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FACOLTÀ DI SCIENZE LINGUISTICHE E LETTERATURE STRANIERE
UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA DEL SACRO CUORE

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DO YOU (DIS)AGREE? INVESTIGATING AGREEMENT AND DISAGREEMENT IN NEWSGROUPS INTERACTION

ELISA CORINO

1. *Introduction: Computer Mediated Interaction*

This work aims to investigate the use of agreement routines in a peculiar form of communicative interaction: the Newsgroup (NG). The choice of NGs as object of our research is due not only to the interest they raise as a particular expression of Computer Mediated Communication/Computer Mediated Discourse (along with mail, chat, MUD... and the like) from the textual point of view, but also to the potential field of research they offer for discourse analysis. Besides discourse analysis, agreement, disagreement and argumentation strategies have been the object of psychotherapy, focus groups (Myers 1998) and legal studies, but there is little material about written forms of communication.

It is a matter of fact that in the past few years the Internet has triggered a boom of research on discourse in connection with human behaviour, on the basis of regular interactions between a huge and steadily increasing number of people.

Online interaction overwhelmingly takes place by means of discourse, nonetheless the traditional methods used by scholars dealing with discourse analysis before the spread of CMC are now feeble for a certain number of reasons.

As Herring (2002) points out, various attempts have been made by linguists to classify CMD as a third way between speech and writing, or as a kind of "written speech", as it exhibits features of orality, including rapid message exchange, informality, and representations of prosody, though produced by typing on a keyboard and read as text on a computer screen.

Nonetheless Netspeak is not a single homogeneous *genre* of communication, it is rather a set of "socio-technical modes" (Herring 2002) that combine the technological means of communication with the social and cultural practices that have arisen around their use.

One of the features that distinguishes CMD from other types of communication, determining some distinctions within CMD itself as well, is *turn taking*. It is commonly recognised that turn-taking in spoken conversation follows a regular alternation between speakers, ideally without gaps and overlaps, whereas CMC suffers from the constraints imposed by the medium that affects the nature of the conversation itself: on the one hand we can find asynchronous CMC, such as e-mail, where there is often a considerable time lag between when a message is sent and when it is responded to, on the other hand synchronous CMC, such as IRC, involves more rapid exchanges of turns, but fosters a lot of overlapping.

Usenet Newsgroups are still a quite unexplored field that lies in between: they deal with a kind of computer mediated group communication that, though asynchronous, presents a high degree of overlapping between exchanges. In comparison with chat messages, NGs posts are much longer and the exchange between the participants is more structured and complex, multiple responses are often directed at a single initiating message, and single messages may respond to more than one initiating message. This is a typical feature of asynchronous CMC, where longer messages tend to contain multiple conversational moves and *quoting* is thus the most relevant way of achieving a successful communication.

In particular NGs provide a wide source of data about (dis)agreement and argumentation, being a virtual community based on opinion and information exchange. The posters¹ most of the times explicitly ask for opinion and judgement or do express theirs about other posters' messages. This kind of exchange implies that the bare occurrence of agreement and disagreement formulas must be higher than in normal colloquial conversation.

In such an environment where dense interactional patterns take place and many people are involved, even agreeing and disagreeing strategies seem to follow certain schemes and rules. We are now going to explore these strategies, trying to sketch a qualitative survey that aims to be as representative as possible, if not exhaustive, of the agreement scale as well as of the gender and interlingual differences displayed in the Newsgroup communication².

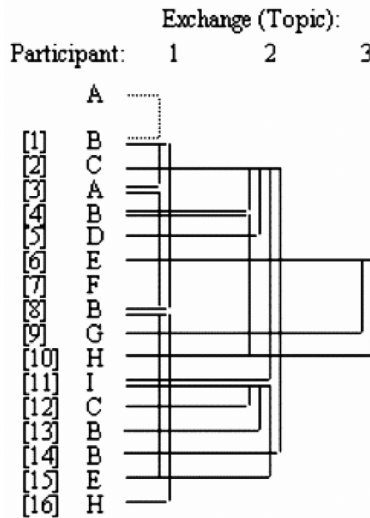
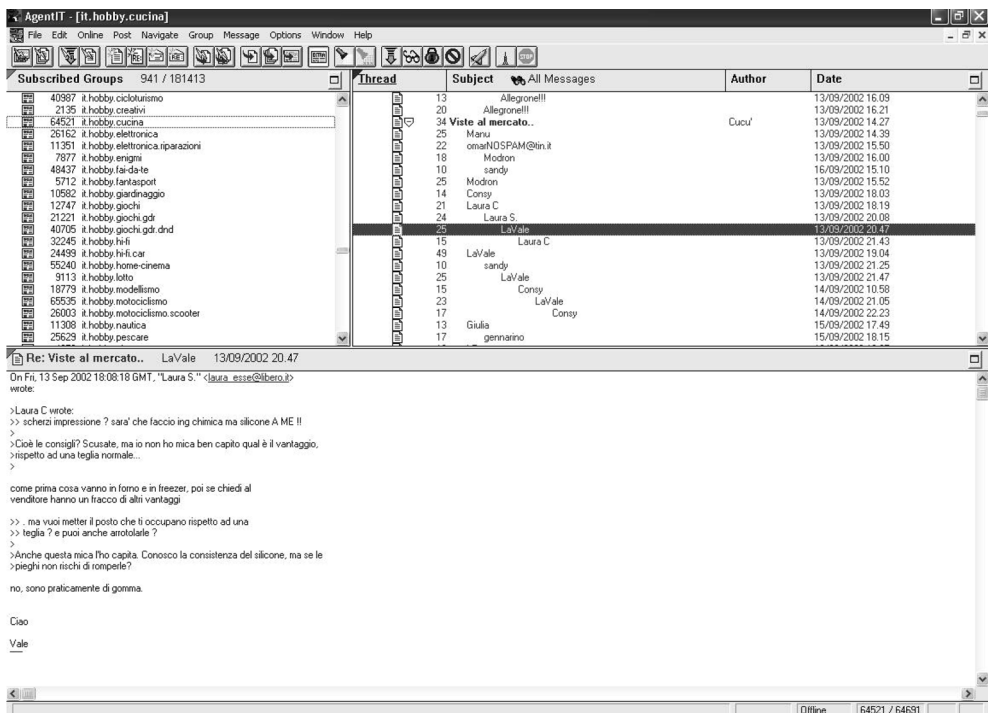
2. CMD and quoting

As it was stated in the previous paragraph, turn-taking in CMC does not adhere to the ideal that speaker turns alternate in an orderly manner. The fact that in CMD there is not a one-to-one correspondence between an initiation and its response is particularly true when speaking about asynchronous communication in Usenet Newsgroups, where exchanges are often interrupted by messages from other exchanges. The task of reconstructing adjacent conversational moves is additionally complicated by the fact that a single message may contain two or more moves which are physically, but not functionally, adjacent. The Gricean maxim of local relevance is frequently violated, as physically close posts are often pragmatically irrelevant to one another, whereas distant messages can be interrelated.

It is not possible to reproduce here a whole thread to exemplify the discussion development, however we try to present a schematic account of a series of consecutive messages posted as part of a discussion on a listserv discussion list reproduced by Herring (1999) and a screen shot of a newsreader like Forte's Agent where you can see the development of a thread according to the hierarchical levels of indentation. Furthermore we refer the reader to the works of Marengo (2007), Corino (2007), Fiorentino (2005) and Gheno (2004) for an in depth discussion about the structure and the textual variety that characterise the Newsgroup as a form of CMD.

¹ People who are posting messages in a NG, each single message is considered a post.

² All the examples are drawn from the NUNC (Newsgroup UseNet Corpora), a suite of multilingual corpora to be found at www.corpora.unito.it, description to be found in Barbera, Corino & Onesti (2007).

Figure 1: *Schematic representation of interaction in a discussion list sample (Herring 1999)*Figure 2: *Representation of a thread in a newsreader program*

The NG thread is a text built in a progressive way through the sequence of posts by different participants, therefore it is not possible to control its communicative effectiveness revising it as it hap-

pens for dialogues in other textual genres. It deals rather with cooperation among participants and respect of common rules of behaviour and textual devices used in order to give as much coherence (and somehow cohesion) as possible to the exchange.

Concerning this Storrer (2002) speaks of “Sequenzialisierung der Antwortnachricht”, though it is not possible to speak of sequencing in a broad sense, i.e. the argumentative progression is set by a series of overlapping messages characterized by the deletion of transitional passages and the repetition of relevant paragraphs. The text as a whole is thus shaped through the selection of the parts of every single post that are considered significant to the participants.

Quoting is therefore a crucial strategy to be studied in order to make comments on any of the textual features of the NG as a genre of communication.

In [1] we can see how the poster explicitly asks for quoting in order to be able to easily follow the discourse and interact.

[1] ti pregotipregotiprego...
 Per favore, potresti mettere – la prossima volta – la tua risposta sotto
 il messaggio originale debitamente tagliato di tutte le parti non utili
 alla comprensione della tua risposta?
 Grazie.
 Saluti, XXX³

In [2] we find the quoting of an answer of a previous post; there is clearly a situation of flaming going on, but a newcomer does not understand the reasons of the disagreement as the quoting is not complete: the lack of the prior messages invalidates the coherence of the discussion, and therefore its intelligibility.

[2] > “Sara YYY”
 >>> Iniziamo dal tono: era paro paro a quello del suo mex urlato e
 >>> minatorio:
 > Pliz: mi manca il mex a cui sta rispondendo la signora YYY... qualcuno me
 > lo inoltra? Grazie! :-)⁴

The meaning of the text is negotiated and co-constructed by the participants and the use of quotation is particularly important when speaking about agreement and disagreement as it determines the relevant elements on which the discussion is based, focusing the attention of the participants on a well localized theme and determining therefore the textual movement and the progression of the argument.

³ Pleasepleaseplease.

Could you please – next time place your answer under the original message and cut out from it all parts that are not necessary to understand your answer?

Thanks.

Greetings, XXX.

⁴ “Sara YYY”.

>>> Let's begin from the attitude: it was just the same as her msg, shouting and menacing:

> Pliz: I missed the msg to whom Mrs. YYY is answering... could somebody forward it to me? Thanks :-)

The whole focusing mechanism changes according to the characteristics of the dialogue itself and its task oriented features. For instance, contrastive markers re-orient the co-participants' cognitive states towards grounding ungrounded topical aspects to be meta-negotiated. Such markers offer a collaborative context-updating strategy, tracking the status of common ground during dialogue topic management.

In the following we are going to illustrate by examples how quoting enables participants to keep alive the focus of the conversation and to prosecute the subject just by pasting parts of the previous messages, analysing the possible connections and mutual influences between quoting and agreeing/disagreeing routines and their implications in topic negotiation.

As Pistolesi (2004) points out, to resort to the quoting strategy can depend on the emotional tenor of the exchange and on the involvement of the participants: direct quoting and resumption techniques seem to be more frequent when one has to express slight opposition and disagreement, whereas they seem to disappear in messages expressing total disagreement.

3. *Etiquette vs Netiquette*

The particular features of the NGs' language could be explained by the structure and nature of the NG itself. On the one hand it deals with a well-defined community, organised and self-conscious, and therefore allowed to a certain amount of "freedom of expression" (participants know each other and are "virtual friends"; they keep regular contact and have regular interaction), avoiding introductions, explanations and formulas typical of controlled interaction. But on the other hand it is strictly regulated by a clear *Netiquette* defining the rules of interaction. In [1] we have introduced an example of the conventions governing the co-construction of the text and the need of a well known and carefully planned quoting strategy, in [2] a menacing attitude is mentioned⁵, but *Netiquette* implies (dis)agreement rules as well.

[3] Q⁶: > [...] riflettessero un pochino su. Per esempio, * quanti * messaggi si ... si ... ho capito potrebbero essere scritti in mail privata? Quanti vengono scritti solo per dire * sono d'accordo *, quando nei ns - più che in altre sedi - vale la regola del * chi tace acconsente * ... e via di questo passo! e, ad esempio, gli "auguri"? Io, da tempo, non ne faccio sul ng ... I Se è gnucco, poi, randellate sui denti. Ma solo dopo averlo aiutato.

A: ah ... vedo siamo d'accordo anche su questo ... il problema è che la selezione naturale tende a far convergere niubbo e gnucco⁷ ...

⁵ Reproducing the whole thread would have been too long here, therefore we refer the reader to the online queryable version of the corpus, nonetheless this example requires some more details to be understood: it deals with a conversation where one of the posters wrote the whole message in capital letters, which is considered a sign of an aggressive attitude, as it often simulates the rising of the voice.

⁶ Q: marks the quoted passage, A: marks the answer.

⁷ The Italian word *gnucco* has a twofold meaning suggested by the pun between its literal meaning, *dull*, and its phonetic likeness to the English *newco(mer)*.

Saluti, XXX⁸

As this post points out agreement and disagreement are strictly regulated, even though there is not a rule explicitly mentioned in the official Netiquette. Nevertheless the principle “silence gives consent” seems to be ignored by newbies and newcomers, whereas experienced posters are irritated by the redundancy and by the noise messages of simple agreement cause in the thread.

Actually there are lots of messages posted just to show one’s agreement, though they do not add any new information to the discussed topic. In § 4 we are going to observe indeed how agreement is never an end in itself, it is rather a strategy to introduce a certain amount of disagreement or further details to the conversation.

4. *How to (dis)agree in multilingual NGs*

In NGs posters most of the times explicitly ask for opinion and judgement or do express theirs about other posters’ messages. This kind of exchange implies that the bare occurrence of agreement and disagreement formulas must be higher than in normal colloquial conversation. Even usual turn taking signals in colloquial conversation can trigger argumentative thread where agreement and disagreement overlap and cut across each other.

In this form of CMD the interactional functions of agreement and disagreement are often carried out by similar routines, playing each time a different role in the negotiation of information. These roles can be roughly divided into three main categories or *levels of agreement* (Bazzanella 1996) that can be applied to this analysis as well: total agreement, partial agreement and total disagreement, and they can be ordered according to a well-known scale ranging from signals of total agreement to total disagreement as in Table I:



Total agreement
sharing
Partial agreement
[...]
Turn taking strategy
Topicalization of information
[...]
Asking for an explanation
Asking for correction
Partial disagreement
Total disagreement

Table I: *Agreement/Disagreement scale (Bazzanella 1996)*

⁸ Q: How many messages could be written in a private mail? How many are written just to say *I agree*, while in ng – more than in other places – serves the rule “silence gives consent”... and so on! And, for example, “good

Total agreement and disagreement are obviously defined by clear and precise expressions, as in [5] where there is a formal and plain expression of disagreement and in [6], where a more creative form of pointing out one's mistake is introduced:

[5] **Q:** > È una enorme rottura di palle; *magari* fosse di tutti i giorni la
> cucina speciale o quella per gli ospiti...

A: Dissento. Come ho già detto, io sono uno di quei single che lavora tutto il giorno in ufficio, arriva a casa tardi la sera e *se* dovessi mangiare un panino schifido al bar o una pizza da asporto o cose comprate in gastronomia tutti i giorni, penso che mi suiciderei. Secondo me è *FAVOLOSO* tornare a casa, sia a pranzo che a cena e mettersi a cucinare. Mi rilassa, mi fa dimenticare il grigio mondo dell'ufficio, mi fa insomma star bene e mi permette di cominciare la notte di buon umore :-)

[...]

JXX⁹

[6] **Q:** > Senti maaaaaaa... Perozzo, sei sicuro di volere il pesto rosso con basilico

> o non cercavi, FORSE, il pesto rosso alla siciliana, che il sempre grande
> Sergio mi ha detto trattarsi di Capuliato alla trapanese... Capuliato, trito
> di carne, e per traslato anche di pomodori secchi, i quali danno il
> caratteristico sapore e consistenza al pesto rosso...

A: Blokka i manzi! ;-)))

Quello trapanese (sennò Gianmaria ci capulia) è un pesto di pomodori FRESCHI. Il capuliato con i pomodori secchi è palermitano e viene dalle montagne e dal centro e, che io sappia, lo usano anche ad oriente. "Capuliatu" è comunque il "tritatu" (basso latino capulare, antico spagnolo capular e antico francese capler, capleier); anche il soffritto (cipolla, sedano e carota) se fatto a punta di coltello è capuliatu.

wishes"? I haven't been doing it in the ng for a long time... If one is newco, then, clubbing. But only after having helped him.

A: Ah... I see we agree about this as well... the problem is that the natural selection makes newco and newbie converge.

Greetings, XXX.

⁹ **Q:** > It is just big pain in the ass; *if only* could special dishes or guest dishes be everyday dishes...

A: I disagree. As I already said, I am a single, working all day long, arriving home late and, *if* I had to eat a disgusting sandwich or a take away pizza and such, everyday I think I will commit suicide. I just think that it is *GREAT* to go back home, both for lunch and dinner to cook. It is relaxing and I forget about the grey world of the office. It is in the end good to me and allows me to start the night with a good mood.:-)

[...]

JXX

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English speaking NGs' users often use intensifying elements such as *really*, *strongly* or *do*...

[7] Eat all you can... **I do agree**, but they do prove particularly useful when you are run off your toes and need a quick lunch that is more than a sandwich. I took my kids to a circus in Chelmsford yesterday afternoon and we dropped in to one of the buffet style places for dinner afterwards.

The use of these routines in order to express only partial agreement usually implies a more complex operation, where agreement is a sort of kind and implicit device used to introduce disagreement. Pomerantz (1975) observes that when participants feel that they are expected to agree with an assessment, yet disagree, they usually express their disagreement with some form of delay. He introduced the term of "dispreferred-action turn shape" to refer to second assessments that display features such as silence or delays after an assessment has been introduced: action that is not "oriented to" the talk as it was invited to be. These actions are structurally marked, displaying what she calls "dispreference" features such as "delay, requests for clarification, partial repeats, and other repair initiators, and turn prefaces". When posters feel that they are expected to agree with an assessment, yet disagree, they usually express their disagreement with some form of delay. Some of the forms of delay that Pomerantz lists are initial silence in response to forthcoming talk and repair initiators, yet in written forms of communication such as NGs we can find a certain degree of disagreement concealed under conversation repair strategies, quoting or initial agreement used to delay and mitigate the confutation of the previous statement, such as in [8] where first of all there is the quoting of the previous messages, the sharing of the same opinion and then the objection, which makes of this post a representative example of partial agreement.

[8] **Q:** >>> La cucina quotidiana non è una banlità
>> È una enorme rottura di palle
> Per me la preparazione della cena quotidiana è un piccolo rito
...
> Un punto fermo di fine giornata lavorativa,
> un attimo di raccoglimento,

¹⁰ **Q:** > liliiteen... Perozzo, are you sure you want the red pesto with basil
> or weren't you looking for, MAY BE, sicilian red pesto, that the great
> Sergio told me is like the Trapani Capuliato... Capuliato, minced
> meat, and dry tomatoes as well, that give the
> characteristic flavour and consistency to the red pesto...

A: Stop the calves! ;-)))

The trapanese one is a pesto made of FRESH tomatoes. The capuliato with dry tomatoes is from Palermo and comes from the mountains and from the centre and, as far as I know, it is used in the East as well. "Capuliatu" is the "minced" (old Latin capulare, old Spanish capular and old French capler, capleier); also the lightly fried mixture of chopped onions, carrots and celery if it is done with a knife is capuliatu.

XX*

- > un muovere le mani con precisione e tempismo.
- > È “casa”.

A: così è anche per me, la cena ... telefonini spenti, le chiacchiere serali con le puzzole, la scelta del menu a partire dagli ingredienti disponibili e dalla voglia :) pentole ciotole vapori profumi per casa...
[...]

ma è anche rottura di palle, quando 7 giorni su 7 devi preparare anche il pranzo per almeno 2 belve affamate (e che non sempre si accontentano), che deve essere rigorosamente già pronto per le 8 del mattino ... e di fatto è la prima cosa che faccio appena alzata
LXXX¹¹.

Some forms of request for explanation can be considered ways of expressing partial disagreement as well, even if it is not explicit but has to be inferred from the context, such as in [9] where comments alternate the quoted passages and create a sort of dialogue in progress: the external reader – the lurker – of this passage has actually the impression to witness an actual dialogue where the one speaker does not know what the other speaker is going to say next.

[9] **Q:** > [...] nel momento in cui contrasti gli allevamenti e giustifichi i laboratori bisogna che tu ne valuti i motivi. 1 Non è uguale uccidere un animale per farne una salsiccia, per farne un cappotto, per trovare cure.

A: quindi, tradotto ai minimi termini: la vita degli animali vale a seconda del grado di convenienza dell'uomo. lo spieghi tu ai bambini nelle scuole che uccidere gli animali per mangiarli non va bene e ucciderli per “curarsi” va bene?

Q: > Se non fai differenze fai solo danni al movimento animalista.

A: ah ecco, volevo ben dire.

¹¹ **Q:** >>> Daily cooking is not a stupid thing to do

>> It is a great pain in the ass

> To me preparing dinner is a small rite...

> An anchor to the end of a working day,

> a moment of concentration,

> a movement to be done with precision and sense of timing.

> it is “home”.

A: So is it for me, dinner ... mobiles turned off, evening chatting with our polecats, choosing the menu according to the available ingredients and to the will :) pans cups steams and smells around...

[...]

but it is a pain in the ass as well, when 7 days out of 7 you have to cook for lunch as well _ for at least 2 hungry wild beasts (that are not always happy with it), that has to be ready by 8 in the morning... and actually it is the first thing I do after I get up.

LXXX

Q: > Perché è comprensibile a più la futilità dell'uccisione di un animale per farne pellicce o per farne cotolette

A: mi pare che tu stia solamente cercando giustificazioni perchè appoggi un massacro scientifico e non lo fai per uno alimentare.

Q: > Se c'è la possibilità di trovare cure a favore della razza umana molti saranno favorevoli.

A: stando dalla parte dei vivisettori ti riuscirà difficile conseguire questo scopo: le persone ti chiederanno che diavolo di animalista sei, e tu dovrai rispondergli che non lo sei¹².

Muntigl and Turnbull (1998) identify four major types of disagreement, ranked from most to least aggravated: irrelevancy claims, challenges, contradictions, and counterclaims. They found that the more a second turn threatens the face of the speaker who made a claim as a first turn, the more likely it is that the third turn will contain further support of that first speaker's claim. The poster in [10] disagrees with a previous message (the quoted message that in its turn disagrees with another message) and agrees with the recipe on the web site, then in the second part agrees with the first poster following his/her logical thread. The quoting mechanism enables participants to mix strategies of agreement and disagreement and to support them with extratextual devices such as hyperlinks, moreover they tend definitely to combine the functions of *agreement markers* and *contrastive markers*, thus re-orienting the topic by commenting or refusing part of it.

[10] **Q:** > ci vuole una faccia da chiulo non indifferente per inventarsi una
> pizza simile
> http://www.pizza.it/ricette/ricetta_week/Gennaio/pizza_capodanno.htm

A: Sulla pizza ci potete sbattere tutto quel che volete. È lo zampone precotto la mostruosità assoluta
0=-:-)

Q: > Eccone un'altra convinta che la pizza sia sacra e che Napoli ne sia la

¹² > **Q:** [...] the moment you are against stock farming and not against laboratories, you must consider the reasons. 1 It is not the same to kill an animal in order to make a sausage, a coat or a medicine out of it.

A: that is to say that: animals life has a different value depending on the convenience degree of mankind. How do you explain to children that killing animals in order to eat them is wrong while killing them looking for "a cure" is all right?

Q: > if you do not distinguish you just damage animalists.

A: **Yep, that's true.**

Q: > 'Cause it is clear the uselessness of killing an animal in order to have fur or steaks.

A: It seems to me that you are just looking for justifications, since you are supporting a scientific massacre but not an alimentary massacre.

Q: > If there is the chance to find some cure of any use to mankind many will agree.

A: Being on the side of vivisection you'll have a hard life: people will ask what kind of animalist you are, and you will have to say that you are not.

> Capitale...

A: Sono d'accordo anche su questo, la pizza, soprattutto quella bassa e croccante, non è altro che una mensa edibile, come una tortilla messicana o una piadina o una crepes. Un piatto su cui ci metti ciò che ti piace. Si potrebbe eccepire per la pizza spessa, che allora diventa una focaccia, ma questo è un altro discorso.

Ciao

XXX¹³

The prosecution of the conversation could easily then shift on the nature of the *focaccia* or the possible substitutes of the pizza.

According to Bazzanella's scale of agreement asking for explanation and correction is nearer to disagreement as it leaves out the intention of the speaker, that does not accord with his counterpart. In the following example, for instance, the poster delays his disagreement with a discursive marker (*senti maaaaaaa...*) introducing a challenging point, then he asks if the author is sure about what he said - may be he wanted to point out something else - and eventually he resorts to the expert's opinion, reporting his judgment. This is a typical example of how politeness in the NG community carries out disagreement, by disguising it as partial agreement.

[11] **Q:** > Scusate la mia ignoranza, Io avevo richiesto una ricetta di pesto di
> Basilico rosso, Io non sapevo che c'è il basilico di colore rosso, (Red
> Rubin Basil)
> e anche di colore blu (African Blue Basil), però quando si pesta non ha
> il colore rosso, per far il pesto il migliore è Sweet Basil Italian
> Large-Leaf.
> (Ho ricercato questo all'Università di Wisconsin Horticultural Dipartimento)

A: azzo... altro che la Massaciucmel University di Bologna... me cojoni!!!
qui adesso useremo i nomi botanici, visto che del basilico che abbiamo
non ce ne puo fregar di meno...

Senti maaaaaaa... Perozzo, **sei sicuro** di volere il pesto rosso con basilico
o non cercavi, **FORSE**, il pesto rosso alla siciliana, che il sempre grande

¹³ **Q:** > you must really have quite a brazen-face to invent such a pizza

> http://www.pizza.it/ricette/ricetta_week/Gennaio/pizza_capodanno.htm

A: One can put whatever he/she wants on a pizza. It is the precooked stuffed pig's trotter the ultimate monstrosity 0=-:-)

Q: > And here we have someone else convinced that pizza is sacred and Naples the capital of it...

A: I agree about this as well, the pizza, especially the thin and crispy one, it is nothing more than a food base, just like Mexican tortilla or Italian piadina or French crepe. A dish you can put whatever you like on. One could make an exception for thick pizza, but now again it becomes a focaccia and that's something else again.

Ciao

XXX

Sergio mi ha detto trattarsi di Capuliato alla trapanese... Capuliato, trito di carne, e per traslato anche di pomodori secchi, i quali danno il caratteristico sapore e consistenza al pesto rosso...¹⁴

A similar strategy involving clarifying requests displays an opposite procedure, though obtaining the same final effect: instead of implying the poster's erroneousess, the writer explicitly mentions a comprehension trouble, caused by the imprecision of the expressed idea. This is a further stage of the scale, getting closer and closer to overt disagreement:

[12] **Q:** >Un punto fermo di fine giornata lavorativa,

A: Non capisco.

Anch'io fui singolo, ma la sera, che a mezzogiorno a casa non rientravo ma neanche mangiavo, mi nutrivo solamente daltronde come adesso, il pensare di DOVERMI mettere a cucinare era un tormento; quante volte pane e mortadella e via a letto a leggere.

[...]

Ciao

XXX¹⁵

Indeed the interaction can determine a change of course, introducing reparation moves and an unconditional *no* can make over into a reparation and finally in an agreement assessment.

[13] **Q1:** >> [...] scopo la comunicazione di "messaggi" ben più ampi dell'oggetto in se. non penso che tu ne abbia paura (perchè mai?), ma come ti ho detto in queste cose credo che ogniuno abbia il proprio punto di vista esclusivo e ogni ragionamento finisca per essere fine a se stesso.

¹⁴ **Q:** > Sorry for my ignorance, I asked a recipe the red pesto, I didn't know there is red basil, (Red > Rubin Basil)

> and even blue (African Blue Basil), but when you grind it, it isn't red, to make the best pesto you should use' Sweet Basil Italian

> Large-Leaf.

> (I searched this at the Horticultural department of the University of Wisconsin)

A: shit... you bet! Massaciucmel University of Bologna... oh my balls!!! Now we're going to use botanic names, as we don't care about basil...

liiiiiteen... Perozzo, are you sure you want the red pesto with basil or weren't you looking for, MAY BE, sicilian red pesto, that the great Sergio told me is like the Trapani Capuliato... Capuliato, minced meat, and dry tomatoes as well, that give the characteristic flavour and consistency to the red pesto...

¹⁵ **Q:** >An anchor at the end of a working day,

A: I do not understand.

I've been single as well, but in the evening, at lunch time I never came home and I didn't even use to eat, I used to feed myself as I do now, thinking of HAVING TO cook was a torture; so many times bread and mortadella and directly to bed.

[...]

Ciao

XXX

Q2: > **No**, io più che altro ho inteso che tu forse hai paura del “campo minato”, ossia quel campo sul quale tutti possono avere pareri discordanti senza che nessuno debba veramente avere torto o ragione. **Sbaglio? penso di no!**

A: **ah scusa non avevo capito! Hai proprio ragione mi fai paura!!** Ma ricordati che secondo me invece é proprio questo tipo di discorsi (paragoni tra vino, arte e filosofia anche spicciola), che spesso nascono davanti ad un bicchiere di vino, 1 Io non faccio mai paragoni tra vino ed arte (oltretutto di arti grafiche e scultoriche non capisco una mazza) , men che meno tra vino e filosofia, purtroppo ho poco tempo per studiarla, ma de-testo quella spicciola¹⁶.

Johnstone (1989) lists three types of persuasive strategies: quasilogic (persuasion can be achieved by using a type of informal reasoning); presentation (moving and involving the listener in order to persuade); persuasion (calling to mind traditional wisdom), exploring our multilingual suit of corpora it can be noticed how the use of these schemes are largely culture-, gender- and language-specific.

English speaking users, for example, tend to employ a well defined range of disagreeing patterns combining the quasi logic and the presentation strategy and obtaining as a result a level of faded agreement that in the end turns to be disagreement. In particular the routine gets going from a simple quoting device, the next turn repair initiators indicate that the speaker of the NTRI is about to disagree and the argumentative moves aim to turn the expression into total disagreement following the sequence quoting – agreement – adversative preposition.

[14] **Q:** > It is polite, and safer, to credit the source of the publication, as you do in the recipes following your post, >which puts one in the same position as a reviewer. Reviews are specifically exempted by copyright rules

A: I agree. But frankly I get fed up with the way that every time someone does something positive in this NG, there are always a bunch of whinging twits who find some excuse to criticise.

[15] Even Madhur Jaffrey on the cooking programme about fast food today (Saturday) stated that ‘they’ (Indian restaurants) cooked anything and called it Rogan Josh. Sadly, **I agree with her, but** widen the dishes to incorporate

¹⁶ **Q1:** >> [...] aim of the communication in “messages” longer then their object. I don’t think you fear them (why then?), but as I told you I think every one has his own point of view and each reasoning eventually becomes an end in itself.

Q2: > **No**, rather I understood you are afraid of the “mined field”, that is to say that field in which any one can have different opinions, even if no one is really right or wrong. **Am I wrong? I don’t think so no!**

A: **ah sorry I didn’t understand! you’re right, you scare me!!** But remember, I think it’s exactly this kind of conversations (comparisons between wine, arts and simple philosophy), that often start in front of a glass of wine, I never compare wine and arts (besides this I do not understand a shit of graphic and sculptural arts) , even less wine and philosophy, unfortunately I have little time to study it, but I hate the small one.

ALL dishes they cook! When I have cooked RJ for the uninitiated (into good Indian cuisine) there is always a period of silence

These features are to be found both in Italian and in English, as well as in German, though they seem to be more common in the latter. Herring (1992) considers these pattern of disagreement to be typical of female posters, our results though seem to withdraw hers, they seem to be rather a regular and recursive structure more language specific than gender specific. A possible explanation could be the existence of an informal Netiquette unwittingly acquired by the community or the sense of belonging to this community itself, as one does not want to be impolite towards a "Net mate".

As for the strategies to introduce disagreement through partial agreement, unlike Italian, English makes full use of modals and conditionals both to express dissent and to set up new themes in the discourse progression.

[16] Mr X does not get the expected result, and may be put off trying again. It's perfectly fair to sell the stuff as "chilli seasoning", because that is not the exact name of another common ingredient. I checked with our local TS, and they said they would investigate a complaint such as this. 1 And I'm quite sure they'd reach the same conclusion as I have. **Now if the ingredients weren't clearly labelled I'd agree with you, but they are, and I simply can't see a problem with it.**

[17] **Q:** >> Bitter? Lime pickle should be hot and sour. (Probably overkill with something like a vindaloo.) yes, lime pickle is bitter like other citrus fruits, (but it does mellow on maturing, so may be perceived by some as sour), green or unripe mango is sour (like pomegranate). There is the difference.

A: It may be a difference between different people's interpretations, but **I would *never* class** a citrus fruit as "bitter". **I would say** that lemon (juice) is the quintessence of 'bitter'. Possibly because any bitterness that is there is swamped by the effect of the acid. so what is acid if it is not bitter, have we got our wires crossed? Is vinegar not bitter?, acetic acid? Other people may not get that effect. well either you or I have an atypical opinion on what is what!! but **I would agree** that people's perceptions on food are different, that is what makes me like pukka Indian food, and others like 'Indian restaurant food', (unless they haven't tried the pukka stuff yet!) cheers WXXX

5. Gender related agreement/disagreement

Social rules have to be taken into account even when talking about CMD, male and female posters are supposed to follow different discursive patterns, just as they do in spoken discourse, both in the way they structure the message and quote passages, in the way they express (dis)agreement, and in the way they select the content of their messages. It seems that

traditional gender stereotypes can be reified even when people believe they are freely choosing their online gender identity in non traditional ways.

Agreement and disagreement strategies can display the different features of the so called “genderlects”: as Herring (1995) points out, women often disagree by cushioning their disagreements with affiliative comments, posting questions rather than making assertions, whereas men use an adversarial style.

Baym (1996) investigates agreement and disagreement patterns in a mostly female newsgroup. The disagreement patterns she discovered matched those suggested by Pomerantz (1975), but some major differences emerged due to the medium, gender, context, and interactive goals: disagreements included quoting, were linked to previous discourse and had pervasive elaboration. Interestingly, accounts and justifications emerged with agreements, and not with disagreements, as the notion of preference predicts.

The tendency for women to be more polite, supportive and emotionally expressive, and conversely the one of men to be more likely to insult, challenge, express sarcasm, use profanity, and send long messages is confirmed by all the examples we have been giving through this contribution. So far we have found long messages (according to Herring 1993 an evidence of the writer’s gender) where contributors use to dwell on the subject displaying an authoritative orientation, using strong assertions and sarcasm. On the contrary female posters can in theory be identified with a stylistic variety characterized by personal orientation, attenuation, questions and justification (Herring 1993).

In the following exchange the difference of gender is plain: on the one hand a woman commenting a recipe, on the other hand a man criticising the woman’s knowledge of ingredients, stressing her inexperience by the use of capital letters (elsewhere in [2] negatively judged by participants as a sign of impoliteness).

[18] **Q1:** >>> Proverò a sostituire la fecola con l’amido di mais (sospettavo che >>> fossero intercambiabili, ma aspettavo che lo dicesse qualcun altro per primo), casomai poi solo farina

Q2: >>Maizena e amido di mais NON sono intercambiabili... sono la stessa cosa! Maizena è, infatti, un marchio commerciale che indica UNA MARCA di amido di mais. Puoi usare anche fecola di patate e amido per dolci. Anche sola farina, ovvio, con il risultato di avere però una torta più pesante. :-)

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Q3: > Ma mi sa che lei intendesse come intercambiabili amido di mais e fecola...

> se non ho capito male..

A: Evvabbuò... ho fatto l’ennesima figura mia! Ecchessarà mai!!! Una più, una meno... ;-)))¹⁷

¹⁷ **Q1:** >>> I’ll try to substitute the potato flour with maize starch (I guessed they were the same thing, but I was waiting for someone to tell me), just in case only flour

This example shows how women are discouraged or intimidated from participating on the basis of the reactions with which their posts are met when they do contribute. Male are generally more likely than women to produce bald, unmitigated disagreeing, though this does not mean they always agree, but they use to express disagreement indirectly, off-record, using intraturn delays, hedges, and pre-disagreement tokens, which are generally followed by using weak disagreements. Even when they are verbally aggressed as in [18] they try to avoid direct confrontation, they rather try to mitigate the exchange seeking for reparation.

Verbal aggressiveness comes to have a different significance for women than for men; as Coates (1986) observes, women are apt to take personal offence at what men may view as part of the conventional structure of conversation.

In the following example the attitude of the man answering the message is rather accommodating, but the repetition of the NP and the appellative “stellina” might offend the woman, treating her as an unacquainted child.

[19] **Q:** >**Semola**, DXX. **Semola** di grano duro (venduta anche come *sfarinato di grano duro*).

A: No, **stellina**; **semolino-semolino**, quello che si usa per fare le pappe ai microbimbini, che ha la grana simile a quella dalla farina di mais bramata bergamasca, che viene venduto in pacchettini da 250/500 g o sfuso da sacchi da 50 kg. proprio quello, addizionato di circa un 20 % di quella che viene venduta come semola di granoduro ma che a me sembra proprio **farina-farina** di grano duro. Fo molti errori, moltissimi di questi molti sono voluti, gli altri sono caz....uali, ma in questo caso giustissimo fui.¹⁸

6. Conclusion

In this contribution we have been trying to shed light on a genre of computer mediated discourse that has not been fully explored by discourse analysis yet. NGs offer an environment where people engage in socially meaningful activities online in a way that typically leaves a

Q2: >> maize starch and maizena are NOT interchangeable... they are the same thing! Maizena is a brand, kind of maize starch. You can use the potato flour and starch for cakes as well. Even the simple flour, of course, obtaining although a cake a little bit heavier. :-)

Q3: > I thought she was meaning interchangeable maize starch and potato flour...
> if I understood...

A: Ockey dockey... I made again a fool of myself! So what!!! Just one more... ;-)))

¹⁸ **Q:** >**Semolina**, DXX. **Semolina** of durum wheat (also known as *flour of durum wheat*).

A: No, **little star**; **middlings-middlings**, the one you use to make babyfood, that is similar to the maize meal from Bergamo, that is sold in 250/500 g packets or by measure 50 kg sack. Exactly that one, with a 20 % of what is sold as semolina of durum wheat but looks like **flour-flour** of durum wheat. I do a lot of mistakes, some of them are deliberate, others are caz... ual, but this time really right I was.

textual trace, making the discursive interactions more accessible to the analysis and to the observation. In particular, agreeing and disagreeing routines have proved to be an interesting aspect of CMD to be further investigated. Our findings partially contradict the previous results of gender related discourse analysis, in particular we found out that some routines, such as the procedure of showing agreement first to object afterwards in the prosecution of the discourse, seems to be more language specific and culture related than a distinction based on genre.

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