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(Article begins on next page)

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From motion to possibility: Latin (ne)queo ‘I can(not)’ in the light of philological and typological data

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Summary: This paper suggests a new account of the origin of the Latin modal constructions featuring the verbs *nequeo* ‘I cannot’ and *queo* ‘I can’ from *eo* ‘to go, to come’. The traditional etymology claims that *nequeo* and *queo* developed from an impersonal form *(ne)quit(ur)* ‘it does (not) go’ into fully-fledged personal verbs. An in-depth analysis of the Early Latin corpus clearly shows that, when it is possible to verify whether there is a syntactic subject or not, *nequeo* and *queo* are always used personally. They convey almost exclusively dynamic modality, mainly participant-related possibility. Importantly, the Latin data fit present-day typological knowledge about the development of participant-related possibility modality from verbs of motion in specific constructions. This study contributes not only to the reconstruction of the early history of Latin *(ne)queo*, but also to the general discussion about the emergence of modality from motion constructions.

Keywords: corpus analysis, diachrony, possibility modality, motion constructions, semantics.

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to reconsider the etymology and the early history of Latin *nequeo* ‘I cannot’ and its positive counterpart *queo* ‘I can’ (from now on *(ne)queo* will be used to indicate

both forms) from *eo* ‘to go, to come’ in the light of the earliest available philological data and of current typological knowledge. The next section reviews the traditional explanation concerning the emergence and the development of *(ne)queo*; section 3 presents the analysis of the Early Latin corpus; section 4 briefly outlines the development of possibility modality from constructions featuring verbs of motion in a cross-linguistic perspective; section 5 outlines a new hypothesis for explaining the development of *(ne)queo*. The concluding section (6) offers a synthesis of the devised hypothesis and shows the relevance of the case of *(ne)queo* from a theoretical point of view.*

2. The traditional explanation: some problems and open questions

Queo ‘I can’ and its negated form *nequeo* ‘I cannot’ are semi-modal¹ verbs (Nuñez 1991: 64 with fn. 2, Magni 2010: 210) conveying dynamic possibility readings (Moussy 2001) and very rarely also deontic ones (author; for the types of modality, cf. below). According to the current etymological explanation, *nequeo* derived from the univerbation of the conjunction *neque* and impersonal *it* ‘it goes’ from *eo* ‘to go, to come’². With regard to the original form from which *nequeo* developed, some scholars think of an impersonal *nequit*—so, in particular, Brugmann 1904b: 64, fn. 2, Sommer 1914: 538, cf. also Walde & Hofmann 1938–1956: s.v. *queo*, Meiser 1998: 223—, while other scholars set an impersonal *nequitur*, showing passive endings—e.g., Ernout & Meillet 1959 [2001]: s.v. *queo* followed by Fruyt 2004: 317 (cf. also de Vaan 2011: s.v. *queo*, *quire*, who accepts both possibilities).

While it is usual to set an impersonal form as the basis of *(ne)queo*, an in-depth analysis of the historical attestations of both verbs clearly hints at a preference for the personal active construction, as I will show in detail in section 3. Moreover, I could not find any certain attestation of an impersonal construction. Three doubtful cases are presented below.

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¹ A semi-modal verb does not express epistemic modality.

² Subsequently, on the model of negative vs positive pairs with and without the negative preverb *ne-* such as *ne-scio* ‘I don’t know’ vs *scio* ‘I know’, *nequeo* was re-interpreted as the negated form (*ne-queo*) of a positive form *queo*.

Moussy (2002b: 141) points out that there is just one case of impersonal use of *(ne)queo*:

(1) *Sed cum contendi nequitum ui,*
But when stretch.INF.PASS can.PTCP.PST force.ABL.SG

clam tendenda est plaga.
secretly stretch.GRDV.NOM.SG be.3SG trap.NOM.SG

‘But when it has been impossible to toil by violence, a toil [i.e., a snare, note by the translator] must be spread by stealth.’ (Pacuvius *Tragoediae* 390, transl. by E.H. Warmington)³

However, even in this case, due to the fragmentary nature of the passage (note also that *ui* is a philological emendation), we cannot completely exclude that the (neuter) subject of *nequeo* was not expressed some lines earlier. We have similar problems with other two attestations:

(2) *si non sarciri quitur*
if not redeem.INF.PASS can.3SG.PASS

‘if it cannot be patched’ (Caecilius Statius, *Palliatae* 279, transl. by E.H. Warmington)

(3) *Iam potero; incipiam et, / si nequit, vi*
now can.1SG.FUT begin.1SG.FUT and if not_can_3SG mightly
contendam, ut...
strive.1SG.SBJV that

‘Well, now I’ll be able; and I will begin; / and if he fails [or: if it is not possible, note mine], I will strive mightily / so that [...]’ (Accius, *Tragoediae* 369-37, transl. by E.H. Warmington)

There is another problem with the traditional view on impersonal *(ne)queo*. The use of *ire* in the sense implied by the above-mentioned hypotheses—i.e., “*cela ne va pas*” of Ernout & Meillet 1959 [2001]: s.v. *queo* or “*das geht irgendwie nicht*” of Brugmann 1904b: 64, fn. 2—is attested only rarely in Latin (and mainly in colloquial contexts)⁴. This can perhaps be due to a

³ If not specified otherwise, the editions of reference I used are those of the database Classical Latin Texts. For the sake of consistency, I introduce the distinction between <u> and <v> even when it was not present in the reference edition.

⁴ I wish to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for confirming that the traditional hypothesis is based on a calque from French or German.

gap in documentation. However, it must be stressed that the attested construction is not impersonal, as there is a subject (e.g., *res*, *omnia*). Cf.:

(4) *Incipit res melius ire quam putaram.*
 begin.3SG thing.NOM.SG better go.INF rather think.PST.IPFV.1SG

‘The business begins to go better than I had thought.’ (Cicero, *Ad Atticum* XIV 15,3, transl. by D.R. Shackleton Bailey)

(5) *Postquam omnia fatis / Caesaris ire videt...*
 After all.NOM.PL destiny.DAT.PL Cesar.GEN.SG go.INF see.3SG

‘When Petreius saw that Caesar’s destiny was carrying all before it...’ (Lucanus, *Pharsalia* IV 143–144, transl. by J. D. Duff)

Moreover, I could not find any example of impersonal *itur* in a sense comparable to German *es geht (nicht)* or of French *cela (ne) va (pas)* (‘it does[n’t] go’). *Itur* means ‘there is a going, people go’.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that there are prosodic and formal differences between *(ne)queo* and *eo*. Bechtel (1899: 190) remarks that, in Plautus, while the perfect of *queo* always ends in *-ivī*, the perfect of *eo* is most of the time *iī*⁵. Sommer (1914: 568) suggests that the perfect *(ne)quīvī* is analogically formed from the perfect participle *(ne)quītus* on the model of *audītus* : *audīvī* (cf. Walde & Hofmann 1938–1956: s.v. *queo*). However, Paratore (1955: 317–321)⁶ remarks that, if the perfect participle is *(ne)quītus*, *(ne)queo* was not perceived by Latin speakers as a compound from *eo*, as we would expect *-ītus*.

To sum up, there is no undisputable evidence of impersonal constructions; *eo* is not used impersonally in a way which can constitute a bridging context; the traditional explanation does not solve the problem of the prosodic quantity of *nequītus*.

3. Results of the analysis of the Early Latin corpus

⁵ Exceptions are rare: cf., e.g., *ivisse* (*Mostellaria* 842) and *exivī* (*Stichus* 459).

⁶ Paratore (1995: 320), who is sceptical about a derivation of *(ne)queo* from *eo*, believes that forms such as *redinunt* (attested in Ennius *Annales* 475, from *redeo*) are made on the model of *nequinont* (instead of *nequeunt*), attested already in Livius Andronicus (*Odyssia* 13.1). In his view, this would attest that Latin speakers in the age of Ennius perceived *queo* and then *nequeo* as compound verbs of *eo*. Cf. also later P.F. 162, 11: *neceunt, non eunt* ‘they cannot, they do not go’.

I have grouped the pre-classical attestations as follows⁷: 1) forms of *nequeo* (75x), 2) forms of *queo* under the scope of any kind of negation (represented in the tables below by the label ‘non queo’), including *ne*, *non*, *nihil*, *numquam*, etc. (79x), 3) forms of *queo* in a context with positive polarity (23x)⁸. It is worth noticing that the use of *queo* in non-negative contexts is limited. The point to be made here is that rather than as the positive counterpart of *nequeo*, *queo* was used as a variant of *nequeo*⁹. Table 1 illustrates the distribution of the forms of *(ne)queo* with regard to Early Latin authors¹⁰.

<i>Early Latin authors</i>	<i>nequeo</i>	<i>non queo</i>	<i>queo</i>	<i>Grand Total</i>
<i>Caecilius Statius</i>		2		2
<i>Gnaeus Marcius</i>		1		1
<i>Gnaeus Naevius</i>		1	1	2
<i>Livius Andronicus</i>	1			1
<i>Lucius Accius</i>	1	3	2	6
<i>Marcus Pacuvius</i>	1	3	3	7
<i>Marcus Porcius Cato</i>	3			3
<i>Publius Terentius Afer</i>	15	14	9	38
<i>Q. Claudius Quadrigarius</i>		1		1
<i>Quintus Ennius</i>		3		3
<i>Titinius</i>	1			1
<i>Titus Maccius Plautus</i>	51	51	8	110
<i>Sextus Turpilius</i>	2			2
<i>Grand Total</i>	75	79	23	177

Table 1. Occurrences of *nequeo*, *non queo* and *queo* in Early Latin authors

⁷ To my knowledge, no complete collection of all the attestations of *(ne)queo* exists. Therefore, in order to outline the situation in Early Latin I carried out a manual search for all possible forms of *(ne)queo* in the Classical Latin Texts database. I also looked for the well-known ‘irregular’ forms which I found registered in the previous scholarly literature. In particular, I drew on the list in Wagener (1892–1905: 623–627), though this source is nowadays not always reliable because of the improvements in some editions of the Early Latin authors. Old inscriptions were also taken into account (EDR, CLASSES, Wachter 1987), but I was unable to find any pre-classical attestation of *(ne)queo*.

⁸ It must be noted that in 2 cases—Pacuvius, *Tragoediae* 153 and Terentius, *Andria* 277—*queo* depends on a *verbum timendi*.

⁹ As shown by Moussy (2002b: 147), in some metrical contexts negated *queo* is a fit substitute for *nequeo*. Moussy (2002b: 146) also notes that later, when in the dactylic poetry the use of non-negated *queo* becomes more frequent than that of negated *queo*, the first is used as a substitute of (positive) *possum*.

¹⁰ It is worth stressing that *non queo* and *nequeo* are attested in some manuscripts as *varia lectio* of each other (e.g., Ter. *Phorm.* 489).

For each passage I checked whether *(ne)queo* is used personally or impersonally and whether the form of *(ne)queo* is active or passive (from a formal point of view). When the construction is personal (174 attestations out of 177), non-negated *queo* is always active (23x), while *nequeo* and negated *queo* are active (71x and 74x, respectively) with 3 exceptions each. Leaving aside the three doubtful cases mentioned above, I could not find any impersonal construction.

These data can be combined with the types of modality in order to see whether there is an association between construction and type of modality. The term ‘modality’ refers here to the notional domains of necessity, possibility and volition (van der Auwera and Plungian 1998) as expressed by modal markers. Modal markers have the function to introduce non-actual states of affairs (henceforth SoA). In the cognitive-functional framework adopted here, the core types of modality are the dynamic, deontic and epistemic ones. As possibility constructions are the focus of this paper, I will leave necessity and volition aside. The dynamic modal types are as follows (Nuyts 2016: 33–39): participant-inherent, if possibility concerns abilities and capacities of the main first-argument participant in the SoA: this is usually an animate entity having control over the event expressed in the SoA, cf. (7); participant-imposed, if possibility is enabled or limited by circumstances which are external to the main first-argument participant in the SoA, cf. (8); situational¹¹, if in the SoA there is no participant or if the mentioned participant has no active role in it, cf. (9).

(7) *Ubi te=cum coniunctus siem, ubi*
 When you.ABL.SG =with hitch.up.PST.PTCP.NOM.SG be.SBJV.1SG when
onus nequeam ferre pariter
 burden.ACC.SG can.1SG.PASS carry.INF equally

‘When I’m hitched up with you and can’t carry my burden the same way, ...’ (Plautus, *Aulularia* 230, transl. by W. de Melo; one character pretends to be a donkey, another a fat ox;)

(8) *Utinam nunc matrescam ingenio, ut meum*
 would.that now become.a.mother.SBJV.1SG nature.ABL.SG that my.ACC.SG
patrem ulcisci queam!
 father.ACC.SG avenge.INF can.SBJV.1SG

‘Would now I could in nature be emmothered, That able I might be to avenge my father!’ (Pacuvius, *Tragoediae* 139, transl. by E. H. Warmington)

¹¹ This type of modality is close to alethic modality of other theoretical framework.

(9) *Unde omnia perdisci ac percipi*
 From.where all.ACC.PL learn.thoroughly.INF.PASS and learn.INF.PASS

queuntur.

can.3PL.PASS

‘From which the whole thing can be learnt by heart and apprehended.’ (Accius, *Carmina* 20.1, transl. by E. H. Warmington)

While dynamic modality refers to (necessities and) possibilities in more generic terms, the deontic domain of possibility is conceived in terms of the presence of a source of authority (permissions, interdictions). The notion can be broadened to include the degree of moral desirability of a SoA. Finally, epistemic modality conveys the stance of the speakers with regard to the chance or likelihood that the SoA takes place.

The semantic analysis confirmed that *(ne)queo* does not express epistemic modality and allowed me to pinpoint a possible new example of the very rare deontic reading (Terentius, *Andria* 394 with the traditional example of Cato, *Origines* 24; cf. author). On the other hand, the analysis revealed that *nequeo*, *queo* and negated *queo* can express all three sub-types of dynamic modality, i.e., participant-inherent (72 non-ambiguous cases), participant-imposed (54 non-ambiguous cases) and situational modality (9 non-ambiguous cases). In four cases, it was impossible to attribute the passage to a certain type of modality, as the context is fragmentary. In some other cases, the reading is ambiguous and could correspond to more than one type of modality. The point to be made here is that the modal reading of the attestations of *(ne)queo* is very specific—overwhelmingly participant-related dynamic modality (85.88% taking into account also the cases of ambiguity between participant-inherent and participant-imposed modality)—and in keeping with the personal use. This situation is shown by table 2.

	?	DEONT	P-IMP	P-IMP?	P-IMP/SIT	P-INH	P-INH?	P-INH/P-IMP	P-INH/P-IMP/DEONT?	SIT	SIT?
NEQUEO	1.33%	1.33%	12.00%	2.67%	0.00%	54.67%	2.67%	20.00%	0.00%	5.33%	0.00%
NON QUEO	2.53%	1.27%	37.97%	0.00%	1.27%	35.44%	2.53%	11.39%	1.27%	5.06%	1.27%
QUEO	4.35%	0.00%	65.22%	4.35%	0.00%	13.04%	0.00%	8.70%	0.00%	4.35%	0.00%
	2.26%	1.13%	30.51%	1.69%	0.56%	40.68%	2.26%	14.69%	0.56%	5.08%	0.56%

Table 2. Frequencies of modality types (deont = deontic; p-imp = participant-imposed; p-inh = participant-inherent; sit = situational).

‘I do. Tell me the lowest price for which you’re going to give her to me, for which she can be had.’ (Plautus, *Persa* 589–590, transl. by W. de Melo)¹²

As for *possum*, the passive constructions with passive forms of the modal verb can be said to be marginal; the same is also true for *nequeo*¹³.

While corpus data does not tell us what the prehistoric situation was, there is no doubt that at the time of Plautus and other early authors (*ne*)*queo* conveyed participant-related dynamic modality and—as expected—was mostly used in personal active constructions. Passive constructions clearly correlate with situational dynamic and deontic modality and are very rare. The point to be made here is that, while it is sheerly speculative to hypothesize an evolution from (non attested) impersonal to personal constructions, it is more economic and straightforward to hypothesize that (*ne*)*queo* developed as a semi-modal verb from personal active constructions, which are also the typical constructions for *eo*.

4. From motion to possibility in a cross-linguistic perspective

While developments from motion verbs to both necessity and possibility are attested—sometimes even for the same verb—(cf. Kuteva et al. 2019: 63, Bourdin 2014, Narrog 2010, author, among others), I focus here only on possibility modality. The meanings taken into account for the typological study are those of ‘coming (to)’ (± telic), ‘going (to)’ (± telic) and ‘arriving at/reach’ (telic). I have found the following cases: a) personal constructions in which the participant in the SoA is expressed as the syntactic subject of the motion verb (cf. below); b) constructions in which the participant in the SoA is coded by an oblique case (cf. Narrog 2010: 91-92)¹⁴; c) impersonal constructions (cf., e.g., Narrog 2009: 81)¹⁵; d) personal passive

¹² There are only two other examples of active (*ne*)*queo* + passive infinitive in my database.

¹³ Osthoff (1898) provides the post-classical Sanskrit modal construction with *yā-* ‘to go; to be possible’ as illustrating the same development as Latin (*ne*)*queo*. However, unlike the Latin constructions with (*ne*)*queo*, I cannot find any example of personal constructions indicating an ability of the main first-argument participant in the SoA introduced by the Sanskrit verb of motion. The path towards modality is not the same.

¹⁴ While the modal profile of (*ne*)*queo* is compatible with these examples, from the syntactic point of view (*ne*)*queo* shows a different behaviour. It is worth stressing that I have not found any example of a possible oblique primary argument for (*ne*)*queo*.

¹⁵ The syntactic and semantic profile of (*ne*)*queo* does not seem compatible with this path of development. As we have seen, there is no positive evidence for impersonal constructions.

constructions (‘potential passive’ in the terms of Haspelmath 1990: 33–34, cf. also Kuteva et al. 2020: 95–96, 314–315)¹⁶. As only a) is relevant here¹⁷, I will outline this case in more detail. Many studies have pointed out modal or quasi-modal developments from ‘arrive at’-verbs in many language families, such as Chibchan, Mande, Sino-Tibetan and Romance (Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca 1994: 190–191, Kuteva et al. 2019: 63, Matisoff 1973: 233–234, author in press). New interesting evidence comes from Bambara. Compare (13), in which the Bambara verb *ka se* ‘to arrive’ keeps its goal-directed meaning of motion with the construction in (14), in which the same verb governing an infinitive conveys a modal meaning. The verb can have dynamic and deontic modal readings.

(13) Bambara (Mande, Western Mande)

Den bε se so.
 child PART.PRS arrive house
 ‘The child arrives home.’ (native speaker)

(14) Bambara (Mande, Western Mande)

Den bε se ka gafe kalan.
 child PART.PRS arrive PART.INF book read
 ‘The child can read the book.’ (native speaker)

A similar pattern of development from goal-oriented motion to modality is attested for other meanings. The Standard Igbo verb *-pù* has two forms: an active one meaning ‘go out’ and a stative one meaning ‘be able, can’ (cf. ex. 15). As a modal verb it can only occur with the infinitive (Uchechukwu 2008: 263).

(15) Igbo (Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo)

Úchè pù-rù í.sù bèkèè.
 Uche [go out >]be.able-STAT to speak English
 ‘Uche can speak English.’

¹⁶ It is worth stressing that in this case the evolution from motion to modality is mediated by the passive function (cf. Sansó and Giacalone Ramat 2016: 17). The path outlined here is not compatible with the profile of *(ne)queo*, unless one can show that *eo* was used in passive constructions and that the path followed by *(ne)queo* was from situational to participant-related modality. Cf. below.

¹⁷ Due to space limitations I cannot deal in detail with the other cases.

(from Uchechukwu 2008: 262)¹⁸

Uchechukwu (2008: 263) outlines the possible pathway from motion to epistemic modality in four steps: from ‘go out’ to ‘go out (to do something)’ (purpose infinitive), from there to ‘be in the position to do something’, subsequently to ‘have the possibility/be able to do something’, and finally to ‘be possible to happen’.

It is worth stressing that all the examples show a goal-oriented construction, in which the SoA expressed by the infinitive is the metaphorical motion goal. Both the syntactic and semantic profiles of *(ne)queo* are highly compatible with these examples, though *eo* is not a lexically telic verb. I deal with this issue in the next section.

5. An alternative account of the origin and early development of *(ne)queo*

From a diachronic perspective, if we accept that *(ne)queo* derived from the motion verb *eo*, we need to hypothesise that, as in the case of other motion verbs developing modal readings, a specific construction—featuring *eo* and a related SoA—started to be read as involving the (im)possibility for the main first-argument participant in the SoA to bring about the SoA. Among the above-mentioned languages which could provide a parallel, we find the Igbo verb *-pù* ‘go out’ followed by an infinitive expressing a purpose and the cross-linguistically widespread groups of verbs meaning ‘arrive at, reaching’ followed by a verb or clause indicating a metaphorical goal. While it is impossible to assess whether *(ne)queo* followed one pattern or the other (or even a third one), the general template featuring a motion verb followed by a verb or clause expressing the goal of the first-argument participant of the motion verb can be set as the bridging construction between *eo* and *(ne)queo*. In fact, *eo* can govern an infinitive of purpose (Bennett 1910: I, 419), a purpose clause introduced by *ut* or a supine expressing the goal of motion. It is important to stress that *(ne)queo* is usually constructed with an infinitive. The construction with the supine is not present in my database of Early Latin, while there is just one case of an *ut*-clause (Terence, *Hecyra* 760). Cf. the following examples:

(16)	<i>Ibant</i>	<i>malaci</i>	<i>viere</i>	<i>Veneriam</i>
	Go.IPFV.PST.3PL	soft.NOM.PL	weave.INF	of_Venus.ACC.SG

¹⁸ Uchechukwu explains that the value of the suffix *ri* is that of licensing a “timeless reading” with stative verbs (2008: 262). Note that the suffix attaches to the same verb to mark the past, when the verb keeps the original meaning of motion, and that it is therefore the context that enables disambiguation between the motion and the modal meaning. The suffix does not signal modality.

corollam.

wreath.ACC.SG

‘the softies went along to weave Love’s little garland’ (Ennius, *Fragmenta* 534, transl. by S.M. Goldberg)

(17) *Oratum ierunt deam*

pray.SUP go. PST. PFV.3PL goddess.ACC.SG

‘they’ve gone to pray to the goddess’ (Plautus, *Poenulus* 1134, transl. by W. de Melo)

Semantically, if the purpose infinitive can be said to represent the goal of the agentive referent which is the subject of *eo/(ne)queo*, the whole construction takes on a telic meaning, so that the agentive referent has (not) reached their goal. This makes these constructions very similar to those seen under a) in section 4¹⁹. However, it is important to stress that I have not found any passage featuring *eo* in a bridging construction from both the semantic and the syntactic point of view.

Syntactically and semantically, a direct derivation from personal *eo* to personal *(ne)queo* fits well into the picture attested by the philological data. This is also in line with both some of the possible developments from motion constructions to modal constructions and the usual development from participant-related to non-participant-related modality in a typological perspective (cf. van der Auwera and Plungian 1998).

Two points still need to be addressed: the passive forms as the possible original forms of *(ne)queo* and the prosody of the past participle *nequītus*.

The hypothesis of active *(ne)queo* developing from passive forms is not economic nor straightforward. However, it is worth mentioning here an interesting case of auxiliarisation of passive *eo*. This verb developed a futurate meaning (but not possibility readings) only in a very specific passive construction (supine + *īrī*). The construction supine + *īrī* ‘to be (to be done)’ is the norm for building the passive of the future infinitive. It clearly shows that passive forms of *eo* had already become passive auxiliaries in the early history of the Latin language. It is important to underscore, however, that this passive construction does not have a modal meaning in the terms defined above (cf. section 3) and the construction always features the supine form. The *(ne)queo*-construction followed another template.

¹⁹ Moreover, negation can also have played a role, by ‘annulling’ the importance of telicity: a negated event can never be said to have been completed (cf., e.g., Kagan 2020: 110).

With respect to the second point, we can suppose that *neque* became *nequ-* for elision when final *e* was before another mid front vowel. When the diphthong was before a vowel, the result is short *e*: **nek^w- + *eĩō > *nequeĩō > *nequeō*; when the diphthong was before a consonant, the result is long *ī*, i.e., the usual evolution of the diphthong *eĩ*: **nek^w- + *eĩ-s(i) > nequeis > nequīs*, etc. It is worth pointing out that the loss of the final *-e* in words such as *neque* is to be placed in the context of the spoken language (*Allegro-Formen*), as shown by the existence of *nec* as well as *neque*. The elision of the final *-e* of *neque* is not an obligatory fact in Latin prosody. It is possible that, before *ītus*, there was no elision of the final *-e* of *neque*, as the following vowel was not the same: so, *neque + ītus > *nequeītus > nequītus* on the model of what happened for other forms of the paradigm of *nequeo*, as shown above²⁰. The same sequence could perhaps explain the vowel in the perfect, which is usually long (*-īvī*), while it is usually short for *eo*. In other terms, as often, the irregular form—here *nequītus*—supplies us with important information about chronology. In fact, if *nequītus* is really more ancient than *nequītus*, and my explanation is correct, this means that the closing of [eĩ] to [e:] is the *terminus ante quem* for the emergence of (*ne*)*queo*. The question now is how to explain *quītast* in Terentius, *Hecyra* 572: I do not have a solution for this point, but the short vowel seems an exception (a poetic licence perhaps modelled on the forms of *eo*?). It must be stressed that the past participle is rarely attested and that this is in keeping with the fact that passive constructions are rare for (*ne*)*queo*. Perhaps these forms followed slightly different paths with respect to those of the active constructions. Moreover, the influence of the 4th conjugation could also be taken into account.

7. Conclusion

Drawing on the fact that (*ne*)*queo* is used personally—with only three very uncertain exceptions—, that it is clearly associated to the expression of participant-related modality (cf. section 3) and that active personally used verbs of motion can developed into modal verbs (cf. section 4), I have suggested that (*ne*)*queo* emerged as an active personally used verb from active personally used *eo*. This hypothesis has two great advantages. It provides a direct morphological and syntactic basis for personally used (*ne*)*queo*, as *eo* is mostly used personally. Moreover, it provides also a semantic basis, as an entity capable of self-motion (i.e., the prototypical subject of *eo*) can be an agentive participant with respect to participant-related modality. The same does not hold true for passive constructions with (*ne*)*queo*, as the agentive or agent-like participant is not expressed. Therefore, the hypothesis of a path from passive

²⁰ Theoretically, however, we can suppose that **nequeitus* would have been maintained without the analogical force of the rest of the paradigm. Cf. *deinde* ‘henceforth’ < *de-inde*.

(ne)queo to active *(ne)queo* is less straightforward and would require to explain the emergence of a completely new syntactic and semantic profile.

It is now time to ask ourselves, what the relevance of this hypothesis is for the general theory about motion constructions developing modal readings. I think that the case of *(ne)queo* has shown very clearly that the emergence of modality from motion verbs is not just a matter of semantic evolution: the emergence of modality—and that of specific modality types—is determined by the evolution of constructions in which syntax and semantics cannot be separated. Semantic-based models of modality paths need to be reviewed and completed.

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