

Workshop 4

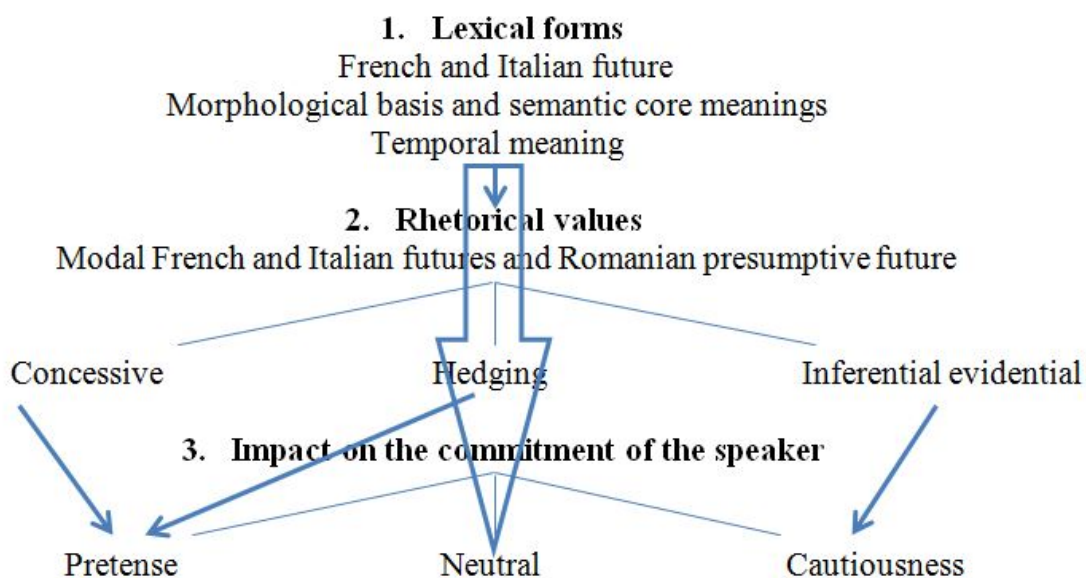
Theoretical approaches to inter- and cross-linguistic variation in futurity

Abstract

Interfaces between lexical meaning, rhetorical values and commitment: The case of the future in French, Italian and Romanian.

Our research addresses the question of how the core meaning of the future in three different languages gives rise to different rhetorical values and how these impact on the commitment of the speaker towards his/her utterance. We focus our analysis on the synthetic future in French and Italian as well as on the presumptive future formed with 'o' (*will*) + lexical verb at the infinitive, / 'o' + 'fi' (*to be*) + present / past participle) in Romanian. The contrasts made visible by the comparison between different future forms in three Romance languages will allow us to discriminate between three levels of analysis (lexical, rhetorical and commitment) and to identify the way they interact with each other.

Our theoretical background can be schematized as follows:



1. Core meaning level. The core meaning of a form is only compatible with some rhetorical values. French and Italian futures can convey an inferential evidential value and not a reportive one.

À ce qu'il se dit, le président serait en train de divorcer.

**À ce qu'il se dit, le président sera en train de divorcer.*

**A quanto dicono, il presidente starà divorziando*

2. Rhetorical value level. The uses of the forms are constrained by the rhetorical value(s) that they have endorsed through a diachronic path. The French future can be used with a rhetorical hedging value to express a request, whereas in Italian such a use is not acceptable in the same context:

*Vous me donnerez bien un morceau de ce jambon ? *Mi darà un pezzo di questo prosciutto?*

By contrast, both Italian and Romanian modal futures have a concessive value whereas such a value is not conveyed by the French modal future.

Mangerà tanto, ma è magro!

*O mânca mult, dar tot slab este! *Il mangerà beaucoup, mais il est maigre!*

3. Commitment level. Three macro types of commitment are taken into account. *Pretense*: the speaker feints to endorse a certain state of affairs, *cautiousness*: the speaker has no direct

attestation of it, *neutral*: no clues indicate a particular stance. When all modal interpretations are excluded, the commitment is neutral. In this case, the future is interpreted as expressing a posterior state of affairs. Such an interpretation is possible with the synthetic future in French and Italian, but not with the analytical form *o + fi* + lexical verb in Romanian.

*Dans deux jours j'aurai 20 ans. Tra due giorni avrò 20 anni. *În două zile oi avea 20 de ani.*

The Romanian form cannot convey a neutral commitment. It always conveys a particular rhetorical value leading to a commitment of the type *pretense* or *cautiousness*.

Our research ambitions to identify the factors enabling or blocking the association of a particular rhetorical value to the core meaning of the future, in the framework of theories of semantic change.

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