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Communicating COVID-19: A Linguistic and Discursive  
Approach across Contexts and Media

Comunicare il COVID-19: un approccio linguistico  
e discorsivo a media e contesti

*Edited by / A cura di  
Maria Cristina Paganoni and Joanna Osiejewicz*

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# Radio Advertising in Italy at the Time of the Pandemic

*Giuseppe Sergio*

Università degli Studi di Milano - Italy

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## ABSTRACT

The article focuses on a specific form of advertising – radio advertising – at a time when it was called upon to change itself, namely during the first phase of the Coronavirus pandemic. Taking into consideration a corpus of radio advertisements broadcast during the programme *La Zanzara*, on air on Radio24, the main rhetorical, morpho-syntactic and lexical aspects are considered. The linguistic profile that emerges is not particularly lively, nor do the adverts show that they have fully adapted to the pandemic.

*Keywords:* advertising; coronavirus; COVID-19; Italian linguistics; radio.

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## 1. NOT-TOO-DIFFICULT TIMES FOR RADIO ADVERTISING

An event as epoch-making as the pandemic – an event that we have all experienced and still are experiencing – could not fail to be reflected in advertising. Indeed, during the pandemic, advertising in Italy and beyond changed itself, adapting to the new scenario. As is well known, in Italy everything changed abruptly with the ministerial decree of 9 March 2020, also known as the “#ioRestoaCasa decree” (which literally means “I stay home decree”). The decree prohibited people from leaving their homes if not under exceptional circumstances, thus marking the start of the most restrictive phase of confinement, also known as “Phase 1”, which lasted until 3 May 2020 and witnessed the closure of all non-essential commercial activities.

It is clear that traditional advertising could not work in this period, essentially for the following reasons: because of the change in Italians’

lives and consumption habits and in their purchasing behaviour; because seeing people going out, hugging, touching and kissing could appear alienating and even disturbing; additionally, it could not work because one of the typical characteristics of advertising is that it is a reflection and at the same time an expression of a society at a given historical moment and it therefore changes alongside the society itself. That is why, even during the COVID pandemic, advertising opted for the representation of scenarios in which the viewers could identify themselves, even though these scenarios always tried to instill hope, convey positivity and encourage people to stay strong and be resilient.

What has been said so far is what emerges, in an extremely concise manner, from a number of studies especially focusing on television commercials broadcast in Italy during the first lockdown and published early, in some cases when the health emergency was still ongoing (Bortoletto 2020; Giorgino 2020; Pietrini 2020, 199-227; Romano 2021). Precisely because the area of television commercials has already been sufficiently explored, in this article I will consider radio commercials broadcast on an Italian national radio network in the above-mentioned Phase 1.

For the present analysis, Radio24, a radio station linked to the national newspaper *Il Sole 24 Ore* and characterised since its inception in 1999 by the 'news & talk' format, was chosen as the broadcaster. Unlike most radio stations, Radio24 favours talk-based programs over music-based ones. More specifically, within Radio24's programming schedule, we analysed the radio commercials broadcast in the weeks from 30 March to 3 April 2021 and from 6 to 14 April 2021 during one of the station's flagship programs, *La Zanzara* (which in Italian means 'mosquito')<sup>1</sup>. Listening to these two weeks of programming resulted in a corpus of 56 different radio commercials (each of which, of course, was broadcast several times).

Before analysing the corpus that is the subject of this article, it should be noted that during the pandemic, TV commercials acquired a predominant role in the advertising *media mix*, as Italians were forced to

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<sup>1</sup> The program – which offers a mix of interviews, telephone calls from listeners, and comments on news, entertainment and political events – is broadcast from Monday to Friday from 6.30 pm to 8.50 pm. The choice fell on this program also because of the possibility of using podcasts of the episodes and recordings of live broadcasts on the Radio24 website (<https://www.radio24.ilsole24ore.com>), which are also available on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/c/Radio24video>). *La Zanzara*, like most of the programs on the Radio24 program schedule, also broadcasts from Milan.

stay home to fight the spread of the disease. This means that many more people were watching TV, including those who would not normally do it. On the other hand, newspaper sales declined (even if newsstands were open, because they provided a service considered essential), and so did, generally speaking, listening to the radio.

Focusing more precisely on *Radio listening at the time of Covid-19*, the research of the same name carried out by the Media Measurement agency GFK Italia on behalf of TER (Tavolo Editori Radio) showed that during Phase 1 there was indeed a reduction in radio listening, but that, all in all, it was contained<sup>2</sup>. The considerable reduction in car travel caused by the lockdown and the related spread of smartworking had a limited impact on radio listening, since, according to the above-mentioned research, about 80% of those who listened to the radio before the pandemic continued to listen to it even during lockdown (depending on the method of detection, the decrease ranged between 17 and 20.2%). While on the one hand, a quarter of the workers (predominantly high-target people, who travel almost exclusively by car) still continued to work outside the home and thus populated the precious 'drive time', on the other hand, the decrease in car listening was counterbalanced by those who stated that they had started listening to the radio during COVID-19 (about 2.4% of the analysed sample); moreover, it seemed to have acquired a more distinctly domestic status, allowing 'drive time' to be transformed into 'sofa time'.

From the point of view of fruition, the range of media through which the radio can be listened to (TV, smartphones, PCs, tablets, smartspeakers) became wider and the targets reached changed, specifically seeing an increase in the presence of working men and women. From a qualitative point of view, the research *Radio listening at the time of Covid-19* shows that during the pandemic, the radio was listened to more attentively, at the same time establishing a more intimate relationship. Indeed, radio acted as an antidote to forced distance and made people feel more united, not least because of the traditional propensity for interaction, typical of radio and reinforced during the pandemic. Also contributing to this feeling was the perception of radio as a credible source of information, capable of filtering, unlike other (social) media, true news<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The research can be read at the following link: <https://www.tavoloeditoriradio.it/lascalto-della-radio-ai-tempi-del-covid/> (last reference: 31/08/2022).

<sup>3</sup> On the potentialities and advantages of radio advertising planning, including low production costs, the convenience of buying radio time, the favourable predisposition

## 2. THE ANALYSIS

In this article we will deal with the strictly verbal element of radio commercials, even if we must always be aware that almost all kinds of advertising – with few exceptions, such as text-only advertisements in newspapers – are characterized by a complex semiosis, in which the words contribute to creating a message together with the image and/or the sound (Sergio 2016, 302-303). In particular, in the case of radio advertising, the verbal element acts in synergy with the music and background noise.

The results of the linguistic analysis, as they will be outlined in the following sub-sections, must be relativised both with respect to the radio station and the broadcast hosting them (and thus also to the target audience), and with respect to the product sectors being advertised. With regard to the first aspect, let us recall that Radio24 is a talk radio station, focused on information and in-depth analysis of issues relating to politics, economics, current affairs, culture and entertainment; within Radio24, the program *La Zanzara* uses such issues through a foul and often vulgar language that, as a peculiar trait of the program's presenters, can be transmitted to the guests in the studio and to those who (whether well-known persons or ordinary listeners) intervene by telephone. As for the product sectors advertised, those relating to IT products, telephone operators, insurance agencies, banks and financial services predominate, but there are also adverts relating to large-scale distribution products (mineral water, pet food, over-the-counter medicines, magazines and publishing products) and to large-scale distribution itself (supermarket chains). The presence of these sectors and not others will predictably guide the lexical physiognomy of our advertisements (see below, § 2.4).

### 2.1. *Textual traits*

Let us draw attention to the most significant results of the analysis and the most recurrent features that the radio commercials analysed have in common. First of all, it should be noted that in the first week under

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created by the medium and its capacity for impact, the possibility of intercepting specific audience segments, the marked interactivity, the stimulation, through hearing alone, of the imaginative faculties, etc., see Sergio 2004, 80-101, with the bibliography cited there.

consideration (30 March - 3 April 2021), only 4 out of 27 radio advertisements implicitly or explicitly referred to the pandemic then in full swing<sup>4</sup>, whereas in the following week (6-14 April 2021) these cases rose to 13 out of 29. Thus, in the two weeks of our interest, the commissioning companies mostly perpetuated the pre-established advertising planning, adapting rather slowly, but nevertheless progressively, to the new scenario. In view of the subject of this article, which intends to focus on the change in radio advertisements during the first phase of the pandemic, in the following we will provide a general overview of all advertisements, dwelling in particular on the radio advertisements in which reference is made to the health emergency.

From the point of view of textual construction, about three quarters of our advertisements are in the form of the communiqué, mostly read or recited by a single male speaker. In only 6 cases, the radio announcement is given by a female speaker, while in 9 cases, two male speakers alternate; there are no radio announcements in which two or more female voices alternate. On the other hand, there are quite frequent cases in which a male and a female voice alternate, as in the following example for CNA (Confederazione Nazionale dell'Artigianato e della Piccola e Media impresa – National Confederation of Craftsmen and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises):

- (1) Male speaker: – E ora... bisogna resistere. Sono un artigiano, no? Gente abituata a resistere. Lotte, sacrifici, ma sono andato avanti. Anche quando tutto mi diceva di mollare. No, non rinuncio all'azienda, alle persone. Perché le imprese sono persone. Non rinuncio al mio sogno. [Background music starts] Io ci sono. E per fortuna non sono solo.

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<sup>4</sup> In a couple of radio broadcasts during the first week, there is an ambiguous reference to the contemporary situation ("Nei nostri negozi lavorano oltre sessantamila persone che si impegnano per dare sostegno a tutti, soprattutto oggi" – "More than sixty thousand people work in our shops to support everyone, especially today": CONAD SUPERMARKET; "Gli abbiamo dato tanto, troppo, tutto!" – "We have given them so much, too much, everything!": CREDITREFORM DEBT RECOVERY SERVICE), but it is not clear whether this is a generic reference to "hard times" or whether it relates to the pandemic situation. For economy of space and in order not to make reading difficult, in this article we will refer to the examples with the names of the investing companies of the radio advertisements, such as, in the cases just mentioned, the supermarkets CONAD and the company CREDITREFORM, which provides financial advisory services (the names will be in small capitals). In cases where large portions of advertisements are quoted, links to YouTube pages where the same advertisements can be heard are also provided (see footnote 5 below). As for transcription criteria, we will use the simplified ones already employed in Sergio 2016b, 73-74; for more refined criteria see Sergio 2004, 134-141.

Female speaker: – CNA è al tuo fianco per la rinascita. Questa è l'ora del coraggio. Italiani e imprese, insieme ce la faremo. CNA punto it.<sup>5</sup>

As can be seen, in such cases there is no real dialogic exchange, but a simple alternation of voices that cooperate to construct a single message; the communicative advantage is that it is more lively than a similar message conveyed by a single voice. The preponderant recourse to the format of the communiqué confirms the tactical vocation of radio advertising, aimed at providing information rather than excitement or suggestion. The fact that this information is predominantly provided by male speakers may suggest that advertisers consider it more credible, especially with reference to the product sectors covered, which fall within the areas traditionally and stereotypically considered “male” (see § 2 above).

In a limited number of cases, radio announcements appear as mimetic sketches (*slices of life*) in which there are two characters who reproduce a dialogue<sup>6</sup>, with the possible addition of a closing, which may be entrusted to a third speaker, in which the pay-off and/or precise instructions appear (typically, the listener is asked to do something: to find out more information on a website, call a telephone number, go to a certain place etc.: cf. Jannacone 1996, 92). In these *sui generis* dialogues, informational linearity and persuasive purpose override and almost nullify the typical characteristics of the spoken word, such as overlapping lines, excessively long pauses, self-corrections etc.: “In an advertising conversation, everything must run smoothly and, in general, every sentence uttered must be informative because every ‘second’ is precious”<sup>7</sup>. Only a few speech stigmata, such as interjections and discursive signals, stand out here and there to create a bland *mimesis*.

The textual function of segmenting the announcement or emphasising specific parts of it can be performed by the musical base. If in fact

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<sup>5</sup> CNA, 6 April 2020: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qbIVYxvjfmc> (min. 24:29-24:58). Trad.: “Male speaker: – And now... we must persevere. I’m a craftsman, right? People used to persevering. Struggles, sacrifices, but I went on. Even when everything told me to give up. No, I’m not giving up on the company, on the people. Because companies are people. I’m not giving up on my dream. [Background music starts] I am there. And fortunately I am not alone. Female speaker: – CNA is at your side for rebirth. This is the hour of courage. Italians and businesses, together we will make it. CNA dot it”.

<sup>6</sup> On the different cases through which a commercial or radio communication can be structured, see Cacciari and Micciancio 1999, 138-146; Sergio 2004, 161-163.

<sup>7</sup> Cacciari and Micciancio 1999, 137. Both here and in subsequent quotations from Italian texts, the translations are mine.



most radio announcements are accompanied from beginning to end by generic background music, which aims to create an emotional ambience of serenity and joy, in some cases the music plays a more structuring textual function, signalling the junctions of the radio announcement. The most frequent case is that of announcements that start with a bare voice and in which music is inserted later, to emphasise or emotionally comment on part of the announcement (cf. Jannacone 1996, 81-82; Cacciari and Micciancio 1999, 44, 148-158). This is what happens in the example mentioned above (1) for CNA, tailor-made for the period of the pandemic.

If in this phase some companies had to change their communication strategies, for the most part they did so through commercials created from scratch to be suitable for the exceptional historical moment, as we have seen in example (1). In a limited number of cases, some companies repropose pre-existing commercials to which some adjustments were made. The latter is, for example, the case of ROCCHETTA MINERAL WATER, which is present in our *corpus* with a “traditional” radio commercial:

- (2) Female speaker: – Quante volte ci dimentichiamo di bere! Eppure, ogni giorno il nostro corpo ha sete di acqua! Rocchetta, giorno dopo giorno, ti depura nel modo più semplice e naturale, facendoti fare tanta plin plin. Rocchetta, acqua della salute. Puliti dentro e belli fuori.<sup>8</sup>

and with a modified one, according to the current health emergency:

- (3) Female speaker: – Rocchetta, giorno dopo giorno, mi depura da tossine e liquidi in eccesso, facendomi fare tanta plin plin. Rocchetta. Puliti dentro e belli fuori. E ricorda: oggi la prima regola per la salute è restare a casa.<sup>9</sup>

The two radio announcements coexist and alternate within the advertising schedule; therefore, the latter does not replace the former.

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<sup>8</sup> ROCCHETTA, 14 April 2020: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPnUw-V0kyE> (min. 58:49-59:04). Trad.: “Female speaker: – How often we forget to drink! Yet, every day our body thirsts for water! Rocchetta, day after day, purifies you in the simplest and most natural way, making you do a lot of tinkling. Rocchetta, water of health. Clean inside and beautiful outside”.

<sup>9</sup> ROCCHETTA, 6 April 2020: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qbIVYxvjfmc> (min. 1:25:36-1:25:50). Trad.: “Female speaker: – Rocchetta, day after day, cleanses me of toxins and excess fluids, making me tinkle a lot. Rocchetta. Clean inside and beautiful outside. And remember: today the first rule for health is to stay at home”.

## 2.2. Rhetorical aspects

In the field of rhetoric, the discourse on the pandemic was characterised, both in Italy and elsewhere, by an intensive use of war metaphors, e.g. speaking of *hero*, *soldier*, *trench*, *front line*, etc. These metaphors were used in the mass media as well as in political discourse, institutional and health communication. In a general tendency towards a dysphoric language, framed in a discursive framework linked to negativity and fear<sup>10</sup>, advertising does not hide the difficult situation, but looks at it with eyes full of hope. In other words, in the radio commercials modified for the pandemic situation we do see some war metaphors, but they are all framed in the perspective of a happy ending, coherent with the advertising feature of exiling negative referents.

Specifically, the metaphors traced in our radio announcements could be found disguised within idiomatic expressions (“E non smetteremo di aiutare chi è in prima linea contro l'emergenza sanitaria e sociale” – “And we will not stop helping those on the front line against the health and social emergency”: RECORDATI PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANY) or evoked through verbs such as *to persevere* (“E ora... bisogna resistere. [...] Questa è l'ora del coraggio” – “And now... we must persevere. [...] This is the time for courage”: CNA). In only one case is the virus defined as “questo mostro invisibile” – “this invisible monster” (AIBI, Associazione Amici dei Bambini – Childrens' Friends Association). Rather, companies portrayed themselves in a more discreet manner, as allies of consumers, without specifying against or in defence of whom:

“CNA è al tuo fianco per la rinascita” – “CNA is by your side for rebirth” (CNA); “Ci sono tanti modi di stare vicino a qualcuno. In questo momento di incertezza, UniCredit è al tuo fianco” – “There are many ways to stand by someone. In this moment of uncertainty, UniCredit is by your side” (UNICREDIT BANK); “AXA e gli agenti AXA ti sono vicini. [...] Perché è in questi momenti che abbiamo più bisogno l'uno dell'altro. [...] Insieme, per proteggerci” – “AXA and AXA agents are by your side. [...] Because it is in these moments that we need each other most. [...] Together, to protect each other” (AXA INSURANCE); “I supermercati Ali e i centri Aliper ti sono vicini, con la qualità, la freschezza e la cortesia di sempre. [...] Uniti, si migliora la vita” – “Ali supermarkets and Aliper centres are by your

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<sup>10</sup> The bibliography on this subject, even only in the Italian context, is vast: on the subject, with particular reference to metaphors, cf. Arcangeli 2020; Salvati e Verdigi 2020; Sergio 2020a e 2020b; Cardinale 2021; Garzone 2021; Pietrini 2021.

side, with their usual quality, freshness and courtesy. [...] Together, life is better" (ALI SUPERMARKET); "Oggi più che mai, una comunità è più grande di un supermercato" – "Today more than ever, a community is greater than a supermarket" (CONAD SUPERMARKET).<sup>11</sup>

This alliance extended to Italy ("Eni è con l'Italia" – "Eni is with Italy": ENI ENERGY COMPANY; "We love Italy. Ali": ALI, with a declaration of love directly in English to exploit the assonance between *Italy* and *Ali*)<sup>12</sup> and to the Italian people ("Italiani e imprese, insieme ce la faremo" – "Italians and companies, together we will make it": CNA). In this unprecedented form of patriotism, which united Italians and businesses in the fight against the pandemic, there was also support for *Made in Italy* (expressly referred to in a couple of radio announcements by the furniture company FOPPAPEDRETTI) and for the Italian supply chain, as can be seen in the following example:

- (4) Female speaker: – È vero che voi di Conad sostenete la filiera italiana?  
Male speaker: – Certo! Oltre il novanta per cento dei prodotti a marchio Conad è fatto da piccoli e medi produttori del nostro paese. Un modo concreto per valorizzare il territorio e la qualità italiana.  
FS: – È proprio vero che una comunità è più grande di un supermercato.  
MS: – Conad. Persone oltre le cose.<sup>13</sup>

In particular, there was an appreciation for company workers and reassurances about their fate, who were seen as the driving force keeping the

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<sup>11</sup> As Santulli and Silvestri (2004, 236) note, "It is certainly no coincidence that the best examples of exploitation of the sense of belonging are to be found in the field of foodstuffs. Symbolically, to feed oneself is to appropriate the object ingested, with all the anthropological and psychological implications of this 'ritual'". The last example cited is taken from a radio commercial which, to the notes of the song *Girasole* by famous Italian singer Giorgia, was broadcast both in the form of a TV commercial (also reported by Romano 2021, 34) and in that of a radio commercial. The latter can be heard here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qbIVYxvjfmc> (min. 1:26:22-1:26:41).

<sup>12</sup> In general the figures of sound were not much exploited, apart from a few rhymes: "Anche in questi giorni, noi di Recordati non ci siamo mai fermati" – "Even in these times, we at Recordati have never stopped" (RECORDATI); "Con Quasar la tua casa fai brillar! [...] Quasar. Pulito stellare, efficacia professionale" – "With Quasar you make your home shine! [...] Quasar. Stellar cleanliness, professional effectiveness" (QUASAR DETERGENTS).

<sup>13</sup> CONAD, 8 April 2020: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-9nKwWvLwY> (min. 1:00:52-1:01:11). Trad.: "Female Speaker: – Is it true that you at Conad support the Italian supply chain? Male speaker: – Of course! More than ninety per cent of Conad brand products are made by small and medium-sized producers in our country. A concrete way to promote the territory and Italian quality. FS: – It really is true that a community is greater than a supermarket. MS: – Conad. People beyond things".

country alive. By communicating proximity to these workers, companies reassured them that they would not lose their jobs.

The rhetoric of alliance and union is not absolute, however, in the sense that it can be relativised by recalling the (objective) distance factors that marked the period of the pandemic. The use of antitheses – which pair opposing concepts/spheres/poles, stimulate the dissociation of the notions involved (and thus their memorability) and have great dramatic potential (Sergio 2004, 302-303; Sergio 2016a, 306; Pietrini 2021, 212) – can be seen in this perspective. These are poles such as “old vs. new”, “outside vs. inside”, “today vs. tomorrow”, even if the opposites that were most often paired were “distant/far vs. close/united”, however always stressing the positive pole of closeness (cf. the pay-off “Distanti ma uniti” – “Distant but united” chosen, in our corpus, by MONGE PET FOOD). The distance is the physical one, imposed by the state of emergency, while proximity is the emotional and affective one, corroborated by sharing the same situation of discomfort. And it is the emotional closeness that, at least in the advertising discourse, makes it possible to overcome the physical one: in other words, being together without being physically close results in a cancellation of distance or at least in its relativisation.

By means of a simple morphological (and not semantic) change, another rhetorical figure, that of the polyptote, can emphasise how this closeness concerns both space, albeit abstractly (“Ovunque voi siate, noi ci siamo” – “Wherever you are, we are there”: UNICREDIT), and time (“Noi di Conad ci siamo e ci saremo” – “We at Conad are there and we will be there”: CONAD; “Non li vedi ma ci sono. I ricercatori troveranno la cura al Covid-19. Anche tu con AIRC dai fiducia alla ricerca, perché è e sempre sarà il nostro domani” – “You don’t see them but they are there. Researchers will find the cure to Covid-19. You too with AIRC have confidence in research, because it is and always will be our tomorrow”: AIRC, Associazione Italiana per la Ricerca sul Cancro - Italian Foundation for Cancer Research). Still in the time frame (at least), the advertisements can be optimistic that the health emergency will soon be over:

- (5) Female Speaker: – Lucky, il mio cane, ormai l’ha capito: anche oggi staremo insieme tutto il giorno. Io inforno il pane, lui lecca le briciole, io telefono, lui abbaia, io faccio yoga, lui si stira sul mio tappetino. Sì, ma Lucky, che non diventi un vizio! Presto tutti e due di nuovo al lavoro. Prepara la pallina. Ma per adesso okay, ancora un po’ di coccole.

Con qualcuno da accarezzare, è tutta un'altra casa. Monge, il pet food italiano che pensa positivo. Distanti ma uniti.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, example (5) shows how the representation of everyday life, confined to a domestic space, changed; it is not by chance that the word *casa* 'home' is one of the most recurrent in the *corpus*; cf. among the most significant examples: "Rispetta sempre le norme di comportamento e soprattutto non uscire di casa, se non è strettamente necessario" – "Always respect the rules of behaviour and above all do not leave the house unless strictly necessary" (ENI); "E ricorda: oggi la prima regola per la salute è restare a casa" – "And remember: today the first rule for health is to stay at home" (ROCCHETTA); "Voglio dire grazie a chi resta a casa [...]. Restare a casa è un impegno civile" – "I want to say thank you to those who are staying at home [...]. Staying at home is a civic duty" (COMIECO); "Siamo tutti a casa, per proteggere i nostri cari, la nostra famiglia, il nostro paese" – "We are all at home, to protect our loved ones, our family, our country" (AXA) etc.

Moving on from figures of thought to figures of speech<sup>15</sup>, the examples we have just mentioned have probably suggested how anaphora

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<sup>14</sup> MONGE, 6 April 2020: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qbIVYxvjfmc> (min. 40:42-41:11). Trad.: "Female Speaker: – Lucky, my dog, has figured it out: we will be together all day again today. I bake bread, he licks up the crumbs, I phone, he barks, I do yoga, he stretches out on my mat. Yes, but Lucky, don't get spoiled! Soon we'll both be back at work. Get the ball ready. But for now OK, a little more cuddling. With someone to pet, it's a whole different house. Monge, the Italian pet food that thinks positive. Distant but united". The expression "è tutta un'altra casa" – "it's a whole different house" is a pun on the idiomatic expression "è tutta un'altra cosa" – "it's a whole different thing". Similar, little winks to the listener are not isolated in the *corpus*; see for example: "La passione per il digitale vi coglie? Abbiamo una rosa di soluzioni per voi" – "Is your passion for digital catching up with you? We have a range of solutions for you" (CLOUD SYSTEMS), where the expression *seize a rose* is played with.

<sup>15</sup> For reasons of space and coherence with the subject of this article, we will refrain from providing a complete registry of rhetorical figures that cannot be correlated with the health emergency, figures that are present in the *corpus*, albeit sparsely. Only a few examples are given below; there are other metaphors ("È la natura il grande architetto dei capelli" – "Nature is the great architect of hair": MIGLIO CRES SHAMPOO) and other parallelisms, sometimes even inclined to the antithesis ("Puliti dentro e belli fuori" – "Clean inside and beautiful outside": ROCCHETTA), similes ("L'impresa è come coltivare un giardino" – "Business is like cultivating a garden": INAZ SOFTWARES), metonyms ("Il piacere della grande lettura in compagnia dei maggiori autori italiani" – "The pleasure of great reading in the company of the greatest Italian authors": PREMIO STREGA SERIES), hyperbole and magnifying expressions ("Fineco. La banca numero uno in Italia" – "Fineco. The number one bank in Italy": FINECO BANK; "Board. Il futuro del

and accumulations, eventually in climax, are particularly frequent, as in radio advertising in general (Sergio 2004, 292-299). While the anaphora is especially congenial to radio advertising because it represents a valuable mnemotechnical aid and marks the scanning in blocks of text (e.g. “Insieme a voi per lavorare, produrre, creare e innovare. Insieme sistemiamo l’Italia. Insieme per ogni soluzione” – “Together with you to work, produce, create and innovate. Together we will fix Italy. Together for every solution”: CLOUD SYSTEMS; “la nostra produzione, la nostra logistica, le nostre persone, non hanno mai smesso di lavorare” – “our production, our logistics, our people, have never stopped working”: RECORDATI), more generally, the pandemic-modified radio announcements present an insistent recourse to lexical repetition (see below, § 2.4). A particular form of accumulation, quite present in the corpus, is that which responds to the so-called “trinomial rule”, consisting in the juxtaposition of three short segments, on the model of the Caesarian *veni vidi vici* (“semplice, rapida, conveniente” – “simple, quick, convenient”: CREDITREFORM; “Un servizio unico, completo, sicuro” – “A single, complete, secure service”: CREDITREFORM; “Trasparenza, semplificazione, zero burocrazia, in tre semplici passaggi” – “Transparency, simplification, zero bureaucracy, in three simple steps”: ISMEA INSTITUTE etc.), also in the form of the double or consecutive trinomial (“in modo semplice, veloce e sicuro, dal telefono, con il pc e con l’app mobile banking UniCredit” – “simply, quickly and securely, from your phone, with your PC and with the UniCredit mobile banking app”: UNICREDIT).

### 2.3. Notes on syntax and morphology

As can also be seen from the examples cited so far, in syntax the paratactic and juxtapositional style, as well as the nominal style, stands out. Just as in traditional advertising, this simplicity is functional to communicative immediacy<sup>16</sup>, but in our case syntactic simplicity is also very

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decision-making” – “Board. The future of decision-making”: BOARD SOFTWARES etc.); on this last, delicate topic, on which the courts have also expressed themselves, see Sergio 2004, 325-328; Sergio 2016a, 308-309, 313-314.

<sup>16</sup> In fact, it is well known that in the language of advertising “the subordination and articulation of discourse according to logical-argumentative criteria [...] is much preferred to the coordination and juxtaposition of rapid utterances that, when they do not blatantly violate the most elementary rules of coherence and cohesion, suppress superfluous or scarcely significant linguistic components and reduce the substance of the reasoning to the bone”: Arcangeli 2008, 77; cf. also Sergio 2016a, 309-312, and, with

useful to create a laconic, poetic, litany-like style. This linear simplicity appears predominant, but not exclusive, as there are naturally some subordinations, mostly final and relative, as well as some phenomena of marked syntax in imitation of speech (e.g. “E dove li trovo questi di Omnisyst?” – “And where do I find these Omnisyst’s people?”: OMNYSIST INDUSTRIAL WASTE GOVERNANCE). The frequent use of anaphora, which we have just seen in § 2.2 and which serves to mark both concepts and time, fulfils a rhythmic function. The voice-over, with its soothing tone and slow rhythm, and the evocative chilling music also contributes to the litany effect.

Still from the syntactic point of view, there are frequent adversatives, employed for the dual purpose of “establishing an oppositional dialectic between the two poles of normal reality and crisis” and to “emphasise the ability to react in a difficult situation” (Bortoletto 2020, 31), to be correlated with the rhetorical figure of the antithesis, such as:

“Ogni medico di famiglia sta lavorando senza sosta per contenere la diffusione del coronavirus, ma può farcela solo con il tuo aiuto” – “Every family doctor is working tirelessly to contain the spread of the coronavirus, but they can only do it with your help” (ENI); “Lotte, sacrifici, ma sono andato avanti” – “Struggles, sacrifices, but I went on” (CNA) etc.

and stereotypical advertising forms, such as “*perché* ‘because’ + main phrase”:

“No, non rinuncio all’azienda, alle persone. Perché le imprese sono persone” – “No, I’m not giving up on the company, the people. Because companies are people” (CNA); “i nostri clienti hanno a disposizione gratuitamente il nuovo servizio di teleconsulto medico [...]. Perché è in questi momenti che abbiamo più bisogno l’uno dell’altro” – “our customers have the new medical teleconsultation service free of charge [...]. Because it is in these moments that we need each other most” (AXA) etc.

On the morphology side, in the verbal sector, the preference of the language of advertising, which lives in the moment, for the present indicative appears to be confirmed. The use of the future tense also finds some extension, either meaning linearly, that is in the proper sense, in perspective from the present (e.g. “Non smetteremo di aiutare chi è in prima linea” – “We will not stop helping those on the front line”: RECOR-

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specific reference to radio advertisements, where the nominal style also appears to be employed extensively, Sergio 2004, 244-258. See Arcangeli 2008 and Sergio 2016a, with the related bibliographies, for concise profiles on the Italian language of advertising.

DATI), and meaning cyclically, that is future as a return to the past and specifically to a pre-COVID situation (e.g. “Presto tutto tornerà come prima” – “Soon everything will go back to the way it was”: MONGE)<sup>17</sup>. The use of the imperative also has a projection into the future, especially when it comes to giving directions, as in the following example: “Rispetta sempre le norme di comportamento e soprattutto non uscire di casa, se non è strettamente necessario” – “Always respect the rules of behaviour and especially do not leave the house unless strictly necessary” (ENI).

What stands out in pronominal morphology is the emphasis on the discursive frame in which a *we* addresses a second person plural *you*, often incorporating it into a single actor, in contrast to the tendency of advertising language to prefer the second person singular *you*, employed by the advertiser to flatter the interlocutor, making her/him feel unique. For example, a sentence such as the following: “Siamo tutti a casa, per proteggere i nostri cari, la nostra famiglia, il nostro paese, dimostrando tutto il coraggio di cui siamo capaci” – “We are all at home, protecting our loved ones, our family, our country, showing all the courage we are capable of” (AXA), by enlarging the number of participants in the communication, creates a sense of belonging; furthermore, plural forms have a euphemistic value and a reassuring scope because they emphasise the fact that the unease is not of the individual alone (already isolated because of lockdown and social distancing), but of the group. A shared problem is in fact perceived as less serious than a problem that falls on the individual, as echoed in the Italian proverb “mal comune, mezzo gaudio”, which literally means “misery in common, half a joy”. As we mentioned above in § 2.2, this *we* can extend to encompass all the Italian people, who are encouraged to abide by the rules and be resilient.

#### 2.4. *The lexicon*

Considering the *corpus* under analysis, which includes radio commercials aired on the ‘news & talk’ radio station Radio24 and predominantly concerning the banking, insurance, telephone and IT sectors (see § 2 above), it is not surprising that the most characteristic lexical sector is that of technical terms. In the radio commercials analysed, no particular

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<sup>17</sup> With specific reference to advertisements at the time of the coronavirus, it has been possible to speak of an “assertive’ future, as it attempts to reassure the customer about socio-economic uncertainty, thus inviting him/her to consume and purchase the advertised product” (Romano 2021, 28).



attention is paid to the comprehensibility of technical terms, which appear only episodically and blandly rephrased (e.g. “the PEC [acronym for Posta Elettronica Certificata], which has legal value, is secure, and saves time and money”: ARUBA). In radio commercials, terms such as *conto deposito* ‘deposit account’, *flotta aziendale* ‘corporate fleet’, *liquidità vincolata* ‘restricted liquidity’, *lordo* ‘gross salary’, *solvibilità* ‘solvency’, etc. can be mentioned with a listener who can understand them. In fact, the Radio24 audience has a hard core of rational consumers, for whom technicalities have an informational value, the importance of which is proportional to their interest in the advertised good<sup>18</sup>.

The other large reservoir characterising these advertisements is that of Anglicisms, both in the now common sphere, such as *manager*, *partner*, *privacy*, *team*, etc., and above all in the technical sphere (e.g. *mobile app*, *banking*, *cloud*, *decision-making*, *device*, *hosting*, *smartphone*, *trading*, etc.). Thus, the lexical field of Anglicisms also appears to be employed with a denotative value, unlike what often happens in the language of advertising, where foreign words can acquire a connotative value stereotypically linked to certain nations. The high frequency of use of Anglicisms – which, by the way, also recur in various brand names, such as *Team System* and *Board*, or in some pay-offs, such as “Inaz. Human energy”, “Visirun. Connect your business!”, “We love Italy. Ali” – and the fact that they are conveyed by the phonic channel alone make the radio announcements complex (it should also be remembered, upstream, that the Italian-English alternation makes the text more complex: “the use of a foreign language implies a more intense effort of textual comprehension than when the language used is only one”: Serra 2009, 34-35).

The lexicon contains a limited number of the most classic components of advertising, those that make it livelier and more recognisable as such (cf. Arcangeli 2008, 63-70; Sergio 2016a, 315-317). These components include superlatives, compound words and neologisms, which all appear in a residual way (but among the neologisms we can mention *smartworking*, appearing for the first time in Italian since 2018<sup>19</sup>, and

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<sup>18</sup> On the persuasive value of technicalities in the language of advertising, where they can allow the assertion of a product's positivity to be circumvented, and on the different impact depending on the type of consumer, see Sergio 2007. There are also a number of examples that can be considered as collateral technical terms, such as *evadere* ‘to bring to completion’ or *trattare in sicurezza* ‘to dispose according to legal procedures’.

<sup>19</sup> In a couple of cases, the term is accompanied by rephrasing: “Smartworking, lavorare da casa o da ovunque” – “Smartworking, working from home or from

*teleconsulto* ‘teleconsultation’, not yet registered by Italian dictionaries). In this general panorama dominated by technicalities and Anglicisms, the lexical facts specifically related to the pandemic situation appear to be of minor relevance.

Medical terms related to health emergencies also occur occasionally, starting with *Covid-19*, which occurs only twice (“L’azienda sociosanitaria territoriale di Cremona, con i suoi medici e tutto il suo personale, sta lavorando senza sosta per fronteggiare il Covid-19” – “The Cremona local health authority, with its doctors and all its staff, is working tirelessly to tackle Covid-19”: *Il Sole 24 Ore*; “I ricercatori troveranno la cura al Covid-19” – “Researchers will find the cure for Covid-19”: AIRC Foundation) and *coronavirus*, which recurs four times (cf. Sergio 2020a):

“Ogni medico di famiglia sta lavorando senza sosta per contenere la diffusione del coronavirus” – “Every family doctor is working tirelessly to contain the spread of the coronavirus” (ENI); “le strutture ospedaliere sul territorio impegnate nell’affrontare l’emergenza coronavirus” – “hospitals in the area engaged in tackling the coronavirus emergency” (*Il Sole 24 Ore*); “per un aiuto immediato contro il coronavirus, CheBanca dona una somma pari all’uno per mille degli importi vincolati con questa iniziativa” – “to provide immediate help against the coronavirus, CheBanca is donating a sum equal to one per thousand of the amounts tied up with this initiative” (CHEBANCA!); “Il coronavirus non risparmia neanche i bambini” – “The coronavirus does not spare even children” (AIBI).

If one traces back other medical terms, with a rather bureaucratic flavour, such as *igienizzazioni* ‘sanitations’, *presidio del sistema sanitario nazionale* ‘national health system’, *strutture ospedaliere sul territorio* ‘hospital facilities in the area’, *azienda sociosanitaria territoriale* ‘local health authority’, *strutture di accoglienza* ‘reception facilities’, *assistenza medica e sanitaria* ‘medical and health care’, etc., the tendency to avoid the name of the virus and the disease is quite common, instead alluding to them by anchoring them to a situation that, unfortunately, was very familiar to all. This anchoring is achieved through deictic elements of a temporal nature:

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anywhere”; “Smartworking, un’espressione che abbiamo ormai imparato a conoscere. Significa poter lavorare da casa o da qualunque posto. Ma bisogna essere attrezzati con la tecnologia adatta” – “Smartworking, an expression we have come to know. It means being able to work from home or from anywhere. But you have to be equipped with the right technology” (CLOUDYA NFON PHONE SYSTEM). The *Zingarelli Vocabulary 2023*, the *Treccani Online Vocabulary* and *GRADIT* were used for lexicographic comparisons.

“Anche in questi giorni, noi di Recordati non ci siamo mai fermati” – “Even in these days, we at Recordati have never stopped” (RECORDATI); “Questa è l’ora del coraggio” – “This is the time for courage” (CNA); “anche oggi staremo insieme tutto il giorno” – “we will be together all day again today” (MONGE); “oggi la prima regola per la salute è restare a casa” – “today the first rule for health is to stay at home” (ROCCHETTA); “oggi più che mai” – “today more than ever” (AXA); “è in questi momenti che abbiamo più bisogno l’uno dell’altro” – “it is in these moments that we need each other most” (AXA); “in questo momento di incertezza” – “in this moment of uncertainty” (UNICREDIT) etc.

In cases such as these the implicitness is easily dissolved, due to the fact that the time alluded to is par excellence the time of the coronavirus: “Such expressions of temporal deixis turn out to be implicit referents, in allusiveness, of the current health emergency: the spectator, whose everyday life is now pervaded by information about the virus, does not need explicit references to grasp the fact that any present temporal reference inevitably leads back to this historical context” (Bortoletto 2020, 19; cf. also Romano 2021, 29). These expressions also emphasise the exceptionality of the present moment, which marks a distinction with respect to the past; the caesura determined by a ‘today’ marked by COVID-19 is also witnessed by derivative neologisms such as *pre-covid*, *before-Covid*, *post-covid*, *after-Covid* (with different types of writing) etc., which are widespread in the press as well as in political language (cf. Pietrini 2020, 38-40). By contrast, in the past in advertising, ‘today’ signalled a distinction produced by the brand (e.g. *tired of... today you can...*), but in both cases the repetition of the forms makes them clichés.

So the temporal deixis allows the negative referents not to be made explicit by implicitly referring to a moment of extreme difficulty. Implicitness and allusiveness were, on the other hand, justified by the pervasive, shared and exceptional situation we were experiencing, which would have been useless or counterproductive to explicate, both in terms of linguistic economy and in terms of diaphasic appropriateness, since this is still an advertising discourse, and therefore prone to euphemism and euphoria.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

For a researcher, the ideal condition is that the object of study or, in the specific case of the linguist, the *corpus* of analysis present abundant

and interesting results: in short, that they “speak” as much as possible. This may sometimes not be the case, but the scarcity of significant elements may also prove interesting, because it tells us of the average-ness or “normality” of the object or *corpus* of study. The latter condition occurred for a good part of the *corpus* chosen for this analysis, centred on the radio broadcasts transmitted during Radio24’s *La Zanzara* program in the weeks between Monday 30 March and Friday 3 April 2021 and between Monday 6 and Friday 14 April 2021, central to the so-called “Phase 1” (9 March - 3 May) marked by the strictest lockdown in Italy.

In the weeks under consideration, in which the country experienced an abrupt change in living and consumption habits, there does not seem to have been an equally abrupt change in advertising planning, which has only gradually resettled. This is due to the novelty of the situation, which had no precedent to draw on, but also to the objective difficulty of devising and producing radio commercials, which, even in their relative simplicity, still require adequate technical time; it should also be considered that the product sectors predominantly advertised on Radio24 lend themselves more readily to being readapted according to an alternative narrative, as can happen for more “pop” sectors, such as food or sport (Russo e Tallarita 2021). In other words, Radio24’s advertisers, at least as far as the sample analysed is concerned, showed little reaction to the changed context and therefore little inclination towards the increasingly popular “real time marketing”, which abruptly adapts to current events (Giorgino 2020, 212-216). It is no coincidence, moreover, that the advertisements created *ad hoc* with reference to COVID-19 are all recited by a single speaker and are presented in the form of rather uniform communiqués. Keeping these aspects in mind avoids the suggestion, as might be inferred from some studies on the subject, that advertising underwent a sudden and rapid transformation at the time of the coronavirus.

In conclusion, we can also say that at the time of the coronavirus commercial advertising changed, moving closer to the typical mode of progress advertising and educational messages, i.e. focusing on ethics and responsibility<sup>20</sup>. In the case of radio advertising, this change took

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<sup>20</sup> See Zancchi 1999, 243-285 for a review of the main types of advertising that can be adopted to achieve objectives outside the commercial sphere: social advertising, public advertising, political advertising, religious advertising. Particularly thorny is the problem of defining “advertising having as its object social issues promoted by industrial and commercial enterprises: even in this case the assessment of the indirect promotional aspect of the messages is decisive” (Zancchi 1999, 253); there is always underlying, in

less dramatic, or simply less conspicuous, forms than in the case of television commercials, which were certainly more inclined to pathos and a poetic bent (Grasso 2020), both in Italy and beyond.

In the radio advertisements modified following the health emergency, the approach to social advertising led to the almost total disappearance of the product or the brand; it is rather the company that retains visibility. On the one hand, the company does not aim at enhancing the value of a product or service, but rather at establishing a relationship of empathy between the company and the consumer and to reinforce the image of the brand as empathetic and socially responsible, in the long-term. This renunciation of talking about the product is not serious in today's context because in marketing strategies the construction of the product and brand image seems less important than the privileged relationship that the brand must establish with customers (one speaks in these cases of 'relational marketing'). This does not mean, of course, that the identifying function of the brand, the guarantee of reliability correlated to its brand, the privileged symbolic associations which give it a stable personality in relation to its competitors, are lost; these characteristics also reach a level of intensity such as to establish a personal relationship with customers. Giving up talking about the product can thus become a means – or if you like, less drastically, a positive side-effect – of gaining or consolidating a reputation for social responsibility. Paradoxically, the health emergency allowed advertising to go beyond the product: the advertising message must indeed testify to the existence of a good or service and urge its purchase, but the vehicle for achieving these ends may not even be the good in question, since with its values, its expectations and ambitions, its tastes to be satisfied and its anxieties to be quelled, the undisputed and omnipresent protagonist of advertising communication is the consumer. Or perhaps we could say, better, that the protagonist is the consumer in his relationship with the brand.

On the other hand it is also true that during the pandemic the move towards social advertising prompted companies to raise awareness of a social problem, inviting people to respect the rules and stand up for themselves in a difficult time, meanwhile offering a reassuring happy ending. As has already been noted by Pietrini (2020, 204-205) in reference to TV commercials, the health emergency standardised advertising messages, channeling them in a single direction. The resulting effect

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fact, a *stricto sensu* advertising aspect, which takes the form of the increase in value that falls on the promoting company, even if it does not speak of the product or brand.

is that of several voices speaking in unison. What these advertisements have in common is the tone of voice; the seriousness, which in some cases may tend to lyricism, which is not at all bucolic, but rather encourages resilience and strength, but also respect for the rules<sup>21</sup>. From a more specifically linguistic point of view, a limited use of rhetorical figures (§ 2.2), syntactical simplicity and a morphology with an insistent use of deixis and first person plural pronouns and adjectives (§ 2.3), lexical uses heavily skewed towards technical terms and Anglicisms (§ 2.4). Ultimately, the stylistic and linguistic choices adopted in radio advertising at a time when the population was increasingly worried, confused and disoriented, confirmed its comforting and reassuring function in a media landscape dominated by fear and concern.

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<sup>21</sup> Moreover, as we noted above, § 2, the advertisements studied seem to fit in with the overall sound of Radio24, while contrasting with the sound of the specific program in which they were inserted, *La Zanzara*, characterised by a bright tone of voice and lapses into low registers of language.

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