

Temporal, aspectual, and modal evaluation of reference

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This paper aims to examine the evaluation of nominal reference in relation to time and reality, exploring temporal, aspectual and modal marking on nouns in Italian based on written corpus data. Although the marking of temporal, aspectual and modal (TAM) features on nouns has been widely discussed in the typological literature (Nordlinger and Sadler 1998, Lecarme 2012, Bertinetto 2020), its relevance for the domain of evaluative semantics has not received much attention.

Evaluative semantics has indeed been traditionally connected to the dimensions of size, intensity, and approximation (cf. Dressler and Barbaresi 1994; Rainer 2015; Masini and Micheli 2020). We will argue that speakers frequently evaluate reference also along the temporal, aspectual and modal dimensions, assessing the validity and certainty of referential predication against the moment of speech.

We specifically analyse the following strategies acting within the noun phrase level:

- i. noun prefixation (e.g. *ex-fumatore*, ‘ex-smoker’ in (1));
- ii. ad hoc compounding involving TAM adverbs (e.g. *i mai-fumatori*, ‘the never-smokers’ in (1); *un forse-lavoro*, ‘a perhaps-job’ in (4); *la nostra un-tempo-amicizia*, ‘our once-friendship’ in (2));
- iii. constructions involving TAM adverbs (cf. discontinuous temporal reduplication *padre-non-più-padre*, ‘father-no-longer-father’ in (5) and *uomini non più uomini*, ‘men no longer men’ in (6)).

Speakers devise these strategies to identify a specific referent in terms of a certain property (the one lexicalized by N) that is relevant in the discourse context, but it has to be modulated along TAM dimensions in order to be applicable. Reference validity is thus evaluated on the basis of its collocation in time (past/present/future), its duration (continuous/ended/incipient), and its certainty (factual/certain/potential/impossible). Crucially, evaluating reference against the TAM dimensions may lead to an evaluation in terms of prototypicality and approximation, as can be observed for *gli appena trentenni* (‘the newly-thirty-year-olds’ in (3)), which is opposed to *i trentenni a tutti gli effetti* (‘the full-fledged thirty-year-olds’). Similarly in example (5) *padre-non-più-padre* (‘father-no-longer-father’) is paraphrased as *padre in altro modo* (‘father in a different way’), indicating some deviation from the prototype (cf. Masini and Donato 2023).

In this paper we provide a qualitative and quantitative analysis of these strategies, in order to account for their functions, frequencies and distributions. Based on itTenTen20 (Jakubíček et al. 2013), WikiCoNLL and ItWac (Baroni et al. 2009) and La Repubblica Corpus (Baroni et al. 2004), we extracted and analyzed all the occurrences of ADV+N characterized by hyphenation, which we considered as an orthographic marker of processes (i)-(iii). However, being the use of hyphenation highly variable, especially in cases (ii) and (iii), we semi-automatically extracted all the co-occurrences of ADV and N, with a syntactic relation holding between the two. We then focused on those being in

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the scope of a determiner, analyzing them in context and coding the TAM features of the adverb, the TAM meanings of the strategy and the additional prototypicality/approximation functions. The results of this study show that temporal, aspectual, and modal modulation of nominal reference can be highly relevant for evaluative semantics and evaluative morphology in particular, with different TAM markers developing approximation and non-prototypicality functions at various degrees (e.g. *appena*, ‘just/newly’, *forse*, ‘perhaps’, or the *discontinuous* temporal reduplication in (5)).

Examples:

(1) [...] *piccole soddisfazioni da ex-fumatore che i mai-fumatori neanche si sognano.*

[...] small satisfactions for an ex-smoker that never-smokers can't even dream of. (itTenTen20)

(2) [...] *rompere il ghiaccio della nostra un-tempo-amicizia* [...]

[...] breaking the ice of our once-friendship [...] (itTenTen20)

(3) [...] *gli appena-trentenni si trasformano in trentenni a tutti gli effetti.*

[...] the newly-thirty-year-olds develop into full-fledged thirty-year-olds. (itTenTen20)

(4) *Si è creato quel magico non-equilibrio per cui è arrivato un forse-lavoro pagato poco e poco appagante ma che dovrebbe essere stabile.*

That magical non-balance has been created where a perhaps-job has come up, a low paid and unsatisfying job, but that should be stable. (itTenTen20)

(5) [...] *lui il padre-non-più-padre, ma padre in altro modo, cioè ci siamo capiti.*

[...] he, the father-not-father-anymore, but father in a different way, that is, you know what I mean. (itTenTen20)

(6) [...] *gli uomini non più uomini, spettri spaventosi che, disperatamente, incredibilmente, cercano ancora di camminare e si trascinano.*

[...] men no longer men, terrifying specters who, desperately, unbelievably, still try to walk and drag themselves along. (itTenTen20)

(7) [...] *così chiamato, secondo gli allora ministri degli esteri* [...]

[...] so called, according to the then ministers [...] (WikiCoNLL)

(8) [...] *Giovanni Sanseverino, già conte di Marsico e barone* [...]

[...] Giovanni Sanseverino, formerly Count of Marsico and Baron [...] (WikiCoNLL)

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