

Filled pauses and prolongations in Roman Italian task-oriented dialogue

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INTRODUCTION

- Filled pauses (FPs) and prolongations (PRs) are markers of disfluency that signal hesitation through vocalization and duration (Eklund, 2001; Betz et al., 2017)

FP = *eeh, ehm* PR = *<ss>si 'yes', otto<oo> 'eight'*

- FPs longer and more frequent than PRs (Eklund, 2001)
- In conversation, FPs help interlocuter gain time before answering a question (Lickley, 2001), while PRs signal speaker's intention to hold floor (Savino & Refice, 2000; Gravano & Hirschberg, 2011)
- Cross-linguistic differences in FPs with respect to preferred type (*uh* vs. *um*) and phonetic quality of vowel (Lo, 2019) and in PRs with respect to target segments and position in word (Betz et al., 2017)
- In Italian, FPs more frequent in spontaneous speech than read speech (Magno Caldognetto et al., 1997), and vowel quality of FPs varies by region (Giannini, 2003)
- PRs more frequent than FPs in Italian? (Savino & Refice, 2000)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the characteristics of prolongations and filled pauses in Italian?
- Do Italian speakers produce more prolongations than filled pauses?
- Is there any evidence that filled pauses and prolongations function interactionally in Italian, and do they function similarly or in distinct ways?

METHODS

Speech material

- Map Task dialogues from the CLIPS corpus (2 analyzed so far; approximately 27 minutes of dialogue)
- Four native speakers of Roman Italian (2 female, 2 male) matched for gender (F-F, M-M); speakers take turns as *instruction giver*

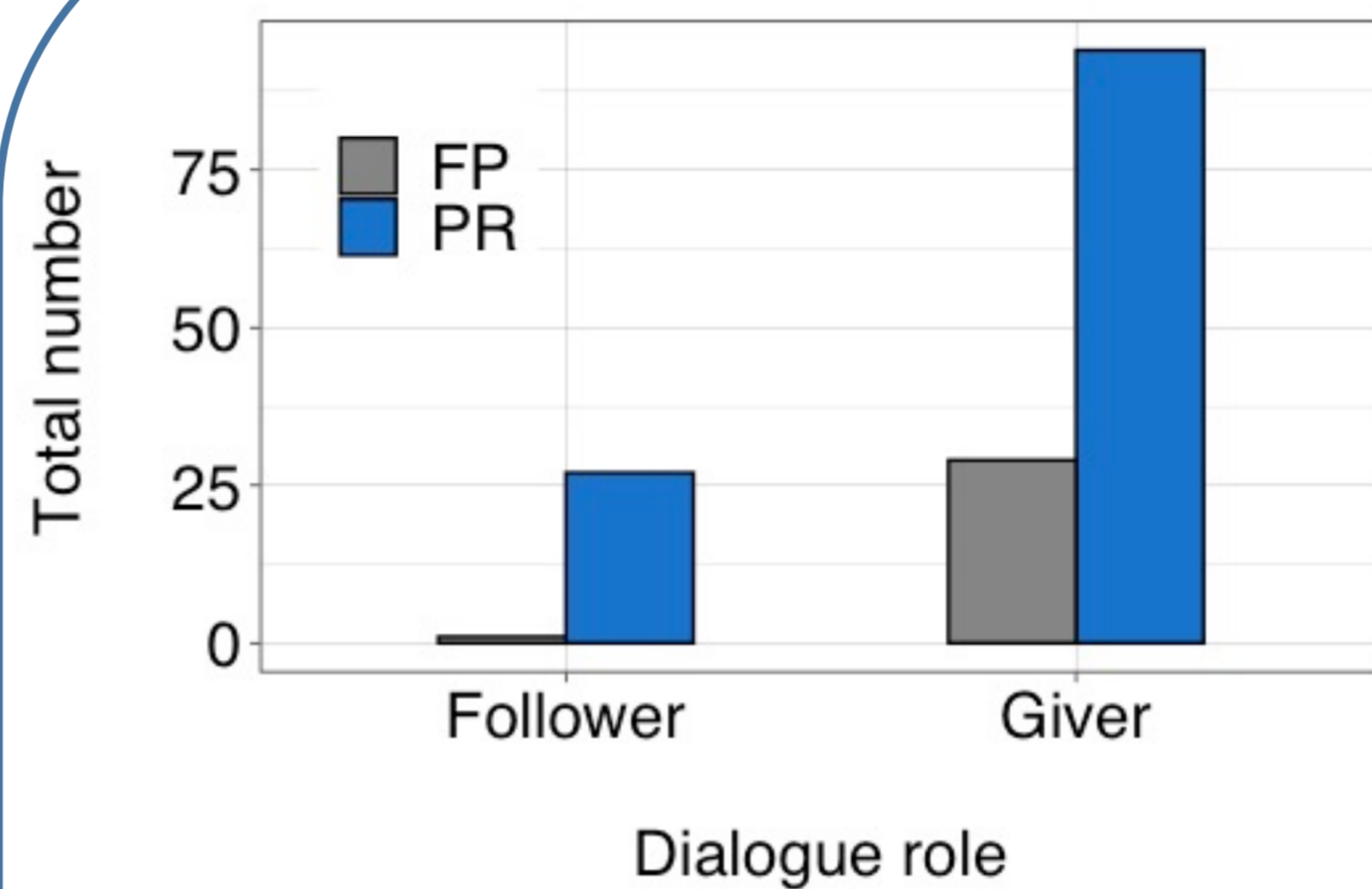
Annotation in Praat (Boersma & Weenink, 2018)

- Segmentation of speech into **turns**, defined here as interpausal units or IPU (Koiso et al., 1998; Di Napoli, 2018)
- Annotation of **syllable nuclei** by script (de Jong & Wemke, 2009) with manual correction → annotation of FPs and PRs

Analysis of FPs and PRs

- Frequency of occurrence:** 1) absolute frequency, for speakers in their two dialogue roles; 2) relative frequency, with respect to dialogue time (min) and speech produced (100 syllables)
- Characteristics of FPs and PRs:** 1) duration (ms); 2) segmental composition; 3) position in turn (initial, medial, final)
- Additional characteristics of PRs:** 1) word class; 2) position in word (initial, medial, final)

RESULTS

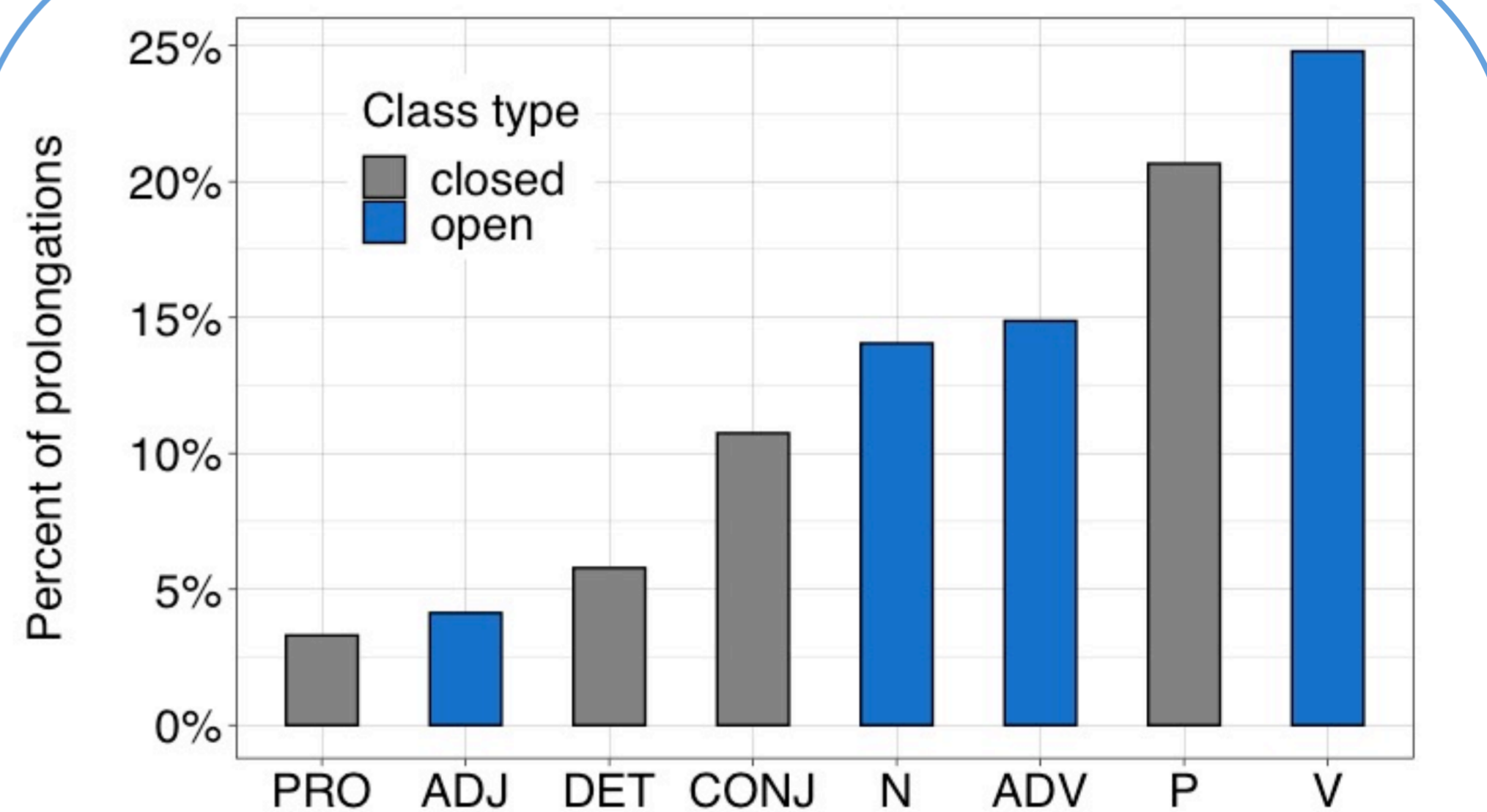


- ★ PRs more frequent than FPs across speakers
- ★ FPs and PRs more frequent for instruction **givers** than followers
- ★ Most FPs produced by a single speaker

Type	Num.	Mean dur. (ms)	Comp. (%V-C)	Freq. (per min)	Freq. (per 100σ)	Position in word (% i-m-f)	Position in turn (% i-m-f)
FP	30	568	67–33	0.7	0.4	NA	67–20–13
PR	121	325	90–10	2.7	1.7	5–4–91	18–43–39

- ★ PRs are most frequently **vowels** in **word-final** position
- ★ FPs tend to occur in turn-initial position; PRs occur in turn-medial or turn-final position

PRs & WORD CLASS



N + ADJ or PP
maggiolino<oo> grigio
'gray Beetle'
curva<aa> verso destra
'a curve to the right'

P + NP
sopra<aa> il tetto
'over the roof'

V + ADV or PP
passo<oo> sotto
'I pass underneath'
passa<aa> al centro
'go through the center'

- ★ PRs occur somewhat more frequently in open class words (58%) than closed class words (40%)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Language-specific characteristics of hesitation – Italian patterns differently than other languages (cf. Eklund, 2001; Betz et al., 2017):

- Relative frequency of PRs > FPs
- Segments undergoing prolongation (primarily word-final vowels)

Link to Italian syllable structure (Savino & Refice, 2000; Krämer, 2009)

Interactional functions of FPs and PRs – Possible roles in turn-taking and discourse management:

- Turn holding (Savino & Refice, 2000) and gaining time before responding to a question or continuing to speak (Lickley, 2001)
- Signaling uncertainty (Betz et al., 2019)