

TITLE: Modality and change. A study of *må* and *kunna* in Old Swedish
SWEDISH TITLE: Modalitet och förändring. En studie av *må* och *kunna* i fornsvenska

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the development of root and non-root meanings of modal verbs through an empirical study of the verbs *må* and *kunna* in Old Swedish. Modality is taken to refer to domains in which possibility contrasts with necessity. In Old Swedish, *må* (*magha*) 'may' and *kunna* 'can' have the potential to express most of the meanings relating to possibility and necessity, as well as lexical meanings.

The two verbs are investigated in an Old Swedish corpus consisting of legal and religious texts. Certain default correlations between type of modal and semantic and syntactic environments, which have been proposed in the literature, are investigated.

The results show that *må* frequently expresses participant-internal possibility, 'ability', and deontic possibility, 'permission', whereas *kunna* is mainly associated with participant-internal and general external possibility. Of particular interest is the use of *må* in conditionals, which provides evidence that this construction type may have played a bridging role in the development of non-root modality.

Using the framework of force dynamics, the development of modal meaning is analysed as a metaphorical transfer of one consistent image-schema between different conceptual domains. The schematic components are described in terms of forces and barriers. The proposed transfer from a physical to a social domain and further on to a mental and a conversational domain provides a good account of the diachronic development.

KEYWORDS: Modality, language change, modals, root modality, epistemic modality, force dynamics, grammaticalization, degrammaticalization, unidirectionality, (Old) Swedish, conditionals, cognitive semantics.

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