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The expression of modality in Old Italian

My aim is to present an exploratory study of the expression of modality in the Old Italian language, a topic that – with the exception of Squartini (2010), who investigates the modal meanings of some verbal phrases – is underestimated among the scholars of Italian linguistics. In order to do this, primarily, I will follow Von Stechow (2006) who divides modality into five subcategories (*alethic, epistemic, deontic, dynamic, theological*), and secondly, I will focus on the means, both grammatical and lexical, that are used to express these modal meanings in Old Italian (conditional mood, modal verbs and adverbs, periphrases, particular adjective and nouns, explicit performatives, etc.). Using the *CorpusOVI*, it will be possible to elicitate important data about the distribution of modals across text types.

From a diachronic perspective, particular attention will be dedicated to those phenomena that highlight changes and constants in the system of modality. As an instance, already in the Old Italian language can we find a high degree of polysemy of modal expressions (e.g. *dovere* ‘must’, which is both deontic and epistemic); but some peculiar modals (e.g. *è mestieri che* ‘it is necessary that’) are not used anymore. On the other hand, in Modern Italian there is a higher number of adverbs expressing a modal meaning.

Keywords: *Modality, Old Italian Language, Diachronic Semantics*

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