Italian adjectives in –bile
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1. Introduction

The Italian suffix –bile – as well as its French, Spanish and English mates (respectively –able and –ble) forms adjectives, such as trasportabile 'transportable' and rafforzabile 'reinforceable', that are mainly obtained from transitive verbs. Intransitive verbs, whether unaccusatives like morire 'to die' and partire 'to leave' or non-unaccusatives like dormire 'to sleep' and telefonare 'to call', in fact, are not suitable as bases for this adjectival suffix, as the ungrammaticality of *moribile 'die+ -able' and *partibile 'leave + -able' and *dormibile 'sleep+ -able' and *telefonabile 'call+ -able' clearly shows.

The behaviour of this suffix is, despite minor differences, crosslinguistically similar; in fact in the last quarter of the past century different proposals have been put forth in order to:

a) formally account for the selectional properties manifested by this adjectival suffix and
b) give the account the most convenient formal shape.1

This proved to be an arduous task, however, at least as far as the Italian suffix was concerned because, to the best of my knowledge, a satisfactory account of the behaviour of the suffix –bile has yet to be found.

After a brief review, in section 2, of the formal analyses offered to account for the formation of –bile adjectives, in particular those dealing with the selection made by the suffix on its verbal bases, this paper will present, in section 3, data from Italian in order to show that the proposed accounts are not completely satisfactory. Section 4 I will deal with a subgroup of (Italian) –bile adjectives that manifest a peculiar meaning and try to offer an explanation for their behaviour. In section 5, finally, some concluding remarks are drawn.

2. –bile adjectives crosslinguistically

On the basis of Aronoff's (1976) proposal on "word formation in generative grammar", the word formation rule proposed for Italian –bile adjectives (cf. Scalise 1984) has the format illustrated in (1):

\[
(1) \quad [[V[^{+\text{transitive}}]}] + \text{bile}] \quad \alpha
\]

sem: that can be V-ed

This rule states that the suffix attaches to transitive verbs (the selectional restriction is marked on the verb) as is the case crosslinguistically. The rule also contains, besides the formal part, what is

1 Among the different formal analyses there are Aronoff 1976, Scalise 1984, Roeper 1987, De Miguel 1985; mainly semantic and/or syntactic are those dealing with French, among which: Plénat 1988, Leeman 1992, Anscombre & Leeman 199?, Leeman & Meleuc 1990 and Hatout et al. (2003) to cite just a few.
generally called its semantic part (cf. Aronoff 1976), viz. a definition of the compositional meaning attributed to the output word, underlining that the derived adjective has a 'passive' reading: *trasportabile*, for example, means "that can be transported", *rafforzabile" that can be reinforced".

This format of WFRs was later challenged because selection by affixes simply made on the word class (i.e. the category) membership of the base word was considered inadequate (cf. for ex. Di Sciullo 1996); such rules, actually, were not able to account for the syntactic-semantic properties the derived word could share with the base one. As for these deverbal adjectives, in fact, a rule like (1) does not explicitly say anything on the relation established between the arguments projected by the verb and the arguments characterising the derived adjective. The 'passive' semantics attributed to –*bile* adjectives does not suffice to underline that, at least in principle, the internal argument of the transitive verb becomes the external argument of the derived adjective while the external agentive argument of the verb becomes (or can become) the *by-phrase* in the argument structure of the adjective, as happens in the verbal passive.

2.1 Roeper’s proposal

A different formalisation was offered by Roeper (1987) who suggested a formalisation of the process forming English –*able* adjectives that made use of theta roles. According to Roeper, derivational suffixes are characterised by a theta grid, just as words are; the grid specifies the thematic roles that will be projected by the derivative they contribute to form. –*able* adjectives, for example, project a grid containing two roles, an agent and a theme: the grid of the suffix, therefore, being identical to that characterising transitive verbs, can serve as a means for the expression of the selection it makes. In other words, selection is made on the matching of theta grids; matching, thus, allows for the exclusion of verbs not sharing their thematic grid with the suffix. Roeper’s proposal can be represented as follows:

(2) \[ [V_{A_g, T_h} + \text{able}_{A_g, T_h}] A_{A_g, T_h} \]

From this representation one can immediately see that intransitive verbs, for example, are excluded from –*bile* suffixation, as the theta grid of intransitives and the grid of the suffix do not match which can explain the ungrammaticality of derivatives such as *sleepable*.

Roeper’s way of expressing selection, however, proves to be inadequate mainly because agentive transitive verbs are not the only verbs allowing attachment of the suffix. As Di Sciullo (1996) observed, not only agentive transitive (French) verbs are derivable by this suffix but also other kinds of verbs, e.g. ditransitives (like *transform* whose theta grid contains, besides the external
agent, an internal theme and a goal) and psychologicals (like detest, whose grid is composed by an experiencer and a theme).

2.2 –*bile* adjectives in Spanish

Spanish –*bile* adjectives were also analysed by making use of thematic roles. De Miguel (1986) proposed that a good way of limiting rule effectiveness was the introduction of a *theme* restriction. On the basis of this restriction only (the subclass of) verbs assigning this theta-role to one of their arguments are possible bases for -*ble* attachment, independent of the syntactic position that the argument occupies. Convenient bases for the suffix –*ble*, thus, are either transitive verbs realising the theme argument in the canonical object position and unaccusative ones whose theme argument is realised in the subject position. Moreover, this kind of restriction is also capable of accounting for –*ble* adjective formation whose base verbs are the pronominal intransitive correspondents of transitive verbs and that have an unaccusative use (i.e. Sp. oxidar 'oxidise') but not a reflexive or pronominal passive use (i.e. Sp. transitive tolerar 'tolerate' vs. tolerarse).

De Miguel (1986:150) proposes the following schema (here slightly modified) in order to illustrate the types of Spanish verbs admitting –*ble* adjectivalisation:

(3) a. superar: agent V theme

\[
\text{superar} \quad \text{SN}_1 \ldots \text{SN}_2 \quad [\text{Ag. Juan}] \text{ supera } [\text{Th. a Pedro}]
\]

'John surpasses Peter'

\[
\text{superable} \quad [\text{Th. Pedro}] \text{ es superable [por Juan]}
\]

'Peter is surpassable [by John]'

b. oxidar: agent V theme

\[
\text{oxidar} \quad \text{SN}_1 \ldots \text{SN}_2 \quad [\text{Ag. el quimico}] \text{ oxida [Th. el hierro]}
\]

'the chemist oxidises the iron'

\[
\text{oxidable} \quad [\text{Th. el hierro}] \text{ es oxidable [+implicit Ag.]} \quad \text{iron is oxidable [+implicit Ag.]}
\]

c. oxidar: theme V

\[
\text{oxidar} \quad \text{SN}_1 \ldots \text{SN}_2 \quad [\text{Th. el hierro}] \text{ se oxida}
\]

'iron oxidises'

\[
\text{oxidable} \quad [\text{Th. el hierro}] \text{ es oxidable}
\]

'iron is oxidable'

d. perdurar: theme V

\[
\text{perdurar} \quad \text{SN}_1 \ldots \text{SN}_2 \quad [\text{Th. la obra de Leonardo}] \text{ perdura}
\]

'Leonardo's work continues'

\[
\text{perdurable} \quad [\text{Th. la obra de Leonardo}] \text{ es perdurable}
\]

'Leonardo's work is permanent'

From this schema De Miguel (1986:151) drew the following two rules, involving the process of externalisation of an argument (cf. Williams 1981) to account for what was also called "argument inheritance" (cf. Booij & van Haaften 1988), namely the fact that the (Theme) argument of the verb becomes the argument of the derived adjective:
When the theme argument is in the object position (i.e. the verb is transitive) the relevant rule will be (4a); where the theme argument is in the subject position the rule will be (4b). De Miguel underlines, however, that this does not guarantee that the adjective can be formed on all the members of the verb class.

3. **Italian data**

The proposals illustrated above are somehow both similar and different regarding the predictability that can be associated to the rules. Scalise's and Roeper's proposals, for instance, are quite similar in that both involve transitive verbs; but since not all transitive verbs are also agentive verbs, Roeper's rule, based on theta-grid matching, is more restrictive than Scalise's, because transitive verbs can project different kinds of thematic structures. In order to illustrate the inadequacy of the "transitivity" restriction when applied to Italian I will, however, overlook this difference. The restriction in fact, whatever the expressed concept may be, is too strong and does not account for the formation of adjectives on other types of verbs.

Let us examine data from Italian where, in any case, the majority of forms come from transitive verbs.

In Italian, adjectives in –bile can be formed on verbs of different types, as illustrated in the following.

**A. Pronominal intransitive version of transitive verbs, if any:**

(5)  
a. *Una ferita facilmente cicatrizzabile*  
   ‘A wound that can easily form a scar’

b. *Un colletto indeformabile*  
   ‘A non-deformable collar’

The adjectives in (5) can be linked either to the transitive version of *cicatrizzare* and *deformare* (cf. 6a-b) and the pronominal intransitive one (6c-d):

(6)  
a. *Questa pomata cicatrizza le ferite*  
   ‘This ointment heals scarwounds’

b. *Le cattive stirature deformano i colletti delle camicie*  
   ‘The bad stitches deform the collars of the shirts’

---

lit. ‘bad ironing\textsubscript{PL} will deform shirt collars’

c. \textit{La ferita si cicatrizzerà bene}  
lit. ‘the wound will (si) heal well as a scar’

d. \textit{I colletti non si deformano facilmente}  
lit. ‘collars do not (si) deform easily’

As De Miguel (1986) points out, this is due to the fact that in (6c,d) there is an implicit agent.

B. Unaccusative intransitives (7a,b), though not all of them (7c,d):

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{Il tempo varia sovente di questa stagione / Il tempo è variabile}  
‘The weather frequently changes in this season / The weather is changeable’
\item \textit{Qui il terreno frana facilmente / Il terreno è franabile, qui}  
‘Here the earth slides down easily / Here the earth is liable to slide’
\item \textit{I ragazzi partono domani / *I ragazzi sono partibili}  
The boys are leaving tomorrow / The boys are leavable
\item \textit{Le merci arrivano di pomeriggio / *le merci sono arrivabili}  
Goods arrive in the afternoon / Goods are arrivable
\end{enumerate}

The forms in (7a-b) can be explained only with De Miguel's solution, obviously. However there is no explanation for the fact that verbs like \textit{partire} and \textit{arrivare} (as well as \textit{scoppiare} 'to burst', \textit{esplodere} 'to explode', \textit{sbucare} 'to pop out', \textit{morire} 'to die') do not admit "bil(e)-isation". Surely this does not depend on the nature of the (subject) noun: be it either [+animate] (cf. \textit{ragazzi} in 7c) or [-animate] (cf. \textit{merci} in 7d), the ungrammaticality of the --\textit{bile} adjective occurs in each case. Verbs such as these, further to being intransitive, are achievement verbs (according to Vendler's 1967 terminology), i.e. dynamic, telic, non-durative. Maybe it is this property that has leverage on the impossibility for these unaccusative intransitive verbs to be adjectivalised with --\textit{bile}. What can be said, for the moment, is that even De Miguel's explanation cannot serve our purpose, since the \textit{theme} restriction does not hold.

Further, Italian allows some "normal" intransitive verbs like \textit{sciare} 'to ski' and \textit{navigare} 'to sail' to accept the suffix: \textit{sciabile} 'skiable' and \textit{navigabile} 'navigable' are well-formed adjectives and the argument they are predicated on does not correspond with the subject of the verb as the following examples show:

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{Gabriele scia}  
'Gabriel is skiing'
\end{enumerate}
Instead, the subject argument of the adjectives corresponds to a complement assigned locative role: *sciare su una pista* 'to ski on a slope', *navigare lungo/sul fiume* 'to sail on/along a river'. How can such forms be accounted for? None of the rules illustrated above (ie. By Scalise, Roeper and De Miguel) seems right for the purpose: these verbs are not transitive, do not have an (Ag, Th) grid imposing matching, nor is their argument assigned a theme role.

3.1 Non-volitional participation

Recently, Plag (2003: 94) asserted that English –able/-ible derivatives, whether of the semantic type “capable of being X-ed” or the “liable or disposed to X”, are united by an identical property: "[...] the referent of the noun modified by the –able adjectives is described as a potential non-volitional participant in an event." Plag's assertion is applicable also to Italian: -bile adjectives with either 'passive' (*dimostrabile* 'provable', *abbassabile* 'reclinable') and 'active' (*fermentabile* 'fermentable', *variabile* 'variable') meaning modify referents that are potential non-volitional participants.

The noun that can be modified by the adjective corresponds mainly to one of the arguments of the base verb on which the adjective is constructed. Does this fact allow for an use of non-volitional participation as a restriction on –bile adjective formation? In other words: does non-volitional participation express the selection that the suffix makes on its base verb? Is potential non-volitional participation to the verbal action the feature tying together the different types of verbs admitting –bile attachment?

Italian data, at first sight, seem to give a positive answer to this question. If we compare, for example, adjectival derivatives obtained from unaccusative verbs, non-volitional participation of the sole participant to the verbal action seems to be the correct feature:

(9) a. *Alcune aree appartenenti al territorio di competenza del 21,1% dei comuni possono franare*

'Some areas belonging to the interested territory of 21,1% of the municipalities are liable to Slide'

a' *Il 21,1% dei comuni ha nel proprio territorio di competenza aree franabili*

'21,1 % of the municipalities has within its jurisdiction some territory that is liable to slid' (data from a Google search)

b. *Paolo parte da Firenze in treno*

'Paolo starts from Florence by train'
b'  *Paolo è partibile  
    'Paolo is startable'

c.  Paolo arriva a Bologna di mattina  
    'Paolo arrives in Bologna in the morning'

c'  *Paolo è arrivabile  
    'Paolo is arrivable'

As can be seen, the verbs partire and arrivare having human subjects, thus potentially volitional participants, cannot become adjectives in –bile (9 b-b', c-c') while the verb franare, whose subject is typically non-volitional, does accept the suffix.

Things, however, are not quite this simple. If the analysis is extended to include unaccusative verbs having a human subject (like morire 'to die, cf. 10a) or the human subject of the verbs partire and arrivare is substituted with a non-human one (cf. 10b,c), the obtained result is equally ungrammatical:

(10)  a.  Nel fine settimana muoiono molti ragazzi a causa di incidenti stradali  
    'During the week-end many young people get killed in road accidents'

    a'  *Molti ragazzi sono moribili nel fine settimana a causa di incidenti stradali  
    'Many young people are die+able in the week-end in road accidents'

b.  Da Venezia parte un treno per Bologna ogni ora  
    'An hourly train starts from Venice to Bologna'

    b'  *I treni partibili per Bologna sono frequenti  
    'Trains start+able for Bologna are frequent'

c.  Pochi treni arrivano in orario  
    'Only a few trains arrive on time'

    c'  *Pochi treni sono arrivabili in orario  
    'Trains arrive+able on time are only a few'

Non-volitional participation, consequently, proves itself to be useless as a restriction on verb selection: the verb morire 'to die' (in 10a) is an unaccusative verb whose sole participant, though sentient, is to be considered with a high degree of probability as non-volitional; nonetheless a –bile derivative is not possible (cf. 10a'). Also unaccusative verbs that can have either a sentient argument (9b,c) or a non-sentient one (10b,c) do not admit –bile adjectivalisation (9b',c'; 10b',c').

Potential non-volitional participation in an event, consequently, can only be applied as a generalisation to the referent of the noun modified by –able adjectives, whether these are with a passive or with active semantics, as Plag suggested.
A restriction on –*bile* adjective formation, if any, is thus most probably to be found in features of the verbs which are different from the (non-)volition of participants in the event, as suggested in the preceding section.

Selection and its formalisation are not, however, the issues I would like to discuss in this paper. I will, rather, take into account a small subgroup of –*bile* adjectives, such as *mangiabile* 'edible' and *bevibile* 'drinkable' whose meaning does not simply indicate that something "can be eaten or drunk" but that have a further implication (cf. also De Miguel 1986 for Spanish).

4. –*bile* adjectives with a special meaning

To illustrate this point, consider the following Italian –*bile* adjectives (and the correspondent base verbs):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mangiabile</td>
<td>mangiare</td>
<td>transitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>edible</td>
<td>to eat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bevibile</td>
<td>bere</td>
<td>transitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drinkable</td>
<td>to drink</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>abitabile</td>
<td>abitare</td>
<td>transitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>habitable</td>
<td>to inhabit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scendibile</td>
<td>scendere</td>
<td>(in)transitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>descendible</td>
<td>to descend</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>salibile</td>
<td>salire</td>
<td>(in)transitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>climbable</td>
<td>to climb</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sciabile</td>
<td>sciare</td>
<td>intransive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skiable</td>
<td>to ski</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| accessibile | accedere | intransitive (bi-argumental)
| accessible | to enter |          |

The meaning of these adjectives can be paraphrased, more or less "that can be V-ed", as the following examples show:

(12) a. *Non tutte le erbe spontanee sono mangiabili*  
Not all wild herbs are edible

b. *L'acqua è troppo fredda: non è bevibile*  
This water is too cold: it is undrinkable

c. *Quei nuovi appartamenti sono già abitabili*  
The new flats are habitable by now

d. *Gli operai stanno lavorando e le scale non sono né salibili né scendibili*  
Men are at work and the stairs are neither climbable nor descendible

e. *La pista nera di Pecol è stata resa sciabile, finalmente!*  

The black slope at Pecol has been made skiable, finally!

f. Quella località, in inverno, è inaccessibile
That resort is inaccessible in winter

In the sentences (12a-d) each –bile adjective carries the meaning "that one can" eat, drink, live in, climb, descend, respectively, while in the (12e-f) ones the paraphrase is a bit different and the two adjectives are to be rendered with an additional "where": skiable is (a slope) where one can ski and (in)accessible is (a place) where one can(not) enter3.

As pointed out above, such adjectives have an implicit further meaning, not to be confused with a figurative sense or one of a plurality of senses. Consider the following examples:

(13) a. Neppure la pasta, in quel locale, è mangiabile
In that restaurant not even the pasta is edible

b. Il vino che ci hanno servito era appena bevibile
the wine they served us was barely drinkable

c. Piccolo ma abitabile, quell'appartamento!
That flat is small but habitable

d. Nel dipartimento di lingue ci sono scale insalibili/inscendibili
In the department of foreign languages stairs are un-climb+able and un-descend+ible

e. Quella pista è estremamente sciabile
That slope is extremely skiable

f. Il percorso che mi hai indicato è accessibile?
Is the route you recommended accessible?

Here the adjectives do not simply signify that the action indicated by the verb can be done, but they also imply that:

(14) a. the pasta is not enough good
b. the wine was not so good
c. the flat is sufficiently roomy to live in
d. the stairs have been improperly built (and it is difficult to go up and down)
e. the slope is very fine
f. the route is not difficult

How can this implied meaning of some of the –bile adjectives be explained? Are these verbs characterised by peculiar properties that allow this interpretation of the derived adjective? Or is there a different phenomenon at work?

3 The paraphrase refers to Italian, of course.
Il has been suggested (cf. Attili 1977) that Italian –bile adjectives can be grouped differently according to their meaning and the double interpretation just examined is typical of those obtained from causative (transitive) verbs. Attili's examples (cf. 1977: 186) are the following:

(15) i. \( \text{che si può} + V = \text{che è permesso} + V \) 'that it is possible+V = that it is allowed to+V'
   a. un film proiettabile
   una carne mangiabile
   un libro leggibile
   'a projectable film'
   'an edible meat'
   'a readable book'

where the three adjectives are interpreted as expressing a possibility, a permission coming from being, say, the film and book not being censored and the meat not poisoned (e.g. the public-health office issued permission);

   ii. \( \text{che si può} + V = \text{che vale la pena} + V \) 'that it is possible+V = that it is worth V+ing'
   b. un film proiettabile
   una carne mangiabile
   un libro leggibile

where the adjectives mean, respectively, that the film is good, that the book can be read because its contents are edifying and the meat is not poisoned.

The double reading of this type of derivatives, according to Attili, is available for the whole class of –bile adjectives formed from transitive causative verbs; the adjectives, in fact, express the double interpretation linked to the verb potere 'can': è possibile 'it is possible' and vale la pena 'it is worth'.

It seems to me, yet, that this double meaning is not generally applicable, that is to say, not all –bile adjectives formed on the class of verbs pointed out by Attili have the two paraphrases; the interpretation of the adjectives in the examples in (16) is, in my opinion, only one; each of them can be exclusively interpreted as expressing a possibility, not a worth:

(16) a. questi mobili sono trasportabili
   'these pieces of furniture are transportable'
   b. alcune sentenze sono annullabili
   'some decisions are annulable'

The to be worth meaning, thus, certainly needs a different rationale. Such a rationale, I would like to suggest, is to be found in the semantic information linked to the noun constituting the object of the verb to which the adjectival suffix is attached.

To put forth my proposal I will make use of what Pustejovsky (1995) called qualia roles that I am going to illustrate for the relevant part in the following section.
4.1 Pustejovsky's qualia structure

In his “Generative Lexicon” Pustejovky (1995) asserts that it is not necessary to hypothesize that all the meanings manifested by a lexical item are listed in the lexicon since new senses of words come from their composition with other words. Listing of word senses can be substituted by “an organization of lexical information within a generative lexicon" (Pustejovky 1995:61) intended as a computational system involving four levels of representation characterizing each lexical item. The levels, connected by a set of generative devices among which there are the semantic transformations in (18), are the following:

\[
\begin{align*}
A &= \text{Argument Structure} \\
E &= \text{Event Structure} \\
Q &= \text{Qualia Structure} \\
I &= \text{Lexical Inheritance Structure}
\end{align*}
\]

Let’s focus on Qualia structure which, according to Pustejovsky (1995: 76) is the representation which gives the relational force of a lexical item [...] and specifies four essential aspects of a word’s meaning (or qualia):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(19)} & \quad \text{a. CONSTITUTIVE: indicates the relation between an object and its constituent parts;} \\
& \quad \text{b. FORMAL: distinguishes the object within a larger domain;} \\
& \quad \text{c. TELIC: indicates the purpose and function of an object;} \\
& \quad \text{d. AGENTIVE: indicates the factors involved in its origin or “bringing about”.
}
\end{align*}
\]

These modes of explanation for a word “permit a much richer description of meaning than either a simple decompositional view or a purely relational approach to word meaning would allow.”

The value of each quale role is expressed through a predicate. The simple listing of the different qualia values says nothing about the contextual denotation of a lexical item; to this end it is necessary to treat “qualia values as expressions with “well-defined types and relational structures” (Pustejovsky, 1995:78). For example a noun like biscuit has the following a quale role:

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4 Type coercion operates when a lexical item or phrase is coerced to have a specific semantic interpretation by a governing item in the phrase, without a change in its syntactic type; there is selective binding when a lexical item or phrase operates on the substructure of a phrase, without changing the overall type in the composition and co-composition when multiple elements within a phrase generate a new non-lexicalised sense for the words in composition (cf. Pustejovky 1995:61).
telling us that the telic of a biscuit (x) is to be eaten by (y). The predicate eat, thus, connects its two arguments x and y each of which represents an argument type. Argument types are defined in the argument structure of biscuit which are, respectively, x: food and y: human. Also the predicate type must be specified: to eat is an event (e), more precisely a process (e: process); this information is represented in the Event structure of biscuit. The representation of biscuit, thus, is the following:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Biscuit} & = \{ 
\text{EVENTSTR} = \{ 
E_1 = e_1: \text{process} \\
E_2 = e_2: \text{process} 
\} \\
\text{ARGSTR} = \{ 
\text{ARG}_1 = x: \text{food\_individual} \\
\text{ARG}_2 = w: \text{human} \\
\text{ARG}_3 = z: \text{animate} \\
\text{D-ARG}_1 = y: \text{mass} 
\} \\
\text{QUALIA} = \{ 
\text{CONST} = y \\
\text{FORMAL} = x \\
\text{TELIC} = \text{eat}: (e_2, z, x) \\
\text{AGENTIVE} = \text{bake\_act}: (e_1, w, y) 
\} 
\end{align*}
\]

It is the qualia, then, that through the relations expressing the links with and between the argument and event structure allow elicitation of the lexical item semantics. Qualia structure also allows us to establish what the interaction is between the lexical item and the co-occurring words, through the use of generative mechanisms (i.e. the semantic transformations) seen above.

### 4.2 -Bile adjectives and the qualia role of verbal objects

Consider the base verbs of the adjectives exemplified in (11) and (13) above and the nouns of which the adjectives are the predicates, nouns that constitute the direct objects of the verbs:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(22)} & \quad \text{mangiare pasta} & '\text{to eat pasta}' \\
& \quad \text{bere vino} & '\text{to drink wine}' \\
& \quad \text{abitare un appartamento} & '\text{to inhabit a flat}' \\
& \quad \text{salire/scendere le scale} & '\text{to ascend/descend the stairs}' \\
& \quad \text{sciare (su una pista)} & '\text{to ski (on a slope)}' \\
& \quad \text{accedere ad un percorso} & '\text{to access a route}' \\
& \quad \text{proiettare un film} & '\text{to project a film}' 
\end{align*}
\]
Each noun represents a kind of "default" object of the verb because eating implies eating food (such as pasta is), drinking has drinks as default object and wine is a drink, a flat is a place typically conceived for living in and stairs for going up and down, slopes are the natural place where to ski and with routes to be accessed while the default for a film is to be projected.

If Pustejovsky's qualia roles are used to express this phenomenon we can say that all the listed verbal objects in (22) are characterised by a telic role: the telos of pasta is actually to be eaten, that of wine to be drunk, of flats to be lived in, of stairs to be descended or climbed, etc.

The verbs, then, indicate the action typically performed with the objects which are the referents of the nouns they govern; said differently, the verb-noun combination realises the telic quale of the (direct object) noun. Consequently, - bile adjectives constructed on these verbs, while admitting the general paraphrases 'that can be V-ed / where one can V', reveal themselves to be redundant when predicated of/attributed to nouns referring to entities whose telos is to be involved in the action expressed by the verb.

The expression of generic possibility expressed by the - bile adjective is effective only in particular situations like those illustrated in (10).

This is the reason why, I would like to suggest, –bile adjectives obtained from these verbs and predicated of the nouns the verbs govern assume an evaluative meaning. To say that a drink is drinkable, stairs are descendible or a slope is skiable is rather superfluous if the intended meaning is that one can drink the drink, descend the stairs or ski on that slope. The meaning of the adjective must, in a sense, be different to be informative. The special meaning of such derivatives comes thus from it being the 'literal' reading, which is ultimately dispensable since that latter reading is in the telos of the adjective's subject noun.

The situation is different with adjectives like those in (14) and many others (e.g. incardinabile 'hinge+able', maneggiabile 'handy', navigabile 'navigable', dilatabile 'dilatable', analizzabile 'analysable' etc.), i.e. adjectives derived from verbs governing nouns whose referents do not establish a telic relation with the verb.

A prediction on the reading of – bile adjectives formed on transitive verbs and intransitives with (peculiar) indirect objects can therefore be made. The prediction is the following:

(23) Prediction on the evaluative meaning of – bile adjectives

If the telic ( quale ) role of a noun is bound to (one of) the argument(s) of its governing noun, the – bile adjective derived from that verb assumes an evaluative meaning when predicated of the entity the noun refers to.

Other questions concerning – bile adjectives remain still to be discussed; among these the fact that many such adjectives, at least in Italian, have a better use when negated than when positively
used (as it is the case for *inconfessabile* ‘unavowable’ vs. *confessabile* ‘admissible’, *incontentabile* ‘hard to please’ vs. *contentabile* ‘easy to please’, *inarrestabile* ‘unstoppable’ vs. *arrestabile* lit. ‘halt+able’, etc.) and the issue, fundamental in my opinion, regarding the possibility of adequately describing the selectional properties manifested by the –*bile* suffix.

Whether or not *qualia* roles can be utilised to solve these problems is a question that deserves further research.

5. Conclusion

As we have seen, adjectives ending in-*bile* are concerned with a series of questions some of which are much debated, for instance the definition of the useful criteria useful to account for the selectional properties of the suffix and the phrasing the semantic content of the word formation process – among other questions that are ignored for the time being, as the unusual reading of –*bile* adjectives as bearers of an evaluative meaning or as more acceptable in their negative meaning as against their positive one.

In this paper, after a brief presentation of the choices that the Italian –*bile* suffix makes on the verbal bases and a discussion of the different proposals put forth in the literature to account for the behaviour of this suffix in different languages, the issue concerning the evaluative meaning manifested by a group of such adjectives was discussed. To account for this peculiar behaviour of a few –*bile* adjectives, Pustejovsky's (1995) *qualia* structure has been used. It was demonstrated that, when in the combination of a verb and its (direct and sometimes indirect) object a telic relation is at work, the adjective that can be obtained adjoining the suffix –*bile* to the verb assumes a peculiar interpretation.

Specifically such an adjective, when predicated of the verbal object, introduces an evaluative meaning and not the 'typical' meaning 'that can be V-ed'.

The successful application of the *qualia* roles to this peculiar behaviour of part of –*bile* adjectives suggests that other problems manifested by these derivatives too could be dealt with by applying Pustejovsky's proposal on the generative lexicon. This is, however, a matter deserving further research.

REFERENCES


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