HOW AND HOW NOT TO EMPLOY DISCOURSE RELATIONS TO ACCOUNT FOR PSEUDO-IMPERATIVES

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1. Introduction

Pseudo-imperatives are compound sentences where an imperative clause is conjoined or disjoined with a declarative clause (1).

(1) a. Do X, and Y will happen/be the case/be done.
b. Do X, or Y will happen/be the case/be done.

These constructions arouse interest because of an intriguing asymmetry in meaning and felicity. Although a pseudo-imperative with conjunction (1a) can be interpreted as asking for performance or omission of action X depending on the desirability of the variable Y, pseudo-imperatives with disjunction (1b) require an instantiation of Y for pragmatic felicity which is undesirable for the addressee, and cannot be used to request forbearance from X. It therefore needs to be asked:

(Q1) Why can (1a) mean "Don't do X!" given appropriate instantiation of Y?
(Q2) Why can (1b) *not* mean "Don't do X!" however Y is instantiated?
(Q3) Why are instantiations of Y in (1b) pragmatically infelicitous in case Y cannot be interpreted as denoting an undesirable state of affairs for the addressee?

To resolve these issues, this paper argues for a uniform conditional-like treatment of pseudo-imperatives and suggests an account of the pragmatic asymmetry in terms of discourse relations.

2. Preliminaries

I will restrict myself to a discussion of pseudo-imperatives which contain *simple imperative forms*. A simple imperative form is what in English could be a bare VP[1], with the exception of the copula. This is meant to exclude imperative forms with do-support, special intonation or otherwise modified with lexical additions such as *please*, *will you*, *damn it* etc. This restriction excludes from consideration instantiations of (1a) such as (2) which behave like (1b) in that they cannot be interpreted to mean "Don't do X!" and are infelicitous under not-desirable instantiations of Y.

[1] Although English imperative forms cannot be distinguished from bare VPs, I assume here that what occurs in pseudo-imperatives are not bare VPs, but imperative forms, (i) because the English copula occurs in its unambiguous imperative form in pseudo-imperatives, and (ii) because of the fact that languages with unambiguously marked imperative forms in which pseudo-imperatives occur, e.g. German or Dutch, feature imperative forms and not bare VPs in pseudo-imperatives.

(2) ? Shut up, please, and I'll beat you.

Let upper-case A denote simple imperative forms and let P denote declarative sentences. Lower-case letters refer to semantic denotations. Following Mastop 2005, I will assume that imperative forms semantically denote actions. Lower-case a is then used to refer to an action. Lower-case p refers to a proposition. Pseudo-imperatives with conjunction (1a) are henceforth called IaDs, which is short for 'imperative and declarative', and schematically represented as "A and P". Similarly, IoDs (1b) are represented as "A or P".

Imperative forms are interpreted in a variety of ways and quite heterogeneous speech-acts are associated with utterances of imperative forms. I will in the following make a simplified distinction between institutional and descriptive uses of imperative forms. In institutional uses the imperative form is used to establish institutional facts. Institutional use of (3a), for instance, affects what the addressee may or may not do: he must not speak. I will write $!a$ for institutional uses of A and I will say that an imperative A *is given* iff it is institutionally used.

(3) a. Shut up, damn it!
b. If you don't want to lose your job, never let this happen again.
c. How can I win Jane's heart? - Dance the duck-dance, for instance.

In descriptive uses of imperative forms like (3b,c) institutional facts remain unaffected. The speaker merely describes a state of affairs: performance or omission of an action has or might have certain consequences. Such statements may certainly still be inducements or deterrents, as (3b) clearly shows. But this does not mean that a particular speech-act of inducing or deterring is associated with the imperative form alone. Rather, the contribution of a descriptively used imperative form A is its semantic denotation a which is asserted to stand in a particular consequence relation to a proposition p, and this assertion may in turn serve as an argument to influence the addressee's choice of action.

I propose to treat such consequence relations which hold between an action and a proposition as content-level discourse relations and to investigate which relations are featured in the interpretation of pseudo-imperatives. To this end, I will shortly introduce relevant discourse relations for which I will provide a very simplistic formal definition on the basis of a context-model: Let W be a non-empty set of future courses of events over a fixed finite amount of time that are considered normal or salient in context. For a proposition p, let's write $w \models p$ if p is an outcome of w. Let's write $a \in w$ if action a is performed in w and, if $a \in w$, let w/a be the future course of events which is as much as w except that a is not performed. Let's write $\neg a$ for forbearance from a, so that $\neg a \in w$ iff $a \notin w$. Forbearance from an action is considered an action. Then define:

$[a]p$	iff	$\forall w \in W\ (a \in w \rightarrow w \models p)$
cause(a, p)	iff	$\exists w \in W\ (a \in w\ \wedge\ w \models p\ \wedge\ w/a \not\models p)$
result(a, p)	iff	$[a]p \wedge$ *cause*(a, p)
require(a, p)	iff	$[\neg a]p \wedge$ *cause*$(\neg a, p) \wedge$ *undesirable*(p)

As W is meant to model normal courses of events, consequence relations are defeasible. The relation *result*(a, p) expresses that the action a brings about the state of affairs p. Reference to causality is needed to distinguish results from logical consequences, yet causality is to be kept separate from necessity. The relation *require*(a, p) expresses that a is necessary because otherwise p holds. Unlike *result*, the latter relation contains a reference to the undesirability of p. The intuition here is that 'a is necessary, because otherwise p' is a natural notion only if p is something to be avoided.

3. The Conjunctive Case

For an IaD "A and P" I will argue that we do not have to assume that an imperative is given but that A is only descriptively used and that a conditional interpretation $[a]p$ enriched to $result(a, p)$ is sufficient to account for intuitions.

It has been noted that IaDs, come in three flavors. Clark 1993 has termed these positive (4a), negative (4b) and neutral readings (4c).

(4) a. Come to my BBQ and you'll finally meet the minus girls.
b. Say one more word about minus girls and I'll throw you into the canal.
c. Swim in the canals regularly and you will live 3.14159 years longer.

In positive readings of an IaD "A and P" the intuitive impact is to have the addressee perform the action a, while in negative readings the overall impact is to have the addressee omit the action a. In neutral readings no urge towards performance or omission is felt.

It is commonplace to accept that IaDs have some sort of conditional reading. Opinions differ, however, about the meaning contribution of the imperative form. For instance, van der Auwera 1986 maintains that the imperative in an IaD is always given, so that "A and P" is to be analyzed as a speech-act conjunction, write $\&$, to yield $!a \;\&\; [a]p$. In negative readings of IaDs, van der Auwera then argues, if p is undesirable for the hearer, we infer that $[a]p$ is a sufficiently strong argument to realize that not $!a$ is meant, but $!\neg a$. For neutral readings of IaDs, van der Auwera holds that "some [IaDs] seem to be primarily imperative, while others seem primarily conditional." (p. 209).

Lascarides and Asher 2004, on the other hand, hold that only in positive IaDs an imperative is given. They argue that the non-veridical discourse relation *Def-Consequence* holds between conjuncts in "A and P", which corresponds to $[a]p$ in our terms. A further default interpretation rule then yields the veridical 'meta-talk'-relation *Explanation** just in case p is hearer-desirable.[2] Veridicality of $Explanation^*$ then ensures that the imperative $!a$ is given and that $[a]p$ explains why it was.

Against Lascarides and Asher, I argue that appeal to *Explanation** is implausible, but also not necessary. It is implausible, because in positive IaDs the speaker is

[2] Recall that a meta-relation R^* holds between two discourse units just in case the content of the one stands in relation R to the fact that the speech act associated with the utterance of the other was performed.

felt to persuade the hearer into performance of an action a, but that surely does not mean that the incentive which the speaker gives to have the hearer perform a is the speaker's own reason for the inducement, or even an imperative $!a$. Appeal to *Explanation** is also not necessary, because we do not need to assume that an imperative is given in positive readings of IaDs. The only thing that matters for a positive interpretation of "A and P" is that it influences the hearer to perform a. A statement $[a]p$ will influence the hearer to perform a if p can be construed, not only as a desirable logical consequence, but as a desirable result of a. Thus, "A and P" will be an argument to perform a just in case the content-level discourse relations $result(a, p)$ and $desirable(p)$ can be inferred. On top of that it is natural to assume that the speaker used "A and P" as an inducement, which could be captured in the further ascription of an intentional-level discourse relation *Motivation*(a, p) (Mann and Thompson 1987). However, two things should not be confused here. Surely, under normal circumstances, we infer that the speaker's intention behind an utterance of "A and P" with hearer-desirable p is to persuade the hearer to perform a. But that does not mean that we have to associate illocutionary force with A. In line with the terminological conventions introduced above, in positive IaDs no imperative is given. It suffices to treat the imperative form as descriptively used.

Negative readings can be accounted for in a similar fashion. We get a negative reading for "A and P" just in case the proposition p is interpretable as something to be avoided by forbearance from a. This is again sufficiently captured by the content-level relations *result*(a, p) and *undesirable*(p). The fact that for undesirable p an IaD is felt to be an urge to forbear from a neither justifies nor necessitates the association with institutional force $!\neg a$. In line with the above, we should rather ascribe an intentional-level discourse relation *Discourage*(a, p), accordingly defined.

Finally, neutral readings of "A and P" are exactly those where p is neither construable as desirable, nor undesirable.[3] Needless to say, that in this case we cannot say that an imperative is given. The discourse relation *result*(a, p) alone suffices to reflect the intuitive meaning.

In sum, I meant to propose that IaDs may be treated uniformly as result statements. The speaker's intention to influence the hearer's choice of action does not require that we associate illocutionary force with the featured imperative forms.

4. The Disjunctive Case

For an IoD "A or P" I will argue that a mere conditional interpretation $[\neg a]p$ may be maintained for uniformity of analysis, if we assume that IoDs differ from conditional statements in that they require their second disjunct to relate to the topic addressed in the first, so that we find a plausible answer to questions (Q2) and (Q3) in the intuition that a conditional $[\neg a]p$ relates to a topic a only in case p is negatively connoted.

[3] Given the necessary space, the neutral case clearly deserved further attention. Neutral IaDs are often generic statements, rather than referring to an immediate action of the addressee.

Although an IoD "A or P" is certainly associated with a conditional statement $[\neg a]p$, it seems implausible to assume that IoDs are merely such conditional statements, in light of the acceptability difference of a contrast pair like (5):

(5) a. ? Invite Jason, or we'll have more beer for ourselves.
b. If you do not invite Jason, we'll have more beer for ourselves.

The difference between IoDs and conditional statements may be sought in a speech-act conjunction analysis in parallel to other conditional uses of disjunction (6).

(6) a. It's a good idea to invite Jason, or we'll be in trouble finishing all that beer.
b. I will invite Jason, or we'll be in trouble finishing all that beer.
c. Jane hopes that Jason is coming, or she'll have to dance (the d.d.) alone.

The supposed parallel would then suggest to analyze an IoD "A or P" as a speech-act conjunction $!a \;\&\; [\neg a]p$. The semantic role of disjunction in such speech-act conjunction readings might be characterized as an epistemic context-splitter modulo topic (cf. Schwager 2004). The first disjunct is about an epistemically uncertain state of affairs. It addresses, as a topic, the performance of an action in the future. Disjunction then supplies the negated topic worlds for contextual restriction of the modal in the second disjunct.

If we treat IoDs as a speech-act conjunction, we can account for the problems addressed in (Q2) and (Q3). The answer to question (Q2) is straightforward under the assumption that an imperative form A is never associated with an imperative $!\neg a$. An answer to question (Q3) could then be that, at least for undesirable p, the conjoined speech acts are associated with incongruous intentions: whereas $!a$ is an inducement to perform a, the statement $[\neg a]p$ is a deterrent.

However there are at least two complications. For one thing, at least some IoDs are not associated intuitively with institutional uses of imperatives, but with descriptive uses. In these cases, the intuitive impact of "A or P" is sufficiently captured in the discourse relation $require(a, p)$, and that is to deny a speech-act conjunction analysis and endorse a conditional analysis. For another, if we take parallel cases like (6) serious, the speech-act conjunction analysis is further discredited by the oddity of examples such as (7) where there is no sign of incongruity between disjuncts.

(7) a. ? It's a bad idea to invite Jason, or we'll have more beer for ourselves.
b. ? It's a bad idea to invite Jason, or he'll break Jane's heart (with the d.d.).

Examples (7) show that conditional uses of disjunction like (6), which are assumed to parallel IoDs, not only have a negative bias in terms of hearer-desirability in the second disjunct, but also a positive bias in terms of speaker-preferability in the first.

Therefore I suggest the following answer strategy for the IoD problem set for consideration: It is plausible and possible to assume that in "A or P" the imperative form is only descriptively used and contributes to the expression of a natural conditional relation *require*(a, p). Cases of pragmatic infelicity, like (7) or inappropriate instantiations of (1b), may then be seen as failures of the second disjunct to relate to the topic addressed in the first. Suppose that in "A or P" the first disjunct introduces the action a as a topic. Disjunction restricts the context of interpretation for the modal in the second disjunct to the non-topic worlds, yielding a conditional

relation $[\neg a]p$. We could then hypothesize that there is no discourse relation that relates p via $[\neg a]p$ to the topic a other than *require*(a, p), which is to say that p has to be undesirable. This is more than an ad hoc redescription of the original problem and it is also more than a bold non-existence claim, for it has indeed an intuitive basis. In particular, the answer to (Q3) from this perspective would be that there is no discourse relation *require'*(a, p) defined as:

$$\textit{require'}(a, p) \quad \text{iff} \quad [\neg a]p \wedge \textit{cause}(\neg a, p) \ \wedge \ \neg \textit{undesirable}(p)$$

which would simply express a particularly awkward relation: 'omission of a is necessary to bring about p'. This is an awkward relation in the light of the fact that it is supposed to be a relation about a and not about $\neg a$. It is due to this relational lacuna that conditional uses of disjunction have the attested desirability biases and therefore instantiations of (1b) cannot request forbearance from the mentioned action.

5. Conclusion

This paper argued for a uniform and parsimonious conditional treatment of pseudo-imperatives. It was suggested that the persuading character of these sentences does not require the association of a particular illocutionary force with the featured imperative forms, but that these are merely descriptively used. An intuitive fact about relations in discourse was made responsible for the acceptability asymmetry in (1).

The most pressing open end is a compositional account of the assumed conditional readings. Remarks on where to look for such an account where already made for disjunction, but conditional readings of conjunctions are, as of yet, a particularly unpleasant gap in linguistic theory, which this paper did not attempt to bridge.[4]

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