

# Performing A Wish

## Desiderative Assertions and Performativity

Cleo Condoravdi  
Palo Alto Research Center & Stanford University

Sven Lauer  
Department of Linguistics, Stanford University

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### Goals of this talk:

- Show that desiderative assertions, like imperatives and performatively used modals, can be used to perform a variety of speech acts
- Provide an analysis of the performative use of desideratives that derives the types of speech acts they can be used for
- Use this analysis as a guide for imperatives
- More generally, demonstrate that a class of performative effects can be analyzed as contextual inferences from a basic act of assertion under certain conditions

## 1 Imperatives

Central problem for semantic analyses of imperatives (in the formulation of Schwager (2006), as far as we know first appreciated in its entirety by Schmerling (1982)):

**The Problem of Functional Heterogeneity** Crosslinguistically, imperatives get associated with a rather heterogeneous range of speech act types (COMMANDS, WARNINGS, REQUESTS, ADVICE, CURSES, PERMISSIONS, PERMISSIONS, CONCESSIONS, ...).

- |     |    |  |                       |
|-----|----|--|-----------------------|
| (1) | a. | Stand at attention!                                  | (COMMAND)             |
|     | b. | Don't touch the hot plate!                           | (WARNING)             |
|     | c. | Hand me the salt, please.                            | (REQUEST)             |
|     | d. | When you get off the highway, make a right.          | (ADVICE)              |
|     | e. | Drop dead!   | (CURSE)               |
|     | f. | Have a cookie (if you want)!                         | (INVITATION)          |
|     | g. | Okay, go out and play!                               | (PERMISSION)          |
|     | h. | Right, do want want, if you think you are so clever! | (CONCESSION)          |
|     | i. | Get well soon!                                       | (WISH)                |
|     | j. | Please, don't have broken another vase!              | (WISH ABOUT THE PAST) |
|     | k. | [On the way to a blind date] Please, be blond!       | (ABSENT WISH)         |

The problem has two sides:

- Imperatives can realize a wide-range of speech-act types
- At the same time, there is a wide variety of speech-act types that cannot be realized by plain imperatives (e.g. ASSERTIONS, PROMISES, THREATS, ...)

- Imperatives can realize (at least) the speech-act types in (1), but not those mentioned in b., *in virtue of them being imperatives*.
- How can we capture the heterogeneity and systematic exclusion of speech act types associated with imperatives without disjunctively listing the different illocutionary forces in the semantics of an imperative operator?

## 2 Performative Uses of Modal Sentences

Well-known observation (at least since Kamp (1973)):

Modal sentences can be used both to *report* and to *bring about* obligations and permissions.

- |     |  |                    |
|-----|--|--------------------|
| (2) | [Tax lawyer to client]<br>You must report this donation as income.                     | (reportative use)  |
| (3) | [Lecturer to class]<br>The final assignment must be in my mailbox by six pm on Friday. | (performative use) |

- Strategy 1**
- Assume that modals are ambiguous between a reportative and a performative meaning (Kamp 1973, Kamp 1978, van Rooy 2000).
  - Alternatively, assume that modals can carry an optional 'performative' meaning component (in addition to its usual, propositional content) that gives rise to the performative effect in (3) (Portner 2007).
- Strategy 2** Assume that the semantics of **must** is constant across the two uses, and that the performative effect arises through pragmatic/interactional reasoning triggered by certain contextual conditions (Kamp 1978, Schwager 2006).

These two strategies can also be employed in the analysis of imperatives:

- Following Strategy 1b., one can simply assume that the meaning of an imperative consists of the additional meaning component that modals can have. Similarly, following Strategy 1a., one can assume that imperatives have the same meaning as modals on their performative reading.
- To follow Strategy 2 one would have to assume that the meaning of imperatives is distinct from that of modals (as imperatives do not have a descriptive use). Or so it would seem.

### 3 Imperatives as Performative Assertions

#### 3.1 Schwager (2006) on performative uses of modals: An assertoric account

Schwager (2006) proposes an 'assertoric' account of performative uses:

- Utterances of modal sentences are always assertions.
- If the context of utterance meets certain conditions, this will give rise to the performative effect.
- In particular, Schwager proposes the following conditions (adapted from Schwager (2006))<sup>1</sup>
  - the modal base is *realistic*
  - the ordering source is preference-related
  - the speaker is taken to have *perfect knowledge* of both modal base and ordering source,
  - the speaker is taken to consider possible both the prejacent and its negation,
  - the speaker considers the ordering source as a good guideline for action.

<sup>1</sup>In fact, we do not think that Schwager's contextual conditions are quite sufficient to ensure a performative effect. The missing condition, in our view, is a condition to the effect that prior to uttering the sentence, the speaker does not believe that it is *settled* that the asserted obligation obtains.

#### 3.2 Schwager (2006) on imperatives: Necessarily performative assertions

The assertoric account of modals enables Schwager to extend the analysis over to imperatives:

- Imperatives are assumed to simply be modal sentences.
- However, imperatives are modal sentences that can only be *performatively used*.
- To ensure this, Schwager assumes that (i)-(v) above are *felicity conditions* associated with imperatives on top of their modal meanings. This is intended to guarantee that any utterance of an imperative is performative.
- In addition, even though these felicity conditions can fail, if they are fulfilled, the update with the content of the imperative can never lead to inconsistency. This explains why imperatives cannot be called 'false', and hence why we have the intuition that they cannot be 'true', either.
- Her account also explains the similarity between performatively used modals and imperatives: The two are the same thing, except that while performatively used modals have the performative effect 'accidentally' (if the context is right), imperatives have it 'necessarily' (they can only be uttered if the context is right in the same sense).

#### 3.3 Schwager (2006) on functional heterogeneity

- On Schwager's account, the functional heterogeneity of imperatives is rooted in the *semantic underspecification* of modals.
- Speech-act categories play no role in the analysis; they come out as mere descriptive labels for classes of uses.
- In order to get some of the performative effects right, Schwager appeals to somewhat non-standard ordering sources ('what the speaker commands' for COMMANDS, for example).
- The idea that the functional heterogeneity arises from modal-like semantic underspecification is also endorsed by Portner (2007), who too expresses doubts about classical speech-act distinctions as analytical devices.

## 4 Performatively Used Desideratives: Data

- Many assertions about desires are plainly informative (or 'reportative').
  - Thus, a speaker who utters (4) may well have no intention other than informing that Susan is in a certain bouletic state,
  - and his utterance may well have no effects other than providing the hearer with this information<sup>2</sup>
- (4) Susan wants to marry a Swede. (No performative effect)
- But simple assertions of desires can be employed to bring about various performative effects, despite **want** not being a 'performative' verb in the classic sense (cf. # **I hereby want ...**):
- (5)
- |    |  |                       |
|----|--|-----------------------|
| a. | [Mother to child]                                    |                       |
|    | I want you to clean your room before playing.        | (COMMAND)             |
| b. | [Mother to child]                                    |                       |
|    | You do NOT want to touch that cookie!                | (PROHIBITION/WARNING) |
| c. | [Doctor to patient]                                  |                       |
|    | I want you to take these pills for a week.           | (ADVICE)              |
| d. | [Recipe]   |                       |
|    | You want to stir the mixture well.                   | (ADVICE)              |
| e. | [Affirming an offer]                                 |                       |
|    | No, really, I want you to take the last cigarette.   | (INVITATION)          |
| f. | [Among collaborators]                                |                       |
|    | I want you to write this up before our next meeting. | (REQUEST)             |
| g. | If it is that important to you, I want you to go.    | (CONCESSION)          |
- If the context is right, the sentences in (5a-g) can be used to perform the type of speech-act indicated in the labels on the right.
  - Intonational clues (symbolized here by the use of exclamation marks and capital letters) can help bring out the performative force. We see these as signaling certain features of the context rather than bringing about the performative effect.
  - Can these performative effects be analyzed as arising through a plain assertion of a speaker or hearer desire?
  - The next section spells out such an analysis.
  - Specifically, we will show how an assertion of sentences like (5a,c,d,e), under the right contextual conditions, can, in addition, provide information about
    - what the hearer is obligated to do. (COMMAND)
    - what the hearer should do in order to achieve a goal. (ADVICE)
    - what the hearer can do and still adhere to standards of politeness. (INVITATION)

<sup>2</sup>Of course, it is quite possible that (4) takes on an additional conduct-guiding implication in the right context, e.g. as a request that the addressee introduce some of his Swedish friends to Susan.

## 5 Performatively Used Desideratives: Analysis

### 5.1 Truth conditions for *want*

- We adopt (the static version of) Heim's (1992) analysis of **want**.
- An advantage of such an analysis over a 'classical' analysis that just quantifies over a set of optimal worlds, is that wanting is not closed under entailment.

Let

$\text{Dox}_a(w) := \{w' \mid w' \text{ is a doxastic alternative to } w \text{ for } a\}$

$\text{Sim}_w(p) := \{w' \in p \mid \text{there is no world in } p \text{ which resembles } w \text{ more than } w'\}$

$p <_w^a q$  iff at  $w$ ,  $a$  prefers any world in  $p$  to any world in  $q$

Truth conditions for **want** (Heim 1992):

$$w \in [a \text{ wants } \phi] \text{ iff for every } w' \in \text{Dox}_a(w) : \\ \text{Sim}_{w'}([\phi]) <_w^a \text{Sim}_{w'}(W \setminus [\phi])$$

Given the usual assumptions about similarity metrics, this boils down to

- (6)  $w \in [a \text{ wants } \phi]$  iff for all of  $a$ 's doxastic alternatives  $w'$  at  $w$ :
- if  $w' \notin [\phi]$  :  $a$  (strictly) prefers (at  $w$ ) a minimal change of  $w'$  to a  $[\phi]$ -world
  - if  $w' \in [\phi]$  :  $a$  (strictly) disprefers (at  $w$ ) a minimal change of  $w'$  to a non- $[\phi]$  world

that is, (4) will have the following truth-conditions:

- (7) For all of Susan's doxastic alternatives  $w$ :
- if Susan marries a Swede in  $w$ , she prefers  $w$  to any otherwise identical world in which she does not marry one.
  - if Susan does not marry Swede in  $w$ , she prefers any otherwise identical world in which she does marry one to  $w$ .

We assume that the *content* of all of the examples in (5) to be the truth conditions given here.

That is, we assume that the conventional effect of asserting (5a) is to remove all worlds  $w$  from the common ground for which the following is not true:

- (8) For all  $w' \in \text{Dox}_{\text{Speaker}}(w)$ :
- If  $w' \notin [\text{Addressee cleans his room}]$ : Speaker strictly prefers (at  $w$ ) a minimal change of  $w'$  to a world in which the addressee cleans his room.
  - If  $w' \in [\text{Addressee cleans his room}]$ : Speaker strictly disprefers (at  $w$ ) a minimal change of  $w'$  to a world in which the addressee does not clean his room.

And we maintain that this is the *only* effect that an utterance of (5a) has as a matter of linguistic convention.

## 5.2 Deriving performative effects

### How do the performative effects come about?

The performative effects arise if the pre-assertion context has certain special properties, so that the utterance of the **want**-sentence has contextual entailments that ensure the performative effect.

In order to spell out how this works, we require a number of additional notions:

**Historical alternatives** The historical alternatives of a world  $w$  at a time  $t$  in which the course of history up to time  $t$  coincides with  $w$ . We let

$$\text{Hist}_t(w) := \{w' \in W \mid w' \text{ is a historical alternative to } w \text{ at } t\}$$

That is  $\text{Hist}_t(w)$  is the set of worlds that agree with  $w$  up to time  $t$ , but (possibly) diverge afterwards.<sup>3</sup>

**Historical contingency** A proposition  $\phi$  is **historically contingent** at time  $t$  and world  $w$  iff

$$\exists w', w'' \in \text{Hist}_t(w) : w' \in \phi \ \& \ w'' \notin \phi$$

If a proposition  $\phi$  is *not* historically contingent at a world  $w$  and time  $t$ , we say that the truth or falsity of  $\phi$  is *settled* at  $t$  in  $w$ .

### Action talk

- We are assuming an ontology that includes events as basic entities, in particular a distinguished subset of events, *Act*, the *actions*.
- We assume that *Act* has at least a semi-lattice structure, and make reference to the *join* of actions, assuming that

$$\alpha \vee \beta = \text{the action that is instantiated iff } \alpha \text{ is instantiated or } \beta \text{ is.}$$

- We employ the generalized join, abbreviating:

$$\bigvee_{\alpha} \phi(\alpha) =: \bigvee \{\alpha \in \text{Act} \mid \phi(\alpha)\}$$

i.e.,  $\bigvee_{\alpha} \phi(\alpha)$  is the action that is instantiated iff any of the actions with the property  $\phi$  is instantiated.

- Further, for agent  $a$ , we let

$$\text{Act}_a(w) := \{\alpha \in \text{Act} \mid \alpha \text{ is executable by } a \text{ in } w\}$$

and employ one-place predicate  $\text{inst}(\alpha)$ , which holds of an action  $\alpha$  (at a world  $w$ ) iff  $\alpha$  is instantiated (executed) in  $w$ .

<sup>3</sup>See Condoravdi (2002), Kaufmann and Schwager (2009) for related uses of historical alternatives. Thomason (1984) spells out one way to cash out the requisite notions formally.

- Finally, we let

$${}_w[\alpha]_t\phi \Leftrightarrow \forall w' \in \text{Hist}_t(w) : w' \in \text{inst}(\alpha) \rightarrow w' \in \phi$$

That is,  ${}_w[\alpha]_t\phi$  says that performing  $\alpha$  *ensures* the truth of  $\phi$  (at  $w$ ).

**Common Ground** We let

$$CG := \{w \in W \mid w \text{ is compatible with what is commonly believed between the interlocutors}\}$$

And generally assume, for the utterance time  $t^*$ :

$$\forall w \in CG : \text{Hist}_{t^*}(w) \subseteq CG$$

And we define *common ground updated with sentence  $S$*

$$CG[S] := CG \cap [S]$$

### 5.2.1 General conditions

All the uses of desiderative assertions *A wants  $p$*  we discuss here require contexts in which the following conditions hold:

**Informativity** The assertion of *A wants  $p$*  is *informative*, that is, it removes worlds from  $CG$ .

$$CG[A \text{ wants } p] \subset CG$$

**Presumption of historical contingency of  $p$**  It is commonly presumed that  $p$  is a historical contingency at the time of utterance  $t^*$ .

$$\forall w \in CG : \exists w', w'' \in \text{Hist}_{t^*}(w) : w' \in p \ \& \ w'' \notin p$$

**Addressee control over  $p$**  It is commonly presumed that the addressee ( $H$ ) has a way to ensure  $p$ :

$$\forall w \in CG : \exists t \geq t^* : \exists \alpha \in \text{Act}_H(w) : {}_w[\alpha]_t p$$

### 5.2.2 Commands

(5a) I want you to clean your room before playing.

**Goal:** Show how (5a) contextually entails (9), given plausible conditions.

(9) You are obligated to clean your room before playing.

We define the following additional condition:

**Speaker Authority over the hearer:** It is commonly assumed that if the hearer believes<sup>4</sup> that the speaker prefers unsettled, hearer-controllable  $\phi$  over not- $\phi$ , the hearer is socially or institutionally obligated to execute an action that ensures that  $\phi$ .<sup>5</sup>

Given the other conditions imposed here, this requirement will boil down to the following condition with respect to  $p$  (where  $O_{H,w}(\alpha)$  stands for 'at  $w$ , it is socially/institutionally required for  $H$  to perform  $\alpha$ ')

$$\forall w \in CG : \text{Dox}_H(w) \subseteq [S \text{ wants } p] \Rightarrow O_{H,w} \left( \bigvee_{\alpha} \forall w' \in \text{Dox}_H(w) : w'[\alpha]_{t^*} p \right)$$

Now, instantiating  $p$  to **You clean your room before playing**, assume a context satisfies **Informativity, Presumption of historical contingency of  $p$ , Addressee control over  $p$  and Speaker Authority**.<sup>6</sup>

· Then

$$\forall w \in CG[(5a)] : \text{Dox}_H(w) \subseteq [S \text{ wants } p]$$

· By the above instantiation of **Speaker Authority**, this means that:

(10)  $CG[(5a)] \Vdash H$  is obligated to perform an action that ensures that **You clean your room** is true.

· But **You clean your room** is an action description, hence the only way to ensure its truth is to instantiate the action **Clean your room**.

· But then

(11)  $CG[(5a)] \Vdash H$  is obligated to clean his room.

· But that just means that the common ground after the assertion of (5a) entails (9).

The indirect way in which *actions* play a role here allows flexibility in the predictions. Consider:

(12) I want your room to be clean by the time I come back.

We can replicate the above argument for  $p = \text{Your room is clean by the time I come back}$ , but we fall short of making the final move, thus that the contextual entailment is only

(13)  $H$  is obligated to instantiate an action that ensures that  $H$ 's room is clean by the time  $S$  gets back.

· This leaves open the possibility that  $H$  hires someone to clean the room, or makes his little brother clean his room, or ...

· This seems to be right to us: (5a) requires a particular action to be taken, (13) allows more leeway.

<sup>4</sup>It would be more appropriate to strengthen this condition to 'if it is common belief that the addressee believes that the speaker prefers  $p$  over not- $p$ '. We gloss over this complication for the sake of clarity.

<sup>5</sup>Since the end of slavery, with the exception of some militaristic situations, the scope of this kind of authority will generally be limited to a certain domain (i.e. not every preference  $\phi$  will satisfy the condition).

<sup>6</sup>The following gives the general idea of the argument informally. See the appendix for the same argumentation in more formal detail, including some comments on the requirements this argumentation puts on the underlying logic of actions.

### 5.2.3 'I want'-Advice

(5c) I want you to take these pills for a week.

**Goal:** Show how (5c) contextually entails (14), given plausible contextual conditions.

(14) Normally, taking your pills results in our shared, topical goal of you becoming healthy being achieved, for all I know that is the most optimal way of doing so.

**Shared Goal** Speaker and hearer share a goal  $g$ :

$$CG \Vdash S \text{ wants } g$$

$$CG \Vdash H \text{ wants } g$$

**Presumption of historical Contingency of  $g$**

**Topicality of  $g$**  The current question under discussion is how to achieve  $g$ .

**No private speaker goals** The speaker has no (realizable, relevant) preference that is not shared by the addressee:

$$\forall w, v, u \in CG : v <_w^S u \rightarrow v <_w^H u$$

This may seem like a rather strong requirement, but we think that it generally is (pretended to be) satisfied when **I want**-sentences can be used as advice. It ensures that  $H$  does not consider the possibility that  $S$  wants  $p$  for his own private reasons.

### 5.2.4 'You want'-Advice

(5d) You want to stir the mixture well.

**Goal:** Show how (5d) contextually entails (15), given plausible contextual conditions.

(15) In order to achieve one of your goals  $g$  (in an optimal way), it is necessary to bring about  $p$ .

**Hearer Goal** For some proposition  $g$ , it is commonly assumed that  $H$  wants  $g$ :

$$CG \Vdash H \text{ wants } g$$

**No interfering hearer goals** It is commonly assumed that the hearer does not have any (realizable) preference overriding his preference for  $g$

$$\forall w \in CG : \forall v \in CG \setminus g : \{v\} \not<_w^H g$$

These two conditions, together with the general **Informativity** condition, entail the following condition:

**Hearer Ignorance about the relationship between  $p$  and  $g$**  It is not commonly believed that the hearer believes that  $p$  is necessary to (optimally) bring about  $g$

$$\exists w \in CG : \exists v \in \text{Dox}_H(w) : v \in \text{Opt}(g) \ \& \ v \notin p$$

### 5.2.5 Invitation

(5e) No, really, I want you to take the last cigarette.

**Goal:** Show how (5e) contextually entails (16), given plausible contextual conditions.

(16) The hearer can act on his desire to do  $p$ .

**Common knowledge of hearer desire** It is commonly known that the hearer wants  $p$ .<sup>7</sup>

$$CG \subseteq [H \text{ wants } p]$$

**Uncertainty about speaker desires** It is **not** common knowledge that the speaker does not disprefer  $p$

$$CG \cap [S \text{ wants not-}p] \neq \emptyset$$

**Considerate hearer** The hearer will not perform any action that ensures  $p$  if the speaker wants not- $p$ :

$$\forall w \in CG : w \in [S \text{ wants not-}p] \Rightarrow w \notin \text{inst} \left( \bigvee_a a \in \text{Act}_H \ \& \ w[a]_t \cdot p \right)$$

## 6 Revisiting Imperatives

### 6.1 Functional Heterogeneity without modal underspecification

- We have seen that desiderative assertions can be put to pretty much the same kinds of uses that imperatives and modal assertions can be put to, if the context is right.
- But: Desiderative assertions are not semantically underspecified in the same way as modals are.
- Furthermore, while there may be some initial plausibility to the assumption that modals (on their performative use) carry an optional 'performative' meaning component ('Strategy 1b'), or are ambiguous between a descriptive and a performative meaning ('Strategy 1a'), the same is not as plausible for desideratives.
- Rather, as we have argued, the performative effects arise as contextual inferences from a basic act of assertion under special conditions.

Can we then, in a Schwagerian twist, assign *imperatives* a constant, non-underspecified meaning, accompanied by a small number of felicity conditions that ensure a performative effect?

<sup>7</sup>This condition does not hold for imperative invitations like **Have a seat (if you like)**!, but, as far as we can see, **I want**-sentences can be used as invitations only if it is commonly known that the hearer wants  $p$

### 6.2 A sketch of an analysis

#### Central idea:

Analyze imperatives as involving an implicit desiderative operator, akin to **want**.

$$\text{IMPOP}_{f,g} \rightsquigarrow \text{WANT}^*$$

- Imperatives are thus assigned a constant, non-underspecified meaning, accompanied by a small number of felicity conditions that ensure a performative effect.
- The analysis proposed by Wilson and Sperber (1988), whereby an imperative  $p!$  expresses *desirability* and *achievability* of  $p$ , as well as Davis (2009) can be seen as analyses in the same spirit.
- **WANT**\* differs from **want** in at least the following ways:
  - (i) The speaker-preferences asserted by imperatives are *realistic*, i.e., they only express preferences over courses of affairs that the speaker takes to be possible. **want** can involve the comparison of possible courses of affairs with weakly counterfactual ones:<sup>8</sup>
    - (17) I know I have to teach in the Spring, but I don't want to.
  - (ii) The preferences expressed by imperatives are subject to rationality-constraints that do not apply to **want**-preferences:
    - Contradicting imperatives are necessarily interpreted as *revisions* (Portner 2007). If (18b) is uttered after (18a) (even with some temporal distance between the two utterances), this requires a revision of the previous command/advice/etc.
      - (18) a. Stay inside all day!
      - b. Okay, go outside and play!
    - On the other hand, conflicting desires can be coherently attributed with **want**. (19) is coherent, describing John as being torn between two options.<sup>9</sup>
      - (19) John wants to live alone and he wants to move in with Mary.
    - Thus while the preferences expressed with imperatives are required to be *consistent*, the same is not true for desires asserted by means of **want**.
  - (iii) Preferences expressed by imperatives, in contrast to those expressed by **want**, are necessarily *conscious* desires. **want** can be used to assert a preference that is unknown to the **wanter**:
    - (20) [Therapist to client] You do not know it yet, but you want to leave your husband.

<sup>8</sup>This example is modified from Heim (1992). We call the notion of counterfactuality involved in this example *weak* because **want** cannot generally express counterfactual desires (that is the job of **wish**). For example, desires about the past are virtually impossible to assert using **want**, at least if the relevant past state is *known*.

<sup>9</sup>It is a shortcoming, in our eyes, that the Stalnaker/Heim analysis adopted above predicts that (19) is a *necessarily false*.

- (21) [Yoga instructor to student] See, when you kick your legs up, you want to take your head down. That is what makes you lose your balance.

Further, like Schwager, we impose an additional felicity condition on imperatives, her **uncertainty constraint**

**Uncertainty constraint**

An imperative utterance  $\phi$ ! is only licit if the speaker is *uncertain* as to whether  $\phi$  will obtain.

This is weaker than the **presumption of historical contingency**-condition above. The presumption of historical contingency entails speaker-uncertainty, but, of course, not vice versa. That imperatives only require uncertainty is evidenced by certain mere-desire-expressing imperatives, like Schwager's

- (22) Please, don't have broken another vase!

**How does this ensure the performativity of imperatives?**

On our analysis, imperatives fulfill (the analogues of) all of Schwager's felicity conditions.

- We impose her uncertainty condition as a conventional constraint;
- the rest of the properties follow from the semantics of the silent desire-verb we employ:
  - it is a desire-verb, hence its ordering source is fixed to be prioritizing;
  - the preference asserted is a conscious one (of the speaker), hence the speaker has perfect knowledge of the underlying ordering;
  - Schwager's 'affirming the ordering-source'-condition is taken as being the asserted content of the sentence.

Thus, to the extent that Schwager's analysis enforces a performative reading of imperatives, so does ours. In particular, the assumption of perfect speaker knowledge ensures that an imperative, though an assertion, can never be challenged by being called *false* (and hence, we also have the intuition that it is not adequate to call it *true*, either.)

**How do the different 'forces' come about?**

The same way they come about for performative **want**-sentences: By contextual conditions resulting from socio-cultural circumstance and manifest assumptions about hearer- and speaker-desires.

- For the sake of illustration, we note that an imperative will get a 'command'-interpretation in exactly the contexts that satisfy the three conditions we imposed above for **want**-commands: **Informativity, Unsettledness, Hearer-control, Speaker Authority over the hearer**

## 7 Imperatives: Meaning vs. Use

### 7.1 The proper place of interactional conditions

- In order to make the right predictions about command-imperatives, Schwager appeals to modal ordering sources such as 'what the speaker commands'.
- It is not exactly clear what this ordering source is supposed to amount to: At times, it seems that Schwager wants to bring the classical speech-act analyses through the back-door (in the ordering source).
- The speech-act notion of COMMAND is necessarily interactional: For example, a COMMAND is only successful if it is understood appropriately.
- But: If we import all these interactional facts into the definition of the ordering source, it becomes unclear how Schwager's felicity conditions (in particular her condition that the speaker have 'perfect knowledge' of the ordering source) can ever be satisfied.
- If we understand the relevant notion of 'commanding' in 'what the speaker commands' as a kind of 'mental/private commanding', her conditions can easily be satisfied.
- But how is such a 'mental commanding' different from mere wanting/intending/preferring?
- It seems: Not at all!

- Our account only requires the speaker to have a certain mental attitude in order to (truly and) felicitously utter an imperative.
- Interactional conditions play a role only at a pragmatic level, in the interaction of the imperative utterance with the context.
- They have nothing to do with the denotational meaning of the imperative.

### 7.2 The importance of uptake

- Our account gives us a handle on explaining why many uses of imperatives require the hearer to ensure *uptake* of the imperative utterance (and understand the cases in which this is not necessary/possible).
- To clarify, we distinguish three notions, where each item in the following list presupposes the earlier one(s):
  - (i) **Uptake**: Uptake succeeds if the hearer understands the imperative in the way it is intended by the speaker.
  - (ii) **Acceptance**: A speaker accepts an imperative if he takes on the pre-jacent as an action-preference for himself.
  - (iii) **Fulfillment**: An imperative is fulfilled if the pre-jacent is made true.

An imperative can be taken up, but denied; or taken up and accepted, but go unfulfilled. Or it can be taken up, accepted, and fulfilled.

- A hearer will often be required to either signal acceptance (thus taking on a commitment to act in a certain way), or denial (thus rejecting such a commitment).
- We can recast our earlier **Speaker Authority** principle by saying that (strong) speaker authority over the hearer obtains in situations in which the hearer is socially obligated to accept any imperative he understands.
- There are cases, however, where we would expect that uptake is not strictly required, e. g. for mere wishes like:

(23) Please, don't have broken another vase.

And indeed, as Schwager (2006) points out, (23) can be uttered even in absence of the ostensible addressee (e.g. after one has heard the sound of shattering glass in the next room).

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## A The derivation of Command-uses for desiderative sentences.

- Instantiating  $p$  as ‘Clean your room before playing’, it seems plausible to say that a context in which (5a) takes on a command interpretation will satisfy at least **Informativity**, **Historical contingency of  $p$**  and **Addressee control of  $p$**  and the above instantiation of **Speaker authority**.
- But then, after updating with [S wants  $p$ ], in virtue of **Speaker authority**, we will have:

$$\forall w \in CG[(5a)] : O_{H,w} \left( \bigvee_{\alpha} \forall w' \in \text{Dox}_H(w) : w'[\alpha]_I \ast p \right)$$

- Now note that ‘you clean your room’ is an action-denoting sentence. We capture this by assuming that there is an action  $a_c$  of the addressee cleaning his room, and let  $p = \text{inst}(a_c)$ .
- The above formula then becomes:

$$\forall w \in CG[(5a)] : O_{H,w} \left( \bigvee_{\alpha} \forall w' \in \text{Dox}_H(w) : w'[\alpha]_I \ast \text{inst}(a_c) \right)$$

- and we assume that the underlying logic of actions and  $\text{inst}$  provides us with the following two theorems:

$$\forall w, t, \alpha, \beta : w[\alpha]_I \text{inst}(\beta) \Leftrightarrow \alpha \text{ is a specification of } \beta$$

$$\forall \beta \in \text{Act} : \beta = \bigvee_{\alpha} \alpha \text{ is a specification of } \beta$$

- But then, we have:

$$\forall w \in CG[(5a)] : O_{H,w}(a_c)$$

which, arguably, is just what (9) says.