

## Perception predicates used inferentially: the example of Italian *vedere* and *sembrare*

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Italian lacks a grammatical evidential system. The category of information source – especially inference and report – may be indicated using sentence adverbs, verbal tenses and modes and verbal constructions that can take scope over propositions and events. This contribution concerns evidential strategies in Italian that (a) indicate inference and (b) are based on m-performative uses (Nuyts 2000) of lexical predicates that presuppose a perceiver as an explicit or implicit argument. We will focus on *vedere* ‘to see’ and on the appearance verb *sembrare* ‘to seem’. The two verbs can be used to convey epistemically weak or strong inference, mostly (but not exclusively) of the “experiential” type (Anderson 1986). Some constructions of *sembrare* are compatible also with report. Typical examples are:

*Si vede che Luigi è d'accordo / Luigi sembra (essere) d'accordo / Sembra che Luigi sia d'accordo* [Luigi agrees]<sub>EV/MOD</sub>.

A syntactic and semantic analysis of corpus data is proposed that sheds light on the relationship between perception and inference and on the internal organization of the category of inference as an information source.

Our data are drawn from a corpus composed of texts pertaining to two argumentative genres, i.e. editorials and reviews (ca. 5 million words), and from the *itWac* corpus (Baroni and Kilgariff 2006), constituted by web crawling and more varied as to text types. We have started out from the editorials and reviews corpus, retrieving all forms of *sembrare* and of *vedere*, reducing these to two random samples of 300 tokens each and annotating the tokens syntactically and semantically. On this basis, six constructions fulfilling inferential functions have been selected for further analysis: impersonal *sembra* + complement clause introduced by *che*; *sembrare* in the present tense + infinitive clause; *sembrare* in the present tense + adjective or noun phrase; *vedo* (1 sg. present) / *vediamo* (1 pl. present) / *si vede* (3 sg. present tense, impersonal use) + complement clause introduced by *che*. Of each construction, a random sample of 80 tokens occurring in *ItWac* has been retrieved and annotated as to relevant semantic and pragmatic features.

A key feature of the constructions in question is the combination of reference to perception with scope over propositions as mental objects. Propositional scope blocks any testimonial reading, imposing an interpretation of percepts as components of a reasoning process – Anderson’s experiential inference – with possible shifts towards further types of inference. It is signalled syntactically (e.g. by the combination with a *che* complement clause and by raising constructions); in *sembrare* (< latin *similare/simulare*), a propositional interpretation is favoured by the lexical meaning of the verb, which encodes a problematic contrast between what is perceived (P) and an imagined situation the experiencer associates with P.

The analysis of inference schemes has been conducted within the framework of the Argumentum Model of Topics (Rigotti e Greco Morasso 2010), which can be applied both to argumentation in texts and to the semantics of inferential markers. Inference is analyzed as a process in which an experiencer derives a conclusion from a *datum* (a minor premise) on the basis of world knowledge (*endoxa*) and of procedural major premises (maxims), which determine different types of inference schemes. *Sembrare* and *vedere* are compatible with (a) perceptual or simply factual *data*; (b) symptomatic and causal inference (especially from effect to cause), induction as well as argumentation from the parts to the whole, preferring a decrease of concreteness and of proximity to the *origo* when passing from the *datum* to the conclusion. The extension to report may be mediated by argumentation from authority, con-

sidered conceptually close to symptomatic argumentation by some argumentation theorists (e.g. van Eemeren et al. 2007). The examined perception predicate based constructions thus appear to be sensitive not only to the type of *datum*, but also to the structure of the inference scheme, confirming the results of research conducted on modal verbs in Italian and French as evidential markers and argumentative indicators (Rocci 2012).

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