

In English, a number of tests distinguish “strong” and “weak” deontic necessity modals (namely “strong” *must* and *have to* vs. “weak” *should* and *ought*). Two of such tests are shown in 1 and 2. In English, the distinction seems so real that there is considerable formal literature on what the underlying semantic property might be (e.g., [Copley, 2006], [Rubinstein, 2012]). In the typological literature, the distinction between strong and weak necessity is also assumed to be universal (cf. [Bybee et al., 1994], a.o.)

(1) **Strengthening test:**

- a. You **should** wash your hands. In fact, you **have to**.
- b. ??You **have to** wash your hands. In fact, you **should**.

(2) **Ashfield test:**

Context: there are many routes to Ashfield, with their pros and contras
To go to Ashfield, you ^{OK}**ought to**/??**have to** take Route 2.

Against the accepted view, I argue that necessity deontics do not form categories of weak vs. strong. The argument is two-fold. First, on data from East Slavic I show that necessity deontics need not divide neatly into two classes. If they did, we would have seen a complementary distribution of modals in “weak necessity tests”, as in English. Table 3, summarizing the results of weak necessity tests for six Russian deontics, shows nothing close.

	Neg weak	Neg str	Stren weak	Stren str	Ashfield	Bridge	Insur-str	Insur-weak	Coffee
nado	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
nužno	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
dolžna	+	+	+	+	?	+	+	+	-
objazana	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	-	-
sleduet	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
stoiť	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+

Second, when we look more closely into English data, their complexities become apparent. In the non-formal-semantic literature, the notion of strength is rarely assumed to produce two neat categories. Instead, different authors speak of relative strength, and sometimes of loose groupings. For example, [Kangasniemi, 1992] reports an experiment where 150 native speakers ranked 6 Finnish necessity deontics for strength, with the mean values varying from 8.2 to 4.5 (out of 10) gradually, not bimodally.

From the formal-semantic perspective, things are not as simple either. Formally, we can prove that two modals differ in strength rather than in modal flavor iff they have different interpretations when their flavor is fixed. But [von Stechow and Iatridou, 2008] argue precisely that the flavor is not exactly the same for weak and strong necessity modals: according to them, weak necessity ones use an additional ordering source bringing in a special flavor, namely that of non-coercive, non-strict rules. But if the flavors cannot be fixed, we have no reliable formal test. Moreover, when we do manage to fix the flavor strictly, “weak” *should* and *ought* may actually appear in contexts where no weakness of any sort is implied: e.g., when you read that “*all documents **should** be received by June 1 for full consideration*”, this is just as strict as statements with *must*.

So how do we explain the observed facts if the “weak necessity theory” doesn’t help? I show that we actually do not need such a theory, as the behavior of different modals in “weak necessity tests” may be correctly predicted from their basic properties, most importantly the types of modal bases and ordering sources they may have. For example, 1a is fine when the first modal may express the modal flavor of advice, and the second, that of deontic necessity. In English, *must* and *have to* are not particularly common in performative advice statements, so they are banned from the first, “weak” position in the test. In similar ways, other contexts are shown to test for basic modal properties that the theory of modality needs to employ anyway. No additional distinction between weak and strong necessity deontics is needed.

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