

## Thematic Session proposal for a workshop on the concept of necessity and its various realizations in natural language

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This workshop is dedicated to exploring how languages encode, interpret and deploy the concept of necessity, a pivotal notion within human communication that cuts across semantics, syntax, pragmatics and typology. This notion is realized through a wide variety of linguistic strategies, from modal verbs, adverbs and grammatical markers to holistic discourse constructions. This workshop brings together scholars from multiple theoretical and methodological traditions to examine necessity in natural language with a view to attaining a perspective that is both broader and more integrated.

Traditionally, logicians and formal semanticists have investigated necessity through the lens of modal logic, exploring relationships between necessity, possibility and contingency (see Prior 1957; Hintikka 1969; Kripke 1980). Their models offer rigour and abstraction but often remain detached from actual language use. Syntactic theories have examined how necessity interacts with clause type, tense, aspect and negation, noting that structural configurations often impose constraints on interpretation (see Chierchia 1985; Condoravdi 2002; De Haan 2015; Hacquard 2009, 2011, 2020; Stowell 2004; von Stechow 2003). Our workshop includes both studies that adopt this formal perspective, such as the paper that investigates the clause-linker *kusu* in Ainu as a necessity marker scoping over deontic and epistemic modality, along with work that adopts a usage-based approach à la Biber (2004) or Flach (2020), like the paper that examines how German double-modality necessity constructions function in the *Wikipedia Discussions Corpus* in comparison to their simple modal-verb (*müssen, sollen*) and modal-adverb (*unbedingt, sicher*) counterparts. Thus, a compositional approach arguing that necessity, like possibility, scopes over negation in English but under negation in Japanese, finds itself in dialogue with a study that aims to show that the French necessity modal *devoir*'s uses form a network of constructions entrenched in speakers' grammatical knowledge with conventionalized meanings that resist compositional analysis.

Equally important, the workshop seeks to highlight the pragmatic and sociolinguistic dimensions of necessity. Expressions of necessity often vary in force depending on context: what counts as obligation, epistemic certainty or interpersonal directive may shift with cultural norms and interactional dynamics (see Myhill and Smith 1995; Gibbard 2012), so that understanding necessity in actual use requires careful attention to these pragmatic realities. As a case in point, one of the contributions to the workshop will show that Macedonian reflexive-dative constructions manifest a broad semantic variability over the general domain of necessity, ranging from physiological urges beyond the speaker's control to psycho-physiological needs that are partially controllable,

to wishes that appear volitional yet are framed as emerging from an internal, uncontrollable source. Another paper argues that approaching root necessity in terms of the source of the modality provides a firmer grip on the distribution and selection of necessity verbs than does previous research. Yet another paper shows how in the expressing of necessity Ainu and Korean favour a positive conditional evaluation, more concerned with ‘what is good if done,’ whereas Japanese tends toward a negative one concerned with ‘what is not good unless done.’ This suggests that, rather than being a purely logical operator, as incarnated in natural language necessity reflects culturally-grounded notions of value and propriety. Thus, it is not surprising to find that the religious nature of Middle Persian texts favours action-oriented obligation expressed by infinitives, and that the modern Spanish construction *necesitar que X haga Y* is associated with pragmatic functions (politeness, urgency, speaker stance) underlying requests made using this construction, along with the power dynamics obtaining between speaker and hearer and the semantico-pragmatic features that distinguish them from similar request-making constructions like *querer/desear que X haga Y*. Another contribution investigates the linguistic strategies employed to express necessity in texts during the critical period when Hebrew first emerged as a daily language with particular focus on the difference between personal letters and official posters, thereby elucidating the interplay between pragmatic functions and language use and highlighting the early development of register differentiation in the expression of necessity in Modern Hebrew. By engaging with scholars in pragmatics and sociolinguistics, participants will gain a fuller appreciation for how necessity operates as both a linguistic and a social tool.

Typological and cross-linguistic perspectives further enrich the dialogue (cf. van der Auwera and Plungian 1998; Palmer 2001). While in many European languages necessity is commonly associated with modal auxiliaries, other language families rely on affixal morphology, clitics, adverbs or particles to cover this semantic domain. These differences call into question universalist assumptions and raise key questions about the cognitive and communicative foundations of modality. For example, a paper on Japanese investigates the distinction between expressions of strong and weak necessity and demonstrates that the former occurs in a double negative verbal form that is not negatable, while weak necessity is expressed nominally by the noun *necessity* and can be negated. The great diversity of languages covered in the workshop will amply feed reflection on this level: Ainu, Korean, Japanese, Mandarin, Spanish, French, English, German, Old High German, Middle Persian, Hebrew, Macedonian, Finnish, Serbian, Tatar, Bashkir, Chuvash, Moksha, Erzya, Meadow Mari, Hill Mari, Udmurt, and Beserman.

The study of the diachronic evolution of necessity expressions is strongly represented in the workshop. One investigation explores how the Xinyang dialect represents a case where the weakening of necessity from objective to subjective correlates with the attrition of the strength of the notion of causation. Another paper explores face-threatening and predictive extensions from the necessity-conditional function of *chufei* in Mandarin and shows that the evolution of this item follows well-known tendencies towards subjectification and intersubjectification, but that subjective/speaker-oriented meaning does not necessarily predate intersubjective/hearer-oriented meaning diachronically, in

line with recent proposals by Narrog (2012) and Traugott (2022). Another diachronic study looks at phrases with the noun *nôt* ‘need, necessity’ in Old High German, investigating co-occurrence patterns between these phrases and the type of necessity they express with a view to documenting the grammaticalization paths followed by necessity expressions. Another paper investigates the two-part necessity expression made up of an absolute phrase followed by a main clause containing a necessity modal, as famously illustrated by the Second Amendment in the U.S. constitution (“A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed”), situating such uses within the overall patterns characterizing late 18<sup>th</sup>-century usage with the aim of clarifying the range of meanings they were actually used to express during this period.

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