



# Textual factualization: The phenomenology of assertive reformulation and presupposition during a speech event

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## Abstract

This paper provides an operational framework to study the unfolding of new factual propositions out of originally suspended-factual (Narrog, 2009; Tantucci, 2015b) statements during a speech event. In particular, this model is centred on the dynamic relationship between cognitive control (i.e. Kan et al., 2013) and epistemic certainty. A speaker/writer's epistemic inclination towards the factuality of a proposition P occurs throughout a text, either in the form of the assertive reformulation of an originally suspended-factual proposition P, or in the form of a presupposition trigger also turning P into a new factual statement. I refer to this phenomenon as textual factualization (TF) and I provide corpus data from the British National Corpus (BNC) to demonstrate it to be a frequent mechanism where an originally suspended-factual proposition [*apparently* P] is subsequently factualized both in written and spoken texts. I argue that TF instantiates as a form of interference/misinformation effect (cf. Ecker et al., 2015) as it triggers the qualitative alteration of an event memory by partially overwriting an original memory trace: from [*apparently* P] to [~~apparently~~ P].  
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## 1. Introduction

This paper proposes a new theoretical and operational model to investigate the encoding of factual propositions out of suspended-factual (cf. Tantucci, 2015b) statements throughout a text or during a speech-event. Special focus is put on the relationship between cognitive control and epistemic certainty (cf. Kan et al., 2013, on cognitive control and Moore, 1922 on action's contingency).

More specifically, the present analysis looks at quantitative and qualitative corpus-data from the BNC to propose that phenomena of 'conflict monitoring' and perceptual/informational 'cognitive control' (cf. Norman and Shallice, 1986; Botvinick et al., 2001; Miller and Cohen, 2001; Schlaghecken and Martini, 2012) not only instantiate at the perceptual level (i.e. as the inhibitory control necessary for overriding stimulus-driven behavioural responses), but also at the epistemic one (i.e. the epistemic inclination towards the factuality of a proposition in cases of uncertainty).

With this premise, I discuss how the pragmatics of presuppositions (cf. Stalnaker, 1974, 1999, 2002; Cruse, 2006; Huang, 2007, 2011; Riemer, 2010; Fetzer, 2011) can trigger factual propositions either based on construals of immediate intersubjectivity (I-I) – i.e. profiling the awareness of a specific addressee – or extended intersubjectivity (E-I) – i.e. referring to a more general 3rd party (3rdP) in society (Tantucci, 2013, 2015a, 2015c). In the latter case, presuppositions

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may prompt new factual propositions based on the epistemic assumption of 3rdP as an abstract interlocutor who is expected to potentially know or justify the factuality of P in a particular context. These points will constitute a theoretical prerequisite to propose that a SP/W<sup>1</sup>'s epistemic inclination towards the factuality of a proposition P can be formally identified throughout a text, either in the overt form of an assertive reformulation of an originally suspended-factual P (cf. Narrog, 2005:679; Tantucci, 2015a:387 on undetermined/suspended factuality), or in the covert form of a presupposition trigger also turning P into a new factual meaning. I define this online process as textual factualization (TF) and demonstrate it to be surprisingly frequent in contexts where an originally suspended-factual proposition [*apparently* P] – encoding interpersonal evidentiality (IE) (cf. Tantucci, 2013, 2015a) – is subsequently turned into a newly factual(-ized) proposition both in written and spoken texts.

This phenomenon can be preliminarily illustrated from the real example below:

- (1) Still, Rehm declared that Jack Kevorkian, who went to jail for killing terminally ill patients, “was before his time” and that “the country wasn’t ready.” But it’s **apparently** ready now. The agenda is set.  
COHA<sup>2</sup> – Giving our final days to God – 2015

Consider the last two propositions from (1) above: proposition P [*it’s apparently ready now*] and P’ [*The agenda is set*]. While the factuality of the former is ‘suspended’, as it can be epistemically defeated or questioned, the latter corresponds to a purely factual assertion<sup>3</sup>:

- (1) a. The country is **apparently** ready now, *though this is yet to be confirmed/yet this is not for sure*.  
b. The agenda is set, *\*though this is yet to be confirmed/\*yet this is not for sure*.

The online phenomenology of the shift from P to P’ is what in this paper will be addressed as textual factualization (TF), namely, the re-positing of an originally suspended-factual proposition P in the new form of a factual proposition P’. This is illustrated in the shift from (1a) to (1b) above, as the statement [*the agenda is set*] entails ( $\supset$ ) that [*the country is apparently ready now*]. Throughout a speech-event, TF instantiates as a type of interference effect (also defined as misinformation effect), viz. the qualitative alteration of an event memory (cf. Ayers and Reder, 1998; Paz-Alonso and Goodman, 2008; Frenda et al., 2011; Ecker et al., 2015) by either partially overwriting the original memory trace (i.e. Loftus et al., 1978; Belli et al., 1994) or blocking the original memory trace at retrieval (Bowers and Bekerian, 1984; Loftus, 2005). In this study, phenomena of TF will be intended to be an instance of the former: from [*apparently* P] to [*apparently* P].

This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 first briefly introduces the reader to the framework of the epistemic control cycle ECC and proposes a new intersubjective configuration of the ECC model. Section 3 is centred on the notion of textual factualization (TF) and its relationship with assertions and presuppositions. Concerning the latter, in 3.1 I discuss the relationship between presuppositions and immediate-intersubjective/extended-intersubjective (I-I/E-I) awareness. Section 4 is the core of this work and presents a corpus-based study of the relationship between evidential reasoning and online TF phenomena. More specifically, in Section 4.1 I first show the suspended-factual status of indirect evidentials (cf. Willett, 1988; Aikhenvald, 2004; Tantucci, 2013). This brief discussion serves as a theoretical prerequisite to the final analysis in Sections 4.2 and 4.3 which provides the results of a corpus survey focusing on phenomena such as the one exemplified in (1a-b), viz. cases of TF of a proposition P’ occurring in the same text where an originally suspended-factual proposition [*apparently* P] first appeared.

## 2. The (intersubjective) epistemic control cycle (I)ECC

In cognitive science, cognitive control (also known as executive functions or the supervisory attentional system) stands for a range of cognitive mechanisms – including attentional control, inhibitory control, working memory, and cognitive

<sup>1</sup> Speaker/writer.

<sup>2</sup> Corpus of Historical American English (last accessed 16/03/2016) (cf. Davies, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> The present study theoretically draws from Narrog’s (2005, 2009) and Tantucci’s (2015, forthcoming) understanding of factuality, considered as the domain of un-modalized expressions. From this perspective, factuality entails certainty:

*The Alps are in Italy, \*but maybe this is not true.*

*The Alps may be in Italy, but maybe this is not true.*

This clearly constitutes a violation of Grice’s maxim of quality and represents an example of what is traditionally defined as the ‘Moore’s paradox in the philosophy of language (cf. Huang, 2007: Section 2.1.3 for a detailed discussion of this issue). The same phenomenon is also captured in Capone (2001) where it is posited that if a speaker uses an unqualified utterance (an utterance without a modal expression), s/he is committed to its truth, since s/he is obeying the quality maxim.

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