NOMINALIZATION AS AN ENHANCER OF LINGUISTIC IMPLICITNESS IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

FEDERICA COMINETTI
UNIVERSITÀ DELL'AQUILA

Abstract – This paper explores the role played by nominalization in enhancing the persuasive potential of texts by allowing a larger and more effective use of linguistic implicit strategies. The analysis starts from the premise that linguistic implicitness has been proven to help persuade addressees, and adopts the taxonomy of linguistic implicitness proposed in Lombardi Vallauri (2019), including four categories of implicit strategies (presupposition, topicalization, implicature, and vagueness). Data are extracted from the IMPAQTS corpus of Italian political discourse and qualitatively analyzed. The analysis shows that nominalized forms, quite frequent in political discourse, ease the presence of three different implicit strategies: presupposition, obtained through the packaging of nominalized forms as definite descriptions; vagueness, obtained through the omission of one of the participants in the action, typically the agent; topicalization, obtained through syntactic and prosodic means. All in all, nominalized forms seem to be able to increase the manipulative power of texts in political discourse.

Keywords: nominalization; linguistic implicitness; political discourse; presupposition; vagueness.

1. Introduction

This paper explores the role played by nominalization in enhancing the persuasive potential of a text by allowing a larger and more effective use of linguistic implicit strategies. This idea sparkles from the acknowledgment that linguistic implicitness can be exploited for persuasive purposes, especially in texts characterized by a global argumentative aim, of which political discourse is a typical representative (Givón 1982; Sbisà 1999; Sbisà 2007; Macagno 2015; Lombardi Vallauri 2016a, 2016b, 2019). Accordingly, any grammatical strategy able to increase the presence of implicit contents in a text should be considered a possible "enhancer" of its manipulative potential.

At least since Halliday (1988), the frequent use of nominalization is acknowledged to be a typical trait of formal and technical registers. Political discourse makes no exception, featuring a large use of nominalized forms. This is described as a resource to obtain synthesis, in the form of concentration of information (Ventola 1996), and a more flexible organization of the sentence information structure (Halliday 1988). I will suggest that the large use of nominalized forms also increases the persuasiveness of the text by easing the presence of a variety of linguistic implicit strategies, ranging from presupposition to vagueness, to topicalization. I will do so by providing a qualitative analysis of a large corpus of Italian political discourse, the IMPAQTS corpus.

The paper is organized as follows: first, a taxonomy of linguistic implicit strategies and the corpus will be presented (§2.1), and it will be explained why and how linguistic implicit strategies can be exploited for manipulative purposes (§2.2). The relevant aspects of the phenomenon of nominalization will be then introduced (§3.1) and it will be shown how nominalized forms can be used to produce more and more effective linguistic implicit

strategies (§3.2-3.5). I will finally draw some concluding remarks (§4).

2. Linguistic implicit strategies as means of persuasion

2.1. A taxonomy of linguistic implicit strategies

Before introducing the taxonomy of linguistic implicit strategies that will be adopted, let me briefly hint at the notion of linguistic implicitness I am starting from. In fact, "although implicitness is central to pragmatics and the term is ubiquitous in the literature, it does not appear to enjoy a widely accepted definition" (Dynel, Cap 2017, p. 1). Acknowledging that the distinction between what is explicit and what is implicit in language is not easily set, Sbisà (2007, p. 7) brings forth a bundle of three criteria (my translation):

1) Availability condition: what is explicit is effortlessly available to addressees.
2) Challengeability condition: what is explicit is challenged by negative answers or objections.
3) Non-drifting condition: in specifying what is explicit, it is possible to drift from the utterance only as much as it is needed to barely satisfy the challengeability condition.

According to such criteria, Sbisà pinpoints two major strategies of linguistic implicitness: *presupposition* and *implicature*. These strategies can be considered the "core" of linguistic implicitness, being included in most analyses and taxonomies[1] (Bertuccelli Papi 2009). Let me adopt for both categories a brief definition useful to the paper's purposes.

As for presupposition, we can recall the definition by Stalnaker (2002, p. 701): "To presuppose something is to take it for granted, or at least to act as if one takes it for granted, as background information – as common ground among the participants in the conversation". Let us consider a famous example (Sellars 1954):

1) Bertrand has stopped beating his wife.

In (1), it is not explicitly asserted but presupposed that Bertrand had been beating his wife. Typically, presupposition can be identified by applying the "negation persistence test"[2] (Strawson 1950, Kiparsky, Kiparsky 1971). Indeed, presupposed contents survive under negation:

2A) Bertrand has not stopped beating his wife.
2B) It is not true that Bertrand has stopped beating his wife.

In both (2A) and (2B), the fact that Bertrand had been beating his wife is not under the scope of negation, because this content is not asserted, but presupposed.

Presupposition is notoriously activated by many different linguistic triggers, including change of state predicates (Sellars 1954; Karttunen 1973, cf. ex. (1)), factive predicates (Kiparsky, Kiparsky 1971; Karttunen 1971), verbs of judgment (Fillmore

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[1] On the contrary, Sbisà excludes from the category of implicitness another phenomenon often included in it: logic implication. I refer to her book for discussion (Sbisà 2007, p. 8).
[2] Or other tests, such as the change of illocution (Sbisà 2007).

1971), iteratives (Levinson 1983, p. 182), some adverbial clauses (e.g., temporal clauses, Frege 1892, Lombardi Vallauri 2000, 2009). For the present paper's purposes, the most relevant trigger is *definite descriptions*: NPs introduced by a definite determiner (Frege 1892).

As for implicatures, Grice (1975) famously defines them as propositions that can be communicated through an utterance without being explicitly said. Implicatures are traditionally classified as *conventional* and *conversational*. Implicatures of the first kind arise from the use of certain expressions (often connectives and adverbs) to which they are conventionally associated. For example, the sentence "Herbert is poor *but* honest" conventionally implies that there is a contrast between poverty and honesty. Conversational implicatures on the contrary do not depend on the conventional meaning of a linguistic expression but arise as a consequence of the apparent violation in discourse of one of the four maxims of conversation[3], which jointly express a general cooperative principle. Let us consider the conversation in (3):

3) A: I am out of petrol.
    B: There is a garage round the corner.

In (3), B apparently gives a non-cooperative contribution, since they don't provide explicit information about the solving of the problem raised by A. However, all the participants in the conversation expect the others to be cooperative, and accordingly, such ostensible violation produces a conversational implicature: in the specific case, B implies that A can get petrol at the garage round the corner, which is presumably open.

Building on Sbisà's basilar taxonomy of implicitness, Lombardi Vallauri and Masia (2014) proposed a distinction between implicit strategies *concealing content* and implicit strategies *concealing responsibility*. In the former case, typically represented by implicatures, what is implicit in discourse is some content, a proposition. With reference to (3), the proposition "You can find petrol in a garage that is round the corner and is now open" is the implicit content, which is never explicitly uttered. In the case of strategies concealing responsibility, instead, all the contents are present in the text; what is implicit is the source's commitment to them. This is the case of presuppositions. With reference to (1), the content "Bertrand had been beating his wife" is present in the text but presented as shared. The source does not take responsibility for the presupposed content, as they would if they explicitly asserted: "Bertrand had been beating his wife. Now he has stopped". In other words, "while implicatures "contain" (but conceal) the content to be held as true, presuppositions contain but conceal the very act of proposing it as true" (Lombardi Vallauri, Masia 2014, p. 162).

Lombardi Vallauri and Masia (2014) also broadened Sbisà's taxonomy of implicitness by listing a responsibility-concealing implicit strategy other than presupposition: *topic*. This is based on the observation that framing a certain content as a topic suggests that the source considers it already active in the addressee's Short-Term Memory, reducing their responsibility on display within that utterance.

Let us adopt an operational definition of topic. Following Lombardi Vallauri (2009, p. 88), I will consider as topic the part of an utterance which – under an information structure analysis – is not the comment, the comment being the part of the utterance which realizes the informative purpose of the utterance and conveys the utterance's illocutionary force. The function of the topic is to anchor the comment in discourse and provide extra

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[3] The famous Gricean maxims (Grice 1975, p. 45).

information to help its processing. In many languages, topics are effected by two types of formal traits: prosody and the order of sentence constituents. As for the former, topics are typically signaled by a recognizable prosodic contour and are void of pitches (Frascarelli, Hinterhölzl 2007; Cresti, Moneglia 2018). Let us consider the following examples:

4) A: Joe has started drinking…
   B: He drinks to forget Sue.
   C: *To forget Sue he drinks.

5) A: Joe has started drinking…
   B: To FORGET SUE, he drinks.

6) It is to forget Sue that Joe has started drinking.

In (4B), "he drinks" is the topic: it includes information already active in discourse and it has the function of helping process the comment "to forget Sue", which is the informative part of the utterance and in fact the only obligatory part. Indeed, (4C), which provides the same information in the opposite order, would not be acceptable in the mentioned context, if uttered with unmarked prosody. (4B) provides an example of the canonical order of topic and comment in an unmarked sentence, with the topic on the left. On the contrary, (5B) provides an example of a prosodically marked sentence, with focus on "to FORGET". In such a case, the topic "he drinks" can appear on the right. Apart from marked prosody, also marked syntax can move topics to the right, like in (6), where a cleft sentence appears: even if the context is not provided, in this example the fact that Joe has started drinking cannot but be interpreted as topical. It may be worth adding that in sentences characterized by marked syntax, as in (6), prosody as well coherently signals the topic. In other words, topics are always prosodically recognizable, when they appear in both canonical and marked syntactic structures.

Finally, Lombardi Vallauri (2016a, 2016b, 2019) further broadened the taxonomy by suggesting another linguistic implicit strategy, to be added to the category of those concealing content: *vagueness*. An expression is vague if it cannot be said if it applies or not to a specific referent (De Mauro 1982, p. 99; Machetti 2006; Mannaioli 2023). Vagueness can be obtained through semantic or syntactic means:

7) Paradise island hotel: experience the best in Acapulco
                                                    (Lombardi Vallauri 2019, p. 98)

8) The vase was broken.

In (7), "experience the best" is a vague expression that each possible addressee of the advertising would interpret differently: it could be referred to the beauty of nature, but also to the quality of infrastructures, the quality of food, the presence of VIP guests, etc. In (8), the passive construct allows the source to omit a participant in the action expressed by the verb "to break", resulting in a vague sentence where relevant detail is missing: addressees do not get to know who is responsible for the breaking.

Summing up, in this work I will take the theoretical stance by Sbisà (2007) and adopt the taxonomy of linguistic implicit strategies proposed by Lombardi Vallauri (2016a, 2016b, 2019), including:

> Strategies concealing responsibility
> > Presupposition
> > Topic
> Strategies concealing content
> > Implicature
> > Vagueness

This taxonomy is also adopted in the IMPAQTS project (Università Roma Tre, 2020-2023, PI: Edoardo Lombardi Vallauri, http://impaqts.it, Cominetti *et al.* 2022), which sees as one of its objectives the collection of a large corpus of Italian political speeches and its annotation per implicitly conveyed questionable contents (cf. §2.2) according to the mentioned scheme.

The examples presented in the remainder of this paper are extracted from the currently available section of the IMPAQTS corpus, including 910 speeches of variable length uttered from 1946 to 2022. Each example is followed by a code pointing at the speech from which it was extracted, conveying some metalinguistic information: the first four letters refer to the name of the speaker (ex. GMEL = Giorgia Meloni, NZIN = Nicola Zingaretti); the following numbers point at the year of utterance (ex. 19 = 2019, 79 = 1979); the subsequent letter refers to the type of speech (A = official discourse in a Chamber or other official assembly; C = meeting or rally; D = press conference or other declarations; T = broadcasted message; N = new media declaration; P = party assembly).

2.2. The persuasive potential of linguistic implicit strategies

Linguistic implicit strategies are resources that allow for concision and politeness. In particular, presupposition allows to avoid wasting time and energy on information shared by everyone:

9) Today, the Sun sets at 8:02 p.m.

In (9), the source may well take for granted the concept of "Sun", sparing addressees pedantic details such as "We live on a planet which spins around a star that we call *Sun*. That star today sets at 8:02 p.m."

Topics instruct addressees on the information structure of the utterance, signaling to which part of the utterance they should pay less attention. This is crucial information since the addressees of spoken communication have physical limits which prevent them from processing carefully the entire flow of speech (Christiansen, Chater 2016; Tversky, Kahneman 1974; Gigerenzer 2008; Ferreira *et al.* 2002; Sanford 2002). Accordingly, contents packaged as topics are marked as not needing particular attention, instructing addressees to save their cognitive energies for what follows (Lombardi Vallauri 2009, 2016a, 2016b, 2019).

Implicatures and vagueness are resources used to act with politeness when it comes to face-threatening acts, such as – for example – declining an offer or pointing out a deficiency:

10) A: Will you join me for dinner?
    B: Today is my father's birthday…

11) Those who have not handed their reports in are kindly invited to do so by today.

In (10), an implicature is used to decline an offer without bluntly saying "no". In (11), reference to non-complying people is obtained through a vague phrase, so as to avoid public exposure.

However, the presence of linguistic implicitness in language is not always an innocent strategy for conciseness and politeness, since implicit strategies may also be used for manipulative purposes (Givón 1982; Sbisà 1999; Sbisà 2007; Macagno 2015; Lombardi Vallauri 2016a, 2016b, 2019). In the case of responsibility-concealing strategies, this happens when the content packaged as a presupposition or topic is not something that can legitimately be considered as shared, but on the contrary, includes uncertain or even false contents of which the source wants to convince the addressees:

12) Continueremo a denunciare lo scempio che questi partiti stanno consumando.
    'We will continue denouncing the wreck that these parties are carrying out'.
    [GMEL19-D1]

In example (12), from the IMPAQTS corpus, the definite description used by the speaker presupposes that the parties she is talking about are carrying out a wreck. This content is at least exaggerated and cannot anyway be taken for granted. But why would the speaker package this content as a presupposition instead of plainly asserting it? The reason why responsibility-concealing strategies are successful means of persuasion is that they can reduce the addressees' critical sense (what Sperber *et al.* 2010 describe as "epistemic vigilance"). Accordingly, contents transmitted as presuppositions or topics are typically processed less carefully, especially in spoken language, thus increasing the chances that questionable contents are uncritically accepted by addressees (as experimentally verified by Schwarz 2015, 2016). Other studies suggest that addressees may even be persuaded to believe that they were *already* informed of such contents (Loftus 1975).

Content-concealing implicit strategies can also be used for manipulative purposes. In the case of vagueness, this happens when this strategy is used to give an advantage to the speaker by concealing a relevant detail without this deliberate omission being noticed. In the sample of political discourse portrayed by the IMPAQTS corpus, this typically happens in two kinds of situations: when the source moves an exaggerated or even false attack to weaken an opponent, and when the source makes a promise they are not sure of being able to keep. Examples of both kinds of tendentious vagueness can be found in (13):

13) I prossimi cinque anni non saranno solo un confronto tra programmi diversi, ma sarà una battaglia politica, culturale, etica, programmatica, tra *chi non avendo idee per il futuro, vuole riportare indietro l'Europa*, e chi invece vuole e scommette su *una nuova Europa del lavoro, del benessere, della scienza, della storia*.
    'The next five years will not just be a comparison between different programs, but it will be a political, cultural, ethical, programmatic battle, between those who, having no ideas for the future, want to bring Europe back, and those who instead want and bet on a new Europe of work, of well-being, of science, of history'.
    [NZIN19-C1]

In (13), the speaker, running for the European election campaign, attacks some opponents "who, having no ideas for the future, want to bring Europe back". Any politician, if explicitly addressed with such a charge, would probably deny it and fight back, accusing the first speaker of defamation. Instead, vagueness protects the speaker from backfire, and still manages to obtain the intended persuasive aim: addressees will easily think of some

politicians who in their opinion appear to have no ideas for the future and are bringing Europe back. Consequently, they will be more inclined to believe that the first speaker is right. In the second part of the utterance in (13), when implicitly referring to his own party, the speaker resorts to vagueness again, this time to talk about his own election program: "bet on a new Europe of work, of well-being, of science, of history". What does "Europe of work, well-being, science, and history" mean? And how will a party "bet" on it? Also in this case, every listener is prone to interpret the expression in agreement with their opinion: for instance, "Europe of work" may refer to less unemployment, but also to better salaries, better job conditions, larger mobility, and so on.

Implicatures also provide an excellent means of persuasion. As mentioned, the content conveyed by an implicature is never explicitly encoded, but partially entrusted to the interpretation of the addressee. In this case, the cognitive mechanism of the *egocentric bias* comes into play: every individual has a preference for their own beliefs and for beliefs they have reached by themselves. Accordingly, addressees, having reached the content conveyed by implicature by themselves, will be more prone to accept it (Reboul 2011, p. 17).

Seen the persuasive power of linguistic implicit strategies, it is not surprising that they appear to be extensively used in political discourse (van Dijk 1992, 1997, 2000, 2011; Chilton 2005; Danler 2005; Rocci 2005; Charaudeau 2005; Reisigl 2008; Lombardi Vallauri, Masia 2020; Cominetti *et al.* 2022; Cominetti *et al.* 2023).

3. Nominalization as an enhancer of linguistic implicitness

3.1. Nominalization

Nominalization is the phenomenon by which any linguistic entity which is not a noun is transformed into a noun from a morphological and/or syntactic point of view. In functional perspective, nominalization is a grammatical strategy aimed at using in referential function second-order entities, such as events of processes, which are typically lexicalized as verbs, or third-order entities, such as facts or utterances (Hopper, Thompson 1985, p. 177; Lyons 1977).

Morphological nominalization is obtained through a set of language-specific morphemes: for Italian, common nominalizing suffixes are *-zione* (*amministrare* 'to administrate' > *amministrazione* 'administration'), *-mento* (*giurare* 'to swear' > *giuramento* 'oath') or *-ata* (*camminare* 'to walk' > *camminata* '(a) walk'). Syntactic nominalization often consists in the use of non-finite verb forms in nominal micro and macro-syntactic contexts:

14) I think that *the landing* on the moon is an excellent achievement by humankind.

In (14), to use the verb "land" as a subject, the source resorts to a [article + gerund] sequence, which is an instance of syntactic nominalization. Besides gerund, in other languages, we find other non-finite verb forms to serve as a base for syntactic nominalization: in Italian, it is infinitive:

15) *Mangiare* presto è un'abitudine salutare.
'Eating (lit. *to eat*) early is a healthy habit'.

*L*ingue e
*L*inguaggi

From a semantic point of view, one of the typical functions of nominalization is the instantiation of reference to the *generic* action expressed by the verbal basis:

16) Signor presidente, la nostra opposizione è espressione della nostra natura di moderati. Siamo diffidenti per istinto verso *la personalizzazione della politica* e *la sua riduzione alle semplificazioni mediatiche*.
'Mister President, our opposition is an expression of our nature as moderates. We are suspicious by nature towards *the personalization of politics and its reduction to mediatic simplifications*' [BAND94-A1]

In (16), two instances of nominalization are found: *la personalizzazione della politica* 'the personalization of politics' and *la sua riduzione alle semplificazioni mediatiche* 'its reduction to mediatic simplifications'. Both nominals are derived from verbs (*personalizzazione* < *personalizzare* 'to personalize'; *semplificazione* < *semplificare* 'to simplify') and have the function to establish a reference to generic actions: the speaker is not expressing his opposition to some specific event (e.g., the fact that someone attempted a personalization of politics), but to a generic concept.

The outcome of nominalization – nouns like *personalizzazione* and *semplificazione*, but also instances of syntactic nominalization – typically (though not always) semantically belongs to the category of *event nominals*, whose semantic content is that of an event or process. Often, as shown in (16), their semantics point to the generic action, but they can also refer to a specific event. In fact, event nominals can typically show an argument structure, which they inherit from their verbal base (Grimshaw 1990; Koptjevskaja-Tamm 1993; Gross, Kiefer 1995). The argument structure of nominals is normally expressed as an indirect complement depending on the nominal:

17A) Humankind/Apollo 11 landed on the moon (in 1969).
17B) The landing on the moon *by humankind* happened in 1969.
17C) The landing on the moon *of Apollo 11* happened in 1969.
17D) The *Apollo 11's* landing on the moon happened in 1969.

In Italian, the arguments of nominals are often introduced by preposition *di*[4] (18), while other possible linguistic devices are possessive adjectives and other indirect complements (for example, the one introduced by *da parte di* 'by').

18) Le nuove elezioni segneranno *il crollo dei partiti tradizionali* e *l'emergere di tante forze politiche nuove*.
'The new elections will mark the collapse of traditional parties and the emerging of many new political forces'. [LDMA18-T1]

In (18), two nominalized phrases appear: *il crollo dei partiti tradizionali* 'the collapse of traditional parties' and *l'emergere di tante forze politiche nuove* 'the emerging of many new political forces'. Both express one of the participants of the argument structure of their verbal basis as a complement introduced by the preposition *di*. Nonetheless, syntactic nominalizations can also express arguments as direct objects[5]:

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[4] Preposition *di* combines with definite articles in complex forms including *del*, *dei*, etc.
[5] Some statistics on the different strategies for expressing the objects of nominalized expressions are
    provided in Cominetti and Piunno (2016).

19) *Il ripetere continuamente le stesse cose* non gioverà alla vostra causa.
'Keeping repeating the same things will not help your case'.

Finally, being a phenomenon impacting the part-of-speech of linguistic entities, nominalization has an influence also on the information structure, because there is a clear association between parts-of-speech and micro-pragmatic roles. Specifically, prototypical topics are nouns, and prototypical comments are verbal predicates (a.o., Sapir 1921, p. 119, Hockett 1957, p. 201, Shibatani 1991, p. 96, Simone 2006, p. 5[6]). Consequently, inflected verbal predicates rarely appear as topics, while their nominalized counterparts can more easily do so (cf. Halliday 1988):

20A) Humankind [landed on the moon]COM.
20B) [The landing on the moon]TOP is an excellent achievement by humankind.

3.2. Nominalization as a presupposition strategy

In §2 it was mentioned that one of the commonest presupposition triggers is the definite description: an NP introduced by a definite determiner. Nominalization allows events or facts – normally lexicalized as verbs – to be packaged as definite descriptions:

21) Noi contestiamo dunque alla Democrazia Cristiana *la pretesa di presentarsi come una specie di insostituibile baluardo della democrazia.*
'We contest to Democrazia Cristiana *the presumption of presenting itself as a kind of irreplaceable bastion of democracy*'. [PTOG60-T1]

In (21), the definite description *la pretesa di presentarsi come una specie di insostituibile baluardo della democrazia* 'the presumption of presenting itself as a kind of irreplaceable bastion of democracy', whose head is the morphological nominalization *pretesa* 'presumption', makes the content "Democrazia Cristiana presents itself as a kind of irreplaceable bastion of democracy" presupposed. As shown in §2, this has an impact on the manipulative power of the message, increasing the chances that the content is more easily accepted by addressees.

As shown in §3, morphological nominals are not the only possible outcome of the process of nominalization. In the following example a nominal infinitive, preceded by a definite determiner, is the head of a presupposing definite description:

22) Care compagne e compagni, anche per questo non è solo una meschinità scandalosa, ma un errore politico, e tanto più grave se viene dalle file della sinistra *questo continuare a ripetere che il Partito Comunista, per uno o altro pretesto, non sarebbe abilitato a governare.*
'Dear comrades, also for this it is not just an outrageous nasty act, but also a political mistake, even more serious if it comes from the left wing, *this keeping repeating that the Communist Party, for any or another pretext, would not be qualified to govern*'. [ANAT86-C1]

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[6] Besides such long theoretical tradition, the association between nouns and topics on one side, and verbs and comments on the other is also confirmed by corpus-based research (Cresti, Moneglia 2010; Mittmann 2012; Cavalcante 2015) and neurophysiological investigation (Piciucco *et al.* 2021).

In (22), the definite description *questo continuare a ripetere che il Partito comunista, per uno o altro pretesto, non sarebbe abilitato a governare* 'this keeping repeating that the Communist Party, for any or another pretext, would not be qualified to govern' presupposes that someone has been keeping repeating that the Communist Party, for any or another pretext, would not be qualified to govern. Again, packaging this content as shared eases the chances that it escapes the addressees' epistemic vigilance. Interestingly, the explicitation of the presupposition unveils that in this example the use of nominalization also proves to produce vagueness, by allowing to omit who is actually responsible for the mentioned action. This aspect will be discussed in the next section.

3.3. Nominalization as a vagueness strategy

In §3.1 it was mentioned that event nominals, the typical outcome of the nominalization process, can inherit their verbal root's argument structure. When a nominalization refers to the generic action expressed by the verb, part of the argument structure is "naturally" missing, since a generic action may have fewer thematic roles or have none at all (cf. ex. (16)). However, it may happen that instances of nominalization referring to a specific event, and not to the generic action, also omit a part of the argument structure. In some cases, such omission is just formal, since the apparently non-expressed participant can be recovered in the context (23), or in the co-text through anaphoric mechanisms (24)[7]:

23) *Porre la questione di fiducia* è stato certamente una decisione politica grave.
'*Asking for a vote of confidence* surely was a dangerous political decision'. [MLUP15-A2]

24) Davvero mi chiedo come sia possibile che dai banchi del Governo giunga una tale mistificazione della realtà. Mi chiedo se sia solo frutto di una spiccata autoironia *il continuare a ripetere che ormai gli incentivi per investire al sud sono uguali o addirittura maggiori di quelli del Galles o dell'Irlanda.*
'I really ask myself how it is possible that such a mystification of reality comes from the Government. I wonder if it is just the result of a strong self-irony, *the continuous repeating that the incentives to invest in the South are equal or even greater than those of Wales or Ireland*'. [SPRE98-A1]

In (23), context and encyclopedic knowledge make it legitimate to omit the agent: only the Government can ask for a vote of confidence. In (24), the nominalization of the verb phrase *continuare a ripetere* 'keeping repeating' does not formally specify who is the subject of the action. Still, this information is easily recoverable from the preceding co-text, where it is clarified that the speaker is talking about the Government. Nonetheless, the encoding of such reference is still vague enough to protect the speaker from the possible consequences of a more explicit attack. If the speaker had said: "The Government keeps repeating that the incentives to invest in the South are equal or even greater than those of Wales or Ireland", the Government could have easily replied that the speaker is a liar, since they probably do *not* literally repeat that specific content. Also, regardless of the

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[7] In such cases, the rest of the utterance containing the nominalization can be decisive, in that, if it has eventive features (such as a verb explicitly inflected for tense) pointing to a precise event, the nominalization is bound to inherit them. I thank an anonymous reviewer for this observation.

Government's possible reaction, the impression that the speaker is exaggerating would have more easily arisen in her audience.

In many cases, the vagueness of the nominalized forms is even greater, and the omitted detail is simply unrecoverable from the context or co-text: the omission of a relevant participant in the described action appears to be deliberately pursued. Let us consider the following example:

25) C'è stata *una dimenticanza delle reali condizioni del Paese.*[8]
'There was *a forgetfulness of the real conditions of the country*.' [AMOR78-P1]

In (25), the choice of using the nominal *dimenticanza* 'forgetfulness' instead of a construct involving an inflected form of the verb *dimenticare* 'to forget' allows for the omission of the first participant in the action, that is the person who forgets, in Italian normally framed as the subject in active constructs. Instead of using an indirect complement to include the participant in the nominal's argument structure, the speaker simply omits it. Such a strategy perfectly fits into the notion of vagueness as defined in the adopted framework.

In some cases, this kind of vagueness can be exploited to distort true content by blurring the actual agent. In the following example, the speaker – a member of the opposition – resorts to a nominalization to refer to an informal meeting between one member of the Government and a group of people who had participated in a demonstration. By omitting the relevant argument, he implicitly eases the interpretation that the meeting was officially held on behalf of the Government:

26) Noi riteniamo che quello che è avvenuto questa mattina non vada assolutamente minimizzato. E ribadisco che ho trovato francamente troppo, come dire, superficiali alcune affermazioni fatte, di chi ha invitato di fatto a minimizzare questo episodio. Poi so bene che non sono stati incontrati giovani con passamontagna, ma credo che *incontrare quelli che avevano partecipato a una manifestazione sfociata in violenza* non sia stata una scelta corretta e giusta. Bisognava prendere le distanze da un'iniziativa che ha avuto quei momenti così negativi.
'We believe that what happened this morning should not be minimized. And I repeat that I found frankly too shallow some statements made by those who have in fact invited to minimize this episode. I do know that youngsters in balaclavas were not met, but I believe that *meeting those who had participated in a demonstration resulted in violence* was not the right choice. There was a need to distance from an event that has had so negative moments'. [MGAS10-A1]

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[8] Larger context is provided here: *C'è qualche volta, c'è stata qualche volta - e continua un po' ad esserci - una specie di polemica contro, specifica contro la Democrazia Cristiana, quasi che su di essa ricadesse la responsabilità di questo stato di cose, di questa impossibilità di riproporre lo schema classico del rapporto maggioranza-minoranza. C'è stato, soprattutto, una fase di fastidio, sulla scia dell'abitudine di addebitare tutti i mali alla Democrazia Cristiana, da qualsiasi parte, una dimenticanza delle reali condizioni del paese e dello schieramento politico.* 'Sometimes there is, sometimes there has been (and still continues to be) a kind of polemics against Democrazia Cristiana, almost as if the responsibility of this state of affairs fell on it; almost as if this impossibility of reproducing the classic scheme of the relationship majority-minority fell on it. There has been, in particular, a phase of annoyance, in the wake of the habit of charging Democrazia Cristiana of all evils, from every side, a forgetfulness of the real conditions of the country'.

In (26) it may be observed that the use of nominalization can serve the purpose of distorting true content into a manipulative one, by omitting a very relevant detail.

As seen in (22), the vagueness produced by nominalization can be embedded in a presupposition if the nominalized entity is packaged as a definite description. In such cases, the manipulative potential of the construct appears to be enhanced by the layering of two different implicit strategies. In (27), for example, the speaker, after hinting in the foregoing at a possible intrigue between some majority and minority parties, presupposes the existence of an attempt of putting together an irregular majority, without specifying who is responsible for such an alleged attempt:

27) Porre la questione di fiducia è stato certamente una decisione politica grave, ma pienamente legittima, di fronte *al tentativo di utilizzare il voto segreto per mettere insieme, su qualche emendamento, una maggioranza impropria al fine di snaturare l'impianto della riforma, rimandarla al Senato e farla così arenare.*
'Asking for a vote of confidence surely was a dangerous political decision, but fully legitimate, facing *the attempt of using the secret vote to put together, on some amendments, an irregular majority to the purpose of denaturing the structure of the reform, sending it back to the Senate and so make it stop*'. [MLUP15-A2]

As a further observation, I would suggest that my intuition as a native speaker is that the omission of the participant in a nominal construct like those in (25-27) goes relatively unnoticed, while probably the absence of one of the arguments of a transitive verb in a verbal construct would be more evident. In fact, the omission of a participant can well be obtained also in verbal constructs, through different lexical or syntactic strategies:

28A) Qualcuno ha dimenticato le reali condizioni del Paese. 'Someone forgot the real conditions of the Country'.
28B) Hanno dimenticato le reali condizioni del Paese. 'They forgot the real conditions of the Country'.
28C) Sono state dimenticate le reali condizioni del Paese. / Le reali condizioni del Paese sono state dimenticate. 'The real conditions of the Country have been forgotten'.
28D) Si sono dimenticate le reali condizioni del Paese. (Impersonal construct) 'The real conditions of the Country have been forgotten'.

In (28A), vagueness about the person who forgets has been obtained through the use as a subject of an indefinite pronoun; in (28B), it has been obtained through the omission of the subject altogether; in (28C), through a passive construction where the agent is not specified; in (28D), through an impersonal construction. All these strategies are frequently attested in the IMPAQTS corpus, also in manipulative contexts, and accordingly annotated as instances of syntactic vagueness.

Although a "vagueness degree" cannot be evaluated on the basis of the syntactic structure, I would suggest that in the four verbal constructions, the omission of the first participant probably does not go identically unnoticed. (28A) involves the presence of a lexical element (the indefinite pronoun *qualcuno* 'someone') which is inherently vague. In fact, it can also be used to emphasize the deliberate apparent omission of a participant[9]. Being the omission of the subject an unmarked grammatical feature of Italian, (28B) is a

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[9] For example, we can imagine a parent entering their child's room and saying: "I see that SOMEONE has not tidied up their room".

very natural utterance. However, from a textual point of view, the lack of the anaphoric antecedent to the null subject can be quite outstanding. (28C) and (28D), framing the action as centered on the other argument, are probably the best verbal options if one has the purpose to hide that they are deliberately omitting a relevant participant in describing an action.

If the kind of vagueness realized by (28A) can be described as lexical, or semantic, it is interesting to inquire to which level of analysis can the other strategies be ascribed. The strategy in (28B) appears to be set at the interface between semantics and syntax, while (28C) and (28D) are purely syntactic. As for (25) and (27), we can notice that nominalization allows for a morphological instantiation of vagueness.

3.4. Nominalization as a topicalizing strategy

Finally, nominalized entities can be prosodically framed as topics, as it happens in (29):

29) La vecchia classe politica italiana è stata travolta dai fatti e superata dai tempi. *L'autoaffondamento dei vecchi governanti,* schiacciati dal peso del debito pubblico e dal sistema di finanziamento illegale dei partiti, lascia il Paese impreparato e incerto nel momento difficile del rinnovamento e del passaggio a una nuova Repubblica.
'The old Italian political class was overwhelmed by facts and overcome by time. *The scuttling of the old rulers*, crushed by the weight of the public debt and by the system of illegal funding of parties, leaves the Country unprepared and uncertain in the difficult moment of renewal and shift to a new Republic'. [SBER94-T1][10]

In (29), the scuttling of the old rulers is not only presupposed by its framing as a definite description but also topicalized, thus enhancing its overall informational backgrounding and persuasive potential. From a cognitive point of view, the action is framed as both taken for granted in the long-term memory of the addressees and active in their short-term memory, when both these points are not legitimate: firstly, the interpretation of the recent political facts as "a scuttling" is just the point of view of the speaker, and not a shared truth. Secondly, such alleged scuttling has not been hinted at before in the text, and accordingly, its topicalization as if it is cognitively active in discourse (Chafe 1987) is not textually legitimate.

The topicalization of a nominalized entity can also occur if the nominal is not obtained through a definite description:

30) Questo elemento è un elemento insieme economico e insieme politico perché, a mio avviso, noi dobbiamo sapere che abbiamo due grandi problemi di politica estera, uno è quello che riguarda la Russia di Putin e l'altro è quello drammatico del Medio Oriente. Ma *ritenere che quello che è avvenuto in Crimea, quello che è avvenuto in Georgia prima, quello che sta avvenendo in Ucraina non sia il frutto di una visione geopolitica che c'è in Russia di un mutamento qualitativo che fa sì che lì stiamo nel post-comunismo, ma non in una dimensione positiva rispetto all'Europa, anzi sul terreno della costruzione di un'azione politica e militare e anche di una visione ideologica e culturale che è alternativa alla Unione Europea.*

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[10] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3OlQ762Qh-A&t=123. Minute 1:50. Last accessed on May 29th, 2023.

'This element is economic and political together because, in my opinion, we must know that we have two big problems in foreign politics, one regarding Putin's Russia and the other is the drama in the Middle East. But *believing that what has happened in Crimea and Giorgia, what is happening in Ukraine is not the outcome of a geo-political vision that there is in Russia of a qualitative change that does so that they are in post-communism, but not in a positive dimension towards Europe, on the contrary on the field of construction of political and military action and also of an ideological and cultural vision that is alternative to the European Union*'.
 [FCIC15-A1][11]

In (30), the head of the topical nominalized entity is a verb infinitive, *ritenere* 'believing (lit. to believe)', which is bearing a very complex complement. Interestingly, in this case, the topic is so long and complex that the speaker loses control of it, and concludes the utterance without inserting the sentence predicate, producing an anacoluthon. Example (30) also shows that topicalization can overlap with vagueness: in the specific case, it is left vague who – among the members of the Italian Parliament to whom the speech is addressed – believes that what is happening in Ukraine is not the outcome of the Russian geo-political vision.
        As easily predictable, the three implicit strategies – presupposition, vagueness, and topic – can appear on the same string of text, thus providing the most implicit-dense possible case:

31) Di fatto, *il tentativo di mettere in difficoltà il Partito Comunista Italiano,* presentandolo come isolato in Italia e in Europa nell'opporsi ad una supina accettazione delle proposte americane, questo tentativo è fallito.
'In fact, *the attempt to put the Italian Communist Party in a difficult position,* by presenting it as isolated in Italy and in Europe in opposing a servile acceptance of the American proposals, has failed.' [EBER79-A1][12]

In (31), the nominalized entity *il tentativo di mettere in difficoltà il Partito Comunista Italiano* 'the attempt to put the Italian Communist Party in a difficult position' is: i) presupposed by its framing as a definite description; ii) vague in that it deliberately omits who is responsible for such attempt; iii) topicalized.
        Such layering of implicit contents is also possible when the nominalized entity is not a morphological noun but a nominal infinitive, like in (32):

32) *L'affidarsi a frammentarie notizie della lunga vicenda, il pensare che tutto sia stato già udito e compreso*, immaginarci in una sorta di situazione obbligata, in una posizione di partito, in una ragione di disciplina, *l'essere in una esigente corrente di opinione di partito*: tutto questo è in contraddizione, tutto questo è incompatibile con la funzione del giudicare.
'*Relying on fragmentary reports of the long matter, thinking that everything has already been heard and understood*, imagining ourselves in a kind of obligatory situation, in a reason for discipline, *being in a demanding current of party opinion*: all of this is in contradiction, is incompatible with the function of judging'. [AMOR77-A1][13]

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[11] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Hj_mmnT2S8. Minute 8:35. Last accessed on May 29th, 2023.
[12] https://www.radioradicale.it/scheda/965?p=5&s=3818&t=3837&f=5.
[13] https://www.radioradicale.it/scheda/289638?p=0&s=452&t=505&f=0.

3.5. Verbal traits in nominalized entities

In the foregoing, the two types of nominalization – labeled as morphological and syntactic – have been shown to behave identically in all the mentioned contexts. In this section, I will instead show some differences between the two, which may affect their manipulative potential.

In fact, when evaluating the role of nominalization in enhancing implicitness, it should also be considered that some features typical of nominals may actually muffle the presupposition strength, thus possibly reducing the overall manipulative power of the construct (see also Cominetti, Giunta 2022). Presupposition is a nuanced phenomenon, with stronger and weaker triggers and other characteristics of the utterance responsible for the presupposition strength (Dahl 1974; Talmy 1978; Givón 1987; Abusch 2002; Glanzberg 2005; Lombardi Vallauri 2009; Lombardi Vallauri, Masia 2018). One of the most relevant traits which may enhance the presupposition strength is the setting of the action in the past (Lombardi Vallauri 2009, p. 40).

The outcome of morphological nominalization is "true" nouns, which share with prototypical nouns the traits of being more time-stable than verbs and less sensitive to temporal and aspectual information (Givón 1979, p. 32; Du Bois 1980, p. 208). For example, a noun like *frattura* 'fracture' – despite referring to an event – cannot convey aspectual or temporal information about the process it expresses. Let us consider example (33), from the corpus, and compare it to its manipulated version (34):

33) Ho sperato che la frattura tra magistratura e politica potesse essere ricomposta attraverso la dialettica.
'I hoped that the fracture between judiciary and politics could be mended through dialogue'. [CMAS08-A1]

34) Spero che la frattura tra magistratura e politica non avvenga mai.
'I hope that the fracture between judiciary and politics will never happen'.

Example (33) includes a definite description (*la frattura tra magistratura e politica* 'the fracture between judiciary and politics') presupposing that a fracture between judiciary and politics exists. In this case, the sentence predicate and the global meaning of the sentence allow to infer that the fracture has happened: what is presupposed is that the relation between judiciary and politics has broken. In (34), the same content cannot be considered presupposed, because the sentence predicate explicitly denies it. More generally, *la frattura* 'the fracture', if decontextualized, may have already happened, be in progress, happen in the future, or never happen altogether. It is not possible for a noun to express such tense-aspectual information by itself.

Under this respect, Italian nominal infinitives certainly share many of the features of nouns, but also keep a typically verbal property: they can be inflected in the past. This point marks the first difference with morphological nominalization, even if – admittedly – the contexts where the past inflection of the nominal infinitive is diriment for the interpretation of the sentence appear to be rare. Indeed, I could not find any in the IMPAQTS corpus. Still, it is plausible to imagine examples like the following:

Lingue e Linguaggi

35) L'aver negato le radici cristiane del continente europeo scatenerà una reazione populista.
'(Lit. The) having denied the Christian roots of Europe will trigger a populist reaction'.[14]

In (35), the fact that someone denied the Christian roots of Europe is presupposed by its framing as a definite description. If the nominal infinitive was inflected in the present, however, such presupposition would not necessarily be in place, because the nominalized content could refer to a hypothetical situation:

35A) Il negare le radici cristiane del continente europeo scatenerà una reazione populista.
'(Lit. The) denying the Christian roots of Europe will trigger a populist reaction'.

Besides the possibility of being inflected in the past, Italian nominal infinitives can show other typically verbal traits: the possibility of being negated and that of bearing direct objects. Neither of these characteristics can appear on morphological nouns, while both can be observed in the case of syntactic nominalization. Let us consider example (36):

36) Io in questi giorni ho scritto in materia facendo uno specifico riferimento al porto di Gioia Tauro, ma a tutta la politica del Mezzogiorno. Cioè, *il non avere il senso della legalità* ci isola dal mondo.
'In these days I have written about this topic making specific reference to the harbor of Gioia Tauro, and to all the politics of southern Italy. That is, *(lit. the) not having the sense of legality* isolates us from the world'.
[RPRO11-T1]

In (36) we observe a definite description whose head is the infinitive *avere* 'to have', preceded by the definite article *il* 'the'. The NP is modified by the negation *non* 'not', a typically verbal feature, and *avere* is followed by a direct object, showing a typically verbal dependency structure. The presupposed (and topicalized) content is that "we don't have the sense of legality". The presence of direct objects is not relevant to the present discussion, since it does not seem to impact the overall persuasive power of the utterance: both the indirect complement and the direct object syntactically belong to the NP, and accordingly appear to be presupposed if the NP is a definite description. On the contrary, the possibility of nominal infinitives to embed the negation is a relevant trait, because it makes the negation part of the presupposed content, a result which would hardly be achieved if the head were a morphological noun.

All in all, nominal infinitives, if compared to morphological nominalization, show two traits that may result in enhancing the persuasive power of the utterance: the possibility of presupposing a negation and that of expressing tense-aspectual traits. Being a hybrid item on the noun-verb continuum (Ross 1972, 1973; Simone, Pompei 2007; Simone 2003; Sasse 2001; Gaeta 2002), syntactic nominalization appears to be able to exploit both verbal and nominal features also to the purpose of persuasion.

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[14] Original example: *L'aver negato le radici cristiane del continente europeo ha scatenato una reazione populista*. '(The) having denied the Christian roots of Europe has triggered a populist reaction'. Source: https://www.radioradicale.it/scheda/675615?p=0&s=970&t=980&f=0.

4. Concluding remarks

In this paper, I have tried to show that the use of nominalization, a trait typical of formal language often exploited in political discourse, may impact the overall persuasive potential of a text. This analysis relies on the acknowledgment that linguistic implicitness has been proven to be helpful in persuading addressees. Accordingly, all grammatical and textual strategies capable of increasing the presence of implicitness in a text are potentially responsible for its larger manipulative power. For my analysis, I have adopted the taxonomy of linguistic implicitness proposed in Lombardi Vallauri (2016a, 2016b, 2019), based on the distinction between implicitness of content and implicitness of responsibility, and I have extracted the data from the currently available section of the IMPAQTS corpus of Italian political discourse.

The analysis has shown that nominalized forms, if compared to their verbal basis, can be packaged as definite descriptions, thus allowing the presupposition of their content, responsible for a lowering of the addressees' epistemic vigilance. Furthermore, nominalized entities, if compared to fully inflected verb clauses, more easily allow for the omission of one of the participants in the action, typically the agent. This results in a vague expression, also responsible for greater implicitness. Finally, if compared to inflected verb forms, nominalized forms can more easily be syntactically or prosodically shaped as topics, another feature that may lead to shallower processing.

Italian syntactic nominalizations, in contrast to morphological nominalizations, have the characteristic of being able to retain some verbal features. Some of them can further increase the persuasive power of the utterance: for example, syntactic nominalizations may allow negation to be embedded in an NP, which may be presupposed as a definite description and topicalized.

Further developments of the present research may include a quantitative analysis, based on a comparison of the frequency of nominalized forms in a corpus of political discourse vs. a general corpus and on the evaluation of the overall implicitness index of the texts (following the quantitative model proposed by Lombardi Vallauri and Masia 2014 and further developments).

Bionote: Federica Cominetti holds a PhD in Linguistics at Università Roma Tre. She is currently Research Fellow at Università dell'Aquila, where she is responsible for a research project on linguistic implicitness in journalistic texts. She also collaborates with Università Roma Tre, where she is in charge of the building and pragmatic annotation of the IMPAQTS corpus of Italian political discourse. Among her research interests, there is the theory of parts of speech and in particular, nominalization, which she also has explored in the book "La nominalizzazione sintattica in cinese standard" (2022).

Author's address: federica.cominetti@univaq.it

*L*ingue e
*L*inguaggi

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