

Exceptional Imperative Constructions are Semantically Regular

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Main Issues

- “Exceptional” imperative constructions are cited one language at a time.
 - Past tense imperatives
 - Negative commands with a dummy imperative verb
- Rare, but occur in several languages.

Proposal

- “Exceptional” constructions encode ordinary semantic meaning.
 - Past tense imperatives → counterfactual preferences
 - Dummy imperative verbs → grammaticalized illocutionary meaning

Preference Semantics

- Dynamic semantic system
- Builds on Inquisitive Semantics (Groenendijk and Roelofsen 2009)

“declaratives provide information by eliminating worlds ... interrogatives introduce alternatives by grouping those worlds into sets, *imperatives order alternatives*.” (Starr 2012:2, emphasis original)

Sentence type	Preference added
▷ declarative	$\langle p, \emptyset \rangle$
? interrogative	
polar question	$\langle p, \emptyset \rangle, \langle \neg p, \emptyset \rangle$
Wh-question	$\langle p, \emptyset \rangle, \langle q, \emptyset \rangle, \langle r, \emptyset \rangle, \dots$
! imperative	$\langle p, \neg p \rangle$

Declarative Update ▷*p* (Starr 2012:27)

1. Take every preference in *R* and intersect both of its members with *p*
2. “Highlight” the asserted proposition by adding the preference $\langle p, \emptyset \rangle$

$$R[\triangleright p] = \{ \langle a[p], a'[p] \rangle \mid \langle a, a' \rangle \in R : a[p] = \emptyset \} \cup \{ \langle c_R[p], \emptyset \rangle \}$$

Imperative Update !*p* (Starr 2012:26)

1. Admit all of the preferences in *R*
2. Introduce a global preference for all the *p*-worlds over the $\neg p$ -worlds
3. Introduce local preferences within the already existing alternatives in *R*

$$R[!p] = R \cup \{ \langle c_R[p], c_R - c_R[p] \rangle \} \cup \{ \langle a[p], a - a[p] \rangle \mid a \in C_R \ \& \ a[p] = \emptyset \}$$

Past Tense Imperatives

- (1) *Syrian Arabic* (Cowell 1964; Palmer 1986)
 kənt kōl lamma kənt fəl-bēt
 you.were eat+IMP when you.were in.the-house
 “You should have eaten when you were at home.”
- (2) *Estonian* (Aikhenvald 2010)
 tulnud õhtul õigel ajal koju
 come+PAST=OPT evening+LOC.SG right+LOC.SG time+LOC.SG home
 “You should have come at a proper time in the evening.”
- (3) *Dutch* (Mastop 2005)
 Had je telefoonnummer dan ook niet aan die vent gegeven!
 Had your phone-number then also not to that guy give-PP
 “You shouldn’t have given your phone number to that guy.”

Past Tense Preferences

- Preference semantics permits counterfactual preferences (preferences which prefer propositions known to be untrue).
- The ability to prefer a past-tense proposition is a **morphosyntactic issue**.

(4) *Have read the book!

(5) Read the book yesterday!
 ≈ *You should have read the book already.* (in proper context)

- An utterance of (1) prefers a proposition *e*, “[the addressee] ate when [they] were at home.”

- (1) is felicitous in a context where $\neg e$ is common ground.

$$R_0 = \{ \langle W, \emptyset \rangle, \langle \neg e, \emptyset \rangle \}$$

$$R_1 = R_0[!e] = \{ \langle W, \emptyset \rangle, \langle \neg e, \emptyset \rangle, \langle e, \neg e \rangle \}$$

- The inclusion of the global preference $\langle e, \neg e \rangle$ in *R*₁ is licit even though $\langle \neg e, \emptyset \rangle, \langle e, \neg e \rangle$ cannot both be satisfied → **counterfactual interpretation**.

- N.B.: the local preference $\langle \neg e, \emptyset \rangle, \langle e, \neg e \rangle = \langle \emptyset, \emptyset \rangle$; this null preference is ignored.

- Uttering (1) in a context where *e* is common ground is less felicitous, because it introduces a *redundant, non-null* preference $\langle e, \emptyset \rangle$.

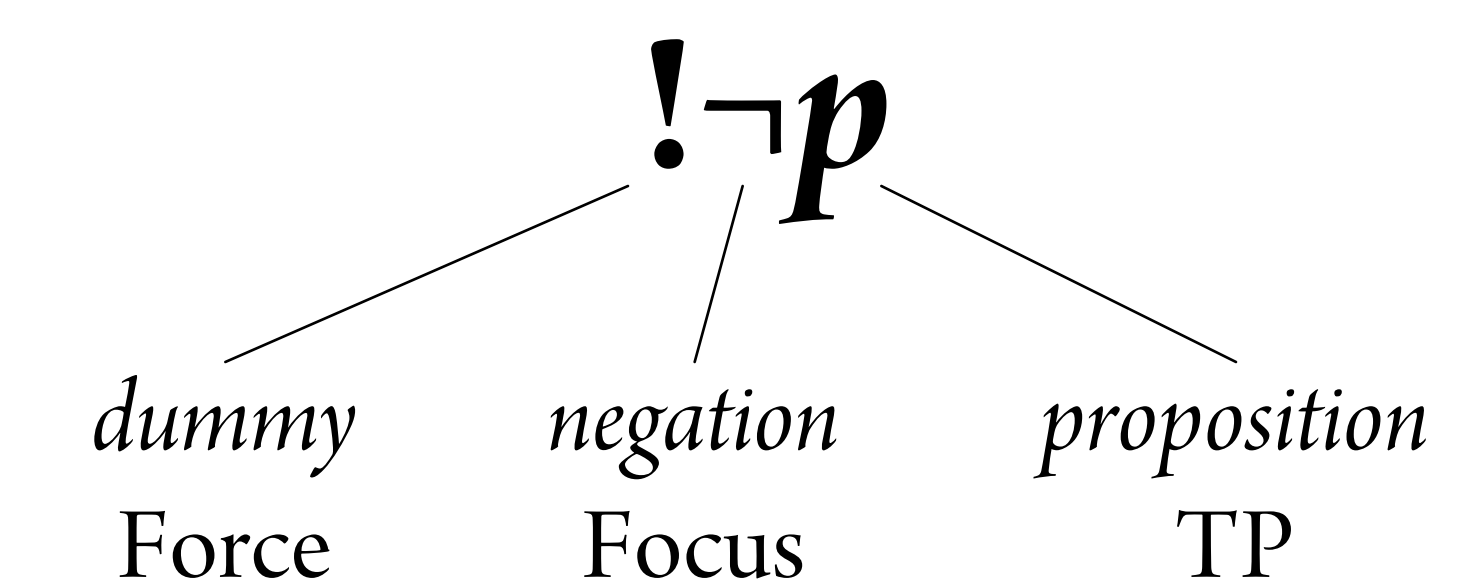
- The converse holds for (3), which prefers $\langle \neg g, g \rangle$.

Dummy Imperative Verbs

- (6) *Serbo-Croatian* (Szucsich 2010)
 Nemoj-te čita-ti novin-e!
 NEGIMP.2.PL read-INF papers-F.PL.ACC
 “Don’t read newspapers!”
- (7) *Latin* (Croft 1991)
 nōli amābō verberāre lapidem
 NEG.want.IMP I.pray beat.INF stone.ACC
 “Don’t beat a stone.”
- (8) *Welsh* (Willis 2013)
 Paid â gadael!
 NEG.2S with leave.INF
 “Don’t leave!”

Dummy Verbs are Non-Propositional

- Derived from verbs that originally meant ‘can’ (6), ‘want’ (7), and ‘stop’ (8).
- (6) ≠ “Don’t be able to read newspapers!”
- Dummy verbs are in the left periphery
 - attached to negation (6–7)
 - supplanting negation (8)
- Syntactically absorb imperative agreement.
- Semantically encode imperative force.



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