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Since David Lightfoot proposed the cataclysmic development of modal verbs in his *Principles of Diachronic Syntax* in 1979, according to which in the sixteenth century English modal verbs suddenly developed from full verbs, reactions have not ceased to be published (cf., to cite just a few, Aitchison 1980, Warner 1983 or Plank 1984). There seems to be complete agreement now that Lightfoot's theory on the sudden reanalysis does not fit into the development of the English modals. Moreover, most scholars are aware that modals (like any other linguistic category) must not be treated as a homogeneous group, and that the evolution of each modal must be studied independently (see, for example, Warner 1993, Krug 2000 or Kuteva 2004). This dynamic conception of the group implies the adoption of a broad point of view which may include all the variables that have contributed to the development of the particular modals, semi-modals, quasi-modals or emerging modals, depending on the terminology adopted.

With the aim of contributing to the study of modality in English, in 1998 a group of Italian linguists decided to join in a research project coordinated by David Hart, whose productive work came to light at the fifth biennial Convention of ESSE (*European Society for the Study of English*) held in Helsinki in August 2000. A collection of the papers presented there was published in 2002, entitled *Modality in Late Middle English and Early Modern English: Semantic shifts and pragmatic interpretations*, edited by David Hart and Maria Lima. Also in 2002, Maurizio Gotti, Marina Dossena, Richard Dury, Roberta Facchinetti and Maria Lima edited *Variation in central modals: a repertoire of forms and types of usage in Middle English and Early Modern English*.

The third outstanding publication of this group of Italian researchers came out in 2003, edited by David Hart under the title *English Modality in Context. Diachronic Perspectives*. This book is

number 11 in the series *Linguistic Insights: Studies in Language and Communication*, whose general editor is Maurizio Gotti. Its aim is to describe some of the features which cause variation in linguistic modality in late Middle and early Modern English, the periods in which many of the most crucial changes take place (pp. 14, 30). All the articles collected in this volume “attempt to throw more light on the behaviour of modal verbs in order to finally reach a more refined overall view” (p. 30), and they all dismiss Lightfoot’s theory on the development of the modals. Instead, they consider modality as an activity or a process, that is, they take modality as a linguistic phenomenon to be viewed in context, and, therefore, their studies are corpus-based, and they take into account all the factors which may have played a role in the development of modals, not only those of a syntactic and semantic nature but also sociolinguistic, pragmatic, etc. The main aim of the book, therefore, is to fill some of the gaps left by Lightfoot’s static explanation.

Though the book is addressed to scholars interested in modality, it wisely opens with a brief introduction to the development of the English modals. This 14-page article, by Olga Fischer, entitled “The development of modals in English: Radical versus gradual changes,” tidily summarizes the history of the modals and presents it as based on gradual changes, the view most widely accepted today. In this short introduction, Fischer pays attention not only to central modals, but also to the rise of quasi-modals as part of the dynamic modal cycle.

The other seven articles in this volume carefully study the factors influencing the emergence or / and development of certain modal forms in late Middle and, most frequently, early Modern English. To begin with, and following the order of the articles in the book, the paper by Debra Ziegeler is entitled “On the Generic origins of modality in English” and is mainly concerned with the semi-modals *be able to* and *be supposed to* from 1400 to 1989. Her intention is to find out whether these semi-modals follow the same grammaticalization pathways as central modals and to analyse variables that may contribute to their grammaticalization, such as the nature of the complement verb. Her study interestingly reveals that the aspectual environment of pre-modals contributes to the onset of modal meanings, and that the expression of general truths, such as future-projecting predictions, fosters the development of modal nuances, both deontic and epistemic.

In "What must needs be explained about *must needs*," Rafał Molencki, explores the grammaticalization of the noun *need* into the adverbs *needs*, which in early Modern English faces the competition of other adverbs of necessity such as *necessarily*. The use of the adverb *needs* is claimed to have played a role in the development of epistemic meanings by modal *must*, which might be used epistemically on its own only at the turn of the seventeenth century.

The first two articles in this volume, therefore, seek to investigate on the origins of particular modal items. The remaining contributions, in turn, study the factors influencing variation among modal forms. Thus, the articles by Arja Nurmi and Maurizio Gotti complement each other, since both examine the factors underlying the variation between *shall* and *will* in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries respectively. Nurmi's article, "*Youe shall see I will conclude in it: Sociolinguistic variation of WILL/WOULD and SHALL/SHOULD in the sixteenth century*," represents the first attempt to systematically combine social variation with the development of modal auxiliaries in the early Modern English period. She studies the sociolinguistic variables of sex and register stemming from the texts in the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence*, and clearly shows that women prefer *will* and *would* rather than *shall* and *should*, and that formal letters favour the choice of *shall*, rather than *will*.

In turn, Gotti's paper, entitled "Pragmatic uses of *shall* and *will* for future time reference in early Modern English," explores the last subperiod of the *Helsinki Corpus* (1640-1710) in order to compare the actual use of *shall* and *will* with the rules pointed out by contemporary prescriptive grammars. Gotti meticulously examines seven parameters: text-type, medium (oral or written), level of formality, sentence type (especially interrogative versus non interrogative), locutor's sex, occurrence in active or passive contexts, and, finally, specific pragmatic functions. Throughout the 61 pages of this article, Gotti analyses these parameters in detail and comes to the conclusion that the uses of *shall* and *will* at the end of the seventeenth century are more varied than attested in contemporary grammars, probably due to the low level of sophistication of linguistic analysis at the time.

The last three articles in the book focus on different aspects of modality. Gabriella Mazzon's "Modality in Middle English directive/normative texts" is concerned with all kinds of modal forms from the 1380s to the 1530s. In an attempt to reach a simple

inventory of modal forms, she analyses marginal modals such as *ought*, modal idioms such as *haue lever*, modal expressions such as *be necessary*, adverbs like *certainly*, nouns such as *aduuse*, and modal lexical verbs such as *ordeyne* or *thinken*. The idea to group together all these forms goes beyond exclusive syntactic and morphological barriers and provides a new perspective for the analysis of modality.

Marina Dossena's article is entitled "Hedging in late Middle English, Older Scots and early Modern English: the case of SHOULD and WOULD," and it constitutes an interesting diachronic and dialectal study on the variation between these two modal verbs. She chose to do without the well-known variation as for first, second and third person, and concentrated on the pragmatic factors surrounding the choice of either modal. Her study interestingly concludes that politeness strategies were already at work before the early Modern period.

The last of the papers, "Semantic and pragmatic shades of modal meaning in *Utopia*", by Vanda Polcse, seeks to describe the semantic and pragmatic values of *shall*, *must* and *should*, as representatives of the central modals in the sixteenth century. After her one-text analysis, she concludes that, although these three modals are not very different semantically, the meanings they convey vary according to the presence of any other modals or modal carriers, which affect the pragmatic interpretation of the whole sequence.

The eight papers compiled in this book show that the period of English selected (late Middle and early Modern) proves indeed to be rich in the expression of modal meanings and it witnesses some variation among different modal forms. Even though the field of modality is too large to be fully comprised in a book, and there is much to be done in the future, this book contains good examples of very fine analyses of modal forms. The authors manage to provide different perspectives of modality integrating central modals, semi-modals, marginal modals and other modal forms such as adjectives, nouns or adverbs. In addition, the papers collected in this book are also a good example of the synergic effect of the factors which may affect modality (e.g. syntax, semantics, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, etc). All in all, this book comes to fill some of the gaps of Lightfoot's sudden reanalysis theory, and will prove to be a very useful tool for the historical linguist interested in

the expression of modality in late Middle and, particularly, early Modern English.

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