

# The grammatical nature of some epistemic-evidential adverbs in spoken Italian.<sup>1</sup>

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This article deals with some adverbs and adverbial constructions expressing epistemic modality in Italian. These forms are commonly considered as fully lexical. It will be shown, though, that they can be compared to grammatical forms, at least to an extent. In fact, on the one hand they are organized in a closed lexical paradigm characterized by semantic complementarity and seemingly easy to be combined with the paradigm opposing the grammatical epistemic forms. On the other hand each of these adverbs preferentially correlates with a 'discourse configuration', i.e., a portion of discourse characterized by a particular geometry, comparable to a large-scope construction. These facts suggest including epistemic adverbs and adverbial construction in the analysis of the grammatical category of 'epistemic modality' rather than excluding them as merely lexical. More generally, the dichotomy between grammar and discourse seems in need of rethinking not merely by considering discourse as the diachronic source for grammatical forms, but also by hypothesising that grammatical categories are expressed not only at a morphological level, but also in discourse structures.

## 1. Introduction

This article deals with some adverbs and adverbial constructions (henceforth, for the sake of brevity, adverbs) expressing epistemic modality in Italian. Choosing to include this topic within a special issue on lexical evidentiality may well seem inappropriate. Epistemic modality and evidentiality, in fact, should be considered in principle as fully distinct categories (de Haan 1999, Lazard 2001, Aikhenvald 2004 among others). The former is the category the speaker uses to performatively *express* his subjective opinion about the truth of a proposition whose content is put forward as unreal, the latter is the category the speaker uses to *describe* the source of information he has in order to assert a proposition the reality status of whose content is unmarked. So, apparently the two categories only share the fact that they take a whole proposition in their scope. Nevertheless, it frequently happens cross-linguistically that the simple fact of indicating the source of evidence for a proposition is interpreted as implying that the speaker does not subscribe to it unconditionally. Evidential markers, therefore, acquire an overtone of doubt and they are extended to convey epistemic meanings. This semantic extension

may happen, but, as Aikhenvald (2004: 153) points out, it is not at all necessary. In this regard, Plungian (2001) suggests distinguishing typologically between languages in which the markers of evidentiality mark epistemic modality too, and languages in which evidentiality simply expresses the source of information used for making a claim. The interaction of epistemic modality and evidentiality is particularly complex in Italian (§2). This complexity can be detected not only at the level of the more grammaticalized epistemic markers (such as modal verbs and epistemic future), but also examining some partially grammaticalized forms (§2.1). This urges a study of those epistemic markers which are commonly considered as fully lexical, such as epistemic adverbs. These forms, indeed, make up a large but closed and structured lexical paradigm (§3). Analysis of their occurrence in large portions of discourse suggests that each of these adverbs is preferentially associated with a specific discourse configuration, i.e., a portion of discourse characterized by a peculiar geometry (§ 4), which contributes to sharply defining its meaning (§5 - §7). A new semantic characterization of these forms emerges which allows us to define the semantic oppositions holding between them. The system designed by these oppositions tends to reproduce (albeit refining it) the complexity of the interaction between epistemic modality and evidentiality (§8). All these facts oblige us to take seriously the possibility of including lexical forms in the analysis of the grammatical category of epistemic modality, and, more generally, to hypothesize that the grammatical meaning can be detected not only at the morphological, but also at the discourse level (§9).

## 2. *The Italian epistemic-evidential system*

The Italian epistemic system comprises five markers, whose grammaticalized status is proved both by their reduced semantic and formal autonomy (Pietrandrea 2005: 62) and by their morphosyntactic peculiarities (Squartini forthcoming): the epistemic future, the indicative and the conditional forms of the modal verb *dovere* – DEVE ‘must’ and DOVREBBE ‘should’ –, the indicative and the conditional forms of the modal verb *potere* – PUÒ ‘can’ and POTREBBE ‘could’. While the four modal forms have both an epistemic and an evidential meaning, the epistemic future has a genuine epistemic meaning, without any evidential colouring. The modal DEVE expresses both direct and inferred evidence and strong certainty, as shown in examples (1) and (2):

- (1) Ci deve essere un bavaglino nella borsa, prendilo!  
'There must (must.IND.PRS.3SG) be a bib in the bag, [I know because I have seen that there is a bib in the bag] take it!'
- (2) I riflettori di questi giorni non gli devono aver fatto troppo piacere, perché hanno spostato l'attenzione.  
'The spotlights in the last few days must (must.IND.PRS.3PL) have annoyed him, because they "distract attention"'

DOVREBBE expresses both indirect (inferred and second-hand reported) evidence and a medium degree of certainty, as shown in (3) and (4):

- (3) Dovrebbe essere a casa, perché ho visto la sua auto parcheggiata.  
'He must (must.COND.3SG) be at home, because his car is in the car park'
- (4) Il questore –secondo quanto si è appreso – dovrebbe essere sentito dai magistrati nei prossimi giorni  
'Apparently, the police investigator should (must.COND.3SG) be heard by the judges in the next few days'

PUO' and POTREBBE express both inferred evidence (see example (5)), POTREBBE may express second-hand reported evidence (see (6)), both express a low degree of certainty:

- (5) Su questo terreno le pagine di Amir possono (but also potrebbero) essere angosciose, grondanti come sono di interrogativi e paure  
'On this subject Amir's pages can (can. IND.PRS.3PL –but also can. COND.3PL) be distressing, oozing fears and questions'
- (6) Secondo alcune indiscrezioni potrebbe essere presente il Ministro dell'Interno  
'According to some leaks, the Minister of Internal Affairs could (can. COND.3SG) be present'

The genuine epistemic nature of the future is proved by the fact that the future (unlike the modals) can be employed in purely conjectural contexts, i.e., contexts lacking any evidential source, like for example (7).

- (7) Saranno le otto e mezza, immagino  
'It must be (be.IND.FUT.3PL) eight thirty, I guess'

It is clear that these contexts cannot be considered as evidential by definition:<sup>2</sup> the speaker simply expresses his opinion, without referring to any evidential source. Neither, as Squartini (forthcoming) sug-

gests, the genuine epistemic nature of the future can be questioned by the fact that the epistemic future, as well as the modal DEVE, is grammatical in generic inference contexts (i.e. contexts “in which [...] the speaker only bases his/her reasoning process on previous personal experience or general world knowledge” –Squartini, forthcoming), as the two examples (8) and (9) show:

- (8) [Suonano alla porta] *Sarà* il postino  
[The bell rings] ‘It must be (be.IND.FUT.3SG) the postman’
- (9) [Suonano alla porta] *Deve essere* il postino  
[The bell rings] ‘It must (must.IND.PRS.3SG) be the postman’

It can be argued, in fact, that the compatibility of the future with an evidential (albeit generic) context does not prove its evidential nature. The future, unlike the modals<sup>3</sup>, may be in some cases engendered by the existence of a source of evidence, but it never fulfils the function of explicitly encoding it. To put it in another way, the future does not serve the purpose of marking information as inferential, it does not have therefore ‘source of information’ as its core meaning, as a true evidential must have (Aikhenvald 2004: 3).

Beside the epistemic-evidential modals, the Italian evidential system, like other Romance evidential systems (Squartini 2001) comprises also a reportive conditional:

- (10) Secondo la stampa locale sarebbero già al lavoro gli operatori della Croce Rossa Internazionale  
‘According to the local press International Red Cross workers are (be.COND.3PL) already at work’

This form does not have either an indirect evidential or an epistemic value. As shown by Squartini (2001), this is a unique case among Romance languages.

All in all, the intersection of the epistemic and the evidential system in Italian defines (as shown in table 1) three different sets: the set of purely epistemic forms (represented by the epistemic future), the set of epistemic-evidential forms (represented by the modals), and the set of purely evidential forms (represented by the reportive conditional). It is worth noting that the Italian evidential system is structured around two crossing axes: an opposition between direct and indirect evidentials (represented by the modals) on the one hand, and, on the other hand, an opposition between more and less mediated reportive evidence (represented by the opposition between the modal form DOVREBBE and the reportive conditional). The former

is an epistemic-evidential axis, where the equivalence ‘more direct is more reliable’ is established, the latter is a purely evidential axis. This state of affairs is quite uncommon among European languages (Pietrandrea 2005: 104).

**Table 1.**

EPISTEMIC FORMS	EPISTEMIC/EVIDENTIAL FORMS		PURELY EVIDENTIAL FORMS
(+ certain)	DEVE	(+direct)	
epistemic future	PUÒ/ DOVREBBE POTREBBE		Reportive conditional →
(-certain) ↓	(- mediated) ↓	(-direct)	(+mediated)

### 2.1. The intermediate lexical-grammatical forms

Interestingly, the complexity of the grammatical epistemic-evidential system is reproduced in the diachronic dynamics as well. So that two lexical epistemic and evidential constructions, *si vede che* (lit. ‘one sees that’) and *dice che* (lit. ‘says that’) – which because of the partial loss of their semantic and inflectional integrity can be considered partially grammaticalized (Pietrandrea 2005:67) – find a place within the system consistent with what happens for grammatical forms. So, while the construction expressing direct evidence, *si vede che*, can also be used with an epistemic meaning, the reportive construction, *dice che*, is purely evidential. The former construction, in fact, entails the expression of the degree of the speaker’s commitment (as evidenced by the fact that it cannot be further epistemically qualified (see (11)), whereas the latter does not (as evidenced by the fact that it does allow further epistemical qualification (see (12)):<sup>4</sup>

(11) \**Si vede che era stanco, ma io non ci credo / e io ci credo*  
 ‘He was clearly tired, but I do not believe that (and I believe that’

(12) *Dice che era stanco, ma io non ci credo / e io ci credo*  
 ‘He says he was tired, but I do not believe that / and I believe that’

Table 2, drawn (and adapted) from Pietrandrea (2005: 105), shows how the intermediate lexical-grammatical forms can be inserted in the previous scheme.

**Table 2.**

EPISTEMIC FORMS	EPISTEMIC/EVIDENTIAL FORMS		PURELY EVIDENTIAL FORMS
(+ certain)		<i>Si vede che</i> (+direct)	
		DEVE	
epistemic future	PUÒ/	DOVREBBE POTREBBE	Reportive — <i>dice che</i> —> conditional
(-certain) ↓		(- mediated) ↓ (-direct)	(+mediated)

The fact that intermediate lexical-grammatical forms are so clearly attracted toward the system structure makes the study of what are considered ‘fully lexical’ epistemic forms more compelling.

### 3. The set of epistemic adverbs and adverbial constructions

Like other languages, Italian has various lexical forms for the expression of epistemic modality: epistemic verbs either followed by a sentential complement or used parenthetically, epistemic adjectives modifying predicative nouns, epistemic adjectival constructions followed by a sentential complement, and epistemic adverbs and adverbial constructions.<sup>5</sup> As mentioned, this study focuses on the latter. The set of adverbs and adverbial constructions expressing the speaker’s opinion is large but closed. It appears as a multidimensional object characterized by a net of near-synonymies crossing different language varieties and, as will be clearer by the end of this article, by the semantic complementarity of its units.

For the purposes of the present study three highly frequent epistemic adverbs have been selected: the two near-synonymous *forse* ‘perhaps’ and *magari* (roughly corresponding to ‘perhaps’, but also to ‘I wish’) and the adverbial construction *secondo me* ‘in my view’. Besides, the evidential adverbial construction *dice che* ‘says that’ has been observed.

These forms have been studied in their context of occurrence, through a corpus-based approach. The analysis has been conducted on two general corpora, homogeneous in their diatopic variety: the Roman component of LIP and the spoken texts of ARCODIP produced by Roman speakers.<sup>6</sup> The first important result to be highlighted is a simple quantitative fact. Table 3 shows the frequency distribution of the four selected adverbs. It can be observed that these forms are not particularly frequent within the corpus and they appear homogene-

ous in frequency of occurrence. But the most striking fact is in the comparison with the frequency distribution of the more grammaticalized epistemic markers<sup>7</sup> (Tab. 4): the lexical forms are much more frequent than the grammatical ones, the former amounting to 180 occurrences, the latter to 114. This fact somewhat contradicts the widely acknowledged relation between high frequency and high degree of grammaticalization (see, among others, Bybee & Hopper 2001) and it may be variously interpreted. In this work it will be considered as a hint towards rethinking the clear cut distinction between lexicon and grammar. This point will be further discussed in § 9.

**Table 3**

<i>Magari</i>	75
<i>Forse</i>	46
<i>Secondo me</i>	38
<i>Dice</i>	21
	180

**Table 4**

DEVE	4	Deve	4
		Devono	0
DOVREBBE	29	Dovrebbe	25
		Dovrebbero	4
PUÒ	14	Può	7
		Possono	7
POTREBBE	17	Potrebbe	13
		Potrebbero	4
Epistemic future	45	Sarà	26
		Saranno	8
		Avrà	10
		Avranno	1
Reportive conditional	5	Sarebbe	2
		Sarebbero	1
		Avrebbe	1
		Avrebbero	1
	114		

#### *4. Discourse configurations as grammatical constructions*

An intuition underlying the present work is that the exact semantic characterization of metapositional level units such as the

epistemic adverbs cannot be obtained through the simple observation of their occurrence in the clause, but that in order to precisely grasp their meanings it is necessary to define the place these units occupy in larger portions of discourse.

For this purpose, a powerful discourse visualization device has been employed: the “grid representation” developed by the G.A.R.S. (Groupe Aixois de Recherche en Syntax) directed by Claire Blanche-Benveniste (Blanche-Benveniste et al. 1979, Bilger 1982, Blanche-Benveniste et al. 1990, Bilger et al. 1996). The basic tenet underlying the development of this instrument is that spoken<sup>8</sup> texts have a peculiar structure which cannot be grasped through linear representation. As a matter of fact, the speaker only rarely utters all at once what is called the ‘maximal grammatical construction’, i.e., the verb (or another major lexical category) with its arguments and adjuncts. More frequently, the syntagmatic production results from a search along the paradigmatic axis. This is revealed by the fact that the production of the maximal construction is preceded by repetitions, hesitations and changes in the lexical choice, that is, fragments of the complete sequence having some syntactic relation with it. The result is that the portions of text surrounding and syntactically related to a maximal grammatical construction – i.e., what are called ‘discourse configurations’ – can take forms that appear to occur regularly in the language. Typical oral texts may be thus characterized by lists of lexemes, repetitions of syntactic structure, chiasmic syntactic structures and so on (Blanche-Benveniste et al. 1990).

The grid representations account for both the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic dimension, which allows us to clearly visualize the configurations of the discourse analyzed. For example, a text like (13) can be represented in grid as in (14), which reveals the existence of a discourse configuration characterized by repetitions of a syntactic structure (PP-V-NP) within a chiasmic structure, yielding an alternation with the mirroring structure NP-V-PP:

- (13) Per cui praticamente per ogni tipo di gioco c’era un edificio specifico no? per cui per esempio il circo serviva alle corse dei carri, l’anfiteatro alle lotte dei gladiatori, lo stadio per i giochi atletici no?  
‘So, actually, for every kind of game there was a building, wasn’t there? So for example the circus was for the chariot races, the amphitheatre for the gladiator fights, the stadium for athletic games, wasn’t it?’

(14)

per cui	praticamente	per ogni tipo di gioco	c'era	un edificio specifico	no
per cui	per esempio	il circo l'anfiteatro lo stadio	serviva	alle corse dei carri alle lotte dei gladiatori per i giochi atletici	no

(Bonvino 2005: 61)

It will be shown in this article that each of the epistemic adverbs analyzed is preferentially associated with a specific discourse configuration, which contributes to sharply defining its grammatical meaning. This suggests two interrelated hypotheses. Firstly, discourse configurations may be treated as true constructions, in the technical sense attributed to the term by Construction Grammar (Fillmore et al. 1988, Goldberg 1995, 2003, among others), i.e. as formal patterns endowed with their own (albeit very abstract) meaning (see also Masini 2006 for a similar hypothesis). Secondly, this state of affairs seems to imply that the grammatical meaning is not only conveyed by morphological elements, but also by large discourse constructions.

### 5. The non-factuality markers *magari* and *forse*

*Magari* and *forse* are two near-synonyms used to hedge the assertion of a propositional content. Both (15) and (16) present a weak commitment of the speaker with the truth of the proposition: they may be considered therefore as epistemically modalized.

(15) *Forse* speravo la stessa cosa che sperava lei  
'Perhaps I was hoping the same thing she was hoping'

(16) *Magari* speravo la stessa cosa che sperava lei  
'Perhaps I was hoping the same thing she was hoping'

In spite of their synonymicity, *magari* and *forse* correlate with totally different discourse configurations. This, we will see, suggests important differences in their respective semantic characterizations.

*Magari* is basically associated with three configurations. In 42 out of 75 occurrences, it introduces what we called epistemic lists, i.e., lists of optional constituents in the scope of the adverb (see also Bonvino et al. forthcoming). We have two examples in (17) and (18).

- (17) Che ne so poteva comparire una scenografia che che *magari* li riportava ne in un ambiente, in una foresta piuttosto che in una giungla nel deserto  
 ‘I don’t know a set could appear that that maybe reconveyed them in in a scene, in a forest, or in a jungle, in the desert’

Che ne so poteva comparire una scenografia	che	che <i>magari</i> li riportava	ne in un ambiente in una foresta in una giungla nel deserto	(piuttosto che)
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- (18) Non era come eh come per noi adesso per cui *magari* che ne so uno va al cinema la sera o al teatro no?  
 ‘It was not like ehm like for us today so that maybe I don’t know one goes to the movies in the evening or to the theatre doesn’t he?’

Non era	come	eh	come per noi adesso per cui	<i>magari</i>	che ne so uno va	o	al cinema al teatro	la sera	no
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The fact that the speaker lists all the constituents in the scope of *magari* (a scene, a forest, the jungle, the desert, in (17), the movies, the theatre in (18)), putting them on the same level as possible options indicates that he does not subscribe to any of them, rather he puts all of them forward as non factual. This would suggest that *magari*, rather than an epistemic, should be considered as a marker of non factuality, i.e. a form signalling that the speaker does not subscribe to the truth of what is being asserted, independently on evaluation about his commitment to the propositional content. This hypothesis finds further support in the analysis of the other two constructions associated with this adverb.

In 6 out of 75 occurrences, *magari* precedes an adjective. Two examples of the construction [*magari* + ADJ] are in (19) and (20):

- (19) Poi si tratta di coordinarli [...] risolvere I loro problemi *magari* anche oggettivi  
 ‘Then one must coordinate them [...] solve their problems that may also be real’

- (20) Ci avevo una gonna corta di velluto verde quindi era magari un po' vistosa  
'I wore a short green velvet skirt, so it may have been a little bit showy'

The construction [*magari* + ADJ] yields a "speech act modality" effect (Sweetser 1990, Papafragou 2000). That is, by using the marker *magari*, the speaker concedes that someone else may have the judgment expressed by the adjective, without personally subscribing to such an evaluation. As a matter of fact, the use of a non factual marker serves exactly the purpose of indicating that the speaker does not subscribe to the judgment expressed by the adjective.

In 6 out of 75 occurrences, *magari* precedes an imperative form. We have two examples of [*magari* + IMP] in (21) and (22).

- (21) magari glielo dica  
'You'd better tell her'
- (22) ma magari lo aspetti  
'but you'd better wait for him'

The occurrence of *magari* in this construction has the effect of weakening the order expressed by the imperative form. This pragmatic extension of the meaning of *magari* is licensed by the semantic nature of this form. A non-factual marker introducing an imperative form, in fact, yields a kind of contradiction: the speaker orders something, but at the same time he does not subscribe to his own order. The rhetorical effect is one of mitigation of the order.

Further support to the characterization of *magari* as a marker of non-factuality is lent by the fact that this form may have optative uses, not attested in the corpus, but easily acknowledged by Italian speakers. We have two examples in (23) and in (24):

- (23) magari venisse!  
'I wish he came'
- (24) A: Ti piacerebbe parlare con lui?  
A: 'Would you like to talk to him?'  
B: magari!  
B: 'I wish!'

The characterization of *magari* as a non factual marker becomes clearer when contrasting the configuration associated with *magari* with those associated with its near-synonymous *forse*.

*Forse* never occurs with epistemic lists. Rather, in 15 out of 46 occurrences, it occurs in configurations where the constituent introduced by *forse* is opposed to another constituent denying it. We have two examples in (25) and (26):

- (25) I motivi principali sono due eh un *forse* perché per la presenza di questa statua colossale di Nerone che doveva essere vicina insomma appunto all’edificio oppure semplicemente per le sue dimensioni colossali  
 ‘The main reasons are two eh one either because of the presence of this colossal statue of Nero that must have been close sort of well yes to the building or simply for its colossal dimensions’

I motivi principali sono due eh un <i>forse</i>	perché	la presenza di questa statua colossale di Nerone che doveva essere vicina (insomma) (appunto) all’edificio
	per	
oppure semplicemente	per	le sue dimensioni colossali

- (26) Ci sono dei fenomeni che sono stati *forse* poco politici o molto politici  
 ‘There have been phenomena that have perhaps been hardly political or very political’

Ci sono dei fenomeni che sono stati	<i>forse</i>	poco politici
	o	molto politici

The semantic effect yielded by the occurrence of *forse* in such a configuration is what we called “non exclusion of a possibility” (Bonvino et al. forthcoming). By saying “*forse* C” (where C is a whatsoever content), the speaker says “it is possible that C but it is also possible that not C”. This leaves open the possibility of also taking into account the opposite of C. For example, by using *forse* in (25), the speaker asserts that the first explanation for the name Colosseum (the presence of Nero’s colossal statue) is true, but also that that explanation may not be true, but that a second explanation (its colossal dimensions) explicitly introduced by *oppure* ‘or’ is true instead. By using *forse* in (26) the speaker says that it is possible that some phenomena have been hardly political, but also that it is possible that they have been not *hardly* political, but *very* political instead. If this

interpretation is correct, *forse* should be considered not as a marker of non factuality, but as a marker of possibility. As van der Auwera (2001) has highlighted, a possibility marker may indicate not only a possible conclusion, but also the possible truth of a binary disjunction: the former being formalizable as  $\diamond p = \neg \neg p$ , the latter as  $\diamond p = \diamond \neg p$ .

Another quite frequent configuration associated with *forse* confirms the hypothesis that this adverb should be treated as a possibility, rather than a non factual marker. In 7 out of 46 occurrences *forse* occurs in a construction [*forse* + ADJ]. We have an example in (27):

- (27) posso fare una domanda *forse* stupida?  
'May I ask a maybe stupid question?'

The construction [*forse* + ADJ] is obviously parallel to the construction [*magari* + ADJ], but while the latter yields the speech act modality effect described above, the former does not. It is simply used to indicate that the speaker is not completely engaged with the judgment expressed by the adjective. It can be hypothesized that the difference in the semantics of the construction depends on the fact that *magari* is a non factuality marker, whereas *forse* is a possibility marker. We have seen above that by using *magari* the speaker avoids subscribing the propositional content and consequently the *origo* of the judgment is transferred from the speaker to the hearer with a concessive effect. When using *forse*, by contrast, the speaker is committed, even if only to an extent, to the propositional content. So the *origo*'s transfer effect is blocked.

The characterization of *forse* as a possibility marker also explains why a construction such as [*forse* + IMP] would be ungrammatical:

- (28) \**forse* glielo dica  
'perhaps tell her'

In this case in fact the speaker would not avoid subscribing to the order yielding the mitigation effect described above. Rather he would evaluate the truth of the order which is being given as possible. This would yield a non-sense effect.

Likewise, in that it is a possibility marker, *forse* does not have optative uses, that would imply a non-commitment, rather than a partial commitment, of the speaker:

- (29) \**forse* venisse!  
'perhaps he came!'

All in all, the comparative distributional analysis of *magari* and *forse* in discourse allows us to refine the semantics of these adverbs that we characterize no more as generic ‘hedges’, but respectively as a non factuality and a possibility marker.

#### 6. *The boundary between evidentiality and epistemicity: secondo me*

By using, as in (30), the adverbial construction *secondo me* (roughly corresponding to ‘in my opinion’), the speaker does two different things at the same time: he expresses his own opinion and he refers to himself as the source of evidence for what he is asserting:

- (30) *Secondo me* Barbara è tornata  
‘In my opinion Barbara is back’

The double function of *secondo me* raises the issue of the epistemic or evidential nature of this form. As a marker of the speaker’s genuine opinion it can be considered as an epistemic. Nevertheless, as a marker of a source of evidence (the speaker himself), it can also be considered as an evidential.

The analysis of *secondo me* in discourse can help to decide whether to consider it as an epistemic or as an evidential marker. In 19 out of 38 occurrences, *secondo me* is used in contexts of contrast, i.e., in contexts in which the speaker expresses his opinion with the aim of contrasting with an opinion expressed either by other speakers, or previously in his own argumentation. The contrast may assume different forms. Firstly, it can be marked by the presence of an adversative conjunction within the configuration (as in (31), *invece* ‘instead’). Secondly, it can be signalled by opposing, in a list or in a chiasmic structure, an occurrence of *secondo me* either to other evidential markers or to other occurrences of *secondo me* uttered by or referred to other speakers. In (32) there is an example of an occurrence of *secondo me* opposed in a chiasmic structure with the evidential expression *m’aveva detto* Marco ‘Marco had told me’. In (33) there is an example of the chiasmic repetition of *secondo me* (alternating with *secondo te* ‘according to you’) referred to different speakers. Finally, contrast can also be obtained by opposing in a configuration the negation of a syntactic structure to its affirmation (like in (34) where the structure NEG + MODAL + V + NP contrasts with the following MODAL + V + *secondo me* +NP):

- (31) A: Soltanto che io ho notato questo  
 A: 'It is only that I noticed that'  
 B: invece *secondo me* Barbara comincia a stancarsi  
 B: 'while in my opinion Barbara is starting to get tired'

A: Soltanto che	io	ho notato questo
B: invece	<i>secondo me</i>	Barbara comincia a stancarsi

- (32) A: dovevo girare a destra, dovevo riuscire a beccare la Roma Fiumicino, m'aveva detto Marco e invece  
 A: 'I was supposed to turn right, I should have somehow got on to the Roma-Fiumicino highway, Marco had told me, but'  
 B: *secondo me* stava sulla sinistra la Roma-Fiumicino  
 B: 'I think the Roma Fiumicino was on the left'

A:	dovevo girare a destra	dovevo riuscire a beccare la Roma Fiumicino	m'aveva detto Marco
	e invece		
B:	<i>secondo me</i>	stava sulla sinistra la Roma-Fiumicino	

- (33) Non è il fatto di essere gentlemen, bisogna essere deboli *secondo te*, *secondo me* è così  
 'It is not matter of being a gentlemen, one must be weak according to you, but I think it is like that'

non	è il fatto di	essere gentlemen	
	bisogna	essere deboli	<i>secondo te</i>
<i>secondo me</i>	è così		

- (34) cioè non è non deve essere una forma di contraccambio eh cioè ci deve essere *secondo me* un rapporto di chiarezza con l'istituzione  
 'I mean it is not and must not be a form of repayment, uh I mean there must as I see it be a clear relation with the institution'

Cioè	non	è		
	Non	deve essere		una forma di contraccambio
Eh				
Cioè		ci deve essere	<i>secondo me</i>	un un rapporto di chiarezza con l'istituzione

The preference for contexts of contrast suggests that *secondo me* is mainly used to stress the fact that the speaker is signalling his own reasoning or knowledge as the source of evidence for what he is asserting, opposing it to other sources of evidence. Having ‘source of evidence’ as its core meaning, *secondo me* is to be considered as a true evidential rather than an epistemic marker.

This hypothesis is confirmed by the fact that *secondo me* is awkward when employed in purely conjectural contexts, as proved by using a test elaborated in Pietrandrea (2005: 94). Let us imagine that a friend has lost his watch and that he asks us where we think that the watch can be. If we do not know anything about that watch, nor on how our friend normally uses it, we can only legitimately use a purely epistemic marker and try:

- (35) L'avrai lasciato a casa  
‘You may have left it at home’

More awkwardly we would say:

- (36) ??*Secondo me* l'hai lasciato a casa  
‘In my opinion you left it at home’

Having characterized *secondo me* as an evidential raises the question of what kind of evidential *secondo me* is. First of all, it is clearly not compatible with reportive contexts, as proved by the test in (37), borrowed from Squartini (forthcoming):

- (37) ?? *Secondo me* il presidente è scomparso: lo dicono i giornali  
‘In my view the President has disappeared: that is what the newspapers say’

It is neither compatible with contexts of direct evidence, as proved by the test in (38), or with circumstantial inferential processes – i.e., inferential processes “based on external sensory evidence” (Squartini forthcoming) –, as proved by the test in (39), adapted from Squartini (forthcoming).

- (38) ?? *Secondo me c'è un bavaglino nella borsa, l'ho visto prima.*  
'I think there is a bib in the bag, I saw it before'
- (39) [indicando un ragno] ?? *Attento secondo me è ancora vivo perché ho visto che si muove*  
[Pointing to a spider] 'Be careful! In my view it is still alive, for I saw it moving'

It can be used instead in inferential generic contexts i.e. "based on previous experience or general world knowledge" (Squartini forthcoming), as proved by the test in (40) (adapted from Squartini forthcoming):

- (40) [Suonano alla porta] *a quest'ora passa sempre il postino quindi secondo me è il postino*  
[the doorbell rings] 'The postman passes by every day at this time. So in my view (*secondo me*) it is the postman'

All in all, the semantics of *secondo me* can be described by referring to Squartini (forthcoming) who suggests qualifying the mode of knowing and the source of evidence of an evidential process by using the features [ $\pm$ self] and [ $\pm$  other]. Using these parameters, *secondo me* emerges as marked by the feature [+self] for the mode of knowing (the speaker's reasoning or knowledge) and by the feature [+self] for the source of knowing, i.e., it emerges as a generic inference marker stressing the speaker's opinion or knowledge as the source of inference.

## 7. A pure evidential: *dice che*

It was argued in §2.1. that the Italian reportive form *dice che*, as well as the reportive conditional, is a pure evidential marker that does not *per se* imply any qualification of the speaker's commitment towards the propositional content.

The analysis of the occurrences of *dice che* in discourse lends support to such a view. This construction occurs 19 times in the corpus, always with a clausal scope. In 17 out of 19 occurrences *dice che* is associated with what Blanche-Benveniste et al. call expliciting structures ("structures à explicitation"), i.e., discourse configurations introduced mainly (but not only) by speech verbs having the function of reporting speech. We have an example in (41):

- (41) mah ha detto che che grosso grosso modo va abbastanza bene solo solo l'aorta *dice che* è un po' dilatata  
 'well, he said that that more more or less it is going well enough.  
 Only only the aorta seems a little bit dilated'

B: mah	ha detto	che						
		che	gr<osso>					va abbastanza bene
			grosso modo					
			solo					
			solo	l'aorta	<i>dice</i>	che		è un po' dilatata

The high frequent occurrence of *dice che* in these configurations suggests that this form, rather than being used to express a distance from what is being asserted, is chiefly used to rivet the reported-speech nature of the configuration without continuously specifying the exact author of the information, who is usually introduced once in the configuration through a reported speech marker (mostly placed at the beginning as in (41), or at the end, as in (42)).

- (42) senti na cosa m'avete cercato perché *dice che* volevate un grigliato, dovevate fare un'offerta. Me l'ha detto XYZ stamattina  
 'Listen, you were looking for me because it seems you wanted a form, you were supposed to make an offer. XYZ told me this morning'

Senti na cosa	m'avete cercato perché	<i>dice che</i>	volevate un grigliato
			dovevate fare un'offerta
me l'ha detto XYZ stamattina			

It is worth mentioning that, beside the construction *dice che*, there is another form widely used in colloquial Italian: the parenthetical *dice*, described as a direct speech marker (Giani 2005; Lorenzetti 2002), or, using Aikhenvald's terminology, as a quotative. We have an example in (43):

- (43) allora è venuta da me e *dice* Mara per piacere mi\_ mi puoi prestare il tuo caffè

'then she came close to me and she said (lit. 'says'): "Mara, may I borrow your coffee, please"'

In spite of the functional differences between the two forms (*dice che* being used as a reportive evidential, *dice* as a quotative), the discourse function of reported-speech rivet has been described for the latter, as well (Rovere 1977, quoted in Lorenzetti 2002).

Interestingly, sometimes the form *dice che* also presents ambiguity between a reported evidential or a quotative value. For example in (44), contrasting someone who maintains that the protagonist of their discussion is not supposed to obtain a burial niche in the cemetery, the speaker reports what has been said just before, i.e., that the protagonist could obtain a niche at the last floor. He repeats several times *dice*. It is not clear in this case whether the speaker uses the form *dice* as a quotative (reporting exactly what was said previously in the discussion) or as a reported evidential only précising the source of what he is asserting.

(44) no ma *dice* guardi *dice dice dice che* secondo il piano che all'ultimo piano glielo darebbero.

'No but he says look he says he says he says that depending on the floor that at the last floor they would give it to him'

A: no ma	<i>dice</i>	(guardi)		
	<i>dice</i>			
	<i>dice</i>			
	<i>dice</i>	<i>che</i>	secondo il piano	
		<i>che</i>	all'ultimo piano	glielo darebbero

All in all, the discourse function of the reported speech rivet of *dice che*, its contiguity with the quotative form *dice*, the occasional ambiguity between its reportive and its quotative values, suggest that this form should be considered as closer to a quotative than to a reportive with epistemic overtones. This characterization, obviously, does not exclude that *dice che* may sometimes acquire an epistemic overtone by means of a pragmatic implicature. In any case, epistemic modality is by no means embedded in its meaning. Under this respect, the Italian *dice che*, which, as mentioned above always has a clausal scope, differs from its Mexican Spanish counterpart, *dizque*, which, as described by Olbertz (this volume), has a core epistemic meaning when used as a modifier of linguistic items below constituent level.

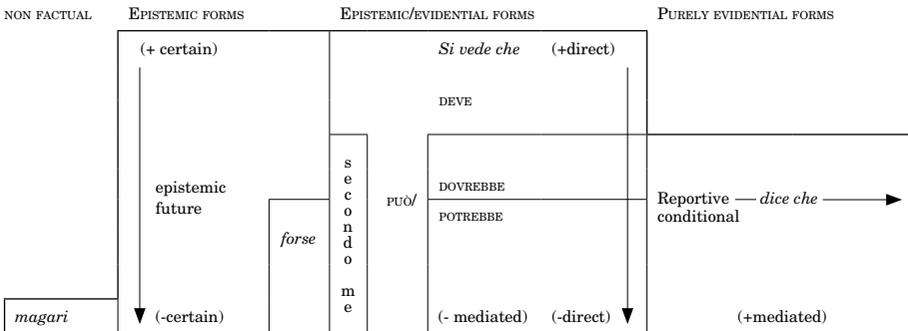
8. The Italian epistemic-evidential system revisited

The discourse analysis conducted so far allows us to provide a semantic characterization of the core meaning of each adverb and, consequently, to redefine the internal configuration of the Italian epistemic-evidential system by inserting therein the lexical forms analyzed. *Magari* emerges as a genuine non factual marker serving the function of putting forward as fictious the content it modifies. It can be employed in epistemic contexts, but it has not the evaluation of the truth of propositional content as its core meaning. *Forse* is an epistemic possibility marker. *Secondo me* is an epistemic-evidential marker of generic inference, mainly stressing the speaker’s opinion or knowledge as source of evidence and therefore chiefly used as a true evidential.

*Dice che* is confirmed as a purely evidential reportive marker.

Table 5 shows how these lexical forms modify the Italian epistemic-evidential system sketched above (Tab. 3). The system is enriched of a new set of forms: the pure markers of non factuality (so far only represented by *magari*). The set of pure epistemic form comprises an opposition between the epistemic future, unmarked as to degree of certainty, on the one hand, and *forse*, a marker of possibility, characterized as such by a low degree of certainty, on the other hand. The set of epistemic-evidential forms includes *secondo me*, a form used in inferential contexts, unmarked as to degree of certainty with no reportive evidential function. *Dice che* is confirmed as a purely evidential reportive marker.

**Table 5**



All in all, the four lexical forms analyzed can be easily integrated in the epistemic-evidential system designed by the opposition holding between the more grammaticalized forms. It can be noticed that

the lexical forms refine the oppositions within the system, but at the same time they prove consistent with its basic architecture. Seeing it from another standpoint, it can be argued that the Italian epistemic-evidential system defines a closed paradigm comprised of both grammatical and lexical markers.<sup>9</sup>

## *9. Conclusions*

Our analysis of Italian epistemic adverbs has shown three facts. Firstly, the epistemic lexical forms form an integrated paradigm with the more grammaticalized ones. Secondly, they are more frequently selected than the latter. Thirdly, when selected, they are set within discourse configurations comparable to large-scope constructions. This state of affairs suggests a closer proximity of lexical and grammaticalized epistemic forms than that usually described. This raises the question focused on in this volume, i.e., the relation between the grammatical and lexical markers of a grammatical category.

Two approaches are possible. One can choose to treat as true grammatical categories only those conceptual categories obligatorily expressed in the language through a paradigm of specifically dedicated grammatical forms (Lazard 2001:360, Aikhenvald 2004:9, among others). In this case the domain of investigation is elegantly and rigorously defined. However, not only it does become impossible to account for the proximity between grammatical and lexical markers noted in this study, but it is the very existence of a category of epistemic modality that is being questioned, languages expressing epistemic modality through specific forms being very rare (Palmer 1986:55, Pietrandrea 2005:41).

An alternative is to define as “grammatical category” every “class of homogeneous and complementary grammatical options” (Simone 1990 (1995:303)). The latter approach both allows us to use the instruments of the theory of grammar in analyzing categories like epistemic modality and evidentiality in languages lacking a paradigm of dedicated forms and it enables us to account for the regularities that have emerged in the present work, provided that a new definition of a ‘grammatical option’ is given. A grammatical unit is usually taken as a unit of the morphological level. Aikhenvald (2004:11), for example, writes “Grammar is taken to deal with closed systems, which can be realized through bound morphemes, clitics and words which belong to full grammatical word classes, such as prepositions, preverbs, or particles”. This identification of what is

grammatical with what is affixed or affixed-like is perhaps misleading. First of all, it has been demonstrated that closed and structured paradigms do exist in the lexicon as well (see among others, Lyons 1977:230 ff and Cruse 1986). Secondly, even if it is true (as the theory of grammaticalization has widely proved) that the forms expressing grammatical meaning tend to be diachronically affixed, this does not mean that only what is affixed is grammatical. It may thus be more worthwhile to provide a functional definition of grammar and to consider as grammatical all those units expressing “general, abstract and relational” (Bybee et al. 1994:5) meanings, deriving from the formal apparatus of enunciation (Benveniste 1970), and related to the more salient aspects of the human faculties, knowledge and communication needs (Lazard 1992). In principle these units can be detected at any level of the hierarchical structure. The condition for considering them as grammatical is that they show reduced autonomy, as Lehmann (2004, but also as early as 1985) suggests. This reduced autonomy is not necessarily to be identified with their paradigmatic obligatoriness and their syntagmatic fusion (as the strongest among Lehmann’s (1985) six grammaticalization criteria<sup>10</sup> would require). It may simply reside in their integration in a closed paradigm of options and in their reduced syntactic mobility. With this approach, the epistemic adverbs studied in this paper could be considered as weakly grammaticalized epistemic forms, rather than fully lexical. As a matter of fact, they form a closed class of homogeneous and complementary options, they convey grammatical meaning, and they show reduced syntactic mobility being associated with discourse configuration.

It is clear that this weaker approach to grammatical categories has some disadvantages. First of all, doing without a clear-cut dividing line between lexical and grammatical units requires redefining the investigation domain each time. Secondly, it deals with tendencies rather than invariants, which could involve overestimating the phenomena described. Thirdly, the fact of detecting grammatical meaning at every level of linguistic structures requires the theoretical effort of rethinking the relations between levels of analysis.

Nevertheless, it seems the only viable solution for accounting for those regularities, frequently neglected in analyzing languages, which, nevertheless, appear to characterize their structure and, presumably, their typological features.

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## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> For a different view see Squartini (forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup> As shown in Pietrandrea (2005:81), the epistemic modals of obligation and possibility refer to what must or can be true. In other words, they condense the syllogistic process employed in the inference. “By marking information as inferential” they provide “information on the source of evidence, which is undoubtedly connected with evidentiality”, as Squartini (forthcoming) would put it, so they explicitly refer both to the source and the mode of evidence.

<sup>4</sup> This test was borrowed from De Haan (1999:93).

<sup>5</sup> For a complete list see Venier (1991) and Schneider (1999).

<sup>6</sup> The LIP corpus (De Mauro et al. 1993) is a general spoken corpus comprising different typologies of texts amounting, in the Roman component, to 158,836 words. The ARCODIP (Pietrandrea 2004) is a small gathering of spoken and written corpora produced at the Dipartimento di Linguistica of the Università Roma Tre. The selected spoken texts produced by Roman speakers amount to 28,338 words. So the present study is based on a spoken corpus representing the Roman variety of Italian, amounting to 187,174 words.

<sup>7</sup> The corpus was searched for the presumably more frequent inflectional forms of each grammatical epistemic marker: i.e., the thirds and sixths persons of the modals and the thirds and sixths persons of the future and conditional forms of the verbs *avere* ‘to have’ and *essere* ‘to be’. It is commonly accepted that thirds and sixths persons are more frequently epistemically modalized than enunciation persons, it is also demonstrated that the epistemic future occurs with stative verbs (Pietrandrea 2005:133 ff.), *to have* and *to be* being two prototypical highly frequent stative verbs. So, the most frequent lexical markers have been compared with the most frequent grammatical markers.

<sup>8</sup> But, to an extent, also written texts (Blanche-Benveniste, personal communication)

<sup>9</sup> Ramat (1996) considers the integration of lexical and grammatical markers within the same evidential paradigm as one of the four possible typological configurations of evidential systems, the others being: 1) expression of evidential meanings through pure lexical markers, 2) expression of evidential meanings through pure grammatical markers, 3) no formal expression for evidential meanings.

<sup>10</sup> Lehmann’s (1985:306) establishes six criteria for grammaticalization. A unit is to be considered as grammaticalized when, at the paradigmatic level, it has lost its semantic and formal integrity, is integrated in a restricted paradigm of options, and is obligatory, and at the syntagmatic level it forms narrow construction, is dependent or affixed to other units, and is less mobile in its syntagmatic construction.

