

ILLOCUTION AND MODALITY IN SPOKEN ITALIAN: PERFORMING A SPEECH ACT THROUGH WORDS AND JUDGING THEIR SEMANTIC CONTENT A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS

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1. Premise

Despite the long tradition of studies on Modality, this notion is not clearly distinguished from Illocutionary force, which many authors still consider in terms of “modality of the utterance” (assertive, deontic, evaluative, etc.) making the semantic value of the utterance collapse on his pragmatic result. This problem is sensible for spontaneous speech processing, where on one side modal lexical indexes are frequent and, on the other, speech act analysis is crucial for parsing the speech flow.

The paper discusses the results of a research in which lexical modal indexes have been retrieved in the C-ORAL-ROM Italian corpus (Cresti & Moneglia 2005) and then annotated according to their modal values (Alethic, Epistemic and Deontic) and illocutive classes (Representatives, Directives, Expressives, Refusals and Rytes). The distribution of modal indexes, face to the informational and pragmatic structure of spoken Italian, clearly shows that Modality and Illocution are two independent levels of the utterance, so they has to be considered different notions.

Looking at the actual data, and in accordance with the *Lingua in Atto Theory* (Cresti 2000), we will show that Illocutionary force and Modality are necessarily independent notions for two main reasons. The first one, presented in 4., is formal. Each utterance has, by definition, one and only one Illocutionary force, i.e. accomplishes one illocutionary act. On the contrary, more than one modal values can coexist in the utterance. In other terms, while Illocutionary force is a property of the utterance, Modality is a property of the elements that compound its structure