

# Totality across domains: (inter)subjective uses of Italian *totale*

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When we communicate, we express content from a particular point of view, that is, with a certain degree of subjectivity: we index the speaker's perspective or viewpoint, contributing to the subjective dimension of discourse (Athanasiadou 2007). However, the use of totality terms as a source of subjectivity has so far received relatively little attention (Paradis 2000; Wu 2015; Wu & Tao 2018). In particular, how such expressions structure subjective and intersubjective meaning (Traugott 2003, 2010; Visconti 2009) in spoken interaction remains poorly understood. This raises the question of how totality can be reinterpreted at the interactional level.

This paper addresses this issue through a case study of the Italian adjective *totale* 'total', examining its semantic-pragmatic contribution across propositional and interactional uses. To capture the spontaneous emergence of these uses, the analysis is based on spoken data from the KiParla corpus (Ballarè & Mauri 2020) and adopts a cognitive-functional framework (Langacker 1998; Paradis 2001; Croft & Cruse 2010, *inter alii*). The approach is qualitative and corpus-based, with occurrences manually annotated for syntactic status of *totale* (noun vs adjective vs discourse marker), semantic-pragmatic function, and the semantic properties of the scope. Attention is also paid to interactional context and speaker metadata.

In its referential uses, *totale* encodes quantitative totality, expressing exhaustive coverage over a domain (1). However, corpus evidence shows that, when conveying the speaker's subjective stance toward a situation, *totale* takes scope over NPs that are semantically positioned along a continuum from denotative (2) to connotative meaning (3). Here, it modifies domains that are not lexically bounded, combining preferentially with mass-like nouns and yielding maximal interpretations. Rather than shifting to scalarity (see Kennedy & McNally 2005 for related phenomena in English), *totale* operates as a bound-imposing operator, introducing a maximal value. In this way, it effectively closes an otherwise open domain (Paradis 2000) and "boosts" (Caffi 2006) the intensity of the utterance.

Crucially, *totale* has recently been used as a discourse marker of agreement (4), considering agreement as an umbrella term including diverse discursive functions, i.e. acknowledgment, alignment and approval (agreement *stricto sensu*) (Borreguero Zuloaga & Ferroni 2020). Data suggests that in spoken Italian, *totale* also functions as a turn-constructional unit indexing full agreement with the prior speaker (Auer 1984; Sacks 1987; Sansò 2020; Pomerantz 2021).

We propose that *totale* systematically operates along a continuum ranging from objective to subjective to intersubjective meaning: across all domains, *totale* consistently encodes the elimination of residual alternatives. Yet, at the interactional level, this semantic configuration is reinterpreted as absence of dissent, yielding maximal agreement (Beltrama & Staum Casasanto 2017), whereby the speaker encodes their awareness of the addressee's stance.

While the present analysis is synchronic, the emergence and distribution of co-existing uses reveal a structural layering (Hopper 1991), which is consistent with a process of (inter)subjectification (Traugott 2010), whereby meanings come to increasingly encode speaker stance and orientation to the addressee.

The paper argues that *totale* retains a unified core semantics - totality - while expanding its scope from the saturation of propositional content to subjectivity and, ultimately, to the management of agreement in interaction. Drawing on naturally occurring spoken interactions, the analysis suggests that expressions of totality are particularly prone to developing agreement functions, as their core

semantics can be reinterpreted interactionally as absence of dissent, thus providing a compact resource for expressing maximal agreement in spoken discourse.

### Examples:

(1) BOI087: perchè

BOI087: allora prima di tutto per un motivo molto semplice perchè la danimarca la popolazione **totale** della danimarca non raggiunge la popolazione di roma

BOI087: quindi

(KiParla)

(1) BOI087: because

BOI087: well first of all for a very simple reason denmark's **total** population isn't even as big as rome's

BOI087: so

(2) PKP110: cioè proprio di notte

PKP110: devo avere il mio buio **totale**

PKP110: il mio silenzio **totale**

PKP110: e sto da dio

(KiParla)

(2) PKP110: i mean right at night

PKP110: i need **total** darkness

PKP110: **total** silence

PKP110: and i'm perfectly fine

(3) BOI090: no però vedo tanti sticker

BOI090: cioè una cosa che vedo sul sui portici di bologna e che ultimamente va un sacco di moda

BOI090: secondo me

BOI090: è uno schifo

BOI090: **totale** perché cioè anche no

(KiParla)

(3) BOI090: no but i see loads of stickers

BOI090: i mean it's something i see on the arcades in bologna and it's been so trendy lately

BOI090: in my opinion

BOI090: it's **total** rubbish

BOI090: because i mean no

(4) PST158: questi giorni di sole ho voglia di andare al mare

PST214: okay

PST158: in liguria

PST214: liguria

PST214: **totale**

(KiParla)

(4) PST158: with all these sunny days i feel like going to the seaside

PST214: okay

PST158: in liguria

PST214: liguria

PST214: **totally**

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