of the bombing argue that the opposition in Serbia had not been very outspoken on their government’s oppressive policies in Kosovo. There is considerable truth in **this claim**, as in their observation that “Serbia cannot have democracy and Kosovo”

(19) **One might argue**, and I have, that Western Europe’s politically morbid dependence upon Washington needs to be broken for the good of both sides – but surely not by defeat at the hands of Slobodan Milosevic.

This discrepancy in resources indicating an argumentative stance on the part of the writer towards the reported content led me to examine the semantic prosody³ of the one argumentative verb used in Italian, *sostenere*. There are 20 occurrences of this verb before a *that*-clause in the Italian corpus, and the writer commitment to the reported proposition varies. It seems that the verb itself carries the idea of distance, but the disagreement with the reported proposition tends to come out explicitly elsewhere in the context.

Examples (20) and (21) show how it is the comment in the underlined adverbial group which makes the writer’s view explicit:

(20) L'ambasciatore jugoslavo a Roma Lekic **sostiene**, come è suo evidente interesse, **che** non ci sono né vincitori, né vinti.

(*The Yugoslavian ambassador in Rome, Lekic **claims** – as it is evidently in his interest to do – that there are neither winners nor losers.*)

(21) E nessuno può onestamente **sostenere che** Budapest e Atene stiano impegnandosi più di noi.

(*And nobody can honestly **claim that** Budapest and Athens are making more of an effort than we are.*)

Thus the verb appears only to indicate distance, not explicit disagreement with the proposition said.

5.2 *Recognizing evidence of the status quo*

The markers that represent acknowledgement of evidence of the status quo are also worth commenting on briefly. The title of this group is supposed to emphasize that the facts referred to in the reported clause seem to speak for themselves, and that the mental act the subject performs is one of recognition rather than elaboration of an opinion. Incidentally, the verb *recognize* does not occur in the corpus before a *that*-clause, whereas the verb *acknowledge* always occurs in argumentative contexts, where a contentious fact has to be acknowledged. The group could have been termed *objective* interpreting (following Hunston 1993) to underline the supposed lack of subjectivity in the marker, or *weakly subjective* interpreting (following Company 2004) to minimize the interpreting act on the part of the speaker, but given that a) any language passes through the subjectivity of the speaker and b) some of the markers like *true* and *evident* are not adequately described by a term like *weak*, the title *recognising evidence* seemed the most appropriate.

In this group, the frequency figures are very similar (1.063 in English and 1.009 in Italian), but they hide an important difference between certain individual markers. The verbs *show* and *dimostrare/mostrare*, and *suggest* and *suggirire*, the nouns *fact* and *fatto* and the adjectives *true/untrue* and *vero* occur with frequencies that confirm the reading suggested earlier of a preference for argumentation in English as opposed to a more static reading of events in Italian. The frequency of occurrence per thousand words for each pair of words is shown in Table 5:

Table 5: Frequency ptw of certain markers of recognition of evidence

<i>Show</i>	0.086	<i>Dimostrare + mostrare</i>	0.195
<i>Suggest</i>	0.124	<i>Suggerire</i>	0.010
<i>Fact</i>	0.182	<i>Fatto</i>	0.244
<i>*True/untrue/truth</i>	0.105	<i>Vero/verità</i>	0.263

*These are counted together since there are no occurrences of a negative, while there are occurrences of the negative and *vero* in Italian.

A close reading of these words in context brings to light the fact that the same historical facts and people, seen from the Italian journalists' perspective, *show* characteristics or feelings or thoughts more often than they appear to in English. This seems to indicate that, in the view of the Italian writers, there is one reading of the facts which is evident to every reader, and that the articles encourage consensus in the reader rather than provoke argument.

Examples (22) and (23) from the corpus suggest this type of reading of history:

(22) L'esperienza storica **dimostra che** quando Washington ha tentato di usare guerriglieri...

(*Experience of history **shows that** when Washington has tried to use guerrillas...*)

(23) Il fallimento dell'Unione Europea **dimostra che** una costruzione sovranazionale, popolata di...

(*The failure of the European Union **shows that** a supranational construction, populated with...*)

Significantly, the reverse figures occur with the verbs *suggest/suggerire*: in the English corpus, events or propositions more often *suggest* an interpretation, rather than *show evidence*.⁴ Examples (24) and (25) demonstrate occurrences of *suggest*, and the contrast is particularly clear, given that *suggest* is the only verb which appears with *experience*.

(24) **Experience** from the earlier stages of the war, in Croatia and Bosnia, **suggests** that Nato's options will be limited.

(25) Mr Milosevic may now be stamping all over Kosovo, but **past experience suggests** military superiority may not be enough to hold on to his territory.

The third pair of words that proves interesting in this group is *fact/fatto* and *true/vero*. Both corpora contain similar frequencies of *fact/fatto*, with the equivalent anaphoric use of *the fact that...* and *il fatto è che* occurring with very similar frequency (0.022 in English and 0.024 in Italian ptw). The same cannot be said of the reference to what is *true*: in fact, *vero* appears twice as often in the Italian corpus, as shown in (26) and (27):

(26) **La cruda verità è che** guardando il leader serbo e il suo speciale metodo di riciclare il comunismo, la Russia scorge l'immagine di se stessa.

(The bare truth is that looking at the Serbian leader and his special way of recycling communism, Russia sees the image of itself.)

(27) Quanto alla deportazione dei kosovari, **è vero che** la guerra non è stata in grado di fermarla e forse in qualche misura l'ha addirittura accelerata.

(As for the deportation of the Kosovars, it is true that the war has not managed to stop it and perhaps it has even accelerated it.)

The tendency demonstrated here in the Italian corpus is that the journalists seem to read events as they appear on the surface, and assert truths rather than argue for them. There is one element which however suggests a different angle on argumentation in the Italian corpus. This is the fact that *vero*, the most common evaluation in the frequently used *V-link + adj + che*-clause pattern, occurs nearly half of the time as a counter-assertion. Examples (28) and (29) demonstrate such cases:

(28) **Però è vero che** c'è un ritorno dei giovani...

(But it's also true that there is a return of young people...)

(29) **Ma è anche vero che**, allorché sono stati in gioco i loro interessi...

(But it is also true that when their interests were at stake...)

This consideration of counter-assertions points in a rather different direction: that of the construction of argument from a discourse point of view, which considers clause relations rather than lexico-grammatical elements. As mentioned in the introduction there are various ways of looking at averral and attribution, and this study has been conducted through the analysis of lexico-grammatical markers. It might be that the analysis of clauses according to the argumentative moves they make would bring different results, and that more signs of overtly argumentative writing might emerge in the Italian texts.

5.3 *Knowing and reflection on beliefs*

The figures in group 5 – knowing and reflection on beliefs – show that a slightly wider variety of resources is used in Italian than in English and that their frequency of use in Italian is twice that found in English: 0.663 ptw in Italian to 0.335 in English. A close look at the verbs in the group provide further evidence for the interpretation that there is a more authoritative style of writing among the Italian journalists. Two Italian markers within the group dominate: *capire* ('understand') and *sapere* ('know'). The frequency of *capire* is 0.021, whereas the verb *understand* does not occur at all in English. That of *sapere* is 0.047 as opposed to 0.020 for *know*. Both these findings are significant because *knowing* and *understanding* are mental processes, and there is actually no way of knowing what someone else knows or understands without explicit evidence for it. The high frequency of these types of verbs – together with *sapere*, we find *comprendere*, *rendersi conto*, *prendere atto* ('realize', 'take stock of the fact that') – is another sign of a type of writing which expresses confidence about its knowledge of the status quo, and declares it, rather than *suggesting*, or *interpreting* events. Some examples of the verbs *sapere* ('know') and *capire* ('understand') follow:

(30) Tutte queste immagini riemergono perché in cuor loro **gli europei lo sanno**, anche quando i politici tacciono: questa non è una guerra simile agli altri interventi degli Occidentali dopo la caduta del muro di Berlino.

*(All these images re-emerge because in their hearts **the Europeans know it**, even when the politicians keep quiet: this is not a war similar to other Western interventions since the fall of the Berlin wall.)*

(31) **Milosevic sa** che gli americani e il comando militare dell'Alleanza rifiuteranno di vedere nel "suo dono" uno spiraglio di pace.

(Milosevic knows that the Americans and the military commanders of the Alliance will refuse to see an opening to peace in his "gift".)

6 *Conclusions*

An overall view of the resources used to report propositions in the two corpora reveals that attribution using lexico-grammatical markers is considerably more frequent in the English corpus than in the Italian: 1.037 ptw EC versus 0.709 IC. It is not possible to state why this is the case. Lexical expressions of attribution are slightly more frequent in the Italian corpus, but the vast majority of lexico-grammatical attribution signals in both corpora are found among the verbs, which, together with reporting nouns and adjectives, account for at least three quarters of all reporting signals.

As regards the attitude of writers to reported or attributed propositions, in the Italian corpus, writers tend to introduce propositions through core verbs that indicate knowledge or belief, such as *sapere* ('know'), *capire* ('understand'), or verbs that do not require interpretation on the part of the writer, but which indicate an objective type of reporting: one such verb is *dimostrare* ('show'/'demonstrate'). As an interpretation of this matter, I suggest that the standing of the commentator in the Italian press, and his or her consequent mode of self-expression is considerably different from that found in the Anglo-Saxon press. A commentator in Italy is quite possibly considered a more authoritative figure than in England; leading articles (*articoli di fondo*) are rarely anonymous in Italian, and opinion articles such as the ones in this corpus appear on the front page of the newspaper as authoritative opinions on important events. Conversely, opinion articles in newspapers in English occupy the prestigious centre pages, and need to be sought out by the interested reader. The tendency to argue more in the English corpus may well reflect the journalist's need to gain and persuade an audience; the Italian journalist, on the other hand, has guaranteed attention by virtue of being on the front page, and may well be expected to provide a clear and authoritative opinion that affirms clear views, seeking consensus rather than stimulating debate.

Also, fewer resources and a lower frequency of use of argumentative verbs or nouns in Italian suggest writing that presents objective facts, rather than arguments for or suggestions of alternative reading, which appears to be more typical of the English commentators. A different interpretation of the writing style of commentators in Italian might be found if an analysis of the argumentative moves in the texts were made, not starting from lexico-grammatical signals. However, from the evidence of this study, the English opinion articles present a more argumentative, interpretative stance through the use of lexico-grammatical markers of attitude towards attributed propositions.

Notes

1. Each corpus consists of roughly 100,000 words, and all the articles discuss the Kosovo crisis of 1999. Most of the articles in English are taken from *The Times*, *The Financial Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent* and *The International Herald Tribune*, while most of the Italian articles come from *La Repubblica*, *Il Corriere della Sera* and *La Stampa e Il Foglio*.
2. 'Averral' here is taken to mean occasions when the writer clearly takes responsibility for the assertions s/he is making. See Tadros (1993).

3. 'Semantic prosody' is a term coined by Sinclair (1991: 70) and used by Louw (1993), building on Firth's idea that prosody is a feature which stretches over several units (quoted in Stubbs 1995: 25). Semantic prosody is the colouring that an item carries because of the contexts it usually occurs in; it can be investigated only through corpus techniques, which examine many occurrences of the item in context. See Partington (2003) for a discussion of the similarities and differences between semantic prosody and semantic preference.
4. These results concur with those of Hunston (forthcoming) on the phrase "there is some evidence to suggest that" and Virtanen (forthcoming) on a study of the collocations of polls and surveys.

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