

Expressing Uncertainty

Italian *tipo* as Vagueness Marker and Slack Regulator

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Abstract

When *tipo* lit. ‘type’ developed a non-nominal form, it gained multiple, contemporary functions, such as approximation and hedging. Using Voghera’s 2013 case study and Youtube-based corpus data from 2014-2023, I examine and categorize these different functions, notably discovering frequent usage of *tipo*_[-N] as filler. I reference this data to propose that *tipo*_[-N] as a Vagueness Marker (or VM) corroborates Lasersohn’s ‘pragmatic halo’ theory (1999), wherein certain words and phrases can serve to restrict or increase an ordered set of acceptable denotations based on the implicit expectations of loose talk. I explain using a cross-linguistics approach that *tipo*_[-N] performs analogously to *like* (as analyzed by Siegel 2005) as a ‘slack widener’, or as a word that widens the pragmatic halo. Finally, I discuss how the development of VMs like *tipo*_[-N] is present across multiple languages, and what this may mean for Lasersohn’s theory and the evolution of language.

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Introduction

The seeds of this thesis were planted during a semester spent studying in Milan in 2022. During a casual conversation, a friend of mine caught my attention when he recalled an event and used *tipo* to approximate the number of people in attendance. As I was familiar with Muffy Siegel's work exploring *like* and pragmatic haloes (namely the former's ability to expand the latter when used to approximate) I asked him to repeat himself, and attempted to explain her research on *like* (Siegel, 2002). He confirmed that not only could *tipo* be used to express an imprecision, but that it could be used in the same manner as *like* to introduce an utterance - as a quotative. This encounter is what inspired this current research. How has it come to be that *tipo* gained these functions? What other functions, separate from its original denotative meaning, may *tipo* perform? First I will establish, referencing Voghera 2013, the development of non-nominal *tipo* (*tipo*_[-N]) over time. Following this, I present a data corpus compiled from YouTube indicating the presence and various meanings of *tipo*_[-N], which I will contextualize with Voghera's study. I will identify where the categories which I observed in the data parallel her findings, as well as potential new meanings and functions (most notably filler).

The second facet to my argument is rooted in Lasersohn's *Pragmatic Haloes*, in which he argues that "speakers make use of a certain kind of pragmatically licensed deviation from the truth [...] and that natural languages are actually structured to exploit this fact, containing expressions whose function is to signal how much pragmatic slack should be allowed in the interpretation of an utterance" (Lasersohn, 1999:548). He defines a pragmatic halo as the ordered set of contextually permissible denotations of an expression, and a slack regulator as a constituent that helps to refine this halo by indicating the necessary level of specificity (Lasersohn, 1999). Examples (1) and (2), from Lasersohn's data (1999:522), provide an example

of the restrictive power that the slack regulator ‘all’ has on the pragmatic halo of ‘the townspeople.’

- (1) The townspeople are asleep.
- (2) All the townspeople are asleep.

While (1) and (2) express the same semantic content, their pragmatic halos differ with the inclusion of ‘all’. We allow ‘wiggle room’ in (1) - that is to say, we expect and accept a certain level of loose talk that creates a pragmatic halo: perhaps a dozen of the townspeople are actually awake, but we do not need to correct the speaker. However, in (2), that halo is constricted when the speaker chooses to emphasize that **all** the townspeople are asleep, allowing less deviation from the core denotation.

The functions for which I referenced extensive existing research in English are approximator, quotative, filler, and hedge. In English, *like* is documented as fulfilling each of these capacities; (3) - (6) demonstrate in turn each of these functions.

- (3) I’ve seen the new film, **like**, six times.
- (4) She was **like**, “I don’t want you in my house again!”
- (5) We’re gonna, **like**, see what happens afterwards.
- (6) I, **like**, don’t love the color.

I intend to show with corpus data that *tipo* may also fulfill these and other roles expressing vagueness. If we allow *tipo* to be analyzed as a slack regulator, this can help us to understand why the word has so many properties: each of these differing functions can introduce a level of vagueness or uncertainty into a phrase. While the semantic scope of *tipo*_[~N] changes depending on what it is attached to in a phrase, the pragmatic effect is increased vagueness. An approximator is perhaps the most obvious example of this, wherein the speaker is explicitly allowing themselves less specificity. A quotative permits that the speaker may not be reiterating, verbatim, the original quote, making explicit the broadened set of possible utterances (Blyth et

al, 1990). A filler allows a speaker time to search for words when they are unsure of what to say, and a hedge can soften a phrase's intensity in order to shield the speaker from any potential negative reaction. The pragmatic similarity between these functions allows *like* to fulfill each of them in English, and therefore they have been my starting point in the process of identifying the different functions of *tipo* as slack regulator.

The process by which *tipo* came to adopt these functions was one of semantic bleaching and subsequent grammaticalization, as Miriam Voghera notes: “the complex path of grammaticalization of *tipo* has not produced multiple vague types of *tipo*_[-N] but, rather, multiple grammatical forms of vagueness coding. In other words, the emergence and development of *tipo*_[-N] have given form, in Saussurian terms, to new signs of vagueness” (2013:307). I seek to corroborate Voghera's claims regarding the vagueness properties of *tipo*, and to expand upon Lasersohn's formulation of slack regulators, to demonstrate how slack may be expanded as well as constricted.

Background

1. Statement of Positionality & Language Overview

I am not a heritage Italian speaker, and my contact with the language stems from study within a university setting, as well as a semester abroad spent in Milan living among Italian and American students. I am now an advanced speaker of Standardized Italian; I live, work, and learn in the United States, and my only L1 is American English.

Italian is an Indo-European Italic Romance language with nearly 68 million users worldwide, of which 59 million speakers are in Italy (Ethnologue). Italian is classified as Level 1

(National) by EGIDS (Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale - developed to gauge language status in terms of usage and vulnerability) within Italy (Ethnologue), and I will be working with the standardized variety. I will rely on using only mainstream Italian because I am only working with Italian that I myself can understand. Any translations provided are my own unless otherwise noted, having corroborated my work with a native Italian speaker.

2. Identified Functions

The preemptively labeled functions that have seen extensive research in English are ‘quotative’, ‘hedge’, ‘filler’, and ‘approximative adverb’. Therefore, I sought to identify these functions from the collected tokens (where possible), and will define them here. A **quotative** serves to introduce speech, or a ‘quote’, from a past utterance; Blyth et al. (1990:222) note that the be+like quotative (analogous to essere+tipo_[-N]) may only introduce direct speech, or alternatively may refer to “a thought, a state of mind, or inner monologue and therefore may be interpreted as never having been uttered.” In terms of slack regulation, quotatives introduce an embedded speech act on which we may impose a pragmatic halo. **Hedges** have been recognized and discussed in linguistics since Lakoff’s proposed model of using fuzzy logic to capture degrees of truth, with hedges such as ‘somewhat’, ‘sort of’, and ‘technically’ (Lakoff, 1973).¹ Fraser (2010:15) defines hedging as “a rhetorical strategy that attenuates either the full semantic value of a particular expression [...] or the full force of a speech act[.]” Fraser also includes (7) and (8) as examples of hedging.

(7) He’s *sort of* nice.

¹ Lakoff also names hedges such as ‘more or less’, ‘approximately’, and ‘roughly’, which here will be categorized separately as approximators.

(8) I *must* ask you to stop doing that.

(Fraser, 2010)

I will be using Fraser's definition of hedging, where the hedge 'shields' the speaker, since Lakoff's original definition of hedges aligns more closely with what we now refer to as **approximative adverbs**, or **approximators**. An approximator (such as *like*, *about*, or *around*; in Italian, *all'incirca*, *più o meno*) may precede numerically quantified NP's and AP's, in order to introduce approximation to the phrase (D'Arcy, 2005). It is worth mentioning that Prince et al. (1982:5) defined an approximator (example: *sort of*) to be a subcategory of hedge "that affects the propositional content but not the speaker-commitment"; they provide *sort of* as an approximator, and *I think* as a shield.

A speaker will use a **filler** (such as 'uh' or 'um'; or, in Italian, 'bho' or 'ah') to mark a pause in their utterance, instead of allowing for a long gap of silence; some fillers indicate a rapid-fire adjustment of what the speaker is trying to say, if they decide to use a different word while they are in the middle of uttering the one they would like to swap out. (Clark, 1996) It has also been posited (Beltrama & Hanink, 2019) that *like* can function as a mirative, or a word that precedes information framed as surprising to the listener (and sometimes also to the speaker). This is a usage that Underhill (1988) previously described as a way to "focus new information", although not necessarily surprising information.

3. Development of *tipo*_[-N]

From the 16th century to present day, *tipo* has developed in meaning and function, with its non-nominal form first appearing in the second half of the 19th century (Voghera, 2013). Table 1 summarizes Voghera's research of *tipo*_[-N]'s evolution and grammaticalization; she notes that these different usages of *tipo* are all still currently in use, and unlimited by variety or region.

Table 1. Meanings of *tipo* from 16th century to present day (Voghera 2013:286-291)

Time Period (first attested)	Meanings of <i>tipo</i>	Semantic Change
16th century	‘model’, ‘symbol’	none (earliest attested use in Italian)
End of 17th century	‘type’, ‘form’, ‘exemplar’	‘model’ → ‘exemplar of a model, standard, specimen’ ‘model as paradigm’ → ‘model as form’
First half of 19th century	‘characters for printing’, ‘human type, person’, ‘kind/class’	<i>exemplar</i> = [+HUMAN] plural <i>tipo</i> (<i>tipi</i>) appears as ‘exemplar’ and ‘characters for printing’ ‘model as form’ → ‘kind/class’
Second half of 19th century	‘someone, a guy’ ‘that represents a model, ideal’ (<i>tipo</i> _[-N])	<i>tipo</i> _[-N] appears (invariable, adjectival postponed modifier) ‘kind/class’ becomes prevalent meaning
First half of 20th century	‘model, kind’ ‘similar to, analogous to’ (in complex prepositions <i>a tipo di, del tipo di, sul tipo di</i>), ‘such as’, ‘something the type of’, ‘-type/-like’	syntactic structure NP [PP1 [PP2]] occurs with <i>tipo</i> as complement of PP1 <i>tipo</i> shifts to non-nominal and becomes part of PP1
Second half of 20th century	‘a guy/a gal’	feminine form <i>una/la tipa</i> develops as pair to <i>un/il tipo</i> ‘a guy’

Voghera proposes (9) to succinctly explain the trajectory of *tipo*’s grammaticalization.

$$(9) \quad N [\text{del tipo di } N] > N [\text{del tipo } N] > N [\text{tipo}]N \quad (\text{Voghera, 2013:293})$$

She goes on to articulate the different syntactic categories in which *tipo*_[-N] now fits (shown in Table 2): adjective, formative in adjectival constructions, preposition, adverb (approximator), and interclausal connective.

Table 2. Semantic values of *tipo*_[-N] (Voghera 2013)

Tipo	Similar	Approximate	Maybe	For example	That is
Adverb					
Intercl. Con.					
DM					

Voghera’s conclusion lends itself to the argument that *tipo*_[−N] functions as a slack regulator, as she threads together each possible semantic value by nominating *tipo*_[−N] as VM (Vagueness Marker). In fact, VMs in Italian may have been first conceptualized nearly four centuries ago by theorist and poet Matteo Peregrini (as cited by Ghezzi, 2022:33-34), whose list of “*particelle temperatrici* ‘tempering particles’ are defined as all the markers speakers may use to underline their inaccuracy.” Such VMs include *un po’* ‘a bit’, *tipo* ‘type’, *come* ‘like’, *cioè* ‘that is’, *magari* ‘maybe’, *insomma* ‘in sum’, *comunque* ‘however, anyway’, and so on (Ghezzi 2022).

4. Pragmatic Halos and Hedging

When expanding the range of what can be considered slack regulation, Lasersohn’s opinion provides us with an obstacle. He states that hedges do **not** function as slack regulators, but rather that hedges such as ‘loosely speaking’ expand the set of denotations outward to mirror the halo while excluding the denotation itself (Lasersohn, 1999:545). In other words, a hedge alters the semantic value of a phrase to include the entire pragmatic halo in its truth conditions, rather than solely affecting the pragmatic content, but the unhedged denotation is no longer accepted as true. By Lasersohn’s equation, which is represented in (10) for the hedge *loosely speaking*, (11) allows for an expanded time frame in which the party might begin, but it would exclude the possibility of the party actually beginning at exactly 10 o’clock. I am in disagreement with Lasersohn on this point, and believe that the denotation of precisely 10 o’clock remains within the acceptable set of denotations.

$$(10) \quad \llbracket \textit{loosely speaking } \Phi \rrbracket^{M,C} = \cup H_C(\Phi) - \llbracket \Phi \rrbracket^{M,C}$$

(11) The party starts at about 10.

Lauer (2012) takes issue with Lasersohn's theory, claiming to prove that 'pure' slack widenings do not exist and therefore casting doubt on the existence of 'pragmatic haloes' in the larger discussion of 'loose talk'. However, his work ignores a key component of Lasersohn's original paper, and misquotes a crucial piece of data. Lasersohn says "pragmatic slack is not the same thing as scalarity or truth-conditional vagueness, but a separate phenomenon **over and on top of it**" (Lasersohn, 1999:533 - my emphasis). With this phrasing, he identifies slack as distinct, but not necessarily in place of truth conditional vagueness. Secondly, while Lasersohn uses (12) and its variations to explore the effect of slack regulators (such as 'exactly'), Lauer introduces (13) to discuss the same process but seemingly conflates the two phrases, ignoring the effects of the word changes on the acceptable loose talk parameters.

(12) Mary arrived at three o'clock.

Fact: Mary walked through the door at 3:01.

(from Lasersohn 1999:522)

(13) A: Mary was here by three.

B: # Mary was here by three, but she did not arrive until a few minutes after three.

(from Lauer 2012:389)

Lasersohn includes the suggested 'fact' of Mary's entrance at 3:01 to demonstrate that we would accept (12) under those circumstances, despite its technical falsehood; this is because the pragmatic halo of (12) likely includes the option of Mary arriving within a few minutes of 3:00. Lauer mimics this contextualization by providing (13) A and B, but the infelicity which he discerns is based in the ways in which he has altered Lasersohn's original phrase. The word choice of 'by' indicates a deadline, a countdown to three o'clock, which immediately indicates that any imprecision the speaker may include is unevenly restricted. This phrase, therefore, does not have a pragmatic halo consisting of an ordered set that extends equally in either semantic direction from the original denotation, but acts in one direction. Not only this, (13) also allows for much more imprecision as to Mary's exact arrival time. For example, perhaps Mary arrived at

quarter to three - this is an acceptable scenario for (13), but depending on the context-derived pragmatic halo for (12), it may be entirely unacceptable. These sentences have very different interpretations before the introduction of any slack regulators, and therefore Lauer's choice to judge their pragmatic haloes as equal and criticize the former by the halo of the latter undermines his argument. His other concern with Lasersohn's 'halos', that the halo itself is underdefined to the point of generating infelicitous expressions, is shared by Klecha (2018:121), who writes, "at the level of single lexical items, the proper standard of precision may not be determinable."

Klecha also firmly distinguishes between vagueness (which may be specified) and imprecision (which may be precisified). Kennedy (2007:43) posits that the division of vagueness/specificity and imprecision/precision is a matter of semantics versus pragmatics, arguing that "vagueness is a matter of semantics, arising only when the conventional meanings of particular constituents conspire to produce it, while imprecision is a more general matter of use." I suggest that this difference between precision and specificity may be Lasersohn's barrier to hedges being accepted as slack regulators, since they (at least the hedges that he explored) alter semantic content.

Beyond proposing and rejecting hedges in his theory, Lasersohn does not provide any examples of slack regulators that might **expand** the pragmatic halo, all the while providing no reasoning for why it shouldn't be expandable. I propose that *like* may serve as a slack regulator in expanding the pragmatic halo of an expression, disagreeing with (Siegel, 2002), who argues that *like* functions neither as slack regulator nor as hedge, but a third, more complex grammatical entity that introduces a free variable to sluicing and *there be* phrases. Siegel's proposed informal account is (14), where "*like* has the effect of replacing the denotation of an expression with the disjunction of its denotation and each element of its halo." (Siegel, 2002:62)

- (14) ($z : z = \alpha' \vee z = \text{something like } \alpha'$) where z is a variable of the same logical type as α' .
(Siegel, 2002, p. 52)

Siegel identifies that *like* can behave in a manner that satisfies Lasersohn's (and Lauer's) wish for a 'pure' slack widener where the core denotation remains within the set of denotations.

Methodology

Youglish collection process

The corpus data was assembled using Youglish, a language learning site that aims to provide users with native pronunciation for target words or phrases. To use the site, one may choose from 27 available languages (7 of which are sign languages) and type in a word or short phrase; Youglish will return an ordered series of YouTube videos where the word or phrase is used, with subtitles provided to individually highlight the spoken words. At the time of this writing, Youglish had indexed over 29,000 videos in which *tipo* was used in the context of Italian speech. Using functions that I knew were pragmatically vague as my guide, I examined and categorized every example of *tipo*_[-N] in the first 1,000 videos. I did not retain tokens of nominal *tipo* (*tipo*_[+N]), nor *tipo* in non-elliptical phrases of the form N [*del tipo di*] N; I was exclusively examining how *tipo* functions on its own and what pragmatic and/or semantic effect it has in a phrase. Therefore, videos using *tipo* in the context of 'di tipo' ('of the type'), 'tipo di' ('type of'), 'questo/quel tipo' ('this/that type'), or *tipo/tipa* referring to a 'guy' or 'chick' were not retained. If a token meeting these criteria appeared, I would open the video and scan its transcript for other available tokens. Each *tipo*_[-N] token was then catalogued in a spreadsheet that also collected video title and link, Youtube channel, upload or streaming² date, and timestamp. I filtered for

² A few of the videos used were not filmed, edited, and posted, but livestreamed and uploaded permanently upon the end of the stream.

content produced by native speakers of Italian (or at minimum, Italian speakers from Italy, since it is possible that some of the speakers were raised speaking Standard Italian alongside one of the many regional varieties in use across Italy).

Categorization of functions

While the initial functions included in my expectations were approximator, quotative, hedge, and filler, I expected to discover vagueness functions that could not necessarily be delineated in these terms. This rapidly became evident as I found *tipo* to be marking vagueness in ways that did not neatly fit into the boxes I had identified. Throughout the data collection process, I described these functions as broadly as possible while specifying what differentiated them; once collection had ceased, I categorized tokens according to their context in order to identify functional categories. These new categories were ‘like/of the type’, ‘like/for example’, and ‘like’.

Caveats regarding data

The intention of the data collection was not to analyze frequency of different usages, nor do I suggest that the breakdown of categories as seen in Table 3 is necessarily representative of real-life use. The functions I am discussing, as relating to vagueness or uncertainty, are frequently used in casual speech, which can be difficult to find in online content. YouTube videos are usually edited for clarity, in such a manner that may have removed examples of *tipo* from the final product in order to appear more collected or fluid. Besides this, the Youglish algorithm is not publicly available, but there was a clear filter which first provided me with content largely produced by either TedX or by white male (or male presenting) ‘culture critics’. These genres of video are more likely to follow a script; therefore, the speech is more formal and

organized - and as *tipo*_[-N] makes more appearances in informal speech, particularly as filler, both of these factors worked against *tipo*_[-N] production. Once I had reached approximately 800 videos, I began seeing much more content self-filmed by women, namely book reviewers and vloggers detailing their ‘shopping haul’ for the audience. These youtubers tended to speak quickly and informally, as the vlogger format is more intimate than that of video essays. It was at this point that I saw a significant uptick in my data collection. Many of the ‘filler’ *tipo* tokens from these types of videos were embedded in rapid, fluid speech³, with the result that they were not easily removable in post. Their presence in this kind of video also aligns with Siegel’s discovery from her interview data that “the use of like to mark lexical indecision correlates with taking little time to plan an utterance” (Siegel, 2002:43).

Data & Analysis

In total, 295 tokens of *tipo* were indexed as marking vagueness or performing a pragmatically relevant function. After accounting for functions that had not been explicitly named and anticipated, the data comprised seven categories: filler, approximator, hedge, ‘like’, ‘like’/‘for example’, ‘like’/‘of the type’, and the *essere+tipo* (be+like) construction. Each category is discussed further below; all included examples (except where otherwise stated) are from Youtube videos indexed by Youglish, and reference the original creator.

³ The filler categorization was confirmed by a native Italian speaker, despite a lack of pause or marked prosody.

Table 3: Usage of *tipo*_[N] by frequency in the analyzed data

FUNCTION (or best translation)	# OF TOKENS
Filler	136
Approximator	71
Hedge	7
like/of the type	27
like/for example	36
like	12
essere+tipo	6
TOTAL	295

FILLER

The most frequent function in the data was filler, with a final total of 136 instances. In some cases *tipo* was evidently filler because it was produced with other filler words in a gap of communication, such as in (15) where the speaker struggles to describe the binding of a book. In other phrases, it served as filler and preceded a gap in communication; in (16) the speaker is having difficulty with her phone and pauses to find the words to describe the issue.

- (15) ... è flessibile; però è - **tipo** - cioè - capi- cioè ha questo...
 ... it's flexible; but it's - **like** - that is - underst- that is it has this...

(Ohmacheansia / Lile laSvamps, 2018)

- (16) ... ma io non riesco **tipo** a... come fare?
 ... but I'm not able to like ... how do you do [this]?

(Cleo Toms, 2017)

- (17) *Senti, ma non è che hai **tipo** un disegno, uno schizzo...*
 Listen, but it's not that you have like an outline, a sketch...

(Less is art, 2020)

However, in many phrases, *tipo* appeared with no pause or hesitation, such as (17); this categorization was confirmed by a native speaker despite the fact that filler words are often

accompanied by a gap.⁴ In these cases, *tipo* did not modify the pragmatics of the phrase, as would a hedge. Both fillers and hedges are discourse markers, and while Voghera did not mention fillers in her analysis, she did identify hedges under the category of DMs (Discourse Markers). She chooses to use a “broad definition [...] considering all uses of *tipo*_[-N] to be DM when they do not affect the truth conditions of the utterance and/or add anything to its propositional content, but signal how to segment the discourse into significant and coherent chunks” (2013:301-2). Notably, none of her example phrases for DM *tipo*_[-N] come from the published corpora she draws upon, but from informal conversations and written online news and communication, which she used to supplement her discussion of more recent *tipo*_[-N] developments (Voghera 2013:285). My data corpus is entirely contemporary to Voghera’s case study, and so it was unnecessary to search for or generate DM *tipo*_[-N] beyond the corpus.

HEDGE

Only six hedges appeared in the data, which was a considerably lower number compared to the rest of the data. The speaker in (18) references what show she has been catching up on, and then uses *tipo* to hedge the statement that she doesn’t watch TV. In (19), the speaker pauses and uses *tipo* as a filler, as a comparative, and as - what I argue to be - a hedge, in the same phrase. The speaker is describing the color of a book’s inside cover, and chooses to further specify its shade, rather than use a more general color. However, she says it is *tipo indaco*, not just *indaco*, which softens her word choice and allows her to use more precision without full commitment. Similarly, in (20) two youtubers discuss their favorite colors, and when Speaker 1

⁴ In this particular case, my informant explained that the speaker is performing a character, a ‘bro’-like persona with this sort of speech pattern and frequent *tipo* usage.

(S1) names her favorite shade of yellow, she hedges the choice with *tipo*. However, when Speaker 2 (S2) cuts in to suggest a different shade (also hedging her question), Speaker 1 replies without hedging, more sure of her precisification.

- (18) ... *perché ormai io **tipo** non guardo più la tv...*
 ... because now I like don't watch TV anymore...
 (Cleo Toms, 2018)
- (19) ... *non è viola, è **tipo**, com'è? **Come** indaco. È **tipo** indaco, esatto...*
 ... it isn't violet, it's **like**, how is it? **Like** indigo. It's **like** indigo, exactly.
 (Ohmacheansia / Lile laSvamps, 2017)
- (20) S1: ... *adesso mi piace il giallo, **tipo** un po' senape...* S2: -Ocra? **Tipo**? S1: -Senape...
 S1: ... now I like yellow, a bit **like** mustard... S2: -Ochre? **Sort of**? S1: -Mustard...
 (Cleo Toms, 2017)

APPROXIMATOR

Approximators, as I stated in Background Section 2, are considered by some to be a type of hedge, since by approximating the following value, they allow the speaker to un-specify the value and weaken the necessary truth conditions. In (20), the speaker is vlogging a trip to a photography studio and mentions that he has previously visited some years before, whereas in (21), the speaker estimates the price she paid for a sweater. Most approximators were in the format of (22), where they preceded a price, since they mostly appeared in 'haul' videos where creators display everything they bought on a shopping trip. However, other approximators appeared in phrases like (23), where the speaker double-hedged by estimating, then providing two numbers instead of one.

- (21) ... *già c'ero venuto **tipo** quattro, forse cinque anni fa...*
 ... I came here before like four, maybe five years ago...
 (Il signor Franz, 2018)
- (22) ... *che ho pagato, bho, 12 euro **tipo**...*
 ... that I paid, uh, **like** 12 euros [for]...
 (Ohmacheansia / Lile laSvamps, 2018)

- (23) ... *questa che costa **tipo** 8 pound...*
... this one that costs **like** 8 pounds...

(Ohmacheansia / Lile laSvamps, 2018)

- (24) ... *dovevano progettare **tipo** 7, 8 città, come Londra...*
... they had to design **like** 7, 8 cities, like London...

(Comune di Trieste, 2019)

LIKE/OF THE TYPE

One youtuber in my corpus is a frequent poster of book hauls and reviews, and in (24) she describes the setting or ambiance of her current book as similar to the Vikings. In another video, *LE MIGLIORI GRAPHIC NOVEL DEL 2017* (“The Best Graphic Novels of 2017”), the same youtuber explains a particularly evocative scene (25).

- (25) ... *ed è una cosa **tipo**... vikings, una cosa del genere, si...*
... and it’s a thing like... vikings, something like that, yes...

(Ohmacheansia / Lile laSvamps, 2018)

- (26) ... *come una sorta di comedy **tipo** serie tv su questi coinquilini...*
... like a sort of comedy, like a TV series about these roommates...

(Ohmacheansia / Lile laSvamps, 2018)

This category is very clearly derived from the elided [*del*] *tipo* as seen in Voghera’s *tipo* evolution - see (9).

LIKE/FOR EXAMPLE

This category is defined by *tipo* connecting a general idea (things of a certain category, general actions) to a more specific example of what may constitute the first part of the phrase. In (27), a vlogger chats about her life, clarifying what sort of things her fridge is missing (fruit) and how she may spend her time downtown (at a shop). In (28), from a Ted Talk, the speaker uses *tipo* to introduce examples of values that come after love. Both of these phrases use *tipo* to introduce noun examples, but as in (29), *tipo* as ‘for example’ can introduce an action; the

speaker complains of her dog chewing up all of her socks - but never the ordinary ones; only her nice socks.

- (27) *Ora devo sicuramente andare a fare la spesa, perché ci sono delle cose che mi mancano*
 Now I seriously have to go grocery shopping, because there are things that I'm clearly
*palesemente del frigo, **tipo** la frutta, e poi, se ho voglia vado in centro, **tipo** da tiger...*
 lacking in my fridge, **like** fruit, and then, if I want I'll go downtown, **like** to tiger
 [flying tiger, a store]...

(Julie Demar, 2017)

- (28) *Poi ce ne sono altri, **tipo** l'onestà e il rispetto.*
 Then there are others, like honesty and respect.

(Tedx Talks:Walter Klinkon, 2014)

- (29) *...Non morde nemmeno le calze, magari, quelle bianche, quelle nere, quelle normali.*
 ...He doesn't even bite the socks, maybe, the white ones, the black ones, the normal ones.
*Morde le calze belle, **tipo** mi ha mangiato quasi tutte le calze a tema*
 He chews up my nice socks, **for example** he's eaten almost all my socks themed
Harry Potter!...
 Harry Potter [my Harry Potter socks]!...

(Cleo Toms, 2018)

LIKE

This usage appeared 12 times and performed a direct comparative function, as in (30) and (31).

- (30) *... è un rossetto cioè in realtà è **tipo** una tinta labbra...*
 ... it's a lipstick or rather in reality it's like a lip tint...

(vittoria.miles, 2017)

- (31) *... questa è la mia postazione al momento, farò **tipo** così.*
 ... this is my station at the moment, I'll do it **like** this.

(Julie Demar, 2018)

ESSERE+TIPO

While this construction only appeared six times in the data, it was used in a range of acceptable scenarios. For example, in (32), the speaker describes the feeling of when her career as a YouTuber finally started to take off. She uses *tipo* to ambiguously introduce an exclamation

as spoken aloud or internal dialogue. However, in (33) the speaker exclaims humorously about a terrible smell, with her hand pressed to her chest as she pauses and leans back for grand effect. Instead of introducing speech, *tipo* is presenting a physical state, exaggerated for humorous effect. Similarly, in (34) the speaker uses *tipo* to introduce a physical reaction and expression - frustration over the fact that she had spent money and time on a makeup brand that announced it would no longer be cruelty-free.

- (32) ... *poi qualcuno ti manda qualcosa gratis e sei tipo "wow!"*
 ... then someone sends you something free and you're **like** "wow!"

(Serena A Tale In Color, 2017)

- (33) *Raga... aveva un odore... che io ero tipo...*
 Guys... it had a smell... that I was **like**...

(vittoria.miles, 2017)

- (34) ... *avrebbe cominciato a testare sugli animali, e io, tipo, ... c'ho messo tutto sto tempo...*
 ... they would start testing on animals, and I'm **like**, ... I spent all this time...

(Chibiistheway, 2017)

However, (33) and (34) differ in that the latter displays an elision of *essere*. Her speech is rapid, similar to many of the identified filler instances, but in the pause after *tipo* it is evident that, like the speaker in (33), *tipo* is serving as introductory material for the following nonverbal communication.

Discussion

I was expecting to see many more tokens of the *essere+tipo* construction than the final number, based on my own informal conversations with native Italian speakers. As (32)-(34) demonstrate, *essere+tipo* can function as a quotative to introduce direct speech, internal monologue, and 'reaction' in a broad sense including physical gesture. One must wonder whether this has any connection to the well developed quotative *be+like* in English, which (as previously discussed in relation to Blyth et al) may introduce direct speech as well as inner monologue. This construction may be a step in continued development of *tipo*_[=N] along its

grammaticalization, or it may be the result of English influence. I began to consider language contact as a factor in *essere+tipo* from the videos of one bilingual Youtuber (which I did not include in my final set). Elissa Dell’Aera is a Canadian Youtuber with Sicilian heritage who was raised speaking only English. She is now fluently bilingual and produces language- and culture-based content. Several of her videos appeared in the first 1000 Youglish hits, which likely is the result of the site’s algorithm forefronting content that is titled and tagged as language learning. Relatively speaking, Dell’Aera made liberal use of *tipo*_[-N], particularly in the *essere+tipo* construction; I believe she employs *tipo*_[-N] analogously to how *like* is used in English.

(35) *Io ero tipo... scioccata completamente!*
I was **like**... completely shocked!

(36) *...Però nell'ultimo anno eravamo tipo, il primo semestre, eravamo tipo in 15 e l'ultimo semestre eravamo tipo in sette, quindi ero proprio una delle ultime persone che sono rimaste a fare questo corso.*
...But in the final year we were like, the first semester, we were **like** fifteen [people] and the final semester we were **like** seven, so I was really one of the last people who remained to do this course.

(Dell’Aera, 2021)

Because of the likelihood that her L1 English was influencing her speech patterns in Italian, I did not retain the tokens from Dell’Aera, but noted the proliferation of *tipo*_[-N] in her videos. Voghera suggests another reason for minimal *essere+tipo* presence - that the quotative *tipo* is “much more frequent in dialogic speech and chat-lines than in formal prose” (2013:297). In the decade since her publication, it is possible that quotative *tipo* has largely developed online, as that is where she initially identified its presence. The frequent use of *be+like* in meme format across the internet has certainly reached Italian online spheres, even meriting one article titled “*Perché in molti meme c’è scritto "be like" ("essere come") con il verbo all'infinito?* [Why do many memes say “be like” (“be like”) with the verb in the infinitive?” (Today Italia, 2021). In

the early stages of this work I was gathering data from X (formerly known as Twitter) alongside Youtube; while I swiftly reoriented to solely collect spoken *tipo*_[-N], examples of *essere+tipo* were more immediately available in tweet form, such as in (37) and (38). In fact, (38) lends further credence to language contact as a source of *essere+tipo*, beginning with ‘hot girls’ as borrowed English slang.

(37) *coppie in crisi sono tipo: è arrivato il momento di lasciarci facciamo un figlio*
 couples in crisis are **like**: it’s arrived the moment to break up let’s make a child
 (@chiaravix, 2023)

(38) *hot girls sono tipo “quanto è bello” ed è una foto sgranata in cui si vede solo il braccio*
 hot girls are **like** “he’s so hot” and it’s a grainy photo in which you see only the arm
e se sono fortunate anche la mano del loro cantante preferito
 and if you’re lucky also the hand of their favorite singer
 (@aadoresyou, 2023)

However, since this is a highly recent usage, it may also be the case that *essere+tipo* is stigmatized as strongly informal and therefore avoided, particularly by people seeking to gain respect and attention - e.g. Youtubers. Once again, without knowing the Youglish algorithm, the possibility remains that the most informal and unedited content (which is ideal for capturing naturalistic speech) on Youtube would not have appeared until after thousands of better curated and tagged videos.

Previous works regarding pragmatic halos in Italian

I am not the first to explore how slack regulation occurs in Italian, or to discuss the theory of pragmatic halos with regards to Italian intensifiers and approximators (or approximative adverbs as they are more often called), but I appear to be the first to discuss *tipo*_[-N] as a slack regulator. Following are some mentions of Lasersohn’s work in Italian pragmatics. In analyzing *quasi* ‘almost’, (Amaral and Del Prete 2010:53) define *quasi* as a scalar adverb in contrast with

“the non-scalar approximative adverb *all’incirca*”, or ‘about/approximately’.⁵ They mention in a footnote, “Approximative adverbs [such as *all’incirca*] behave as those modifying expressions that Lasersohn (1999) calls ‘slack regulators’” (Amaral and Del Prete, 2010:55). In this brief manner the authors make a claim that Lasersohn distanced himself from - while neither the word *about* as an approximative adverb, nor the phrase ‘approximative adverb’, make an appearance in his work, I believe that Lasersohn would categorize the former as a ‘hedge’, which he argues does not fall under the purview of slack regulation. As I have stated, I am in disagreement with Lasersohn on this point - and furthermore, it is possible that Lasersohn simply did not take approximative adverbs into consideration.

On the other side of slack regulation, (Beltrama and Bochnak, 2015) explore halo restriction with the intensifier *-issimo*, echoing Lasersohn’s account that while modifiers such as *very* may act upon adjectives (or other expressions) encoding scalarity and/or gradability, *-issimo* (or, in Lasersohn’s case, *perfectly*) may modify non-gradable expressions.

- (39) Il serbatoio è pien-**issimo**.
 The tank is full-ISSIMO
 ‘The tank is completely/perfectly full.’ (Beltrama and Bochnak, 2015:864)

Following, they argue that *-issimo* does often regulate slack via precisification; however, they warn that “For this analysis of these predicates to go through, we must say that the interpretation of predicates subject to imprecision are context-sensitive, rather than having strict truth conditions that can pragmatically be subject to imprecision” (2015:865). *All’incirca* ‘around’ is used the same as *circa* ‘around’, which Ghezzi defines as an approximator and more specifically as a “preposition-based rounder” (Ghezzi, 2022:74). *Circa*, *all’incirca* and *tipo* can all be used to approximate temporally, such as in (40- 42).

⁵ In fact, their analysis of the approximation properties of *quasi* versus *all’incirca* - and the accompanying figures - are quite similar to my contrast in the previous section of Lauer and Lasersohn’s uses, respectively, of *by* and *about*, the latter producing a unidirectional approximative quality.

- (40) *Abbiamo fatto così e comunque tipo l'abbiamo presa alle 11 e l'abbiamo fatto - che*
 We did it like this and anyhow like we got them at 11 and we did it - what
ore sono? le tre - alle due e mezza, circa.
 time is it? three - at two thirty, **about.**
 (Julie Demar, 2018)
- (41) *... questo meraviglioso make up che non mi riuscirà mai perché io non mi trucco*
 ... this marvelous makeup that I will never succeed at because I don't do my makeup
tipo dalle 15 a 18...
like from 3:00 to 6:00...
 (Julie Demar, 2018)
- (42) *Leo è arrivato all'incirca alle 15*
 Leo arrived at **around** 3:00
 (Amaral and Del Prete, 2010:54)

Longstanding versus new approximators: *tipo* and *like*

A commonality across Italian and English is the relative recentness of *tipo* and *like* in approximation (and other vagueness) roles. D'Arcy describes *like* as a 'lexical variant' of *about*, with the former rapidly replacing the latter in the vocabulary of younger speakers (D'Arcy, 2005). Siegel works to affirm *like*'s role as a Discourse Marker, and then argues in favor of this DM *like* that has semantic bearing on a phrase, all while using an approximator *like*. This stems from Siegel's refutation of the existence of approximator *like*, although *like* as an approximative adverb is well-attested and documented (D'Arcy 2005). This disproof is based on her analysis of variance in acceptable responses to phrases using *about* or *like*, as seen in (43)-(44).

- (43) He has about six sisters.
 (a) ?Yes, he has exactly six.
 (b) Yes, he has about six.
 (c) No, he has exactly six.
 (d) #No, he has about six.
- (44) He has, like, six sisters.
 (a) Yes, he has exactly six.
 (b) Yes, he has about six.
 (c) ?#No, he has exactly six. (Good only as a sort of prescriptive correction; speaker shouldn't have used the word like.)
 (d) #No, he has about six."

(Siegel, 2002:40)

Consider Siegel's *like* argument in conjunction with Voghera, who explains that *tipo* can fulfill a new role in a phrase that would be awkward if replaced with a different hedge: "It is not easy to produce an effective rendition of such meaning without using *tipo* [as in (45)]; the only way of approximating its double function would be an awkward utterance of the kind in [(46)]:

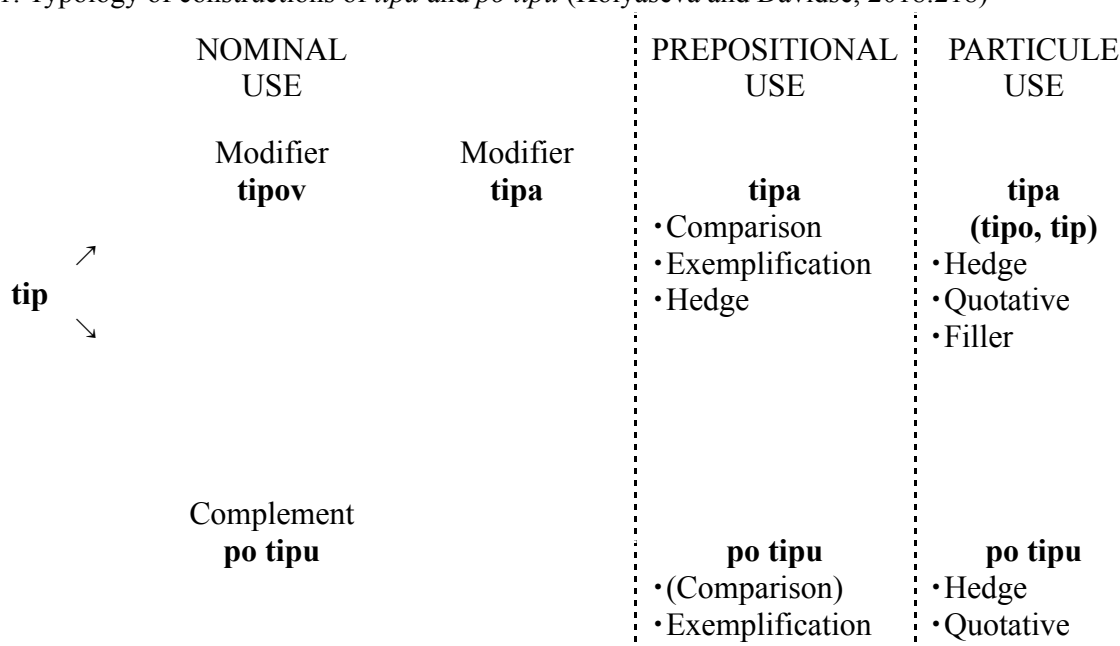
- (45) Partiamo domani tipo
'We'll leave like tomorrow'
- (46) ?È probabile che partiamo domani forse
'It is probable that we are leaving maybe tomorrow'

Drawing on Siegel's findings in English, I propose that both *tipo*_[~N] and *like* are capable of slack regulation, because of their status as relatively newly developed vagueness markers.

Cross-linguistic vagueness: 'Type Nouns'

As Kolyaseva and Davidse (2018) note, Italian *tipo* joins a category of words they define as Type Nouns (TN), which "seem strongly inclined to develop new, grammatical, meanings across languages" (2018:192). They precede their analysis of *tip* in Russian (see Figure 1) with the information that this process has been observed in seven different languages, in six of which the TN in question is an iteration springing from the Greek root *typos*: *tipo* (Portuguese, Spanish, Italian), *type* (English), *tip* (Swedish, Norwegian), and *tip/tipa/po tipu* (Russian) (2018:192).

This leads me to speculate that we will continue to see this kind of vagueness marker growing. We have discussed *tipo* and slack regulation with particular regards to its history as a type noun and its flexibility as opposed to other hedges, and so I would expect to find that other Type Nouns functioning in this matter would also fulfill the requirements to becoming a slack widener.

Figure 1: Typology of constructions of *tipa* and *po tipu* (Kolyaseva and Davidse, 2018:218)

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have explored two central questions; the current state of *tipo*_[−N] usage, as analyzed in naturalistic speech gathered from YouTube videos, and the theory (inspired by Muffy Siegel’s work with *like* in English) that *tipo*_[−N] may function as a slack widener, where it increases a denotation’s pragmatic halo. With regards to the former, I discovered that *tipo*_[−N] currently serves in many VM roles. Along with predicted functions, such as approximator, hedge, quotative, and filler, *tipo*_[−N] also indicates ‘like’, ‘like’/‘for example’, and ‘like’/‘of the type’. Each functional category serves as a VM, and allows the speaker to alter the pragmatics of their proposition. Showing a development from Voghera’s data in 2013, several tokens of *tipo*_[−N] as a quotative appeared in the YouTube videos. Thus we can continue Voghera’s timeline of *tipo*_[−N]’s grammaticalization towards further markers of vagueness. Next, I proposed that *tipo*_[−N] follows a similar semantic/pragmatic track to *like* in English, where in an approximative role it

alters a phrase's pragmatic halo but not necessarily its truth conditions. As *tipo*_[-N] as a VM is a more recent, semantically bleached usage of the word, similar to *like*, it sidesteps the truth conditional pitfalls that prevent long standing approximators such as *about* or *all'incirca* from performing as 'pure' (exclusively pragmatic) slack regulators. This further affirms Lasersohn's entire theory of pragmatic halos, eliminating the difficulty that he discussed in his original article of whether 'pure' slack widenings exist. A step to further corroborate this finding would be a study, led by or involving native Italian speakers, to confirm that the addition of *tipo*_[-N] to a phrase follows the same pattern of felicitous/infelicitous responses demonstrated in (43). Springing from this analysis, assuming that VMs take part by nature in slack regulation helps to explain how VMs like *tipo*_[-N] can appear in so many semantic positions, but share the same underlying pragmatic effect. Another categorization to account for is the Type Noun designation discussed by Kolyaseva and Davidse; this explains why words like *tipo*_[-N] have followed similar trajectories, and elaborates on the vagueness properties of different words by proposing a commonality of their etymological origins. Future studies could interrogate TNs performing as VMs (such as *tip/tipa/po tipu* in Russian) to uncover whether they meet the conditions to be identified as 'pure' slack regulators.

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