

## Introduction

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Modal verbs present researchers of diverse orientations with intricate data, with respect to both form and meaning. Formally, the modal verbs are of particular interest in the Germanic languages, in which they continue the ancient class of preterite-present verbs, verbs that are perfect in form, yet present in meaning. Semantically, interesting issues of vagueness and ambiguity, or polysemy and polyfunctionality, are probably universal, with the expression of modality recruiting grams in fairly concrete fields, using them for shades of necessity and possibility that refer to participants, circumstances, and interlocutors' propositional attitudes. Modal verbs also lend themselves to meanings that are not properly speaking 'modal' – at least not in everyone's conception of the term – meanings like time and evidentiality.

Three of the papers in this collection deal with predominantly formal matters. They are all written in the transformational paradigm. Jacqueline Gutiérrez studies the properties of Italian *bisogna* 'is necessary', and Virginia Motapanyane and Larisa Avram Romanian *putea* 'can'. Kleantes Grohmann belongs here too, though he does not study modal verbs but rather modal constructions, viz. infinitival exclaimatives such as *Peter kiss Mary?* 'Peter could/might/must/should kiss Mary?'.<sup>1</sup>

Of the semantic papers one is written from a logical perspective: Javier Gutiérrez-Rexach's analysis of Spanish deontic *poder* 'may'. A pragmatic-logical approach is taken by Fátima Oliveira in her study on Portuguese *dever* 'must' and *poder* 'can' and their negations. Gabriele Diewald looks at the set of German modals and attempts to account for their multiple uses in a unified way. Meanings closely related to modality are studied in Paul Larreya's study of the future in

English, French and Italian, and in Tanja Mortelmans' analysis of the evidential nature of the German modals *müssen* and *sollen*. A little bit apart are the contributions by Aurelia Usoniene and by Maria Eugenia Vázquez-Laslop: the former studies the English verbs of seeming, and the latter the epistemic use of Spanish *prometer* 'promise'.

Diachrony enters into several papers, too, but most clearly in the contributions by Delia Bentley and Mieke Van Herreweghe. Bentley studies the development of Italo-Romance 'have to' constructions. Van Herreweghe studies the shift from a permission to an obligation meaning in Old English \**mozan*, the ancestor of modern *must*.

Some of the papers deal with Germanic modals, some with Romance modals, and some with both. All of them are written in a Germanic language, however. A companion volume with papers on similar topics, but written in a Romance language is *Les verbes modaux* (Patrick Dendale & Johan van der Auwera (eds.), Amsterdam: Rodopi, "Cahiers Chronos", 8, 2001). Both collections stem from a conference organized at the University of Antwerp (UFSIA) in December 1998, under the auspices of the Linguistic Society of Belgium. The initiative was taken by the "Emploi de la langue et langue d'emploi" group associated with the Romance department of the University of Antwerp (UIA) and by the budding "Center for Grammar, Cognition and Typology", associated with the Germanic department of the same campus. We would like to thank the University of Antwerp (UIA and UFSIA), the Ministry of Scientific Research ("GOA"-Project on Pragmatics), the Faculty of Literature and Humanities and the *Centre d'études linguistiques des textes et des discours* ('CELTED') of the University of Metz, and also *Les Amis de l'Université de Metz*.