Ways of Expressing Ability in Secwepemctsín*

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Abstract: This paper presents a discussion of two separate modals in Secwepemctsín: *xwent* and *xil*. We show that in many contexts they appear semantically identical and express ability. We then present how the modal forms are constrained and how they differ, reflecting on the challenges the empirical facts present for our understanding of ability modals, as well as for composition with (in)transitivizing morphology.

Keywords: modality, limited control, semantics, actuality entailment, Secwepemctsín

1 Introduction

In this paper we describe an interesting and puzzling pattern in Secwepemctsín at the intersection of modality, aspect, and the Salishan limited control system. We present various data concerning the expression of ability — that someone is or is not capable of some action — in Secwepemctsín. There are two ways of expressing ability in Secwepemctsín. The first is the modal predicate *xwent*, and the second one is various manifestations of *xil*:[1]

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[1] 1 = first person, 2 = second person, 3 = third person, CIRC = circumstantial modal, COMP = complementizer, COND = conditional, CTR = control, D/C = determiner/complementizer, DEM = demonstrative, DET = determiner, DIM = diminutive, DIST = distal, EMPH = emphatic, ERG = ergative, FUT = future, IMM = immediate, INCH = inchoative, IRR = irrealis, LC = limited control, LC.MID = limited control intransitive, LOC = locative, MID = middle, NEC = necessity, NEG = negative, NMLZ = nominalizer, OBJ = object, OBL = oblique, PL = plural, POSS = possessive, PST = past, Q = question particle, RPRT = reportative, SBJV = subjunctive, SG = singular, STAT = stativizer, TR = transitive. In the Secwepemctsín examples, we use practical orthography of the language in the top line, which results in some clitics being presented as free morphemes. The gloss line includes detailed morpheme boundaries. Material which is underlyingly present but has been deleted by a regular phonological process is marked by square brackets [...] in the gloss line. Clitics are indicated with equal signs (=), and suffixes with hyphens (-). Furthermore, 'vf' stands for volunteered form by the consultant, 'sf' stands for suggested or supplied form by the elicitor. Examples that have been elicited by the author are marked with (i) the date that these data points were elicited, and (ii) the initials of the consultant who provided the example.

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(1) *Context: Asking someone who knows about the climate of California if a soapberry bush could grow there.*

    xwénten   k sḱults   re sxúsem   ne California?
    xwént=en   k=s-ḱult-s   re=sxúsem   ne=California
    CIRC=Q   D/C=NMLZ-grow-3POSS   DET=soapberry LOC=California
    'Can soapberry grow in California?'   (Oliver 2021:297)

(2) *Context: Bruce never smoked and dried sockeye before, so he had to work for a long time to master it and to have the ability to do it.*

    q̇7es   re Bruce   eystéll s**xelenwéllň**s   es ḱécens
    q̇7es   re=Bruce eystéll s-**xel-nwéllň**-s   e=s-ḱéc-en[-t]-s
    long.time DET=Bruce finally NMLZ-xil-LC.MID-3POSS COMP=NMLZ-dry-CTR[-TR]-3ERG
       re sqlelten7úẇi.
       re=sqlelten-7ú7y
       DET=salmon-real
    'After a long time Bruce was able to smoke the sockeye salmon.'   (GD | sf | 12.06.2021)

In this paper, we show how modal *xwent* is puzzling since it is a modal that cannot be embedded. We then show how modal *xil*, combined with several suffixes, is puzzling in its relationship with different types of (in)transitivizing morphology — such as limited control middle morphology in (2), because *xil* behaves like a modal with some (in)transitivizing morphology but not with other. At the same time, the same (in)transitivizing morphology is never modal except with *xil*.

    With this paper, we aim to comprehensively present this puzzle of Secwepemctsín ability modals, articulate questions it poses for the extant literature, and propose new avenues for future research. Finally, by presenting these empirical facts in a clear and concise way, we hope to further efforts of language retention, documentation, and revitalization.

1.1 Language and methodology

The main language of study is Secwepemctsín, an Interior Salish language. It had at most 160 fluent L1 speakers remaining at the time of writing of Ignace and Ignace (2017) and Gessner et al. (2022), although that number is now considerably lower and the language is critically endangered. Secwepemctsín comprises two main dialects (Western and Eastern; Ignace and Ignace 2017; Kuipers 1974) encompassing speech communities in the Central and Southern Interior of British Columbia between the Fraser River and the Rocky Mountains. There is urgency to continue and increase the level of documentation of Secwepemctsín, as to support the active community efforts to retain and revitalize these languages.

    Unless otherwise indicated, the data from Secwepemctsín are drawn from fieldwork by the authors. Data collection took place both virtually through Zoom and through face-to-face elicitations, and employed standard fieldwork methodologies (Bochnak and Matthewson 2020; Matthewson 2004). The vast majority of elicitation tasks involved setting up a relevant context of use. Sporadically, visual aids such as pictures were used to support context tracking (Burton and Matthewson 2015).

2 Different modals, overlapping use

2.1 The versatility of modal *xwent*

The predicate *xwent*, when followed by an 'irrealis' *k* or *e=s* subordinate clause, is one of the primary ways of expressing ability in Secwepemctsín.[2]

(3) a. **xwent** (ri7) **k** scwentés.
    xwent (ri7) **k**=s-cwe-n-t-és
    CIRC (EMPH) D/C.IRR=NMLZ-lift-CTR-TR-3POSS
    'He or she can lift it.' (MJ | sf | 2.16.2022)

  b. **xwent** (ri7) **es** cwentés.
    xwent (ri7) **e=s**-cwe-n-t-és
    CIRC (EMPH) COMP=NMLZ-lift-CTR-TR-3ERG
    'He or she can lift that.' (MJ | sf | 2.16.2022)

The uses of modal *xwent* extend beyond ability, however: it is used as a general marker for circumstantial possibility. This includes deontic possibility (permission) or pure circumstantial possibility.

(4) *Context: You are going for a job interview and you are not sure what to do with your bag. The receptionist outside the office tells you that it is fine to take your bag into the interview with you, but you can also leave it in the waiting room.*

xwent k skwenc   re7 ctéckeṅten,   ell **xwent**
xwent k=s-kwen[-n-t]-c   re=7-ctéckeṅten   ell **xwent**
CIRC D/C.IRR=NMLZ-take[-CTR-TR]-2SG.ERG DET=2SG.POSS-backpack and CIRC
    k sllwélenc   ne7élye.
    k=s-llwél-en[-t]-c   ne7élye
    D/C.IRR=NMLZ-leave.behind-CTR[-TR]-2SG.ERG here
'You can take your backpack, and/but you can leave it here.' (RI | vf | 8.21.2021)

(5) *Context: A child is playing with a ball near a strong river, and you want to warn them that the river could take the ball away.*

crelralétkwe   re setétkwe. **xwent** k skwewts   re7 st'eqwméke7.
c-relral-étkwe   re=setétkwe **xwent** k=s-kwewt-s   re=7-st'eqwméke7
LOC-strong-water DET=river   CIRC D/C.IRR=NMLZ-float-3POSS DET=2SG.POSS-ball
'The river is rough/swift. Your ball could float away.' (MJ | sf | 3.16.2022)

However, *xwent* cannot be used with a modal meaning under negation or in the antecedent of a conditional. Rather than being ungrammatical, *xwent* in these constructions simply means 'fast'. 'Fast' is the other meaning of the predicate *xwent*, and the meaning shared by its cognates across Salish.[3]

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[2] The modal use of *xwent* is not described in Kuipers (1974).

[3] *x̌ʷəm* in St'át'imcets (Van Eijk 2013:317), *x̌ʷəŋ* in Saanich (Montler 2018:832), and *x̌ʷəm* in Hul'q'umi'num' (Bätscher 2014:23) and Downriver Halkomelem (Suttles 2004:456). Kuipers (2002:199) traces the root √x̌ʷən 'fast' to Proto-Interior Salish, but the forms found in Coast Salish suggest a Proto-Salish connection.

(6) *Context: Watching a rock-lifting competition, expressing disbelief that the current competitor will be able to lift that rock.*

    a. #ta7 k s**xwent**s   k scwentés.

       ta7 k=s-**xwent**-s   k=s-cwe-n-t-és

       NEG D/C.IRR=NMLZ-fast–3POSS D/C.IRR=NMLZ-lift-CTR-TR-3ERG

     #'He didn't lift it fast.'   (MJ | sf | 02.16.2022)

      Intended meaning: 'He can't lift it.'

    b.   ta7 k s**xenwéń**s   es cwentés.

       ta7 k=s-**xe[l]-nwéń[-t]**-s   e=s-cwe-n-t-és

       NEG D/C.IRR=NMLZ-**xil**-LC**[-TR]**–3POSS COMP=NMLZ-lift-CTR-TR-3ERG

      'He is unable to lift it.'   (MJ | sf | 02.16.2022)

(7) *Context: Your friend mentions that she needs help with something tomorrow. You want to help her, but you are busy tomorrow and you don't know if you'll be able to go.*

  #e   **xwent** ken snens,

  e   **xwent** k=n-s-ne\<n>s

  COND fast   D/C.IRR=1SG.POSS-NMLZ-go\<DIM>

         me7   knúcwentsen.

         me7   knúcw-en[-t]-ts-en

       CIRC.NEC help-CTR[-TR]-2SG.OBJ-1SG.ERG

  #'If I should go quickly, I will help you.'

  Intended meaning: 'If I can go, I will help you.'

  Consultant's comment: "With the *e* [conditional marker] there, it means 'If I should go quickly.'
  If you take the *e* away, it means 'I can go.'"   (MJ | sf | 04.06.2022)

    The consultant's comment in (7) makes it clear that the modal meaning of *xwent* is incompatible with the presence of the conditional marker. It remains unclear why exactly *xwent* loses its modal meaning in these environments.

2.2   Single-purpose modal *xil*

Three forms of the root *xil* — *xilt, xelnwéń*, and *xelnwéllń* — can be used to express ability in Secwepemctsín.

(8) *Context: You hear a noise in the middle of the night, so you go out of the house to investigate with someone. It is pitch black outside, and you can't see anything at all, so you ask the other person if she can see at all.*

  xenwéllńen-k   te7 swíkem?

  xe[l]-nwéllń=en=k   te=7-s-wík-em

  xil-LC.MID=Q=2SG.SBJV COMP=2SG.POSS-NMLZ-see-MID

  'Are you able to see?'   (RI | vf | 04.12.2021)

The status of the -*t* suffix on *xil-t* is unclear, but -*nweṅ[-t]* is the limited control transitive suffix, and -*nwellṅ* is the limited control middle suffix.

These forms can occur under negation with their modal meanings intact, unlike *xwent*. This is the canonical way of expressing *in*ability in Secwepemctsín.

(9) a. ta7 k s**xil**ts   es cw7ims
         ta7 k=s-**xil**-t-s   e=s-cw<7>-ím-s
         NEG D/C.IRR=NMLZ-xil-IMM–3POSS COMP=NMLZ-lift<INCH>-MID-3POSS
         tek scencénc.
         te-k=s<cen>cénc
         DET.OBL-IRR=rock<PL>
         'He cannot lift rocks.'   (MJ | vf | 03.09.2022)

     b. ta7 k s**xenwéṅ**s   es cwentés.
         ta7 k=s-**xe[l]-nwéṅ[-t]**-s   e=s-cwe-n-t-és
         NEG D/C.IRR=NMLZ-xil-LC[-TR]-3POSS COMP=NMLZ-lift-CTR-TR-3ERG
         'He is unable to lift it/them.'   (MJ | sf | 02.16.2022)

     c. ta7 k s**xenwéllṅ**s   es cwentés.
         ta7 k=s-**xe[l]-nwéllṅ**-s   e=s-cwe-n-t-és
         NEG D/C.IRR=NMLZ-xil-LC.MID-3POSS COMP=NMLZ-lift-CTR-TR-3ERG
         'He is incapable of lifting it/them.'   (RI | vf | 05.28.2021)

Unlike *xwent*, however, the forms of *xil* can *only* be used to express (in)ability, not other forms of possibility.

(10) *Context: A group of children are eyeing some* sxusem *(soapberry ice cream) at a party, and you want to tell them they're allowed to have some.*
      #re skwimé7melt **xenwéṅ**s   es íllens   re sxúsem.
      re=skwimé7melt **xe[l]-nwéṅ**[-t]-s e=s=7íllens   re=sxúsem
      DET=child(ren)   xil-LC-TR-3.ERG   COMP=NMLZ=eat-3.POSS DET=soapberry
      Intended meaning: 'The children can eat the sxusem.'
      Consultant's comment: "You're saying 'the child was capable of eating the sxusem.'"
                                                                      (RI | sf | 11.21.2021)

(11) *Context: Sander is going for a run, but it's storming outside. I am trying to warn him of the dangers.*
      #**xenwéṅ**s   es csepúlecws   te tsktṡus!
      xe[l]-nwéṅ[-t]-s e=s-csepúlecw-s   te=tsktṡus
      xil-LC-TR-3.ERG   COMP=NMLZ-fall-3.POSS DET.OBL=cliff
      Intended meaning: 'You could fall off a cliff!'
      Consultant's comment: "[You're saying] he's able to fall off a cliff. Kind of weird."
                                                                      (RI | sf | 11.21.2023)

3 New questions

3.1 Limited control on *xil* vs. lexical verbs

An interesting fact about the modal use of *xil* is the lack of an actuality entailment in all of its manifestations. Particularly, when *xil* composes with limited control marking, both transitive and middle, event actualization is not required:

(12) ***xil* and limited control transitive — no event actualization**

    a.   re Henry   **xenwénˀs**   es ctsíqens
        re=Henry   **xel-nwénˀ**[-t]-s   e=s-c-tsíq-en-[t]-s
        DET=Henry   xil-LC[-TR]-3ERG   COMP=NMLZ-LOC-dig-CTR[-TR]-3ERG
            re ctsipwens.
            re=c-tsipwen-s
            DET=LOC-root.cellar-3POSS
        'Henry is able to dig his cache pit/root cellar.'
        Consultant's comment: "He's capable but we don't know if he has done it yet."
                                                    (RI | sf | 11.21.2023)

    b.   re Julia   **xelenwénˀs**   es ctsíqens   re ctsípwen
        re=Julia   **xel-nwénˀ**[-t]-s   e=s-c-tsíq-en-[t]-s   re=c-tsípwen
        DET=Julia   xil-LC[-TR]-3ERG   COMP=NMLZ-LOC-dig-CTR[-TR]-3ERG   DET-LOC-root.cellar
            ḱémell   ta7   k swi7s   ey.
            ḱémell   ta7   k=s-wi7-s   ey
            however NEG DET.IRR=NMLZ-finish-3POSS yet
        'Julia is able to dig a root cellar but she hasn't finished yet.'   (JA | sf | 11.20.2023)

(13) ***xil* and limited control middle — no event actualization**

    re Henry   **xenwéllň**   es ctsíqens   re ctsipwens.
    re=Henry   **xel-nwéllň**   e=s-c-tsíq-en[-t]-s   re=c-tsipwen-s
    DET=Henry   xil-LC.MID   COMP=NMLZ-LOC-dig-CTR[-TR]-3ERG   DET=LOC-root.cellar-3POSS
    'Henry is able to dig his cache pit/root cellar.'
    Consultant's comment: "Same as the other one [we don't know if the event has taken place]."
                                                    (RI | sf | 11.21.2023)

On lexical verbs, however, some form of event actualization is entailed with limited control marking, such that the limited control transitive entails event culmination and the limited control entails a partial change of state (Nederveen 2024), which is illustrated in (14) and (15):

(14) **Limited control transitive — culmination entailed**

a. #re Henry   **ctsiqenwén̓**s   re tsípwen,   k̓émell   ta7

   re=Henry   c-**tsiq-nwén̓**[-t]-s   re=tsípwen   k̓émell   ta7

   DET=Henry   LOC-dig-LC[-TR]-3ERG   DET=earthen.cellar   however   NEG

     k swi7s.

     k=s-wi7-s

     D/C.IRR=NMLZ-finish-3POSS

   Intended meaning: 'Henry dug an earthen cellar but has not finished.'

   Consultant's comment: "You can't say *ctsiqenwén̓s* if he's not finished yet."

                                             (MJ | sf | 02.23.2022)

b. *Context: Bruce hunted deer and froze the meat. The freezer broke before it was fully frozen.*

   #Bruce   **sulenwén̓**s   re tṡi7,   k̓émell   ta7   k stsult.s

   Bruce   **sul-nwén̓**[-t]-s   re=tṡi7   k̓émell   ta7   k=s-t-sul-t-s

   Bruce   freeze-LC[-TR]-3ERG   DET=deer   however   NEG   DET=NMLZ-STAT-freeze-IMM-3POSS

     ey.

     ey

     still

   Intended meaning: 'Bruce froze the meat but it wasn't yet frozen.'

   Consultant's comment: "Something is going on here...You can't put *sulenwén̓s re tṡi7*, because it says [the meat] froze."   (GD | sf | 10.27.2021)

(15) **Limited control middle — partial change of state entailed**

a. #Henry   mekwmékw   re seḱwmín̓s.   Henry   **nik̓enwélln̓**   te tetétxmen   k̓émell

   Henry   mekwmékw   re=seḱwmín̓-s   Henry   **nik̓-nwélln̓**   te=te~tétxmen   k̓émell

   Henry   dull   DET=knife-3POSS   Henry   cut-LC.MID   DET.OBL=PL~fin   however

     ta7   k stsnikníks   re tetétxmen.

     ta7   k=s-ts-<nik>ník̓-s   re=te~tétxmen

     NEG   D/C.IRR=NMLZ-STAT-cut-3POSS   DET=PL~fin

   Intended meaning: 'Henry's knife is dull. Henry was cutting some but none of the fins got cut.'

   Consultant's comment: "You are contradicting yourself here, because you are saying that some fins got cut."   (MJ | sf | 02.16.2022)

b. #Sander   **q̓wlenwélln̓**   te peták,   k̓émell   re ck̓weltsentéltens   q̓uwúp-uke.

   Sander   **q̓wl-nwélln̓**   te=peták   k̓émell   re=c-k̓weltsenélten-s   q̓uwúp=ekwe

   Sander   roast-LC.MID   DET.OBL=potato   however   DET=LOC-stove-3POSS   broken=RPRT

     Yerí7   ul peták stsixw   ey.

     ye-rí7   ul peták s[t]-tsixw ey

     DEM-DIST   so potato STAT-raw   still

   Intended meaning: 'Sander roasted some potatoes, but his stove was broken. That's why the potatoes are still raw.'

   Consultant's comment: "No, they cannot all be raw still, because you say he was able to."   (GD | sf | 08.24.2022)

The contrasting findings between *xil* and lexical verbs in their composition with limited control marking poses interesting questions for our understanding of both the nature of limited control and the nature of *xil*.

In previous literature on limited control in Secwepemctsín (Nederveen 2024), limited control is analyzed and understood as purely aspectual and void of any modal meaning. The data above suggest that there may be at least some modal meaning associated with limited control. Alternatively, if limited control is not modal, we would have to adopt the view that *xil* is a modal verb scoping over limited control morphology, cancelling its aspectual contribution. This is an appealing option, since the only environment in which limited control gets a modal meaning is when it composes with *xil*.

Moreover, based on example (9a), which shows that *xil* with marking other than limited control is modal, we have some evidence that points in the direction of *xil* being modal, and limited control scoping lower. However, this is not the complete picture, because *xil* with the middle marker seems to have no modal semantics at all:

(16) tá7wes   ṫri7   ke7 s**xilem!**
      tá7=wes   ṫri7   k=e7-s-**xil-em**
      NEG=3.SBJV EMPH   D/C.IRR=2SG.POSS-NMLZ-xil-MID
      'Don't do it!'   (Kuipers 1974:82)

With control transitive marking on *xil*, the root appears to change to *xill* (no *xil-n* or *xil-t* with transitive morphology is attested), and we once again get no modal meaning:

(17) tá7wes   ṫri7   k s**xillt**c!
      tá7=wes   ṫri7   k=s-**xill[-n]-t**-c
      NEG=3.SBJV EMPH   D/C.IRR=NMLZ-xil[-CTR]-TR-2SG.ERG
      'Don't do it that way!'   (Kuipers 1974:82)

(18) m-**xíxllt**en   mell.
      m-**xí<x>ll[-n]-t**-n   mell
      PST-xil<DIM>[-CTR]-TR-1SG.ERG   already
      'I've done this before.'   (MJ | vf | 03.02.2022)

Given the forms above, it is difficult to argue that the root *xil* is contributing modal semantics by itself, otherwise we would expect *xil-em* to be modal as well.

Looking at all these facts, we are presented with a conundrum in which it is unclear how the aspectual and modal components of the limited control forms of *xil* interact precisely. We leave this question for future work.

3.2   What's the difference between *xil* forms?

As shown above, there are contexts where limited control marking is merely aspectual, determining the aspectual properties of its predicate. Within the category of limited control, there is the distinction between the limited control transitive, and the limited control middle. On lexical (non-modal) verbs, this distinction plays out as follows, according to Nederveen (2024):

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	Transitive	**Middle**
Limited Control	*Entail Culmination*	*Entail Partial Change of State*

Table 1: Aspectual contrast of limited control forms in Secwepemctsín

Essentially, the two different limited control forms have two different aspectual entailments. Transitive limited control entails culmination, whereas intransitive (middle) limited control entails a partial change of state (without culmination), which is illustrated in (14) and (15) above.

When limited control morphology composes with *xil*, it appears that the aspectual contrasts between the transitive and middle forms is neutralized because neither form carries an actuality entailment, which was shown in (12) and (13). Given that it was the varying extents to which event actualization was entailed by each form, it has become increasingly difficult to detect any aspectual differences on *xil*-forms, if there are any. In our findings so far, *xilt*, *xelnwén̓*, and *xelnwelln̓* appear largely interchangeable: they express ability unembedded and inability under negation. The translations given in (9) (repeated below as (19)) give rise to very similar interpretations.

(19) a.   ta7   k s**xil**ts   es cw7ims
               ta7   k=s-**xil**-t-s   e=s-cw<7>-ím-s
               NEG   D/C.IRR=NMLZ-xil-IMM–3POSS   COMP=NMLZ-lift<INCH>-MID-3POSS
                 tek scencénc.
                 te-k=s<cen>cénc
                 DET.OBL-IRR=rock<PL>
               'He cannot lift rocks.'   (MJ | vf | 03.09.2022)

      b.   ta7   k s**xenwén̓**s   es cwentés.
               ta7   k=s-**xe[l]-nwén̓[-t]**-s   e=s-cwe-n-t-és
               NEG   D/C.IRR=NMLZ-xil-LC[-TR]-3POSS   COMP=NMLZ-lift-CTR-TR-3ERG
               'He is unable to lift it/them.'   (MJ | sf | 02.16.2022)

      c.   ta7   k s**xenwélln̓**s   es cwentés.
               ta7   k=s-**xe[l]-nwélln̓**-s   e=s-cwe-n-t-és
               NEG   D/C.IRR=NMLZ-xil-LC.MID-3POSS   COMP=NMLZ-lift-CTR-TR-3ERG
               'He is incapable of lifting it/them.'   (RI | vf | 05.28.2021)

The slight difference in translation between *xelnwén̓* and *xelnwélln̓* hinted at a difference in duration of inability (for instance, temporary inability vs. permanent inability), but we found no such difference in our testing: both forms are consistent with temporary inability, as (20) shows below.

(20) a.   re pexyéwt   me7 ctsíqenses   re ctsípwens
               re=pexyéwt   me7 c-tsíq-en[-t]-s=es   re=c-tsípwen-s
               DET=tomorrow   FUT   LOC-dig-CTR-TR-3ERG=3SBJV   DET=LOC-root.cellar-3POSS
                 re Henry   k̓émell   ta7   k=s**xenwén̓**s   pyin te sitq̓t.
                 re=Henry   k̓émell   ta7   k=s-**xe[l]-nwén̓[-t]**-s   pyin te=sitq̓t
                 DET=Henry   however   NEG   DET.IRR=NMLZ-xil-LC[-TR]-3ERG   now   DET.OBL=day
               'Henry will dig his root cellar tomorrow but he is not able to do it today.'
                                                 (RI | sf | 11.21.2023)

b. re pexyéwt me7 ctsíqenses re ctsípwens
re=pexyéwt me7 c-tsíq-en[-t]-s=es re=c-tsípwen-s
DET=tomorrow FUT LOC-dig-CTR-TR-3ERG=3SBJV DET=LOC-root.cellar-3POSS

    re Henry ḱémell ta7 k sxenwéllṅs pyin te sitq̓t.
    re=Henry ḱémell ta7 k=s-**xe[l]-nwéllṅ**-s pyin te=sitq̓t
    DET=Henry however NEG DET.IRR=NMLZ-xil-LC.MID-3POSS now DET.OBL=day

'Henry will dig his root cellar tomorrow but he is not able to do it today.'

(RI | sf | 11.21.2023)

However, even though the aspectual differences between the limited control transitive and middle are neutralized when they compose with *xil*, we are aware of one difference in distributional restrictions. Namely, we found that *xelnwéllṅ* cannot appear under the future marker *me7*,[4] while *xelnwéṅ* can.

(21) a. *Henry me7 xenwéllṅ es ctsíqens re tsípwen.
    Henry me7 **xe[l]-nwéllṅ** e=s-ctsíq-n[-t]-s re=tsípwen
    Henry FUT **xil-LC.MID** COMP=NMLZ-dig-CTR-TR-3.ERG DET=root.cellar
    Intended meaning: 'Henry will be able to dig a root cellar.' (RI | sf | 11.21.2023)

   b. Henry me7 xenwéṅs es ctsíqens re tsípwen.
    Henry me7 **xe[l]-nwéṅ[-t]-s** e=s-ctsíq-n[-t]-s re=tsípwen
    Henry FUT **xil-LC-TR-3.ERG** COMP=NMLZ-dig-CTR-TR-3.ERG DET=root.cellar
    'Henry will be able to dig a root cellar.' (RI | sf | 11.21.2023)

At this point, we lack sufficient evidence to conclude whether this difference is driven by the aspectual difference, or by something else. Whether there are any other syntactic differences, or any semantic differences at all is also unclear at this point.

The precise way in which the two different manifestations of limited control differ when composing with *xil* presents an interesting area for future work. Understanding where the contrasts lie in this area would not only shed light on *xil*-forms, it would also contribute to a more thorough understanding of control and limited control (cf. Nederveen 2024).

4 Implications and conclusions

This paper is part of an ongoing investigation on the syntax and semantics of ability and limited control in Secwepemctsín. We have discussed several ways of expressing ability in Secwepemctsín and described the analytical puzzle as it stands. Moreover, we have added more empirical knowledge related to the use of Secwepemctsín and the expression of ability in the language, and we hope to answer the remaining questions in the future. Specifically, we have identified the following pressing questions:

1. What differentiates *xwent* and *xil* in their modal uses, if anything?

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[4] Oliver (2023) argues that *me7* is actually a more general circumstantial necessity modal, as it has deontic readings in addition to marking future. Whether this plays a role in how *xelnwéṅ* may scope under *me7*, while *xelnwéllṅ* may not, remains to be seen.

2. What is the source of the modal meaning of *xil*-modals?

3. Is limited control contributing any modal meaning to *xil*-modals, and how does that affect our understanding of limited control on lexical verbs?

Answering these questions, or any part of them, will have important implications not only for our understanding of Secwepemctsín, but also the semantics of modality and limited control from a cross-Salish perspective and the semantics of ability modality from a cross-linguistic perspective.

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