

# 'I SAW YOU'

## (TOWARDS A THEORY OF THE PRAGMEME)

By Alessandro Capone

In this paper, I analyse the utterance 'I saw you' in the context of a fantastic story by the Italian novelist Italo Calvino. In particular, I argue that this utterance falls short of criteria of informativeness and that, following a positive thinking logic, it is assigned a default interpretation as an 'accusation'. In the second part of the paper, I move towards a theory of the pragmeme and argue that the utterance 'I saw you' has got specific interpretations in particular discourse types (e.g. games or the school). In a context in which a student was prompting, the teacher says 'I saw you' and the utterance is interpreted by default as an injunction to stop prompting.

### *1. The problem*

The utterance investigated in this paper is drawn from a fantastic story entitled 'Gli anni luce' by the twentieth century Italian writer Italo Calvino. (For the purpose of clarity, I shall use an English translation as the basis of my discussion). In this story, as we will see, a single utterance, such as the one studied in this article ('I saw you'), may give rise to a multitude of in-depth considerations, which shows that in proffering an utterance, there is more to meaning than the bare abstract semantics of the sentence. Yet, there is a close relationship between the semantics of the sentence and the pragmatics of the corresponding utterance, when contextualized; I am persuaded – and I hope to persuade my readers – that the transformations carried out by the pragmatic component are **conservative**, in that the initial semantics must be preserved throughout the transformation process and must be recoverable from the output. I also hope to make it clear to you that the 'common ground' is maximally operative in such transformations. Finally, I would like to persuade you that the interpretation of a simple utterance such as 'I saw you' makes recourse to societal considerations and rules that are embedded in situations of use. I think that a notion broached by Mey (2001), the **pragmeme**, a contextualized speech act, is tremendously useful in understanding the situated uses of 'I saw you' I am considering in the final section of the paper.

## 2. *From Calvino's story 'The light-years'*

'One night I was observing the sky with my telescope as usual. I noticed that from a galaxy, which was a hundred million light-years away from the earth, stood out a sign saying 'I saw you'. I made a rapid calculation: it had taken the light of the galaxy a hundred million years to reach me and considering that from there, people saw what happened here with a hundred million years' delay, the event of their seeing me had occurred two hundred million years ago. Before checking on my diary to see what I had done on that day, I had a presentiment: exactly two hundred million years ago, I had done something which I had always tried to hide. I had hoped that with the passing of time, people would have forgotten the episode; I thought it clashed egregiously with my habitual behaviour up to, and after that day: so if anyone had tried to recall that fact, I would have denied it, not only because it would have been impossible to find any evidence, but because a fact that was governed by such exceptional circumstances – even if it had really occurred – was so improbable that it could be considered false even by myself. However, now I realized that someone in a distant galaxy had seen me and that the story was likely to come out (...)' (Calvino 2000:121; my translation, AC).

## 3. *Gricean pragmatics and positive thinking*

Gricean pragmatics sees communication as a rational enterprise – one in which rationality guides both production and interpretation. It guides production, as speakers are under constraints of informativeness, orderliness, relevance, truth, etc. But it also guides interpretation: when these constraints seem to have been flouted, utterances are interpreted under the presumption that the Gricean maxims are nevertheless obeyed. The Gricean enterprise operates on the premiss that communication proceeds under the constraint of rationality and that not only speakers, but hearers as well, have to act on the presumption that what goes on is rational, even when appearances make one think otherwise.

The approach is based on goodwill and on positive thinking. Goodwill is involved in transforming otherwise irrational conversational products into coherent and rational sequences; positive thinking is involved in the tenet that one should do one's best to amend texts which fall short of the criterion of rationality, by imposing on them the presumption that they abide by the rationality constraints, and by providing interpretations which diverge from the literal meaning and 'save appearances'.

Rationality implies the ability to maximize efficiency and to handle information in such a way that neither too much nor too little is given, taking into account the needs of the recipient. It also means that every cost must be balanced by a commensurate cognitive effect.

The Gricean approach may be seen as partially dependent on general principles of positive thinking, as outlined below:

### **Attribute Meaningfulness**

Assume that what a person does has a meaning, unless you have serious reasons for thinking otherwise.

If you do not understand an action, suspend your judgement about it or, if you have doubts, ask the person doing the action why she/he did it.

### **Show goodwill**

Contextualize an action in such a way that it can be interpreted positively; if you do not find a context in which it can be interpreted positively, then at least allow for the possibility of finding a context in which the action can be interpreted positively.

### **Be constructive**

Repair your coparticipant's mistakes by attributing positive interpretations to her actions; in particular, adjust any interpretations of her actions by taking into consideration the intentions that can be plausibly attributed to her.

## **Be understanding**

If you cannot understand an event, allow for the possibility that the coparticipant is following a different kind of logic.

The maxims above are motivated by the assumption that human beings, insofar as they act as agents, are rational. The presumption of rationality will lead you to find motivations for their actions in spite of what *prima facie* may look like meaningless or irrational behaviour. This presumption will lead you to the conclusion that if your reasoning has sufficient depth, then you will be able to see a motivation for an action x; alternatively, if you cannot find a motivation for action x, surely you would be able to find it, if the broader context in which that action occurs were accessible to you. After all, linguistic behaviour is behaviour of some kind, and as such it is to be viewed using the logic of positive thinking. The inferential work undertaken by a hearer rests on the assumption that the speaker is rational, that is, follows a logic of some kind, and that by being able to situate an utterance in the appropriate context, one may achieve a number of cognitive effects.

### *4. The literal meaning*

Speech acts have got a literal meaning. We assume that, in the absence of contextual clues, we can analyse the meaning that would be conveyed if we just received the information associated with the words contained in a sentence and were able to calculate complex meanings by the combinatorial rules of the language. The literal meaning hypothesis, therefore, is not that we always process utterances, starting with their abstract semantics. In fact, the pervasive effect of the context may lead us to certain conclusions about the interpretation of a certain utterance, long before we actually consider the literal meaning of the forthcoming sentence, since we are often in a position to guess what textual sequence is to follow. The hypothesis merely postulates that we can understand the abstract meaning of a sentence in the absence of contextual clues, provided that the sentence is sufficiently rich and articulated to express a complete thought.

But what happens if this is not the case? One source of confusion must be ascribed to a tendency to equate meaning with propositions or complete thoughts. Meanings, instead, are quite abstract. To use a metaphor: Meaning is like an unfinished house – a system of pillars and beams – on which all sorts of materials and further decorations can be placed to create an object endowed with a house function. A house is a house, even in the absence of embellishments, as long as its basic function is preserved. To extend the metaphor further, what would happen if you restructured the same building by putting bars at the windows? You would not call that building a house but a prison. And yet there would be some basic function which the house and the prison would share.

The metaphor points up the fact that by placing the same sentence in different contexts, we obtain distinct utterances, diverging considerably in meaning from the basic sentence. Yet, they would have to share a literal meaning with the basic sentence (except in cases of irony). So, there is nothing wrong or strange if, in calculating meanings – the abstract semantics of sentences – we end up with logical forms that are in many ways inadequate to express a (fully articulated) thought, and sometimes express thoughts that would be strange if they were not further expanded. These forms are just primitive semantic schemata which will have to be further embellished and expanded to form meaningful and articulated thoughts.

The literal meaning hypothesis is apparently jeopardised by the view held by some linguists such as Giora. According to Giora (1997), salient meanings (e.g., conventional, frequent, familiar, enhanced by prior context) are processed first. Thus, for example, when the most salient meaning is intended (as in e.g., the figurative meaning of conventional idioms), it is accessed directly, without having to process the less salient (literal) meaning first. However, when a less, rather than a more salient meaning is intended (e.g., the metaphorical meaning of novel metaphors, the literal meaning of conventional idioms, or a novel interpretation of a highly conventional literal expression), comprehension seems to involve a sequential process in which the more salient meaning is processed initially before the intended meaning is derived. But this view does not really refute the principle that it is a good working assumption to start with lexical meaning first and then

move on to semantic composition following the combinatorial rules of the language. All it seems to show is that certain semantic configurations do not trigger a compositional interpretation process, as idiomaticity has prevailed over compositionality.

### 5. *'I saw you'*

What does 'I saw you' mean? It surely means something along the following lines: an event occurred in the past in which you (the reader or listener) were the agent. This event was the target of another, parallel event in which I (the writer or speaker) was the experiencer; this event may be characterized as an act of perception by the experiencer occurring at the same time at which the event of doing something by the agent occurred. The question is now whether there are one or two events. Already the utterance itself, which *prima facie* looked quite simple, confronts us with a dilemma. The question might appear to be one of point of view: if we look at the events from the outside, say from the point of view of an omniscient narrator, there is only one event: X sees Y doing something. From the point of view of Y, however, there are two events going on: the one in which he is agent and the one in which X, possibly through his binoculars, intentionally observes the portion of reality in which Y's event occurs.

### 6. *Preliminary pragmatic considerations*

When would you say 'I saw you?'. Would you say 'I saw you' to a person X in a normal situation in which it is obvious both to X and to you that you saw X? I suppose you would not, as such an utterance would be uninformative. Considering that what is obvious should not be normally said, the first inference you make on hearing 'I saw you' is that the utterer of the sentence does not consider that it is obvious to you (the hearer) that he saw you. So, it may be safely deduced that the observer's position was one that did not expose him or her to the risk of being seen by the observed person, the addressee of the utterance 'I saw you'.

There is another pragmatic inference to be drawn. Obviously, the utterance has a purpose, which is not merely to inform the hearer that the speaker saw him/her. The purpose is to let the hearer know that it makes a difference whether s/he was seen or not. If you have done something which deserves neither blame nor praise, you would not bother about being, or not being seen (or having been seen). It is simply indifferent to you.

You are watching television in the evening. They are showing a regular movie, one which you may watch without being afraid of being accused of watching something which you should not watch (e.g. a father would not watch a pornographic movie with his children around). Suppose your child says 'I saw you!'. I am persuaded that in this circumstance you would feel entitled to reply 'So what!' and you would go on watching the movie undisturbed by the apparently purposeless utterance. An utterance such as 'I saw you' carries the conversational implicature that the act seen was either bad, or otherwise noteworthy. Suppose you appear on TV – you are giving an interview in your area of expertise – and your neighbour says 'I saw you'. She obviously means something like 'I would like to congratulate you'. So, depending on the circumstances, 'I saw you' may get interpreted either as an accusation or as a compliment. A simple utterance like this gives rise to an interpretative ambiguity, receiving either a positive or a negative reading depending on contextual clues. The meanings that could accrue to the sentence uttered in different contexts are quite distinct and may even be in a relationship of opposition (a compliment being the opposite of an accusation).

There is a further inference to make in the Calvino story. The recipient believes that the utterance was proffered on the same day on which the action in question occurred. So, knowing that the message is sent from a distant galaxy and that the time when he receives the message need not coincide with the time it was encoded, he makes calculations and then consults a diary to see what happened on that day and to find out what the blameworthy action was.

But how does the addressee know that the time when he did the blameworthy action had to coincide with the day on which the *I saw you* notice appeared in the far galaxy? Some pragmatic reasoning must be involved. Suppose that the noteworthy event and the utterance

which constituted a reaction to the event occurred on different days – then the likelihood of the two events being perceived as related would be minimal. Since some expectation of relevance is carried out by rational communication, given that relevance also guarantees maximal cognitive effects, the likelihood that the event and the reaction to it occurred on the same day increases as the chances that the message will be construed as a reply to the stimulus proper (and not to other possible stimuli) are maximized.

From the very beginning, the recipient of the message in the story has inferred that the action which was noticed was blameworthy; in addition, the recipient has a presentiment that the writer of the message alludes to an action which he is especially ashamed of, as it is not representative of his character. In particular, the recipient seems to be aware that a distinction must be made between the individual as a person and the individual in various stages of his or her life. As an individual, the man doing that blameworthy action is at an exceptional stage of his life. Now, in light of the assumption that 'I saw you' may be used either to deliver an accusation or a compliment, the notion of *common ground* may help explain why, from the very beginning, the addressee anticipates a pejorative meaning. Since he knows that the sender of the message must have a purpose, and that such a purpose could be either to blame or praise him, he calculates that the interpretation ranges between blame and praise. But anticipating a negative event, he chooses the pejorative interpretation.

Now, I am persuaded that this reasoning is faulty. Surely the utterance may be used indiscriminately to blame or to praise. Since the recipient is aware, and proud, of the many noteworthy positive events in his life, he could indefinitely oscillate between the positive and the negative option. But as the positive events are innumerable, it is hard to specify which particular positive event the sender of the message had in mind. So, while it is possible to use 'I saw you' for positive events, it is less likely that the utterance is so used.

Suppose now that 'I saw you' indeed carries the conversational implicature that the speaker is proffering an accusation. The situations in which it is possible to utter 'I saw you', despite the fact that the action involved is praiseworthy, will still carry the standard conversational implicature, which then may be tested for cancellability. I



argue, and hope to demonstrate, that the protagonist of Calvino's story does understand the utterance as an accusation, as this is the standard conversational implicature associated with it; as such, it is not influenced by the particular context in which the utterance giving rise to it occurs, but is likely to arise just as it would in the default context.

But we are still facing the mystery of how the alleged implicature arises. Even admitting that understanding this particular utterance is largely context-independent, still the **ideal context** provided by the Gricean assumptions about the rationality of conversation is expected to spur some reasoning which is responsible for the standard implicature. Which is this reasoning? We can try to reconstruct the logic of the interpretative act by putting ourselves in the addressee's shoes.

Let there be two interlocutors, A and B. A says 'I saw you'. B, the addressee, who is not aware of the fact that A saw him and has caught him in the act (which act? we are not told), and who assumes that A's utterance is not purposeless, attempts to work out its specific purpose. The utterance 'I saw you' may either express a compliment or an accusation. If it is interpreted as a compliment, then B must supply some kind of continuation to it, e.g. 'I saw you while you were talking on the TV' or, more vaguely, 'I saw you doing that wonderful thing. I am proud of you'. If the utterance is interpreted as an accusation, the continuation may go like this: 'I saw you do that blameworthy thing. You should be ashamed of yourself'. Of course, depending on the context, a further continuation is possible, such as in a blackmailing situation: 'Now, either you follow my instructions or I will reveal your secret'. The scenario that favours such an interpretation is one in which B has committed a serious crime, for which he feels guilty. He knows that there are very severe penalties for such crimes and he is afraid of ending up in jail.

Now, choosing either the positive or the negative interpretation is a matter of choosing a certain **path of rational thinking**. A has uttered 'I saw you' with a certain purpose in mind, which is either to blame or to praise B. Assuming that, standardly, one's good deeds exceed in number the bad ones (this assumption follows from the logic of positive thinking outlined above), the likelihood that 'I saw you' is to be considered a reaction to a positive event decreases. Given the great

number of positive events potentially involved, it will be almost impossible to establish a connection between the utterance in question and a specific **salient** positive event. On the contrary, on the assumption that the negative events are numerically inferior, the recipient B will identify *the most salient event* to which A's utterance is connected. Because of this, under the negative interpretation, the chances for the assertion 'I saw you' to be connected with a *specific* event are greater.

The path of rational reasoning we have followed crucially hinges on two Gricean principles: that of relevance and that of quantity (of information). The need to be relevant has forced us to search for a connection between an utterance and an event occurring at the same time that the utterance was uttered. The need not to provide more information than is needed for the purpose of the conversation and its corollary (expanding the utterance information until the m-intended illocutionary point is reached) spurs the recipient on to provide the illocutionary force 'accusation'. This interpretation establishes a connection between the utterance and a negative event, thereby eliminating other possibilities (in particular, positive events, since these are far more numerous than blameworthy ones), and for that reason it is more informative.

### 7. *Expanding the utterance*

A person who hears 'I saw you' will naturally be inclined to ask 'You saw me (doing) what?'. Although one interpretative possibility of the utterance is 'I saw you there', on another interpretation the utterance could be construed as 'I saw you doing that'. The information which the former option carries is in some cases insignificant: I am in the company of Mary, I tell her: 'I saw you'. I am likely to be met with an expression of puzzlement, as it will not do to state information that is obvious and/or is part of common ground (or retrievable from surrounding perceptual stimuli which are publicly available). Of course, there are ways to make that information significant. For example, in the game of hide-and-seek it is the one child's task to find other children and to 'catch' them by saying 'I saw you'. But this is a

performative utterance and it is informative insofar as it is used performatively. We can work out another way of making the utterance informative by creating a scenario of which the recipient was not supposed to be part; by noticing his presence, the speaker accuses him of something which he was not supposed to have done. Alternatively, one can create a scenario in which two conversationalists try to establish some common ground to facilitate interaction, and one of them says 'I saw you there' to implicate that they are people who go to the same type of place.

The other plausible interpretation of 'I saw you' as 'I saw you doing that' can be obtained by some appropriate expansion work. This interpretation is different from the one previously considered in that it considers not just one, but two events in establishing common ground. The next section deals with this.

#### *8. Common ground and 'I saw you'*

Consider again the utterance 'I saw you doing that'. Common ground is certainly involved in the understanding of this utterance. Even if we admit its standard pejorative implicature, the specific import of 'that' still has to be specified in context, as only the common ground established between the speaker and the hearer can allow us to retrieve the referent of 'that'. The pejorative conversational implicature guides the interpretation process as we seek out only events that are blame-worthy. In the case of two or more such events, it is the most accessible one which will be chosen. However, choosing events involves being able to select from a list of candidates; such a list should be accessible as common ground both to the speaker and the hearer. Ariel (2001, 2002) discusses accessibility and establishes that a criterion for accessibility is the fact that a topic has been talked about numerous times. I doubt that we can apply Ariel's notion of accessibility in this context, as so far, no actual conversation has occurred between the sender of the message and the recipient. It is not the fact that a topic has been mentioned numerous times, but that it has a potential for being talked about many times, that makes the event in question more accessible. After all, if a somebody from another galaxy bothers to

write a message to a person on the earth, then the event this somebody intends to talk about is surely noteworthy. The most negative event of the list is thus the one that maximizes cognitive effects by making the coding and processing costs worthwhile.

As to other people attending to the conversation as overhearers, I doubt that the speaker has any obligation to presume common ground with them. The interpretation of the utterance by the hearer rests on his being able to select proper referents for 'that' from the common ground. However, as the speaker has got no obligation to establish common ground with the *unratified participants* in a conversation, it is only the *ratified participants* who have the right to benefit from common ground in the interpretation of the utterance.

### *9. Maximizing cognitive effects*

In Calvino's story, 'I saw you' is interpreted as an accusation. For this to happen, it must be expanded to 'I saw you doing that', where the deictic is to be connected with some event that is salient in the context. We have already discarded the possibility of connecting 'that' standardly with positive events – as these would be innumerable. So, we fell back on the hypothesis that 'that' refers to a negative event. Although negative events are more limited in number, they still create a range of options from which the recipient can choose. I propose that the event that gets chosen is the most salient one, both for the speaker and the addressee. The reasoning is the following. If the speaker bothered to issue an accusation, then he thought it was worth his while to do so – with the ulterior purpose of perhaps correcting the addressee's behaviour or even blackmailing him. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that, among the events that are candidates in connection with the accusation, he is referring to the worst possible item on the list – an event such as really would justify the effort of producing the utterance. Such a worst event, inasmuch as it justifies an overt criticism, would thereby underwrite the cost of the utterance.

*10. Pragmatic transformations are meaning-preserving*

One of the ideas broached in this paper is that pragmatic transformations are meaning-preserving. The term 'transformation' has been suggested by Ralph Walker (personal communication) and is, admittedly, unusual in the context of pragmatics (in fact, it rather is redolent of Chomsky's generative grammar). A transformation, in pragmatics, has to be seen as a process that turns a certain input  $x$  into an output  $y$ , such that  $y$  presents an increment in meaning with respect to  $x$ ;  $y$  is properly related to  $x$  in that it derives from  $x$  (the literal meaning) in virtue of certain assumptions about the rationality of communication and its cooperative nature. A pragmatic transformation is meaning-preserving in that the original semantic schema embodied in a sentence (a layer of meaning reduced to the bone with a potential for being enriched and expanded) is not altered in the process of the transformation. Take again 'I saw you'. A positive or negative evaluative meaning may accrue to the utterance, conditioned by, and as a consequence of, appropriate expansions. Yet, at any stage of the transformation it is possible to go back to the original semantic schema. Whether interpreted as a positive or a negative evaluation, 'I saw you' still expresses the speaker's thought when he noticed, at some time prior to the time of utterance, that the addressee was present in some unspecified location.

As to pragmatic transformations, not all of them preserve meaning; irony is one that does not. Consider the question/answer pair:

- (1)  
A: Does he stoop?  
B: He does and he doesn't.

B's reply is, obviously, a contradiction. To make the utterance interpretable, one has to invoke the principle of goodwill in order to amend the meaning and provide a more adequate interpretation that will cancel the contradiction (e.g. he stoops when he is too tired to walk). I propose that this transformation (based as it is on a pragmatic adjustment) is not meaning-preserving, insofar as it is not possible,

merely by considering the output, to retrieve its input. In other words, the semantic information is not preserved throughout the transformation.

### *11. Perlocutionary effect*

Not only does an utterance have an illocutionary point – it also sometimes<sup>1</sup> has a perlocutionary effect, defined as the further effect that the utterance has as a consequence of the recognition of its illocutionary point. So, let us take for granted that – in lack of a particular context – 'I saw you' counts as an accusation. The hearer might well be entitled to wonder what the further purpose of the speaker in uttering such an accusation could be. If the purpose of the utterance is merely to make an illocutionary point and no further inference can be made as to a possible perlocutionary effect, then the search for an interpretation stops here. However, given the disruptive effect that an accusation may have on interpersonal relations, and supposing that conversation is maximally rational, such that the cognitive effects should balance the costs involved, it is likely that accusations are uttered with an ulterior purpose in mind – maybe the speaker wants to scare you in order to make you act in a certain manner.

Suppose now you augment the utterance interpretation by adding the inference that the speaker wants to scare you. Then the next step is to ask yourself why he wants to scare you – does he have a perverse pleasure in scaring other people or does he, instead, have a further purpose in mind? And what could this be? Quite plausibly, he wants to blackmail you or otherwise damage your reputation by making public your blameworthy conduct.

### *12. Towards a theory of the pragmeme*

The novel angle of the present paper is that it tries to reconcile a view, held by the formal semanticists, namely that semantics has to do with those aspects of meaning that are independent of context, with the

view that meaning is socially and situationally conditioned and that speech acts acquire their full meanings in the interactional context in virtue of their being situated in social practices. Mey (2001) has recently developed a theory of the **pragmeme** which I found especially useful and intriguing. The pragmeme is essentially a pragmatic unit corresponding to a socially situated speech act. My view differs from Mey's in that I think that the path from sentence meaning to the pragmeme is a rather tortuous one, inasmuch as it involves considerations about the abstract semantics of a sentence, its explicatures, its conversational and conventional implicatures and, furthermore, the conventional inferential layers due to the utterance's being situated in a certain social context.

It is time now to look at some situated uses of 'I saw you' to point up the conditions and effects of placing an utterance in a certain context. As an example, let's look at the game played by children (usually under 10 years old) called 'hide-and-peek'. In this game, one of the children has got to count up to (say) 20, eyes shut and facing a wall (or a tree). Upon finishing the count, the child must then look for the other children. Spotting one of them, the child has to call out 'I saw you' and then run back to the place where the game started (the wall or the tree). Whoever arrives there first, wins.

Now, what is the import of 'I saw you' in this situation? Do we proceed from literal meaning until we arrive at the socially situated meaning? Do the literal meaning and the socially situated meaning diverge? It is not altogether clear to me that we are faced here with a crucial divergence. But what *is* the socially situated meaning of 'I saw you'? From an informational point of view, uttering 'I saw you' in the game situation is totally purposeless, as it is obvious, both to the speaker and to the addressee (who normally are in visual contact), that the latter has been spotted (of course, there may be situations in which a physical obstacle would prevent this mutual vision). In the game, however, the purpose associated with the utterance is to start a sequence in which the two children start running at the same time to the place where the game started. In its performative aspect, then, the utterance roughly amounts to 'Let's start running'. The socially embedded meaning is not at odds with the literal meaning – after all,

the assertion 'I saw you' provides the reason for initiating the running sequence.

Another situation in which it is possible to observe utterances such as 'I saw you' is the classroom. The teacher notices that Michelangelo (his favourite student) is whispering the answer to a question to his desk mate. The teacher says 'I saw you'. This is not just an utterance of blaming, but an order to Michelangelo to stop what he is doing. How can this speech act be transformed into the pragmeme 'Stop prompting'? It is the social situation, the rules and expectations about students' obligations and teachers' tasks that promote the **inhibitive interpretation** of 'I saw you'. In this context, it is out of the question that the utterance could count as a compliment – such an interpretation simply cannot occur. In fact, even though the teacher thinks highly of Michelangelo and also admires him for helping his fellow students, and even though Michelangelo knows that the teacher has this positive opinion about him, it is unlikely that he will choose such a tortuous path of *individual* interpretation, proceeding from considerations about his teacher's high esteem for himself, to the interpretation that the speech act counts as a compliment. Michelangelo will almost certainly prefer to follow the *social* path of interpretation, rather than constructing his own individual path. Thus, he is able to work out that the teacher, despite his high opinion of him, in fact wants him to stop prompting answers to his desk mate.

### 13. Conclusion

In this paper, I have analysed a textual fragment drawn from one of Italo Calvino's short stories: 'I saw you'. This utterance intrigued me because of its illocutionary and also potentially perlocutionary import. It seems clear that some expansion work is involved in order for the addressee to reach the right interpretation. Among the inferential processes involved are reasonings based on the notion of rationality and efficiency; the notion of common ground also plays a key role. As to the perlocutionary effects of the utterance, these were seen to be dependent on further pragmatic inferences. Finally, I have considered the role that pragmemes play in speech act interpretation.



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### **Note**

1. Jacob Mey (p.c.) has suggested that an utterance always has some perlocutionary effect.

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