FROM MODAL SEMANTICS TO DISCOURSE : EXPLORING THE FUNCTIONING OF THE ADJECTIVE *POSSIBILE* IN A CORPUS OF ITALIAN FINANCIAL NEWS

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Abstract

In this paper we investigate the interface between the semantics and the discourse functions of the Italian modal adjective *possibile* ('possible') in a corpus of economic-financial news. Our aim is to show how a context-dependent semantic analysis of the adjective based on Relative Modality (RM) and a careful examination of linguistic constraints and contextual saturation sheds light on the distinctive role played by *possibile* at a discourse level. Drawing from previous work about lexical modals in RM vein, we define *possibile* as a relational operator linking the modalised (prejacent) proposition to another set of propositions which is saturated in the situational or discourse context of utterance (conversational background). In order to look at the saturation of the conversational backgrounds, we have annotated at different levels (syntactic and semantic) 222 occurrences of *possibile* in a theoretically representative sample of the corpus. The different syntactic constructions of the predicative and attributive uses of the adjective are found to impose constraints on the adjective's readings and on the type of conversational backgrounds they are compatible with, affecting, indirectly, the inferential construction of discourse representations.