

Premodal, modal and postmodal: a corpus-based study of the polyfunctionality of Latin modal markers

Helena Bermúdez-Sabel^{1*}, Paola Marongiu¹, Francesca Dell’Oro¹

helena.bermudez@unine.ch, paola.marongiu@unine.ch, francesca.delloro@unine.ch

1: University of Neuchâtel

*: corresponding author

Though some Latin modal markers—such as modal verbs and particles—have received close attention (cf. Bolkestein 1980; Magni 2005; 2010; Moussy 2008; Schrickx 2011), a comprehensive corpus-based approach of Latin modality is still missing. In particular, a thorough outlook on modality can only be achieved by working with a corpus that specifically targets the representation of the complexity of the Latin diasystem (Coseriu 1969). This is the main goal of the project WoPoss (short for *A World of Possibilities. Modal pathways over an extra-long period of time: the diachrony of modality in the Latin language*). After briefly presenting the WoPoss corpus, we will focus on the annotated occurrences of non-modal meanings conveyed by the modal markers in our corpus.

Our project relies on a fine-grained linguistic annotation that includes the description of modal passages by identifying and analysing their different components: the modal marker, its scope, the participant(s) in the state of affairs, and the modal relation between the marker and its scope. Our theoretical framework is heavily influenced by Nuyts (2016) and the project *MODAL* (Ghia et al. 2016). A predefined list of lexical modal markers is systematically annotated (Dell’Oro 2022). Our annotation scheme also accounts for their non-modal occurrences, specifically describing the premodal and postmodal uses (van der Auwera and Plungian 1998). Moreover, it also covers non-literal (rhetorical and pragmatic) uses of modal markers. The complexity of our annotation scheme enables us to perform complex queries by combining multiple parameters. All modal and non-modal meanings are also represented in the form of interactive diachronic visualisations (Marongiu and Dell’Oro 2022). These visualisations offer a comprehensive overview of their modal, premodal, postmodal and non-modal meanings, providing an accurate chronological reference for their emergence.

After presenting how our methodology allows us to address multiple research questions concerning modality, we will tackle the polyfunctionality of some lexical items and morphological suffixes that convey modal or non-modal meanings depending on the context.

Although the semantic change that motivates the emergence of modal and postmodal meanings follows well-known grammaticalisation paths (van der Auwera and Plungian 1998), the study of semantic distribution can offer a valuable insight about this process. For instance, one of the most polyfunctional markers attested in our corpus is the impersonal verb *licet* which can convey dynamic, deontic, epistemic and, as a conjunction, also postmodal (concession) readings—it should be noted that reference lexicographic resources such as the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* (Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin 1900–) do not list meanings or passages that could be interpreted as epistemic, according to our framework. Our preliminary results show that the epistemic meaning of *licet* is by far the less frequent reading. This shows how concession senses may emerge from readings other than epistemic, complementing the trends observed for other languages (e.g. Traugott and Dasher 2001, 115; Beijering 2011). Our work will provide the comparison between the dictionary-based results and the semantic distribution of the meanings as attested in the corpus.

We argue that a corpus-based approach, built upon a multi-layered, fine-grained linguistic annotation, is a solid means to arrive at far-reaching results concerning the evolution and semantic distribution of premodal, modal, and postmodal meanings.

Acknowledgements

This work was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF N° P00P1_176778) and it is led by Francesca Dell’Oro at the University of Neuchâtel.

Bibliographic references

- Auwera, Johan van der, and Vladimir A. Plungian. 1998. “Modality’s Semantic Map.” *Linguistic Typology* 2 (1): 79–124.
- Beijering, Karin. 2011. “Semantic Change and Grammaticalization: The Development of Modal and Postmodal Meanings in Mainland Scandinavian *må*, *mätte* and *måste*.” *Nordic Journal of Linguistics* 34 (2): 105–32. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0332586511000138>.
- Bolkestein, A. Machtelt. 1980. *Problems in the Description of Modal Verbs: An Investigation of Latin*. Assen: Van Gorcum.
- Coseriu, Eugenio. 1969. *Einführung in die strukturelle Linguistik*. Tübingen: Romanisches Seminar der Universität.
- Dell’Oro, Francesca. 2022. “WoPoss Guidelines for Annotation. Revised Version.” Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6417878>.
- Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin. 1900–. *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Ghia, Elisa, Lennart Kloppenburg, Malvina Nissim, Paola Pietrandrea, and Valerio Cervoni. 2016. “A Construction-Centered Approach to the Annotation of Modality.” In Bunt, Harry (ed.) *Proceedings of the 12th Joint ACL-ISO Workshop on Interoperable*

Semantic Annotation. Portoroz: ACL, ISO. 67–74

- Magni, Elisabetta. 2005. "Modality's Semantic Maps. An Investigation of Some Latin Modal Forms." *Journal of Latin Linguistics* 9 (1): 325–36. <https://doi.org/10.1515/joll.2005.9.1.325>.
- . 2010. "Mood and Modality." In *New Perspectives on Historical Latin Syntax. Constituent Syntax: Adverbial Phrases, Adverbs, Mood, Tense*, edited by Philip Baldi and Pierluigi Cuzzolin, 2:193–275. Trends in Linguistics. Studies and Monographs 180. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Marongiu, Paola, and Francesca Dell'Oro. 2022. "From Static to Interactive Maps: Drawing Diachronic Maps of (Latin) Modality with *Pygmalion*." *Journal of Open Humanities Data* 8(2): 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.5334/johd.58>.
- Moussy, Claude. 2008. "Quelques emplois parallèles de *opus* et de *necesse*." *Collection de l'Institut des Sciences et Techniques de l'Antiquité* 1120 (1): 143–52.
- Nuyts, Jan. 2016. "Analyses of the Modal Meanings." In *The Oxford Handbook of Modality and Mood*, edited by Jan Nuyts and Johan van der Auwera. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199591435.013.1>.
- Schrickx, Josine. 2011. *Lateinische Modalpartikeln: nempe, quippe, scilicet, videlicet und nimirum*. Leiden, Boston: Brill.
- Traugott, Elizabeth Closs, and Richard B. Dasher. 2001. *Regularity in Semantic Change*. Cambridge Studies in Linguistics 97. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.