Memory, between evidentiality and epistemic uncertainty:
the case of Italian *sembrare* 'seem'

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1. Memory and evidentiality

- "Somewhat surprisingly, standard treatments of evidentiality in grammar **do not frequently refer to memory** and memory-related notions" (Dahl, 2013: 31)

  → **Lack of consensus** on evidential status of memory (Ifantidou, 2001)

- Jakobson (1984) → probably the first to suggest this evidential source:

  " **The speaker reports an event on the basis of** someone else's report (quotative, i.e. hearsay evidence), of a dream (revelative evidence), of a guess (presumptive evidence) or **of his own previous experience (memory evidence).** " (1984: 46)

- Ifantidou (2001) and Schneider (2007) → "memory evidence" is **expressed by lexical means** that indicate that "information is simply recalled":

  eng. *I remember that, I recollect that, as I recollect*; **fr.** *je me rappelle*; **sp.** *me acuerdo*

- Recent approaches to evidentiality started to take memory in consideration (e.g., MODAL Corpus; Nissim & Pietrandrea, 2017).

  However, at the moment **we lack a systematic analysis** of this evidential source…

… and this leads to **problems in the definition** of memory evidence:

1. Evidentiality or epistemic modality? (trying to remember → *modal-like meaning*, cf. Letuchiy, 2010)

   "[…] particularly **for memory-based sources**, the coding and expression of **evidentiality may intersect with** the coding and expression of **epistemicity**"
   (Fetzer & Oishi, 2014: 322)

2. Memory often plays a role even when another information source (direct or indirect) is specified (cf. Faller 2002: 97)

3. Which type of evidentiality? Similar to inferential evidentiality? (*datum* → memory) (Janssens & Nuyts, 2021)

2. SEEM-verbs constructions: a brief overview

- Renowed evidential strategies in various languages (Cornillie, 2007; Gisborne & Holmes, 2007; Aijmer, 2009; Musi, 2015; Squartini, 2018)

- Associated to **indirect evidentiality**:
  - *sembrare*+infinitive ("raising" construction) → **inferential evidentiality**
  - (1) Gianni **sembra dormire**.
    'Gianni **seems to be sleeping**'

  - *sembra che* (impersonal construction) → **inferential evidentiality; reportive evidentiality**
  - (2) **Sembra che** Gianni si sia trasferito all'estero.
    '**It seems that** Gianni moved abroad.'

- Associated to **epistemic modality** (expression of uncertainty):

  ○ *mi sembra che* → **belief** (cf. Cornillie, 2007); speaker's point of view is foregrounded

    (3) **Mi sembra che** Gianni abbia fatto bene.
       '**It seems to me that** Gianni was right.'

- SEEM-verbs constructions → evidential strategies that always show an epistemic component

  ○ **Epistentials** (Faller, 2002; Musi & Rocci, 2017) → syncretism of evidential and epistemic meanings

- Studies hinted at the possibility that SEEM-verbs can encode **recalled information**:

  o Italian → Miecznikowski & Musi (2015: 275)
  o Russian → Letuchiy (2010: 364-365)
  o English → Broogardt (2013: 211)

- However, **no analysis** has been carried out **on the matter**.

- **Our aims** → describe mnemonic evidentiality

  → understand which SEEM-construction(s) are associated with memory

  → describe the contexts of use of this evidential source

3. Case study: materials, coding, methods

- Three constructions: *sembra che*, *mi sembra che*, *sembrare* + infinitive

- Study on written and <u>spoken italian</u> → lack of studies on *sembrare* constructions in spoken Italian

- Empirical (corpus-based) and statistical methodology + qualitative analysis

- **Corpora**

  o **Written Italian → CORIS** (Rossini Favretti et al., 2002).

  - Written Standard Italian texts (1980-2016).

  - Six textual types:
    - *Newspaper*
    - *Magazines*
    - *Websites*
    - *Fiction*
    - *Academic Prose*
    - *Legal Prose*

  - Random sample: 628 occurences of *sembrare*
    216 coded as *sembra che, mi sembra che or sembrare*+infinitive.

o **Spoken Italian → LIP** (De Mauro et al., 1993) and **KIParla** (Mauri et al., 2019).

- Five groups of communicative situations:
  - *Face-to-face conversations*
  - *Telephone conversations*
  - *Non-free dialogical interactions*
  - *Monologues*
  - *Radio and TV programmes*

Lessico di frequenza
dell'italiano parlato

Tullio De Mauro – Federico Mancini
Massimo Vedovelli – Miriam Voghera
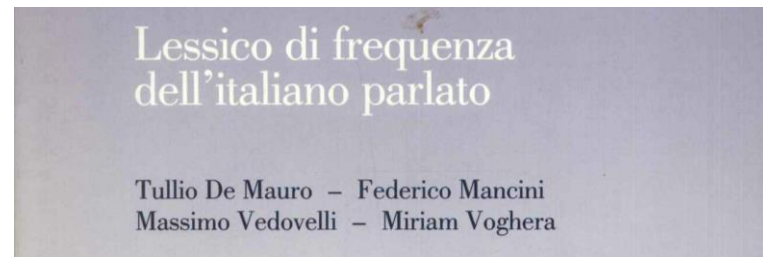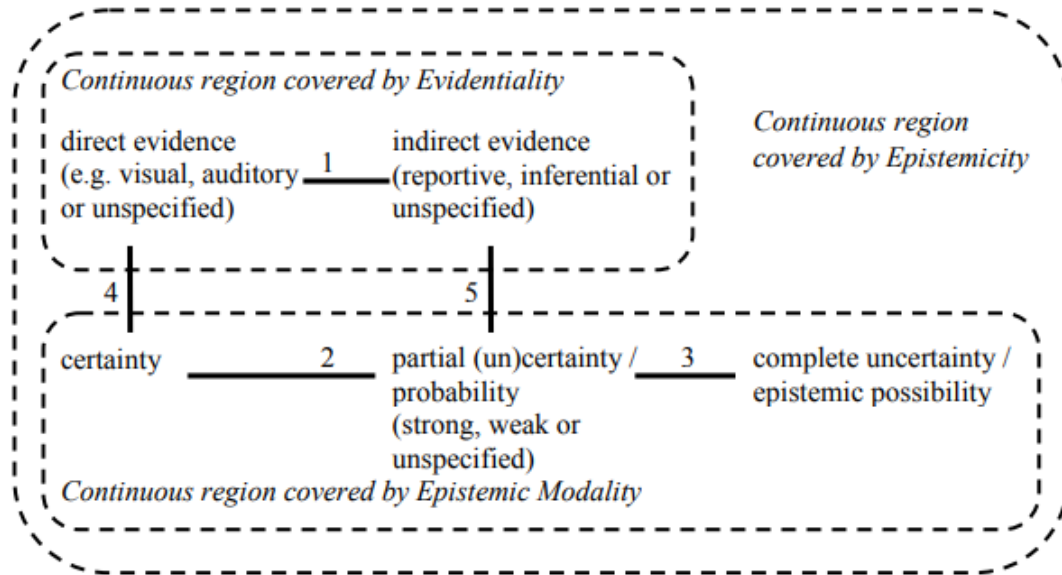
Corpus KIParla
L'italiano parlato e chi parla italiano

- **Sample:** 950 total occurences of *sembrare*
  189 coded as either *sembra che, mi sembra che* or *sembrare*+infinitive.

- **Coding of the occurences**

  o Epistemicity (Boye, 2010; 2012) → includes epistemic support and epistemic justification

Semantic map of Epistemicity (from Boye 2010: 17)

- **Coding of the occurences**
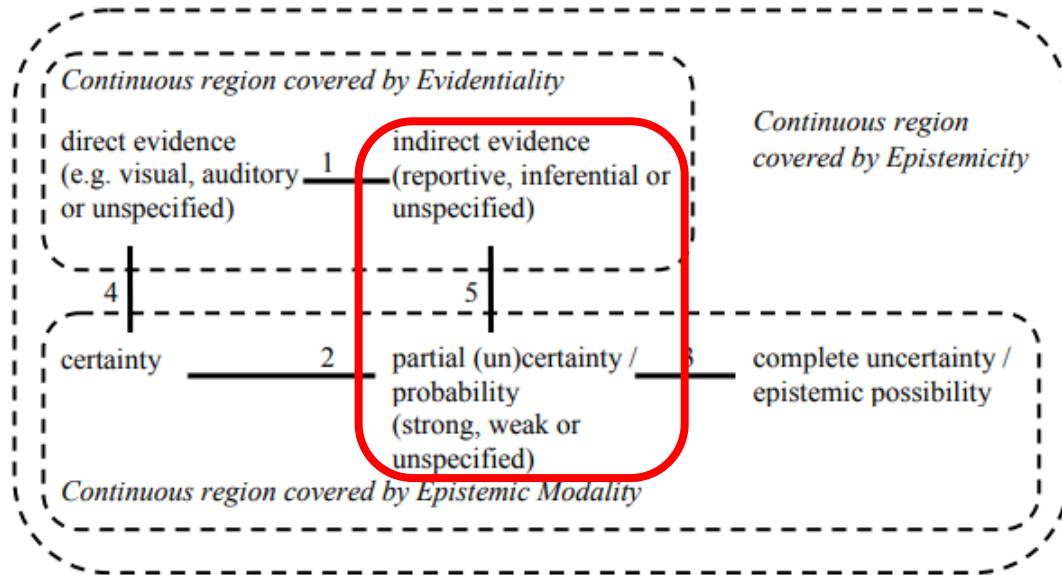
  o Epistemicity (Boye, 2010; 2012) → includes epistemic support and epistemic justification

Semantic map of Epistemicity (from Boye 2010: 17)

- **Coding of the occurences**

  o Four levels: *Inference*, *Reportive*, *Belief* (cf. Cornillie, 2007), *Memory*.

  - Inference and Belief vs **<u>Reportive</u>**

    > **Test** (Cornillie, 2007; Musi, 2015)
    > (a) '*...però non la vedo così*'
    >   '…but I don't see it that way'
    > (b) '*Chi lo dice?*'
    >   'Who says it?'

  - **<u>Memory</u>**:

    > felicitous insertion of *da quel che ricordo*
    > 'as I recall' **and/or**
    > contextual information

  - **<u>Belief</u>** vs Inference:

    > felicitous substitution with *credo che*
    > 'I believe that' **and/or**
    > no indication of sources in the context

- **Methods**

  o **Dependent variable**: Construction (*sembra che, mi sembra che, sembrare*+inf)

  o **Categorical variable**: Epistemicity (*Inference*, *Reportive*, *Belief*, *Memory*)

  o **Test**: Chi-squared tests with Monte Carlo simulation of p-value

  o Analysis of **standardized residuals of the cells** (+/- 2 → significant contribution) (cf. Agresti, 2007)

4. Results and discussion

- **Significant results** in written and spoken corpus (both p-value= 9.999e-05)
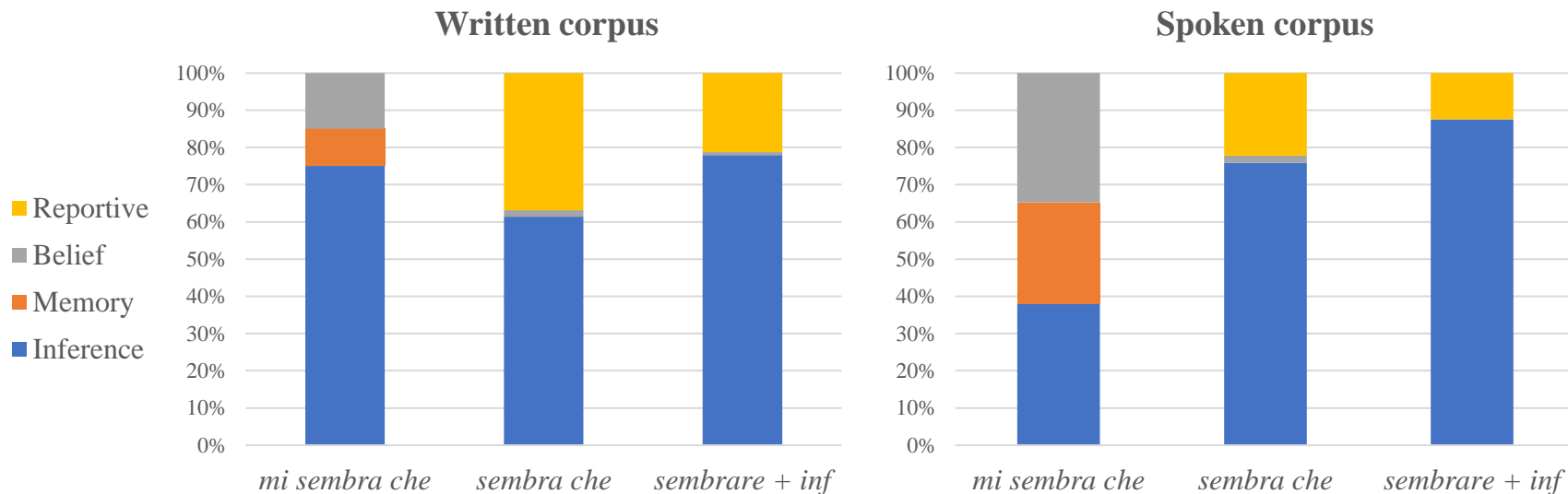
- Association plot (written corpus)

- Association plot (written corpus)

- Association plot (spoken corpus)

- Association plot (spoken corpus)
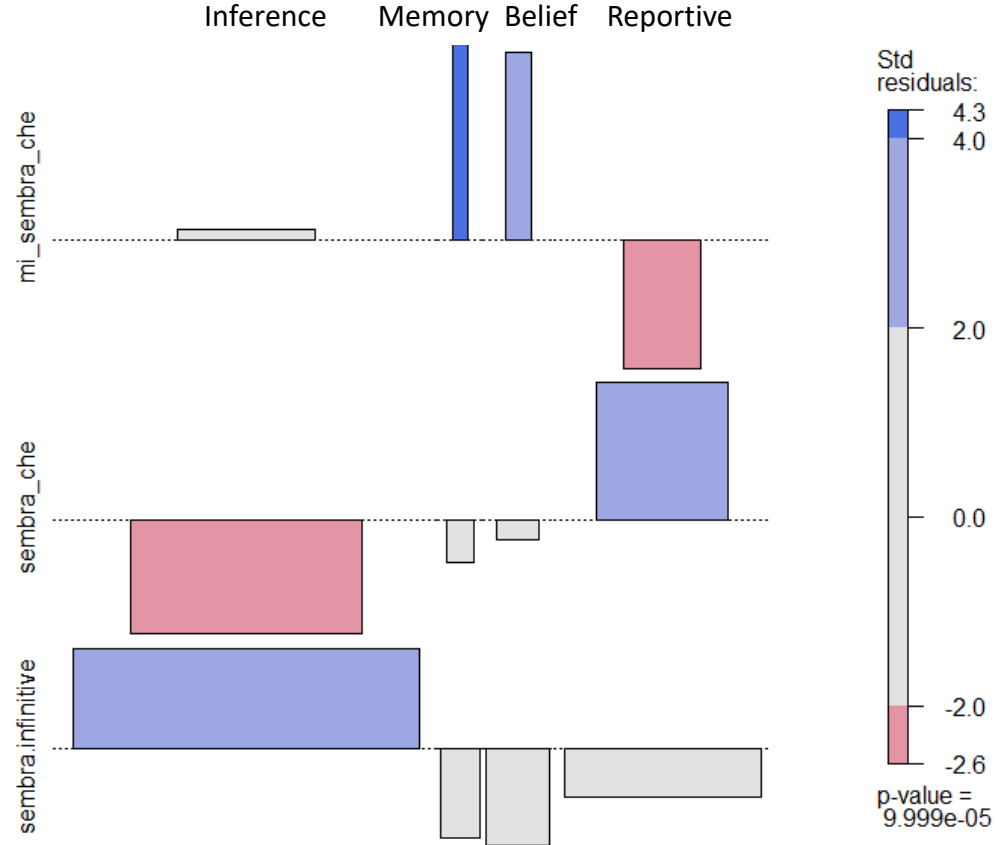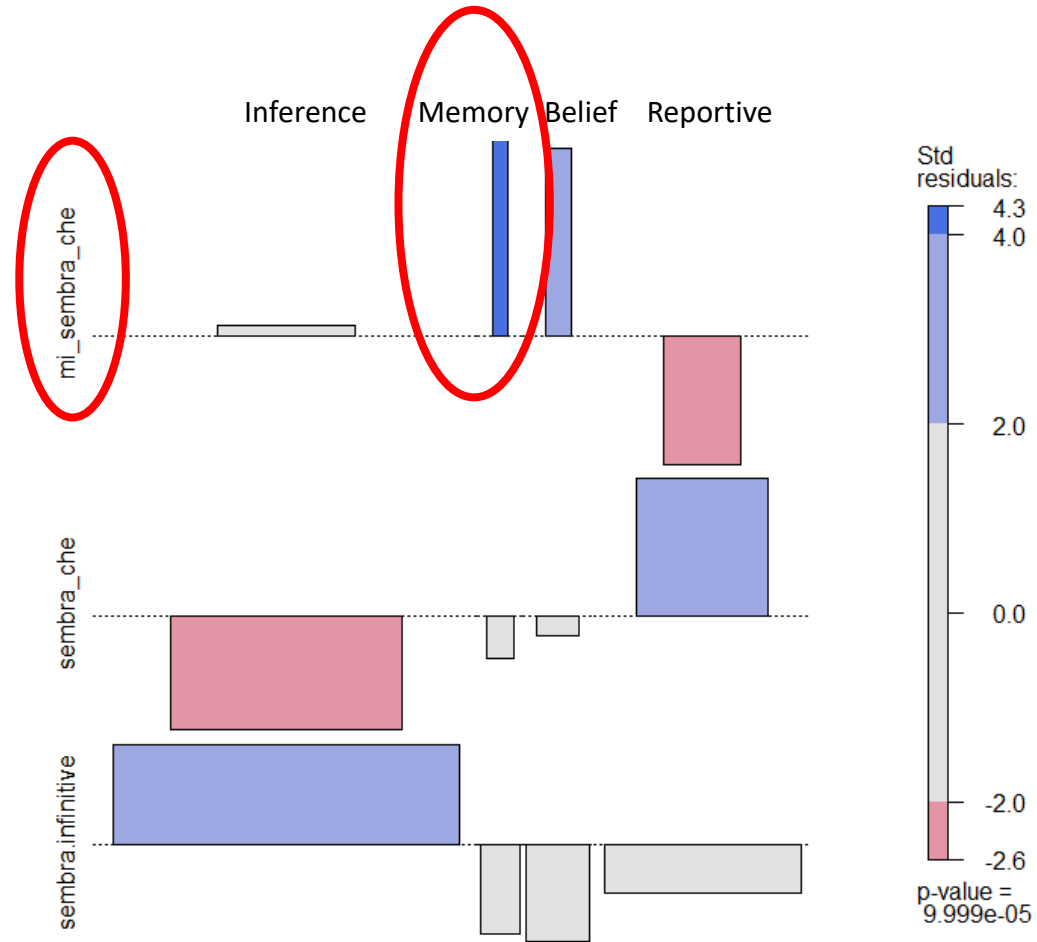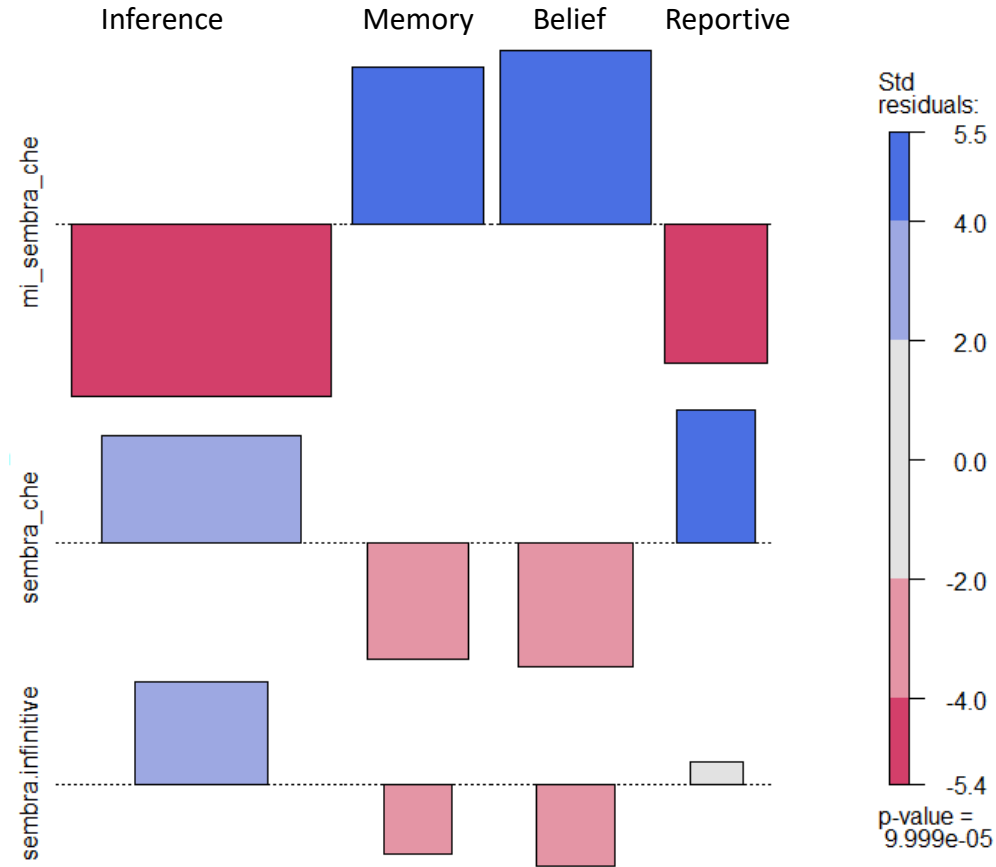
Written vs Spoken data

Percentage of epistemic types in written and in spoken corpus
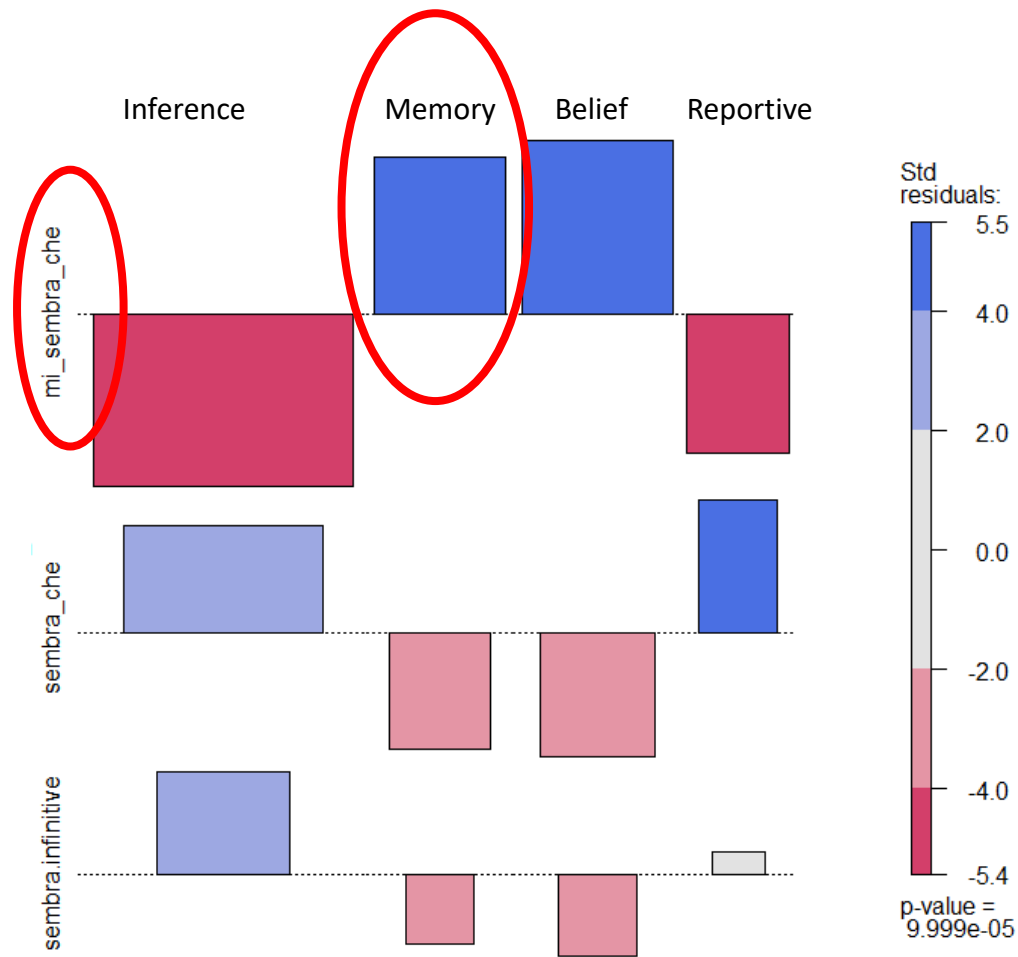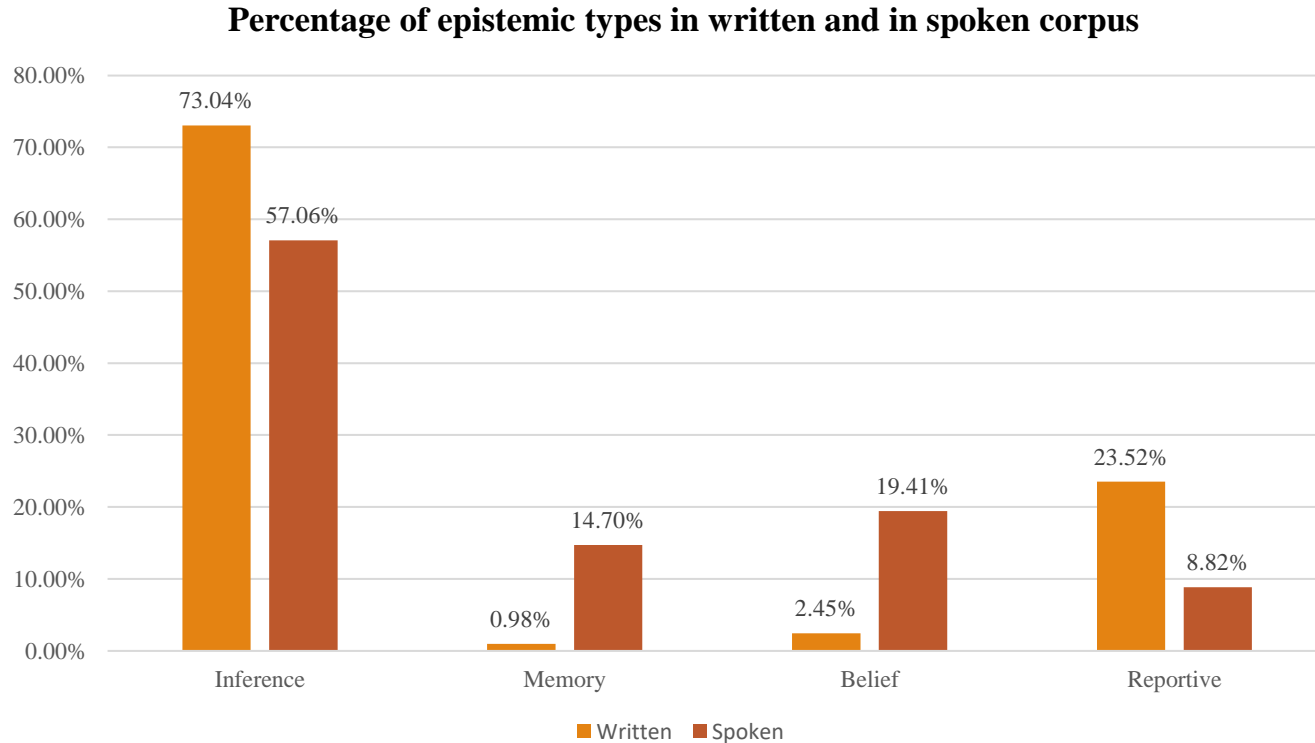
Association between Constructions and Epistemicity:

- *sembrare* + **infinitive** → Inference (4)

   (4)   Per lo meno a partire da "I clowns" […] **Fellini sembra essere approdato** ad una grande forma di saggezza.

       'At least as of "The clowns" […] **Fellini seems to have reached** a great form of wisdom.'   (CORIS)

- *sembra che* → Inference (5) and Reportive (6)

   (5) **Sembrerebbe proprio che** molti considerino più importante "far finta" che "essere veramente."
       '**It would seem that** many see it more important "to pretend" than "to really be".'   (CORIS)

   (6) Avevo sei anni - forse - quando mio padre è morto. **Sembra che**, sulle montagne, un gruppo di banditi abbiano assalito il suo camion e l'abbiano ucciso.
       'I was six - maybe – when my father died. **It seems that**, on the mountains, a group of bandits assaulted his truck and killed him.'   (CORIS)

- ***mi sembra che*** → Belief (7), Memory (8)

(7)   ho parlato col capo per quel fatto del libro dell'aereonautica no e **mi sembra che** non sia male l'idea di
       fare un servizio […]
   'I talked with the boss about the book on the aviation and **it seems to me that** it is a good idea to do a news
       report […]'   (LIP)

(8)   comunque in camera d'albergo <u>mi ricordo</u> che c'erano **mi sembra che** ci fosse sky e poi a pagamento quei
       canali […]
   'However, in the hotel room <u>I remember</u> that there were **it seems to me that** there was Sky and some pay-
       per-view channels […]'   (KIParla)

Summing up…what can we say about memory and *sembrare*?

- **Strategy** → only *mi sembra che* construction

- **Context of use** → spoken interactions

  o Only two occurrences in the written corpus

  o Mainly in **unplanned and dialogic interactions** → only one example in monologic speech (university lesson) in a <u>dialogic</u> sequence

    →in (9) backchecking (checking shared previous information, cf. Squartini 2013; 2017)

   (9) confermatemi **mi sembra che** l'abbiamo visto che coltrane aveva trovato […]

    'confirm it to me, **it seems to me that** we saw that Coltrane found […]'   (KIParla)

- Possible explanations for the context of use:

  o **Unplanned speech → less attention to the reliability of the source** (cf. Chafe, 1985)

  o Memory is **not a fully reliable source**.

  o As expressed by *sembrare* → **Uncertain memory**

  (10)   alle undici e mezza **mi sembra che** arrivava il treno
          '**it seems to me that** the train arrives at half past eleven'
                                                                    (KIParla)

       → *It seems to me that* = *I seem to remember that* (it. *Mi sembra di ricordare che*)

o   As we said, SEEM-verbs commonly express uncertainty

Mind-as-Body: **Uncertain appearance**   ➔   **Uncertain appearance**
in physical space   **in mental space**

(cf. Fukada, 1996)

o   So, why is memory expressed **only** by *mi sembra che*?

   ➔ The same formal strategy expresses both a Belief and a Memory meaning

Can **Memory** be an **extension of Belief** (epistemic) meaning?

•   Verbs of Thinking and Believing ➔ sources for verbs of Remebering (Fortescue, 2021)

   ➔ recent emergence of the memory evidential meaning of *geloven* 'believe' in Dutch
(Jannsens & Nuyts, 2021)

o **Ambiguity** between epistemic and evidential meaning in some occurrences (when the subordinate verb is in present tense):

(11) eh dissi ma quella **mi sembra** eh **che** sta al gruppo della signora pero' non ero sicura
'I said **it seems to me that** she is hanging with the lady's group but I was not sure'

(LIP)

o A shift from epistemic modals to evidential strategies is possible (e.g., epistemic conditional in French)

→ the speaker lacks control over information: "the proposition is presented as an assumption until full knowledge has been acquired" (Celle, 2020)

5. Conclusion

- In Italian, *sembrare* can express memory evidentiality in its construction with the experiencer and subordinate clause (*mi sembra che* 'it seems to me that')

- Memory evidentiality, as expressed by *mi sembra che*, is a form of uncertain memory, and shows also a strong connection with epistemic uncertainty.

- The nature of this source makes it more available in unplanned, spoken interactions.
  - → Relevance of contrasting written and spoken data in the study of the distribution of evidential sources and strategies

6. Further research

- Further study on the distribution and (discourse) functions of memory evidentiality

- Other strategies:

  o Ongoing study: parenthethical *mi sembra* and *mi pare* 'it seems to me'

  o Can some **past tenses** (e.g., Imperfect) have this evidential function? (cf. Turkish evidential past: Csató & Johanson, 2021)

    (12) il posto se non ri **si chiamava** zu <u>si chiama</u> zubiri
          'the place if I re[member correctly] it **was called** Zubiri it <u>is called</u> Zubiri'

Thank you for your attention!

Questions and comments are welcome!

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