



# Italian *non vedo/non si vede* + indirect wh-interrogative clause ('I don't see why/what/how...') as a marker of disagreement

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## ABSTRACT

The paper studies the functions of negated indicative present forms of the verb *vedere* 'to see' that refer to the speaker and are followed by an indirect wh-interrogative subordinate clause. The investigation of an Italian written corpus of newspaper articles, reviews and forum posts shows that this construction set forms a discourse routine with a recurrent pragmatic function. It expresses a disagreeing action of rebuttal that includes the reformulation and critical assessment of an interlocutor's preceding utterance and projects arguments sustaining the speaker's standpoint. The routine is highly specialized: its functions are limited to those mentioned, whereas it does not express bare denial, counterarguments, or agreeing actions. The corpus analysis also shows that this specialization is a characteristic of the combination of the examined negated verb forms with indirect wh-interrogative clauses, whereas combinations with other complement types either do not occur at all in the corpus (indirect polar questions and complement clauses introduced by *che*) or have a broader range of diverse discourse functions (nominal complements with propositional meaning). The routine's lexical and grammatical components (inferential lexical meaning, deixis, negation and its scope, the presupposing properties of indirect wh-interrogatives, mood) all contribute to realize its discourse function.

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## 1. Introduction

This paper is concerned with the discourse functions of a particular set of evidential constructions in Italian, namely negated indicative present forms of the verb *vedere* 'to see' that refer to the speaker and are followed by an indirect wh-interrogative subordinate clause. More specifically, I will examine these constructions' contribution to the expression of disagreement. I will show that they regularly mark disagreement and that they have a specific inferential meaning, which signals that the antagonist's discourse is argumentatively flawed and that the opposing position of the speaker him/herself is, in contrast, backed up by arguments.

A typical instance of negated *vedere* + wh-interrogative clause in the context of disagreement can be found in example 1, taken from an Italian newspaper article that appeared in 2006:

Example 1. Public debate following the *Calciopoli* scandal (2006) (*Corriere della Sera*, July 22, 2011)

[title:] Calciopoli, la replica di Moratti: "Non vedo perché dovrei giustificarmi"

Calciopoli, Moratti's reply: "I don't see why I should explain myself"

[video still image]

[lead:] Il presidente nerazzurro [Moratti] risponde a Della Valle: "Il tono non mi è piaciuto per niente".

The black-blue president [Moratti] answers Della Valle: "I didn't like that tone at all".

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The scandal referred to in the article (“Calciopoli”) regarded the manipulation of soccer plays. The article’s title and lead report two utterances by Massimo Moratti, at that time owner of the Inter Milan football club, which are categorized as replies (“replica” ‘reply’, “risponde” ‘answers’) to a preceding discourse addressed to Moratti by Diego Della Valle, the then owner of the ACF Fiorentina football club. The title cites Moratti’s refusal to justify himself, expressed by a negated *vedere* construction with an indirect interrogative clause introduced by *perché* ‘why’ and containing the modal verb *dovere* ‘must’ in the conditional mood. The lead, on the other hand, underlines Moratti’s oppositional attitude by citing a metacommunicative comment referred to Della Valle’s “tone”. The journalist’s categorizations and Moratti’s metacommunicative comment clearly frame the turn containing negated *vedere* as a reactive move that expresses disagreement with a preceding claim. The *wh*-interrogative clause rephrases that claim (namely that Moratti, according to Della Valle, owns someone an explanation). *Vedere* is used as a mental verb and its negated form, in combination with the indirect *why*-question and the conditional mood, seems to denote not only (dis)belief and/or doubt, but also an inference performed by the speaker, thus assuming an evidential meaning. On the discourse level, the construction suggests that Della Valle’s position is not backed up by any plausible reasoning and, in virtue of the verb’s inferential meaning, creates the expectation that the article will report the reasons Moratti has to refuse a public explanation and justification of his deeds.

Evidential markers and constructions fulfill a range of discourse functions. In the first place, they serve the two opposed core functions of boosting an assertive utterance by referring to a reliable source of knowledge and, on the other hand, of mitigating the utterance (Caffi, 2007) by pointing to a source that is unreliable and/or distant from the speaker. Related to that, evidential markers participate in the sequential management of epistemic stance and status in conversation (Heritage and Raymond, 2005) and interact with the verbal construction of coherence relations in argumentative discourse (Rocci, 2017; Miecznikowski, 2020). From a multimodal perspective, it has been shown that they can assign a justificatory function to elements of the situational context (Kendrick, 2019:265–266). These various functions may all contribute to the management of disagreement in interaction, but the use of evidential constructions to directly realize a disagreeing action has not been studied much so far.

To show how negated *vedere* + *wh*-interrogative clause contribute to mark disagreement, I will start out by defining how the notion of disagreement and of disagreeing action is understood in this paper (Section 2) and then analyze the syntactic and semantic properties of negated speaker-centered *vedere* forms + *wh*-interrogative clause (Section 3). Within the latter section (Subsection 3.3), I will refer to a small quantitative study based on the ItTenTen16 corpus (Jakubíček et al., 2013) and hypothesize, on that ground, that the analyzed constructions with indirect *wh*-interrogative clauses form a recurrent *discourse routine* (Kraif and Tutin, 2017). In the main empirical part of this paper, I will describe the discourse functions of the constructions in a corpus of written argumentative texts and contrast them with speaker-centered negated *vedere* forms combined with other types of complements (Sections 4 and 5), before arriving at a conclusion and outlook (Section 6).

## 2. Disagreeing actions in context

Disagreement is understood here within a pragmatic and interactional framework that tightly relates discourse to sequentially organized action. It is seen as a reaction to assertive actions, i.e. to actions by means of which an author (an individual, a group, an institution etc.) presents one or more propositions and commits him/herself (more or less strongly) to their truth. People disagree with an assertive action, in this sense, when they refuse to endorse the commitments ascribable to its author. According to this definition, not any action can be disagreed with. An addressee may, for example, not comply with a request, not answer a question, disapprove a wedding just performed, appeal against a sentence etc., but I will not consider those opposing stances instances of disagreement because they react to actions that are not assertive in nature. As a corollary, I expect explicitly disagreeing with an action to display an interpretation of that action as being assertive. In example 1, for instance, Moratti’s disagreeing reply to Della Valle’s preceding discourse displays an understanding of that discourse as asserting a standpoint – a «previously taken position» (Angouri and Locher, 2012:1550) – about Moratti’s having the duty to apologize, whereas other kinds of sequential developments might have ascribed it other actions, such as requesting or threatening.

A disagreeing reaction can occur in various ways. What is relevant in the context of this paper are *disagreeing verbal actions* such as Moratti’s reply in example 1, i.e. utterances  $u_2$  that express a disagreement regarding a preceding utterance  $u_1$ . Disagreeing actions have a semantic, textual and sequential relation with  $u_1$ . Semantically,  $u_2$  or some content implied by it is incompatible with  $u_1$ . On the textual level,  $u_2$  usually establishes cohesive links with  $u_1$ , for example via simple negation (*no*), a subset of corrective and contrastive discourse markers (*rather*  $u_2$ , *but*  $u_2$ ),<sup>1,2</sup> different kinds of anaphora referring back to  $u_1$  (*I don’t think [so]<sub>u1</sub>, I don’t agree with [what X said]<sub>u1</sub>*), repetition of  $u_1$  (*A: She lives in Munich – B: She doesn’t live in Munich*), metadiscursive verbs (*You’re lying* [by uttering  $u_1$ ]), downgraded or ironic epistemic evaluations of  $u_1$  (*maybe, sure...*), etc.

<sup>1</sup> See Section 3.3 on the question of discourse markers and their relation with other types of constructions that fulfill pragmatic functions.

<sup>2</sup> Corrective markers contribute to accomplish other-initiated other-repairs: they signal that a speaker B perceives some kind of problem in a speaker A’s preceding turn and introduce a segment of discourse that speaker B presents as a candidate solution for the problem (see Kitzinger, 2013 for an overview over the literature on repair). Contrastive, or adversative, markers express some kind of semantic or pragmatic contrast, i.e. a “the presence of a conflict either between the connected states of affairs or between one of them and some prior expectations” (Giacalone Ramat and De Mauri, 2012:191). For Italian and other Romance languages also see Cuenca et al. (2019) and Fedriani and Molinelli (2019); in an argumentative perspective see Anscombe & Ducrot’s classical analysis of French *mais*, which is discussed and further developed in Rocci et al. (2020).

Sequentially, the refusal of sharing the commitment conveyed by  $u_1$  blocks or suspends certain courses of action projected by  $u_1$ . Given the general preference for agreement in conversations, disagreeing actions are often dispreferred responses and/or open sequences of repair. However, in some contexts – e.g. when responding to compliments (Pomerantz, 1978) or in certain phases of disputes (Kotthoff, 1993) – disagreeing is the unmarked response and should not therefore be considered a dispreferred option. All in all, the sequential implications of disagreeing actions seem to be dependent on various contextual factors such as the specific subtype of action performed by the asserted  $u_1$  (informing, assessing, complimenting, explaining, giving a subjective opinion, hypothesizing etc.), the activity type, or the distribution of roles among the participants.

Disagreement is of special importance in argumentation, which is often defined as an activity aimed at dealing with a *difference of opinion* (e.g. Van Eemeren and Houtlosser, 2015:154–156) that concerns an *issue* (e.g. Schär and Greco, 2018; Rigotti and Greco, 2019:65–71), also called *quaestio* ('question', 'problem') or, in German, *Streitfrage* ('question that is the object of a dispute') (e.g. Deppermann, 2003:14, Hannken-Illjes, 2018:116–120). Arguments, which present claims as being inferable from already accepted premises, are typically (even if not exclusively) «disagreement relevant speech events; they are characterized by the projection, avoidance, production, or resolution of disagreement.» (Jackson and Jacobs, 1980:254). In argumentative discourse, one therefore encounters a particularly differentiated set of quite conventionalized disagreeing actions. Their definition has been discussed in rhetoric and dialectics for centuries, mainly in a normative perspective, a debate that is currently being continued in contemporary studies in argumentation theory and dialogue diagramming (Rocci, 2020). Two rather broad and basic categories are: (a) the direct and explicit expression of dissent with  $u_1$ , possibly accompanied by a criticism that motivates the dissent (*attack, rebuttal*); (b) the presentation of an argument from which a conclusion contrary to  $u_1$  must be inferred (*counterargument*). A further typically argumentative action is (c) *concession*, which consists in agreeing on  $u_1$ , while simultaneously communicating, or preannouncing, a disagreement with the conclusion that  $u_1$ 's author suggests to draw on  $u_1$ 's basis (cf. also Couper-Kuhlen and Thompson, 2000).

Example 1 discussed earlier, taken from written news discourse, reports a dispute between two public persons. This is a context in which both disagreeing actions and argumentation are common and, within disagreeing actions, all three types (a)–(c) presented above are to be expected. In the reported case, the current speaker (Moratti) rejects a previous  $u_1$  by accusing its author (Della Valle) of not providing convincing reasons in favor of  $u_1$ . Being a direct expression of dissent with  $u_1$ , this disagreeing action can be classified as a rebuttal (a).

In the corpus-based part of the present paper, I will consider several types of written genres in the public sphere that are to a certain extent similar to the newspaper discourse illustrated by example 1: opinion articles in newspapers, reviews of events, books and commercial products, and comment forums associated to articles and reviews (see Section 4.2). These genres vary as to

- sequential properties: forum posts are structurally designed to react to the reference article/review and/or to preceding posts, while articles and reviews are configured as sequence initial contributions (when published online and associated to a comment forum) or are not inserted in a clearly defined sequential structure (when published in a print medium).
- communicative purpose and roles: opinion articles are written by journalists and interpret news in the context of a broader political and cultural debate, often defending a certain position in the debate; professional reviews are typically written by experts, describe first-hand experience with the reviewed object, evaluate it and allow readers to decide if to purchase/visit it; posts on comment forums less rigidly conform to genre norms and can serve diverse purposes<sup>3</sup>
- text length and formality: forum posts are shorter and more informal than articles and reviews;
- degree of specialization: reviews tend to be more technical than news discourse.

All considered genres, however, share the property that opinion-giving and argumentation are central communicative tasks. Journalists position themselves in a debate and justify their positioning by reasons; reviewers give reasons for their evaluations and recommendations; forum users engage in debates about the issue raised by the reference article or align/disalign with a reviewer's evaluation and recommendation (Miecznikowski, 2015b; Miecznikowski and Musi, 2017). When it comes more specifically to the expression of (dis)agreement, both agreeing actions and disagreeing actions of the types (a) to (c) are to be expected. This is true especially of comment forum posts, which in virtue of their sequential properties are likely to contain second pair parts that react to the reference text or preceding forum posts. However, agreement and disagreement can be found in articles and reviews as well, where antagonist positions may be evoked through reported speech and other polyphonic means. The corpus is therefore adequate to investigate the role that linguistic markers – for example an evidential construction, as in the present paper – play in agreeing and disagreeing actions.

### 3. *Non vedo/non si vede* + *wh*-interrogative clause construction: towards an analysis as a marker of disagreement

#### 3.1. *Constructions with verbs of seeing: main parameters of variation*

The Italian verb *vedere* is highly polysemic and its meaning varies according to the type of construction in which it occurs, conforming to a tendency that has been observed for verbs of seeing cross-linguistically (see e.g. Kirsner and Thompson, 1976; Viberg, 1983; Sweetser, 1990; Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 1999, 2008; Voinov, 2013; San Roque et al., 2015; Szczyrbak, 2019:25–27).

<sup>3</sup> A special case are consumer reviews proposed in forums in reply to official reviews (see Miecznikowski and Musi, 2017).

An important parameter of variation regards the complements the verb combines with. In a way that is typical for perception verbs (cf. [Dik and Hengeveld, 1991](#)), they co-vary with the sensorial modality of the seeing experience. Complements that denote concrete entities (e.g. *Vide [la casa rossa]<sub>entity</sub>* ‘He/she saw [the red house]<sub>entity</sub>’) or states of affairs (e.g. *Lo vide [∅ cadere nell’acqua]<sub>SoA</sub>* ‘She saw him [∅ topple into the water]<sub>SoA</sub>’) favor a direct reading of visual perception. More abstract meanings are favored by abstract nouns (*Vedo il problema* ‘I see the problem’) or by complements that denote propositions, which are understood here as discourse objects that can be evaluated as true or false ([Dik and Hengeveld, 1991](#); [Pietrandrea, 2005](#)) and are mainly expressed by finite clauses (*Vide [che non aveva senso aspettare più a lungo]<sub>p</sub>* ‘He/she saw that it was useless to wait any longer’).

Within uses of *vedere* that have scope over a proposition *p*, a further important parameter of variation regards temporal and personal deixis. When (a) the seeing experience takes place in the present or has taken place in the past yielding results that are relevant in the present and (b) the experiencer coincides with, or includes, the speaker and/or the hearer, *vedere* constructions can assume an *m*-performative meaning, i.e. “express the speaker’s current attitude towards the state of affairs” ([Nuyts, 2001:40](#)). The constructions then express the speaker’s epistemic modal evaluation of the certainty of *p* and/or have an evidential meaning, i.e. point towards the speaker’s *information source* ([Aikhenvald, 2004](#)), or *epistemic support* ([Boye, 2012](#)), for *p*. Constructions with verbs of seeing frequently assume epistemic and evidential meanings cross-linguistically (de Haan, 2001; Aijmer, 2004; Pietrandrea, 2005:67; Pietrandrea, 2007:43–44; Whitt, 2010; Cornillie and Gras, 2015; Kotwica, 2017; Kendrick, 2019; Estellés Argueda and Albelda Marco, 2020; Schuring and Dendale, 2020).

With propositional complements, *vedere* mostly behaves like a factive predicate (implying the truth of *p* in all contexts) or at least like a semi-factive predicate (implying the truth of *p* in some contexts, but not in others, [Karttunen, 1971](#))<sup>4</sup>; as we will see in the next sections, some *m*-performative evidential uses are entirely non-factive, though, suggesting a type of semantic change that has been observed in other cognitive verbs as well (see [Colonna Dahlman and van de Weijer, 2022](#) for an analysis of evidential uses of cognitive factive verbs in nine languages, including Italian).

### 3.2. Evidential *vedere* with propositional complements

The construction I will analyze here is part of a larger set of *vedere* constructions with propositional complements. Such complements are encoded for example by clauses introduced by the complementizers *che* (see example 2) and *come* (see example 3), by anaphora referring back to an immediately preceding utterance (see example 4), or by main clauses combined with a parenthetical *vedere*-construction, for example *come si vede* ‘as you can see’, see example 5).

Even if they are not incompatible with direct visual perception, those constructions tend to refer to more abstract mental processes. Some semantic frames of *vedere* in those constructions include sensorial visual perception as a part, e.g. ‘to infer on the basis of visual clues’ (cf. the examples 2a, 2c, and accentuated *si vede* in example 4) or ‘to know by repeated experience, including visual observations’. Others extend the idea of vision metaphorically, e.g. to see before one’s mind’s eyes’, ‘to imagine’, ‘to understand’ (cf. example 3). In the fairly grammaticalized impersonal construction *si vede che* (cf. also [Pietrandrea, 2005:60–67, 104–105, 2007:43](#)), the verb mainly means ‘to infer on the basis of some premises’ and is compatible with non visual premises (cf. example 2b). *Come si vede* ‘as you can see’, on the other hand, presents *p* as compatible with, or inferable from, components of the discourse context. These can be visually accessible (e.g. an action performed by a participant or a picture) or not, as in example 5 (for a more detailed semantic and pragmatic analysis of *come si vede* see [Miecznikowski, 2015a](#)).

#### Example 2

- a) Vedo [che sei in forma]<sub>p</sub>. ‘I see [that you are in good shape]<sub>p</sub>’  
 b) Mi hanno detto che lo zio ogni mattina va a nuotare. Si vede [che è di nuovo in forma]<sub>p</sub>!  
 ‘I’ve been told that my uncle goes swimming every morning. Apparently [he’s gotten better]<sub>p</sub>!’  
 c) [Si vede]<sub>focal accent</sub>[che sei in forma]<sub>p</sub>. ‘One can clearly [see]<sub>focal accent</sub>[that you are in good shape]<sub>p</sub>.’

#### Example 3

Vedo [come ogni minimo dettaglio possa fare la differenza]<sub>p</sub>.  
 ‘I see [that every little detail can be decisive]<sub>p</sub>.’

#### Example 4

[Paola è stanca]<sub>p</sub>. Non [lo]<sub>p</sub> vedi? ‘[Paola is tired]<sub>p</sub>. Can’t you see [that]<sub>p</sub>?’

#### Example 5

Guido ha molte assenze, è sempre in ritardo e risponde male all’insegnante. Come si vede, [non è un allievo modello]<sub>p</sub>.  
 ‘Guido often does not show up in school, is always late and responds rudely to his teacher. As you can see, [he is not an exemplary pupil]<sub>p</sub>.’

The *vedere* constructions illustrated by the examples 2 to 5 can be considered to be *m*-performative. The present tense refers to the *hic et nunc* of the situation of speaking. In 2a and 3 the cognizer coincides with the person of the speaker (*vedo*). In 2b, 2c and 5, impersonal *si vede* refers to a generic set of cognizers that includes the speaker. As to example 4, an *m*-performative

<sup>4</sup> As pointed out by [Simons \(2007\)](#), the truth of complement clauses embedded under semi-factive verbs may be presupposed, presenting *p* as being part of the common ground, or entailed, presenting *p* as new information.

reading arises more indirectly. In a face-to-face context, the question *non [lo]<sub>p</sub> vedi?*, preceded by the speaker's assertion of *p*, suggests that the speaker invites the hearer to share an experience of inference based on visual clues that he/she is currently making. Via implicature, the 2nd person form (semantically denoting only the addressee) thus leads to the construction of an intersubjective experiencer and can therefore be interpreted m-performatively (cf. also Miecznikowski et al., 2021).

In the m-performative interpretation, the verb's perceptual or inferential meanings assume a speaker-oriented, subjective or intersubjective, evidential meaning. Moreover, they express an epistemic evaluation of *p*, mostly in terms of certainty (exploiting the factive properties of the uses in question; all examples except the semi-grammaticalized *si vede che* construction in 2b).

Negated *vedo/si vede* + *wh*-interrogative clause constructions share several properties with the m-performative constructions discussed so far, such as deictic features, verb meanings and the basically propositional nature of the complement. On the basis of these features, I will assume that they have an m-performative meaning in most cases. They however differ from the other constructions by the peculiar nature of the complement (an indirect *wh*-interrogative clause, often modalized by the conditional or subjunctive mood) and by the presence of negation. In the following sections, I will argue that they have a peculiar evidential meaning that combines with the epistemic and polyphonic expression of doubt about someone else's discourse and is therefore well suited to express disagreement.

### 3.3. Negated *vedo/si vede* + *wh*-interrogative clause: a discourse routine

An important specific feature of the construction examined here is that the verb *vedere* governs an indirect (subordinate) interrogative clause focused on a *wh*-phrase (*subordinata interrogativa indiretta parziale*, Serianni and Castelveccchi 2006 [1989]:570, cf. also Fava 2001):

#### Example 6

Dalla foto non vedo chi ci ha traditi.

'From the picture, I don't see (≈ I'm not able to infer) who betrayed us.'

#### Example 7

Grazie all'applicazione vedo/si vede se c'è stato un contatto con un contagiato.

'Thanks to the application I see/one can see if there has been a contact with an infected person.'

Indirect *wh*- and polar (yes/no) interrogative clauses together form the class of indirect interrogative clauses. In Italian, these are governed by verbs of asking, doubting, saying, perception, knowledge, deciding, hypothesizing, attributing relevance (Fava, 2001:700–702), a set that includes *vedere*. These verbs specify a cognizer's attitude, experience and/or action with regard to a certain question; in the perspective of truth conditional semantics, the intension of the indirect interrogative clause can be considered to be the set of propositions that constitute a true and complete answer to that question.<sup>5</sup> Indirect interrogative clauses are similar to non-interrogative complement clauses with respect to their syntactic function (subject or object), their clausal nature and their quite abstract meaning (a set of propositions in the case of indirect interrogative clauses, a proposition in the case of complement clauses). They differ from complement clauses by the introducing element (a *wh*-phrase<sup>6</sup> or the conjunction *se* 'whether' in interrogatives, the conjunctions *che* or *come* in complement clauses).

When used affirmatively, *vedo/si vede* combine with all types of subordinate clauses discussed up to now. As to negated *vedo/si vede*, the forms can occur with all types of clauses mentioned above, but there is a particular solidarity between negated *vedo/si vede* and indirect *wh*-interrogatives. Evidence for this solidarity comes from *come*-clauses, which in Italian can be complement clauses (introduced by *come* 'that' as in example 3) or interrogative subordinate clauses (introduced by *come* as a *wh*-interrogative pronoun 'how, in what manner'). *Come*-clauses depending on negated *vedo/si vede* tend to force an *wh*-interrogative reading of the subordinate clause:

#### Example 8

Non vedo come ogni minimo dettaglio possa fare la differenza.

'I don't see how [=in which way] every little detail can possibly be decisive.'

Moreover, indirect *wh*-interrogative clauses co-occur more often with negated *vedo/si vede* than with affirmative *vedo/si vede* as a governing verb, whereas *che*-clauses and indirect polar questions have the inverse preference. This becomes evident when one compares the clauses' proportions of co-occurrence with affirmative and negated *vedo/si vede* in the ItTenTen16 corpus (Jakubíček et al., 2013) and relates these proportions to the overall frequencies of affirmative and negated *vedo/si vede*. In ItTenTen16, overall there are approximately four times less negated tokens of the two *vedere* forms compared to the affirmative tokens (110'437 vs. 419'369), yielding what I will call a *neg/pos ratio* of 0.263. I performed a corpus search of a set of

<sup>5</sup> Hamblin (1973) claims that an indirect question denotes the set of its possible answers. I assume with Karttunen (1977:20) that, more specifically, the denoted set includes all true propositions that jointly constitute the question's complete answer. I intend completeness in a context-sensitive way (completeness for all practical purposes).

<sup>6</sup> Italian indirect *wh*-interrogatives also resemble free relative clauses, to a certain extent, because a subset of interrogative pronouns, namely *chi* 'who' and *quanto* 'what', can introduce both clause types. Free relative clauses are relative clauses with a silent antecedent (Benincà, 2010; Bertollo and Cavallo, 2012) or, according to the Italian grammatical tradition, a 'double', or 'mixed', pronoun that combines the function of a demonstrative pronominal antecedent and of a relative pronoun (Serianni and Castelveccchi, 2006 [1989]:321–322, 622). Besides the introducing pronoun, the two clause types can be distinguished by considering the verb on which the clause depends (see the list of verbs governing indirect interrogatives given in this section) and the construction of the *wh*-phrase's referent as unknown (typically the case in indirect interrogatives). Negated *vedere* can introduce free relative clauses, but, as we will see in Section 5, in the corpus examined here this construction is not attested: negated *vedere* is never followed by a *chi*- or *quanto*-clause.

strings that are indicative of the two verb forms co-occurring with *che*-clauses, *se*-clauses and a *wh*-interrogative clauses and, on this basis, estimated the *neg/pos* ratio of the various constructions.<sup>7</sup> *Che*-clauses co-occur 85 times more often with affirmative *vedo/si vede* than with the negated forms (*neg/pos* ratio: 46:3916 = 0.012), thereby clearly deviating from the baseline *neg/pos* ratio of *vedo/si vede* in the direction of affirmative tokens. Polar interrogative clauses show the same preference, even if to a somewhat lesser degree (*neg/pos* ratio: 7:94 = 0.055). *Wh*-interrogatives, inversely, co-occur five times more often with negated *vedo/si vede* than with the affirmative forms (6501:1291 = 5.036).

As we will see in Section 5, the distributional differences between the considered subordinate clauses combined with *vedo/si vede* that can be observed in the ItTenTen16 corpus are confirmed by the data of the main study presented here. In the more limited corpus examined in the main study, the combinations of negated *vedo/si vede* with *che*-complement clauses and indirect polar questions are in fact entirely absent.

One might want to explain the observed distribution on purely semantic grounds, claiming that negated *vedere* denotes the speaker-cognizer's lack of knowledge, matching the preferences of indirect interrogative clauses, whereas affirmative *vedere* denotes the cognizer's knowledge, which is congruent with *che/come*-complement clauses. However, those semantic congruities do not explain the difference between indirect *wh*-interrogatives (which behave as expected according to that hypothesis) and indirect polar interrogatives (which, on the contrary, pattern with *che*-clauses). An alternative hypothesis to explain the particularly strong affinity between negated *m*-performative forms of *vedere* and *wh*-interrogatives suggests that this combination forms a conventionalized marker whose *raison d'être* is a recurrent discourse function. In other words, the construction set could be a *discourse routine*: a 'lexico-syntactical configuration' (« une configuration lexico-syntaxique ») in which certain elements are variable, but 'belong to paradigmatic classes' (« appartiennent à des classes paradigmaticques »), and which 'have a rhetorical and discursive, genre-related function' (« ont une fonction rhétorique et discursive, propre au genre considéré ») (Kraif and Tutin, 2017, p. 3; cf. also Miecznikowski, 2022). As conventionalized constructions that fulfill pragmatic functions, discourse routines resemble discourse markers, understood here as a functionally defined class of linguistic structures that "do not affect the truth conditions of an utterance", "are related to the speech situation", "serve to indicate the mood of a sentence, and to express attitudes and emotions", and "are multifunctional, operating at several levels simultaneously" (Bazzanella, 2006:449). However, discourse routines may have propositional content and thus affect the truth conditions of an utterance; also, having variable parts, they are less lexicalized than most discourse markers. In the case at hand, the combination of conventionalized fixed elements (a negated indicative present form of *vedere* referring to the speaker with scope over a *wh*-interrogative clause) with some variable parts (the grammatical person of the verb and the interrogative pronouns) suggests a categorization of the construction as a discourse routine. I will pursue this hypothesis, assuming that the discourse function in question is related to the expression of disagreement.

### 3.4. Doubt, presuppositions of indirect *wh*-interrogative clauses, and the role of modal markers

I will now discuss the type of ignorance, or doubt, expressed by the construction. In some instances of *non vedo/non si vede* + indirect *wh*-clause, the speaker's doubt specifically concerns the unknown referent's identity (see example 6). What happens more often, in the construction under analysis, is that doubt is extended well beyond the identity of the referent. Example 8 ('I don't see how every little detail can possibly be decisive') illustrates this case: even if *come* 'how' superficially lays the focus on the manner in which all details could be decisive, the overall effect of the utterance seems to be simply to doubt that every little detail is decisive.

The scope of the speaker-cognizer's doubt depends on the implicit content associated with the indirect question and on the modality of the *wh*-interrogative clause.

*Wh*-questions and their indirect correspondents are known to convey associated implicit propositions. When the *wh*-constituent is an argument of the *wh*-clause's predicate, i.e. denotes an essential participant in the described state of affairs (typically *chi*- and *cosa*-clauses, preceded by prepositions if the predicate requires it; spatial *dove*-clauses with verbs such as *trovarsi* 'to be located'), the associated proposition is an existential statement. What is implicitly communicated is that there is at least one entity (or place) that satisfies the question's predicate ( $\exists x(P(x))$ , see example 6, which I report below as example 9). In all other *wh*-questions, referring to the spatio-temporal circumstances of the state of affairs (non argumental *dove*, *quando*), to instruments or manner (*come*, *in che modo* etc.), or to a reason or cause (*perché*, *per quale ragione* etc.), the implicit proposition simply corresponds to the description of the state of affairs (*p*, see example 10).

#### Example 9

Dalla foto non vedo chi ci ha traditi.

'From the picture, I don't see (≈ I'm not able to infer) who betrayed us.'

Implicit proposition: 'Someone betrayed us'.

#### Example 10

Dalla foto non vedo dove abbiamo pranzato quel giorno.

<sup>7</sup> The search targeted frequent constructions that allow to avoid false positives and can be considered insensitive to the affirmative/negative variable. For *che*- and *se*-clauses, the strings "vedo/si vede + che/se + è/sia/ha/abbia" were used, which identify zero subject constructions with the 3rd person singular of the auxiliary verbs ESSERE and AVERE. *Come*-clauses were not included for the reasons illustrated by example 8. To determine the *neg/pos* ratio of *vedo/si vede* + *wh*-indirect interrogative clause, I counted the particularly frequent combinations with *cosa* 'what', *perché* 'why' and *dove* 'where'. The search yielded a *neg/pos* ratio of 1191:832 = 1.432 for *cosa*, 4448:236 = 18.848 for *perché* and 862:223 = 3.866 for *dove*.

'From the picture, I don't see ( $\approx$  I'm not able to infer) where we had lunch that day.'  
 Implicit proposition: 'We had lunch that day'.

Along the lines sketched by Katz (1972:201ff.), Lyons (1977:597, 762ff.), Groenendijk and Stokhof (1984:30–37), Levinson (1983:184), Heritage (2010:47) and Stivers and Enfield (2010:2621), I will consider the propositions associated with wh-questions as presuppositions. This analysis is compatible with the observation that the speaker presents the implicit content of a wh-question (or of its indirect counterpart) as being part of the common ground, differently from the wh-constituent, which is placed in the utterance's focus. In formal semantics and in pragmatics, there has been much debate about the consequences of such presuppositions for the answerability of the wh-question, about their defeasibility in context, and about the alternative possibility to model them as implicatures generated by a reasoning based on the Gricean principle of cooperation. This debate suggests that presuppositions of direct and indirect wh-questions are "pragmatic presuppositions" (Stalnaker 1974) of a rather weak, defeasible kind or, as Groenendijk and Stokhof (1984:36) put it: "the relevant presuppositions are 'speaker presuppositions': they concern certain expectations that the questioner has."

Indeed, it seems rather common that the speaker's expectations turn out not to be shared by the interlocutor (11) or are doubted by the speaker him/herself (12):

Example 11

A: Chi ci ha traditi? – B: Nessuno, siamo stati sfortunati, tutto lì.

'A: Who betrayed us? – B: No one, we just had bad luck.'

Implicit proposition: Someone betrayed us (contradicted by B's answer)

Example 12

A: Chi ci ha traditi (se tradimento ha avuto luogo)?

'A: Who has betrayed us (if there was a betrayal)?'

Implicit proposition: Someone betrayed us (doubted by the condition formulated by A him-/herself)

The presuppositions of indirect wh-interrogative clauses are regularly triggered when the clause does not contain any modal marker. This is the case in (9) and (10): that's why, as observed earlier, the speaker's ignorance expressed by negated *vedo* in these examples exclusively regards the identity of the focused referent. However, as soon as modal or evidential markers are added to a wh-interrogative clause that depends on negated *vedo/si vede*, the presuppositions of the interrogative clause become unstable. Consider the following examples, which contain, respectively, a subjunctive (*congiuntivo*) form and a conditional form:

Example 13 (*La Repubblica*, reader's post)

[Writer1, September 21, 2010, 23:16]

non vedo poi in che modo la weltan[s]hauung odierna, [c]he viene definita religione, ponga problemi allo sviluppo della scienza.

'I also don't see in which way today's weltanschauung called religion causes<sub>CONGIUNTIVO</sub> problems for the development of science

Example 14 (*La Repubblica*, reader's post)

Writer2, November 11, 2010, 20:03

Writer3

[...] Inoltre, sto genio di Stanislav Grof, che io non l'avevo mai sentito nominare, non vedo dove e quando ne avrei ironizzato nel mio commento precedente. Ho solo riportato di quello che avevo letto alcune parti che non mi convincevano e avevo dato il mio giudizio.[...]

[...] As to that Stanislav Grof genius whom I had never heard of, I don't see where and when I ironized<sub>CONDIZIONALE</sub> on him in my preceding post. I just cited some passages of my readings that didn't convince me and gave my opinion.

In example 13, the writer does not signal the belief *p* that religion hinders the development of science. The presence of the subjunctive mood contributes to this effect by suspending the speaker's commitment to *p*. As a consequence, the lack of knowledge expressed by *non vedo*, even if superficially concentrating on the referent of the focused wh-phrase, extends to the entire proposition *p*.

Neither in (14), the indirect question focused on "dove e quando" ('where and when') presupposes the unfocused part *p* ("ne avrei ironizzato nel mio post precedente" 'I ironized<sub>CONDIZIONALE</sub> on him in my preceding post'). The decisive modal marker here is the conditional form. This particular use is a variety of the quotative conditional (*condizionale citativo*, cf. e.g. Calaresu, 2004:193–202, Miecznikowski, 2008:882–883, 885–886, Azzopardi, 2011:286–288), which produces a quite strong effect of non-coincidence (Authier-Revuz, 1995), distancing (Caffi, 2007) and even polemic refusal.<sup>8</sup> In this context, *non vedo* not only expresses a doubt about the focused 'where and when'-circumstances and about *p* itself. In combination with the quotative conditional, the negated verb specifically expresses the speaker-cognizer's rejection of a *p* proposed by someone else, which the speaker manifestly does not integrate into the common ground.

### 3.5. Scope of negation and evidential meaning

In what precedes, I have shown that negated *vedo/si vede* refers to the speaker's incapacity of accessing an information that would be necessary to complete a *p* that is present in the discourse context and is doubted by the speaker. I will now argue

<sup>8</sup> The Romance conditional's "polemic use", which derives from its quotative use and is activated especially in interrogative and exclamative contexts, has received particular attention in the French tradition, cf. Abouda (2001), Haillet (2002), Azzopardi (2011:255–258).

that the construction, with regard to *p*, not only expresses the speaker's doubt (at the epistemic level) or even rejection (at the interactional level), but also presents that skeptical stance as the result of an inference, i.e. indicates a source of information and thus qualifies as an evidential construction. This is possible thanks to a switch of negation scope from the matrix perception verb to *p*. That switch results in the speaker's (a) committing him/herself to the weak hypothesis *p*' that 'possibly *p* is not true' and (b) signaling that he/she has obtained *p*' by inference:

(15) see (.infer') (*S, p'*);  $p' = \diamond \neg p$

In (13), for example, according to this interpretation, Writer1 commits himself to the claim that possibly religious world views do not impede the development of science; in addition, he signals to possess inferential evidence for that claim. Similarly, in (14), according to (15), what Writer3 communicates is that possibly he has not ironized about Stanislav Grof (*p'*) and that the source for *p'* is a reasoning.<sup>9</sup>

Besides the semantic and presuppositional properties of the construction, the evidential reading of *non vedo/non si vede* + wh-interrogative constructions made explicit in (15) is favored by the fact that such an evidential reading is more informative, and therefore more cooperative – or more relevant, depending on the pragmatic framework chosen – than a mere declaration of ignorance and inferential failure. Moreover, a change in the negation's scope bears similarities to negative raising in verbs of thinking + embedded proposition *p* (*Non penso che verrà* 'I don't think he/she will come'  $\approx$  *Penso che non verrà* 'I think he/she will not come'); analogy may thus play a role in activating an evidential reading.

I will assume that this evidential reading is strongly conventionalized and is likely to contribute to the construction's functions in argumentative discourse.

### 3.6. Towards an analysis as a disagreement marker

The properties highlighted up to now show that *non vedo/non si vede* + wh-interrogative clause is a set of compositional, yet routinized constructions by which the speaker expresses some doubt about a proposition that is present in the discourse context and signals that his/her doubt derives from some kind of reasoning. All discussed elements of the construction – the verb, personal and temporal deixis, the negation particle, the wh-indirect interrogative complement, mood – combined with presupposition and reinterpretation of scope, contribute to convey this very peculiar meaning, which combines evidential, modal, textual and sequential functions. I hypothesize that the main function of this set of constructions is to signal a specific kind of disagreeing action, namely a rebuttal of a preceding utterance *u*<sub>1</sub> that corresponds to the doubted proposition *p*.

This hypothesis leads to predictions as to the occurrence of *non vedo/non si vede* + indirect wh-interrogative in conversation or written dialogues/polylogues:

- (i) The doubted *p* tends to resume the content of a specific previous *u*<sub>1</sub> uttered by, and/or explicitly attributed to (as in example 1), another speaker.
- (ii) Congruently with the constructions' inferential, reason-giving meaning component, the current speaker does not simply deny *u*<sub>1</sub>, but provides arguments against *u*<sub>1</sub> in the immediate co-text of *u*<sub>2</sub> (see Rocci, 2017 and Miecznikowski, 2020 about the role of evidential markers in the establishment of text cohesion).
- (iii) The constructions differ, with regard to their discourse functions, from other similar constructions, in particular from other negated *vedo/si vede* constructions with scope over propositional complements that are not indirect wh-interrogative clauses.

These predictions guided the corpus study presented in the following sections, which contrasted *non vedo/si vede* + indirect wh-interrogative clause with other instances of negated *vedo/si vede*.

## 4. Design of the corpus study

### 4.1. Data

The corpus considered in this study (for an overview see Table 1) consists of written texts in which, as anticipated in Section 2, opinion giving and argumentation are central communicative tasks:<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Note that this has consequences for the interactional This interpretation entails, among other things, that @considerator discards a different option available to him when talking about his own previous actions, namely the option of a simple denial made from a knowing stance (+K, cf. Heritage and Raymond, 2005), which would imply insisting on his privileged, direct access to those actions.

<sup>10</sup> The data were collected within the project "Dalla percezione all'inferenza. Aspetti evidenziali, argomentativi e testuali del lessico della percezione in italiano" (grant no. 141350 by the Swiss National Science Foundation, Università della Svizzera italiana, 2012–2015). All texts were downloaded manually from publicly available websites in 2010 and 2011. The texts regard matters of public concern and do not contain any sensitive information about the writers. Additionally, in the extracts cited in the present paper, names of journalists and user names of forum authors were replaced by pseudonyms (Journalist1 and Journalist2, Writer1–6) in order to protect the privacy of forum participants. Names of public persons mentioned in articles and forum posts (e.g. book authors and politicians) were not anonymized. For copyright reasons, only short extracts (1–2 sentences) of comment articles and reviews are cited here.



- Reviews of books, movies, music, plays, exhibitions, restaurants and electronic devices, copied from the websites of the newspaper *La Stampa* (1995–2011), the journal *Italica* (1920–2010), [www.digital.it](http://www.digital.it) (2011–2012), [www.fullsong.it](http://www.fullsong.it) (2011–2012), [www.mymovies.it](http://www.mymovies.it) (2011–2012), [www.mostrainmostra.it](http://www.mostrainmostra.it) (2011–2012), [www.passionegourmet.it](http://www.passionegourmet.it) (2011–2012).
- Editorials and comment articles of the newspaper *La Stampa*, 2011–2012 and the online edition of *La Repubblica*, 2012.
- Posts in the comment forums of online articles (*La Repubblica*, 2012) and reviews (digital, fullsong, mymovies, passionegourmet, 2011–2012).

**Table 1**  
Composition of the corpus.

	Number of texts	Number of words
Reviews	3'274	1'027'822
Comment articles	105	582'246
Forum posts	50'018	672'900
Total	<b>53'397</b>	<b>2'282'968</b>

In the corpus, I retrieved the strings *non vedo* and *non si vede* using AntConc 3.4.0 (Anthony, 2014), and annotated them in a database individually. Reliability was assured by using well-defined syntactic, semantic and textual features as annotation criteria.

#### 4.2. Identification of negated *vedo/si vede* constructions and annotation of syntactic and semantic features

One token of *si vede* turned out to be a 3rd person singular reflexive form rather than an impersonal form referring (also) to the speaker; it was excluded, yielding a first dataset of 78 *non vedo* and *non si vede* constructions. 4 *non vedo* tokens and 6 *si vede* tokens combined with concrete nouns as well as four instances of the idiomatic expression *non vedo l'ora di* + infinitive ('I can't wait to', lit. 'I don't see the hour of') were discarded, resulting in a final dataset of 64 tokens. Those were annotated as to text genre (review, comment article, forum post), based on the titles of the newspaper and journal sections within which the texts had been published. As to syntax, I classified the syntactic type of the verb's complement and registered the presence of mood markers in clausal complements (indicative, subjunctive, conditional).

#### 4.3. Classification of actions

I read the articles in which tokens occurred and, in the case of forum posts, the threads in which they were placed and the articles these threads were referring to. I considered cohesion relations resulting from syntactic similarity, lexical repetitions and topical continuity alongside with explicit intertextual means such as allocutions, practices of reported speech and forum metadata (thread structure) to find out, for each utterance  $u$  containing negated *vedo/si vede*, if it was directly related to any preceding utterance  $u_1$  made by another participant. Utterances that did not enter in any relation with an  $u_1$  were categorized as "new claims". In the remaining cases, I classified the action performed by  $u_2$  in relation to  $u_1$  as a rebuttal, counterargument, concession (using the semantic criteria outlined in Section 2) or agreement (when  $u_1$  was semantically and argumentatively compatible with  $u_2$  and not followed by a counter-argumentation as in the case of concession). A further action proved to be relevant, which consisted in redefining the discussed issue. I attributed this category when the *vedere* complement meta-discursively topicalized the on-going argumentation. 'Quaestio shifts' (*Quaestioverschiebungen*) are quite frequent in argumentative interactions and often go unnoticed (Deppermann, 2003:14). Some instances of negated *vedere*, however, function as metadiscursive repair initiators that openly signal problems related to the definition of the issue. They can be considered dispreferred responses to  $u_1$ , but are not disagreeing actions according to the definition given in Section 2 because they do not epistemically evaluate  $u_1$ .

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Person deixis and discourse genre

The examined construction set is overall more frequent per one million words in forum posts than in reference texts and, among the latter, more frequent in opinion articles than in reviews. If, as hypothesized here, it forms a discourse routine that expresses disagreement, this finding could be explained by varying frequencies of disagreeing actions in the considered genres, congruently with these genres' sequential properties (more second pair parts expected in forum posts) and textual properties (professional reviews contain a high proportion of descriptive, non argumentative discourse lacking in opinion articles and forum posts) (cf. also Section 2).

In the negated constructions considered here, the first person singular form *vedo* and the impersonal form *si vede* differ as to their semantic meaning, which is limited to the speaker in the first case and includes a wider community in the second. As shown in Table 2, in the entire dataset of 78 tokens, including uses combined with concrete nouns, *vedo* occurs with a

comparably very high frequency in forum posts, a finding that is probably due to the fact that such posts are quite informal and organized as dialogues or polylogues, making the expression of the single speaker's subjective stance highly relevant. In contrast, *si vede* prevails in reviews and comment articles, which are more formal and more monological genres.

**Table 2**Distribution of *non vedo/non si vede* in the subcorpora.

	1st pers. sg. ( <i>non vedo</i> )			impersonal ( <i>non si vede</i> )			Total
	Concrete noun and idiomatic <i>non vedo l'ora di...</i>	Other complements	Total 1st pers. sg.	Concrete noun	Other complements	Total impersonal	
Reviews	0	1	1 0.97/1 Mill. w.	0	4	4 3.9/1 Mill. w.	5
Comment articles	0	3	3 5.2/1 Mill. w.	5	5	10 17.2/1 Mill. w.	13
Forum posts	8	45	53 78.8/1 Mill. w.	1	6	7 10.4/1 Mill. w.	61
Total	8	49	57 25/Mill. w.	6	15	21 6.6/1 Mill. w.	<b>78</b>

The semantic difference between the two forms (speaker only vs. generic experiencer) does not seem to be clearly correlated with any of the other annotated syntactic combinatorial properties and pragmatic functions. *Vedo* and *si vede* will therefore be treated jointly in the following sections.

## 5.2. Complement types

Among the 64 cases of the final dataset, which excludes 10 instances of *vedere* + concrete noun and 4 instances of *vedere l'ora di* (see Section 4.2), 31 contain an indirect constituent interrogative clause (see Table 3). The combination with indirect *wh*-interrogative clause is the most frequent syntactic construction of negated *vedo/si vede*, a finding that confirms its high degree of conventionalization. The most frequent pronoun used is *perché* 'why'; as shown in Table 3, six more interrogative pronouns are attested. As anticipated in 3.3, footnote 6, indirect interrogative clauses introduced by *quanto* and *chi* are absent. The corpus data confirm a further conventionalized property of negated *vedo/si vede* + *wh*-indirect interrogative clause, namely these constructions' preference for the subjunctive and conditional mood (cf. Section 3.4). In 26 out of 31 tokens, speakers choose one of these moods over the indicative mood, thus avoiding to endorse the truth of the indirect question's presupposed content.

**Table 3**Complement types co-occurring with negated *vedo/si vede*.

Syntactic type	Tokens	Syntactic type	Tokens
Wh-interrogative clauses		NP-centered complements	
<i>perché</i> 'why' <sup>a</sup>	14	NP + AdvP and/or PP	17
<i>cosa</i> 'what'	7	NP + infinitive clause	6
<i>come</i> 'how'	5	Predicative ' <i>vedere</i> NP in NP' construction <sup>b</sup>	4
<i>quale</i> 'which'	3	"bare" NP (relational noun with modifier ellipsis)	3
<i>dove e quando</i> 'where and when'	1	NP + relative clause	2
<i>in che modo</i> 'in what manner'	1	NP + deverbal <i>-bile</i> adjective <sup>c</sup>	1
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>33</b>

<sup>a</sup> In one case, *perché* occurs in nominalized form (neg *vedere* + *il perché*).

<sup>b</sup> The Italian construction is similar to the English one, e.g. "non vedo nessuna idealità in queste proteste" 'I don't see any ideality in these protests' (comment article, *Repubblica*).

<sup>c</sup> The corpus contains one instance of this construction: "l'edonismo radicale, che non vedo conciliabile con il comunismo" 'radical hedonism, which I don't consider [lit. see] compatible with communism' (forum post, *Repubblica*).

The dataset contains 33 complements in which an NP carries the main semantic information and which mostly lack a finite verb (an exception being two NPs modified by relative clauses). They tend to be syntactically and semantically complex, which usually makes it possible to paraphrase them as clauses, as illustrated by the following example annotated as 'NP + AdvP and/or PP':

Example 16 (*La Repubblica*, reader's post)

[Writer4 August 8, 2010:]

[...] e **non si vede veramente [la via di uscita da questa crisi]. [...]**

[...] and **we don't really see [the way out of this crisis]. [...]**

Possible paraphrase: 'we don't really see [how to get out of this crisis]'

Thanks to their affinity with propositional complements, NP-centered complements might in some cases trigger evidential interpretations that bear resemblances to those that are typical of constructions with indirect *wh*-interrogative clauses (see Section 3.5). In the above excerpt, for instance, a relevant evidential implicature might be that Writer4 infers, on the basis of available evidence, that in the immediate future there is no way out of the crisis. In the next section I will show that, despite these common properties, the constructions with NP-centered complements are not functionally equivalent to those with indirect *wh*-interrogative clauses and that the latter's functional specificity resides in the way it marks disagreement.

### 5.3. Actions: overview

The majority of tokens (53 out of 64) turn out to react to a specific utterance  $u_1$  contained in the preceding sequential context (in an article commented upon or in a preceding forum post) and/or reported within the host text. For 11 utterances, no  $u_1$  could be identified, considered the entire text or forum in question; these have therefore been classified as “new claims”. Two instances have been classified as renegotiations of the issue (“non vedo il motivo del contendere” ‘I don't see the reason for this dispute’, “non vedo qual è sinceramente il problema” ‘I frankly don't see what is the problem’) (Table 4).

**Table 4**  
Action types realized by negated *vedo/si vede* combined with different types of complements.

	Rebuttal	Counter-argument	Renegotiation of the issue	Concession	Agreement	New claim	Total
Indirect <i>wh</i> -interrogative clause	27	1	1			2	31
NP with AdvP and/or PP	6	3		1	1	6	17
NP with infinitive clause	2	2	1			1	6
NP + predicative NP	3					1	4
NP with modifier ellipsis	3						3
NP with relative clause	1	1					2
NP with deverbal <i>-bile</i> adjective						1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>64</b>

Reactive tokens of negated *vedere* + proposition show a strong overall preference for disagreement (49 rebuttals and counter-arguments vs. 4 other reactive actions). This tendency is particularly evident in constructions with *wh*-interrogative clauses, which in this corpus never express agreement, not even partial agreement (concession). More specifically, as hypothesized, the latter express rebuttals (27 tokens), i.e. directly put into question  $u_1$ , rather than presenting a more indirect attack by means of a counter-argument (one token only). This preference for rebuttals is less clear in constructions with NP-centered complements (15 rebuttals vs. 6 counter-arguments).

### 5.4. Zooming in on rebuttals

In this section, I will discuss a series of examples that illustrate the category of rebuttal in more detail. I will focus, among other aspects, on the argumentative criticism that often accompanies the denial of  $u_1$ . We will see that constructions with *wh*-interrogatives differ from those with NP-centered complements not only because they more often express rebuttals, but also because, in rebuttals, they tend to more often express argumentative criticism rather than simple denial.

A first category of rebuttal, in which one mostly finds negated *vedere* + *wh*-interrogative clause, is what could be termed accusation of logical fallacy. The pronouns used are mostly *perché* ‘why’ and *come* ‘how’, combined with possibility and necessity modals, and the formula *cosa c'entra X con Y* ‘which relation there is between X and Y’. I also encountered one occurrence of a relational NP+PP (*non vedo il nesso tra X e Y* ‘I don't see the link between X and Y’). Consider the following extract:

Example 17 (*La Repubblica*, November 14, 2010)

[From a comment article by Journalist1:]

Diversi lettori in questi ultimi mesi hanno fatto la seguente osservazione, come se avessero scoperto l'acqua calda: [“Lei non è obbiettivo, lei è schierato”] $_{u1}$ , lei è contro Berlusconi e tifa per i Democratici negli Stati Uniti”. [...]

Writer5 14 novembre 2010 alle 20:3

Mi pare che ciò che lei Lei scrive sono opinioni o commenti sui fatti e sulle persone. Logico che siano di parte, **non vedo come non potrebbe essere**. [...]

[From a comment article by Journalist1:]

Various readers made the following remark in the last months, as if they had invented the wheel: “[You are not objective, you are on one side”] $_{u1}$ , you are against Berlusconi and a fan of the democrats in the United States”. [...]

Writer5 14 novembre 2010 alle 20:30

It seems to me that what you are writing are opinions and comments about facts and persons. It's logical that they are partial, **I don't see how it could not be so**. [...]

$U_1$  is an allegation (‘You are not objective, you are on one side’) addressed to Journalist1 by ‘various readers’ and reported by him in one of his articles published online. A forum user, Writer5, rebuts to  $u_1$  by formulating a complex move. The move

starts out from an argument that belongs to the larger class of arguments from definition, in the sense that it derives an essential property ('partiality') from a categorization ('what you are writing are opinions [...]'). It proceeds with  $u_2$  containing the negated *vedere* construction.  $U_2$  is a disagreeing action that attacks the allegation  $u_1$  by doubting one of its felicity conditions, namely that the journalist, in his writing, can choose to be either partial or not. The inferential source signaled by the *vedere* construction is congruent with the argumentation that immediately precedes, thus suggesting that the rebuttal is justified by precisely that argument from definition.

In (18), *cosa c'entra* 'which relation there is' is combined with a further wh-interrogative clause, 'how X is comparable to the situation today', to attack a journalist's claim based on an analogy between the political situation at the moment of writing and in the past. Arguments that back up  $\diamond\neg p$  (see 3.5) =  $\diamond\neg u_1$  are given in the further development of the forum contribution.

Example 18 (April 15, 2011, *La Repubblica*)

Comment article by Journalist2]

[...] [In ogni caso riaffiora alla mente il ricordo della candidatura di Ilona Staller] $_{u_1}$ , al secolo Cicciolina, presentata nelle liste del Partito radicale ed eletta a furor di preferenze (18 mila circa) nel 1987, circoscrizione di Roma. Questo porta a pensare che l'Italia, con le sue turbe, è rimasta più o meno la stessa. [...]

Writer6 16 aprile 2011 alle 12:51

[In ogni caso riaffiora alla mente (debole) il ricordo della candidatura di Ilona Staller] $_{u_1}$ .

**Non vedo cosa c'entri, o come sia comparabile all'attualità, la profezia-provocazione dei Radicali dell'87.** [...]

[Comment article by Journalist2]

[...] [Anyway, the memory of the candidacy of Ilona Staller (then called Cicciolina) comes to mind] $_{u_1}$ , who figured on the Radical Party's lists and was elected thanks to preference votes (about 18.000) in 1987, district of Rome. This suggests that, in spite of all turbulences, Italy has more or less remained the same. [...]

Writer6 16 aprile 2011 alle 12:51

[Anyway, the (faint) memory of the candidacy of Ilona Staller comes to mind] $_{u_1}$ . **I don't see how that '87 profecy-provocation is relevant or comparable to the situation today.** [...]

A second recurrent type of rebuttal is the reproval of providing insufficient justification. The typical construction is *non vedo perché* 'I don't see why'. In extract 19, for example, one forum writer, Considerator, accuses another, Writer2, of formulating too (self)confident and unhumble statements. The accused rebuts by first denying the inner states he was attributed and then attacking the part of the reproval that regarded the linguistic choices he made. He rephrases  $u_1$  as stating an obligation to employ the conditional form, which is a generally known hedging device in Italian, and uses negated *vedere* + *perché* 'why' to critically assess  $p$  and hypothesize the contrary ( $\diamond\neg p$ ); several arguments follow to back up  $\neg p$ . The criticism advanced consists in suggesting that the interlocutor has not given enough reasons, which contrasts with the lengthy counterargumentation that Writer2 develops himself (not reported in the example).

Example 19 (*La Repubblica*, November 10, 2010)

Writer3 10 novembre 2010 alle 16:39

[...] WRITER2: Sai benissimo che fior fiore di scienziati come David Bohm e Karl Pribram non la pensano proprio come te [...]. In più, loro non hanno [tutta quella sicurezza che invece mostri tu nelle tue affermazioni] $_{u_1}$ . A proposito di umiltà intellettuale. [...]

Writer2 10 novembre 2010 alle 18:02

@Writer3

La mia presunta sicurezza non è dovuta a poca umiltà. Ti sto dicendo come la penso, **non vedo perché dovrei usare a tal proposito mille condizionali.**

[arguments backing up this position follow]

Writer3 10 novembre 2010 alle 16:39

[...] WRITER2: You know perfectly well that the crème de la crème among scientists, like David Bohm or Karl Pribram, don't exactly share your opinion [...]. Moreover, they don't have [all that confidence that you show in your statements] $_{u_1}$ . Talking about intellectual humbleness. [...]

Writer2 10 novembre 2010 alle 18:02

@Writer3

My alleged confidence is not due to a lack of humbleness. I'm telling you how I think things stand, **I don't see why I should use a flood of conditionals to do so.** [arguments backing up this position follow]

Example 1 is of the same kind as example 19: a reproach of providing insufficient justification, formulated in the title of the article reported in the example, is combined with arguments in favor of  $\neg p$  given in the article text.

A third rebuttal type consists in accusing the interlocutor of being too vague/generic. It is mainly expressed by wh-interrogative constructions that focus on a participant or circumstance of an event. This type is illustrated by example 14, which I reproduce here as 20, adding a segment of the preceding discourse containing  $u_1$ :

Example 20 (*La Repubblica*, May 25, 2011) (=

Considerator 11 novembre 2010 alle 19:43

Caro WRITER2, [...]

Per concludere, dai retta a me, [non ironizzare su un genio come Stanislav Grof] $_{u_1}$  (di cui, tra l'altro, non sapevi neppure che esisteva, prima che io inserissi il link): magari tu avessi la metà del suo acume e della sua apertura. [...]

Writer2 11 novembre 2010 alle 20:03

@Writer3

[...] Inoltre, sto genio di Stanislav Grof, che io non l'avevo mai sentito nominare, **non vedo dove e quando ne avrei ironizzato nel mio commento precedente.** Ho solo riportato di quello che avevo letto alcune parti che non mi convincevano e avevo dato il mio giudizio.[...]

Considerator 11 novembre 2010 alle 19:43

Dear WRITER2, [...]

In conclusion, take my advice, [don't ironize on a genius such as Stanislav Grof]<sub>u1</sub> (about whom you didn't even know he existed, by the way, before I posted the link): I wish you had only half of his acumen and of his openness. [...]

Writer2 11 novembre 2010 alle 20:03

@Writer3

[...] As to that Stanislav Grof genius whom I had never heard of, **I don't see where and when I ironized on him in my preceding post [as you are claiming]**. I just cited some passages of my readings that didn't convince me and gave my opinion.

The forum user Writer2 is accused (again by Writer3) of having made ironic statements about the psychiatrist Stanislav Grof. The rebuttal  $u_2$  suggests that this is not the case ( $\diamond\neg p$ ). It combines an attack that targets the vagueness of  $u_1$  (since it is unclear where and when the blameworthy action took place, the accusation cannot be assessed properly) with the evidential implicature of having reasons to claim the contrary. The latter are specified more precisely in the following co-text, where the forum user describes his preceding discourse in a way that is incompatible with their categorization as irony.

The fourth type of criticism is the simple affirmation of the contrary. It is not conveyed by interrogative clauses except in one case, in which *come* 'how' figures in the meta-communicative expression *non vedo come si fa a dire p* 'I don't see how you can say that p'. It is conveyed, instead, by various predicative constructions and relational nouns. Example 21, taken from a review of Beppe Fenoglio's correspondence from the 1940ies and 50ies, illustrates this type. It is a citation from a letter by Fenoglio, who answers a letter written to him by a friend.  $U_1$  is not reported, but the reviewer's glosses make it clear that Fenoglio reacts to a specific passage of his friend's letter:

Example 21 (Book review, *La Stampa*, March 3, 2002)

Conseguita la licenza liceale, [Beppe Fenoglio] scrive all'amico Giovanni Drago e lo conforta perché, pur avendo ambizioni letterarie, è stato avviato dai genitori agli studi di Farmacia: "... **non vedo in questa decisione un ostacolo reale alla tua inclinazione**: concordi con me nel pensare e soprattutto nel vedere che le preoccupazioni ed i calcoli posizionistici, sono dighe ridicole al prorompere delle passioni sentite".

After obtaining his College degree, he [Beppe Fenoglio] writes to his friend Giovanni Drago and comforts him because, while having literary ambitions, he [Drago] has been sent by his parents to study Pharmacology: "... **I don't see this decision as a real obstacle to your inclination**: like me, you surely think and, above all, see that worries and calculations about one's professional position are ridiculous dams against the outburst of passions"

Differently from the cases discussed previously, this kind of rebuttal does not include any argumentative criticism of  $u_1$ . The negated *vedere* construction straightforwardly expresses the author's disbelief of  $p$ , paraphrasable as 'this decision is an obstacle to your inclination', which refers back to  $u_1$ . The construction's evidential interpretation, on the other hand, has some features in common with negated *vedere* + *wh*-interrogative. In a negative raising interpretation, the construction communicates a belief of  $\neg p$  stemming from a non-hearsay source. *Vedere X in Y* seems compatible with inference and direct perception; given the degree of abstractness of the content  $p$ , the only plausible source of knowledge is inference. As in the rebuttal types I discussed before, arguments in favor of  $u_2$  are presented in the immediately following co-text and the construction's evidential meaning thus contributes to establish claim-argument cohesion.

Finally, a rebuttal type that in the corpus is never accomplished through negated *vedere* + interrogative clause, but only by nominal constructions, is the denial of a proposition that an interlocutor conveyed implicitly. Consider example 22, which is taken from an article in the newspaper *La Repubblica* and the associated comment space:

Example 22 (*La Repubblica*, May 25, 2011)

[...] Così mentre si smantellano i campi rom e il presidente del Consiglio inveisce contro Zingaropoli, il presidente del Conservatorio "Giuseppe Verdi" Arnoldo Mosca Mondadori [...] ha aperto le porte del suo Istituto ai ragazzini rom: "Hanno la musica nel Dna, non possiamo abbandonarli alla strada!" [...]

Writer6 25 maggio 2011 alle 03:00

**Non vedo l'incompatibilità fra le due cose.** Smantelliamo gli accampamenti, in cui muoiono bruciati i bambini, E diamo un futuro ai bambini che fino a ieri erano sulla strada. [...]

[...] And while the Roma camps are being dismantled and the Prime Minister is inveighing against Zingaropoli ['Gypsy city'], Arnoldo Mosca Mondadori, president of the Conservatory Giuseppe Verdi [...], has opened the doors of his school to the Roma kids: "They have music in their DNA, we can't just leave them on the street!"

Writer6 25 maggio 2011 alle 03:00

**I don't see the incompatibility between the two things.** Let's dismantle the camps, where children die in fire, AND give a future to children that until yesterday were on the street. [...]

In the article, the journalist construes a contrast which suggests, via implicature, that Mondadori's initiative and the dismantlement of the camps are two very different, maybe incompatible, things.  $U_2$ , which denies that incompatibility, does not reject an explicit  $u_1$ , but is interpretable as a rebuttal only if the reader reconstructs  $u_1$  by pragmatic reasoning.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper has shown that Italian negated *vedo/si vede* + indirect *wh*-interrogative clause encapsulates a complex action in a remarkably compact verbal routine.

The quantitative investigation in the ItTenTen16 corpus presented in Section 3.3 made it clear that negated *vedo/si vede* combines more frequently with *wh*-interrogative clauses than with other types of clausal complements and suggested a certain degree of conventionalization of that particular combination of elements, motivated by a recurring discourse function. That hypothesis was supported by the qualitative investigation of a corpus of written argumentative texts, which showed a quite stable form-function pairing. The construction set in question indeed regularly assumes a particular, complex discourse function: it expresses disagreement with a preceding utterance  $u_1$ , which the speaker rephrases as an embedded proposition

p, marks as being part of a preceding discourse, polyphonically attributes to someone else and strongly doubts, while simultaneously pointing out some argumentative flaw in it and suggesting that the speaker him/herself has reasons to believe the contrary. In other words, the routine expresses a particular kind of disagreeing action, which combines rebuttal, argumentative criticism and the prefiguration of upcoming argumentation – while it is barely used to realize other reactive actions such as counter-arguing, conceding or agreeing.

Both the semantic and pragmatic analysis of the various combined elements conducted in Section 3 and the examination of a series of examples in Section 5 suggested that all combined components contribute to realize the complex function described above: the inferential verb's meaning, deixis, negation and its scope, the presupposing nature and mood of the indirect constituent question. The corpus analysis confirmed, in particular, the importance of the wh-clause as a complement of negated *vedere*. By contrasting negated *vedere* constructions with different types of complements, I was able to show that the strong specialization observed was a specific property of the negated verb's combination with indirect constituent questions, while combinations with abstract nominal complements appeared to be more diverse as to the actions they contributed to perform (and clausal complements other than wh-clauses were in fact not at all attested).

From a grammaticalization and pragmaticalization perspective, the routine's specialization can be interpreted as a sign of an early stage of discourse marker formation, more precisely the formation of an argumentative discourse marker based on the verb *vedere*. I indeed suppose that this lexeme has a crucial role in the construction, whereas I do not expect other mental verbs compatible with negation and wh-indirect interrogatives (such as *capire* 'to understand') to precisely share the range of functions observed in this paper. This hypothesis calls for further investigation.

At least two other avenues of research are opened up by the study presented here.

A first set of problems regards the combination of evidentials with negation. When discussing the case of negated *vedo/si vede* + wh-interrogatives, I argued that a switch of negation scope is possible in these constructions. Put otherwise, when speakers declare not to 'see' (infer) p, they do not declare complete ignorance, but declare the failure of an inferential path aimed at finding p, implying that attempts have been made and thus some evidence has been considered. So the construction activates an *evidential frame*, i.e. evokes an experience of knowledge acquisition (Miecznikowski, 2020), even if the outcome of that experience is negative; that is what makes these constructions' meaning similar to hypothesizing the possibility of  $\neg p$  on the basis of available evidence. The routine examined in this paper is quite particular, however, because it contains an indirect wh-interrogative, whereas there is evidence to suggest that most constructions with evidential verbs express the proposition in the verb's scope by syntactically independent clauses, complement clauses or noun phrases.<sup>11</sup> It remains to be seen if similar effects can be observed in other construction types and which interactional functions negated evidential verbs have more generally. Despite recent promising work on "negative epistemics" (Lindström et al., 2016), the specific problem of the semantic and pragmatic interaction between negation and indications of information source is still underresearched.

A second set of problems regards agreeing and disagreeing actions in argumentative discourse. Semasiological corpus studies such as the present one as well as conversation analytical work and onomasiological corpus annotation studies can contribute to build solid empirical foundations for the understanding and classification of argumentative actions (on this *desideratum* see Deppermann, 2003; Spranz-Fogasy, 2006). Among the questions that deserve further investigation is that of the role played by repeating and rephrasing the antagonist's standpoint in (dis)agreeing actions. In written genres such as those considered in the present study as well as in interactions composed of long turns (for example in parliamentary debate, cf. Cuenca, submitted), the establishment of a sequential relation between  $u_1$  and  $u_2$  often cannot be assured by adjacency, but requires the speaker to incorporate  $u_1$  into his/her own text or turn. The routine examined here is, among others, an answer to this structural requirement, together with other means such as reported speech using verbs of saying (cf. Jacquin, submitted) or the repetition of lexical material. In a debate context, rephrasing the interlocutor's standpoint simultaneously raises several interactional problems, including not only the identification and attribution of  $u_1$ , the ascription of an action to it and epistemic stance taking, but also the strategic choice of a certain degree of fidelity to the interlocutor's intentions (risking to commit a *strawman fallacy* if pragmatic fidelity is low, cf. for example Schuhmann, Zufferey & Oswald, 2019). More descriptive research is needed to shed light on the way verbal and interactional resources are used to accomplish agreement and disagreement as complex actions both in conversation and in contexts in which the establishment of sequential structure cannot rely primarily on adjacency.

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## Declaration of competing interest

None.

<sup>11</sup> In a study conducted on a corpus of spoken monologues and dialogues in French and English, Miecznikowski (2022) found that in a total of 193 identified evidential constructions p was expressed by a complement clause 88 times, besides 62 syntactically independent clauses, 35 NPs, 6 infinitive clauses, and only 2 indirect interrogative clauses.

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