

The Variable-Force Root Modal in Laz is Gradable

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In this talk, I document the syntactic and semantic properties of the modal suffix *-oni* in Laz (an endangered South Caucasian (Kartvelian) language spoken in Turkey/Türkiye). On the syntactic side, the verbal suffix *-oni* constructs nonfinite predicates that serve both attributive and predicative functions in the language, akin to *for*-infinitives in English. Nevertheless, *-oni* is a semantically specialized form, systematically contributing a variable-force prioritizing modal. Notably, the force variability of *-oni* also survives under negation, suggesting structural ambiguity. I argue that *-oni* denotes a gradable modal, as evidenced by its ability to participate in comparative structures. An account of variable-force modals based on degree semantics (Grano, 2024) not only explains its variable-force nature but also accounts for how different syntactic contexts restrict it, in line with the Determiner-Modal Generalization (Bhatt, 1999; Hackl & Nissenbaum, 2012).