

WRITER'S ARGUMENTATIVE ATTITUDE: A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF 'LETTERS TO THE EDITOR' IN ENGLISH AND ITALIAN

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Abstract

This article deals with those aspects of language that can be seen to carry out a primarily "interactional function" in that they are used to "establish and maintain social relationships" (Brown and Yule 1983: 2 and 3). Such aspects have been variously referred to as performing an "expressive" (Bühler 1934), "emotive" (Jakobson 1960), "social expressive" (Lyons 1977) or "interpersonal" (Halliday 1994) function or, more recently, as performing the function by which "social roles and relationships are constructed" (White 2002: 2). In this article such aspects are referred to in very general terms as 'attitudinal' or as carrying 'attitudinal meaning' or expressing 'attitude'.

It is widely accepted that the interaction generated through language has a strong pragmatic dimension, that is, it can hardly be appreciated out of context. This article is particularly concerned with highlighting the significance and the all-pervasive nature of such pragmatic dimension in the case of the interaction engendered between writers and readers through the medium of Letters to the Editor published in the English and Italian print media.

The following three questions arise:

- 1) At which linguistic level can specific attitudinal resources be identified and compared?
- 2) To what extent may the extra linguistic context play a role in the specific case of Letters to the Editor?
- 3) Are similar attitudinal resources and strategies used in the English and Italian letters? How may any differences be explained?

In order to answer these questions the article firstly explores the nature of attitudinal meaning as outlined in previous studies. The second section focuses on the cultural context in which the letters are produced with particular reference to the role of language, argumentation, the press and the genre Letters to the Editor in England and Italy. The third section deals with the argumentative structure of the letters and the specific attitudinal meanings associated with the various components of such structure. The method of analysis is illustrated through examples from the English corpus. The main findings are presented and a comparison is drawn between the two corpora. The findings are further assessed in the light of the contextual framework set out in the preceding section.

Keywords: Letters to the editor, Attitude, Argumentation, Certainty, Normativity, Evaluation, Emotion.

1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to show the extent to which the linguistic resources and strategies that encode the writers' interpersonal stance must be assessed in the light of pragmatic factors. For this purpose the specific example of Letters to the Editor in the

English and Italian printed media has been chosen because it represents an interesting case in which interaction is linguistically constructed. In opinion letters to the paper the writers take position by expressing their views on current events and states of affairs and by appealing for action. In so doing they also reveal their feelings towards such events and provide their evaluation of the people and circumstances involved.

The first section is concerned with clarifying the nature of those linguistic resources that typically carry out an "interactional function" (Brown and Yule 1983: 2). The section considers how such resources have been traditionally dealt with, investigated and referred to. It will be shown how emphasis on particular aspects may be placed according to circumstantial factors such as the nature of the linguistic system investigated (in this case either standard British English or Italian), the type of discourse (a form of critical writing in this case) and interacting parties (newspapers' readers and editors in this case).

The second section turns to the cultural context in which the letters are produced and considers how such contextual features may be reflected in the writers' linguistic choices. Attention is drawn to differences in linguistic practice with particular reference to the use of written English and Italian, the understanding of argumentation (the linguistic conventions associated with the expression of opinion and point of view) and, particularly, the traditional role of Letters to the Editor, as a genre, within the development of the press in England and Italy.

The third section provides the theoretical and methodological framework that allows for the linguistic analysis of the letters in terms of their interactional impact. The framework is centred around the writers' main communicative purpose: The expression of opinions and the nature of the opinions expressed. Once again it is function in context (the pragmatic aspect) that informs the choice of the variables investigated and the interpretation of the material. Examples are provided for illustration and the results of the analysis are summarized, compared and evaluated.

In the last section the findings are assessed in the light of the contextual environment in which the letters are produced as outlined in the preceding section.

2. 'Attitudinal meaning'

Speakers and writers can rely on a wide range of linguistic resources to establish and maintain a relationship with their interlocutors or readers. Some of these resources are embedded in the grammar of the language they use. In the case of English, for example, studies have focused on the role played by modal verbs (e.g.: *may*, *can*, *must*) and adjuncts (e.g.: *surely*, *probably*, *undoubtedly*) within the clause and the way that such tools allow speakers and writers to take position in respect of the strength of their certainty or conviction, requests or commands (Halliday 1994). In Halliday's framework such resources are said to perform an "interpersonal function" whereby "the speaker adopts for himself a particular speech role" (essentially, giving or demanding information or service) and, "in so doing, assigns to the listener a complementary role which he wishes him to adopt in his turn (essentially accepting the information or providing the service)" (Halliday 1994: 68)

Several studies have been carried out on the Italian modal system, namely by Simone and Amacker (1977), Rainaud (1992) and, more recently, by Van der Auwera and Dendale (2001) and Cresti (2002). A great deal of attention, however, has also been

given to additional and widely used grammatical structures that allow Italian speakers and writers to express their attitude to people, facts and events. Such structures are noticeable for providing a means to express not only the strength of the speakers or writers' certainty or the urgency of their demands (as typically conveyed by modal operators) but also their evaluative or emotive stance towards people and events. For example one can say:

- (1) *Sono contento che tu sia venuta*
 'I am happy that you have(subjunctive) come'

The use of the morphological subjunctive variant *sia* rather than indicative *sei* draws attention to the emotive meaning expressed lexically by *sono contento* ('I am happy').

One can similarly say:

- (2) *É normale che tu abbia paura*
 'It is normal that you have (subjunctive) fear'

The use of the morphological subjunctive variant *abbia* instead of *hai* draws attention to the evaluative meaning expressed lexically by *é normale* ('it is normal').

Italian has also developed a range of morphological structures (suffixes) which add an emotive or evaluative meaning to essentially 'neutral' words. The noun *ragazzo* ('boy'), for example, can be altered to *ragazz-ino* or *ragazz-etto* ('small/young/inexperienced boy') or to *ragazz-one* ('big/strong/heavy-built/clumsy boy') or *ragazz-accio* ('badly-behaved/ugly boy') or *ragazz-uccio* ('endearing, sweet, small boy') . The basic form of adjectives and adverbs can also be altered through suffixes. The variant formations express additional evaluative meaning as in *cald-ino* ('a bit warm'), *cald-uccio* ('nice and warm'), *cald-issimo* ('very hot') for *caldo* ('warm') or *bell-occio* ('beautiful in an effeminate and non-appealing way') instead of *bello* ('beautiful').

These suffixes are used creatively and the meaning conveyed can vary considerably depending on the root word and the context. *Tappet-uccio*, for example may mean: 'Nice little carpet' or 'cheap carpet' and *mes-accio* does not refer to a 'badly-behaved month' (see paragraph above) but to a 'month when a series of bad things happened'.

In addition, word order is very flexible in Italian. Grammatical meaning is carried by the inflection and the order of words and thematic structure can be altered to create emphasis and encode a degree of evaluation. It is possible to write, for example, in standard Italian prose:

- (3)
- (a) *Il tempo felice della giovinezza é passato e la vecchiaia si avvicina.*
 'The time happy of the youth has gone and the old age is nearing'.
- (b) *É passato il tempo felice della giovinezza e si avvicina la vecchiaia.*
 'It has gone the time happy of the youth and is nearing the old age'
 [emphasis on the feeling of regret].

- (c) *La vecchiaia, passato (é) il tempo felice della giovinezza, si avvicina.*
 'The old age, gone (has) the time happy of the youth, is nearing'
 [emphasis on the threatening feeling of old age nearing]).

(a) is the unmarked version. In (b) the alternative thematic distribution emphasizes the feeling of regret whereas in (c) the emphasis is on the feeling of threat engendered by the onset of old age. *Tempo* ('time') and *felice* ('happy') can also swap places in each case, adding to the number of possible emotive nuances.

The level of investigation, however, can be widened to include not only linguistic structure and isolated clauses or propositions but also linguistic use in context and for specific purposes, that is "discourse" (defined as "meaning beyond the clause" instantiated through texts and constituting the interface between grammar and social context. Martin and Rose 2003: Subtitle-7). The interactional strategies that can be adopted by speakers and writers in discourse are articulated through a much wider range of structural patterns. The type of social interaction enacted through discourse (whether spoken or written) is typically realized through the participants' self-expression in terms of views, feelings and evaluation.

The expression of evaluation, stance and point of view has been investigated particularly through the analysis of narrative discourse in relation to the structure of the narrative plot and the writer's presence. Although many studies in this area are mainly concerned with propositional attitude, it has often been recognized that evaluation can be expressed at various structural levels throughout a whole text rather than through single expressions or parts (see Thomson and Huston 2000). It has also been observed that contextual factors (such as the type of text and the cultural setting) inherent to the notion of discourse, play an essential role when decoding evaluative meaning. (See, for example, Corazzi and Jin 2000).

Other studies have focused on discourse other than narrative and have further explored the linguistic resources adopted by writers and speakers as they reveal their selves, values and feelings through language (e.g.: Ochs and Schieffelin's study of "affect" 1989; Finegan's exploration of "subjectivity" 1995; Lemke's study of "evaluation" and "attitudinal meaning" 1998; and Martin and White's development of the notion of "appraisal" 2003 and earlier).

Lemke's inclusive view of "attitudinal" and "evaluative" meanings is particularly relevant to the present article. Lemke clarifies that attitude and evaluation can be expressed not only "to take a stance toward and socially orient ourselves and our text to others" but also "to take a stance toward the ideational or propositional content of our texts" (1998: 1). Lemke argues that "whatever we have to say about the world, we can also tell others, in the same utterance, to what extent we believe what we say is likely, desirable, important, permissible, surprising, serious, or comprehensible" (ibid.). The seven semantic classes of "evaluative attributes" which Lemke identifies in a corpus of newspaper editorials (1998) include the categories "warrantability/ probability" and "normativity/ appropriateness" as well as the more obviously attitudinal categories concerned with evaluation and affect ("desirability/ inclination", "humorousness/ seriousness").

Martin (2000: 143) is equally aware of the many levels at which interaction between speakers or writers and readers is achieved and points out that verbal exchanges are negotiated not only in terms of exchanges of information or services (as expressed through the grammar of "mood" and "modality" within Halliday's framework)

but also through the ways in which the participants interact with each other by expressing what they are "feeling, the judgements they make and the value they place on the various phenomena of their experience" (ibid: 144). Martin states that the expression of feelings, judgements and values is more congruently realized in English through lexical rather than grammatical choice and introduces the term "appraisal" to refer to "the semantic resources used to negotiate emotions, judgements and valuations" (2000: 145). He also identifies resources of "engagement" which essentially express the speakers' commitment to the truth value of their assertions and signal their preparedness to engage in a dialogue with their interlocutors.

The focus of my analysis is on the writers' expression of belief and appeal for action in their letters to the paper but the expression of their feelings can also be seen to play an essential role. It will be shown that both Lemke's and Martin's categories, variables and insight may be fruitfully applied to the analysis of opinion letters of this type. I have continued to use the term "attitudinal meaning" in Lemke's wider sense throughout this article even though, within Martin's framework, "attitudinal meanings" are clearly understood as indicating specifically the "speaker/writer's emotional responses" or their view of the "social acceptability of the behavior of human actors" or their assessment of "semiotic and natural phenomena by reference to their value" (White 2002: 5-6).

In summary, speakers and writers can express their attitude to propositions, people, events and objects in the real world through a variety of linguistic resources. The specific attitudinal meanings conveyed in discourse are generated through a combination of linguistic choice, discourse type (or genre) and context.

Table. 1 below shows the relationship between the level of analysis (from the grammatical to the pragmatic and contextual), the general areas of investigation associated with attitudinal meaning, the attitude type depending on function performed and the level of reference. As one moves down the levels of analysis, the pragmatic aspect becomes increasingly more relevant and the closer one gets to the purely contextual level the wider the attitudinal meaning potential of linguistic expressions becomes.

Martin (2000: 161-62) crucially refers to the fact that the selection of the particular linguistic resources counting as "appraisal" and their interpretation must be accounted for in relation to the type of discourse considered and the overall context in which it is set (the last level of analysis in fig. 1).

Discourse types can be differentiated on the basis of their general function. Argumentative and persuasive discourse, for example, is a type in which the emphasis is on the expression of views and opinions rather than on narration or description. The instantiation of a discourse type through particular types of texts (such as readers' opinion letters published in the correspondence sections of newspapers) that share the same basic features (purpose, addressers and addressees and medium of communication) is commonly referred to as 'genre' (as clarified by Martin and Rose 2003). The following section deals with the contextual features of the genre Letters to the Editor (Letters from now on) published in England and Italy.

Table 1: Dimensions of Attitudinal Meaning

<u>Level of Analysis</u>	<u>General Areas of Investigation</u>	<u>Attitude Type according to function</u>	<u>Level of reference</u>
Clause	Modality (modal verbs and adjuncts)	Degree of certainty and obligation	Proposition/ Proposal
Clause	Lexical /Semantic evaluation	Degree of feeling and evaluation	Propositions, objects, people and events in real world
Clause type: Declarative, Interrogative, Imperative	Speech acts	Level of interpersonal interaction (giving/demanding information or service)	Participants and their interaction
Discourse (narrative, argumentative, descriptive...), genre/register/ style	Subjectivity, Evaluation, Involvement, Point of view, Affect, Appraisal (lexical and grammatical resources)	a) Degrees of self-expression b) Levels of verbal interaction	Writer/ Addresser Readers/Addressee/s
Context	Socio-cultural conventions associated to genre and verbal interaction	Levels of socio-cultural interaction	People, language, discourse and world

3. Contextual features of the genre 'Letters to the Editor'

The contextual features informing the expression of attitude in the discourse of the Letters relate particularly to the development of the press and a correspondence section in the two cultural settings. There are, however, more general contextual aspects that have to do with the development and uses of English and Italian as linguistic systems and with the understanding of argumentation and rhetorical expression in the two cultural settings. I will start by outlining briefly the more general aspects and then turn to the specific.

3.1. *Linguistic context*

Foley (1997: 200) suggests that English, as other non inflectional languages may be seen to rely more heavily than inflectional languages on covert categories, that is, on meaning that is not introduced through a constant formal marker (e.g. inflection) but through various lexical combinations. This may arguably apply also to the expression of attitude. It is problematic, however, to argue conclusively about the relationship between the level of grammaticalization (form) and speakers' use. More can be said on the cultural conventions associated with the use of British English in written discourse and their significance in respect of the expression of attitude. I am referring to the documented pressures on English writers to employ "a simple, utilitarian style" or "Senecan style...characterised by the relative brevity of the sentences, looseness of structure, succinctness and pithiness of phrasing, and jerkiness of rhythm" (Corbett and Connors 1999: 505f). Corbett and Connors (1999: 511) point out that this kind of

writing (often referred to as 'plain style') "had its origin during the Restoration period with writers like Dryden, Bunyan and Temple and its development during the Queen Anne period through writers like Defoe, Swift and Addison".

According to Strevens (1987: 177), the influences of Descartes' logic and the birth and spread of empiricism and the scientific method, not only in science but also in philosophy, in the 17th and 18th centuries, may, at least partly, explain why "native speakers of English constantly make use of the refinements of logic" and expect language to "express precisely the truth or falsity or the propositions it contains". Strevens further qualifies his statement, however, by adding that this "is not to say that English (or any other language) is 'logical' but that "there is no doubt that the possibility exists in English to express logical relationships with great precision".

It has been argued (Strevens 1987: 92-93) that within other cultures, using English as their first language, expectations may be rather different.

Following an investigation into a large number of texts (500) from a variety of English spoken and written registers, Biber and Finegan (1989: 103-118) came to the conclusion that the "expression of stance [affective or evidential] is a 'marked' choice in English and that the prevailing norm is to leave stance lexically and grammatically unmarked, thus putting the burden on the addressees to infer a speaker's stance". They suggest, however, that, in English, "stance" may be more often "integrated into text rather than overtly marked" and that there may be "a variety of secondary stance markers" that "might show that stance is marked in some fashion and to some extent in many texts...labelled 'faceless'", that is devoid of attitudinal meaning.

As mentioned in 2. above, the expression of attitude and subjectivity is highly grammaticalised in Italian, particularly through its fully-fledged mood system, morphological features and the potential offered within an inflected system (flexible text, sentence and word order).

It has been observed (Ramat 1993: 35) that linguistic use seems to reflect a strong expectation that complexity of linguistic expression (very long sentences, frequent use of subordination and unusual lexical items) is an indication of the speaker or writer's quality of thought, intellectual ability and, ultimately, authority. Wierzbicka, whose work has systematically focused on the link between "cultural values" and linguistic use (2003), draws attention to the link between the frequency of use of certain Italian grammatical patterns such as lexical and clausal repetition, expressive morphologic derivations (as mentioned in 2. above) and absolute superlatives and Italians' tendency to display their emotions without inhibition (2003: 279). In her opinion such linguistic use also reflects Italians' varied and frequent use of gestures and facial expressions to convey feelings and emotions (2003: 282).

Syntactically modern written Italian is a relatively static and overtly grammatically complex language. It is not, in fact, very different from the Old Italian used 700 years ago when the Tuscan variety started to acquire a literary standard status. In spite of the considerable changes in lexical use, Italian written sentence structure has remained relatively stable because for centuries it was the language of the educated minority and has been little affected by the spoken varieties of Italy's many dialects. The insistence has been on conservation and adherence to norm and even at the time of Italy's political unification (1861) Italian was still a literary language with elitist and formalistic characteristics (Sobrero 1993).

Migliorini (1966: 480) acknowledges that the Italian prose style has been undergoing a process of simplification (shorter sentences, more direct constructions,

increased avoidance of subordination) started in the 19th century and accelerated through the influence of *impressionism* and *futurism* at the beginning of the 20th century. But he adds that "...even so, the Italian sentence still often seems long and cumbersome to an English reader: To achieve normality in English prose a translator from Italian has frequently to divide the Italian sentence at its colons and semicolons and recast its clauses as separate units".

It is argued that Italian writers seem to value the self-expressive and impressive functions of language to a higher degree than their English counterparts. English writers, on the other hand, typically favour the 'informative' function (including: Definition, classification, comparison, contrast, analysis and synthesis) that is commonly associated with scientific discourse (see Kaplan 1972) and leave less room for self-expression. However, within the discourse of the press and of the Letters, in particular, specific cultural expectations are bound to give rise to mixed and complex configurations. It remains to be seen if the general expectations outlined above will be consistent with the findings from the analysis of the Letters.

3.2. *The understanding of argumentation*

The writers of the Letters are not just expressing their views using the strategies inherited from linguistic convention. Their expressive choices are also grounded in their understanding of the *rules* of argumentation in their ideological environment. The consistent choice of certain rhetorical strategies may be compatible only with the specific cultural understanding of what counts as convincing or effective reasoned debate. If, for instance, the rule applies that providing factual evidence is the strongest tool available to support an opinion, then it follows that a view that is thus supported will be seen as particularly convincing. If, on the other hand, other strategies are perceived as more effective (e.g.: Stressing the writer's conviction about the truth of a proposition) then providing factual evidence may not be the best strategy.

Different genres would obviously activate different rules so that, for example, subjective arguments may be more effective and widely employed in the context of argumentation in a letter than they would be in the context of argumentation in an essay or in an academic article.

Belonging to the western cultural tradition, both English and Italian writers use language in order to persuade and convince the readers of the validity of their claims and/or the need for following a particular course of action. This is considered an acceptable and useful practice and is associated with democratic political thinking, the fundamental belief in rationality and the possibility of verbal resolution of conflict.

Even in the Western cultural environment, where argumentative writing is generally practised and accepted, subtle variation may exist in respect of the relevance attributed to one or the other component of argumentative discourse. Connor and Lauer (1988) provide an in-depth view of the development of "persuasive writing" within the Anglo Saxon cultural setting (England, New Zealand and the US). They noticed (1988: 151-52) that the "evaluative" component within the Anglo Saxon students' argumentative framework "was not evident in the average performance of any of the groups", confirming their view that the "credibility" and "affective" appeal of persuasive writing are not given as much importance in the curricula of these countries as they once were and that logical and rational arguments are prioritized.

The shift is arguably linked with the demise of orality at the advantage of literacy in the above mentioned cultural areas. This led to an almost exclusive focus on the teaching of logic and deductive and inductive reason ('logos' or 'rational appeal') at the expense of 'ethos' and 'pathos' (in the Aristotelian tradition), that is, the 'credibility' and 'affective' appeals (Connor and Lauer 1988: 139). Little consideration is given, in other words, to the audience aspect of the communicative event.

Corbett and Connors' study (1999) reveals that, in the Anglo Saxon cultural areas, there gradually developed a strong view that language should match purpose and - when it comes to 'ordinary registers' and, particularly, to argumentative content - the clearer the arguments the more effective the discourse. Rhetoric (as style) tended more and more to be associated with the specific discourse and requirements of poetry and literature and self-expression with conversation or non verbal media. Towards the middle of the 20th century, an attempt was made to recover the interpersonal aspect of English argumentative discourse, rediscover a 'new rhetoric' that would take the audience factor into account. Rather than going back to 'ethos' and 'pathos', however, the key term became 'identification', that is the need for the writers to identify themselves with the readers in order to ensure a positive response. The notion of 'effective argument' was revisited accordingly. It was recognised that "most things about which people argue exist in the realm of the contingent, the probable, the plausible" and that - as in the Anglo-Saxon law system, so in general verbal interaction - the audience is not 'affected' so much by a-priori rational premises as by real events or 'precedents' that would justify similar course of action in similar circumstances (see Corbett and Connors 1999: 538f).

As for the Italian cultural setting, Connor and Lauer (1988) argue that - in spite of the general 'rationalisation' of western thought - argumentation retains here more of its traditional 'interpersonal' properties, thanks to the persistence of the Humanistic ideals of the Renaissance and, possibly - I would add - due to the different demands made on the language (e.g. the greater use of oral language within the education system). This is consistent with a more visible speaker's or writer's presence, that is, attitudinal meaning.

In the case of the Letters one is dealing not only with the conventions of written argumentative discourse but also with less formalised, yet still widely held, views and practice of verbal interaction possibly bearing on written practice. When considering the cultural norms reflected in the expression of opinion in spoken Polish and (Australian) English, for example, Wierzbicka mentions "the English preference for a hedged expression of opinions and evaluations and the Polish tendency to express opinions in strong terms and without any hedges whatsoever" (2003: 43). The English preference for hedged expression of opinions and evaluations in spoken interaction may be reflected in the level of explicitness in which opinions are expressed in the Letters.

It is difficult to predict which argumentative features would be particularly prominent in English and Italian Letters and whether some of the differences highlighted above will be reflected in the findings from the analysis. Additional contextual features derive from the role of the press in the English and Italian cultural settings.

3.3. *Development and functions of the press*

Italian newspaper editors and journalists have traditionally been dedicated to supporting the particular point of view of specific interest groups (see Pellegrini 1997). The first publications at the end of the 19th century were written in order to advertise particular business initiatives and often appeared in the form of bulletins in which readers were informed of the financial situation of a particular company and encouraged to take an interest in or support that company. At around the same time this advertising function was extended to supporting particular political interests, and the political parties and the Catholic Church publish their own newspapers to this day, some with national coverage. More recently, strong connections have been established in Italy between the press and the entertainment industry, particularly television, undermining its independence and contribution to the political debate.

The British newspapers were born out of the traditional liberal ideology of the 19th century and fulfilled, at least partly, an educational aim, that is one of increasing political and social awareness (see Barker 2000: 225). Although it is debatable to what extent this intention was fulfilled, according to Harris and Lee (1986: 108) the British press still fulfils three major functions: "inspirational", "informative" and "integrative".

The British readership is comparably very large by European standards. Journalists are professionals trained to adopt a very specific journalistic style (Tunstall 1996). This can be largely attributed to the newspapers' need for sales to ensure their economic survival in view of their financial independence from the government (Harris and Lee 1986). The British editors' need for "audience appeal" (Fairclough 1995) has promoted the search for the sensational and has given rise, particularly in the tabloid press, to a form of fake expressivity. Strong feelings (particularly anger, shock and horror) are expressed in a stereotyped form and fixed pattern (Barker 2000). There remains little room, in these cases, for real debate and exchange of opinion. This explains, for example, the total absence of opinion Letters from some of the most sensationalist tabloids, noticeably *The Sun*.

Whilst Italian television and, to a certain extent, magazines, have undergone a similar process of popularisation and standardization, no real equivalent to the tabloid press has developed in Italy (Murialdi 1998). The Italian readership is comparably very low by European standards (Lumley 1996). The most widely-read Italian papers are quality broad-sheets notoriously inaccessible to the majority of readers because of their obscure use of language (Murialdi 1998). On the one hand the discourse of the press exhibits the signs of formalised self-expression (rhetorical and literary tendency), combining features from various traditional written registers (bureaucratic and affected) (Dardano 1981) but, on the other, it offers considerable potential for individual style and genuine self-disclosure.

Another important cultural difference concerns the attitude towards the reported news: A tendency towards formal separation between news and comment within Anglo-Saxon journalism in general (Harris and Lee 1986; and Fowler 1991) and a strong explicit presence of the editorial view throughout most of articles in the Italian papers (Dardano 1981). Colombo (1995) suggests that the Italian practice may be explained in terms of the pervading "catholic culture" historically founded on the value assigned to authoritative interpretation. Faced with political censorship, English journalists have tended to retain the factual sections of the paper to avoid exposing their opinions to condemnation. The Italian journalists, on the other hand, resort to semantic complexity

and ambiguity in order to evoke respectability and legitimacy (if holding political power) or to disguise opinions for which they may be held accountable (if devoid of political power). The censoring bodies are not necessarily political parties or figures but, more commonly for the Italian press, the big corporations that finance the papers.

Italian journalists have generally been more subject to constraints from *above* than their English counterparts, whether imposed by their financial patrons or self-imposed in view of their political roles in society. English journalists, on the other hand, are far more subject to pressures from *below*, that is, the requirements of the wide public they serve. It follows that a significant difference can be observed in the relationship between the press and the readers. Whilst the relatively more independent English journalists tend to identify with their readers (representing the general consensus, the common sense views and appearing to make common front with the readers in the face of government decisions and events), the Italian journalists, who are often politicians and/or business people, are further removed from their readers. As their distance from the readers is greater and more obvious, they have more interpersonal negotiating to do. Their relationship to the general public resembles that of the politicians' and authorities, characterised by a need for *persuasion* and *impression*.

More subtle and transient differences in the newspapers' functions arise generally from the power and characteristics of the ruling government and censoring bodies, the availability of sources and the pressure from public opinion. These factors can combine differently at any given time in both cultures, giving rise to various writing constraints and use of language.

Despite all the differences, however, it is also true that English and Italian speakers share many Western European cultural values through geographical, historical and linguistic proximity and that in both cultures the role of the press is essential for the communication of information, ideas and points of view. In both British and Italian newspapers and magazines there is plenty of opportunity for the expression of varying opinions, judgements, beliefs and attitudes in the presentation of information and comments. Many articles are examples of argumentative discourse in which opinions are presented and supported.

Editorial constraints and journalistic conventions do not completely prejudice individuality of expression, particularly in the correspondence section.

3.4. The correspondence section

The number of readers writing letters to the papers is much lower in Italy than in England, reflecting the lower paper circulation. The Italian writers tend to have a higher profile than their English counterparts. They are often well-known personalities in their own right or become well known for their letter writing and individual style. In some papers, however, the focus of the correspondence section is not so much the letters as the editor's reply, that is, the *wise* and informed view from above offering advice and comfort in the face of the readers' bewilderment and dismay. In these cases the letters of opinion share some features with the type of letters written to an 'agony aunt'. As the emphasis shifts to general dissatisfaction, opinions may be less clearly formulated.

Following the popularising trend from the mid 19th century (see 3.3 above), many English papers publish Letters to the Editor for their selling value, adding to the overall *sensational* appeal and conforming to the cliché of shock-horror outrageous

denunciation typical of the tabloid press. These letters exhibit the overt and emphatic, yet contrived expression of feelings mentioned above (3.3). As for the quality papers, they also tend to conform to their readers' expectations, providing a witty and entertaining section and, generally, conforming to the paper's tone. In both types of publication, therefore, there is not much room left for genuine and protracted debates on the big issues affecting society as a whole. Carefully selected letters (echoing the paper's concerns) can be used in English papers to increase the readers' impression that the papers are, indeed, representing them. It can also be argued that the overall framework of 'common-sense' constructed by the papers (see 3.3. above) and reflected in the letters (see, for example, the frequent use of the first person plural personal pronoun 'we') is not generally compatible with much variety of opinion and individuality.

By writing their letters the English writers may be, at some level, aware that they are entering the comment section of the paper and are, therefore, exposed to the criticism generally reserved to mere opinion in the British cultural context (see 3.2. above). They may be unconsciously mindful, therefore, that their comments are likely to be more successfully received if they refer to specific events. Concise to-the-point exposition is generally an editorial requirement for the English letters and may motivate the writers to cut out what may be perceived as irrelevant comments. For the Italian writers, on the other hand, it is acceptable to move from event to comment and back and, indeed, use events as background for more general views and digressions. This may partly explain why a similar number of opinions ('claims') was identified in the Italian and the English letters, although the linguistic material was considerably larger in the Italian (see 5.1. below).

As in the rest of the Italian papers, so in the correspondence section a clear distinction is maintained between paper and readers. The Italian editors interviewed in Ambrosi and Tessardo's survey (1991) consistently see the correspondence section as establishing a relationship between paper and readers rather than between readers. They argue that, by writing their letters, the readers 'seek the protection' of the powerful press. The papers' editors host the readers' views and often provide an informed and authoritative answer, but they do not identify with the readers who offer their 'hopeless victims' testimony'. In connection with the Italian people's historical alienation from their government, the papers represent a benign authority. It has been noticed, in this regard (see Ambrosi and Tessardo 1991) that the Italian letters do not seem to express much conviction that writing may actually produce any changes. The more ordinary writers seem to write out of resignation. Here again, self-expression is, significantly, more relevant than clear presentation of events and views. So it is possible, and indeed necessary, for the Italian letter writers to address current events in terms of their general relevance to the major social issues affecting the individual. Fewer letters deal with the details of specific events for their local and present significance (e.g. specific episodes of child abuse and violence, the treatment of the elderly and disabled, drug abuse and mafia).

Overall, however, both the English and the Italian opinion Letters seem particularly suited to the exploration of attitudinal expression. Though not immune to editorial intervention and control, they are likely to retain at least some of their original individuality of content and presentation. Letter writers are not generally professional journalists. Their backgrounds and writing styles vary considerably and they are required to formulate opinions on a variety of topics in a relatively short space.

A practical advantage of considering Letters rather than other more lengthy argumentative discourse is that it allowed me to consider a larger number of different examples and draw broader conclusions.

I selected the Letters from a variety of English and Italian newspapers and magazines, trying, where possible, to include whole selections from the same issue for the sake of objectivity. The Letters were all written in the 1990s and cover a large range of topics related to events taking place in England and Italy at the particular time of writing. I excluded letters in which the writer's main intention is not to express an opinion. This meant that I had to exclude some newspapers altogether, noticeably some tabloids (such as *The Sun*) and, generally women's magazines (both containing mainly letters requesting advice). Some letters were also unsuitable because they expressed mainly thanks, apologies or clarifications (e.g. some letters in the local *Evening News*) or provided long descriptive accounts of events and contained too strong a narrative element (e.g. some letters in *The Times*).

Some letters were excluded because they did not contain enough general reference for an average reader to understand exactly what the opinion was expressed about, either because the paper or the topic was too specialised or because too much reference was made to previous correspondence or because the letters were actually addressed to a specific person, body or interest group and not generally to the editor or general public (e.g. some letters in the *Evening News*). I have, however, included letters by representatives of particular interest groups when they seemed to be writing on their own behalf and addressing the wider public. From *The European* I have only selected letters by English native speakers as established from the names and addresses given.

In many Italian papers the letters are often followed by a reply by the Editor or 'Expert'. I have excluded those asking directly for advice but I have included those expressing opinions where the reply takes the form of comment rather than advice. However, I have not analysed the reply.

The Italian corpus contains Letters from weekly current-affairs magazines (published for the general public rather than for special interest groups such as: Women, computer experts, countryside lovers etc.), which are more prolific in Italy than in England. They represent the closest counterparts to the English tabloids.

I have restricted my analysis to forty letters for each corpus. This appears to be a sufficient number to allow for some patterns to emerge.

For the Italian letters I have chosen 2 high circulation dailies (*Il Corriere della Sera* and *La Repubblica*), 4 weekly magazines (*Panorama*, *Epoca*, *L'Espresso* and *Liberal*) a regional evening daily (*Cronaca Vera*), a party-financed well established daily (*Il Secolo XIX*) and a Church-financed well established daily (*Avvenire*).

For the English letters I have chosen 1 quality daily (*The Times*), 2 quality Sunday papers (*Independent on Sunday* and *The Sunday Times*), 1 provincial daily (*Evening News*), 1 Sunday tabloid (*Mail on Sunday*), 1 daily tabloid (*The Express*), 1 daily 'low' tabloid (*The People*) and 1 weekly paper with international readership (*The European*).

Although I have selected Letters expressing opinions, they also perform other functions. The writers may present new information on particular topics, express their emotive reaction to events and states of affair and write entertaining humorous letters. Attitudinal meaning is expressed through all these functions. In this article, however, the emphasis is placed on the attitudinal meaning generated through the argumentative function.

4. Theoretical and methodological framework

4.1. *The argumentative structure and 'argumentative attitude'*

Argumentative structure has been widely studied from a philosophical perspective (see particularly Toulmin 1958). It is also a subject of study within critical thinking theories (for example Fisher 1988) and linguistics (noticeably Van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992; and Lo Cascio 1991). Toulmin et al (1979) have provided an outline of the main aspects of argumentation that can be applied to the study of various fields in which argumentation plays an important role (e.g.: Communication, law and business). In most studies the following core components have been identified:

- a) A main proposition or conclusion or claim
- b) A set of propositions or premises or data or reasons or grounds from which the conclusion(s) can be drawn or inferred

and, in the pragmatics-orientated linguistic analysis:

- c) The contextual features or warrants or assumptions or general rules underlying or informing the premises

In my analysis I have opted for Toulmin et al's main categories of "claim" and "grounds" (supporting the "claims"). My aim, however, was not to assess the validity of the "claims" in relation to the overall argumentative structure (as in most of the studies mentioned above) but to explore the types of attitudinal meanings that can be expressed within such structure in the context of the Letters. Hence the term 'argumentative attitude'. Categories and variables have been adapted accordingly. For each letter it is possible to identify, to some extent, the writer's main **claim**, the **grounds** used to support such claim and the linguistic input that contributes to each component. It can be argued that the contextual features outlined in 3. above perform the function of **warrants** in that they provide the overall contextual framework in which the argumentative content of the Letters is to be interpreted. Given the focus of the argumentation in the Letters (expression of personal opinions where the ethical and subjective dimensions play an essential role), however, it would be difficult to identify the assumptions that underlie the claims in each case. They are embedded in common sense cultural values and shared views of 'right' and 'wrong' that are not generally explicitly stated (as recognised by Toulmin et al 1979). The nature of the supporting grounds (e.g.: Factual evidence as against assertion of principles or convictions) provides an insight into the assumptions of what constitute valid claims in the case of the genre and cultural context concerned.

4.2. *The claim: Types and examples*

The writer's main claim may be literally stated in or inferable from or implied in the text and can be summarised in one or more super-ordinate proposition/s. It can basically be

either **epistemic** (when the writer takes position in respect of truth validity) or **deontic** (when the writer takes position in respect of normative rightness) .

More than one claim may be identified for each Letter and a high degree of overlapping can be expected, in that an epistemic claim such as:

- (4) Our seas are polluted

may often imply or co-exist with a deontic one in the same Letter, for example:

- (5) New measures should be found to clean our seas

The main attitudinal nature of the claim may be revealed by the kind of supporting grounds (see 4.3. below) provided (e.g. a list of the positive aspects associated with a desired course of action would point to a deontic rather than an epistemic claim). In other cases, the overlap may become even more apparent precisely because of the grounds used, which seem to evenly support both an epistemic and a deontic claim (or, possibly, two or more claims with the same attitudinal value).

There are many cases, in the Letters analysed, in which the claim is, in fact, entirely implied by the grounds and not actually linguistically present in the text. The titles given to the Letters may sometimes provide a clue as to the main claim/s expressed (according to editorial interpretation) or they may be rather misleading. Conversely, two or more claims may be identified on the basis of similar linguistic material and clear-cut distinctions may not always be possible. The degree of overlapping, however, may be seen as a significant aspect of the overall argumentative strategy (see 5. below) and may vary more or less noticeably between the English and the Italian corpora, adding a further dimension to the comparison (see 5. below).

When the claims are literally stated in the text it is possible to identify the key linguistic items (often modal verbs and adverbs) that can be seen to qualify the degree of commitment to the truth value or to the normative rightness of the claim. Examples would be the adverb *undoubtedly* in:

- (6) Our seas are undoubtedly polluted

or the modal verb *must* in:

- (7) New measures must be found to clean our seas

Toulmin et al. (1979: 70) argued that "every argument has a certain *modality*..." that can be expressed through "modal qualifiers" and refers to "the strength or weakness, conditions and/or limitations with which a claim is advanced". This can apply both in assertions of truth as well as assertion of normative rightness (Toulmin et al. 1979: 328). The claims identified have been compared in respect of their "modality" features with particular reference to the source of their strength ("subjective" or "objective", as distinguished by Halliday 1994).

It could be argued that expressions of evaluation and emotion may similarly contribute to qualifying the strength of the epistemic or deontic assertion in terms of subjective involvement. An example would be the use of 'agonising' and 'precious' in:

- (8) New measures must be found to clean our agonising precious seas

The role of what one may refer to as 'evaluative or emotive qualifiers' is not traditionally included in accounts of argumentative structure and strategies although it may be alluded to. When dealing with "aesthetic interpretation" and "critical accounts" as alternative patterns of argumentative "reasoning" Toulmin et al. (1979: 282) refer, for example, to the effectiveness of accounts that "carry conviction" and have "the power to present a vivid and convincing view of the work" and are the product of "well-chosen language" (as well as of "experience, reflective thought and careful deliberation").

In the case of the Letters the writers' evaluative and emotive attitude to the events and people on which claims are made is visible throughout the argumentative structure (see 5.1 and 5.2). However, explicit expressions of the writers' own reactions to events, people or states of affairs as in:

- (9) I am appalled at the state of our seas

have not been analysed. Such expressions are arguably not part of the overall argumentative structure as it is not the writers' feelings that are being discussed or reasoned over and they do not constitute claims that need supporting (according, for example, to Toulmin et al's definition of reasoning 1979).

The following two English Letters have been selected for illustration of the analysis carried out:

Letter 1: *Promoters did not do research*

AS PREDICTED, the Norwich Music Festival '98 extravaganza at Carrow Road fell flat on its face.

At the risk of sounding smug, I would like to say, both for myself and on behalf of the other cynics who predicted this "top of the flops": WE TOLD YOU SO!

I was most annoyed, however, by the response of the promoters' consultant Mr Mark Nelson who seemed to imply that if we, the people of Norwich, wish to attract big names to the city, we must first all do our duty and donate £20 to go and see a collection of almost forgotten names from decades past.

The blame for this white elephant must lie squarely at the feet of the organisers.

I do hope that another promoter with a better idea of what people want to go and see, approaches Norwich City Football Club in the near future.

Up-to-date bands may not come cheap, but if people are likely to flock from all around the region to see them, and for the right act they would, then they are worth the money.

(Ralph, *Evening News*, 25-6-98)

Letter 2: *Who let Irek in so easily?*

I AM pleased that Irek Mukhamedov, now principal dancer with the Royal Ballet and his family are flourishing here (Passport, *Travel and Money*, 9 February). Perhaps the Home Secretary could explain, however, why they are not economic migrants. They (apparently) had no problems in their own country other than irritation with the bureaucracy, yet they were welcome to "defect" to the UK to fulfil their desire to give their children a "Western upbringing".

At the same time many other people seek asylum here. Some have clearly been tortured (confirmed by British doctors) and have a well-founded fear that they will be persecuted or killed in their home country. Despite this they are classed as suspected economic migrants, often

incarcerated for years in conditions that can only remind them of the abuses denied any means of financial support they are fleeing, or else and generally treated like criminals. They are subject to highly-biased procedures that can present almost insurmountable obstacles to prevent them proving their case. Some have been forcibly repatriated and "disappeared".

Why are they not given EC passports as Mr Mukhamedov and family have been? It would be quicker and vastly more humane. It might also be cheaper: prisons are very expensive.

(Boswell, *Independent on Sunday*, 16-2-97)

In Letter 1. the main claim is to do with asserting a matter of truth (epistemic) and can be summarised as follows:

- (10) The promoters of the Norwich Music Festival '98 are to be blamed for its failure.

In this case the title provided is based on the main claim. The claim is literally stated as follows:

- (11) "The blame for this white elephant must lie squarely at the feet of the organisers."

The degree of commitment to the truth value of this claim is expressed by the modal "must" (implicit subjective modality) and the adverb "squarely" (implicit objective modality). One cannot identify any specific evaluative or emotive expression apart from the evaluative meaning implicitly expressed through such epistemic qualifiers. The claim is also further implied by the grounds that are provided in its support such as the reference to the fact that the organisers ignored people's opinion. This can be inferred, for example, from:

- (12) "I do hope that another promoter with a better idea of what people want to go and see, approaches Norwich city Football Club in the near future".

In Letter 2. two main claims can be identified. One of the claims is again an assertion of truth, namely that:

- (13) The government is not treating asylum seekers fairly.

The assertion, however, is nowhere literally stated in the text but can be inferred from the reference to the fact or belief that asylum seekers are not granted asylum on the basis of how they are treated in their respective countries of origin but depending on whether they can be useful in this country. This is implied throughout the Letter. A further claim is to do with the writer's positioning in terms of normative rightness (deontic) and can be summarised as follows:

- (14) The Government should grant British citizenship to genuine asylum seekers.

Once again the claim is not stated anywhere in the Letter but can be inferred from the reference to the positive aspects associated with the proposed action. The action is

presented as humane ("it...would be...vastly more humane") and convenient for the government ("It would be quicker...It might also be cheaper: Prisons are very expensive")

4.3. *The grounds: Types and examples*

By 'ground' is meant the semantic material (stated in or inferable from or implied in the text, as for the claims) provided in each Letter in support of one or more claims or, to use a different terminology, the premises on which one or more conclusions can be based. Grounds are provided in support of the claims or may provide the basis for an implicit claim that is not otherwise linguistically present in the text, as seen in 4.2. above.

The typology of ground types presented below is empirically based as it is derived from direct observation of the types used to support the claims made in the Letters rather than on the traditional categories that are commonly associated with scientific, legal or academic argumentation. The link to such traditional categories (as outlined by Connor and Lauer 1988) has been clarified when relevant. Further insight in the typology of grounds is offered by Toulmin et al (1979) as they deal not only with the traditional fields of argumentation (law and science) but also with the type of argumentation that can be found in other areas of reasoning that is artistic and literary criticism and "management and ethical reasoning". Particularly helpful is their identification of the grounds commonly used in ethical reasoning based on the dichotomies of "wright and wrong" and "good" and "bad".

Within the context of Letters to the Editor one is likely to find arguments that are 'persuasive' rather than 'scientific' (Lo Cascio 1991). That is, the writers will generally tend to appeal to premises of a subjective rather than objective universal nature and they are likely to be founded on unstable social, economic and ethical principles rather than undisputed physical evidence (see Lo Cascio 1991: 298). A variety of different 'persuasive' strategies can be observed in the Letters.

Particular attention has also been given to the attitudinal dimension of the categories identified that is their interactional aspect (e.g.: The level of writer's involvement and the reliance on 'affective' grounds). The link to commonly understood attitudinal concepts, such as modality and evaluation, has been clarified when relevant. The grounds on which the claims are based may, for example, differ in terms of their (perceived) origin, that is, either extrinsic (located outside the writer's subjectivity e.g. factual evidence or authority – textual or personal – in the case of an epistemic claim) or intrinsic (located inside the writer's subjectivity e.g. the writer's own conviction about the necessity of a course of action in the case of a deontic claim). (Lo Cascio 1991: 299f). This distinction between subjective and objective representation as well as differences relating to varying degrees of explicitness have been often noticed in relation to modality and attitude (e.g. Halliday 1994).

Similarly, polarity values of 'positive' and 'negative' which have commonly been associated with modality (Halliday 1994: 88f), attitude, evaluation and "appraisal" (Martin and White 2003) can also be seen to apply to the argumentative structure of the Letters, particularly in the case of the deontic claims. For example, the claim:

- (15) People should not drink and drive

can be based on grounds focusing on the negative outcome of the criticised behaviour (e.g. the risk of accidents) or/and the positive outcome resulting from avoiding the criticised behaviour (e.g. enhanced road safety).

Although grounds are given in support of an overall epistemic or deontic claim, their linguistic appearance and meanings may not always be directly consistent with the type of claim they are helping to support. Deontic claims, for example, are largely based on epistemic claims providing the supporting grounds. The deontic claim:

- (16) Child benefit should be abolished

can be made on the basis of epistemic assertions referring, for example, to the negative aspects of the criticised situation such as:

- a) It is unfair
- b) It is a waste of money for the government

Different grounds for a claim may be expressed through the same linguistic material, depending on the emphasis assigned, in turn, to key linguistic items during the decoding process.

The following **grounds** have been identified in the case of the **epistemic** claims:

- 1) Providing **factual evidence** in the form of examples, figures, facts, specific occurrences that can be easily verifiable. Linguistic cues can be: Absence of typically modal lexical items or presence of high certainty modal lexis such as: *Surely* or *must*; use of indicative forms of the verb; presence of lexis denoting perception and cognition, that is revolving around the notions of: *Seeing, noticing, realising, predicting* and similar ¹.

A typical example can be found in the Letter written by in which the epistemic claim that Norwich city Council are implementing conservative policies is partly based on the following evidence:

- (17) "The Crematorium at Earlham has been sold to the private sector...Another profitable part of the Council is now to be sold off – namely the City Works"

(Benn, *Evening News* 28-8-97)

- 2) Providing **logical reasoning** involving relationships of cause and effect, entailment, contradictions, analogies and comparisons. Logical reasoning may be signalled by the presence of dedicated grammatical items such as conjunctions (*because, therefore, instead of ...*) or adverbs (*equally, comparatively, consequentially ...*) or they may be inferable from various linguistic material including metaphors and similes (see Lo Cascio 1991: 323).²

An example can be found in the Letter in which the claim that British handymen are competent workers is partly grounded in the following reasoning:

¹ One might define this type of grounds as “based on the structure of reality” and appealing to the “rational”(Connor and Lauer 1988: 146).

² These grounds also appeal to the “rational”(Connor and Lauer 1988: 146).

- a) The handyman I contacted was British
- b) This handyman did a good job
- c) All British handymen are likely to do a good job

expressed as follows:

- (18) "I phoned my nearest repair shop, many miles away in Hillhood, Glasgow. I told the proprietor the make of the machine and the problem. He then told me clearly and succinctly how to effect the repair and added: 'If you really want a new part I can send you one, but you shouldn't need it'. I didn't...Are Scottish repairmen a superior breed?"

(Baker, *The Times* 9-6-97)

In both Letters reproduced in 4.2. above the epistemic claims are partly grounded in a mixture of factual evidence and logical reasoning. In Letter 1, for example, the organizers of the music event are blamed on the basis of the fact that they ignored people's views as well as on the basis of the logical reasoning that:

- (19) "up-to-date bands may not come cheap but *if* people are likely to flock from all around the region to see them, and for the right act they would, *then* they are worth the money".

(Ralph, *Evening News* 26-5-98)

The writers' own perception of the events is also at the basis of the grounds provided here (see type 5. below).

- 3) Providing **first-hand factual evidence** in the forms of facts etc. as in 1) but inclusive of the writer's personal involvement.

A typical example can be found in the Letter in which the claim that the River Walk in Norwich is not very pleasant is grounded in the following first-hand factual evidence:

- (20) "No seats, no lights, from Whitefriar's Bridge to Tye Bridge. A sea of mud in parts when it rains. Also the closing down of the men's urinal – *we* see the fishermen outside *our* flats using the shrubs and trees to urinate. Not a pleasing sight. Also an empty factory opposite us is partly boarded-up and a heaven for pigeons".

(Dyers, *Evening News* 26-6-98).

In this case the use of the inclusive first person plural pronoun and first person plural possessive determiner provide the linguistic clues for this type of evidence. But even when such clues are not available (as, for example, the initial section of the quoted text) it is understood that the writer, a Norwich citizen, has witnessed what he describes.

- 4) Providing **personal experience**: Similar to 3) but more subjective in nature e.g. the writer has *experienced* rather than *witnessed*.

Personal experience is mentioned in support of the claim that Life in the Fifties was very good as follows:

- (21) "I holidayed in Rome during the filming of Ben Hur, in Monaco when Grace Kelly married Prince Ranier and was driven across Lake Lucerne at midnight in a speed boat. And I was just a secretary not a film star...We did things in style"

(Perry, *Mail on Sunday* 12-1-97).

The writer refers to herself as the actor and acted upon in the events described. The basis for her claim seems to owe more to her involvement than her observation.

- 5) Expressing **own conviction/perception**: Characterised by direct or indirect reference to subjective perception, evaluative stance and emotive involvement, indicating that the writer is innerly convinced (in connection with his/her own general understanding of reality and values) rather than proven right by facts and events s/he has specifically experienced, witnessed or knows about. Claims are not easily verifiable. Typical linguistic cues are: Presence of first person pronouns and possessive adjectives; lexis denoting evaluation and emotion. Scientific, academic and similar rigorous reasoning would not rely on such grounds but they are regularly adopted in the type of 'looser' argumentation of which the Letters are an example.^{3/4}

In Letter 1 reproduced in 4.2 above the writer's claim that the organisers are responsible for the failure of the music event is not grounded only in factual evidence and logical reasoning but also, to a large extent, in his own subjective perception of the events. His impression seems to be that the organisers did not have a clear idea of what people really like and made unreasonable demand on the people of Norwich, which is implied, for example, by:

- (22) "...the promoters' consultant...seemed to imply that if we... wish to attract big names to the city, we must first of all do our duty and donate £20 to go and see a collection of almost forgotten names from decades past".

(Ralph, *Evening News*, 25-6-98)

The subjective and emotive nature of these assertions is evident in the use of the modalizing construction "seemed to..." and the irony producing overstatements.

- 6) **Undermining adversary claim** (real or potential): This can be achieved in various ways, including elements from other types of ground e.g. by undermining adversary evidence.
- 7) **Undermining adversary claimant(s)** (potential or real): This type of ground may not be clearly different from 6) but the criticism is addressed more directly to the people supporting or perceived to support the adversary claim. Strategies used vary as in 6)

³ Such grounds can also be defined as relying on the "affective" appeal, whereby emotion is expressed by the writers and evoked in the readers (Connor and Lauer 1988: 146).

⁴ Note that both 'own perception' and 'logical reasoning' have 'internal' origin but 'logical reasoning' are presented as 'objective' whereas 'own perception' is explicitly grounded in the 'subjective'.

and may include: Attacking adversaries' credentials, questioning their competence, motives and convictions.

- 8) **Quoting supporters of the claim** in an approving context e.g. by emphasising their competence, good qualities, reliability.⁵

The following **grounds** have been identified in the case of **deontic** claims:

- 1) Mentioning the **negative aspects** of the criticised situation, behaviour or course of action or negative outcome resulting from failure to change or avoid the criticised situation. This may include undermining any possible positive aspects or outcome in relation to such situation.

In one of the Letters for example, the claim that British women should dress better is supported by mentioning the following negative aspects and results of non compliance (the expressions bearing the negative meaning are highlighted in italics):

(23)

- a) The otherwise dynamic image of the country is tainted, inferable from:

"As we advance in science with mobile phones, the Internet, computers and modern kitchens, *the most devastating deterioration* in our British life is the *scruffy* and *lazy* state of dress".

(Harris, *The Express* 22-3-98)

- b) It puts people off visiting Britain/London, inferable from:

"No wonder tourists are *shocked* with *scruffy* London – I was *horrified* on my last visit and will *not* be going again" (ibid.)

- c) Women cannot find role models to refer to when it comes to fashion, inferable from:

"...the *scruffy* and *lazy state of dress*, especially among women, whom we look to for fashion". (ibid.).

- 2) Mentioning the **positive aspects** or outcome of the behaviour or course of action advocated.

The positive aspects of the compliance are mentioned, for example, in support of the claim made in Letter 2 in 4.2. above that the Government should grant British citizenship to genuine asylum seekers. As seen above, the writer argues that such action would be:

- (16) "... vastly more *humane*...It would be *quicker*...It might also be *cheaper*: prisons are very expensive".

(Boswell, *Independent on Sunday*, 16-2-97)

⁵ Note that types 3, 4, 6, 7 and 8 center on the notion of 'credibility'. Types 6, 7 and 8 also signal "awareness of the audience values" (Connor and Lauer 1988: 146).

- 3) Arguing that a course of action is required or to be avoided on **moral** grounds (that is, the action is 'right' or 'wrong' rather than simply 'good' or 'bad' as observed by Toulmin et al. 1979: 313-321): This type of argument may be seen as a sub-group of 1) and 2) but it is common enough to be classified independently.
- 4) Arguing that a course of action is **(un)reasonable** (intellectually, logically rather than simply 'good' or 'bad'). This type is arguably also a sub-group of 1) and 2)
- 5) In some cases the **positive** aspects or results of a course of action advocated simply by being **assumed**. This is the case when the writer argues that the attempt to pursue the particular course of action has not been satisfactory so far or is more urgent than before and/or a priority in respect to other or that the conditions to pursue it are now more favourable than before.
- 6) **Quoting other supporters** of the course of action
- 7) **Undermining adversary claim**
- 8) **Undermining supporters of adversary claim**

Note that types 6), 7) and 8) are also used to support epistemic claims and that 'undermining an adversary claim and/or the claim's supporters' (7 and 8) may involve showing that alleged positive or negative aspects or outcome of a situation or course of action are not really such, leading back to types 1) and 2).

As clearly illustrated in the examples of the 'positive' and 'negative' aspects listed in support of the deontic claims given above, issues of normative rightness ('bad' and 'good', 'right' and 'wrong') are bound to be grounded, to a greater or lesser extent, in the writers' subjective appreciation of reality, including their emotive reactions to such events (see Toulmin et al. 1979: 332). The expressions highlighted (italics) in the examples presented above (23. and 16.) seem indeed to convey both evaluative (as a constitutive aspect of the deontic meaning) and emotive meaning. In this analysis, however, no attempt has been made to investigate and compare the nature of the emotive involvement and the grounds supporting the deontic claims have been classified merely as either negative or positive. A detailed study of the evaluative and emotive component involved could be carried out on the basis of, for example, Martin and White's model of "appraisal" (2003) but it falls outside the scope of this article.

It must be pointed out that - given that much of the contextual material on which the claims and the grounds are founded is deeply embedded in the ideological make-up of the writers and readers (see 3. above), it is not surprising that the exact linguistic level(s) at which the particular meanings are derived, in each case, was impossible to retrieve. The classification of the linguistic material analysed into the types identified (both claims and grounds) has not always been straightforward. Combinations of ground types are common, giving rise to mixed types, noticeably the combination of factual evidence and logical reasoning. As mentioned, the writers' emotive involvement is noticeable throughout the argumentative structure of the Letters in relation to both the deontic and the epistemic claims. Meanings have been assigned in each case within the context of the whole Letter but, ultimately, the categorisation into types is necessarily a matter of degree rather than

absolute distinction. It is likely that alternative distribution could be envisaged by other analysts and it would be a matter for further research to test whether very different results and conclusions are drawn if the criteria suggested are adhered to.

5. Results of the analysis

The comparison of the results is carried out on the basis of the type of claims and grounds favored in each corpus e.g.: Their frequency, degree of semantic and functional overlapping, the linguistic features contributing to the attitudinal meaning of the claims.

As a great deal of the argumentative meaning is implied rather than stated the results cannot be calculated in relation to the number of words per corpus. The percentages of epistemic and deontic claims and ground types are calculated in each case in terms of the overall number of claims and grounds identified in each corpus. Some of the results are reported as general trends rather than precise figures.

In order to simplify the reporting of the results the English Letters or corpus is referred to as 'E' and the Italian Letters or corpus is referred to as 'I'.

5.1. *The claims*

The relevant material from the Letters can be seen in Appendixes 1 to 4. The claims have been categorised taking into account the context of the whole Letter in each case. As the corpus of Letters could not be reproduced in its entirety the nature of the main claim and the reason for the classification have been clarified when necessary. The same claim is sometimes stated more than once in the same Letter (all the instances are itemized as a, b, c etc. under the same number in the Appendixes). The same linguistic material may be reproduced more than once (or highlighted in more than one way) when it performs more than one function (it belongs to more than one category)

Table 2. below shows a summary of the results obtained for the claims.

One can see that in both corpora the epistemic claims are more frequent but in 'I' they are more significantly so. Letters containing mixed claims are also noticeably more common in 'I'.

12 instances of stated epistemic claims have been identified in 'E' and 19 in 'I'.

The source of certainty is presented as explicitly deriving from the writer (first person form of the verb indicating opinion or direct reference to opinion as deriving from the self, as in "in my opinion") only in 2 cases in 'E' against 10 in 'I'. The readers are invited to share responsibility for the writers' claims through rhetorical questions in 6 cases in 'I'. The readers are involved in a less direct way through the use of exclamation marks in 2 cases in 'E' (e.g. "How economical with the truth some TV adverts appear to be".)

14 instances of deontic claims have been identified in 'E' and 19 in 'I'.

The people and bodies held responsible for pursuing a certain course of action (e.g.: "the relevant government agencies" or "the political parties") are stated in 10 cases in 'E' and only 8 in 'I' where the use of interpersonal forms is more common (e.g.: *It is necessary, one needs to, it is required...*). In 'I', therefore, less emphasis is placed on the agent expected to carry out or not to carry out an action than on the change or course of action advocated. The Italian writers tend to explicitly present themselves

(first person form of the verb indicating opinion, such as: *I feel...* or expressions such as: *in my view*) as the source of the normative strength (7 cases) whereas the English writers do so less often (2 cases). The readers are invited to part-take in the source of the normative strength through rhetorical questions in 2 cases in 'E' and in 2 cases in 'I'. In the two Italian examples the readers are directly appealed to through imperative forms.

The writers' emotive involvement (capitalized expressions in the Appendixes) is frequently expressed both in 'I' and in 'E'. It is encoded in the lexical meaning of nouns (such as "deterioration" verbs ("write off", "feel") and, particularly, adjectives ("wonderful", "selfless", "noble", "devastating", "scruffy", "lazy"). It may also be expressed through repetition as in:

- (24) "it is *true* to say that the gamekeeper is a *true* guardian...". (Claim 1. in App. 1)

or overstatements as in:

- (25) "...the most selfless and noble people on this planet...the Robin Hoods of the 20th Century" (Claim 10 in App.1)

or exclamative expressions as in:

- (26) "How economical with the truth some TV adverts appear to be" and "What a sheltered life he has led" (Claims 8 and 12 respectively in App. 1)

or, more subtly, through humour and irony:

- (27) "it is time the political parties started considering...a tax on junk mail" (Claim 5. in App. 2).

Given the larger number of stated claims and the overall higher number of words in 'I' more examples of emotive involvement were available here.

5.2. The grounds

80 epistemic types of ground have been identified in 'E' and 87 in 'I'. The higher number in 'I' reflects and reinforces the situation seen in the claims.

In both corpora the most common way in which the writers support their epistemic claims is by expressing their own conviction or perception of events. 22 examples have been identified in 'E'. In 12 of them the grounds are clear examples, in the remaining 10 they are combined with other types, particularly with 'providing factual evidence' (in 7 cases). 37 examples have been identified in 'I'. In 22 of them the examples are clear. In the remaining 15 they are mixed, particularly with 'providing factual evidence' (11 cases).

Table 2. Claim types and their attitudinal linguistic features

Variables	40 English letters (4890 words)	40 Italian letters (5669 words)
Distribution (epistemic/ deontic)	EP: 57.7%; DE: 42.3%	EP: 62.9%; DE: 37.1%
Inferable from grounds	53.9%	40.8%
Letters containing mixed claims	9/40	13/40
Attitudinal features in stated EPISTEMIC claims (see Apps. 1 and 3)	Almost exclusively external source of certainty (implicit subjectivity) . No reliance on readers' support.	Both external and internal source of certainty (implicit and explicit subjectivity). Some reliance on readers' support (rhetorical questions).
Attitudinal features in stated DEONTIC claims (see Apps. 2 and 4)	Emphasis on both actions and actors. Almost exclusively external source of normativity (implicit subjectivity). Some reliance on readers' support (rhetorical questions).	Stronger emphasis on actions than actors. Writers are more often the source of normativity (explicit subjectivity). Some strong reliance on readers' support (direct imperatives).
EMOTIVE features in stated ep. and de. claims (see capitalised expressions in Apps. 1 to 4)	Frequent	Frequent (more examples due to larger corpus of claims)

Providing factual evidence in support of epistemic claims is also very common in the Letters. 30 examples can be found in 'E'. 10 of them are clear. In 13 other cases 'logical reasoning' is added to the factual element and in the remaining 7 the type is combined with expressing one's 'own conviction or perception', as mentioned. In 'T' there are 24 examples, 10 clear and most of the others (11) in combination with expressing one's 'own conviction or perception' as mentioned. There appears to be, in 'T', a variety of linguistic features that turn potentially factual evidence into expressions of conviction and perception, e.g.: The use of the future or the conditional rather than the present tense, the lack of examples, explanations and reasons, the reference to individual cases rather than general situations (including the wide use of first person pronouns and verbs, first person possessive determiners and pronouns and the use of evaluative and emotive expressions).

Considering the Italian larger number of epistemic grounds, factual evidence appears considerably less often than in 'E'. Out of the 24 examples identified 11 are combined with expressing one's own conviction or perception. Out of the 30 examples identified in 'E' 13 are combined with logical reasoning and only 7 with expressing one's own conviction or perception. As for expressing one's own conviction or perception, the much higher number in 'T' (37) as against the lower frequency in 'E' (22) shows a prevalence of this type of ground even allowing for the larger number of epistemic grounds altogether.

In both corpora third parties are either quoted in support of a claim or undermined if supporting the adversary claim. This, however, seems to be more common in 'T' (34 cases) than in 'E' (23). It is also noticeable that in both corpora third parties are more likely to be quoted in order to be undermined rather than in support of the writers' claims. In most of the English cases (12), however, no clear distinction is made between the claimant and the claim itself whereas in 'T' there are 21 examples in which the claimant is directly criticized. The overall impression is, therefore, of a stronger personal component in the Italian epistemic argumentation.

67 deontic types of ground have been identified in 'E' and noticeably less (51) in 'T'.

Most of the deontic grounds are clear examples of their type (not combinations) and the majority refer either to the negative aspects of the situation/ course of action objected to or to the positive aspects (in general or on moral or intellectual grounds) of the advocated course of action. The difference lies in the distribution of the positive and negative aspects: Even in 'E' (29 positive and 28 negative examples) and much more biased towards the negative in 'T' (25 positive and 11 negative examples). In both corpora the negative aspects refer to: General damage to people (society, government, country or individuals' feelings, reputation, skills and well-being).

Also noticeable is the absence of third parties (adversaries or supporters) in 'E'. In 'T' third parties are mentioned relatively often: 4 times in support of the claim and another 4 times in order to undermine the claim. This points to the value of the interpersonal in 'T'.

A final point concerns both the epistemic and the deontic grounds in the case when reference is made to third parties. In 'E' the most common criticism addressed to an adversary claimant is his/her lack of evidence or ignorance of the facts. The adversary claimants are sometimes referred to in general terms (*some people, they...*) but more specific mention (name or role) is equally common. In 'T' ignorance of the facts is one reason for criticism but the writers often deliver a more personal attack by referring to the individuals' short-sightedness, face-saving attempts and confused idealistic views and bias. Table 3. below provides a summary of the results.

Table 3. Ground types and frequency

Variables	40 English letters (4890 words)	40 Italian letters (5669 words)
EPISTEMIC GROUNDS		
Distribution	80 = 55.5%	87 = 62.3%
Most common epistemic grounds	Providing factual and logical evidence. High frequency of mixed types	Expressing own perception and conviction. High frequency of mixed types
Degree of personal involvement	High	Very high
Reference to third parties (interpersonal component)	Frequent	Very frequent
DEONTIC GROUNDS		
Distribution	67 = 44.5% (much more linguistic material in support of DE claims)	51 = 37.7 %
Most common deontic grounds	Negative/ positive aspects of (non) compliance. Low frequency of mixed types.	Negative aspects of non compliance. Low frequency of mixed types.
Degree of personal involvement	High (nature of grounds)	High (nature of grounds)
Reference to third parties (interpersonal component)	None	Frequent, personal and specific.

6. Evaluation of the results

It seems that the Italian writers have a preference for formulating epistemic claims, that is for taking position as *believers* rather than *activists*, whereas the situation is more balanced in 'E'.

In 'E' the percentage of the claims that are inferred from the grounds rather than being literally stated is higher than in 'I'. It would appear, therefore, that Italian writers are more *explicit* in their assertions. In 'I', on the other hand, the number of mixed letters (containing more than one claim) is higher than in 'E' and, generally, the Italian claims have been harder to decode and classify into types. The greater flexibility in the Italian word order and the use of more complex syntax (see 3.1.) may be partly responsible for this. The following example provides a simplified illustration of the Italian syntactic complexity, leading to the embedding of claims:

(28)

X is wrong (epistemic claim) because...

- a) Y, who always tells the truth, says so (ground containing additional epistemic claim (*Y always tells the truth*) or
- b) Y, whose ideas are all too easily forgotten, says so (ground containing an additional deontic claim (*we should not forget Y*).

It could be argued that the decoding difficulty resulting from syntactic complexity is to do with meaning overlapping rather than implicitness.

In the stated epistemic claims, the Italian writers show a greater tendency towards the *explicit* expression of certainty and a preference for presenting the self as the source of certainty. The English writers tend to be less explicit and personal.

When it comes to appealing for action in the stated deontic claims, the Italian writers are more inclined, once again, to present themselves as the source of the normativity. They prefer, however, to place the emphasis on the action required rather than on the identity of the people or bodies that would be responsible for complying or making the changes. There are, however, two noticeable exceptions, that is two Letters in which specific readers are appealed to directly through imperative forms (see 5.1.)

The writers' emotive involvement embedded in and qualifying their assertions of truth and normativity is explicitly expressed (linguistically available) as frequently in 'I' as in 'E'.

The predominance of the *explicit* and *personal* in 'I' is reinforced by the higher frequency of epistemic grounds expressing the writer's conviction and perception and involving third parties, either to rally their support or to undermine their credibility through direct attack. The English writers rely more heavily on grounds centred on the factual, logical, objective and impersonal.

The English writers are more likely to expand on the reasons for supporting or rejecting a course of action or for approving or disapproving of a situation. Deontic grounds are not only more frequent but also more balanced in that they present deterrents and disadvantages as well as incentives and advantages. The predominance of *negative* references in 'I' cannot be explained in terms of claim types, as the numbers of positive (*do x!*) and negative deontic claims (*do not do x!*) is almost identical.

Another factor which is consistent with, and indeed adds to, the impression of the stronger presence in 'I' of *belief* over *action* and of the *explicit subjective* and (*inter*)*personal* over the *objective* and *impersonal*, mentioned above, is the choice of topics on which claims are made. The tendency is for the Italian writers to use specific

current events as starting points for a more general discussion on principles, ideas and people, whereas the English writers are more concerned with the details of the issues at hand. This would also explain the greater difficulty in identifying the main claims in 'I'.

6. An integrated picture of 'argumentative attitude' in Letters to the Editor

It is now possible to assess the findings from the analysis in terms of the contextual premises outlined in 3. above and provide an integrated picture of the attitudinal meanings expressed in the Letters in relation to their argumentative structure.

The Italian cultural expectations for the explicit expression of attitude and higher degree of self-disclosure (as highlighted in 3. above) are generally consistent with the tendency towards the explicit and subjective expression observed in the Italian Letters in terms of the higher frequency of stated claims (including, therefore, the frequent expression of emotive involvement accompanying the main epistemic and deontic claims), the modal features in the epistemic and deontic claims and the frequent reliance on the writers' own conviction and perception in support of the epistemic claims.

The preference for implicit formulations (including the higher percentage of implied rather than stated claims) and the strong reliance on factual evidence in the English Letters, by contrast, is consistent with the preference for the empirical approach to reasoning typical of the English strong scientific tradition, whereby conclusions are not postulated but arrived at from the evidence available. The preference for indirect formulations may also partly reflect the tendency for "hedged expressions of opinions" in English spoken interaction as observed by Wierzbicka (2003: 43) and mentioned in 3.2 above.

The wider involvement of third parties (supporters or adversaries) in the Italian Letters and the tendency to presenting the self as the source of certainty in the epistemic claims is compatible with the general preference, in the Italian cultural system, for argumentative strategies appealing to the 'credibility', 'emotive' and 'affective' factor (see 3.2 above). Not only are third parties addressed more often in Italian than in English, but reference to their identity and views is also more specific, personal and subjective.

The stronger element of *self-disclosure* in Italian also matches the expectations deriving from the practice of writing to the paper. The Italian writers are primarily addressing a benevolent authority and raising their solitary voices from the confused mass to express their frustrations whereas the English writers epitomise the voice of the people (see 3.4 above) which the papers claim to represent (see 3.3. above).

There is, however, in both the English and Italian letters ample evidence of the writers' subjective involvement, which seems, in fact, to characterise this type of genre.

It is not possible to be confident about the possible correlation between the considerably stronger presence of the epistemic in Italian and any cultural expectations. One explanation could lie again in the different functions associated with the Letters: A place for the discussion of general principles and negotiation between the individual and the authority in the Italian tradition and an opportunity for raising rather more concrete matters that are presented as needing a solution by general consensus in the English tradition.

It was noticed that the Italian claims are more commonly directly stated in the Letters but harder to decode and classify into types as additional claims seem to be contained in the supporting material. This was partly attributed to the higher degree of

flexibility in the Italian word order but could also be partially due again to an emphasis on views and beliefs rather than on the need to back them up with particular argumentative strategies.

9. Concluding comments

Analysing the expression of attitude in discourse is a huge undertaking. By observing it through the parameters of a defined main discourse type (such as argumentation) and genre (Letters to the Editor) in two different linguistic and cultural settings (Italian and English) I have tried to isolate some of the variables involved and have provided a model of analysis. The analysis has revealed that 'argumentative attitude' is expressed through similar strategies in the English and Italian Letters but significant differences have also emerged. Such differences are visible at a linguistic level but their significance must be assessed in the light of the cultural expectations surrounding the type of genre.

This model could be applied to the analysis of other types or argumentative discourse within the same or different linguistic and cultural settings. Narrative or descriptive discourse (see Table 1.) can also be analysed in a similar fashion. The approach is one that focuses not only on the key linguistic structures through which attitudinal meaning can be expressed but also one that takes into account the specific features of the discourse type and genre considered and the cultural context in which they are produced. Such approach is strongly advocated and outlined by Cortazzi and Jin in their account of evaluative meanings in narratives (2000) and by Martin (2000: 161-62).

It must be pointed out, however, that most texts are not pure examples of a discourse type or genre. As observed in the case of the Letters and as mentioned in 3.4. above, the writers' argumentative intention is invariably accompanied by additional intentions, motivating them to reveal themselves and interact with their potential readers. The writers may, for example, wish – consciously or unconsciously – to gain in self-esteem by displaying knowledge and writing skills and by being published in the paper and helping to shape public opinion. Or they may wish to criticise the paper's line or attack particular individuals, promote their own self-interest or, simply, express their emotive reaction to current events. It would be possible, therefore, to analyse the two corpora of Letters in terms of the linguistic features which typically express the writers' self-involvement and interaction with the readers independently from the argumentative intention. These features would include all those linguistic structures that typically foreground interpersonality and self-expression such as: Modal verbs and adverbs, interrogative, exclamative and imperative clauses, features of spoken language, evaluative lexical items, use of first person form of the verb and even use of figurative language and irony. Any findings from this analysis could be integrated with the results obtained from the analysis of the argumentative structure and assessed in relation to further cultural expectations (see Pounds 2003).

APPENDIX 1

Linguistic features qualifying the degree of certainty expressed in the English epistemic claims directly available in the Letters (stated in or immediately inferable from the linguistic material):

The linguistic items qualifying the truth value of the claims are highlighted in bold. Those referring to the internal source of certainty are underlined and those showing readers' involvement (questions, and other forms of direct address) are italicised (no identified cases). Expressions revealing the writers' emotive involvement have been capitalised.

- 1) ' **it is, in my opinion, TRUE** to say that the gamekeeper is a **TRUE** guardian not only of his pheasants and partridges, but also of many small songbirds and small mammals.'
- 2) ' ... control of NCC **has recently been taken over** by the Tories'.
- 3) ' ... this ... **really SMACKS** of the Tories'.
- 4) 'I wrote to the Evening News last year concerning the **lack** of them [brass bands performing in the parks of Norwich]'
- 5) 'The blame for this white elephant **must lie squarely** at the feet of the organizers'.
- 6) 'The Fifties **were** a WONDERFUL time'.
- 7) ' ... much of the truancy in schools nowadays **is** because pupils often move from classroom to classroom'.
- 8) 'HOW ECONOMICAL WITH THE TRUTH SOME TV ADVERTS **APPEAR TO BE**'
- 9) 'They [Richard and Judy] should be more professional ... '
NB: as no deontic grounds are provided apart from an expression of dislike, I have interpreted this as a statement of the main epistemic claim expressed in the Letter, namely, that 'R. and J. are not very professional'.
- 10) '**Anyone ... will see them** as THE MOST SELFLESS AND NOBLE PEOPLE ON THIS PLANET... ... THE ROBIN HOODS OF THE 20th CENTURY'.
- 11) ' ... THE MOST DEVASTATING DETERIORATION IN OUR BRITISH LIFE **is** the SCRUFFY and LAZY state of dress, especially among women ... '.
- 12) 'WHAT A SHELTERED LIFE HE **HAS LED**'.

APPENDIX 2

Linguistic features expressing deontic attitude in the English deontic opinions directly available in the Letters (stated in or immediately inferable from the linguistic material):

The linguistic items qualifying the normative value of the claims are highlighted in bold. Those referring to the people or bodies held responsible for pursuing the course of action are underlined and those referring to the source of the normative assertion are italicized. Expressions denoting emotive involvement have been capitalized. Notice that readers are appealed to more directly through the (rhetorical) question format in 9. and 10.

- 1) '*I FEEL* **it is about time the relevant Government agencies started to** take the bus companies to task and return Norwich to being a "Fine City" once more'.

- 2) 'We **are entitled to** regard feminism as a FLAWED and SOMEWHAT STUNTED account of social reality without being WRITTEN OFF as NON-ENTITY'.
- 3)
- a) '... we **should dispose** of it [intermediate-level waste] responsibly.
- b) 'That **is our task**'.
- c) 'If we cannot show that Sellafield will be safe for radioactive waste disposal we **WILL NOT seek to** build a repository there'.
- 4) 'Britain **needs** a government and local authorities that take all sources of pollution far more seriously'
- 5) '... **it is time** the political parties **started** considering ... a tax on junk mail ... '. IRONY
- 6) '...anything in excess of 10% of income **should be considered** to be A LITTLE "TOO FROTHY".'
- 7) '**It would be good to** see him [Earl Spencer] doing something for former Japanese prisoners of war or children who have performed acts of heroism ... '
- 8) 'Earl Spencer **would do well to** follow his sister's example [she made an effort to give something back]'.
- 9) '... why did officials stop stamping passports when one traveled abroad?'.
- 10)
- a) 'If the proposed referendum on a single European currency goes ahead, **are we teenagers going to be included?**'
- b) 'Teenagers **should be included**'.
- 11) '**I HOPE we don't** join the euro...'

APPENDIX 3

Linguistic features in the Italian epistemic claims directly available in the Letters (stated in or immediately inferable from the linguistic material):

Highlighting as in App. 1. A literal English translation is provided in brackets under each example.

- 1) 'Il NOSTRO mare ... **é** pulito'
(Our sea... is clean)
- 2) '... la presenza in Italia di extracomunitari e stranieri...**in realtà é un falso** problema ...'
(...the presence in Italy of people not belonging to the European Community and of foreigners...in reality is a false problem)
- 3) '**Non penso** che si **possa** parlare di reinserimento degli ex carcerati nella società ... '
(I don't think that one can [subjunctive] talk about the resettlement of former inmates in society)
- 4) '... *cosa devo fare? Devo PER FORZA farmi raccomandare per poter sfondare?*'
(...what must I do? Must I really get myself recommended to be able to make it in the world?)

- 5) '... **non vi** [sull'autostrada] **é** più nessun controllo'
(...there isn't [on the motorway] no longer any control)

- 6) '... l'IPOCRISIA tutta **italiana** ... '
(...the all-Italian hypocrisy)
NB: This phrase is the closest linguistic realization of the main epistemic claim that: Italians are hypocrits.

- 7) '**Riconosco che in parecchi casi** questo [' ... che la scuola privata "si é ampiamente dimostrata migliore nell'amministrare uno studente" di quanto non abbia fatto sinora la scuola pubblica] **é vero**. Bisogna vedere però se la scuola italiana riesce **sempre** a fornire all'alunno un bagaglio di conoscenze che corrisponda alla classe frequentata a al titolo di studio conseguito.'
(I recognize that in many cases this [...that private schools 'have widely proven themselves to be better at managing students' than state schools have so far] is true. One ought, however, to see whether Italian schools always manage to provide their pupils with the level of knowledge that matches the years attended and the qualification obtained).
NB: The whole passage qualifies the writer's commitment to the validity of the claim that: private schools are better than state schools.

- 8) 'PURTROPPO la PREPOTENZA e l' ARROGANZA di questo MONDO DI NUOVI RICCHI **sta prevalendo** su TUTTO E TUTTI.'
(Unfortunately the bossiness and arrogance of this world of the new rich is prevailing on all and everyone)

- 9) '**Verranno** tutti PRESI, educati all'italiana e CATTOLICIZZATI senza che ALCUNO dei loro nuovi genitori si senta in dovere...di portarli alle loro chiese, pur presenti in Italia.'
(They will all be taken, brought up the Italian way and turned into Catholics and none of their parents will feel obliged to take them to their churches, though they are available in Italy).
NB: This is the closest linguistic realization of the main epistemic claim that: Italians are not concerned with keeping children from Eastern Europe in contact with their religious tradition.

- 10) 'La pubblicità garantisce che i NUOVISSIMI e LUSSUOSI traghetti veloci della Tirrenia, tratta Civitavecchia-Olbia e viceversa, impiegano tre ore e mezzo per svolgere il loro servizio. **Non é vero**.' (The advertising guarantees that the brand new and super luxury fast ferries from Tirrenia, on the Civitavecchia-Olbia route take three and a half hours to carry out their service. It is not true.)

- 11) '... **credo** ancora **convenga** prendere il "VECCHIO" traghetto ...'
(I believe that it is still more convenient [subjunctive] to take the 'old' ferry)
NB: this statement is the closest linguistic realization of the main epistemic claim that 'the old ferries are better'.

- 12) '*Ma QUALI pensionati difende Bertinotti?...Ma COSA VUOLE DIFENDERE il segretario di Rifondazione?* ... La sua insistenza **é davvero** immotivata'.
(But what pensioners does Bertinotti protect?...But what does the Chairman of Rifondazione wish to protect? His insistence is really unjustified).

- 13) '... **non condivido** l'eccessiva sottolineatura fatta [nei (vostri articoli sull'Albania ...)] sugli aspetti criminali dell'esodo. **Non credo** infatti che i profughi siano tutti DELINQUENTI ... '
(I don't approve of the excessive emphasis placed [in your articles on Albania] on the criminal aspects of the exodus. I don't indeed believe that the refugees are [subjunctive] all criminals).

- 14) '... la nuova classe politica al potere **persever[a]** nella stessa condotta [le vecchie abitudini da prima repubblica] con FACCE DI BRONZO DEGNE DI FIGURARE NEI MITICI CONGRESSI DEMOCRISTIANI'
(...the new political class in power perseveres with the same behaviour [the old habits typical of the First Republic] with bronze faces worth appearing in the mythical Christian Democratic congresses).

- 15) '... **vorrei GRIDARE FORTE** una cosa: **albanesi FESSI e VIGLIACCHI!** FESSI... VIGLIACCHI ... '

(...I would like to shout loudly one thing: Albanians you idiots and cowards! Idiots...cowards...)

- 16) '... quel **GROSSO PALLONE** del "maestro" televisivo'.
(...that big balloon, the 'teacher' on TV)
- 17) '... una classe politica che **si é resa**, con i suoi ritardi, indirettamente COLPEVOLE delle UMILIAZIONI, delle SOFFERENZE e della MORTE di tante persone'.
(...a political class that has made itself, with its delays, indirectly guilty of the humiliations, the suffering and the death of so many people)
- 18) '*E noi?* **Sono convinto** che, salvo lodevoli eccezioni, **non abbiamo ancora capito** concretamente l'importanza degli strumenti della comunicazione sociale per la "nuova evangelizzazione"; **non siamo consapevoli** del loro forte influsso nella formazione della cultura e della mentalità corrente'.
(And we? I am convinced that, apart from praiseworthy exceptions, we still have not really understood the importance of the means of social communication for the 'new evangelization'; we are not aware of their strong influence on the formation of culture and the current way of thinking).
- 19) '*Vorrei dire* ciò che **penso...Io dico** che (i delinquenti che hanno ammazzato, buttando un sasso dal cavalcavia di Tortona, quella povera ragazza che viaggiava in auto)...sono FIERI DELINQUENTI che dovrebbero essere lasciati NELLE MANI dei parenti delle vittime CON LICENZA DI FARLI A BRANI'
(I would like to say what I think...I say that [the criminals who killed, throwing a stone from the Tortona bridge, that poor girl who was travelling by car]...are hardened criminals who should be left in the hands of the victims' relatives with permission to tear them to pieces).
NB: These statements represent the closest linguistic realization of the main claim that: 'the young people who killed a woman by throwing a stone from a bridge are not worthy of any compassion'.

APPENDIX 4

Linguistic features in the Italian deontic claims directly available in the Letters (stated in or immediately inferable from the linguistic material):

Highlighting as in App. 2. A literal English translation is provided in brackets under each example. Note that two specific readers are appealed to directly through the imperative format (5. and 13.).

- 1) '... le leggi italiane, specie quelle sul lavoro, **sono da** rivedere.'
(...the Italian laws, particularly those on employment, ought to be reviewed)
- 2) 'Intanto [prima di raddoppiare la B.-F., costruire il ponte sullo stretto di Messina o investire soldi per il Giubileo], **non si potrebbero** finire le opere iniziate anni fa e ancora non compiute? Ad esempio, la strada statale ...'.
(Meanwhile [before doubling up the B-F, building the bridge on the Messina strait or invest the money on the Jubileum], couldn't one finish the work started years ago and still incomplete? For example, the state road...).
- 3) '... DOV'É FINITA la polizia stradale? [sull'autostrada Torino-Milano]. Perché non si controllano almeno i camion ...'.
(...where has the road police ended up? [on the Turin-Milan motorway]. Why does not one at least check the lorries...)
- 4) '... **faremmo sicuramente bene a** seguire l'esempio di Alain Juppe [sembra che il premier francese A.J...abbia dichiarato di voler adottare un'unica ora tutto l'anno]'.
(...we would be surely well-advised to follow Alain Juppe's example [it appears that the French premier A.J. has declared [subjunctive] his wish to adopt only one time for the whole year]).

- 5) '*Ci sia consentito dare un consiglio a questo papà sconosciuto: scelga* di essere un PADRE PRESENTE, lo **scelga** CON FORZA! Forse é ancora in tempo. **AUGURI.**'
(May we be allowed to give a piece of advice to this unknown father: choose to be a present father, choose it with all your strength! Perhaps you are still in time. Best wishes!).
- 6) 'Invece di sottoporre alla gente AMMUCCHIARE di quesiti referendari su questioni LONTANE ANNI LUCE dal proprio vissuto, come consumatrice **MI PIACEREBBE mi informassero e interpellassero** su questioni che mi toccano ben più da vicino: l'olio e il latte. Perché non si spiega chiaramente il SACROSANTO motivo per cui gli oleocoltivatori protestano?'
(Instead of giving people heaps of questionnaires to fill in on issues which are light-years away from their present concerns, as a consumer I would appreciate it if they informed and consulted me on issues which affect me much more closely: oil and milk. Why don't they explain clearly the well-founded reason why the olive growers are protesting?)
- 7) '... la scarcerazione di Adriano Sofri e degli altri componenti di Lotta Continua...questo provvedimento di clemenza. *IO CI TENGO A FARVI SAPERE LA MIA PERSONALE OPINIONE: NON CI STO!*'
(...the release of Adriano Sofri and of the other members of Lotta Continua...this act of clemency. I am keen to let you know my personal opinion: I don't agree!)
- 8) '... **va avviato** un paziente lavoro di analisi sull'aspetto politico,...della dissoluzione dell'Albania.'
(...one ought to start a careful process of analysis on the political aspect,...of the dissolution of Albania).
- 9)
- a) '**È ORA DI** FINIRLA CON LA STRUMENTALIZZAZIONE ... **BASTA!** Ma lo **devono dire i maestri, i professori, e TANTISSIMI genitori.**'
(It's time to stop the strumentalization...Enough! But it must be the teachers and many parents who say it).
- b) 'PECCATO che la lettera di Angelo sia apparsa solo su "Popotus". Non perché non abbia valore. Ma pochi lo leggono. **CONFIDO in** un più ampio risalto, a cominciare da "**Avvenire**".'
(It's a pity that Angelo's letter has appeared [subjunctive] only on 'Popotus'. Not because it is worthless. But few read it. I trust it will be given a higher profile, starting with 'Avvenire')
- 10) 'Ma, al di là dei possibili ulteriori miglioramenti riguardanti "Avvenire", c'è **un'esigenza fondamentale** che **occorre** ribadire ... **non si può** ... **ignorare** l'incidenza ambivalente, positiva o negativa, dei mezzi della comunicazione sociale.'
(But, beyond the further improvements in relation to 'Avvenire', there is a fundamental need which must be stressed...one cannot...ignore the ambivalent influence, positive or negative, of the means of mass communication).
NB: This statement represents the closes linguistic realization of the main deontic claim that: 'The Church should make better use of the media'
- 11)
- a) '... **CONDIVIDO PIENAMENTE** l'intervento di Angelo Scelzo su "Avvenire" ... ed **HO MOLTO APPREZZATO** la sua risposta. Sono entrambi testi "aperti", che **evocano** ALTRE risposte, ALTRI contributi, ALTRE riflessioni. **Esigono** un dibattito di più ampio respiro teso alla ricerca delle radici culturali e del "dna" vocazionale sia del nostro Paese che dell'Europa intera.'
(I fully agree with Angelo Scelzo's contribution on 'Avvenire'...and I have really appreciated your reply. They are both 'open' texts which call for further replies, further contributions, further reflections. They demand a wide ranging debate aimed at the search for the cultural roots and for the vocational 'dna' both of our Country and of the whole of Europe).
NB: These assertions represent the closest linguistic realization of the main deontic claim that: 'The original values and principles on which we base the notio of a united Europe must be rediscovered'
- b) 'I parametri di Maastricht **non bastano.Occorre** un progetto capace di rifondare assiologicamente il

Trattato di Roma.'

(The parameters of Maastricht are not enough. A plan is needed that is able to radically reshape the Treaty of Rome).

- c) 'La comunità europea ha bisogno di ridisegnare la mappa dei suoi principi'.
(The European Community needs to redraw the map of its principles).
- 12) '*Secondo me **bisogna** AFFONDARE un simile Governo e ...*'
(In my opinion one ought to sink such a Government and...).
- 13)
- a) 'Egregio professor Romano, vorrei, con queste poche righe, LANCiarLE UNA FORTE PROVOCAZIONE: **RINNEGHI** di essere un intellettuale italiano!'
(My dearest Professor Romano, I would like, with these few lines, to challenge you: deny being an Italian intellectual!)
- b) '**RINNEGHI** di appartenere a quella categoria ...'
(Deny belonging to that category...)
- c) '**RINNEGHI** di essere un intellettuale italiano ... **RINNEGHI**, professor Romano, e con lei tutti gli AMICI di liberal'.
(Deny being an Italian intellectual...Deny, Professor Romano and with you all the friends of Liberal)

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Letters to the Editor

Evening News:

B.J. Clark *Guardian of many creatures* (28-8-97)

A.W. Benn *Are the Tories now in charge of city?* (29-6-98)

P. Ellery *Bus company should clean up its act* (29-6-98)

N.Dyers *Survey of walk was incomplete* (26-6-98)

B.A. Baker *Where are all these bands?* (25-6-98)

K. Ralph *Promoters did not do research* (25-6-98)

Independent on Sunday:

J. R. Adams *It's nature and nurture – genes are not all* (9-2-97)

F. Lucas *Arts pay off* (19-1-97)

K. Norman *If you are innocent don't say so* (16-2-97)

H. Stevenson *Ivory towers for women too* (16-2-97)

J. Boswell *Who let Irek in so easily?* (16-2-97)

N. Birt *Feminist fever* (16-2-97)
W. K. Cowan *Political lies* (16-2-97)
T. Curtin *Our waste* (16-2-97)

Mail on Sunday:

E. Perry *Never scoff at fabulous Fifties* (12-1-97)
S. Steward *Girls or boys* (12-1-97)
P. Stebbing *That's no way to treat a lady* (12-1-97)
C. Wells *The poisons on our doorsteps* – no.1 (12-1-97)
M. Williams *Cheap price to pay for these special children* – no.3 (5-7-98)
B. Fawcett *Healthy degree of satisfaction* – no.1 (5-7-98)

The People:

K. Halliwell, untitled (9-2-97)
G. Yeats, untitled (9-2-97)
H. Salmon *VAT'll stamp out the junk mail* – no.1 (9-20-97)
J. Grainger untitled (9-20-97)
E. Verity *Bev's haystack needles me* – no.1 (9-2-97)
J. Machin *Green enough to be Robin's merry-men* (9-2-97)

The European:

C. Turner, Tobacco Manufacturers' Association, London, England *Flying with a cocktail* (5/11-12-96)
M. Sharrock, MS Consultants, Harpenden, England *Work for everyone* (28-11/4-12-96)

The Times:

P. Baker *A stitch in time* (9-6-97)
P. Tucker *Housing density as key social issue* – no.3 (9-6-97)
A. Sims *Pole position* (9-6-97)
R. MacLean *Covering up* (9-6-97)

The Sunday Times:

B. Simms *Quality of charity can be strained* – no.1 (5-7-98)
E. Crabtree *Boys will lose toys* – no.2 (5-7-98)

The Express:

W. O. Harris *Dressed not to impress* (22-3-98)
F. Spence *A problem shared* (22-3-98)
J. Barry *Lesson for Earl Spencer* (27-6-98)
D. Boardman *Bring technology into play* (27-6-98)
G. Thomas *Ecu vote for teenagers* (27-6-98)
A.M. Wilders *Parents take the rap* (27-6-98)

Panorama:

M. Melgrati, Councillor for Public Works, Alassio *Il Mare di Alassio* (14-10-94)

Epoca:

A. Bagno *Stranieri un falso problema* (22-4-92)
A. Arce *Il reinserimento degli ex detenuti* (22-4-92)
M. Paolucci *Raccomandato per forza* (22-4-1992)
D. Rampa *All'aquila, all'Aquila* (22-4-92)
F. Conti *Propaganda di pessimo gusto* (22-4-92)

C. Battistoni *E noi come campiamo?* (22-4-92)

Corriere della Sera:

C. Corsi *E le opere iniziate?* (2-8-96)
L. Crosetto *Occorrono più controlli* (5-2-97)
D. Truffi *Cambia solo il prefisso* (5-2-97)
A. Lupi *Le responsabilità dei magistrati* (5-2-97)
A. Lalomia *Alcune perplessità* (5-2-97)
F. Finzi *Ciclica seccatura per i bioritmi* (26-9-96)

La Repubblica:

F. Sabatini *L'assenza dei padri* (3-6-97)
C. Schillaci *Prepotenza e arroganza* (3-6-97)
T. Vitale *Consumatori truffati* (20-12-97)
G. Arletti *Bambini dall' Est* (20-12-97)
E. Piervincenzi *Superveloci a passo di lumaca* (23-7-98)
M. Iannelli *Ci manca solo il re* (3-6-97)

L' Espresso:

L. Vaglia *Ma la grazia no* (10-4-97)
G. Salvatore *Benvenuto le Olimpiadi* (12-4-97)
L. B. *Chi difende Bertinotti* (10-4-97)
M. Pallotta *Fratelli albanesi* (10-4-97)
G. Rimedi *Facce di bronzo* (10-4-97)
A. Ventrella *Non fate i profughi* (10-4-97)
F. Franchini *Contratti d'oro?* (10-4-97)
M. Bertuzzi *In nome delle insegnanti* (10-4-97)

Il Secolo XIX:

S. Montebello *Le chiacchiere del palazzo* (5-4-97)
Signed letter (name not given) *No agli imbonitori al telefono* (5-4-97)
M. Pennone *La favoletta del rospo* (5-4-97)
A. Cesarino *La Lanterna nascosta* (5-4-97)

Avvenire:

R. Mafficini *Il 'pallone' di 'Caro Maestro'* (5-4-97)
A. Rossini *Una legge sul dono d'organi* (5-4-97)
R. Perlini *Importanza dei mass media* (5-4-97)
Don P. Mocerino *Europa: comunità o club privato?* (5-4-97)

Cronaca Vera:

Signed letter (name not given) *Ragazzi con problemi* (9-4-97)
Anonymous letter *Anonimo deluso* (9-4-97)
Signed letter (name not given) *Persecuzione* (9-4-97)

Liberal:

A. Russo *Contro il Viagra un'indegna crociata* (23-7-98)
R. Todero *Elogio di una voce fuori dal coro* (23-7-98)