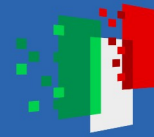




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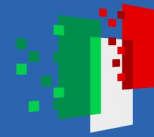
**MODAL PARTICLES:
CROSS-LINGUISTIC
PERSPECTIVES
AND MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS**

**24th September 2025, Ca'
Foscari University of
Venice**

**Ben as an Italian Modal Particle: a
multimodal analysis**

**Federica Cognola*, Giovanni Palilla,
Erika Petrocchi***

***Università Ca' Foscari; Università
della Tuscia**



1. Ben as an Italian Modal Particle

Italian as a language lacking modal particles (=MP) CITA;

Ben “well”, as an element exhibiting modal usages, first noted by Coniglio (2008; 2011, 33ss.); Cardinaletti (2011).

A. Bene as a Manner Adverb:

- (1) a. Luca non ha *bene pulito bene i vetri
"Luca didn't clean the windows well
b. Bene ha pulito i vetri, non male!
c. Come li ha puliti? Bene

→ postverbal;

→ full form;

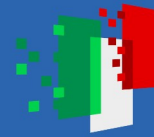
→ no syntactic/ prosodic restrictions.



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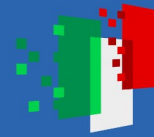
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B. Ben as “molto” (a lot) before an adjective:

- (2)
- a. Stringi i lacci ben stretti
”Tight the laces tightly
 - b. Era ben diverso da come me lo aspettavo
”He was very different from how I expected him to be.”

→ preadjectival;

→ reduced form.



C. Ben as a MP:

- (3) Presupposition: <Gianni has not answered>
a. Gianni avrà **ben** risposto (Belletti 1994:30)
“Gianni will have indeed answered”
b. Deve **ben** aver già confessato (Coniglio 2008:123)
“He MUST have already confessed”

→ presuppositional (modal-ben is **non-initial** in the sense of Diewald xx and it always refers back to a **pragmatischer Prätext**);

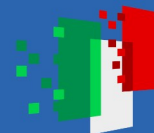
→ presupposition = [-p] (ben specialized for positive sentences)

→ reduced form;

→ must appear between finite + non-finite verb forms;

→ compatible with manner + Adj modification:

- (4) Lo avrà già ben già fatto bene
Avrà già ben allacciato i lacci ben stretti



Other properties of Modal Particles (cf. Thurmair 1989):

→ syntactic and prosodic (no comma intonation) integration (Cognola&Moroni 2024), scope on the whole sentence:

- (5)
- a. Sarebbe ***ben*** venuto se avesse potuto
 - b. **Ben* sarebbe venuto se avesse potuto
 - c. *Sarebbe, ben, venuto
 - d. Sarebbe, probabilmente, venuto
- He would have come / He would have probably come*

→ MPs cannot be isolated, negated, modified, nor coordinated (cf. Coniglio 2008)

- (6)
- a. Viene domani? *Ben
Does he come tomorrow? *Ben*
 - b.*Lo avrei abbastanza ben comprato
I would have bought it
 - c.*Lo avrei sì e ben comprato
I would have bought it

→ Compatible with root embedded clauses (cf. Coniglio 2008):

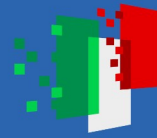
- (7)
- a. So che sarebbe ben venuto se lo avessimo chiamato
 - b.*Ti chiedo quando/se sarebbe ben venuto



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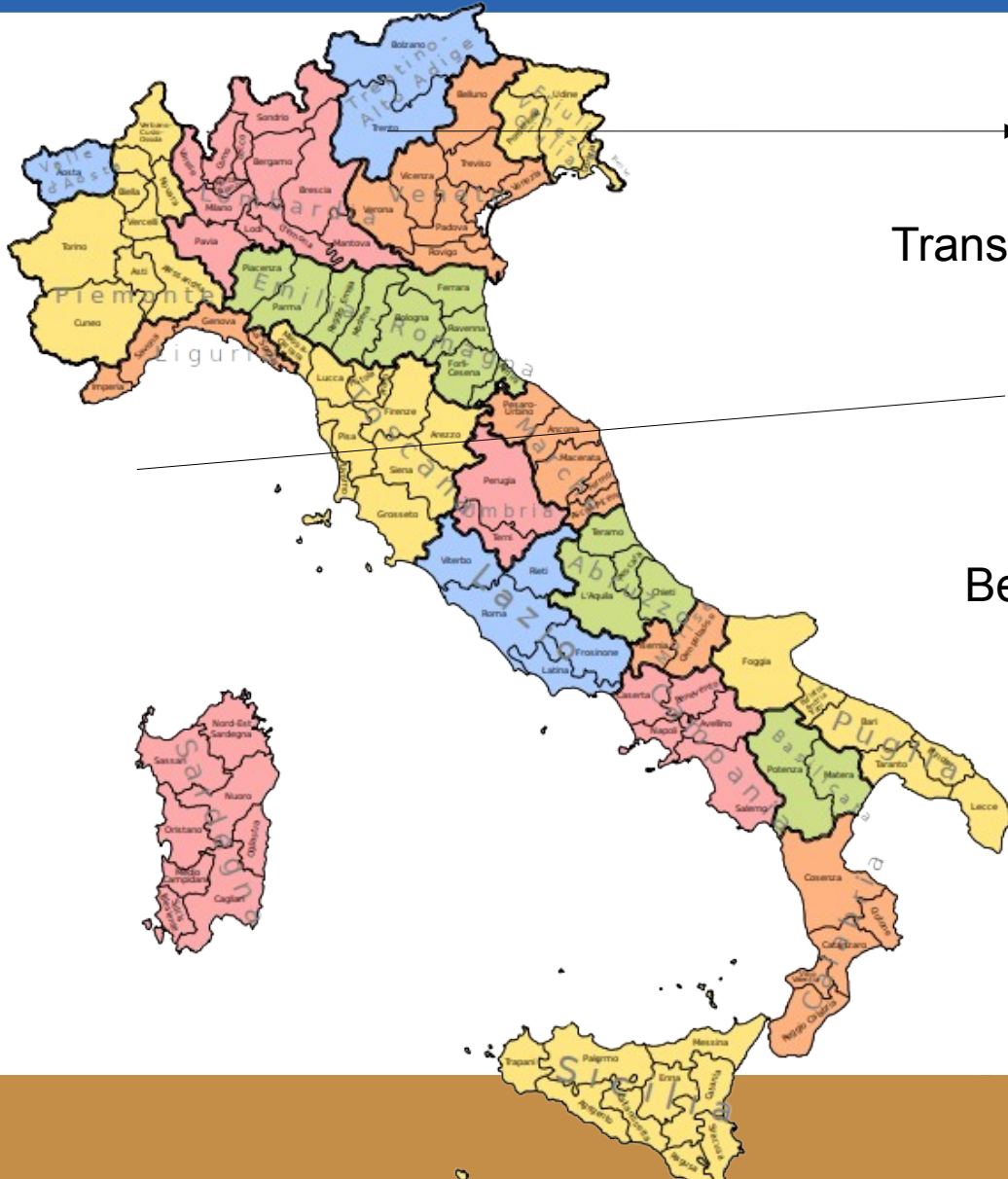
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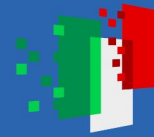
Trentino centrale:
→ active isogloss for ben

Transitional area

Ben virtually absent

Cognola&Schifano (2018);
Cognola & Moroni (2024):
MP in Italian as a
Sprachbund phenomenon

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/
File:Italian_regions_provinces.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Italian_regions_provinces.svg)



Ben OK with complex verb forms & with modals:

- (8) a. La pasta l'avrebbe ben mangiata → OK in all varieties
He would have eaten the pasta
→ b. La pasta la mangia ben → OK in Central Trentino only
He does eat the pasta

Ben referring back to a presupposition just mentioned in the discourse:

- (9) A: La pasta tanto non la mangiavi
B: No, l'avrei ben mangiata la pasta → OK in all varieties

Ben referring back to a presupposition inferrable from the context:

<You go away because there is no beer left>

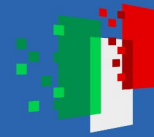
- (10) Dove vai? Ce ne è ben ancora birra. → OK in Central Trentino only



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Ben OK in concessive argumentation contexts (konzessive Argumentation, cf. zwar-aber; schon):

(11) a. La pasta lei l'avrebbe **ben** mangiata, **ma** tu non ne hai fatta abbastanza per tutti

→

OK in Central Trentino

b. Può **ben** telefonarmi oggi, **ma** credo di esserci

→

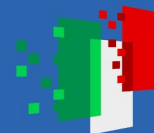
OK in Central Trentino



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Analysis (Cognola&Schifano 2018 a,b and further work):

→ Repp (2014) MPs as CG managing operators (CG = sentences taken to be true by the participants to the conversation);

→ analysis for DOCH

<retrieve> + <contrast>; it involves the illocutionary operatum VERUM (Romero & Han (2004) = the p in its scope should be added to the CG; (FALSUM (Repp 2014) = no degree of strength for adding p to the CG.)

Dove vai? Ce ne è **ben** ancora birra. / Du gehst? Es gibt **doch** Bier!

(Zimmermann 2011:2017)

Ben / doch:

<retrieve> = there is beer left

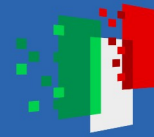
<contrast> = pragmatischer Prätext = you think that there is no beer left



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Open questions to be addressed in the RUM project:

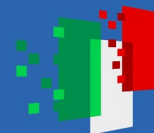
- sociolinguistic distribution of modal *ben* across Italian varieties: are the data collected by Cognola/Schifano (2018 a,b) confirmed?
- are there specific uses of *ben* connected to the specific Textsorte “political speech”?
- prosodic status of *ben*? (accented + non-accented *ben* like accented and non-accented *doch*?);
- are there specific gestures connected to the modal usages of *ben*, possibly in contrast with other usages of *bene*?



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Quantitative analysis of the corpus data:

53 examples of *ben*, pronounced by 24 politicians;

Two major types of *ben*:

Context 1) preverbal *ben* = 16 → it is NOT a MP

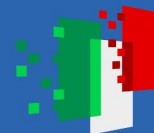
14 embedded clauses

3 in main clauses (2 same speaker)

Context 2) clause-internal (in main clauses + root embedded) *ben* = 24

→ it is a MP

→ only the latter is a MP, but the two have similar pragmatic properties.



Context 1: Ben functions here as an adverb:

→ not described in the literature on *ben*

(12) Tanto è stato fatto dalla Provincia, come **ben** ha ricordato la
consigliera S. e tanto c'è da fare, giustamente siamo qua a
parlarne anche quest'oggi.

taa_240207 (1.16)

"The Province has done a lot, as Councillor S. rightly recalled, and
there is still much to do. It's right that we are here to talk about it again
today.

(13) ... quella che è il centro, come **ben** diceva prima il collega V., è
proprio la persona con le sue fragilità e con le sue
difficoltà, con la sua malattia.

(0.35) taa_240411 – 5.47.39

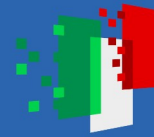
"The focus, as my colleague V. rightly said, is the person with their
vulnerabilities, their difficulties, and their illness."



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→ Similar meaning as *giustamente* (correctly), originally a manner adverb, now a speaker-oriented adverb (Satzadverb);

→ no presupposition is involved;

→ it is always used to **retrieve** an already mentioned issue / fact / document, typically mostly making reference to the colleague involved in it.

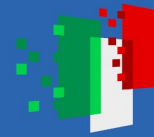
Retrieve + confirm



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Ben in context 1 appears 10/16 times with a gesture (in several examples no gesture is made, the speaker is reading);

Interestingly, no gestures are found in the 3 examples in which *ben* refers to a document/fact, but gestures are limited to cases in which a colleague is mentioned and are addressed to the public.

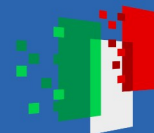
→ when present, the gesture is in nearly all cases a “intersubjektiven Deiktikums” → Dagegen zeigt man mit intersubjektiven (oder ‚interaktiven‘) Deiktika auf den Gesprächspartner als Gesprächspartner. Die Funktion ist also nicht primär referentiell (zum Beispiel die Identifikation des Referenten eines Pronomens in der zweiten Person), sondern sie ist vielmehr auf der pragmatischen Ebene anzusiedeln. (Schoonjans 2018:135)



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One hand (pointing/ palm up):

quella che è il centro, come **ben** diceva prima il collega V., è proprio la persona con le sue fragilità e con le sue difficoltà, con la sua malattia.

(0.35)

taa_240411 – 5.47.39 →accented

”The focus, as my colleague V. rightly said, is the person with their vulnerabilities, their difficulties, and their illness.”

Two hands:

Io lo ringrazio perché lei stamattina ha fatto un appello, come ha **ben** detto, al nostro Presidente della Provincia (taa_230329_2) → flat

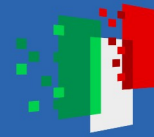
“I thank him because, as he rightly said, he made an appeal to our President of the Province this morning.”



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→ “Typischerweise ist die Wirkung des intersubjektiven Deiktikums mit Übereinstimmung oder Einverständnis zu verknüpfen. Am ausführlichsten analysiert wurde bislang die Verwendung dieser Geste als Reaktion auf die Äußerung, mit der man sich einverstanden zeigt.” (Schoonjans 2018: 135).

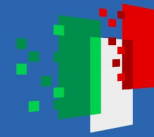
→ retrieve & confirm.



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- Ben can be accented or non-accented in this function;
- in some examples it is not prosodically integrated:

(14) Effettivamente in questi anni così non è stato, # **ben** # dice il collega M.,
relativamente alla questione dell'ufficio legislativo a nostra disposizione,

Taa_230711 da 0.20

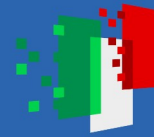
“Indeed it hasn't been that way in recent years, as my colleague M. rightly pointed out,
regarding the legislative office at our disposal.”



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Context 2:

→ ben functions as a MP; it is always presuppositional:

(15) Context: there is a discussion about procedures

Quindi era ben giusto quello che stava dicendo C.
"So what C. was saying was right indeed."

→ Presupposition: < it is not right >

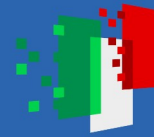
→ **retrieve presupposition present in the context & contrast**



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Many examples of “konzessive Argumentation”:

Perché noi possiamo anche rafforzare l'autonomia, ma se non usiamo nemmeno le leve, gli strumenti che l'autonomia ha oggi, possiamo **ben** rafforzarla ma ci serve a **ben** poco.

taa_241211

“We can strengthen our autonomy, but if we don't even use the levers and tools that autonomy provides today, we can certainly reinforce it, but it won't be of much use.”

→ Presupposition: <we do not want to reinforce>

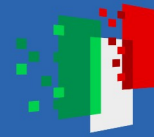
→ **retrieve presupposition inferrable & contrast**



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→ is prosodically integrated;

→ In most cases these usages involve a de-accented *ben*;

→ however, it is possible to have accented *ben*, especially in cases in which a novel argument is retrieved.

→ in some cases the prosody sounds “strange”, artificial.



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Ben in context 2 appears 15/24 times in combination with a gesture (in several examples no gesture is made, the speaker is reading/not moving/ not visibile);

→when present, the gesture is a “intersubjektiver Deiktikum”:

1) The gesture can refer to somebody present in the public:

Presupposition <C. is wrong>

(16) Quindi era ben giusto quello che stava dicendo C.
”So what C. was saying was right indeed.”



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2) The gesture (one hand) is connected to a novel argument which is brought into the discussion:

Talking about bears:

Questo qua era esattamente a 500 metri da casa, era stato portato dalla moglie col cane e dopodiché lui tornava praticamente a casa, 500 metri da casa sua. Anche qua non voglio leggervi oltre perché non voglio tediarvi. Per dire cosa? **Si può ben pensare di spostare, di ucciderne 8, di spostarli. Io non dico di ucciderli, però io dico che il problema va risolto.**

Taa_240304 12.16.25 0.50

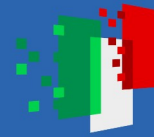
“This one was exactly 500 meters from home. He had been taken there by his wife with the dog, and after that, he was returning home, 500 meters from his house. Again, I don't want to read any more because I don't want to bore you. My point is this: we can certainly think about moving, killing 8, moving them. I do not want to kill them, but I simply say that the problem must be solved.”



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Function of the gesture:

→ expresses “Übereinstimmung oder Einverständnis” zu verknüpfen. Am ausführlichsten analysiert wurde bislang die Verwendung dieser Geste als Reaktion auf die Äußerung, mit der man sich einverstanden zeigt.” :

→ it can also introduce a novel argument with which the speaker agrees.

Ben as MP conveys the following information:

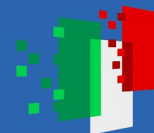
- 1) retrieve;
- 2) contrast (negative presupposition);
- 3) confirm (through the gesture) → also as strategy to introduce a counterargument.



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Conclusions

→ sociolinguistic distribution of modal *ben* across Italian varieties: are the data collected by Cognola/Schifano (2018 a,b) confirmed?

Yes, *ben* is still very reduced.

→ are there specific uses of *ben* connected to the specific Textsorte “political speech”?

Yes, Satzadverb with the meaning of *giustamente* + konzessive Argumentation.

→ prosodic status of *ben*? (accented + non-accented *ben* like accented and non-accented *doch*?);

Still unclear: non-accented *ben* is the unmarked option for both Context 1 and 2, but cases of accented *ben* are found; possible role of a “theatral”, artificial prosody.

→ are there specific gestures connected to the modal usages of *ben*, possibly in contrast with other usages of *bene*?

Yes, “intersubjektiver Deiktikum” (Übereinstimmung oder Einverständnis) → retrieve & confirm + retrieve & contrast