The main aim of this work is to propose an analysis of modal verbs *dever* 'may/must', *poder* 'can/may', *ter de/que* 'have to' and *haver* 'have' in Contemporary European Portuguese (CEP) and in Old Portuguese (OP). Evidence from texts from 13th-15th centuries (data extracted from CIPM – Computerized Corpus of Medieval Portuguese) show that, in modal constructions, the modal selects an infinitive; in negative contexts, negation must precede the modal; and there is obligatory clitic climbing out of the infinitival domain. At first sight, these properties favour an analysis of modals as verbs selecting for a restructuring vP complement (Wurmbrand, 2001), with no evidence of the presence of functional projections in the infinitival domain. However, a closer analysis shows that certain modals are often followed by a preposition-like element, which is evidence of the existence of (at most) one functional projection in the infinitival domain, hosting this element.

It is in the mid-15th century that the first signs of change begin to appear: the very few examples of cliticization in the infinitival domain (although not yet of negation) suggest that modal verbs gradually begin to acquire the double selection properties which they exhibit in CEP (Gonçalves, 1999), where, on a par with the restructuring properties which characterise them in OP (evidence of a single sentential domain), they may behave as non-restructuring verbs, allowing for the occurrence of negation and clitics in the embedded domain. We propose that, in this case, modal verbs select TP complements, with Tense in the infinitival domain being dependent on Tense from the upper clause, thus explaining the effects of referential dependency which characterize the infinitival complements of modals (Gonçalves et al., 2009).

In this talk, we will show that the differences we observe in modal constructions between OP and CEP do not correlate with any differences in the semantic values of the modals (Hacquard, 2009); rather, they may be explained purely in terms of properties of the functional structure, which are related to selectional properties of the verbs in question.

References