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Verbs of motion and intermediate source domains of modality: the understudied case of It. *occorrere* ‘to be necessary, to be needed’

Abstract: Though the emergence of modality from verbs of motion is a well-attested phenomenon, the assessment of cross-linguistically valid pathways still remains a desideratum. In this paper I offer an outline of the pathway followed by the understudied Italian modal verb *occorrere* ‘to happen; to be necessary/needed’ (from Latin *occurrere*, originally ‘to run towards, into something or someone’). Based on the analysis of two large corpora, this paper reconstructs the emergence of the impersonal constructions ‘*occorre* + INF’ and ‘*occorre che* + SBJV’ vis-à-vis the personal one (‘to be needed’). The data and their analysis confirm the complexity of the pathway: in fact, the emergence of modality is strongly interlaced with the co-presence of the ancient meaning ‘to happen’, but also with the emergence of a deontic construction in which *occorrere* assumes the function of the auxiliary *essere* (‘to be’) as well as with the later evolution of another construction with negative polarity and in which *occorrere* is a telic metaphoric verb of motion. Though the pathway followed by Italian *occorrere* could be idiosyncratic in a cross-linguistic perspective, its in-depth study sheds new light on the question of how modality emerges and in particular on its source domains and their relations.

Keywords: auxiliarization; diachrony; eventive meaning; goal-orientedness; Italian; Latin; source domains of modality; verbs of motion.

1. The modal pathway of *occorrere*: general overview and goals

In Present Day Italian (henceforth PDI) the impersonal modal verb *occorre* ‘(it) is necessary’ is the result of a pathway from motion to modality which has not been investigated at all. Though not as frequent as impersonal PDI *bisogna* ‘(it) is necessary’,¹ *occorre* has already been recognized as part of the modal system of Italian (Cornillie et al. 2009: 119). An in-depth investigation of the pathway which goes from the non-modal *occorrere* ‘to run towards; to happen; to come to mind’ (INF = base form) to the modal impersonal (3 SG) *occorre* can

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¹ In order to give the reader an idea of the relative frequency of the two verbs, I will make reference to CoLFIS, a corpus of written and read Italian (counting 3.798.275 words). While the lemma *bisognare* appears 921 times and corresponds to a usage rank of 291, the lemma *occorrere* appears only 383 times and its usage rank is 818. It is also important to underline that in PDI, while *bisognare* is always modal or pre-modal, *occorrere* can also express other (pre-modal or non-modal) meanings (see Section 2.2).