

The French construction '*j'arrive à* + INF' at the borders of modality. An exploratory survey of a journalistic corpus.

Abstract: The French construction *j'arrive à* + INF seems to allow readings very close to possibility modality. After a brief diachronic and typological description, I carry out an investigation of a journalistic corpus in order to better understand its contemporary uses. Subsequently, after having shown that it has implicative semantics, I claim that the construction is irreducible to modality, as it lacks the property of introducing non-factual states of affairs.

Keywords: corpus, French, implicative verbs, modality, verbs of motion

1. Introduction. Crosslinguistic comparison has shown that verbs of motion can acquire modal meanings in both the necessity and the possibility domain (Bourdin 2014, Narrog 2010: 92). The distribution of motion verbs as sources of modality in these two domains depends on many factors which still need to be studied in depth. This paper aims at bringing a contribution to the theoretical discussion by outlining the case of the French personal construction *j'arrive à* + INF, in which a verb of goal-oriented motion ('to arrive at') construed with an infinitive acquires the meaning 'to manage, to succeed'. In the first part of the paper, I briefly outline the diachronic metaphorical development from 'to arrive' to 'to succeed' and present some crosslinguistic evidence (2). Subsequently, I carry out an exploratory survey of the uses of the construction as attested in a contemporary journalistic corpus (3, 4). On the basis of this exploration, I deal with the following questions: a) whether the construction can be considered implicative (5) and b) whether the construction can be considered modal and when (6). Thereafter, I try to grasp the main difference in the behaviour of an implicative and a modal verb from a theoretical point of view (7). In the conclusions (8), I present the main results of this study as well as its limits and suggest some further lines of research.

2. The metaphorical meaning and some typological data. The French verb *arriver* is originally a marine term. It is derived from a popular Latin form **adripare* > *arripare* 'to land' (since the 9th century, cf. Stotz 2002: I, 382), composed of the preverb *ad* 'to, towards', indicating direction toward a location, and the noun *ripa* 'shore'. In the form *ariver* it is attested since the