



Claiming epistemic access: *eh* *ciò*-prefaced turns in Trevigiano and in regional Italian[☆]



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ABSTRACT

This conversation analytic study describes the interactional uses of *ciò* [ʧo], a pragmatic particle that is used both in the regional Italian spoken in Veneto (a region of northeastern Italy) and in Trevigiano (*Trevixàn* [treviˈzɑŋ]), an Italo-Romance variety widely used in the Treviso area. Preliminary results show that *ciò* (derived from the imperative form of the verb *ciór/tòr* [ʧor]/[tɔr] 'to take') is mostly used as a preface in responsive position and is frequently preceded by the particle *eh*. In our data, the (*eh*) *ciò*-prefaced turns are designed as general, objective, obvious contributions through which participants provide a wider perspective on the topic while treating the preceding talk as defective or not dealing with relevant aspects of the subject under discussion. This study contributes to the documentation of linguistic forms that are used by speakers of an Italo-Romance variety as conversational resources in talk-in-interaction.

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1. Introduction

Modern Italian, the descendant of a Romance vernacular spoken in medieval central Tuscany, is nowadays articulated in a range of regional varieties with specific morpho-syntactic, lexical and phonetic features (regional Italians, '*italiani regionali*'; cf. D'Agostino, 2012). Simultaneously, a multiplicity of other Italo-Romance varieties known as *dialetti* ('dialects'; cf. Maiden and Parry, 1997) are still commonly spoken throughout the country. Against a background where many of these local varieties seem to be losing ground, the Venetan dialects (Venetian or Eastern; Central; Western; Northern; cf. Zamboni, 1974: 9) represent a partial exception, as their use, in a largely bilingual community, is still widespread. According to a recent report by the Italian National Institute of Statistics ('Istituto Nazionale di Statistica'; ISTAT, 2017), in 2015 these dialects were still used by 62% of the population in family conversations, one of the highest rates in Italy. It has also been found that being a competent speaker of one of the Venetan varieties facilitates immigrants' integration, as its knowledge may be crucial both in the workplace and in the everyday life of local communities (De Carlo, 2010). In a situation characterized by diglossia and prolonged language contact, it is no wonder that code-switching and code-mixing (Auer, 2011) in the Veneto region are ubiquitous phenomena, as our data show. This study focuses on the word *ciò*, a particle frequently used in conversations that take place both in regional Italian and in Trevigiano (or *Trevixàn* [treviˈzɑŋ]), even by speakers who do not have the local

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dialect as their first language. Regardless of the language in which the conversation occurs, the presence of *ciò* can be explained by the fact that pragmatic particles are particularly prone to borrowing in situations of language contact (Fiorentini, 2017; Matras, 1998).

This paper presents the uses of (*eh*) *ciò*¹ in turn-initial position as a conversational resource used by participants for practical purposes in talk-in-interaction, both in regional Italian and in the dialect spoken in the Treviso area. More specifically, (*eh*) *ciò*-prefaced turns convey the speaker's knowledgeable stance, contributing to the local management of epistemic relations between participants.

In the following section (2), we will offer an overview of the studies on discourse particles within the tradition of conversation analysis (henceforth CA). Then, we will introduce the epistemic domain as a primordial dimension for the management of information through (*eh*) *ciò*-prefaced turns (3). Before introducing our data (5) and presenting our analyses (6), we will review previous work on *eh* and *ciò* as pragmatic particles in spoken Italian and Venetan (4).

2. An interactional approach to pragmatic particles and turn-beginnings

A considerable CA-informed literature on turn-initial resources labeled as discourse markers, discourse particles or pragmatic particles has been growing since the 1980s. Descriptions from different theoretical perspectives (for a review, cf. Heritage and Sorjonen, 2018: 2–4) focus on a vast range of linguistic forms in several languages. These linguistic resources are of great interest to researchers who study language use in everyday interactions and, more specifically, the coherence relations between segments of talk. They can also indicate alignment and misalignment between interactants (Couper-Kuhlen and Selting, 2018: 506–511), and help building different social and situation-related identities (Bolden, 2006).

There is still little unanimity among scholars as to which items to include or leave out from this category, and this lack of agreement reflects in the wide variety of labels that have been used to categorize them. Despite the plurality of approaches, there seems to be consensus around some basic features of pragmatic particles, such as their metadiscursive functions and their lack of propositional content. Also, they are usually weakly linked to the syntactic structure of the sentence (Aijmer and Simon-Vanderbergen, 2006) and can index both contiguity and discontinuity between courses of action (Bolden, 2015). In this paper we draw on a conversation analytic approach, which differs from others in that it is data-driven and it relies on audio/video recordings of naturally occurring interactions. From a methodological viewpoint, this approach adopts an emic perspective. As Seedhouse puts it,

[w]hat CA means by an emic perspective [...] is not merely the participants' perspective, but the perspective from within the sequential environment in which the social actions were performed. Here the interactants talk their social world into being by employing the context-free interactional architecture in context-sensitive ways. (2005: 252)

The use of pragmatic particles is therefore described within the sequential environments in which turns at talk are produced and is rooted in the trajectories of participants' social actions.

The particle we examine in this article – *ciò*, often preceded by the particle *eh* – tends to occur at the beginning of the turn, i.e. at the junction between the preceding and the incipient turn (Heritage and Sorjonen, 2018: 1–2). This position provides the coparticipant(s) with valuable indications about the shape and type of the turn in progress. Crucially, turn beginnings start revealing the analysis of the prior speaker's turn by the current speaker:

[Turn-beginnings] project a 'shape' for the turn, and they are in that respect potentially critical elements for speaker's recipients, who, in having to analyze the turn as it develops, may need the turn beginning resources as part of the materials for their analysis. (Schegloff, 1987: 74)

Sacks et al. (1974) proposed a three-part structure of turns: “one which addresses the relation of a turn with a prior, one involved with what is occupying the turn, and one which addresses the relation of the turn to a succeeding one” (722). This entails that, aside from the core TCU (Turn-Constructional Unit), turns may be prefaced by linguistic elements – such as (*eh*) *ciò* – that convey the participants' stance in relation to prior actions, thus serving broad discourse marking purposes (Lindström, 2006: 84). Such *appositional beginnings* (Sacks et al., 1974: 719) are different in nature with respect to other non-linguistic resources (such as inbreaths, sniffs, sighs, lip and tongue smacks, as well as other clicks) that participants may employ to project incipient speakership (Schegloff, 1996: 92), to delay the realization of relevant answers (Torreia et al., 2015) or turn progression (Hoey, 2020). The linguistic resources that occupy the initial slot of a turn are particularly interesting as one of the most striking expressions of the progressivity of talk-in-interaction, where every turn at talk constitutes a response to the preceding turn but also the background for subsequent actions (Heritage, 1984: 242).

3. Knowledge in interaction

Information in everyday interaction is a persistent issue for participants: it is constantly followed, checked and inspected, and has important implications in terms of action formation, in that knowledge imbalances between participants prompt and

¹ We have chosen this type of representation (namely (*eh*) *ciò*) because, as we will explain later on, not all occurrences contain the particle *eh*, but all the cases analyzed are homogeneous as regards the type of action carried out by the speakers.

advance sequences of actions (Heritage, 2014: 388). The epistemic access to a domain or territory of information (Kamio, 1997) can be considered “as stratified between interactants such that they occupy different positions on an epistemic gradient (more knowledgeable [K+] or less knowledgeable [K–])” (Heritage, 2012: 4). The epistemic status of participants depends on their positioning relative to a specific information domain at a given moment. In other words, the epistemic positionings of the participants are not defined once for all, but vary from domain to domain and over time, emerging from the interactional contributions of the people involved (Heritage, 2012).

Among the practices that participants mobilize to position themselves towards the topic under discussion there are “formulations”, a wide range of meta-communicative descriptions in conversation: “We shall speak of conversationalists’ practices of saying-in-so-many-words-what-we-are-doing [or what we are talking about, or who is talking, or who we are, or where we are] as formulating” (Garfinkel and Sacks, 1970: 351). In this paper, the type of formulations we will analyze consist of “glossing practices” (Heritage and Watson, 1979: 160) that are linked back to some versions or aspects of prior talk. Such practices index the epistemic access to specific events or states of affairs, on which a participant sheds new light. The subjects talked about by the participants in the excerpts examined in our collection can be classified either as AB-events (Labov and Fanshel, 1977: 100), i.e. facts known to both coparticipants as shared experiences and/or as parts of common knowledge, or as A-events (Labov and Fanshel, 1977), i.e. autobiographical facts known to A (the teller) but not to B (the recipient who produces the *(eh) ciò*-prefaced response).

Our analyses show that *(eh) ciò* turn-prefaces are conversational resources that are resorted to for practical purposes both in Trevisano and in the Italian variety spoken in the Veneto region. In particular, *(eh) ciò*-prefacing projects the participants’ stance conveyed by their incipient turns vis-à-vis the actions brought about by prior speakers. Through their *(eh) ciò*-prefaced turns participants treat prior contributions as not fully noteworthy or not dealing with facets that are potentially relevant for the understanding of the topic at stake. In doing so, they assume a K+ position (Heritage, 2012). In addition, *(eh) ciò*-prefaced turns invoke the speaker’s own view on the subject at hand, signaling that a possible epistemic discrepancy (Heritage and Raymond, 2005) between participants could be in the making.

4. *eh* and *ciò*: previous studies

Previous research has not yet dealt with the use of the particle *ciò* in ordinary conversations from an interactional perspective, but a few studies have shed light on relevant sociolinguistic aspects related to both its historical evolution and its actual functions in discourse. Marcato and Ursini (1998: 289) describe *ciò* as the outcome of the development of the form *tiò* ([tjɔ]), from the verb *tor* ([tɔr]), ‘to take’ (cf. Lat. *tollere*), with a shift over time to a palatal articulation of ‘t’. The authors observe that the relationship between *ciò* and the verb *tor* is far from being obvious for today’s speakers of Venetan, while the link between the imperative form and *ciò* as a particle is more transparent in those varieties (e.g. Buranello, spoken in Burano, or Northern Trevisano) that have *cior* ([tʃɔr]) as infinitive verb form. Penello and Chinellato (2008) address this topic from a sociolinguistic angle. For the purpose of their study, the researchers created a number of isolated sentences that were submitted to informants for their acceptability judgment. In this variationist study, *ciò* is described as a vocative and an interjection that can appear in pre- and post-phrasal positions, but also as a stand-alone particle. When employed as an interjection, *ciò* can express surprise, confirmation, doubt, resignation, indignation and desire, while the vocative *ciò* serves to get someone’s attention (Penello and Chinellato, 2008: 112). In their study, based on forged examples and acceptability questionnaires submitted to informants living in different provinces of the Veneto region, the authors conclude that the range of functions performed by the particle is highest in the central area, corresponding to the Venetian hinterland, while it tends to decrease towards the western and northern edges of the territory. In a recent study, Pauletto and Ursi (2021) show that *ciò* does not just occupy the left or right margins of the turn, but is also attested in the middle of the turn – as preface of a new TCU – preceded by subordinating (*perché*; ‘because’) or coordinating (either *ma* or *però*; ‘but’) conjunctions. On the other hand, *ciò* as a stand-alone particle is not attested and its occurrence in turn-final position is also rare, while in a large number of cases the particle is preceded by other elements, being *eh* the most frequent. Finally, the use of *ciò* as a summoning resource (the vocative *ciò* mentioned by Penello & Chinellato) is not attested in Pauletto and Ursi’s data.

Previous research has not dealt much with the pragmatic particle *eh*, a pan-Italian linguistic resource. However, there are some illuminating studies on its use in spoken Italian. Poggi (1981) offers a functional analysis of *eh* as an interjection, identifying four different variants: a declarative *eh*, expressing general alignment, an interrogative *eh* used as a tag question, an intermediate *eh* that is neither declarative nor interrogative, and an interrogative *eh* that responds to troubles of hearing and/or understanding (cf. Drew, 1997 on “open” class repair initiators as first-pair parts of an adjacency pair, within a repair sequence). Dascalu Jinga and Vanelli (1996) differentiate instead between three types of *eh*, according to the placement of the particle within the utterance: (a) an isolated *eh* (which does backchannelling by confirming, agreeing or requesting for repetition), (b) a pre-sentential *eh* (mitigating or intensifying the illocutionary force of the sentence) and (c) a post-sentential *eh* that requests confirmation. Finally, De Stefani (2010) distinguishes between a stand-alone and a TCU-initial *eh*, both treated as resources for implementing various social actions. In his study, the stand-alone variant is always dealt with by the coparticipant(s) as a complete contribution to the ongoing exchange. In this configuration, *eh* can be deployed as a next-turn repair initiator (Schegloff et al., 1977), or as a second-pair part expressing general agreement. Furthermore, the stand-alone *eh* can be used in responsive position either as a continuer (Schegloff, 1982) or as a second assessment (Pomerantz, 1984). The TCU-initial variant is interesting from our standpoint in that, according to De Stefani, it can display alignment but it also prefaces turns expressing epistemic claims.

Unlike previous studies on *ciò*, the current research is based on recordings of naturally occurring interactions, i.e. phone calls and ordinary conversations, taking place between native speakers of Trevigiano and/or the Italian variety spoken in the Treviso area. Furthermore, the focus of the research will not be so much on the *functions* of the particles themselves, as on the *courses of action* that the speakers implement through the recourse to these specific linguistic resources in talk-in-interaction (cf. Goodwin, 1995; Schegloff, 1996).

5. Method and data

Conversation analysis has highlighted the basic mechanisms of spontaneous interactions, which proceed by sequences of actions (Sacks et al., 1974). This means that a speaker's turn at talk projects a series of expectations onto the next speaker's turn. For example, a polar question makes relevant a type-conforming answer as next action (Raymond, 2003), while an offer projects acceptance or rejection as suitable responses. These minimal sequences are known in the CA literature as *adjacency pairs* (Sacks and Schegloff, 1973), tying structures (Sacks, 1995 vol. 1: 540) in which a first turn at talk (first-pair part) makes the delivery of a specific response (second-pair part) conditionally relevant (Schegloff, 1968). The analytical part of this article is based on this sort of observations, and relies on the way participants treat turns as social actions within larger sequences.

This study is based on two different corpora: five family dinner conversations with a total of ten participants, and a corpus of 233 ordinary mobile phone calls recorded between June 2016 and May 2020, involving thirty five speakers. The phone calls take place either in Trevigiano (*Trevixàn* [trevi'zan]) or in regional Italian, with frequent code-mixing phenomena between (regional) Italian and the local dialect. The cases that will form the empirical basis of our study were transcribed following the conventions used in the conversation analytic tradition (Jefferson, 2004). Our collection contains 115 instances of the particle *ciò*, which appear in a variety of positions within the turn. More than half of them occur turn-initially (58 instances), alone or in combination with other particles, *eh* being by far the most frequent (46 instances). In our data, *ciò* is regularly placed after the accompanying particles. In almost one third of the cases, *ciò* appears within the turn (36 instances), while 16 times it is the only component of the turn (always preceded by *eh*). We have only three examples of *ciò* appearing in turn-final position. The present study will consider both *ciò* and *eh ciò* as part of turns occurring in second (i.e., responsive) position, which represent the vast majority of cases within our corpus.²

Our data show a clear distinction between two uses of (*eh*) *ciò*-prefaced turn. The first one concerns the negotiation of agreement in sequential contexts where a coparticipant dis/agrees with the action produced in first position (6.1). The second sequential context concerns the formulation proposed by a coparticipant in relation to a personal experience described and/or recounted by the first participant (6.2). In both cases, coparticipants show epistemic access to the event(s) previously mentioned through their (*eh*) *ciò*-prefaced turn.

6. Analyses

In this section, seven extracts from both informal phone calls and face-to-face ordinary conversations will be analyzed to highlight the different social actions carried out by participants while discussing a topic that is accessible to all of them. In our collection, (*eh*) *ciò*-prefaced turns realize two conversational practices: they introduce either a new claim within an argumentative structure, which serves to negotiate agreement (6.1), or a formulation that provides a succinct elaboration from a previously reported state of affairs (6.2). In both cases, epistemic accessibility to an event or state of affairs is indexed by participants who produce *ciò*-prefaced turns in response to coparticipants' turns. On a more general note, (*eh*) *ciò*-prefaced turns illustrate the notion of progressivity in talk-in-interaction (Stivers and Robinson, 2006; Schegloff, 1979) insofar as they embody responsive actions carried out by co-participants. Hence, they contribute to the advancement of the ongoing sequence by preventing either the production of a multi-unit turn by the current speaker or the closure of the sequence through a minimal response.

6.1. Negotiating agreement and epistemic access through (*eh*) *ciò*-prefaced turns

The following extracts have in common the argumentative nature³ of the exchange between participants, as in the case of the first excerpt, where Piero, a mechanic, is giving Manlio a detailed report about the repairs made to Manlio's brother's car:

Ex. 1 (Manlio 32; Ma = Manlio; Pi = Piero) (phone call; Trevigiano)⁴

01 Pi sì (mi) ghe vée dita e:::hi inietori dopo par l'amor
yes (I) told him e:::h the injectors then God
02 de dio:: col: col tempo no- no lo so:: parché te sa
forbid with with time I do- I don't know because you know

² There are indeed some cases of (*eh*) *ciò*-prefaced turns in third position, but these will be analyzed in a future ad hoc study. No occurrences were found in those turns at talk which constitute the first part of an adjacency pair.

³ Argumentation in talk-in-interaction is triggered by disagreement or claim of opposition, which are "related to the projection, production and resolution of such a disagreement" (Spranz-Fogasy, 2002: 233), and result in sequence expansions (cf. Jacobs and Jackson, 1989; Antaki, 1994; Wirđenäs, 2002). However, the first of the four extracts analyzed in this section could be described in Wirđenäs' terms as an *argumentative sequence without opposition*. This definition describes sequences in which participants argue in favor of the same point of view (2002: 72).

03 però:per adesso te dixe⁵, (1.3) problemi xero insoma.
 but so far I tell you (1.3) zero problems I mean.
 04 (0.2) sì,=(no se hapi creà) nessun problema.
 (0.2) yeah,=(there hasn't been) any problem.
 05 (0.3)
 06 Ma ben=ben dai. anca eù, (0.5) co chea machina eà nol ghe ne
 good good PRT. he too (0.5) with that car he can't get
 07 vien mai fora=heheheh,
 out of it=heheheh,
 08 (0.2)
 09 Pi e:::h,
 10 (0.2)
 11 Pi [(eh porét)]
 PRT poor guy
 => 12 Ma ciò [co le scomin]sia a deventar vece l'é un problema eh?
 PRT when they start getting older it's a problem huh?
 13 (0.3)
 => 14 Pi eh ciò co te passi i duxentomía te sa che,
 PRT PRT when you pass two hundred thousand kilometers you know that,
 15 (.)
 16 Ma e=he::[: ,
 17 Pi [ié tante robete da: ,
 it's a lot of little things to,
 18 (0.9)
 19 Ma i é tuti rega[eàì do]po.
 that's just a bonus afterwards.
 20 Pi [(risòlver)]
 (solve)
 21 (0.6)
 22 Pi eh=heheheh

At the beginning of the excerpt, Piero is reporting on his last intervention on the car and details a situation that for the present is not problematic at all, as far as the injectors are concerned (l. 01, 03–04), although that might change in the future (l. 01–02). In line 06 and 07, Manlio responds by producing a multi-unit turn: he first acknowledges the mechanic's report with a positive assessment ('*ben=ben dai*'), then produces a general characterization of the troublesome car that is designed as a laughable (Glenn, 2003) and a candidate for affiliation.⁶ By proposing this broader view on his brother's car (l. 06–07), which reframes the situation outlined at the beginning by the mechanic (l. 03), Manlio provides an epistemic recalibration on the matter. Piero indeed aligns ('*e:::h*'; l. 09; cf. De Stefani, 2010) and produces a minimal, affiliative assessment targeting the car's owner ('*eh porét*'; l. 11). Seeking for affiliation, Manlio delivers a diagnostic turn that accounts for the problematic state of his brother's car through a generalization (line 12; note the use of plural forms: '*ciò co le scominsia a deventar vece l'é un problema eh?*'). The turn is formatted as a *ciò*-prefaced declarative clause, followed by a tag question in turn-final position that projects a confirmation (Couper-Kuhlen and Selting, 2018: 238–241) as next relevant action. By doing this, Manlio positions himself as someone who is at least partially knowledgeable but still subordinate versus the recipient (Heritage and Raymond, 2005: 20). The *ciò*-prefaced turn is deployed by Manlio to bring up a feature that was not accounted for in Piero's report, although being available to him. After a short gap (l. 13), Piero self-selects, producing a multi-unit (*eh*) *ciò*-prefaced turn that partially recycles and reformulates (Garfinkel and Sacks, 1970) Manlio's turn (l. 14 and 17). The reference to a specialized knowledge domain, namely a concrete mileage as a crucial dividing point for car reliability ('*eh ciò co te passi i duxentomía te sa che*,'; l. 14), conveys the speaker's professional take on the topic and positions him as fully knowledgeable (K+, according to the terminology proposed by Heritage, 2012). Interestingly, the turn is temporarily suspended (l. 14; '*(...) te sa che*,') but is nevertheless acknowledged by Manlio (l. 16). Piero then resumes his turn with a delayed completion (Lerner, 1989), which is again an unfinished TCU (l. 17; '*i é tante robete da:*'). Subsequently, Manlio delivers his own completion of the multi-unit turn initiated by Piero by recycling the same syntactic structure '*i é: they are*' ('*i é tuti regaèi dopo*'; l. 19) to deliver a figurative expression (Drew and Holt, 1998) that summarizes the topic and projects its closure. Then, Piero produces the syntactic completion ('*risòlver*'; line 20) of his own unfinished turn (see line 17), in overlap with Manlio's turn. Piero's action is acknowledged in the following turn by the mechanic's laughter, which brings this sequence to an end (l. 22).

Two aspects need to be highlighted here: on the one hand, the recourse to the mechanic's specific technical background that readjusts the participants' relative epistemic positioning (Heritage, 2012); on the other hand, the way the sequence is built, through the emergence of agreement and the collaborative moves of the participants. In particular, the latter are

⁴ An English translation is provided in italics. All names of people and places in the transcripts are pseudonyms.

⁵ The letter 'x' represents the phoneme /z/.

⁶ The term *affiliation* describes here "actions with which a recipient displays that s/he supports the affective stance expressed by the speaker for example in the environment of a troubles-telling" (Lindström and Sorjonen, 2013: 351).

⁷ Northern Italian dialects have obligatory subject clitics (cf. Poletto, 2000) connected to the syntactic subject of the inflected verb: in this case, 'le' corresponds to the feminine third person plural (*they*, i.e. 'cars').

achieved through the insertion of specific syntactic resources at TCU junctures (Lerner, 1991), as part of a specific action trajectory that presents a bird's eye view on the topic. Participants co-construct a problematic picture by switching from the current situation (the injectors that have been fixed) to an uncertain future (more problems will be likely to occur because of the high mileage of the car) through a smooth argumentative process. The relevance of relative knowledgeability, access and rights to a specific domain of information (Kamio, 1997; Heritage, 2012) is thus paramount.

The relationship between the action implemented by a (*eh*) *ciò*-prefaced turn and the participants' relative access to a domain is again apparent in the next excerpt, where Rosa and Manlio, work colleagues and union representatives, are discussing some sensitive issues in view of an upcoming meeting:

Ex. 2 (Manlio 18; Ma = Manlio; Ro = Rosa) (phone call; Trevigiano)

- 01 Ro mi vojo dir ma- .hh a=e::::: e dinamiche poitiche da
I mean the political dynamics from
- 02 fòra che bisogna in RSU .hh esser, (0.7) velatamente
the outside that in a RSU⁸ you need to be (0.7) covertly
- 03 sempre in guèra parché ghe xe sta roba mi no a me piaxe,
always at war because there's this thing I don't like it
- 04 .hhhhh (0.2) parché dovèmo far squadra,=veramente
(0.2) because we need to team up,=we really
- 05 dovaréssimo far squadra anca co e altre organixassion.
should team up even with the other organizations
- 06 per[ò,
but,
- => 07 Ma [ciò::=e:::::h semo:::: na organixassion fata cossì
PRT=PRT we are an organization (that is) made like this
- => 08 che gà: tante anime=e:::::[::,
that has many souls and,
- 09 Ro [eh [sì son d'accordo.
PRT yeah I agree.
- 10 Ma [xe complicà::: eh,
it's complicated PRT,
- 11 (0.4) xe complicà::: (0.6) vègnerghene fòra
(0.4) it's complicated, (0.6) get out of it
- 12 parché::[::,
because,
- 13 Ro [eh s:e,
PRT yes
- 14 Ma e diferense e saría g- (.) e saría altre eh?
the differences would be g- (.) would be others huh?

During the phone call, Rosa and Manlio address various issues related to the lack of collaboration between members affiliated to different unions in their factory plant. Both colleagues have much the same access to this situation, which implies that they have a similar epistemic status (Heritage and Raymond, 2012). The extract begins with Rosa's complaint (l. 01–03), followed by the suggestion of an alternative/desirable scenario (l. 04–05). This wish is followed by the conjunction '*però*,' ('but,' l. 06), which has a contrastive value. Manlio then self-selects and utters a multi-unit turn. Instead of affiliating to Rosa's grievance (the preferred action that generally follows a trouble telling; cf. Drew and Holt, 1988: 410) or to the alternative scenario she proposes, Manlio produces a *ciò*-prefaced description of the organization that highlights its heterogeneous character ('*che gà: tante anime*'; l. 08), a matter of fact that has not been considered by Rosa. This action can be seen as a finely tuned one since it accounts for the foreseeable contrastive description projected by the last word pronounced by Rosa ('*però*,'). Manlio first produces a general statement ('*semo:::: na organixassion fata cossì*'; l. 07) and then appends an explicative relative clause (l. 08). In doing so, Manlio brings the coparticipant's attention to a distinctive feature of their organization, accessible to both of them but that Rosa did not bring up in her complaint. Indeed, she fully agrees with Manlio (l. 09), who then accounts for his point of view by offering his own interpretation on the subject (l. 10–12, 14). In overlap, Rosa expresses once more her explicit agreement (l. 13). Here, the development of this extended sequence can be analyzed in terms of an argumentative sequence involving two parties. In particular, through his *ciò*-prefaced turn, Manlio orients to Rosa's initial complaint as a defense of a claim and responds by formulating a counter-argument. Thus, what he does is proposing an alternative picture of the organization, treating Rosa's view – and her complaint – as not grounded in the actual situation.⁹

In the following extract, Maria Elena (ME) and her mother (ma) are talking about Maria Elena's mountain cottage:

Ex. 3 (Maria Elena = ME, and mamma = ma) (phone call; Italian, Trevigiano)

- 01 ME l'alternativa a quella l'unica alternativa che vedo io a
the alternative to that one the only alternative that I see to
- 02 quello .hhhhhè quello dell'Ikea che adesso che ho scoperto

⁸ RSU means *Rappresentanza Sindacale Unitaria*, 'Unitary Trade Union Representation'.

⁹ We want to thank an anonymous reviewer for highlighting the possibility of multiple interpretations.

that one .hhhhh is the Ikea one which now that I have found out
 03 che posso metterlo anche nell'altra posizione, .hhh invece
 that I can place it even in the other position, .hhh while
 04 >perch(é io) < e::h l'avevo pensato s:olo ed esclusivamente
 because I PRT I had conceived it only and exclusively
 05 .hhhh vicino alla finestra e lì più di un metro non puoi=
 .hhhh near the window and there more than a meter you can't
 06 ma [esa(to)]
 exactly
 07 ME =metterlo, .hhhh invece [:, (.) quel]li dell'Ikea ce n'è uno
 put it, .hhhh while, the Ikea ones there's one
 08 da un metro e venti:, .hhhhh cheè: di legno dipinto, (.)
 that is one twenty, .hhhh that is made of painted wood, (.)
 09 però i vól: trexento euro.=allora io non li volevo spendere
 but they want three hundred euros.=so I didn't want to spend
 10 quei soldi perché ogni vol[ta,]
 all that money because every time
 11 Ma [qua]nto voéveo?
 how much did he want?
 12 (0.2)
 13 ma quanti schéi voév(ei)?
 how much money did they want?
 14 ME trexento euro.
 three hundred euros.
 15 (1.2)
 => 16 Ma eh ciò (el xe u)n armadio ma el xe finío però no te
 PRT PRT it's a wardrobe but it's finished but you
 => 17 gavares[si da farghe gnente.]
 would have nothing else to do.
 18 ME [()] sì=sì::, .hhh però:::~::~
 yeah=yeah, .hhh but
 19 e:::~::~:h quello del- dell'Ikea appuntoè:: m:::~::~:
 PRT the- the Ikea one indeed is m:::~::~:
 20 (0.4) eh c'era sia rosso che azzurro:, .hhhh che sarebbero
 (0.4) PRT they had it both in red and blue, .hhhh which would be
 21 due colori che (però) non starebbero molto bene dentro
 two colors that would not fit inside (though)

Maria Elena (ME) has to furnish her mountain cottage and reports in detail to her mother the unsuccessful attempts to find a suitable wardrobe for the limited space at her disposal. In the previous sequence, not transcribed here, ME maintains that she first thought she could restore an existing wardrobe, an option now discarded for practical reasons. Having to dismiss the preferred choice, the only feasible solution seems to be the purchase of a new wardrobe that would be suitable for size and type of finish (l. 01–08). The drawback represented by the high price of the item is the reason for ME's announced decision ('però i vól: trexento euro.=allora io non li volevo spendere quei soldi'; l. 09–10). After a repair sequence that targets the price (l. 11–14), mother's (eh) *ciò*-prefaced response expresses a mild disagreement by bringing to ME's attention an overlooked advantage of this solution: the fact of not requiring any additional work on her part (l. 16–17). This aspect is accessible to both participants, but is brought up by ME's mother: her (eh) *ciò*-preface introduces a response that is not fully aligned in terms of preference, since the relatively high cost of the IKEA wardrobe is also presented as a complainable matter insofar as ME highlights its problematic nature (l. 09–10). ME's turn would in fact project support as well as affiliation as next relevant responses (Drew and Holt, 1988). ME produces an initial pro-forma agreement (line 18; cf. Schegloff, 2007) but she then argues against ma's proposed option because of a further shortcoming (l. 19–21).

In this extract we see that the (eh) *ciò*-prefaced responsive turn is mildly disaffiliative: a participant disagrees by referring to aspects of the previous turn that are part of common knowledge, but that have not been considered by the coparticipant and emerge as a new element in support of a possible solution. By highlighting the pros and cons of a possible solution (i.e. the purchase of an IKEA wardrobe), ME and her mum are here co-constructing an argumentative sequence.

In the next excerpt, we see that even overt disagreement may be expressed through a (eh) *ciò*-prefaced turn. Here, members of a large family are having dinner together. The conversation takes place in Trevigiano. The topic of the conversation is a long-dead uncle/brother-in-law who had a rather unhappy life. At the beginning of the conversation (not transcribed here), Anna expresses sorrow for Gino's circumstances, positively assessing his (wasted) intellectual potential. Strong disagreement is promptly expressed by her diners Manlio and Giancarlo.

Ex. 4 (cena 1: Féelo che?; Ma = Manlio; An = Anna; Gi = Giancarlo; Fl = Flavio) (dinner; Trevigiano)

01 An no ma díe che Gino [lo ha fat] par=
 no but I'm saying that Gino did it out
 02 Ma [()]
 03 An =forza di cose ma se lu dovesse siellierse un lavoro .hh
 of necessity but if he had had to choose a job
 04 nol se sielliéa de far el murèr.
 he wouldn't have chosen to be a construction worker.

05 (0.2)
=> 06 Ma eh ciò cossa féeo de quei ani là
PRT PRT what could have he possibly done at that time
=> 07 Ma nol [podea fa]r=
he couldn't have worked as
08 An [ma,]
but,
=> 09 Ma =l'impiegato eh,
an office worker PRT_i
10 (0.2)
11 Ma l'avea a quinta elementare anca lu [me (par a mi.)]
he too had only studied until fifth grade I think.
12 An [scolta Man]lio, (0.2)
listen Manlio, (0.2)
13 de questo capisse. però, (.) che lu (.) l'avesse pì
I know but that he (.) had more
14 pro- pr[o- m]:::.,
15 Fl [mhm:]
16 Pi [()]
17 Fl [propen↑s]i[o:n.]
propensity.
18 An [mhm:] par far na roba de u- de uficio che par
mhm to do some office stuff than to
19 far el murer,
work as a construction worker,
20 (.)
21 Gi ma in realtà no eh?
actually not huh?

Anna's initial turn (l. 01) consists of a multi-unit turn: she first rejects Manlio and Giancarlo's implication (Gino being wasted as a construction worker; data not transcribed here) with the preliminary component *no* (l. 01), and then repairs what retrospectively appears to be a misunderstanding (l. 01 and 03). After that, she establishes a hypothetical scenario in which Gino would have never made the decisions he actually made ('*ma se lu dovesse siellierse un lavoro .hh nol se siellia de far el murèr*'; l. 03–04). Manlio challenges Anna's claim through a (*eh*) *ciò*-prefaced rhetorical question (l. 06), a turn format through which he disputes prior claims and realizes a request for account (Koshik, 2003). He then makes an explicit negative assertion that questions Anna's claim as unwarranted (l. 07 and 09), and offers an account in support of his opinion (l. 11). Nevertheless, the disagreement is maintained, as Anna keeps her ground (l. 12–14, 18–19), making explicit her point of view with the assistance of Flavio (who aligns and offers the resolution of a word search; l. 17, '*propension*'). The sequence comes to an end when another coparticipant, Giancarlo, responds by fully disagreeing with her (l. 21). In this particular instance, Manlio claims a more knowledgeable status through his (*eh*) *ciò*-prefaced turn. He conveys a strong epistemic positioning by referring to actual facts (namely, Gino's poor educational background, l. 11) to which all the participants have equal access, but that have been disregarded by Anna. Here, the argumentative sequence between two parties, Anna and Manlio, results in an overtly displayed disagreement, whose opposing positions are consolidated.

As the analysis of the four excerpts so far analyzed has shown, (*eh*) *ciò*-prefaced turns allow participants to display their epistemic access to shared elements of the topic under discussion through generalizations (ex. 1 and 2) or evidence to which all participants have access. In excerpts 3 and 4, coparticipants position themselves vis-à-vis the subject being talked about by proposing new, specific arguments, which have not yet been considered. This action is accomplished in order to claim epistemic access, adjust epistemic positioning and assess the terms of agreement (Heritage and Raymond, 2005). This is done by resorting to a piece of information that is retrievable in prior talk (ex. 3) or accessible to all participants involved (ex. 4).

In all the cases analyzed, (*eh*) *ciò*-prefaced turns contribute to drawing the contour of an event or a state of affairs, while being part of an extended argumentative sequence.

Participants' positioning with respect to a given topic is particularly relevant when primary epistemic status is indexed and expressed not only through morphosyntactic resources (as is the case for epistemic stance; cf. Heritage, 2012), but also deploying specialized lexical items. In the next section we will see how (*eh*) *ciò*-prefaced turns can be part of sequences of a different type where, rather than agreement or disagreement, a different responsive action becomes relevant.

6.2. Indexing a knowledgeable position through (*eh*) *ciò*-prefaced formulations

The (*eh*) *ciò*-prefaced turns described in Section 6.1 convey the informed point of view of the coparticipant, who draws on elements which fall into the common domain of knowledge of both parties. In this section, we will see that the same type of preface serves the speaker to introduce a turn that summarizes with a formulation (Garfinkel and Sacks, 1970) what has just been stated in the just produced turn, in a move that marks the coparticipant's independent epistemic access to the topic

dealt with. The environment in which the *(eh) ciò*-prefaced turns are produced is not so much characterized by the presence of dis/agreement (Pomerantz, 1984; Sacks, 1987) in argumentative sequences, as by troubles-talk (cf. Jefferson, 2015).

In extract 5 Pino tells Erminio about the severe muscle pain he suffered from the day before, after a cycling race.¹⁰

Ex. 5 (Pino 3B; Er = Erminio; Pi = Pino) (phone call; Trevigiano)

- 01 Er eh sì=[sì.
PRT yes=yes.
02 Pi [a xera veramente::::: no me xera mai successo na
it was really I had never experienced
03 roba del genere ghe gò messo un'ora, (0.5) a sugarme,
something like that it took me an hour (0.5) to dry myself off
04 (0.8) e:::::::::: rivestirme: in machina no::: parché me
(0.8) and get dressed in the car PRT because
05 tirava e gambe (e me [faxeva) un]=
my legs twitched they made a=
06 Er [eh sì.]
PRT yes.
07 Pi =disastro.
=mess.
=> 08 Er eh ciò m- cioè te ha a contrassión dea muscoeatura.
PRT PRT m- I mean you have a muscle contracture.
09 Pi eh sì.
PRT yes.

The extract begins with Pino providing a detailed and unmitigated report of his difficulties (lines 02–05, 07). Erminio does not respond to Pino's troubles-telling in a particularly affiliative way, but rather acknowledges it as something predictable (line 06; 'eh sì'), thereby displaying his epistemic access to the topic. Immediately afterwards, Erminio produces an *(eh) ciò*-prefaced turn that conveys a formulation presenting the gist (Heritage and Watson, 1979) of his coparticipant's long turn (line 08). The recapitulatory function of this turn is evident thanks to the use of *cioè*, one of the main reformulation discourse markers in Italian (Fiorentini and Sansò, 2017). Erminio's turn conveys a diagnosis, as the specialized lexicon chosen corroborates: literally 'the contraction of (the) musculature' ('a contrassión dea muscoeatura'; l. 08). This formulation, a sort of medical verdict, is subsequently acknowledged by Piero (l. 09), i.e. the experiencer of the pain. Here, through his *(eh) ciò*-prefaced turn, Erminio presents a perspective overview on a putative B-event (Labov and Fanshel, 1977) that involves the troubles-teller.¹¹ In this way, he displays a K+ epistemic status (Heritage, 2012) by mobilizing a specialized lexicon and offering a diagnostic formulation on the basis of the symptoms mentioned by Pino.

The next excerpt presents a similar case: Flavio produces a troubles-telling concerning a case of acute physical pain he experienced. Both participants resort to *(eh) ciò* prefates to introduce formulaic expressions.

Ex. 6 (Flavio 132; Fl Flavio; Ma = Manlio) (phone call; Trevigiano)

- 01 Ma e::::h probabilmente sì te varà dormio: in te
PRT probably yeah you must have slept in
02 na poxission m::[: ,]
a position m:::
03 Fl [e]h.
PRT
04 (0.6)
05 Ma col piè magari teso e dopo te sì a fredo
with your foot outstretched and then you are cold
06 te o gà mosso e::::: xe restà el nervo:::,
you moved it and the nerve got
07 (0.2)
08 Fl eh [dove che no'l dovéa.]
PRT where it should not have been.
09 Ma [(incepà.)]
stuck
10 (0.2)
=> 11 Fl eh ciò gò [visto:] gò visto e sté=
PRT PRT I saw I saw stars=
12 Ma [ehsì.]
PRT yes
13 Fl =mai success[o.
never happened

¹⁰ Note that both participants are passionate amateur cyclists and are members of the same cycling club.

¹¹ Labov & Fanshel's categorization into A- / B- / AB-events is subject to negotiation and firmly anchored to the experiences of the participants and the identities they mobilize in interaction, moment by moment. Here, Pino (B) recounts his personal experience giving lots of details about the pain he experienced. This information is presented in such a way that Erminio (A) can comment on the subject without his B-event declarative being treated in a dispreferred way (cf. Turner 2012: 100–104). Additionally, as we have already said, they both belong to the same cycling club as amateurs.

=> 14 Ma [e::h ciò,
PRT PRT
15 (0.4)
16 Fl eh.
PRT
=> 17 Ma co l'età:: h.=dopo se xonta sempre tuto [eh?]
with age h. everything adds up PRT
18 Fl [h.] e::h, =eh
((laughter)) =PRT

Flavio has previously described a sudden and excruciating pain he felt in his right foot as soon as he got out of bed (data not transcribed here). His brother, Manlio, proposes a hypothesis about the cause of Flavio's pain. Manlio first mentions a sleeping position, framing it as a guess (*'probabilmente sì te varà dormìo: in te na poxissón'*, l. 01–02). He then focuses his attention on anatomical details (*'col piè magari teso e dopo te sì a fredo te o gà mosso'*, l. 05–06), providing an aetiology for his brother's pain, thereby signaling his own epistemic access to this type of events. In line 06, Manlio focuses on the nerve, his concise explanation being realized through an unfinished turn. Following a lengthening and a brief pause (l. 07), Flavio completes his brother's turn by appending a relative clause (*'dove che no'l dovèa'*, l. 08), after acknowledging Manlio's topic proffer (*'eh'*). In line 09, Manlio resumes his turn with a delayed completion (Lerner, 1989, see also ex. 1). Flavio then produces a (*eh*) *ciò*-prefaced turn in order to claim epistemic access by mobilizing a figurative phrase (Holt, 2011: 399), which includes a verb of vision (*'eh ciò gò visto: gò visto e stée'*, l. 11). His epistemic primacy is underlined by the exceptional character of his experience (*'mai successo'*, l. 13). Partly in overlap, Manlio utters an *eh*-*ciò* prefaced turn that projects more to come. After a short pause (0.4 seconds, l. 15), he adduces Flavio's age as an ironic general account for this kind of physical ailments. The second *eh*-*ciò*-prefaced turn presents once again a figurative expression and ends with a tag (*eh*, l. 17; see ex. 1) that solicits response. This turn is finally treated by the teller in an unproblematic way (l. 18), as laughable (Glenn, 2003; Holt, 2011).

In excerpt 6, the first instance of (*eh*) *ciò*-prefaced turn is reinforcing the personal experience of pain undergone by Flavio, while the second contains a generalization (cf. ex. 2) that points to the age of the coparticipant as the main cause of his condition, deploying an argument that has not been evoked yet despite its availability to both parties.

The last excerpt is taken from a dinner among friends. Here, Lorena expresses affiliation through her (*eh*) *ciò*-prefaced turn by mentioning supporting evidence that none of the fellow diners has brought up, yet.

Ex. 7 (at Clara's; Fl Flavio; Cla = Clara; Lo = Lorena) (dinner; Italian and Trevigiano)

01 Fl tlk .hhhhhhh ho- hhhh.=i eh sono arrivato a insegnare
I have- the PRT I got to teach up to
02 diciannove ore all'istituto italiano di cultura ma
nineteen hours at the istituto italiano di cultura but
03 per un, (0.7) °eh° sì neanche per un::: semestre.=per
for one, (0.7) PRT yeah not even one term. for
04 un:::=mese e mezzo. .hhh[hhh]
a month and a half.
05 Cl [mhf] €exero dimagrio
PRT and I had lost
06 vintichii.€
twenty kilos.
07 Fl ahe:::, (.hhhh) ciò non () [me paréa de] no ndar mai=
PRT PRT I didn't () it seemed to me as if I was never
08 ?? [()]
09 Fl =fora da là: xero sempre in clase.
leaving that place I was always in class.
10 (0.7)
11 Fl ciò e::: [m:,]
PRT PRT
12 Cl [eh] sì per forza.=[certo.]
PRT yeah of course. absolutely.
13 Fl [e::h.]
PRT
14 (0.2)
=> 15 Lo ciò m=parché dopo ghe xe tuta a
PRT m=because after that there's all the
=> 16 preparassio↓:↑: [n.]
planning
17 Fl [e]hs:i::: =e::[::,]
PRT yeah PRT
18 Cl [(eh)]
PRT

In the previous sequence, not transcribed here, Flavio has just complained about the long working hours his school manager forces him to do. The extract begins with a narrative reference to the only previous work experience comparable in terms of teaching hours (l. 01–02) but not with regard to duration. Clara's ironic response (l. 05–06) is formulated as a co-animation in that it completes Flavio's turn in a ventriloquist way (Webb et al., 2018), which ultimately serves to portray his

friend's complaint as exaggerated, by treating it as a *laughable* (Holt, 2011). Flavio's answer does not play along the tease (cf. Drew, 1987): actually, his extreme case formulation (*'me pareà de no ndar mai fora de là: xero sempre in classe'*, l. 07, 09; cf. Pomerantz, 1986) serves to counter Clara's indirect criticism by accounting for his complaint as legitimate and anchored in his own personal experience (*'me parèa ...'*, "it seemed to me", which is subsequently unframed: *'xero ...'*, "I was"). After an aborted turn by Flavio (l. 11), Clara affiliates (l. 12). Lorena then self selects (l. 15) and makes explicit through her *(eh) ciò*-prefaced turn what had not been said up to that point: in addition to working in the classroom, teachers must also plan their own lessons, with foreseeable additional investment of time and energy required. From a syntactic point of view the quality of an account on behalf of the coparticipant can be observed in the use of the subordinating conjunction *perché* ('because'), which directly links this turn to Flavio's previous one. The sentence is formulated in third person and has a generalizing character, receiving immediate ratification by Flavio (l. 17). Lorena, a teacher herself, endorses Flavio's complaint by verbalizing a weighty reason that up to that moment has not emerged in the coparticipant's turn and yet is accessible to all three of them as educators. The co-production of the complaint is ultimately the way Lorena resorts to in order to display empathy and affiliation as well as direct access to the topic being talked about by Flavio.

7. Conclusions

In this paper we have carried out the first interactional study on the use of *(eh) ciò*-prefaced turns in naturally occurring conversations taking place both in regional Italian and in Trevigiano (*Trevixàn* [trevi'zan]). Through *(eh) ciò*-prefaced turns coparticipants respond in second position to a reported situation by producing general statements that are presented in a recapitulatory fashion. In our data, the *(eh) ciò*-prefaced turns tend to occur in specific sequential environments, mainly in argumentative sequences – where the expression of dis/agreement becomes a relevant next action (cf. Pomerantz, 1984; Sacks, 1987) – or in response to troubles-talk concerning both first-hand (ex. 2, 3, 5, 6, 7) and third parties' (ex. 1, 4) events. By highlighting the self-evident and/or shared nature of the piece of information delivered and by emphasizing the speaker's personal perspective, *(eh) ciò*-prefaced responses underscore the coparticipant's independent access and epistemic rights in relation to a specific state of affairs. Similar to what has been noticed for *and*-prefaced formulations, *(eh) ciò*-prefaced turns "articulate a 'missing' element of the addressee's preceding talk – what the other might have or should have said, but did not" (Bolden, 2010: 27).

As for the positioning of the participants in relation to the complainable character of the topic being talked about, these turns may express either a disaffiliative (ex. 3 and 4) or a more affiliative stance (ex. 1, 2, 7) vis-à-vis the action brought about by the coparticipant through their previous turn (Antaki, 2012).

The general character of the formulations, the syntactic co-construction of *(eh) ciò*-prefaced multi-unit turns as well as the subsequent acknowledgements produced by coparticipants illustrate their impact on the progressivity of the ongoing sequence (Stivers and Robinson, 2006; Schegloff, 1979) and on the emergent constitution of meaning in interaction. With reference to the latter dimension, *(eh) ciò*-prefaced turns, like formulations, "have both an explicative and a transformative aspect" (Deppermann, 2011: 122). In other words, they are part of the sequential development of a topic in progress and provide either new elements, mobilized by some participants but available to all, or an overview that sheds new light on the topic in question.

Moreover, *(eh) ciò*-prefaced responsive turns represent useful resources for the emergence of participants' identities (e.g. as an experienced mechanic – in the case of Piero – in ex. 1; as fellow cyclists in ex. 5; as teachers in ex. 7) that are relevant in relation to the events reported. Such conversational practices shed light on the ways epistemic positioning is sequentially and interactionally achieved by the co-participants.

By drawing on natural occurring data and emphasizing the sequential positioning of *(eh) ciò*-prefaced turns in conversation, this study expands our knowledge on the Venetan particle *ciò* as a linguistic resource for talk-in-interaction. More specifically, while in previous studies this particle invariably appears in isolation at the beginning or at the end of a turn, as a *coda*, our data indicate the existence of a multifaceted reality, in which *ciò* is frequently preceded by other particles and can also be found inside a multi-unit turn, at the beginning of a new TCU (Pauletto and Ursi, 2021). Further interactional studies will be needed in order to highlight other types of social actions carried out by resorting to *(eh) ciò* in Trevigiano, in the regional Italian spoken in the Treviso area as well as in other Venetan and neighboring varieties.

This study once again highlights the complexity of the Italian socio-linguistic context, where different dimensions intersect seamlessly to give rise to an intricate linguistic continuum (cf. Berruto, 1987). The analysis proves that local Italo-Romance varieties still provide speakers with meaningful, albeit geographically limited, interactional resources.

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There are no competing interests.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

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