

Aspetti diacronici e contrastivi dei marcatori epistemici in italiano

Gianluca Colella

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the system of epistemic modality markers in Italian from both a diachronic and a contrastive perspective. The attested data show that already in Old Italian we can find a polysemous use of the modal verbs *dovere* ‘must’, which is both deontic and epistemic, and *potere* ‘can/‘may’, which is both circumstantial and deontic. However, most of the epistemic adverbials (e.g. *certamente* ‘certainly’ or *probabilmente* ‘probably’) have not developed a modal meaning, but seem to act as discourse makers. On the other hand, although in Modern Italian there is a higher number of adverbs expressing a modal meaning, some peculiar modals (e.g. *e’ risica*, lit. ‘it risks’, and *forse e senza forse*, lit. ‘maybe and without maybe’) are not used in modern Italian or are relegated to peripheral uses. Attention is also devoted to how the diachronic development of epistemic adverbs in Italian has followed different paths with respect to other Romance languages; for example, the adverb *possibilmente* (lit. ‘possibly’) in standard Italian expresses exclusively circumstantial modality (‘if it were possible’), while the Spanish *posiblemente* expresses epistemic modality (‘possibly’).