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Käte-Hamburger-Weg 3

Historical development of possibility modality in Slovenian – a case of a modal cycle

Slovenian expresses possibility with a modal adverb that combines with a finite verb, an atypical pattern both among Slavic languages and European languages more generally (Hansen 2005, Olmen & Auwera, in press). This pattern, however, is generally restricted to affirmative contexts; under negation, the combination of a modal auxiliary and an infinitival main verb must be used instead (Lencek 1968, Hansen & Roeder 2007). Building on diachronic data, we will propose that the above situation arose as a consequence of a cyclical change (van Gelderen 2011), in which a manner adverb originated as a reinforcer of the modal auxiliary and then grammaticalized into a modal. We will argue that the modal-adverb strategy could not generalize to contexts with sentential negation because of the hierarchical order of the relevant functional projections and the characteristics of the negative particle.