Deriving modal flavour in Turkmen
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In this talk I develop a semantics for the Turkmen strong modal forms depicted in Table 1:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>DEONTIC/EPISTEMIC MODAL FLAVOUR; (LOGICAL CONSEQUENCE)</th>
<th>Verb + -maly/-meli</th>
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<tr>
<td>CIRCUMSTANTIAL MODAL FLAVOUR; (LOGICAL CONSISTENCY)</td>
<td>Converb + bilmek</td>
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Data from in-context elicitation reveals that in Turkmen, deontic and epistemic modal meanings are consistently expressed with –maly/-meli as in (1)-(2), while circumstantial modality is expressed with the verb bilmek as in (3) (contexts not shown):

(1) mixmaan-lar on-dan öng git-meli-di-ler. (deontic)
guest-PL ten-ABL before go.NEC-PST.3PL
‘The guests had to leave before 10.’

(2) Dewlet-ting it-i gaty uly bol-maly. (epistemic)
Dewlet-POS dog-ACC very big COP-NEC
‘Dewlet’s dog must be really big.’

(3) hawwa, bu gaawyn-lar bärde üth-ip bil-jär-ler. (circumstantial)
yes DEM melon-PL here grow-CV MOD-IMPF-3PL
‘Yes, these melons can (definitely) grow here.’

However, cross-linguistically this way of categorizing the modal base is atypical; the more typical pattern is for a split to occur between epistemic modals on the one hand and ‘root’ modals (including circumstantials) on the other, where the former are structurally higher than the latter (Hacquard 2009).

Rather than claiming Turkmen to be exceptional, I argue that modals in Turkmen are lexically unspecified for modal flavour and that any apparent split between deontic/epistemic and circumstantial modal flavour in Turkmen arises indirectly. In particular, I show that we can account for the Turkmen pattern by adapting Kratzer’s (2012) analysis of English ‘must’ and ‘can’ for –maly/-meli and bilmek, respectively. On this type of analysis, modals take two arguments: a proposition (their scope) and a function from worlds to premise sets (their restriction; also referred to as a ‘conversational background’). The modal –maly/-meli is used to assert that the proposition is entailed by the premise set, while bilmek is used to assert that the proposition is consistent with the premise set. An interesting implication of this analysis is that modals can lexicalize the manner in which inferences are made.

References