Mood and the Analysis of Imperative Sentences

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1. Introduction

Wilson and Sperber's 'Mood and the analysis of non-declarative sentences' (1988) is an important and influential contribution to the literature on the semantics of imperative and interrogative sentences, not least because it highlights non-directive uses of the imperative, such as audienceless cases like (1) and predetermined cases like (2):

(1) Please don't rain.

(2) Please be out (muttered by a child sent to apologise to someone).

Wilson and Sperber's account of imperative semantics seeks to accommodate such uses by positing that the encoded meaning of imperative sentences presents the proposition expressed as potential and desirable, without specifying to whom the desirability applies. This enables Wilson and Sperber to account for cases where directive force is evident as instances where the proposition expressed is desirable to the speaker, but without thereby postulating directive force as the encoded meaning of the imperative.[1] It also enables them to deal with uses of the imperative to give advice (3) and permission (4) as cases where the state of affairs described by the utterance is desirable to the hearer, rather than to the speaker, hence avoiding the problems faced by theories that treat the imperative as necessarily entailing the expression of the speaker's desire (see e.g. Harnish 1994).

(3) Take paracetamol.
(4) Go ahead. Marry her. But you'll regret it.

But what does it mean, in speech-act terms, to present a proposition as desirable and potential? In answering this question, Wilson and Sperber introduce the generic speech act descriptor 'telling to': to tell somebody to P is to present P as both desirable to someone and potential.[2] An interpretation of an utterance of an imperative sentence is thus a higher-order explicature that has the structure given in (5), as exemplified by (6). The move from (6) to the more precise (7) is a result of pragmatically resolving, in favour of the hearer, the underspecification of to whom the proposition expressed is desirable. In the case of a command such as (8), the desirability would be attributed to the speaker.

(5) S is telling H to P.

[1] There are a number of reasons for not building directive force into the imperative's semantics. See Jary and Kissine (2014), and references therein, for discussion.
[2] Wilson and Sperber's (1988) treatment of the semantics of mood appears somewhat different to that in Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995). How the two approaches should be identified is explained by Wilson (1998-9). See Jary (2010: 124-126) for discussion.

(6) The speaker is telling the hearer to take paracetamol.

(7) The speaker is advising the hearer to take paracetamol.

(8) Stand up!

But while this approach has many merits, it is not without problems. A desideratum of any account of the semantics of the imperative sentence-type is that it explain why the imperative cannot be used to make assertions. Wilson and Sperber's account, however, offers no explanation of why an utterance of an imperative is not open to interpretation as a claim that the state of affairs described is desirable and potential (see Jary 2011: 269-270). Another desideratum is that an account of imperative semantics should explain the strong preference of imperatives for agentive interpretations. For example, (9) cannot be uttered as a good wish, i.e. as merely presenting winning the lottery as potential and desirable, but must be interpreted as telling the addressee to take some action that ensures that he win the lottery:

(9) Win the lottery.

The root of these problems, we contend, is that Wilson and Sperber posit only one format of mental representation: factual representations that can serve as premises and conclusions in inference (see Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995: 73-75). To entertain, unembedded, such a representation is to adopt its content as a belief. The trouble with this one-format approach is that it does not allow thought to lead to action: beliefs can only beget further beliefs. In order to model thought processes aimed at instigating and directing action, it is necessary posit an additional format of representation whose tokening results in action (by means of an association with motor representations). Relating such a format with the interpretation of imperative sentences, we will show, results in an account of imperative semantics that treats this sentence type as encoding potentiality, but that also explains the imperative's strong preference for agentive predicates and its absolute aversion to assertoric use. Furthermore, the nature of this format of mental representation requires that we differentiate between how imperatives are interpreted by an addressee and how they are interpreted by an audience. The latter, we will see, is broadly in line with the higher-order explicature approach advocated by Wilson and Sperber (1988; Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995). However, it is the former that explains the idiosyncratic semantic characteristics of the imperative.[3]

2. Two types of mental representation

As noted above, Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995: 73-75) posit just one type of mental representation: assumptions. An assumption is a propositional form of a type whose tokening amounts to adopting the

[3] Due to space limitations, in this paper, we discuss only 2nd-person imperatives, termed 'canonical imperatives' by Aikhenvald (2010). However, an advantage of the proposals we make is that they offer insights into 1st- and 3rd-person imperatives, too. See Jary & Kissine (under revsion). For guidelines on how to distinguish non-2nd-person imperatives from hortatives and the like, see Jary and Kissine (2016).

attitude of belief towards that proposition. Assumptions can be embedded within other assumptions, but an unembedded assumption is a 'factual assumption': to entertain such a representation is to believe its content. Assumptions serve as premises and conclusions in inference. In Jary and Kissine (under revsion) we call representations of this type 'doxastic representations', and contrast them with action representations. An action representation is of a type whose tokening is capable of causing action through an association with motor representations. Such a format of representation must be posited if we are to model how thought can result in action: doxastic representations alone allow us to model the move from belief that P to the belief that Q, but not from the belief that Q to the intention to bring about R.[4]

Of interest here is the nature of action representations. Due to their role in the psychology and behaviour of the individual, such representations will have a number of essential characteristics not necessarily shared by doxastic representations. These result from the fact that an action representation with a particular content can only be entertained by the individual for whom it serves as a representation. This is in contrast to a doxastic representation: any number of individuals may hold doxastic representations with the same content.

To see why this asymmetry exists, consider a situation in which you stand before a closed door. You form the intention to open the door. In the terms we are using, you have a doxastic representation with the content THE DOOR IS CLOSED and an action representation with the content I OPEN THE DOOR. Now imagine that a doppelganger of you is created and stands at your side. Both you and your doppelganger have a doxastic representation with the same content: THE DOOR IS CLOSED. However, the content of your respective action representations cannot be the same: your action representation is satisfied only if you open the door, while your doppelganger's action representation is satisfied only if she does. To borrow some terms from philosophy, the 'I' in the action representation is an essential indexical (Perry 1979); in other words, that representation is *de se* (Lewis 1979).

Now, of course, doxastic representations can also be *de se*: both you and your doppelganger will have a doxastic representation with the content THERE IS A CLOSED DOOR IN FRONT OF *ME*. For this thought to locate the holder's location in front of the door *from the holder's perspective*, it must be read as *de se*, that is, as essentially indexical. Note that what makes such a thought *de se* is not simply that it is about the holder, but that it is *about the holder and used by her to locate herself in the world*. This is what the notion of essential indexicality aims to capture. For current concerns, the key point is that while doxastic representations *may* be *de se,* action representations are *necessarily de se*. As a consequence, while it is possible that a doxastic representation has the same satisfaction conditions as an action representation (such as if you intend to open the door and I believe that you will open the

[4] This point is argued by Millikan (2004: ch.16), though it has its roots in the Sellarsian notion of a language-exit rule (Sellars 1953; 1954).

door), it is not possible that two action representations have the same satisfaction conditions: each action representation is only satisfied if it itself causes the state of affairs denoted to be brought about (by the individual for whom it serves as a representation).[5]

Besides their de se nature and their association with motor representations, action representations are notable in that an action representation does not require the explicit representation of the agent of the act denoted. By virtue of the fact that they serve as action representations for an individual, that individual will be the agent of the action denoted. In other words, what makes you the agent of an action representation of yours is just that it is an action representation entertained by you. There need be no constituent of the representation that stands for you: the nature of this type of representation means that the tokener will necessarily be the agent of the act denoted.

Finally, action representations will be restricted to representing states of affairs that are neither ruled in nor ruled out by the doxastic representations of the individual. This follows from the basic requirement that a rational agent cannot set itself goals that cannot be, or have already been, fulfilled. Consequently, action representations, under normal circumstances, will represent potential states of affairs.

3. Imperatives and their interface with action representations

Our claim is that imperative sentences are uniquely specified for interface with action representations. This is motivated by a number of considerations. First and foremost, the prototypical use of imperatives is to perform directive speech acts (Jary and Kissine 2016), and we define directives as speech acts which present the hearer with (what the speaker sees as) a reason to act (Kissine 2013: 104-106), so it is reasonable to assume that imperatives interface with a format of mental representation whose function is to trigger action. However, there are also syntactic considerations that support this hypothesis.

First, there is the well-established fact that imperatives tend, cross-linguistically, not to require an overt subject. This is the case even in languages such as English, which normally do require overt subjects (see Jary and Kissine 2014: 101-103 and references therein for discussion of the extent of this tendency). Furthermore, a number of syntacticians have argued that the role of overt subjects in imperatives such as (10), (11) and (12) is not to form a predication with the verb but to identify the addressee (Platzack and Rosengren 1997; Zanuttini 2008; Alcázar and Saltarelli 2014).

(10) You be good!

[5] It has been argued by Lewis (1979) that *de se* representations express properties rather than propositions. The reason is that propositions cannot be self-locating. Due to space restrictions, we will not go into why this is so in this paper, but see Jary and Kissine (under revsion) for further discussion.

(11) Someone help him.

(12) The boy at the back sit down.

In particular, the role of overt 2nd-person subject pronouns in imperatives differs from that in declaratives: in an utterance of 2nd-person declarative, it is taken for granted who the addressee is and this fact is exploited to specify the subject of a predication; by contrast, an overt subject (2nd-person pronoun or otherwise) serves to identify the addressee, and hence is only present when context alone is insufficient for this purpose. These subject considerations further motivate the claim that the imperative is specified for interface with action representations. Recall that we noted that action representations require no constituent that stands for the agent of the act denoted, this being implicitly specified by the functional role of the representation. Consequently, it would be unsurprising to find that a linguistic form specified for interface with representations of this type does not require a predication.

Interface with action representations can also account for the lack of assertoric potential that imperatives display. Assertions are a means of sharing information; sharing information requires that representations of the same content be entertained by different individuals. As we saw above, action representations with a given content can only be entertained by the individual for whom they serve as such. The assumption that imperatives are specified for interface with action representations thus precludes them from assertoric use, for their content cannot be shared. Furthermore, given that a function of truth judgments is to signal acceptance of a proposition, we would not expect imperatives to be amenable to truth judgements, as they cannot be used to put forward a proposition for sharing. And this is, of course, borne out by the data: imperatives have been widely noted not to be open to judgments of truth and falsity.

The strong preference of imperatives for action predicates is also to be expected on the current account, according to which interpreting an imperative entails interface with a representation whose function is to provoke action in the holder. On such a hypothesis, one would expect non-agentive predicates to be coerced into agentive readings, and this is what is found. In both (13) and (14), an interpretation is required in which the addressee acts in some way to bring about the state of affairs required.

(13) Be the best in the class.

(14) Have some self-respect.

Such coercion, however, will only be expected in cases where there is an addressee who seeks to interpret the imperative by means of interface with an action representation. In cases where the specified addressee manifestly cannot interpret the utterance, or where there is no specified addressee, nobody will be expected to interpret the utterance in this way and the strong preference for agentive interpretations should not apply. As we will see in the next section, when we introduce the notion of consuming an utterance, this is exactly the pattern that is observed in the data, most notably in the audienceless cases highlighted by Wilson and Sperber (1988), and in advertising imperatives.

A final observation that supports the hypothesis that imperatives are specified for interface with action representations is that, like these, imperatives are restricted to denoting potential states of affairs. This, of course, plays a central role in Wilson and Sperber's account of imperative semantics, but is also advocated by Davies (1986). Our view is that it the only semantic feature of imperative sentences that counts as encoded by this form, for, as we will see, it constrains all interpretations of the imperative. This is in contrast to agency, for example, which, as we have noted and will go on to discuss in more detail, is absent in some uses of the imperative.

4. Consumers and other interpreters

The proposal we make, then, is that imperatives are specified for interface with action representations, and that characteristics arising from the function of these representations explain a number of constraints on the interpretation of imperative sentences. In particular, the *de se* nature of action representations means that an utterance of an imperative can only properly be interpreted by the addressee. But what do we mean by 'properly interpreted' and how do we respond to the observation that people other than the addressee interpret imperative utterances? In particular, how do we account for the fact that utterances of imperatives update the conversational record, so that the action of the speaker and the obligations that may thereby be placed upon the addressee can become manifest to all observers of the speech event?

We do this by distinguishing between consumers and interpreters of an utterance.[6] Consumption is a type of interpretation, but not all interpretation is consumption. To consume an utterance is to interpret it by tokening a mental representation, of the type specified by the linguistic form, such that the utterance and the mental representation it triggers share the same satisfaction conditions

As has been noted in the literature (see e.g. Schmerling 1982; Boisvert and Ludwig 2006), imperatives are satisfied only if the state of affairs denoted is brought about by the addressee. We have claimed that imperatives are specified for interface with action representations. Due to the *de se* nature of such representations, it follows that only the addressee can token a representation (of the type specified by the imperative morphosyntax) that has the same satisfaction conditions as the

[6] Other authors (Clark and Carlson 1982; Levinson 1988; McCawley 1999) have also advocated noting the distinction between addressees and other observers of the speech acts, be they participants in the speech event or otherwise. However, none of these authors draws the distinction, crucial to our analysis, between an interpretation with the same satisfaction conditions as the utterance (i.e. 'consumption') and other interpretations.

utterance. In other words, only the addressee can *consume* an utterance of an imperative. Declaratives, by contrast, are not restricted in their consumption: there is no constraint on who can token a doxastic representation with the same satisfaction conditions as the utterance. So, an action representation with the satisfaction conditions of (15) can only be tokened by John: the utterance can only be consumed by John. To be sure, other observers of the utterance can token a doxastic representation with the content 'John will open the door', but to do so is not to *consume* the utterance, because the representation tokened is not of the type specified by the linguistic form of the utterance.[7] This is in contrast to an utterance of (16): there is no restriction on who can token a doxastic representation with the same satisfaction (i.e. truth) conditions as the utterance, thereby consuming the utterance. Hence we can say that declaratives are for general consumption, but imperatives are not.[8]

(15) Open the door, John.

(16) Mary closed the door.

So, while an addressee and a non-addressee can both consume an utterance of a declarative, only an addressee can consume an imperative. How, then, do non-addressees interpret utterances of imperatives? Our answer is that they do so very much along the lines suggested by Wilson & Sperber: by representing the utterance in speech-act terms. In other words, non-addressees interpret the utterance by tokening a doxastic representation of the speech event, with the schematic structure given in (5). This is not a consumption of the utterance, because the satisfaction conditions of the interpretation do not match those of the utterance: the interpretation is a description of a state of affairs in which the speaker does something, but there is no representation of the speaker in the utterance (*pace* Alcázar and Saltarelli 2014).

In our view, however, 'telling to' should not be glossed as 'presenting as potential and desirable', but rather as giving the addressee reason to bring about the state of affairs denoted by the utterance (i.e. as 'directing', in the sense of Kissine 2013: 104-106). The grounds for the utterance to stand as a reason will vary from utterance to utterance, and these grounds will determine its precise illocutionary force. If it stands as a reason because it is an expression of the speaker's desire, then it will count as a request; if the utterance denotes an act that falls within the scope of the authority that the speaker has over the hearer, then it will count as an order; if it is manifest that the speaker believes that the act denoted is of benefit to the hearer, then it will count as advice; and so on. At the generic level, the fact that the linguistic form employed is designed for interface with an action representation indicates that

[7] Moreover, (15) on its own does not in itself provide a reason to form the belief that John will open the door: additional considerations are required.

[8] That imperatives can only be consumed by addressees, whereas declaratives can be consumed by non-addressees, is one reason we do not identify the role of addressee with being a consumer. Also, an utterance of an imperative can have a manifest addressee but no consumer. This is the case with examples (1), (2) and (17).

the addressee is being presented with a reason to act, and that, in turn, warrants classifying the speech act as a case of 'telling to'. The notion of desire only needs to be brought in, in certain cases, to specify the precise illocutionary force of the utterance.

5. Imperatives without addressees

On our account, the strong preference that imperatives have for action predicates is due to the interface required with action representations when they are consumed. Imperatives can only be consumed by addressees. Our account therefore predicts that the action constraint on imperatives should not apply when there is manifestly no intention that the utterance of an imperative be consumed. This will happen in two types of circumstance: when the utterance denotes an addressee but it is manifest that speaker does not intend the addressee to interpret the utterance; and when no addressee is specified by the utterance. The first type of case is exemplified by the examples from Wilson and Sperber cited above and repeated below:

(1) Please don't rain.

(2) Please be out (muttered by a child sent to apologise to someone).

In (2), the child speaks as if he were addressing the person he has been sent to apologise to, but he has no intention that the utterance be interpreted by that person. In (1), the 'addressee' is the sky or the ominous dark clouds on the horizon: these are not the sort of things that can normally interpret an utterance. Another example is that of Dominicy and Franken (2002), spoken by an excited archaeologist to a recently discovered mummy that will prove a theory of hers if it turns out to be of the required age. Again, the 'addressee' is specified by the utterance, but there is no intention that the utterance be interpreted by that addressee.

(17) Please, be born before 4000 BC!

In each of these cases, a non-agentive predicate is acceptable. This is because, we argue, the utterance has no consumer and hence there is no requirement that it interface with an action representation. It is worth noting, however, that in each case the state of affairs is potential, relative to a background information set. In the case of (17), this is the knowledge state of the speaker, who is as yet ignorant of the age of the mummy. If she knew the mummy to date after 4000BC, then she could not utter (17) to express a counterfactual desire. Consequently, we do not see potentiality as resulting from interface considerations, and we agree with Wilson and Sperber and Davies (1986) that the imperative mood encodes potentiality as a constraint on its interpretation.

The second type of case in which we would expect the agency constraint on imperative interpretation not to hold is that in which no addressee is specified by the utterance. Advertising imperatives such as

(18) and (19) are a clear example: in such cases, there is no addressee specified, and nobody is intended interpret the utterance by tokening an action representation whose satisfaction conditions match those of the utterance. Indeed, it is hard to specify the satisfaction conditions of such uses: who is to be the envy of all her friends? And such cases cannot be described as instances of telling to.[9]

(18) Be the envy of all your friends.

(19) Win up to £100 in this week's competition! (Davies 1986: 43)

Rather, the goal of the producer of the utterance is to get interpreters to buy a product (an action not specified by the utterance). It is not easy to describe an advertising imperative in illocutionary-act terms. A perlocutionary description is the best one can do:

(20) The advertiser seeks to persuade A to bring about P (i.e. A's buying the product advertised) by presenting Q (i.e. the content of the imperative) as a desirable outcome of A bringing about P.

Whatever the correct analysis of such uses of the imperative, the crucial point for current concerns is that these cases do not specify an addressee. Hence, on our account, they cannot be consumed, only otherwise interpreted. As the agency constraint on imperatives is, we argue, a result of their consumption, our account predicts that this should not apply in such cases. And this is what we find: in neither (18) nor (19) is the stative predicate coerced to an agentive interpretation.

In our terms, advertising imperatives are cases where there is no consumer of the imperative because, due to the absence of an addressee, there is none specified by the situation in which the utterance is produced. By contrast, there are also cases in which one can be the consumer of an imperative without being the addressee. Signs and instruction-manual directions written in the imperative mood are a good example of this. When following a recipe, for example, one is seeking direction and thus tokens action plans as a result of interpreting sentences such as 'Add salt and stir'. However, the situation is not one that can be described as a context in which the interpreter is the addressee without stretching unreasonably the notions of participants to a conversation. Thus recipes and the like are produced in

[9] It might be objected that advertising cases such as (18) and (19) have 'generic addressees' (cf. Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995: 158). While we do not want to get into terminological disputes, we are certain that there is a sense in which adverts and other broadcasts do not have an addressee in the strictest sense. The notions of telling someone that/to assume (a non-generic) addressee. Consequently, A's response in (i) is pragmatically odd, even if the BBC is her source of information.

(i) A: The Prime Minister has resigned.
B: How do you know?
A: ?The BBC told me.

By this token, advertising imperatives such as (18) and (19) are addressee-less: they have interpreters but not addressees, despite being grammatically 2nd-person. This is not to deny that broadcasters can choose linguistic forms that indicate the kind of interpreter they are aiming at. The choice of *tu* rather than *vous* in a French advertising imperative, for example, may indicate that the advertisement is aimed at younger people.

the absence of an addressee while nevertheless being translated into *de se* action representations by the interpreter.[10] The difference between the two cases is that in the latter the interpreter is seeking a course of action, and thus looking for properties to consume in the production of action representations. In the advertising case, by contrast, the interpreter is not seeking direction.

By distinguishing between consumers and (mere) interpreters of utterances, we are able to correctly predict the conditions under which imperatives will impose an agency constraint on their interpretation. When an addressee is both specified by and manifestly intended to interpret the utterance, there will be an agency constraint on its interpretation. This is a result of the addressee being required to consume the utterance by tokening a mental representation of the type specified by the linguistic form: an action representation. We know of only one possible counter example to this claim: good wishes (also discussed by Wilson and Sperber 1988). Cases such as (21) and (22) are directed at and expected to be interpreted by an addressee. However, in English the use of imperatives in good wishes is highly unproductive: (9), for example, cannot be uttered as a good wish. More generally, languages differ greatly in how accepting they are of imperatives as good wishes (Jary and Kissine 2014: 65-69). As a result, we would rather treat such cases as peripheral to imperative semantics, requiring a special treatment that perhaps sheds light on cross-linguistic variation in imperative semantics and usage.

(21) Get well soon.

(22) Have a nice day.

(9) Win the lottery.

6. Conclusion

On the analysis we have presented, there are two possible ways an utterance of an imperative can be interpreted: by means of a higher-order representation of the utterance (or of the attitude it expresses) or by tokening an action representation with the same satisfaction conditions as the imperative. The latter option is open only to addressees, while the former is open to both addressees and non-addressees. The higher-order interpretations are doxastic in nature, 'assumptions' in the RT framework, so how they can achieve relevance is well documented in the literature. But what about

[10] Interestingly, in French and Spanish, the only circumstances in which infinitives can be used to give directions are cases such as those discussed, where the producer of the utterance has no addressee in mind but proffers direction for whoever seeks it. (It is certainly the only use condoned by the Real Academia Española. See: http://www.rae.es/consultas/infinitivo-por-imperativo) Thus we find infinitives used to give directions in published recipes and on signs, for example, but the giving of directions using infinitives in conversation is not acceptable. We conjecture that the acceptable situation for infinitive directions are those in which consumers are self-selecting, and thus no addressee need be specified by the utterance. In such a case, all that is required for interface with an action representation is an unsaturated agentive property, which an infinitive may encode.

action representations? These cannot serve as premises, so cannot lead to contextual effects. What sort of positive cognitive effects can they have?

Humans are clearly capable of foreseeing some of the outcomes of their actions. So, if the foreseeable outcomes of a course of action constitute, or help towards, the achievement of a goal, or they are beneficial to the individual in some other way, then the cognitive effect with be positive and justify the effort expended in interpreting the utterance. There thus seems to no reason, in principle, why an imperative consumed by an addressee could not achieve relevance. However, the Relevance Theory model of cognition needs to include action representations in its ontology if it is to treat interpreters as agents, rather than as simply cognizers. And once the need for this format of representation has been acknowledged, then the account of imperatives that we propose offers a straightforward explanation of a range of data.

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