Half in Common (HIC): How Common Ground Shapes the Meaning of *Half*

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The Puzzle. "Half the path was flooded" is systematically ambiguous: the first half (ordered, located), a contiguous stretch (unordered but connected), or any segments summing to half the total (pure measure). At least **seven logically distinct readings (A–G)** are available. No language encodes all seven; a few forms cover multiple partitions, creating systematic ambiguity. No theory explains how speakers disambiguate. I argue the answer lies in common ground (CG): the shared knowledge that speaker and hearer bring to interaction.

The Argument: Common Ground Determines Lexical Meaning. CG has been studied as something grammar *manages*: discourse particles, evidentials, and mirativity markers *check CG status* and *update* it. I argue CG plays a qualitatively different role for content words like *half*, *metà*, *mezzo*: it uses CG *content* to *determine the proposition itself*. Grammar alone narrows but does not select a reading; CG alone has no structured space to operate on; only their interaction yields determinate interpretation. CG is a co-constitutive component of the grammar–meaning interface.

Core Architecture: Grammar as Gatekeeper. Three CG-sensitive mechanisms operate in sequence:

1. **Grammar gates the reading space.** The morphosyntactic frame restricts accessible readings. In Italian, bare *metà*+N and *la metà del*+N restrict to measure (F/G); modifiers open spatial readings. For *mezzo*+N, noun type gates the family (spatial nouns: C/D, E; measure nouns: F/G).
2. **QUD-driven Relevance:** The shared discourse goal selects among frame-compatible readings (*Where?* $\rightarrow$ spatial; *How much?* $\rightarrow$ measure).
3. **Alternative-based Informativeness:** The hearer reasons over what the speaker *could have said*. Italian speakers share *mezzo*+N (spatial), so choosing bare *metà* reinforces the measure reading.

The central empirical test exploits a structural asymmetry: spatial readings (C/D) are *start-anchored* (the "first half" begins at the entity's origin), while measure readings (F) are *position-independent* (any contiguous 50% qualifies), enabling a clean verification test.

Research Design: Describe $\rightarrow$ Test $\rightarrow$ Integrate. **WP 1 (M 1–20)** tests the **Cross-linguistic CG Hypothesis**: languages with finer-grained partition lexicons require less explicit CG; diachronic change follows a conventionalization trajectory from personal to communal CG. Comparative morphosyntax and corpus analysis across five languages. Output: typological database; two journal articles. **WP 2 (M 12–28)** tests the **CG Disambiguation Hypothesis** through three experiments. Exp. 1: grammar gating (bare *la metà* accepts any 50% region; *la prima metà* only start-anchored). Exp. 2: scene type $\times$ partner visibility (2$\times$2; shared CG amplifies spatial forms; measure unaffected). Exp. 3: QUD manipulation (mouse-tracking). Output: one journal article. **WP 3 (M 20–36)** tests the **CG Composition Hypothesis**: CG-management devices (mitigators, mirativity) compose with *half*-words within the gated space. CG-enriched formal semantics and RSA model (with A1, Franke). Output: integrative journal article; cross-project workshop. The WPs test both directions of the co-constitutive claim: WP 2 tests grammar$\rightarrow$CG; WP 1 tests CG$\rightarrow$grammar.

Falsifiability. If bare *la metà del*+N rejects non-start-anchored 50% regions, grammar is not gating—equally significant. Each prediction is independently testable; partial disconfirmation refines the model.

Innovation and SFB 1718 Positioning. (1) A co-constitutive architecture extending CG from grammatical markers to lexical content; (2) the first structured typology of *half*-word lexicalization (two axes: extension, ordering); (3) diachronic change as communal CG conventionalization. Within SFB 1718: B-area devices check CG *status*; *half*-words use CG *content* to determine the proposition. Extends to demonstratives (Colasanti et al. 2025) and spatial relational nouns (Levinson 2003).

Feasibility. Builds on SEMSUBSET (MSCA, 2019–2023, ZAS Berlin); the A–G framework is established. Mouse-tracking: Kaup (A5); RSA: Franke (A1). Modular: WP 1 independently publishable. Target: four journal articles.